Layers

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Layers

by orphan_account

Summary

I feel sad. Wanted something to cheer myself up. This is the result.

I have no set dates for updating, so bear with me.

This is the Bratva fic no one wanted. Note - I like that Oliver isn't possessive. I also like when women have agency. You will find both here. This is a Oliver/Felicity-centric story.

Thanks for reading!
Fistacuffs Are For Assassins

Trouble.

It was an easy word to say. It rolled off her tongue with familiarity, the vowels knocking against each other softly, and wasn’t a particularly obnoxious word. For all its simplicities, it sure meant a lot of complications.

Layers.

That was a better word. Layers didn’t sound so…troubling.

It was amazing to her that her formidable intellect allowed her to build life-saving technology and computers that were six months ahead of what was on the current market but couldn’t stop her from running into…layers. Or perhaps those layers came about because of her intellect. Maybe if she were just a little less smart and focused she wouldn’t find herself running from someone.

Someone.

A huff of exasperation left her.

She didn’t even know the names of the people she had walked in on at her townhouse. One had been a fit woman with honey hair; the other had been a tall Italian man with dark hair and kill-me eyes. In fact, they had both been in possession of kill-me eyes. It was why she had ran. At no point did she think it was a good idea to linger with them casually standing in the mess of her once spotless townhouse and have a chat with them. They wanted something.

She had a good idea what.

There was no way they were getting that. Nope, nu-huh. It was the biggest of all layers. It was the sort of layer that governments put in wooden crates and hid in warehouses after Indiana Jones rescued it from Nazis. It was world ending.

Why was she so smart? Why did she have to tinker? Tinkering led to layers, layers led to running out of her townhouse in the middle of a January night, snowflakes swirling against harder drops of icy rain, the chill seeping to her bones, and running out of her townhouse with her bag of groceries clenched in her hand and nowhere to go led her to internal rambles and a sense of profound uncertainty.

She had no idea what she was going to do.

She couldn’t go to the police. She could report the break in, sure, but she was smart enough to realize that would only draw attention. Reports would raise flags, and flags raised were only good when they were freak flags and she was twenty and slightly drunk.

She didn’t feel safe going back home knowing that they were definitely looking for it. She had her emergency credit card tucked in her shoe but that was a paper trail she didn’t feel like leaving. She would be able to find herself in seconds if she used her card, and she trusted someone with means could find someone nearly as good as her to hunt her down.

What she really needed was to think. She had been walking for forty-six minutes without stopping. She had turned down so many roads and crossed so many smelly back alleys she was nearly high from all the urine and garbage she had passed. Her feet were aching, her nose was dripping with
snot, and she could no longer feel the fingers that were wrapped around the bag she was still inexplicably carrying. She knew that sweating in the cold was bad. She had watched a reality show on it once – and reality programming had yet to lie to her. The sweat was making her colder and her thin jacket was not enough to stave off the pervasive frost. It was getting dangerous.

She just wanted to lie down. She wanted a roaring fire, a good book, and a TK46 microchip to talk dirty to. It wasn’t a difficult list to manage, but it certainly wasn’t happening tonight.

Or maybe even tomorrow.

Could she go into work tomorrow? Did they know where she worked? How had they known about it? Who of the people she had told had told someone else? Who could she trust? Was Barry an option? Iris? Caitlyn? Even if she could trust them, did she dare drag them into the complete shit-storm of layering that was quietly upending her world and giving her the mother of all migraines? Was she completely alone? Again?

She was spiraling, drifting into a vortex of panic.

She was watching herself spiraling, and there was nothing she could do about it. Her breathing turned erratic. She pressed her back against the wall of the brick building she had been passing, her movements unexpected even to her, and looked up at the sky. She saw very little beyond the sickly streetlights that had become fewer the longer she had walked and the snow/rain mixture. The sound the mixture made as it hit the ground around her was like paper crinkling. It and her racing heart thrumming like a drum in her ears were the only things she could hear. It was strangely calming and utterly terrifying. The silence meant that her thoughts were allowed little distraction from the spiraling terror that had descended, but she also felt closed in, protected from the world in the way only snow can do.

“Felicity Smoak, you are not a spiraler. Well, you are a spiraler, but you spiral, then you un-spiral, and then you do whatever you need to do to survive, because that is who you are. You survive. Survivor has nothing on you. You could totally make a water fountain out of bamboo and boar poop in the wild. And you are talking to yourself in the middle of the glades about poop…Why? Stop. Seriously. Stop.”

Felicity shook her head, another puff of air leaving her, feeling like she understood people’s exasperation with her all too well in that moment, and focused on practicalities. She could manage practicalities. She had spent a lifetime looking them in the face.

Her first thought was that she needed to warm up. The cold was not helping the panic. It was clutching at her, crawling and sneaking her way up her body. Hot tingles of panic mingled with cold twinges of looming hypothermia. She needed to normalize, feel safe. Then she would think. Simple. She liked simple.

She pushed away from the wall and purposefully rolled her shoulders. For the first time in forty-nine minutes she stopped looking over her shoulder for signs of being chased and tried to figure out where exactly she was so she could then figure out where she could go that offered safety.

Her head swiveled left, then right, then left again, indecisiveness shooting through her. She really had no idea where she was. Power-walking was not only great cardio, it apparently was an excellent means of putting her a hell of a ways away from her house.

Her poor house. So wrecked, so violated.

“Stop,” she whispered again.
Things could be replaced, people could not. This she knew.

She considered her options again, the headlights of a lonely car adding illumination to the broken buildings and trash-lined streets momentarily. The tires sent the rain to hissing instead of crinkling, and she found herself mesmerized by the sound.

“Lefts have always been my favorite,” she said brightly as she watched the car go past. She followed the car eagerly, hoping the driver knew something she did not. The car was soon out of sight, but it didn’t really matter. She finally had a plan, a direction, a left to follow to the end. One thing at a time, she reminded herself – a mantra that was the backbone of the pain she had survived.

The snow/rain mixture continued to crinkle prettily in her ears as it landed on her shoulders and the fluffy panda hat Caitlyn had knitted last Hanukah. The drops were getting harder, creating a haze that was only broken by intermittent lights of houses, apartments, and gas stations, all with bars on the windows and shabby as the common motif.

Finally, rearing out of the weather like her own personal summit, appeared a warm haze of lights unlike the others. They were bold and aggressive, with a willingness to draw people in instead of keep them out. The buildings had improved, if only slightly, and the warmth of the light created a prickle of hope in her heart. It felt like a haven, even if havens were usually illusions that hid the darkest of darkness. Sometimes she needed an illusion more than she needed reality. That time was now.

Her pace increased, and she hurried across the deserted street, her shoes scrapping over the asphalt unevenly in her haste. The sign in the window that materialized around the rain relaxed her instantly and a soft laugh escaped. Big Belly Burger – of course.

She should have known it would be her savior.

She yanked the door out of her way almost too forcefully and stepped inside with a quick shuffle of feet. She inhaled the smell of oil, fries, grilled meat, and cleaning products with a small smile before quickly scurrying over to the farthest booth from the door. She kept her chin lowered and her shoulders tense, feeling more at ease with her surroundings but not exactly trusting that it was entirely safe.

There were several people inside of the diner – two women in the back corner, a large man at the counter, and group of five friends. The group was the loudest thing in the square space, drowning out the god-awful 90s music that was playing on repeat in the background. She didn’t catch anyone looking at her, but it didn’t matter. She felt exposed, like a nerve had been dug out of her and left to prodding at the simplest of glances. The company meant witnesses in case something happened, but she was suspicious and afraid. Was she followed? Had they anticipated her coming here? How could they anticipate that? Did they want to kill her, or just find out where it was? Would death suck as much as she had always thought?

Right. Spiraling.

She looked down at the bag she was clutching, vaguely realizing that she hadn’t dropped it still and let out a small moan at the memory of setting her purse by the front door before she had realized that there were people in her house going through her things and violating her life with their grubby little paws.

She was certain they didn’t have paws, nor had either seemed little, but they were definitely grubby.

“Pardon?”
Felicity jumped, her mind reeling back to the present with a snap, and looked up at the man standing next to her table. He was wearing a shirt with the Big Belly logo and seemed just shy of not-friendly.


“Did you say I was grubby?” the man asked loudly, quieting the entire restaurant with his indignation.

Heat, warm and welcome after so long in the cold, threatened to storm her face. “No! I wasn’t talking to you.” Which was not the best thing to say, as the only other person she could be talking to was herself and people tended to find that disconcerting outside of her office, where they had all come to expect it from her.

The man stared. She looked up at him, a mixture of nervousness and hope on her face. “I’ll have a coffee please.”

“You have money, right?” he asked, looking her over again. “You gotta pay. Boss is particular about that.”

She looked down at her grocery bag and realized that she had stuck her change inside with her receipt as she had left the store, a habit she had never been more grateful for in her life. It had meant lost money before, but now it meant she could have a coffee and warm up as she figured out what to do next.

She pulled out a bill and showed it to him proudly, waving it a little to be sure he got the message. He nodded, eyeing her grumpily, and went behind the counter. She sunk lower in her seat, aware that she was still getting weird looks from the others in the restaurant. They clearly thought her as insane as the man did.

“Not the first, won’t be the last,” she muttered.

A minute later, the waiter returned, setting the coffee down in front of her, along with all the fixings. She slid her hands around the cup, letting the warmth seep into the tips of her fingers with a happy sigh.

The sigh gave way to larger fears.

She needed a plan. She needed to outthink whoever had been in her apartment, and the only way she could do that was through facts. She needed information. The only way she could get that was if she had her computers. That meant either home or work. She pursed her lips, considering her options.

No one would blink an eye at her coming to the office at nearly ten o’clock at night. She did it often enough when inspiration struck. There was still the problem of not knowing if they knew where she worked and if they would look for it there next. If they were logical, and she had to assume they were, then they would absolutely go there next to look. They couldn’t trash it the way they could her home, but she didn’t want to find out what a second encounter would feel like either. She liked all her blood on the inside of her body. It was the best place for it, really.

She was weighing the odds, knowing they weren’t good but trying to convince herself otherwise out of pure desperation, when she was interrupted a second time.

“Are you okay?” a soft voice asked.

She pulled her eyes away from her murky coffee, realizing the mug had started to cool, and looked into a pair of bright blue eyes.
The woman was insanely beautiful, with long eyelashes, full lips, and blonde hair that fell just to her shoulders. She was wearing a leather jacket, motorcycle boots, and something about her screamed danger. Something else screamed at her that the woman cared with a capital C. It was a funny feeling she had no reason for, but was heightened by the concern brewing in the cerulean eyes that had definitely seen darkness in the past.

Behind her, another woman stood confidently. Her expression was stoic but there was also compassion. She shared the blonde woman’s worry.

“I’m fine,” Felicity said slowly, her eyes darting from one woman to the next defensively. Her hand found her grocery bag again, almost as if she thought it would protect her from the danger she felt radiating from them.

The blonde hesitated, looked over her shoulder at the second woman, and then took a measured step closer to the table. “Are you sure? You seem a bit…”

She searched for a strategic way of voicing her concern.

“Your body language suggests that you are afraid, and your expression denotes panic and worry,” the second woman adds in a British accent that is the definition of controlled. The woman could probably balance plates on her voice alone, it’s so rigid and almost tangibly visible.

“Jumpy,” the blonde woman finished with a sigh, shaking her head softly at her partner.

“I’m dandy. Great. Fine, even,” Felicity said, waving a hand nervously, forgetting that it was wrapped around the mug still and bumping it awkwardly.

“Seems like it,” the blonde said, a small smile jumping to her lips for the briefest of seconds.

Felicity was grateful they cared – caring was a rarity – but she just wanted them to go away. She felt like the longer they stood there, the more attention they brought to her. She didn’t need the attention any more than she needed people trashing her home.

“Just…layers,” she mumbled. Her eyes landed on the coffee pensively before they darted back up to the blonde. “I’m okay. Thank you.”

“Sure,” the woman replied. She reached back and took the dark-haired woman’s hand with a simple grace that left Felicity both envious and awed. They walked out together, the chime on the door rattling lightly as a farewell.

Five seconds later a different blonde woman, with honey instead of wheat coloring, walked through the door. It was the blonde from Felicity’s apartment. She marched directly over to the counter, where she handed Felicity’s waiter a fifty and turned to look at Felicity with pursed lips. Felicity let out an, “Eep!” and drew her groceries to her chest protectively.

The woman’s eyebrows constricted momentarily before she stepped forward, her direction unerringly Felicity-centric.

Felicity looked down at the coffee cup in front of her, panic tearing through her. It was literally the only thing besides her groceries within reach. It wasn’t much, but she intended to use it to the best of her abilities in what will most likely be a very quick, very messy fight. Her hand slipped down and she grabbed the cup, turning it a little, a small squeak escaping with the movement.

She looked up again, prepared for the worst, when the bell chimed yet again. The woman stopped walking immediately as a voice called out.
“I remember saying I would kill you next time I saw you.”

The woman turned slowly, her hands clenching into fists. Felicity looked past the woman and saw the dark-haired woman standing in the open space between the door and the nearest table. Her stance was wide and calm. She looked like she was ready to order food, not level death threats at someone definitely interested in having a pointed chat with Felicity.

“You’re welcome to try,” the blonde said with a light shrug, looking nearly as unaffected. It was only the slight widening of her stance that suggested she was preparing for a fight.

“Okay,” the dark-haired woman replied, marching forward with power and purpose.

As the women met in the middle of the restaurant with kicks and punches, the waiter dived for cover, the man at the bar quickly scooped up his sandwich before leaving, the group of friends scrambled for the exit, and Felicity was grabbed by the arm and tugged out of the booth in a strong move that had her instantly on her feet. The same hand pulled her away from the fight, which involved a lot of carnage, as dishes, tables, and condiments went flying through the air, and into the back of the diner.

Stumbling, Felicity caught up to her abductor's pace, and the present, and saw the blonde woman with the caring blue eyes and soft smile.

“Are you going to kill me?” she asked, her voice trembling slightly.

“Nope,” the woman replied.

“That’s awesome,” Felicity said weakly.

The woman laughed, and immediately looked startled by the sound, as if she couldn't believe herself capable of it. She pushed her way outside, the metal door groaning loudly against the night, and ushered Felicity into a waiting car.

“How did you-?” Felicity tried to ask, wondering how they had gotten a car to the back so quickly, but the woman shut the door in her face without waiting for her to finish.

A few seconds later, the car rocked as the woman got in the driver’s seat and put the car into gear. All of Felicity’s words disappeared as they roared down the road and turned the corner.

“Aren’t you worried about your friend?” Felicity managed finally over the utter absurdity of whatever was happening around her and the last two hours of what had become her life.

“Nope,” the woman replied, bringing the car to a smooth stop at the front of the diner. The woman grinned appreciatively as the glass shattered explosively and Felicity’s waiter came violently crashing down onto the sidewalk. “I hate snitches,” the woman added with a vicious smile.

A second later, a second window shattered as the honey blonde woman came flying through the air and landed next to the man. Unlike the man, who was clearly unconscious, the woman immediately stumbled to her feet. She was bleeding from what looked like everywhere and her eyes had lost their confident cockiness. She was afraid. Felicity didn’t blame her.

The dark-haired woman jumped up to the window, all raging fury and vicious reckoning, and started to follow the woman outside. Felicity’s would-be attacker did the only sensible thing.

She ran for her life.

Felicity felt absolutely no regrets about that.
“I think I’m gonna throw up,” Felicity said tightly as the woman disappeared into the darkness of the swirling snow.

The blonde woman shot her a worried look. Before she could say anything, Felicity held up a finger.

“I swallowed it.”

The dark-haired woman started forward, to chase the evil-blonde as Felicity had decided to call her, but the maybe-not-evil blonde next to her called out the window. “Next time, Nyssa.”

Nyssa’s aggression deflated immediately, though the rage did not leave her eyes, and she turned to the car obediently. She slipped into the back as Felicity tried to process her rescue and if she had just landed in a situation as bad as the one she had found at her house. It didn’t feel like it, but she was exhausted, and shell shocked, and not in the best position to judge whether or not she was going to be driven somewhere and murdered violently.

She didn’t know why they had helped her or what they wanted. Did they know about it? Were they trying to trick her? Her eyes landed on the waiter. Why did she have the sudden urge to get out of the car and kick him while he was down? The nausea had been replaced by pure rage. She didn’t mind being violently murdered by Nyssa and the maybe-not-evil blonde as much as she wanted revenge.

The blonde woman pressed the gas pedal, peeling away from the curb out of habit rather than need before Felicity could get out of the car, and settled more comfortably into her seat. The windshield wipers creaked with every swish they made across the glass, and the leather moaned with every nervous shift Felicity made. The silence stretched for a few minutes as Felicity dully processed her situation, her grocery bag still held tightly against her chest. She finally looked down, deciding almost analytically that she was in shock, and saw what had become of her groceries.

“My ice cream melted,” she lamented.

The blonde’s amused smile and Nyssa’s raised eyebrow followed them into the swirling snow and whatever waited beyond.
It's Always Hard to Say Goodbye to the Groceries You Love the Most

Chapter Summary

I had trouble not writing floofy instead of fluffy. I'm five.

Thanks to FanMomMer for being awesome in life and this fandom. Go read her stuff or perish.

I can't begin to express how lovely all your comments and kudos felt. Thank you so much for reading, and I hope to keep you entertained. : )

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The car was like the snow. It was equal parts terror and safety. She had seen Nyssa throw not one but two people out of a window, and she knew without any doubt in her heart that the maybe-not-evil blonde was equally as scary in a fight. But sitting in the front seat wrapped up in her little cocoon of expensive leather and melting ice cream was like looking out at the snow and feeling as though no other person existed on the planet. She was safe.

For now.

Safety was relative, and mostly subjective, and she was well aware of how quickly situations could turn from fine to holy-crap-that’s-a-pistol-being-pointed-at-my-head. It had only happened to her once, but it was a lesson well-learned.

Despite her certainty that she was still in danger, she didn’t look for an escape, and she didn’t try to jump out when the car slowed for traffic lights and turns. The only sign of her wariness was in the way she continued to clutch her bag of groceries and the worrying of her teeth against her bottom lip.

She didn’t speak to either of the women, and they let the silence linger. Neither tried to fill it as she would have had she not been in the middle of shock. Her thoughts kept switching between her melted ice cream and the growing realization that she had absolutely no idea how to be safe. She was a poorly balanced top spinning out of control, gaining momentum and force. She would topple over soon. The resulting splat would not be fun.

The protective bubble hovered around the entire car as the snow disappeared entirely and the rain splattered noisily on the windshield. Felicity soaked it in absently and ran through different scenarios of how exactly the bad guys had realized what she had created. Everyone that knew about her invention was a friend. They weren’t exactly super spies, though. They were scientists and inventors, spending more time lost in their work than dealing with the intricacies of interpersonal relationships. They were like her – determined to make the world better, all of them dreamers, believers, and superheroes in their own right. It was entirely possible they spoke to the wrong person and let something slip. It was also possible that the evil-blonde hadn’t been there for it, but for another reason entirely. Felicity wasn’t exactly known for keeping her curiosity to herself. She was always careful – and there were few people as good as her at navigating technology – but secrets had a way of being exposed. It was their nature – they were seekers; they wanted to be found. She had exposed her fair share.
Eventually the car came to a slow stop. Felicity blinked, the rolling motion of the car having lulled her thoughts inward, and looked around. They were on a suburban street lined with trees and perfectly trimmed yards. She hadn’t thought either woman would live in such a sweetly innocent street after everything she had witnessed. It didn’t fit with the more metal vibe they gave off, but she wasn’t going to judge. It was possible people who threw other people out of buildings liked to garden. Maybe peacefulness was their thing after long days of beating people up. Felicity liked to listen to death metal when she got angry. Contradictions were a fact of life.

The blonde turned the car off and the seat squeaked loudly as she turned to look fully at Felicity. Felicity clutched her groceries tighter as her pulse raced with adrenaline and fear. This was the moment she discovered if they were going to kill her. She didn’t think suburbia a good place for murders, but she was hardly an expert.

“I think we have a few things we need to talk about before we go any further,” the blonde said.

“Murdering me won’t be fun,” Felicity blurted. “Really. I’m not a great victim. I complain, and there’s all the…drooling when I’m scared. Plus, you don’t want to get all that blood on your shoes. It would ruin your whole look.”

“You drool when you get scared?” the blonde questioned, amused.

“If I say yes will you not murder me?” Felicity asked hopefully.

“I already told you I don’t intend on it,” the woman replied.

“Things change,” Felicity said. “And I’ve not exactly had the best night in the world.”

“I swear to you on my very profound love for the very sexy assassin you see in the backseat that I have no intention of murdering you ever,” the blonde announced.

“Assassin?” Felicity squeaked.

“Perhaps it was not wise to lead with that, beloved,” Nyssa intoned with heavy eye rolling implied.

“Yeah…” the blonde agreed. She looked Felicity over carefully, her eyes scouring her face, her tense posture, and her obvious panic. “Nyssa why don’t you check in? Let them know that the reason we’re running late is because of an emergency.”

“Of course,” Nyssa replied instantly. She opened the door, slid out of her seat, and was gone before Felicity could even hear the rain pounding on the asphalt outside. Her graceful shape was obscured by the rain in seconds.

Felicity didn’t follow her path to the house. She was too busy staring at the tree directly outside her window, happy to find that her brain was coming ever so slightly down from the panic. Logic and plans were starting to formulate. If they really weren’t going to kill her, then maybe everything would be okay. She just needed to get out of the car and go back to her original plan of finding a computer and looking into her attackers.

“If you’re not going to kill me, does that mean I can go?” Felicity asked, proud of how steady she sounded as the words left her.

The woman hesitated. “Yes.” She shifted again, bringing her knee up to rest between them. She stared directly into Felicity’s eyes, allowing Felicity to see the years of darkness. “But I don’t think it’s a good idea.”
“I’m aware of the dangers,” Felicity said. “Clearly.”

“Mmm,” the woman said. “Did you know the last time Nyssa and I ran into Kane she was removing people’s organs – with the people still awake for the surgery I might add – to sell the organs on the black market? Took real pleasure in watching her victims die, too.”

Felicity gulped. The bile rose in her throat again. She pushed it down.

“Kane is her name?”

The woman nodded slowly, almost like she knew Felicity had taken the wrong information from her.

“She seemed more like a Cindy. I knew a Cindy in high school. She was not nice.”

The woman’s lips quirked up again. “My point is that Kane is very dangerous and, no offense, you don’t exactly seem prepared for the kind of crazy she can throw into your life.”

“I’m not a damsel in distress,” Felicity said firmly, heat rising in her chest with her indignation. “I don’t need a knight to rescue me, and I certainly don’t need anyone protecting me. I can handle myself…despite the almost throwing up parts. Just pretend that didn’t happen.”

“I clearly can’t force you to do anything you don’t want to do, but I would like to mention that I work for some people who are very powerful, very rich, and who take a great deal of offense at people like Kane operating in Starling without their permission.”

“Trading one evil for another isn’t great bartering tactics,” Felicity said. “And I don’t particularly want to get wrapped up in whatever crazy you have going on that you need assassins.”


Felicity hesitated. She didn’t trust the woman with the full extent of her abilities if she really had nothing to do with the layers that were complicating her life currently. “I planned on research followed by threats.”

The woman’s eyes widened at the steel in Felicity’s tone.

“I’m scarier than I look,” Felicity said. “Even if I can’t kick people through Big Belly windows while looking like a supermodel.”

“And where will you go right now?” the woman asked.

Felicity hesitated. The woman was puncturing through all of her logic gaps and making the need for help clearer than ever. She really wanted to find a phone and call one of her friends for help. They would be there for her in an instant, but she kept circling back to who had blabbed and if she really wanted to drag them into danger. The answer was an emphatic no. She didn’t want anyone to get hurt.

“Inside that house are people who are bad, yes, but good, too. And they will help you if I say so,” the woman said. “But if you want to figure things out on your own, protect yourself the way you know how, I respect that, too.”

“Thanks,” Felicity whispered.

“This is what I’m going to do,” the woman said. “I’m going to go inside. I’ll leave the keys in the
ignition. You want to leave, you take my car and you go. You figure it out. If you want my help, well, the front door’s unlocked.”

The woman didn’t reach across the car or try to touch Felicity in parting. Felicity got the impression that she was not overly fond of physical contact with strangers. It was a strong defensiveness Felicity pitied her for having, but her gaze was as strong as a touch. It was compassionate and strangely impressed. She did not see Felicity as a victim or a damsel in need of rescuing. She was offering help because she could, no other reason. It was the strangest thing Felicity had ever had happen to her, and she had been through a lot of strange in her life.

The woman nodded once, her gaze dropping down in finality, and turned away. She got out of the car without another word, leaving Felicity to whatever choice she made. True to her word, the keys were still in the ignition. Felicity bit her lip and looked back at the house. The lights were on but the blinds were down. It looked no different than the rest of the houses on the streets, but it seemed to glow in the rain, her brain giving it magical properties due to the possibility of it being a real haven instead of an imagined one.

The rain closed her in and the chill sent her to shivering once more. The minutes ticked by and she didn’t move. She was curious, compelled to understand the mystery of the house and the people within, but well aware that mysteries were not always a good enough reason to step into the unknown.

There was something about the house, though. It was warmth and cascading light, backed by a sense of safety and strange familiarity. The house wasn’t a cure-all, but she was eager not to face whatever trouble she had found on her own.

She shook her head at the thought. She would still face it on her own. She was not dragging anyone else into her mess. But maybe they had a computer she could borrow. It was better than trying to find a place to hack from that wouldn’t get her immediately discovered. If there wasn’t a computer here, maybe the woman could direct her to one that was safe. It wasn’t giving in. It was asking a question. She could do that. She was good at questions.

She pushed open the car door, keeping her bag still clutched in front of her like a shield, and hurried through the hissing rain, across the manicured lawn that squished unpleasantly under her shoes, and on to the covered front porch. She stared at the door, suddenly unsure. What was she doing? This was stupid and wrong and destined to be messy.

She’d had worse ideas.

She knocked twice, the sound hesitant even to her, and she heard the distant sounds of laughter dying away. There was a moment of silence, and then the door opened, the blonde woman in its place.

“I just wanted to know if I could use your computer. Then I’m gone.”

“Sure,” the woman said, holding the door open wider.

It felt like a dare and a welcome all rolled into a simple gesture. Felicity stepped over the threshold, surprised at how normal everything looked inside after the woman’s promises of wealth and bloodshed, and felt some of the tension unknot in her gut. There was a lot of white in the design and splashes of color in the artwork on the walls and the flowers on the tables. The foyer was broad and showcased mahogany-colored stairs that dominated the entrance. A living room was to her right and a hallway to her left. She knew from the sounds coming from the living room that there were more rooms that way, perhaps the kitchen and dining room. The house was unnaturally silent, as if it and
the people inside were holding their breath.

Then, a man appeared around the corner in the direction of what had once been laughter and warmth.

He was tall, broad shouldered, and unfairly handsome. His jaw was covered in stubble, his eyebrows were thick and currently twisted with concern, and his eyes were a vivid blue. Her eyes danced with his for only a second before they moved back to the woman. She knew him of course. Everyone did. She just didn’t understand how Oliver Queen, the blonde woman, and a known assassin were connected.

She wasn’t certain she should make the connection at all. It felt like another layer.

“Sara?” Oliver asked, his eyes still on Felicity, his tone demanding an explanation.

“She needs to use a computer.”

“That was your emergency?” he asked.

“It’s complicated,” the blonde woman, now formally named as Sara, replied with a shrug.

“It usually is,” Oliver replied tightly, his eyes landing on Felicity again. She looked up at him boldly, trying to get a read on his mood, wondering if he would recognize her. They had been to some of the same tech events over the past two years, but she had only spoken near him, not to him. She was scrambling to understand how he fit in to the enigma that was Sara and Nyssa. She wondered if she was about to get the third degree and scrambled for a good way to handle it. Instead, he surprised her. “She’s cold,” he said, eyeing Sara as if she were responsible for the weather.

A small blush graced Sara’s face. Oliver had turned away before it fully formed, headed for the hallway. He disappeared for a minute before he swept back into the foyer, all certainty and grace. In his hands were a towel and a large blanket. He stopped in front of Felicity, taking in the way she was still clutching her groceries and quirked an eyebrow at her, clearly curious as to why she was holding the bag.

“I coupon,” she blurted. “Got a great deal on the ice cream, two dollars off, which is pretty awesome, but it has melted…obviously.” Her eyes went to Sara for help, but the woman just looked amused. Felicity found Oliver’s gaze again. “I think I’m still in shock. How long does it last? I haven’t read any studies on it, which is just silly of me considering the current circumstances. I feel just like I did before that Polysci test. Forgot to study because of a…pet project. Not important. The point is that I can’t actually seem to let go of this bag.”

Oliver’s lips quirked up in much the same way Sara’s had earlier, and he tilted his head the smallest of degrees as he looked at her, his eyes sparkling with warmth and laughter. The moment passed quickly. He looked past her to Sara, the steely hardness she had noticed without truly noticing until the smile had graced his face returning in an instant.

“I think she could use something hot to drink…any maybe some food,” he said.

Sara nodded and silently retreated to the kitchen. Oliver refocused his attention on her and it was… intense. She felt like she was under the sort of scrutiny that could get her killed. Or maybe that was the adrenaline and shock talking. Either way, she was determined to show him that she was not intimidated. She stared right back, waiting for him to make the next move. He finally did, gesturing for her to walk first into the living room. She did, her nerves feeling frayed, and uncertainly waited for further instructions by the sofa, surprised again at how warm the home felt to her. It was far better
than the Big Belly. He placed the blanket and towel on the sofa and gestured her over to him. She complied, but only because her legs were trembling.

He moved out of the way as she sat but not far enough away to make her truly comfortable. She wasn’t certain if she was more uncomfortable of the fact that he was clearly hanging out with assassins as a hobby or the intensity in which he was looking at her. Both sounded about right.

“The way I see it, you have two options,” Oliver said in a tone that was clearly meant to be calming as he sat on the sturdy coffee table that rested in front of the cream-colored sofa. “You can hang on to the bag and stay cold, or you can let me have it and dry off and get warm. Your choice.”

She looked down at her bag, the soggy carton of ice cream, and other odds and ends she had bought, not looking nearly as appealing with the temptation of a fluffy towel and extra soft blanket within reach. Her heart was screaming at her to warm up and calm down. She didn’t have to trust the situation, or Sara and Oliver, but she could certainly take advantage of the warmth.

But it felt like more. It felt like he was asking her to trust him; he was asking her to let go of the thing that was part of her current emotional safety net and trust that nothing would happen to her if she did. It was a lot to ask from someone he had just met; someone who was clearly scared and fighting off panic, no matter how brave she was. He clearly thought her capable of it.

She couldn’t trust him, no matter how soft his voice was or how disarming his direct gaze happened to be. And yet…

She slowly released her death grip on the bag and took a deep breath to steady her trembling hands. Her eyes locked on his, she held the bag out to him, hoping she hadn’t made the wrong choice and ruined all hope of leaving the house without further trouble following her.
It's Not Snooping If You Care

Chapter Summary

This is here because I promised FanMomMer it would be. You can thank her with kisses.

Banter, the beginning.

I do like to keep things light, but it will get darker as we explore Oliver's extracurricular activities and Felicity's situation. Also...slowest of burn. Thanks for reading.

There was something disconcerting about having his attention solely focused on her. She thought maybe it was because he was so tall and bulky, with violent grace in every shift of his body. Though he looked perfectly normal in a white dress shirt and grey slacks, he also seemed out of place, as though the clothes were a distraction against what he was truly capable of accomplishing should the need arise.

Oliver gently took the bag from her hands and carefully sat it on the floor next to the coffee table. His eyes tracked the movement, finally breaking from hers, and she felt him thinking hard about the oddity of her showing up to the house to ask to use a computer. It surprised her that Sara and Nyssa hadn’t told him everything, but perhaps they felt like they didn’t have to. Maybe he had no idea they were assassins. Maybe she was misreading the entire situation. She certainly felt off kilter enough.

When his eyes met hers again, she saw the questions that he wanted to ask. She had no intention of answering them. She decided a distraction was in order.

“We’ve met before, you know,” she said quickly. “Well, not met-met. More like stood near each other and not talked. I guess that’s not really meeting. What would you call that? Socializing near each other? That doesn’t sound nearly as interesting.”

His lips moved for a second, as if trying to figure out which thing to address of her words. Finally, his eyes sparkling with surprised humor, he tilted his head again. “When?”

“A few times,” Felicity replied. “There was the Annual Scientific Breakthrough Awards, the Starling City Science and Technology Summit last year, and the Christmas gala you threw last to raise money for Feed Starling.”

“Ah,” he replied, his forehead creasing as he tried to remember if he had seen her before.

“It’s okay if you don’t remember,” she said. “Like I said, talked near, not to.”

“There was a speech,” he decided, his eyes clearing of their confusion. “‘The sum total of our scientific advances cannot be without consideration of the cost of humanity. We must look to the future with a strong dedication to what makes that future worthwhile, and never forget that what we do is first and foremost for the betterment of people, not the uncaring eye of commerce.’”

Felicity’s eyes widened. That had been her speech at the Breakthrough Awards. It had been three years ago. “Right,” she agreed.
“That was a great speech…naïve, but great.”

“Naïve!” she huffed indignantly.

“Absolutely,” he agreed, looking amused by her indignation, as though he were looking at a cat instead of a grown woman who could conveniently knee him in the balls with their proximity. “Dry off,” he added, picking up the towel again and handing it to her.

She took the towel wordlessly and pulled her panda hat off with a quick tug. He looked away as her hair cascaded out, as if she had done something indecent, and shifted on the table slightly, his large hands coming to rest on his thighs in tight fists. She looked away as she started toweling off her hair, staring at a picture over the mantle. It took her a second to realize that the picture was of him and a brunette she had seen in the tabloids more than once – his sister.

Either this was his home or hers. She didn’t know why that surprised her so much, save for the fact that she had expected both of them to live in super modern, ultra-sleek houses where the house had fully integrated A.I. Not that she would complain about the A.I. part. She had been working on a program off and on for the past year that could do exactly that. It had been an idea that had stemmed from her utter disgust of not being able to change the channel on her television when she was comfortable, slightly buzzed, and had forgotten the remote in the kitchen.

“I’m sorry if I’m interrupting something,” Felicity added before her thoughts could get lost in daydreams about the latest code to make such A.I. possible. “You can get back to it if you need to. I don’t need a babysitter.”

“It’s nothing that can’t wait,” he said.

The conversation she had noticed in the distance had started back up as she toweled away the melted snow and lingering rain. It felt a little staged, as if the people in the kitchen beyond the dining room were doing everything in their power not to speak of certain things, but the warmth was hard to miss. There was a lot of laughter and gentle teasing, combined with some light clanking as food and drink were made.

He shifted again, tension swelling in the ridges of his shoulders and back. The gentleness was warring with a hard determination she had not noticed the previous times she had seen him, not that she had really looked at him too hard those times. The pastries at those events had been no joke. It had taken a lot for her to notice other things. The hardness felt real, though, like all cards were on the table instead of a mask in need of being broken down.

“Sara wouldn’t have brought you here unless she thought it was something serious,” Oliver told her then in his quiet voice. He was stern, but she did not miss the gentleness. “What is it?”

Felicity shook her head, frustrated at the situation and herself. “I made a mistake. It’s something I have to take care of, which I will once I borrow your computer.”

“It’s something that’s as easy to manage as a couple of clicks on the computer?” he asked skeptically.

She hesitated. She didn’t think it would be that simple. It never was. Layers had a way of multiplying once the first edge had been peeled away, but she was absolutely not going to find out any more about Oliver Queen, his assassin friends, or the very real possibility that he was into some things that could get her killed.

“I appreciate your concern, Mr. Queen, I really do,” she said, inhaling sharply, hoping she wasn’t about to offend him but needing to make her line in the sand clear, “but I don’t want to involve
anyone else in my mess or get involved in anyone else’s mess.” She stopped toweling herself off, tired tears filling her eyes. She kept them locked securely behind the borders of her eyes, but her expression crumpled and she knew he saw her stress and fear. She had stopped caring. She was just so done with her night and feeling the constant, unwavering panic. “I just can’t handle anything else tonight besides getting to the bottom of what is going on. I want things to go back to normal.”

Oliver stared at her. His expression was enigmatic and his eyes were full of darkness she could not imagine. He shifted again, his knees coming in contact with the side her thighs. He didn’t look put off by the contact. He didn’t even seem to notice it.

“Sometimes we have to find a new normal,” he replied.

She stared back, knowing he was right, wondering how many times he had been forced to do exactly that. She didn’t know everything about him, but she knew enough to realize that he had spent a lifetime constantly readjusting, relearning what he knew about the world, and surviving. She felt inordinately connected to him in that moment.

He blinked several times as he stared at her, as though something in her expression had shocked him, then stood swiftly. She leaned back as he loomed over her, surprised at the movement, her defensiveness sparking instantly. With her lingering panic, it felt like he was going to attack her. Instead, he turned and walked out of the room, headed for the kitchen.

Weird…And broody. Broody weird,” she decided.

Numbly, she picked up the towel, peeled away her tan jacket, and continued the process of getting warm. Five minutes later, Sara returned with a tray loaded down with hot chocolate, cookies, a sandwich, and a cupcake. Felicity’s eyes brightened noticeably and Sara fought off another smile.

“Thanks!” Felicity gushed, grabbing the cupcake first and taking a bite. She sighed happily. The sweet treat still in her mouth, crumbs spilling out chaotically as she spoke, she exclaimed, “This is better than sex.”

Sara laughed again, her entire body radiating with the humor. She sat on the sofa next to Felicity, maintaining her distance in a way that Oliver had not and looked at Felicity seriously, her levity disappearing almost instantly.

“Ollie said that it’s okay for you to use the computer, but you have to eat first or no deal.”

Felicity took another big bite of her cupcake, her eyes locked on Sara’s, and Sara shook her head. “I guess getting you to eat won’t be as difficult as I imagined.

“Imv neber turnb downb a cuvecake,” Felicity said around her food.

“Okay…” Sara said, blinking several times, surprised again.

Felicity had no idea how she kept surprising people. The sound of laughter from the kitchen told her that they knew how to have fun, so why was she so unexpected? It made no sense.

She downed the rest of the cupcake then attacked her sandwich and hot chocolate. She felt ravenous, suddenly, the beast of hunger urging her to eat everything on her plate as quickly as possible. Sara watched in amused silence, her eyes flickering between Felicity’s face and the disappearing food often.

When the food was gone, the hot chocolate nothing but a memory at the bottom of the cup, Sara spoke again.
Felicity nodded, feeling far better than she had in hours. She was prepared, focused, and ready to take on whatever secrets she uncovered. She could find answers. She knew her worth and her skill.

Sara carefully wrapped the blanket around Felicity’s shoulders, as if fearing that Felicity would be cold and Sara would suffer for it, and then led Felicity to the stairs. Felicity hesitated, drawn to the sound of conversation that floated out to her, eager to find out why Oliver had left so suddenly, but realized that was just the sort of curiosity that got her into layers.

She hurried up the stairs after Sara, her eyes fixated on the furnishings, paintings, and pictures of the Queen family and various people Felicity didn’t recognize. Sara stopped finally in front of an innocuous door, indistinguishable from the others in the hall. She pushed it out of the way and gestured for Felicity to enter. Felicity did, and immediately felt her heart clench.

“Oh, you poor things,” she muttered, looking at the three computers grouped together on the large desk. She could tell even from the distance of the door to the wall that they were poorly arranged and managed. Without looking back at Sara, she went to the machines and immediately dropped down to look at the wires going into the CPUs. She rolled her eyes and immediately turned off all the computers from her place on the floor. There was no way on earth she was working on such a setup. It hurt her soul, her eyes, and her ability to focus.

Her head disappeared under the desk and she started muttering to herself angrily. She dismantled everything carefully, her anger growing with every misplaced wire and plug.

“All that money…Can’t even plug…The wires aren’t dildos, you just can’t ram…Cyber abuse…Nerve of some people…Not in the stone ages…Owens a tech company…Ignorant asshole…Piece of—”

“What’s this?” a voice cut through her ramblings. It was masculine and sharp. Oliver was clearly unamused.

“She hasn’t finished a sentence in twenty minutes,” Sara said, “and she’s not been replying to me when I talk. I don’t even know if she knows we’re here.”

“Should be arrested…Awful, terrible, no good, set up…Who doesn’t he have spare…Oh! There it is…Where’s the…God, he doesn’t even have…Why is this his life?”

“She can’t just come in here and dismantle my computers,” Oliver barked.

“I think she already did,” Sara pointed out.

Felicity popped out from under the desk. Her hair was in her face and her cheeks were warm from struggling with the wires and her profound hurt over his inability to plug in a computer the right way. She plugged the wires back into the monitors, her focus total, and turned the computers back on.

“Much better,” she proclaimed, sitting in the chair.

Her chair turned slightly of its own volition and a large torso appeared in front of her. She blinked, surprised to see anyone near her, and looked up, tracing the lines despite herself, and finally saw that it was Oliver. Did he not believe in personal space?

“I said you could use the computer, not mess with it,” he said, his jaw ticking with irritation.

“You didn’t clarify, actually,” she said with a shrug. “And there was no way in Google hell I was
using that setup you had going on. Did you put that together? If you did...Wow. And not in the good way.”

Oliver’s jaw ticked again. His eyes blazed with anger and something else she couldn’t identify that had his eyes darkening.

“I didn’t think I had to qualify my words. It’s assumed that when you let someone use your computer they use it then stop.”

“You know what they say about assuming.”

“What do they say about irritating the guy whose house you’re in?”

“Oh! I wasn’t sure if this was your house. I thought it might have been your sister’s. There are a lot of pictures of her in here. Of course, that makes sense, too. You love her. Obviously.” She looked up to find his forehead crinkled again with confusion. He was clearly flabbergasted that she wasn’t afraid of him. She looked determined, unaffected by his anger, and ready to meet him word for word. She tilted her head at him. “Was there something else? I should really get to looking so I can get out of your way. Don’t want to be here all night and bother you more than I have to.”

“Your concern is touching,” he replied dryly, sliding away from her with a sigh.

Felicity hummed absently in reply and focused on the screens. She immediately went to work, her first order of business securing his computers so that she could go hunting without leaving a trail.

She immediately realized that something was wrong with everything. His computers had watchers on them. There was a bug. She followed the trail to the source, an idea sparking in the back of her mind as she did. She now knew how to leave the house without feeling indebted to him.

She glanced up nervously, wondering if he could tell what she was up to, and saw him in murmured conversation with Sara. As they talked, Nyssa joined them, quietly slipping her hand into Sara’s, as though the lack of contact had bothered her.

She dug around for ten minutes, her eyes widening as she realized the reason for the bug on his computer and what the watchers were hoping to find. They clearly hadn’t because they weren’t as good as she was but...

Not good.

She thought about getting up and leaving right then, but she also knew that this was the safest place for her in the moment. Sara was right. No one would mess with Oliver – no one save for shadowy government agencies. She was back to feeling equally terrified and safe. She kept her expression stoic as some of their conversation reached her.

“...Kane won’t leave it there,” Oliver was saying.

“I know,” Sara said.

“I volunteer to track her down,” Nyssa offered immediately.

“It won’t solve her problems,” Oliver said, crossing his arms across his chest. “Kane always has an employer.”

“That’s her concern,” Nyssa said. “She can handle it.”
“I think it might be our concern,” Oliver disagreed. “Someone has gotten it into their head that they can operate in my city without consequences. We need to find out who it is.”

“Uh-huh,” Sara said skeptically.

“Is there a problem?” Oliver asked.

“There’s more people operating in this city than we can stop, despite our resources. We fight them all when we can get away with it. What makes this a priority?”

Oliver arched an eyebrow. “Because I said so.”

It was said mildly but Sara looked suitably chastised. She nodded and Nyssa tugged on her hand, getting the message. They disappeared from the door, seemingly not eager to hang around Oliver while he was so grumpy. Felicity shot him an unimpressed look even as she continued to type. He looked back at her and actually harrumphed. It was ridiculous and pouty. She fought rolling her eyes at this man who kept surprising her and refocused her eyes on the screen.

Oliver sat on the chair across from her, his body having all the appearance of openness but she felt like it was a manipulation. It was not nearly as honest as the almost smile downstairs, but she didn’t tell him so.

Felicity completed her digging on Oliver’s life and the bugs he had lingering, printing out several sheets that she snatched away from the printer before Oliver could get a good look at them and turned them upside down on the desk. Satisfied, she dug into the real work – the reason she was running for her life.

Felicity opened a video feed on the far right computer and sent a program to check all cameras with the descriptions of Kane and the Italian man. On the center computer she ran a search on Kane, including all known associates. On the far left computer, she researched anyone who might be interested in it, who of her friends might have tipped off Kane’s employer, and scoured all the criminal, police, and banking databases to find a breadcrumb that would lead her somewhere meaningful.

She pulled a pad and a pen closer to her, using the pen to scratch her eyebrow as she focused entirely on the computer. As she wrote out a bit of code to correct the Trojan she had sent out to attack the FBI database, she noticed that the pad already had writing on it. There was a name followed by a date for tomorrow.

“Veronique,” Felicity repeated.

Oliver reached forward and ripped the paper away from the pad, the scowl back in place. At least he had stopped trying to look endearing, or open, or whatever he had been trying to accomplish.

“I just…” Felicity shook her head, realizing there was nothing to say, and went back to writing. “You don’t have to keep me company,” Felicity said even as she wrote.


Felicity’s smile was lopsided. He had no idea.

“That wasn’t snooping. That was…an overhaul. You can thank me later.”

“Thank you?” he demanded.
“I didn’t mean right now,” she retorted.

He shot her a look of utter irritation and exasperation. She adjusted her glasses and went back to looking at the computer screen. “This might take a little while,” she added. “And I’m certainly going to be absorbed by it. You can sit there if it makes you happy, but you won’t know what I’m doing and you will most certainly be bored.”

“Seems to me like you’re trying to get rid of me,” he replied.

She looked into his vivid eyes again, seeing a challenge and something that may have been curiosity. She didn’t want his curiosity, but it was too late. She had already piqued it within him. She wondered if mysteries bugged him as much as they bothered her.


“Mmm,” he replied, looking unconvinced that she really had his best interests at heart.

She shrugged mentally and went back to figuring out her personal mystery, though it was disconcerting to have his strong gaze lingering on her while she worked. She was sometimes looked at while she worked but she never usually noticed until someone broke her out of the haze.

It took double the effort to ignore him and work through the questions plaguing her. Even then, she could feel him nearby, lingering, like a phantom itch she couldn’t quite scratch. It was irritation, and something else she didn’t quite feel like naming.

The video was her first lead. She saw Kane and the Italian man get into a sleek Posche a block down from her townhouse. She ran the plates, hoping against hope that it wasn’t a rental.

“Sneaky,” Felicity complained when the rental came back under a shell corporation with a shadow investor.

There was a grunt followed by the sound of heavy bulk moving in a chair. “Find something?” Oliver asked his voice softened by sleep.

She looked at him for the first time in several hours, surprised he was still there. It looked as if he had been sleeping, though she doubted he trusted her enough for that. The sight was strangely endearing.

Felicity shook off the thought, knowing it was ridiculous, and allowed her fingers to fly across the keyboard once more. What popped up was far from settling.

“Frack,” she stated simply, her eyes widening.

The shell company had several layers of businesses to protect it but under all of those layers was a name she knew well.

“What?” Oliver repeated, looking both concerned and irritated that she wasn’t speaking. He stood and joined her on her side of the monitors. “Ted Kord?” Oliver asked slowly, his mind lost to a memory she wasn’t privy to.

Her heart was racing, her palms sweaty, and her mind trying to fill in the blank spaces.

“He’s my boss…” The betrayal and fear were warring in her chest. She worked closely with Ted to develop products in his company’s R&D. She wasn’t in charge of the department officially, but everyone came to her for decisions, particularly Ted. He had always been nice to her. “I think I may have just quit my job.”
Porn is Better When It's in 3D and Not Full of Wiretapes

Chapter Summary

Felicity takes matters into her own hands. There will be danger music.

This fic is called layers for a reason. Layers upon layers. You’ll see. Also, Curtis!

Thanks to everyone for commenting and leaving kudos! I see it all, and it never fails to make me smile!

She definitely wasn’t quitting her job. That would solve absolutely nothing. Her boss – her fracking boss – was potentially trying to steal technology she had invented, and he was willing to use people like Kane to do it. She had to dig deeper, and she had no choice but to put her neck on the line to do it. The situation was bigger than her. People could get hurt if it got out. She knew there was a definite time limit on how long she could stay at her job before Kord made a more overt move, though – if he truly was involved and the connection wasn’t a fluke. She had days, not weeks. She would have to move quickly.

She looked at clock, unsurprised to see that it was officially tomorrow, and knew it was time to go. She had work tomorrow – today, really – and lingering in Oliver’s house made her nervous. She now had official proof that he was dangerous. It was more than the kind of danger that could get her killed, though. There was danger in the way he looked at her that had her heart fluttering, but she was certain it was of her own making. She had to be imagining the spark that zinged in the air between them whenever their gazes locked and the way his heated look warmed her from head to toe. Still, it felt like danger all the same to linger.

There was no way in purgatory that she was going to let a pretty face make her forget that her mission in life was to help people. Oliver’s seemed to be to hurt them.

No matter how beautiful – and holy closeness how near to her – he was, she knew he was not the type of man she should even think about kissing. Yeah. She was totally thinking about kissing him now. His lips looked really soft, and she’d bet his hands on her back would be an extra level of torture, warm and strong and knowledgeable.

Nope, not going there.

Felicity stepped around him quickly, his eyes moving from the screen to her, and shut down the feeds, putting everything she needed for later perusal on her personally engineered dark net, and left the computers the way she had found them. Mostly. A little like how she had found them. They were better, and that’s all that mattered.

After the briefest of pauses, she gathered the pages she had printed and stapled them together with a firm tap of the stapler against the paper. She walked around the table, wanting space between her and Oliver when she handed him the information she had printed. She had no idea how he was going to react, and if she had to run it was better to be near the door. Her instincts told her to trust his reaction as peaceful, though, so she did. She held out the crisp parchment nervously, her arms crossing once he took them with a crinkled brow and started reading. The confusion cleared quickly. His face was like one of those color wheels that gradually showed the progression of one shade to the other, only
in emotions. The whole spectrum of confusion, concern, fear, and anger were showcased for her to see. It was fascinating, and a bit like watching a lion devouring a caribou two feet from her as the rage built.

She started speaking to mitigate the nervousness she felt. She was also uncertain if he understood everything she had found and wanted to be sure he had no questions. “So, ARGUS is definitely watching you…well, they were. I got rid of the bugs and put up a firewall they will absolutely not be able to crack. They seemed particularly interested in your shipping manifestos, money laundering, and drug sales. I traced them back to the source and the curious thing is that they had enough to arrest you but haven’t. I think they wanted to use the information as leverage for a future favor. Their database had a weird malfunction and the records are gone. Whoops! But they’ll probably try again, just so you know. Also, they got to you through porn.”

Oliver arched an eyebrow, his eyes widening, before he ducked his head, looking entirely embarrassed. The embarrassment was at war with the anger and steel. She felt as though she had shocked the embarrassment out of him, making it difficult for him to maintain his mask. She liked the thought very much.

“I get it!” she hurried to add. “Well, I didn’t get the whole obsession with all the against the wall porn. I mean, I understand it, but I don’t. It’s just not a thing real people can do, you know? I have never met anyone who could pick me straight up and leave me there while going at it. Not without immediately dropping me. It’s tiring, and not as fun as people make it look on screen and in novels. It’s a whole lot of effort for not a lot of payoff.”

The right side of his mouth quirked up in what she could only describe as smugness. She realized what she had said, giving away far too much about her sex life than she should to a stranger, and felt the blush threatening. No, it wasn’t threatening. It was stampeding full throttle. Stop lights had less red to them.

“That sobered him, the steel returning. He lowered the papers and looked her in the eyes. He took several steps closer, and she contemplated backing away to the door slowly, like one might do if a rabid dog were in the room and growling at her, but decided that holding on to her ground was far smarter. She had no intention of backing down now. She wanted him to see that she was not the type of woman he could boss around or threaten. She wiped her hands on her jeans again to hide the sweat and balled them into tight fists. He closed the last bit of space, popping her personal space bubble, and ducked his head to meet her eyes.

“How much did you see?” he asked, his eyes locking hers in place.

“Everything that was on your computer,” she replied.

His eyes continued to gaze into hers. The sense that he was a wild animal had faded. He wasn’t the wild thing she had imagined, not in the way she had thought. The predator in front of her was tightly controlled, coiled, and able to do damage with ice that chilled her to the bone. There was something else – intelligence she hadn’t noticed in any of their previous encounters. He could calculate and plan in a way that transcended her. It made sense the more she thought about it. He was the leader of the Starling City chapter of the Bratva, and had billions of dollars and thousands of people to his organization. He was efficient from what she had seen of his records, organized, and ran the entire thing like a business. There were no gaps, no loose ends.
It was…impressive. For a mobster who probably spent all his free time drafting up new designs for concrete shoes his organization was surprisingly graceful.

She wondered if he had figured out a nice concrete pump. If she was going to be pitched into the ocean, she’d rather have at least a little style to her name.

“I’m not interested in getting you or me into trouble, Mr. Queen,” she added swiftly. “I didn’t have to tell you about that Trojan or do any of those things for you to clear it out and save you from jail. I could have left here without you knowing any wiser. I’m that good. The reason I did it is because I want you to understand that we are even. You will not hold your help over my head for additional favors and I get to leave in one piece for helping you with something that could have fractured your entire organization.”

Surprise flashed in his eyes, and then he simply looked intrigued.

“Do you always threaten strangers who do you a favor?” he asked.

“Just the mobster ones,” she said lightly.

For the briefest of seconds she saw pain in his eyes, then the coldness returned and he stepped away from her, giving her space to finally take a full breath without being overly aware of not brushing her teeth since that morning. She took a deep breath, pleased that the conversation was going so well. He had seemed intimidating before, but now she felt safe again. It was curious how often she went back to feeling safe; it was almost like their default, which was just…weird.

“Thanks for letting me use your computer,” Felicity added, moving to the door, surprised that she felt reluctant. The reluctance was not something she felt like investigating further in the turmoil of her brain.

“Is this you refusing to let us help you take care of your problem?” Oliver asked.

“I make my own way in the world. Always have,” Felicity said quietly. She found his eyes, feeling like he needed the reassurance. “I’ll be fine, but thank you.”

He nodded, trusting her, and set the papers on the table. He turned away from her, his form an impressive display of masculinity and, surprisingly, one of heavy burdens.

“For the record, I would have let you leave without thinking you owed me anything,” he said.

Something about the sadness and the vulnerability had shame twisting in her gut. She knew he was bad – she had seen proof of it on his computer – but his words had all the weight and honesty of someone good.

He was exceedingly confusing.

His words were also clearly a dismissal. She hesitated, feeling like the second she left his house the danger and uncertainty would return, then decided that it was for the best. Danger she could see was better than the danger she could not. She went to the door and opened it, hesitating once more. He still hadn’t turned, his entire body so still that it felt as if time had frozen around her. She sighed and started to leave the room, words, for once, failing her.

“Take care, Felicity,” he said as she left the room.

It took her until she was downstairs to realize that she hadn’t given him her name. He had remembered it. She cursed herself for rambling about their previous shared work functions, surprised
he could remember her name after all that time, but the fear wasn’t the sharp thing it had been only hours ago. It was strange, too, how his lips on her name made her feel so…okay.

The house was dark, the sounds of humanity gone as she descended into the foyer. Everyone had left. It was very late, and she realized that she still had no idea where to go. She felt the press of her credit card and decided she might have to get a hotel room after all. It was better than the streets.

“Ollie said you needed a ride,” a voice shattered the peace of the dark.

Felicity jumped, yelped loudly, and then immediately glared at Sara, whose blonde hair was the lightest thing in the dark room.

“Sorry,” Sara added, laughter in her voice.

Felicity pouted at the amusement, rubbing her chest where her heart had decided to dance something that felt like a mambo – or maybe it was waltz. Waltzs were weird.

“He said to take you wherever you want to go, but I have a feeling you don’t want to go home,” Sara added. “And this might be strange, but I’m going to offer it anyways. Nyssa and I have a large apartment near QC. You’re welcome to crash overnight… or until you figure something else out. I can promise you that no harm will come to you while you are there.”

“I…” Felicity hesitated.

“I know your fear. Strangers do not help other strangers out without an ulterior motive, but I was once scared, alone, and frightened for my life.”

Felicity stared. She couldn’t imagine Sara scared of anything.

“I needed someone to help me, and she did. She saved my life. All I ask is to pass on the gift that was given to me to you.”

All at once the tension, fear, and distrust thawed and firmly melted away into a puddle of her stark emotions that gathered at her feet and left her suddenly free. Sara wasn’t a bad person, just mixed up in things Felicity didn’t condone. The good she saw outweighed the questionable choice of getting mixed up with the Russian mafia and Oliver Queen. Sara was not her choices.

“Okay,” Felicity agreed.

There was a long pause. “Okay?” Sara questioned.

“Yeah,” Felicity said, smiling broadly in response.

“Okay,” Sara agreed.

She walked to the door and opened it for Felicity, her expression eager. Felicity lingered a second longer, taking in the design of the house one last time, grateful that she had found it when fear had been her only thought, and smiled softly, her thoughts mostly with the man upstairs, the tableau of his masculinity merging with the burdens in an interesting arrangement she would never forget.

Felicity finally stepped to the door and was immediately blocked by a large man with the largest arms she had ever seen outside of anime. He nodded at Sara and then seemed to realize he was in Felicity’s way. He stepped back politely, giving her the right away, and tilted his head at her before coming to the conclusion that her appearance wasn’t any of his business.
“Dig? Is everything okay?” Sara asked.

“Oliver texted a 911,” the man, Dig, replied in a strong voice.

“That’s what you get for living in his neighborhood,” Sara said. “Worse decision ever.”

She turned to look at Felicity and seemed to make up her mind about something. “I’ve got somewhere to be, but call me if it’s something serious. I don’t like when you two got out alone.”

“Will do,” Dig replied.

He nodded at them both again, and Felicity and Sara finally left the house. Dig closed the door behind them, his dark eyes assessing Felicity as though she were a threat. She didn’t blame him. The mob always had threats coming at them. It was part of the fun of being so powerful and doing things the government didn’t like. The fear didn’t really feel like it was worth the effort. It was more headache than fun, and that was just a shitty way of spending time. Life was hard enough as it stood.

Felicity shrugged absently at the thought, then walked down off the porch and into the pouring rain. She ran to the car and slid inside, the leather squeaking unpleasantly.

“Where’s Nyssa?” Felicity asked, remembering the dark-haired assassin as Sara fastened her seatbelt and peeled away from the curb.

“She went out earlier. Wanted to see if she could track Kane. She’ll probably get in a little later. Don’t freak out if you hear someone.”

“Doesn’t she sleep?” Felicity asked.

“I don’t know if Nyssa really ever fully sleeps. It’s more like she waits,” Sara said.

“You’re teasing,” Felicity decided.

“Am I?” Sara replied with a completely straight face.

Felicity decided it was best not to answer that. She focused on the rain, and the sounds of the car, and how she was going to make sure no one got it, while staying alive and making sure the responsible people got what was coming to them.

They were ten minutes towards town when she realized that she had forgotten her jacket and her hat. She lamented the loss of the hat far more than she did the jacket, but she also knew there was no way she was returning to Oliver’s house to get it. She had been confused by him enough for one eternity. They were both casualties of her shitty night.

Sara and Nyssa’s apartment was directly in the center of town. It was a high-rise, with a spectacular view of the city, the harbor, and Queen Consolidated. The Q of the building was shiny and bright. Felicity felt as though it were mocking her. She didn’t need a reminder of the man she had just left. She didn’t want to think about anything at all for the next four hours – as that was all the sleep she would be getting before she had to go to work.

“The spare bedroom should have anything you need,” Sara said. “Do whatever…just don’t come into my room. I don’t react well to strangers in my space. I have certain…reflexes.”

“I won’t,” Felicity promised.

Sara nodded as Felicity released a large yawn. When Felicity turned away from the window, Sara
had disappeared and the apartment felt empty. Unlike Oliver’s apartment, there were no pictures or personal adornments. There was no warmth or sense of love. It felt like a furnished rental, and Sara had done absolutely nothing to make it feel like home. Felicity shrugged at the weirdness of Sara’s disappearing act, the emptiness of what should have been a home, and went to the only room that had an open door in the hall. She kicked off her shoes, wrapped the comforter over her body without getting under the sheets, and promptly fell asleep.

She was running late. It wasn’t that big of a surprise considering the night she’d had and the fact that she had woken up fifteen minutes from her house, which Sara had to drive her to in order to change clothes, which just made her want to cry at how thoroughly destroyed her things were, which made her linger more than she should have before they drove all the way back to Kord Industries. There was another two minutes on the street outside the building as Sara cautioned her against going to work when she was clearly in danger. Felicity thanked her with a smile, promised Sara that she would be careful, and then ignored everything Sara had said by getting out of the car and marching straight to the front door.

She didn’t look back at Sara, but she felt the woman’s eyes on her until the steel building swallowed her up and put the street behind her.

She felt like a spotlight was on her as she walked, but she knew no one was paying her any more attention than usual. The only weird look she got was from the security guard, and that was because she didn’t have her typical coffee and tablet in hand. It was the first time in three years she had arrived without either.

Despite no one noticing her, she was still late, and she felt like it would be obvious she suspected her boss of trying to steal from her. She punched the button on the elevator five times, hoping it would make the thing descend faster. All it did was make her knuckle hurt.

Finally, the damn thing dinged brightly and she hurried inside, grateful that no one else was with her. It allowed her to fidget without being self-conscious.

On the twelfth floor, the doors slid open again. The irritation gave way to genuine warmth.

“Hey, Curtis!” she said.

The man looked up from the tablet he had been engrossed in and blinked twice before seemingly realizing that Felicity was in front of him. His expression brightened. “Hey, girl! You are so late.”

She huffed. “Thanks for noticing.”

“I won’t tell Kord if you don’t,” he replied.

“Deal,” she said.

“Do you think you can look over the specs for the N1G6 spectrometer for me sometime today? It’s not wanting to integrate with the processor, and I’d like to get your take on the problem before I throw the entire thing out the window and make a lot of people mad.”

“Sure,” Felicity agreed.

“Then you can tell me about that specimen of a man you went out with last week.”

Felicity had frozen had the beginning of his sentence, her thoughts going to Oliver, before she
realized Curtis meant her date with Ron. Ron was okay. Super attractive, but really dumb.

“There’s not much to tell. And should you be living vicariously through me?”

The elevator door dinged, signaling their arrival on Curtis’s floor. “I’m married, Felicity, not dead, and some stories are better when they’re shared.”

“Nope. Nu-uh, no stories from me,” Felicity replied.

Curtis smiled dramatically, proving that he wasn’t finished with her, then waved in parting. The doors slid shut again and she was left to feel the full force of the nervousness and uncertainty of her plan. She had to move today, tomorrow at the latest. She had a plan mapped out in her head, but that didn’t mean it would work. There were a lot of maybes that could go really wrong. Hope was wonderful, but it didn’t really tell her whether or not she was going to die for her efforts.

Her floor was the twentieth. She had always liked that number. It was round, and swirly, and fun to write, and she had been thrilled when she had moved up to it. Now it was just a reminder of how many floors she would have to go if she ran into trouble.

The doors opened one last time, and she straightened her back before marching out into the long hallway that was bordered on either side by rooms sealed by blast-proof glass. Scientists and technicians were doing experiments behind the reinforced rooms, and further down the hall, long rows of cubicles marked her fellow computer gurus. She bypassed them all and went to fifth largest office on the floor – her office. It had never mattered to her that she wasn’t the head of the department the way her friends said she should be. She liked her place. She had minimal paperwork and her position as Chief Engineer meant that she got to use her knowledge and bridge the gap between the people who didn’t understand and those who did. She liked teaching people almost as much as she liked tweaking the orbital mechanics of the Watchtower satellite she had accidently hacked into last year.

What? It had been wobbly.

She went to her desk and tried to focus on getting some of her work for the day done so that she didn’t look suspicious. She was only half focused on it, which was full focused in normal human speak, and her eyes kept going to her desktop computer’s clock. She knew Kord’s schedule. He was a creature of habit. She just hoped that his failed attempt to find it didn’t make him change things up. Maybe he would try to act natural, too. She thought he probably would, but she didn’t know for certain. He was also the owner of the company, rich beyond belief, and didn’t have to worry about having his throat slit if he moved too quickly to the left. He was not she. He could act as weird as he wanted to provide he still cut everyone’s checks and completed his contracts.

His dependency on habit was how she knew he always went to lunch at twelve and that his assistant always went with him because he liked to work through lunch, like an animal. At 12:05 she had set all of the cameras in the entire building to a loop and was ready for the first part of her plan.

She smoothed her skirt down, giving herself a quick pep talk to stem the butterflies, and marched out into the hall. Whistling lightly, trying to look super casual, she pushed open the door to the stairwell and let it swing shut behind her. She looked up at the stairs and her heart sunk. After a moment of dread, she looked down at her pumps and realized they had to go. She pulled them off then started up. She started out fast, the sense of time pressing against her, but by the fifth stairwell she was panting heavily and gripping the railing for support.

Twelve floors up and she finally reached the proper door to Kord’s level. She peeked around the door cautiously and saw that everything was quiet as expected. She slipped around the heavy door and tiptoed down the long hallway, danger music playing in her head.

She hummed along absently, wondering why spy movies never let her know how terrifying this kind of thing was. Her heart was racing, her boobs had started to collect all the sweat from her entire body, and she kept picturing herself getting shot in the head. She had to keep reminding herself that things would be worse if she didn’t act now. Bravery now meant lives saved later.

It was all the motivation she needed.

When she reached Kord’s office her fear climbed a few degrees on the terror scale, but she kept her courage and stepped inside. Nothing jumped out at her and the office was simply an office doing office-y things. It was safe. She went straight to the computer and plugged in the tiny device she had created to spy on other people’s computers without their knowledge. It was the only way into his computer. She had created the firewall to keep hackers out of his desktop, and it had its own mainframe that was kept heavily guarded at all times. Direct to the device was the only way to get a good look at what he was doing. She clicked the device in to the port, hid it with a few cables, and then regained her feet.

The danger music in her head louder with her success, she hurried back to the stairwell. No one stopped her, her mission complete. She paused at the top of the stairs and looked down at the shoes in her hand. She whined loudly, then started walking, her feet heavy on the stairs but her pace swift.

At the twentieth floor she slipped her shoes on, wiped the sweat of her face with her ponytail, and finally walked out into the hall. She immediately turned around and darted into the stairwell, panic welling once more.

Ted Kord was in the hallway outside of her office and he looked livid. She made a quick choice and started down again, hoping she wasn’t putting her faith in the wrong person.

She found Curtis in the product development wing, happily ensconced in his latest project. She sat down next to him and pulled the device away from him without asking.

He blinked several times before he realized what had happened and who it was sitting next to him. He took in her flushed face and the way her eyes kept darting to the elevator.

“I’ve been here the past ten minutes and if you tell anyone else otherwise I will steal all of your dolls and donate them to a fire,” Felicity said.

“Action figures,” Curtis said. “They are action figures. And you could have just asked nicely.”

“Please?” Felicity corrected.

“Of course,” Curtis said.

She tinkered with the spectrometer for a while, feeling her body cool slowly, and willed her heart rate to drop to normal. Curtis had questions, but he kept them to himself. She was grateful. Answering things was for later. Maybe.

It took Kord all of ten minutes to find her. He swept into the department with his typical regal air and determined demeanor. She used to find his dark face handsome. Now she just wanted to punch his weirdly symmetrical nose and never look at him again. She forced herself to smile at him and started babbling about the spectrometer, but he stopped her with a raised finger.
“I actually wanted to ask you why there was a delay on the drone project. The military isn’t exactly patient when it comes to paying for things. I was told you delayed it.”

Relief swept through her. Work. She could handle work. “There was a flaw in the subsystem that could make the whole thing explode,” Felicity replied. “It won’t take me long to fix it. A week at the most.”

“You have three days,” Kord said.

The threat in his voice didn’t rattle her the way it would have normally. If she got her way he wouldn’t have three days.

“Yes, sir,” she replied.

He left, pulling his phone out as he did, and Curtis shifted next to her. He leaned in close. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Felicity said. “Have you seen Caitlyn around? I need to talk to her about some things for the wedding.”

“Bioweapons, like normal,” Curtis replied.

Felicity hurried away from him after a quick goodbye, but she didn’t go to Caitlyn. She went back to her office, cracked her knuckles, rolled her neck, and then went to work diving into every single aspect of Ted Kord’s life.

By the time she was done she felt shell-shocked. She had thought his motivations for wanting it were greed and commerce. She had been wrong. By a lot.

He was bad – the type of bad that bad guys avoided and police agencies didn’t know exist. He wasn’t on anybody’s watch list, not like Oliver. He also made Oliver’s crimes look tame. She had imagined Oliver as a lion. Now he seemed like a cuddly kitten she could hold in her lap and pet while he purred…and she was getting way off topic.

Kord ran the gambit of criminal activity, including selling his projects – projects that ostensibly went to the military – to people worse than the Bratva, people who saw mass murder as a fun side hobby. He was an extortionist, an arm’s dealer, a patron of the slave labor trade, an embezzler, a thief, and had millions invested in all of those trades.

Nausea swam through her stomach, her throat constricting tightly, and she braced her hands against the desk to keep herself upright.

How many of the inventions she had created had been sold to murderers? How many of her things had hurt people? How had she not seen it? How had she trusted him? How had she been so blind?

Oh, god, was she a murderer, too? She hadn’t meant for her technology to hurt people, but the burden of responsibility was still on her shoulders. She should have verified. She should have known better than to trust a man with things that could hurt other people. Hadn’t Cooper been a prime example of the misuse of that trust?

She inhaled sharply before her thoughts could do down that particular line of thought and focused on stopping Kord. That was all that mattered right now. She might not have been able to prevent him from hurting people, but she was certainly going to stop him from doing it again. And she definitely had proof it was him who had sent Kane after her. She had found correspondence and proof that he had loaned the car out to her as a job perk.
She sat up straight again and thought for a moment before she realized that Kord had given her everything she needed to take him down simply by being arrogant enough to keep records on his computer – a computer she had made impenetrable to hacking. She didn’t have to find a way to Kung Fu him as she had planned. Hitting things was for last resorts and Gary in accounting after he had made Shelly cry.

Felicity simply had to let the world see what kind of man he was. Her only problem was in knowing who to trust. There was proof he had ties to some of the cops in the city, but surely there was at least one honest officer in Starling. Her fingers went to the keyboard as she started her search, prepared to look for as long as she needed to in order to find someone with no ties to Kord, someone who saw the law as worthy of upholding.

An hour later, she had Detective Quentin Lance’s email queued up, a whole crap-ton of data to send him on Kord’s misdeeds, and a very fake email written by her. She read over the email one last time, making sure it said everything it needed to say, then she leaned back, her blue eyes flashing with fire and determination.

“That’s for screwing with my house,” she said.

She pushed send.
It surprised her when chaos didn’t immediately descend after pressing send. She had thought the action would feel a little bit more like the end. Instead, there was a knock on a door from a colleague needing an answer on one of the many projects she was overseeing. She refocused on work, feeling as though she were floating above the reality of the moment, nothing seeming tangible. She was going through the motions, waiting for the chaos to descend.

By the time the end of the day rolled around, she had accomplished a lot at work, Kord had stayed in his office, and she felt as if the police hadn’t gotten her message. She was worried, and nervous, and really didn’t feel like going home until she knew one way or the other if Kord was going to be arrested, or if he was free to send more people like Kane to rough up her furniture.

Had she trusted the wrong person? Was Detective Lance in Kord’s pocket as well? At least it wouldn’t come back to her if he was, though it didn’t really solve her problem. Her skin prickled in alarm as she realized that there was no way on earth she could contemplate going back to her house that night. It had been invaded. It could be invaded again with her in it. She felt exposed.

“Felicity!” a voice rang across the lobby as Felicity marched toward the front entrance to the building, her shift finally over for the day. She turned expectantly, a smile already blossoming.

“Caitlyn,” Felicity greeted her friend.

Caitlyn smiled warmly; the ice that she was known for carrying around the office thawed as she looked into Felicity’s eyes. “I haven’t seen you in a couple of days. I thought we could get dinner?”

“Dinner?” Felicity questioned dazedly. She realized what Caitlyn was asking a second later. “Yes. Absolutely.”

She liked the idea of dinner, mainly because it was Caitlyn, but also because it delayed her having to think about where she was going to spend the night.

Caitlyn’s smile turned soft and she wrapped her hand around Felicity’s elbow. They walked out together and climbed into Caitlyn’s car without Caitlyn asking if Felicity wanted to drive. One of her favorite things about having geniuses for friends was that practical thoughts often went over their heads – like why Felicity didn’t offer to drive herself so she could leave after the meal. Their brains simply worked on a different level, and practicalities only hit them when they were necessary.

They talked about work, about Caitlyn’s upcoming wedding to Ronnie, Caitlyn’s problems with an old friend, and their shared disappointment in the new season of Doctor Who. At no point did Felicity bring up being chased by a murderer and organ donor enforcer, and potentially ruining Ted Kord’s day. It just didn’t seem to fit with the flow of the conversation for some reason.

As dinner was ending, Felicity couldn’t keep her worry off her face. She didn’t want to go home. She didn’t want to even drive by the street.
“Okay, I wasn’t going to say anything, but you’ve looked a little like you’re going to throw up all dinner. Are you okay?” Caitlyn asked kindly as they stepped out into the parking lot.

“I just…” Felicity still didn’t want to invite layers on her friend, so she settled for a partial truth. “My house was broken into last night.”

“Oh my god!” Caitlyn exclaimed. “Were you there? Were you hurt? Do you need a doctor? I happen to be very qualified.”

“I’m fine.” Felicity smiled her reassurance. “I wasn’t there when it happened. I just – the idea of going back is…”

“Well then you are officially invited to a girl’s night in,” Caitlyn said.

“Oh, I couldn’t impose-”

“Why do people always do that?” Caitlyn asked with a cute little nose wrinkle. “If someone offers you something, it’s clearly not an imposition. They wouldn’t offer if it was. They’d stay quiet and let you do whatever you were going to do anyways. You have to trust people to know what they’re doing when it comes to looking out for the people they care about and the offers they make.”

“Well, when you put it that way,” Felicity said, some of her anxiety drifting away with Caitlyn’s words.

“I do,” Caitlyn said firmly.

“Thanks,” Felicity replied.

Happy to have won the conversation, Caitlyn hooked her arm around Felicity’s elbow once more. “I have a hard time with realizing this sometimes – and I think maybe we’re similar in this respect – but there are people you can depend on, who have your back, Felicity. There’s no shame in asking for help. You don’t have to deal with everything alone.”

“Thanks, Caitlyn. I know…” Felicity agreed with a sigh, thinking that not every situation was one that she could depend on her friends to face, not when they were her fault and could get her friends killed. But she would try with the things that wouldn’t get them hurt. She knew Caitlyn was right.

The rest of the evening was spent wrapped up in the comfort of Caitlyn’s condo. Ronnie arrived an hour later and immediately took Caitlyn into his arms, and they spent the rest of the evening cuddled together. Felicity loved seeing them. It lifted her spirits and pulled her out of worry, if only briefly.

It wasn’t until she was tucked into bed that her thoughts drifted back to the situation and the peace the couple had left in her chest faded back into worry and fear. Thoughts of Kord, Kane, and what would happen if it fell into the wrong hands had her tossing and turning for several hours.

Then Oliver floated into her mind, her heartbeat slowing slightly as she pictured his strength and calm, and she allowed herself the daydreams that could only come when sleep and wakefulness were at war with one another. She pretended he wasn’t a mobster and she hadn’t been on the run for her life when she had met him. She imagined how meeting him could have gone differently if that were the case. She would have asked for his number; she wondered if he would have given it to her. She thought about the name she had seen on the piece of paper: Veronique. Did that woman hold Oliver’s heart in trust? She pictured the myriad expressions that had graced his face during their exchanges, wondering how a mobster could feel so honest, approachable, and…good.

He hurts people, she reminded herself. She had seen proof of his crimes on his computer. They were
incongruous to the impressions she had gotten from him as a man. It left her completely confused. Despite her confusion, her mind wandered to being with him fully, and the distraction carried her softly into sleep.

The next morning she was a mixture of terrified and cautiously optimistic about the course of the day. She knew she needed to go into work, if only to keep suspicions off her long enough to figure out if Detective Lance had gotten her email, though she had an exit strategy mapped out in mind if he didn’t. Caitlyn drove them to work, their discussion focused on Barry, his work for Queen Consolidated, and his abysmal love life, particularly his long, unrepentant crush on Iris. It felt nice to focus on someone else’s problems, and Felicity was distracted right up until the moment Caitlyn got off on her floor of the Kord building and Felicity was left to the company of five people she didn’t know and the worry that today was the day that Kord realized what she had done.

She fell into the rhythm of her work fairly quickly, knowing it was the only thing that could stave off her panic. She kept alerts on her phone and an eye on the security cameras just in case. Curtis came to her office and stayed for an hour, and they work-shopped different problems that needed to be resolved with his projects and hers. If he noticed her lingering nervousness, he very carefully kept it to himself, joking and bringing lightness she desperately needed. When he was gone, she performed her liaison duties and otherwise kept her head down.

At lunch, she decided to get out of the office, her tension settling into a thick knot in her stomach. So many hours had passed since she had sent the email. They weren’t coming. Something was wrong. She was convinced that her email to the police would be ignored and she would have to think of another way to get Kord to back off.

She was outside the building, the day bright despite the alarmingly bitter wind, when her named was called once more. Unlike the call of the previous day, this one did not make her immediately smile. It sent a shiver down her spine and a bubble of nervousness mixed with hopefulness shimmed their way into her gut. She squashed the hopefulness, knowing it was stupid, and turned to look directly into the eyes of Oliver Queen.

“Mr. Queen,” she said. Her eyes darted around the plaza nervously. She knew that Oliver Queen was the type of man who garnered attention wherever he went, and it would look weird that he was talking to her. It might get back to Kord who…had no idea that Oliver was involved with the Bratva. No one did, save for Oliver’s closest advisers and ARGUS.

“Oliver, please,” Oliver corrected.

She smiled briefly in return, her eyes darting back to the people who were swarming in and out of the building. Oliver carefully reached out, giving her time to dodge his hand, and touched her elbow, pulling her away from the doors and out of the way of the stream of traffic. Though more sheltered by the building, she still felt as if everyone was looking at them. It went completely against her plan of keeping her head down.

“This is a surprise,” Felicity said, hoping to goad him into an explanation without demanding one.

Oliver’s gaze had not wavered at all. It was like he was trying to stare into her soul – or figure out what she was thinking before he spoke. Either way, it was disconcerting, and she found herself staring right back, unwilling to back down despite the nerves that had sent her veins to pulsing with electric fire.

“Yeah…” Oliver agreed seriously. The seriousness of his words made her think that he was just as surprised to be there standing in front of her as she was. Had he not planned this? He startled a little, and then held up a paper bag for a store way that was way out of her price range. “I wanted to return
“I’ve never shopped at Ivy,” she said. “Well, I’ve shopped there, but I always just end up staring at the dresses I want and drooling a little. Not that I drool. I hope Sara didn’t tell you that I do. Because that was a joke. Mostly. There was one time senior year, but that was because I had my wisdom teeth out.”

Oliver’s eyes were shining with humor, and his expression was nearly gleeful. She huffed at him irritably for enjoying her rambling and he shook the bag to bring her attention back to it. She took it curiously and looked inside. Her jacket and panda hat were neatly folded inside.

“I would have returned them sooner but I had them laundered.”

‘Had them laundered.’ It was such a rich person thing to say. She nearly laughed at him, but the niceness of the gesture stopped her. It was overwhelmingly sweet. She pulled the panda hat out and clutched it to her chest happily.

“Thank you,” she said softly.

Oliver nodded, then ducked his head, looking almost bashful. She stared, amazed that he could continue to go from dangerous to sweet so fluidly.

What even was this man?

“I should be the one thanking you,” he said.

“For what?” she asked.

He looked surprised that she genuinely didn’t know his reason.

“For what you did with my computer,” he said cautiously.

“Oh! I said you would thank me, I just didn’t think it would actually happen this soon,” she replied, grinning cheekily at him. “And I definitely thought it would be a bit more grudging.”

He huffed a laugh and then shook his head. “Okay,” he replied dryly. His nervousness returned a second later. “I was wondering if I could thank you with lunch.”

That sobered her.

“Lunch?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he agreed.

“With you,” she reiterated.

“That would be the point of asking you and not someone else,” he said.

She deliberated. Her sense of preservation told her that going to lunch with him was a really bad idea. He was a criminal and the leader of the Bratva in Starling. He was deadly. A larger part of her trusted him for a reason she couldn’t place. And she was curious, wondering if the good she saw in him was in any way strong enough to displace the bad she had witnessed on his computer. He stuck his hands in his pockets in what she recognized was a nervous trait designed to keep from fidgeting with his fingers and looked beyond her briefly before his eyes landed on hers again.

“Please,” he added.
Damn it.

“Okay,” she agreed.

He blinked several times in shock, but didn’t hesitate. He gestured for her to start walking, then fell in beside her. She stuck her panda hat on happily, not caring that it clashed with her work clothes, just pleased to have it back, and grinned again. His look of contentment broadened to a small smile, which she took as a win.

“I read up on you,” Oliver admitted as they walked side by side.

“I suppose that’s only fair,” she replied sardonically.

He nodded seriously, though his eyes were still twinkling. How were they twinkling? She looked up at the sun accusingly, wondering if he had made a pact with it at some point in the past.

“It was an impressive read.”

“I live to impress,” she replied cheekily.

“I don’t mean to pry, but what made you chose Kord Industries over QC, Merlyn Global, or Palmer Tech, when you clearly had the pick of the lot?”

“I didn’t have the pick of the lot,” Felicity said. “I had a master’s degree in cyber security and technology and wore pink and yellow as a rule. Most of my interviewers took one look at me and made up their minds about my abilities based on appearance alone. Kord’s hiring manager saw beyond it…so did Kord. Plus, Caitlyn was already working there and gave me a good reference.”

“You’re telling me that you didn’t get a job at QC because you’re a woman?” Oliver demanded.

Felicity shrugged. “They were willing to offer me a very low position in a field I didn’t want to be in. Kord offered me more. There wasn’t much of a choice to make.”

She glanced over and saw that Oliver’s face had turned stony. He looked murderous. A vein was throbbing in his temple that looked alarmingly like it was a precursor to an aneurysm.

“What was the name?” he asked.

“What?”

“The name of the hiring manager. I want it.”

“I don’t think concrete shoes are the way to deal with this situation,” Felicity replied dryly.

He shot her a hurt look. “I don’t plan to kill him. I plan on firing him and hiring someone who can do the job without sexism getting in the way. QC has been having trouble with their Applied Sciences division for the past three years. I thought it was simply that we weren’t trying hard enough. I’m beginning to realize it might be the people we’re hiring…and if you weren’t hired, I want the person who neglected to look at your resume fired.”

“My friend Barry works there, so it can’t be all bad,” she said.

“Allen?” he asked.

“Yeah,” she agreed brightly, happy Oliver knew his name. She had no doubt that could only be a good thing for Barry’s career.
“He’s a smart kid,” he replied.

“The best,” she said.

“Okay,” he agreed, as though her words had helped him make up his mind about something. He shook off the thought. “I didn’t mean to unload QC internal problems on you…I was just curious about why you picked Kord over us.”

“I don’t mind listening,” Felicity said gently.

Oliver opened a door to a restaurant then, and she was surprised that they had reached their destination. Her surroundings had faded a bit with their conversation. She stepped through and sighed deeply as the warmth of the heated room touched her face. She pulled off her hat and turned in time to see Oliver direct an amused grin at her. She touched her hair and realized it had gone in all directions. She smoothed it down quickly and Oliver led her over to a booth in the back.

They sat across from each other and he leaned his elbows against the edge of the table, all casualness and calm as he looked at her. She fidgeted nervously, wondering if he had a hidden agenda in asking her to lunch. Was he going to try to find a way to hold her in his debt? She dismissed the idea outright a second after she had it. He had said he didn’t want her to be in his debt. She felt like he meant it. Which left her with no idea of what he wanted. It was another confusing moment to add to a whole list of them.

“Is everything okay with…” he paused, searching for the right word, “your situation? Last time we spoke you made mention of quitting.”

“Quitting was the easy answer. I found a better way, only I’m not so certain it’s going to work,” she said. “If it doesn’t, I’ll have to think about implementing plan b.”

“What’s plan b?” he asked seriously.

“Terror, followed by crying, followed by…something,” she replied. “It’s a work in progress.”

“Oh,” he said.

“Can we not talk about it?” she pleaded. “I’ve thought of nothing else the past three days and I’m just…tired.”

“Sure,” he agreed easily.

The waitress appeared as if on cue and they ordered their food. They fell into companionable silence for a minute, a million questions dancing through Felicity’s head. The first question was the one she couldn’t let go.

“Why are you really here, Oliver?” she asked.

His eyes zeroed in on her face. He struggled for a minute before he finally shrugged. “I wanted to check up on you.”

It felt like a partial truth.

“Uh-huh,” she said.

His eyes narrowed. “You don’t believe me?”

“It just seems a little…normal.”
“You don’t think I’m normal?” he asked.

“I think you do a lot of strategizing. Everything is three steps ahead in your mind, and if it’s not, then you’re figuring out how to make it so. It makes sense considering your…line of work, but it makes me feel like you want something.”

“My whole life isn’t my work,” he said defensively.

“Isn’t it?” she asked.

He frowned. “Maybe I wanted to feel normal for an hour,” he replied so softly she was surprised she heard him.

She blinked – once, twice, and a third time. Oh.

“Okay,” she agreed. “I can pretend you’re not who you are, and you can pretend I’m not who I am, and we’ll just talk. We can do that.”

His entire body brightened with hope. It made her smile. She searched for a topic. Her mind bubbled up with one without effort.

“I had a goldfish when I was little. His name was Orion. He ended up on top of the Las Vegas Statue of Liberty.”

He looked startled. “How?”

“A bully, a slingshot, and a surprising understanding of geometry from someone who failed fifth grade twice.”

He winced even as his lips fought to resist his smile. She waited, allowing the ridiculousness of the situation to permeate the moment, then he finally huffed out a laugh, almost melting into his seat as he relaxed. She laughed with him, explaining the story in greater detail.

The goldfish story switched to other stories from her childhood – the things she could tell without pain. He didn’t share nearly as much, contenting himself to listening, interjecting when he had something to add, and smiling when he was particularly amused with one of her stories.

Finally, her break was over and he was helping her into her coat, picking up the bag he had brought to her, and handing off her purse. He was the perfect gentleman, and his manners were impeccable. She wasn’t surprised, but was she a bit taken aback at how she seemed to be his total focus as he helped her.

“Thanks for lunch,” Felicity said, as he had insisted on paying.

“Sure,” he agreed easily, keeping his pace slow as they walked outside, as if he had absolutely nowhere to be. She doubted that were the case. People like him were always needed somewhere. Between running QC and the Bratva business, he had to stay pretty busy. She didn’t have nearly his amount of work and she barely had downtime. Of course, she was a workaholic.

She kept her pace with his, not caring if she was late returning to work. She wanted to extend their time. The entire exchange with him had been surprisingly nice. She didn’t know what to make of it, but it was the first time she felt truly at peace since leaving his house.

They stopped in the plaza near the front door to Kord Industries and looked at each other shyly. They both knew the goodbye was coming, and, surprisingly, they were both reluctant to face it.
“Thanks again for returning my hat,” she said, pointing up at where it was on her head.

He grinned. “Of course.”

“I keep saying thank you,” she said thoughtfully. “I usually have more to say than that.”

“It’s nice to hear it,” he said, in a way that changed it to, “I don’t mind.”

She nodded and searched for a way to prolong their time together. *He’s a mobster, potential murderer, and not a good person to be around for longer than necessary,* she warned herself. That shook her out of her awkwardness and refocused her thoughts. He seemed to realize that staring at her wasn’t the way to go either and shifted slightly before speaking.

“I know you won’t accept a job offer at QC, but there’s one there if you want it,” he said, startling her. “However things turn out with Kord, I wanted you to know that.”

Her eyes widened. “That’s…”

“You don’t have to say thank you again,” he returned. “Just think about it.”

“I will,” she promised seriously.

Oliver’s entire body changed into tight defensiveness as he caught sight of something over Felicity’s shoulder. She followed his line of sight and saw a man in a suit followed by three uniformed police officers walking across the square. The man was the definition of grizzled. He was also someone she had recently read up on to the point of knowing too much about his online habits – Detective Lance. She looked back at Oliver curiously, and it was pretty clear in a glance that the pair had a history. The detective saw Oliver and nearly stopped walking. His business expression switched to utter disgust. His pause was minor and he continued forward, ignoring Oliver save for the deathly glare.

“Old friend?” Felicity asked Oliver.

Oliver grunted, his expression somewhere between hangdog and determined. He clearly thought that Lance was there for him. Felicity had a different notion. As if to prove the thought, Kord appeared at the door on his way out to lunch. His assistant and an investor were with him.

Detective Lance finally looked away from Oliver. “Mr. Kord, Detective Quentin Lance. I’d like to have a word with you.”

Kord bristled at the interruption of his business and looked over at his assistant, who started typing away on her tablet to see if the detective had an appointment. Felicity turned to better watch the exchange, a growing feeling of glee gathering in her stomach. Oliver turned as well, the stillness returning to his body. Kord’s assistant shook her head at Kord.

“It seems you don’t have an appointment, Detective. If you’d like to schedule one now, I’d be happy to talk to you at another time,” Kord said.

“Cute,” Detective Lance said, stopping Kord as he tried to walk past him. Kord looked down at the hand on his arm, pure danger in his face. To his credit, Detective Lance looked amused instead of frightened. “I’m going to have to insist we talk now.”

“What’s this about?” Kord asked.

“I think you know,” Lance said. He pulled out a stack of papers and unfolded them. He held them out for Kord to peruse.
Felicity watched as Kord went from his typical dark to as white as was a possible for a man of his color. He looked like he was going to be sick. His expression remained stoic, but the papers trembled a little.

“How did you get this?” Kord demanded.

“You sent them to me, Mr. Kord,” Lance replied.

“What?!” Kord exclaimed.

“It came from your computer, one I’m told only you have access to, at a time your assistant verified you as being at your desk,” Detective Lance.

Kord looked at his assistant whose eyes had gone large.

“I didn’t know…He didn’t say…”

“I have a multitude of sins to confess,” Kord read off the email Felicity had spent a long time writing and rewriting, cutting off his assistant with an irritable wave. “I’ve never said that in my life.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t really care. I have a confession from you, records that have been proven to be from your personal computer, and a lovely warrant here to search your company, your home, and the subsidiaries you mentioned in the email. Where’s your V.P.?” Lance asked.

“In her office,” Kord replied tightly.

“I’ll let her show me around, then. As of right now, you are under arrest for murder, kidnapping, extortion, fraud, embezzling…” Detective Lance stopped. “Actually we might be standing here for a while if I read all your crimes off. I’ll let the officers take care of that for you.”

The officers stepped forward, the closest one pulling out his handcuffs, while the woman started searching Kord for weapons.

“This is preposterous!” Kord said.

“Tell it to a jury,” Lance returned, marching inside the building with the spare officer.

As far as dramatic exits went, it was pretty awesome.

Kord was taken away, his assistant and the investor staring after him in shock, as people around the plaza did the same. In an instant, Felicity felt her lingering tension uncoil and she let out a relieved breath. Her tension melted and the burdens in her chest popped like a giant balloon. Kord was no longer a problem. He wouldn’t get her tech, he wouldn’t be able to threaten her, and she was finally safe. She didn’t know what would happen next with the company and her job, but it was worth it for getting him off the streets. He would never hurt anyone again, and she liked the idea of that very much.

Oliver finally shifted next to her, drawing her attention back to him. He was looking at her with a mixture of awe and fear. She stared back at him, waiting for his reaction.

“You did this?” he asked quietly.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” she said with a proud smile.

“Right,” he said. He looked at Kord again, who was being put into a police car, and frowned. “Remind me never to piss you off.”
“I’m pretty sure you remember everything,” Felicity replied instantly.

He huffed another laugh. “Pretty impressive,” he said. “How’d you do it?”

“A girl likes to keep her secrets,” Felicity replied. “Lunch was amazing, Oliver, but I should really get in there and see what’s going on. I’ll see you around?”

His eyes had gone distant but they refocused at her words. “Definitely,” he replied.

She smiled at him and turned on her heels. She started to walk away, but not before he sent a small wave her way. It was dorky and wonderfully out of character. She waved back and went inside, her mood a complete 180 from the start of her break. She didn’t know what had her feeling so happy – lunch with a ridiculously handsome mobster or bringing down a different criminal, who extorted women and children as a practice.

She thought it might have definitely been the warmth and sense of being impressed in Oliver’s eyes when she had waved her goodbye.

She may not be sane, but at least nothing in Oliver’s past suggested he indulged in the slave trade, either in his personal life or business. That was something. Too, he was sweet, a little bit shy, and entirely a gentleman. The goodness she had sensed during lunch had only become more and more apparent to her as the meal had progressed. He had showed her nothing but respect, he listened, he worried, and he was not the enemy. She would process all that later, though. Right now, she just wanted to bask in the truth of a fun lunch and a nemesis conquered.

Oliver watched her walk away until she was out of sight. She felt his stare on her neck the entire time. It was oddly calming. She smiled to herself, wondering if this was how insanity felt, and hurried to the elevator and her floor, where she knew her colleagues’ panic would be the standard for the foreseeable future.
Chapter Summary

How’d you guys like that premiere?

Stuff starts to build, discussions are had, Felicity gets carried places.

Thanks for reading!

She had never understood the phrase, “like chickens with their heads cut off.” It had always felt A) icky, B) weird, and C) impractical for a chicken to being doing anything without a head. She understood that phrase exceedingly well now.

For people who had absolutely no idea what was going on or where they should be pointed, there was a lot of running around and running into things and each other. Everyone was freaked out. News of Kord’s arrest had traveled fast. Some people sat at their desks, theirs heads in their hands. They had gotten over the chicken/no head stage and were in the acceptance stage of things. Felicity didn’t try to comfort anyone yet. She had bigger fish to fry.

She didn’t like that phrase either. She preferred her fish the way she enjoyed raisins – in the garbage can.

Apparently taking down billion dollar corporations left her feeling a little clichéd. Whatever. She had a singular focus, and that was retrieving her tech before the forensic specialists got ahold of it and realized it meant Kord’s computer had been hacked. It would throw a monkey wrench into everything, and she was not fond of monkeys or wrenches. She shuddered at the memory of the monkey she had met on the strip – one who had been a complete asshole – and urged herself to focus on the task at hand. She needed to get up to Kord’s office, and that either meant sneaking or going with the direct approach. With Lance hanging around, she thought the best idea was a direct approach. It was better he be distracted by her arrival instead of suspicious because of her sneaking.

Felicity dropped all of her things in her office and spent several minutes looking for a legitimate reason to go upstairs. She finally found one, her heart stuttering with nervousness, and she printed out full copies of her department’s projects, expenses, and projections for that quarter. The papers in hand, she went to the elevator and calmly waited for it even as people ran around her floor, talking, panicking, and otherwise showing how dependent on their jobs they were. She wondered if any of them had been involved with Kord’s dealings. She also realized that was for the police to work out. She had done as much as she was willing to do.

The elevator dinged softly and she stepped inside, pleased no one else was there. They were all still on their floors having the mother of all freak outs. That meant having time to think without feeling awkward over uncomfortable silence. As she rode up she considered Oliver’s offer.

Would working for him be a better choice, or would it simply be shuffling problems around instead of eliminating them? Was this a chance for a fresh start? Thoughts of the job offer quickly dissolve into thoughts of Oliver’s face when he had made it, and thoughts of Oliver’s face left her feeling very, very unprofessional.
She snapped out of her daydream when the doors dinged at her again, and hurried forward, a faint blush on her cheeks from the lingering daydreams.

Kord’s office was not the graveyard it had been on her last visit. The floor hummed and buzzed with conversations and activity. Detective Lance stood directly outside the V.P.’s office, the V.P. looking stony and, if Felicity wasn’t mistaken, angry as hell. She wasn’t entirely certain who was more intimidating – the V.P. or Lance. They were both holding their own exceptionally well.

She checked to make sure that no one was looking at her, then slipped into Kord’s office. She immediately went to the computer and squatted down long enough to pull her tech away. When she stood, she mentally fist-bumped that she had managed to retrieve it without getting caught.

“What are you doing?”

Felicity whirled around, her eyes widening, and saw Detective Lance in the doorway. He was staring at her, all imposing intelligence and fierce determination. His focus was singular; and it was suddenly all place on her. She quickly slipped the device into the belt around her dress, disguising the movement as fidgeting.

“I heard you down in the plaza arresting Kord,” Felicity said, feeling like he would recognize her after glaring at Oliver so hard. He did not seem like the type of man who missed much. “I thought that you would be doing an audit on the departments, so I went ahead and pulled out all the data from the last quarter, including my notes on upcoming projects and projected profits. I also made sure to include the clients in case you needed that as well.”

“That’s very…helpful of you,” Lance replied. He took the papers and looked at them thoughtfully. “Want to explain to me why you aren’t panicking like the rest of your coworkers?”

“I only panic over fictional characters and running out of wine,” she replied.

“What’s your name?” Lance returned.

“Felicity. Smoak.”

“Ms. Smoak, do you think I’m playing a game here? Your boss is responsible for some very bad things. You need to take this situation a little more seriously.”

All levity fled from her face. “If he did something wrong, I want to know about it. He needs to be held responsible, and this,” she tapped the papers in his hands, “is my way of letting you know that I will help you however you need help. People need to be held accountable when they hurt others. That’s something I take very seriously.”

“Uh-huh,” Lance said. “Which is why you were talking to Queen?”

“I don’t follow,” Felicity said.

“Queen has hurt a lot of people, Ms. Smoak. And he will hurt a lot more, including you. He is not a good person. I don’t know what he wanted or why you were with him, but you should steer clear of him.”

“Respectfully, Detective, that’s for me to decide, but thank you for the warning. Will you need anything else from my department?”

“I’ll let you know,” he said.
She nodded and started to walk away. He caught her attention as she crossed the threshold.

“Ms. Smoak?”

She turned around, wondering if he had somehow noticed the device or had figured out her connection to exposing Kord. She kept her expression bright even as her heart raced.

“Be careful.”

“I will,” she replied, smiling at him.

He started to smile back, then blinked in surprise, and frowned grumpily. She took the almost smile as a win, wondering why so many grumpy-pants people had entered her life lately, and hurried to the elevator. The warning against Oliver resonated, but she was far too happy she hadn’t been caught to focus on it for longer than it took her to get to her floor.

The rest of her day was spent answering questions, calming her coworkers, and urging everyone back to work. While the company was certainly in trouble, it had not collapsed yet, and she knew that work was better than agonizing. Still, by four o’clock most everyone had gone home and she knew that work was better than agonizing. Still, by four o’clock most everyone had gone home and she

The computer forensics experts Lance had called in. One tech, who specialized in engineering and technology, was going through her projects with a bubbly joy she found magnetic. His name was Cisco, and he was the most calming thing about her day. He had work to do, however, so she left him to it with a cheery goodbye and a promise to check on him tomorrow.

Outside, she sucked in the chilly air and smiled to herself. Not everything had gone to plan, but things were definitely looking up. **It** was still hidden, the police were taking care of Kord, and she had her panda hat back. Even incipient joblessness could not ruin her good mood.

She decided to treat herself, going to the line of stores that were just outside of the industrial center, and spent several hours wandering around and enjoying the dresses, shoes, and bags she saw. But mostly the shoes. She wanted all the shoes.

She didn’t buy anything, as nothing really leapt out her, but looking was a lot of fun. She bought a nice dinner at her favorite restaurant instead, and walked around a park that was twinkling with lights and full of families ice skating and playing in the leftover snow until the glass of wine she’d had with dinner had worn off and she felt safe to drive.

It was dusk when she got into her car and fully dark by the time she reached her road, but she didn’t mind. She felt safe, convinced that the problem had been solved. When she got to her house, it took her a minute to remember that everything was still a mess. Her mood had been so improved she had forgotten the state of her home. They were just things, but they were her things. She gently nudged a broken lamp and eyed the clutter with a sigh. That was tomorrow’s problem. Right now, she felt like sleeping in her own bed for a solid eight hours. Everything else could wait.

Her bedroom was as trashed as the rest of her house, but her mattress was still intact, though it had been leaned against the wall. With a lot of huffing and puffing, she rearranged it, put fresh sheets on it – because sleeping on sheets bad guys had touched was gross – and snuggled under the covers with a sleepy flop. The bed wasn’t as comfortable as Caitlyn’s or Sara’s, but it was hers and she fell asleep not long after her head touched the pillow.

She woke to heat – intense and searing. It burned her nostrils; it squeezed the air out of her lungs. She coughed, sitting up to catch her breath, and felt the struggle turn real. Air wasn’t coming. She was choking, starved for oxygen in a way she had never been. Instinct told her to get down, but her
body took a second to obey her thoughts. The pause allowed more smoke to fill her lungs.

The ground was hard and littered with broken shards and torn fabric, but she could breathe a bit easier. She could think. She could look around without being solely focused on her burning lungs.

The heat was steady and fierce. Dancing shapes illuminated the growing flames that were turning her house to smoke and ash. The heat was a living force around her and within her chest; it hummed, it grew, it sought all living things to destroy and renew.

The door was so far away. It was open, but she didn’t know if she could reach it. The window was closer. She crawled over to it and used the window ledge as leverage as the roar caught up to her. She had never been inside a fire before. She was surprised at the mixture of loudness and stillness. It was unlike anything she had ever experienced. It was beautiful in the terrifying, “oh god, oh god, I’m going to be baked alive,” way.

She tried to push the window open, but it was sealed tight. She started to panic a little, tears slipping down her cheeks even as she fought the swollen wood to budge even an inch.

It wasn’t happening. She wasn’t strong enough. Physics had once again proven themselves immobile.

That was when her brain went into logic mode, a defense against dying she liked very much. If leverage couldn’t open the window, then force would have to do. She reached out and found the closest thing that was solid – a lamp that had been knocked over. She picked it up and hefted it at the window. The window shattered, more glass landing around her bloodied feet, and she cleared the glass away from the frame with clumsy swipes, breathing in the fresh air eagerly. It wasn’t enough. She still felt like a hand was around her neck, tightening, closing, taking away everything that mattered.

Her legs shook and her body trembled with the need to fall. She wanted to give in. She wanted it so badly. But her heart was screaming for the second time in three days that she was a survivor. It was screaming at her to move. So she did. She leaned against the wall and prepared herself for a very painful dive onto what she was pretty certain was some form of Azalea bush. She had always thought it pretty. Now, she just really hoped it would provide some kind of soft landing. Before she could make the leap, a hand reached through the window, masculine and somehow familiar, and she grasped it without hesitation.

The second her fingers were in his palm, she was tugged forward, her entire body moving through the air in some sick carnival-like ride for her life. It was like being on one of those rides that slung her up into the air via bungee cords before doing it all over again once she reached the bottom. At the end of her wild fling through the window was a firm body; one who was seriously not prepared for the strength of his own pull.

She knocked into the man, both of them grunting in pain, and he fell, wrapping his arms around her as naturally as her hands found his chest. They hit the ground together and she decided that the movies got it wrong. Falling on top of a person hurt nearly as much as hitting the ground. Or maybe it was just that the man was super hard.

“Mostly super hard,” she muttered.

“What?” he asked.

She started coughing, ignoring him, and stayed on the super not-sofa pillow that he had become. He wasn’t satisfied with remaining a pillow. He shifted, moved her so that she was in his arms, and
stood. She kept coughing, even as her eyes drifted to her house…which was seriously burning. Her eyes widened as she caught sight of her bedroom. It was totally engulfed in flames. How had she made it out? How had she not noticed that much fire? How was she alive right now?

“My panda hat is in there,” Felicity rasped out sadly.

There was a soft huff from the man’s chest, as though her words left him simultaneously indignant and amused, and she knew then who it was.

She looked up at him, but his face was obscured by a balaclava. His eyes were still twinkling, and she knew she had the fire to blame this time. Even the destructive force of an inferno made him look handsome. Annoying.

He carried her to the curb, where she knew her car was waiting. He put her in the passenger seat and she got a decent look at her lawn for the first time. She knew that it had shielded it from her on purpose, but he couldn’t hide it now. Three men were lying on her brown grass. She didn’t have to check to know that they were dead. Their blank stares and crooked bodies said enough. She gulped, her entire body freezing with the reveal of actual dead people nearby, and startled violently when Oliver closed the driver’s side door.

She froze again as he started the engine and put it into gear. She briefly considered the idea that he had started the fire and that jumping out of the car would be a super duper good idea with lots of potential of staying alive. She immediately dismissed it when his eyes connected with hers. Why was logic always flying far, far away where Oliver was concerned? She knew it wasn’t his looks. She wasn’t that superficial. It had to be something else – something she wasn’t sure she felt like identifying.

Sensing her fear, his eyes softened and his body language went from defensive to calming. “Do you want out?” he asked.

She shook her head.

That was enough for him. He pulled away from the curb as fire trucks and ambulances roared down her street from the other end and neighbors started coming out on their porches and lawns to watch the chaos and fret about if the fire would spread to their homes next. She watched in the side mirror as everything she had ever owned, every picture, every memory, was destroyed in the heat, ash, and roaring silence of the merrily burning fire she had been inside of only moments before.

“Fuck,” she decided.

Oliver said nothing. She liked that he said nothing. She didn’t want him to tell her that everything was okay. She wanted the truth.

“Those men?” she asked.

“Sent to make sure you didn’t get out and to start the fire. It was meant to look like your stove malfunctioned.”

“I’m never cooking with gas again,” she said.

“They won’t bother you again, but you have a bigger problem,” he said.

“Like you potentially stalking me?” she asked.

“I wasn’t stalking you,” he said.
“You were at my house,” she reminded him. “That’s not friendly behavior.”

“I heard a call for a fire over the radio. I responded to it.”

“Are you a firefighter?” she asked.

“No. I was just in the neighborhood.”

“With a handy balaclava stashed in your coat…which is green. Why is your coat green?”

“It’s…That’s not…Can we focus?” he asked.

“I was focused, just tangent-ing. I can focus tangent.”

“It’s not focusing if you’re going off point, Felicity. It’s the opposite, in fact.”

“To you maybe,” she said.

“To everyone, including all known dictionaries.”

“Not a good enough argument, but thanks for playing.”

Then, because she was really scared and exhausted and had been through the mother of all traumas, she burst into tears. Oliver immediately pulled the car over, letting it idle as he watched her awkwardly. His hand twitched, then he balled it into a fist, until he hesitantly raised it. Through blurry eyes she saw him slowly reach out to rest his hand on her shoulder. She turned instinctively, seeking out the comfort, and he took this as permission to plant the hand more firmly on her shoulder. It was warm, large, and told her that she was safe to cry as much as she needed to before she reclaimed her equilibrium. She turned even more and clutched at his arm, wishing that she wasn’t having a meltdown all over the poor guy but unable to dictate her actions as much as she wanted to around her terror.

Oliver didn’t seem to mind. He unbuckled his seatbelt and gently put his other hand under her knees. He pulled her to him, much as he had done when carrying her away from the house, and held her as tightly as the small space would allow. She clutched at his stupidly green jacket and cried herself out.

When the tears were spent, she wiped her nose on his jacket absently and looked up at him with shining eyes. He looked distant, slightly perplexed, and a little lost in his own head. He caught her stare and stared back with equal intensity, saying so much and not enough.

“You smell like smoke,” Felicity said.

“I’m aware,” he said.

“I smell like smoke…and Smoak,” Felicity said.

He wrinkled his brow in confusion.

“It was funnier in my head,” she whispered.

“Okay,” he said.

“You can let me go now,” she muttered, embarrassed at how much she had slobbered, snotted, and otherwise put body fluids she didn’t want him to see all over his jacket.

“Right,” he agreed, loosening his arms as if she had scalded him.
Awkwardly, her butt, boobs, and elbows knocking into everything she didn’t want them to, she crawled out of his lap and settled back into her seat. She wiped her face on her shirt, aware that she was probably just spreading more ash everywhere, and rolled her shoulders, all business.

“Okay, so…I made someone mad,” she said.

Oliver snorted.

“Horses snort, Oliver, not people,” she told him primly.

He rolled his eyes, but didn’t rise to the bait. “It’s very clear that someone wants you dead, yes.”

“I already worked that out, keep up,” she told him.

He shot her an exasperated look, but she missed it. She was too busy trying to figure out what the fire was about, who she had made mad, and what she was going to do about it. At least Kane and the Italian man hadn’t gotten around to killing her via a fire. They had just been threatening. Unless this was them.

“Were you really just in the neighborhood?” Felicity asked then. “Or were you on Bratva business?”

“Can’t I do both?” he asked evasively.

“So, yes,” she said. “What Bratva business is there in the suburbs?”

He winced lightly at a memory and half shrugged one shoulder in a failed attempt at nonchalance. “Uh…A conversation.”

“Would this conversation include pointy things and ouchies?”

Oliver stared at her in earnest. “Ouchies?” he demanded.

“I was gonna say boo-boos, but only my mother calls them that.”

He sighed. “I’m going to take you back to my house…Unless you want to go somewhere else? We can talk about this situation there…if you want.”

It was her turn to stare. Why was he always so hesitant with her? Why did he have to ask permission, and be so respectful, and then kill people on her front lawn without batting an eye? Why did he have to look at her like she was going to call him a monster at any minute?

“I don’t want anyone else to get hurt,” Felicity said slowly.

“You’ll be safe there,” he promised.

“I’m not worried about myself,” she said.

He tilted his head to show that he was listening and needed more of an explanation.

“I don’t need anyone getting wrapped up in this situation, and I don’t want to pull the Bratva into it and start a turf war, or whatever. And I…I seriously don’t want you to get hurt because of something I did. I don’t want any of my friends to get hurt because of me.”

“Friend?” he asked.

“Working on it, maybe,” she said. “Saving my life didn’t hurt.”
His lips twitched in his characteristic smile she was finding herself liking more and more. It was stupidly sweet.

“You don’t need to worry about me,” he said. “I can take care of myself.”

“Someone should,” she muttered.

“What?” he said.

She shrugged, not wanting to go into how she suddenly felt like he spent all his time worrying about other people and how other people didn’t worry about him nearly as much, unloading their burdens onto his shoulders without censure. That was not really a discussion she felt like getting in to with so many other things to figure out and resolve. Maybe if they didn’t get killed she could ask him about it.

“Yes,” she decided, going all in. It was a gamble even her Vegas born mother would find ridiculously risky. It may very well start a war, but she had a feeling one had already been started with the fire. Oliver wouldn’t ignore it. She could see it in his eyes. Whether she went with him or not wouldn’t stop it, but maybe if she had his ear she could mitigate the damage and save lives, maybe even his.

“Yes?” he asked.

She shot him a pointed look and he blinked several times before finally putting the car back into drive and pulling out into traffic. No other words were needed between them to understand what she had meant. Silence fell, Oliver checking his mirrors in near constant alertness, his hands steering them towards the subjective safety of his house. It had felt safe, but it was nearly as exposed as her townhouse had been. There was no gate, nothing to keep the bad guys from storming inside and setting them all on fire.

Her breathing turned heavy at the thought, but she stayed turned away from him to keep him from noticing. She allowed the panic attack to take over, figuring she had earned it. It only lessened when she heard the engine shut off and his hand landed on her shoulder again, gently caressing the skin on her back.

She inhaled deeply, nodded without looking at him to let him know that she was fine, and opened her door, only to remember her numerous cuts, some of which still had glass in them. She yelped, promptly sat back down, and Oliver was at her side, kneeling to take a look before she could even process that he had moved.

“May I?” he asked, gesturing at her.

She nodded, certain that walking was not an option, and he swept her into his arms again.

“You’re really good at that,” she said.

“Carrying people?” he asked.

“Yeah. It should be an Olympic sport. I’d watch that.”

“Thanks?”

“It wouldn’t have to be the Winter Games. We could start a new tradition of Fall Games – lead event: Carrying People. Scores based on technique, style, and execution. Oh. You just opened the door and held me up with one arm. Full marks. Very impressive.”
“I don’t know how I feel about you judging my carrying,” he said gruffly, though she sensed his amusement.

“My feet hurt now,” she said. “Why didn’t they hurt before?”

“Because you were in shock. The adrenaline is wearing off. Everything will hurt about twice as badly as normal.”

“Yay,” she said.

He closed the door behind him with one foot and took her over to the sofa, where he gently lowered her down. Her arms lingered around his neck, but only because her body was stiff and reluctant to follow her commands. Mostly.

When she was safely cushioned and propped against a good amount of pillows, he disappeared. She heard talking, but there were no return voices in the house, so she assumed he was on the phone. The conversation didn’t last long. A minute later he returned with a first aid kit. The grim expression was back on his face, and she thought that the conversation did not go well.

“I name thee grumpy face,” she said, pushing on his furrowed brow without thinking. She froze, her lips parting in an o as she realized what she had done, and hastily lowered her hand. “Sorry!”

He closed his eyes for a beat longer than was normal. When he opened them, some of the steel had melted and he looked a little less burdened. “This will sting.”

She sighed and watched as he started cleaning out the cuts, wincing, yelping, and otherwise being a really lousy patient as he worked. He took it all in stride, showing her patience not many people had in her life. There was also an intimacy to the cleaning, as if he was allowing himself to enjoy the touch and the whispers of, “maybe,” she could feel in every connection of skin. She didn’t like the whispers, and she sensed that he thought they were a bad idea as well, but it didn’t stop the intimacy from swelling up around them.

When he was done, her wounds on her feet, arms, and legs safely bandaged, he packed everything back up, stood swiftly, and disappeared into the shadows of the house without sound or shadow to give proof of his passing.

Felicity leaned back against the sofa, knowing that he was taking a much needed break from the intimacy, and tried to get the thrum of pleasure out of her veins long enough to focus on the very real problem of yet another person with a vendetta looking to cause her pain. And they had. Her house was gone. The one thing that connected her to Starling was destroyed, taken from her forever. Ransacking her things had nothing on the scorching burn of ash that would probably sizzle and pop for days. Her life was in that house. Someone had wanted to send a message, and she had received it loud and clear.

The question was what she was going to do about it, and if she really had the energy to hunt down another psychopath without her brain collapsing. She knew she had no choice. It was live or die, and she always found a way to live.
Sitting in a mostly dark house with injured feet was super creepy when said house wasn’t her house and she had just gotten done being pulled out of a fire meant to kill her. It was also really awkward, as she felt like Oliver was somewhere in a dark corner avoiding her because they had a…something. An intimate moment wasn’t worth becoming a ghost. It was childish and super irritating, but she couldn’t march over to wherever he had gone and yell at his face because her feet really hurt. The idea of not being able to confront him until he came to her added to her irritation.

She contented herself with crossing her arms and huffing as violently as one could huff.

“Boys,” she complained.

“Tell me about it,” another voice interjected into the silence.

Felicity jumped and squeaked as Sara stepped around the corner of the sofa without a sound and knelt in front of her. Her eyes raked Felicity’s body with an alarming amount of anger before they landed on Felicity’s face again. Felicity wasn’t prepared for the amount of genuine, solid concern she felt radiating from the woman. She didn’t understand how Sara could be that worried about her after knowing her for so little time, but the emotion was plainly there and deeply felt. It was nice. It calmed some of Felicity’s lingering anxiety, and she felt herself relax into the sofa more deeply.

“Do you need anything?” Sara asked.

Felicity shook her head, reassuring her in a glance that she was perfectly fine, if not shaken and seriously pissed that someone had murdered her house dead.

“Do I need to call anyone? Will anyone be worried about you?” Sara added, rocking back on her heels thoughtfully.

“Oh,” Felicity said, rubbing at her eyes with the palms of her hands, feeling fully exhausted at the idea of having to explain over and over again that she was safe and that her house was gone. She knew she would have to at some point, but she didn’t know if she had it in her to worry about it tonight. Her eyes widened as she considered the one person she would absolutely have to call.

There was no hiding the truth from Iris. A house fire would be in the news. Iris worked the night shifts at the paper and would hear about it. Iris would panic.

“Iris,” Felicity added.

Sara pulled her phone out and handed it off to Felicity. There were no warning to be careful about what she said and not mention where she was, as Felicity had expected. There was just more of the worry on Sara’s face as she took Felicity in.
Felicity dialed Iris’s number and waited. Her friend picked up on the last ring before it went to voicemail. She sounded out of breath, as if she had been running, and mildly irritated at the interruption.

“Hello?”

“It’s Felicity.”

“Felicity! Oh my god. Are you okay? Where are you? Why weren’t you there? Do I need to come get you? Are you okay?”

“Iris! I’m fine!” Felicity replied. “Deep breaths.”

Iris took a second to breathe, her exhales filling the phone with noise. “I was worried.”

“I got that,” Felicity agreed.

“I’m just…Where are you?” Iris asked, sounding a lot calmer.

Felicity found Sara’s eyes. Sara shrugged and Felicity remembered that no one knew of Oliver’s involvement in the Bratva. It was a secret. Being at his house wasn’t the secret she had built it up to be. But there was the problem of Iris having a major celebrity crush on Oliver; Iris would badger her to know why she was at Oliver’s house in the middle of the night instead of her own.

“Felicity?” Iris repeated.

“With a friend,” Felicity said.

“Where you at your house when it…?”

“Are you asking as a friend or a reporter?” Felicity asked.

“That’s not fair,” Iris chastised.

“I know. I’m sorry. You’re right. I’m just…It’s been a long couple of days and everything is gone… just gone. And I feel like the trouble has just started and my life is going in a thousand different pieces, and I may have made a mistake, and there’s a story there, but I can’t tell you because I can’t have it in the news because it will put a lot of people in danger, including you, and I kind of don’t want to go to jail for my involvement in it, and I-”

The phone was gently pulled from her grasp and Sara spoke into the phone. “Felicity’s having a bit of a…moment.”

Sara listened intently to Iris for a minute, her eyes locked on Felicity’s face. Finally, she nodded. “I understand. Yes. No. I’m not sure that’s wise…You know how to do that? Oh, I see. Fine. The address is…”

She listed out the address for Oliver’s house, said her goodbye, and then tucked her phone into her pocket. “She’s on her way over.”

“She doesn’t need to be involved in this,” Felicity complained.

“And you could use a friend,” Sara said.

“You could be my friend,” Felicity said.
Sara’s lips crossed the boundaries and she finally fully smiled at Felicity. “I think we already are. But I won’t be here long. Ollie will want me on the streets looking for answers. Nyssa is…”


“Nyssa and I need to talk to Ollie…see what he knows. Then we have to go. It’s best if you have a friend here. The adrenaline is still lingering, but when it wears off, you’re going to want a friendly face.”

“What do I tell her? Why am I here? She’s a reporter. She’ll have questions,” Felicity said.

“Answer only the ones that you feel like answering,” Nyssa said. “And if that does not satisfy her, threaten her to hold her tongue.”

“She must be fun at parties,” Felicity said.

“She grows on you,” Sara said. Sara’s eyes narrowed and her lips puckered thoughtfully. “Tell her that I was in the neighborhood and saw the fire. Oliver’s house was closer than mine so I brought you here.”

Felicity shook her head. “Iris will see right through it.”

“Not if you keep your mouth shut,” Nyssa said.

“Iris is intuitive. She reads people. She knows your thoughts before you have them. She sees everything,” Felicity said, wide-eyed and uncertain.

Nyssa looked impressed. “A good skill to have. One that seems to terrify you. I must meet this person.”

“Then tell her that you can’t tell her and hope that’s enough,” Sara said with a shrug that told Felicity that Sara did not see it as her problem.

“Sara…Nyssa,” Oliver greeted them, walking in from the dining room with a tray.

He set it on the table in front of Felicity but didn’t catch her gaze. She saw hot chocolate, more chocolate to eat, ice cream, and a couple of brownies. She stared at the sweets, wondering what the actual frack, and tried to process Oliver having those types of things in his kitchen. It took her a second to realize that she had told him over lunch that she stress eats sweets – that they were her comfort food. Why kind of fluffy mobster was she dealing with here? Clearly the kind that remembered her bad habits.

Sara smirked at the sight of the tray, but she didn’t say anything, something that both Felicity and Oliver seemed to appreciate.

“We need to talk,” Oliver said, all business.

“So talk,” Sara replied.

His eyes flicked over to Felicity, who had picked up the ice cream, because she’d had enough of hot things for the night, thank you very much, and had a spoonful of the treat halfway to her lips.

“In private,” he commanded.
“I think she has a right to hear what you have to say,” Sara said.

“She does not need you to mollycoddle her if she is to be safe. She has already left your protection once because she is ignorant of the realities of the world,” Nyssa added.

“Hey!” Felicity demanded.

“Who’s ignorant?” a new voice interjected. It was the man from her previous visit. Dug? Dig? Some kind of digging motion.

“Felicity,” Sara said as Nyssa added, “Her.”

“Oh. It’s you. I didn’t think I’d see you again,” Dig said.

Definitely Dig.

“Surprise,” she said dryly.

“You okay?” he added.

She nodded, grateful that everyone seemed to be at least treating her compassionately, if not like she was the stupidest person in the room. She may not be the smartest, but she was still pretty smart.


“Clearly not,” Nyssa disagreed.

“Yeah…” Felicity sighed.

Oliver was fidgeting and growing impatient with the conversation. He was in practical mode and tense in a way she had not seen him. He seemed different than the caged animal she had seen in his office upstairs. It was like the cage was dissolving and he was eager to let his cold do some real damage. She remembered the men on her lawn with a cold shiver and refocused on her ice cream so that she wouldn’t have to see him be someone she didn’t recognize as Oliver.

The others picked up on his mood and focused, becoming just as coiled and practical. Dig crossed his arms over his chest, Nyssa stood stiff as a board, and Sara mimicked Dig’s body language. They made for a pretty intimidating group. Felicity had never felt safer in her life. She was glad they were on her side, and she hoped to never find out what going against them felt like.

“The men were highly trained. No ID, nothing on them besides weapons and cell phones,” Oliver said.

“Did you get the phone?” Felicity asked.

Oliver hesitated, then pulled a black phone out. Felicity reached for it but he snatched it out of her reach and she pouted up at him. His eyes were twinkling again, but his expression remained stoic.

“Can you trace it?” she asked.

“I have a guy,” he said.

“You have a guy?” she mocked him.

“Yes.”
“Is he the same guy that set up your computers? If he is…you need a new guy. And by guy I mean girl. And by girl I mean me. Not that you need me-need me. I meant you needed my skills. I’m very good at certain things.” She recoiled in horror. “And by that I mean technology…not anything else!”

Dig was openly grinning, Sara was smirking, Nyssa looked startled, and Oliver was a mixture of irritated and amused.

Felicity was not done. She moved so that she was on her knees on the sofa and looked into Oliver’s eyes seriously.

“This is my thing. We do it my way,” Felicity said.

“If we don’t?” he asked.

“I’m gone,” Felicity said, somehow knowing that was the only threat she could level he would respect. “I’ll figure it on my own…again. This way, we figure it out together. You let me in, or I’m out for good.”

Dig whistled quietly, while Sara and Nyssa looked worried. Their reactions made her think she had stepped over a line. She didn’t care. She kept her eyes on him and waited, feeling fierce and determined.

Oliver blinked, looked down at the phone, and shifted slightly. The movement was in preparation for a choice she felt stretching out in front of her in all directions. It would matter. It would change everything.

Slowly, he reached out, the phone extended, his entire being screaming uncertainty. She smiled in encouragement and plucked the phone out of his hand.

“Thanks,” she said. She flopped back down on the sofa and realized that analyzing the phone would have to wait. She needed gear. She needed the computers upstairs.

“Since we’re in this together, I think we’re owed an explanation,” Oliver said.

“It’s a secret,” Felicity said.

“I got that,” Oliver replied.

“It’s a really big secret,” Felicity said.

“You know mine,” Oliver said.

“This isn’t a, ‘I’ll show you mine if you show me yours,’ game, Oliver. This is serious.”

“I can’t help you if I don’t know what’s going on,” he said.

“So you really are all-in at helping me?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

“What if I asked you not to start a war?”

“You don’t want us to go after the guys who tried to kill you?” Sara asked incredulously.

“I’m pretty sure those guys are dead. But whoever sent them…I want them to face justice, not a bullet.”
“That’s not really how we work,” Sara said.

Dig grunted, clearly disagreeing.

“Okay, so we have a lawyer we take things to sometimes…and we’ve dropped people off at my dad’s station before,” Sara said.

“Your dad is a cop?” Felicity asked.

Sara nodded. Felicity thought the irony of that truth was only something she enjoyed. The pain that filled Sara’s eyes was proof enough that the situation was painful. She didn’t understand the pain, but she left Sara to her secrets.

“I won’t do anything more than is necessary,” Oliver said, answering her question. “I don’t believe in the necessity of acceptable loses.”

And just like that, a knot fluttered free from her stomach and she relaxed.

“Thank you,” she said.

Sara frowned, while Dig looked between them curiously. Oliver didn’t seem to notice. He was back to staring at her intensely. She looked right back, wondering where this particular bout of intensity was coming from and why he looked so relieved. He moved around the sofa and sat on the table in front of her, much as he did the first time she had seen him. He thought over his words carefully before speaking.

“I know why you don’t trust me. I get it. But if you want me to help, I need the truth…As much as you are willing to tell me.”

“It’s not a matter of trust. It’s just that everything keeps spiraling. The layers keep forming, multiplying, and leaving me just a little bit worse off than I was an hour ago.”

“I can handle it,” he said, all certainty and stone. She needed that certainty.

Her hands started trembling and the panic built up once more.

“I really messed up,” she confessed. “I’ve messed up before, but not like this. I didn’t think about the consequences when I started dreaming. I didn’t realize it could be so dangerous. I should have seen it, but I got caught up in the idea that it was going to help people. I mean, one time in college I created a super virus that really backfired on me, and this is worse.”

Oliver reached out and touched her shoulder again.

“Hey,” he said, grounding her instantly.

She nodded, pushing back the traitor tears that were forming, and took a deep breath. “I made a battery.”

There was a pause.

“Anyone else think that was kind of anticlimactic?” Dig asked.

Oliver was frowning. “Okay?” he prodded her.

“It’s a self-charging battery the size of my palm that can power a city block. It puts out zero waste, greenhouse gases, or poisons. It takes in energy from the environment, energy that is in the
atmosphere always, converts it to power, and releases moisture as a byproduct. It’s the future, and I created it to help low-income families, hospitals, and just anyone who needed free energy.”

“That doesn’t sound so bad,” Oliver said.

“Unless you consider that is a self-charging battery that can power a city block and fits into the palm of my hand,” Felicity said.

“A weapon,” Nyssa said.

“It could level a city the size of Starling,” Felicity said. “And be transported in someone’s pocket. It could power a dirty bomb, be used to modify a gun, or power a stealth bomber. Its functions are limitless. Too, it holds a lot of energy. I can’t even destroy it without risking blowing myself up. It might take in the energy of the destruction and multiple it before complete failure.”

“Kord is heavily invested in weapon designs,” Oliver said thoughtfully, finally realizing Kord’s interests.

“He was heavily involved with a lot of things,” Felicity said. “He was not nice.”

“Did you find any contacts or clients when you went after him?” Oliver asked.

“I saw a lot. There was too much for me to go through personally. I was on a timetable.”

“Do you have the information?” he asked.

She nodded, biting her lip. “You think it was someone connected to him? You don’t think it was something else? I do have a few enemies. Like I said…it’s not my first mistake.”

“Is anyone else glad she isn’t a supervillain?” Dig asked.

“She is kind of scary. She’s like a bubbly evil mastermind who could take us all down without coming near us,” Sara said.

“I do not like enemies I cannot see,” Nyssa said.

“I think we should start with Kord and go from there,” Oliver said.

“Do you think that right now is the best time for that?” Dig asked. “We do have a few things on our plate.”

“It can wait,” Oliver said firmly.

“If by wait you mean it’s really pressing, yeah,” Dig replied.

“Dig…” Oliver warned.

Dig held up his hands and rolled his eyes, clearly not impressed by Oliver’s decision to be helpful.

“I don’t mean this rudely, but you guys don’t seem like criminals,” Felicity said. “Or mobsters.”

“You have a lot of experience with those?” Sara asked.

“I grew up in Las Vegas,” Felicity said.

“Ah,” Sara said. She smiled. “For someone who looked into our business, you sure did miss a lot.”
“What’s that mean?” Felicity asked.

“Leave it,” Oliver told Sara. “We have work to do. I want you and Nyssa to hit the streets. See if anyone has heard anything about this battery. Don’t worry about keeping it quiet.”

Nyssa and Sara nodded. Sara took Nyssa’s hand, winked at Felicity, and they disappeared out the front door. Dig stepped closer, eyeing Felicity again. He looked at her with concern that kept surprising her considering the company.

“This really a hill you want to charge?” Dig asked Oliver.

Felicity liked his honesty, appreciating that he had Oliver’s best interests at heart.

Oliver nodded. Dig nodded back to show he understood.

“What do you need?” Dig asked.

“Make the usual calls. Prepare our people. Let it be known that we have an interest. See what crawls out,” Oliver said.

“Alright, man,” Dig agreed. Dig turned to leave.

“And, Dig?” Oliver called.

He turned back.

“Lyla doesn’t need to know about the battery.”

Dig winced and then nodded, looking as if he agreed completely. He left the house, closing the door behind him quietly. His exit left her alone with Oliver again.

“Are you leaving, too?” she asked nervously.

“Do you want me to?”

“I…”

“I’ll stay,” he decided, sensing her fear. “But you should get some sleep.”

“I have a phone to dissect and Kord to re-look at, which will not be fun, because psychopath! But I can’t just sleep.”

“Whatever you want,” he said with a shrug.

“Why are you so nice to me?” Felicity said. “All I’ve done is create problems for you. You shouldn’t be this nice.”

“Because I’m a gangster?” he asked darkly, thoughts turning inwards again.

“Because people are never that nice to people they don’t know.”

“I know plenty,” he said. “And for a mobster, I have a strong superhero complex...or so my sister says.”

“Oh, disapproving sister doesn’t like you risking your neck. Tell me more,” Felicity said.

He smiled, his entire body relaxing. Just as he was about to open his mouth to respond, a knock
came from the front door. He tensed again and stood fluidly. Her hand clenched on the phone as she tensed as well, but then he was leading Iris into the room.

Iris looked a little flustered – she kept glancing at Oliver and flattening her hair. She stopped looking at Oliver the moment she saw Felicity on the sofa. She rushed forward with a small cry and pulled Felicity into her arms.

She rocked Felicity for a minute and then released her. She checked her over as Sara had done, and some of her fear faded.

“I’m so happy you’re okay,” Iris said.

Felicity smiled and touched Iris’s cheek, where tears had long dried. “Sorry to worry you.”

“I think you have a story for me,” Iris said.

“Remember that time we went to that bar and that thing happened that we never talk about because you asked me not to?” Felicity asked.

“Yes,” Iris said warily.

“This situation is far worse…and I don’t actually know what’s happening, not really, and I don’t want you to get in trouble.”

“I chase corruption, criminals, and politicians – surprising how often those three are one person – so I’ve kinda got the danger part down.”

“Iris, I need you to trust me. It could get me in trouble if you go prying.”

Iris searched her face, investigator mode in full force. She finally nodded. “Okay.”

“Thank you.”

“So…Why are in Oliver Queen’s house?”

Felicity looked over her shoulder, but Oliver had disappeared. She took comfort in the fact that he hadn’t gone far. She could sense him the house, close by in case she needed him.

“He’s a friend,” Felicity said.

Iris looked dreamy as she replied, “What a friend.”

Felicity laughed and pulled Iris back to her, in desperate need of the comfort. They settled back onto the sofa, curled around one another in a way that made Felicity feel safe in a different way than how Oliver’s presence made her feel. Iris didn’t make her feel tingly, and light, and totally female.

The phone he had given her still clenched in her hand, her arms wrapped firmly around Iris, Felicity closed her eyes and felt the adrenaline that had chased her since the fire wind out of her body and drag her down into a restless sleep that was haunted with smoke, unnatural stillness, and dead men lying on her lawn.
Cliches Are Good For Some Things

Chapter Summary

Everything in this chapter is FanMomMer's fault. I do mean everything. Blame her.

What's that thing called when people smoosh their faces together?

She hated clichés. She hated the word. She hated that the concept was used so willy nilly. She hated everything about them. But apparently they were around because they were based in a modicum of truth. For instance, when someone falls asleep after having a traumatic experience, nightmares follow, and that someone ends up gasping awake like she’s in the middle of a 90s television show.

For a second, she felt like she was back in the fire. She could feel it in her throat, in her lungs, burning her skin and tightening a noose around her neck. Sweat was beaded on her forehead, and her heart was racing.

Fires really, really sucked, she decided.

She inhaled deeply to calm her racing heart and finally took stock of her room. It was a bedroom, with white furniture, high ceilings that included a white fan, and a bed that took up the majority of the room. Iris was on the bed next to her, though ‘next’ was a bit of a reach. The bed was so large Felicity couldn’t actually reach Iris without stretching out horizontally. Did beds come in super king? Whatever it was, she couldn’t stay in it.

She threw back the covers, stepped out onto the cold hardwood floor, and tiptoed out of the room. Iris didn’t stir with her departure and Felicity took that as a win. She carefully closed the door behind her, and then paused.

She was on the second floor of the house. She had several options to serve as a diversion. The first was to go downstairs and eat everything in Oliver’s kitchen then pretend they had been broken into by Goldie Locks in the morning. The second was to watch TV on mute and hope that she didn’t get the itch to hack into that infomercial jewelry site again and order five sparkling necklaces she really did not need. The third was to pace around the house and wake everyone up. And the fourth was to start her research on the phone and Kord. While there were several benefits to all but the third, she liked the fourth option the best.

She went to the office, hoping that Oliver wouldn’t mind her getting on his computer again. He had certainly seemed irritated the last time, and then realized that she didn’t have the phone. It was either downstairs or Oliver had it. He wouldn’t go back on his deal to let her have it, would he?

The phone appeared in front of her at the thought. She bit her lip to keep from screaming and swore violently in her mind when she realized it was Oliver again. He was holding the phone out to her from behind her.

“Thought you might need this,” he said, stepping around so that he was in front of her.

Her eyes widened at the glorious picture he painted in the dim light of the office that was shrouded by the sleepy haze of night. He was in blue pajama pants and his chest was gloriously naked. Scars
zig-zagged across his body, but they were not nearly as tempting as everything else about him. She just wanted to touch things – all the things. The ways in which she touched all those things didn’t necessarily have to be with her hands either. As long as there was touching, she was on board.

And he had spoken to her. Words. Useful. Speak.

“Thanks,” she replied, nodding and stepping around him before he could get the very right idea about what she wanted to do to him and his very nicely chiseled everything.

“Couldn’t sleep?” he asked in a way that turned it into, “I understand."

“Yeah,” she said.

“Want to talk about it?”

“Not really,” she said.

“Okay.” He plopped down in the closest chair, everything still looking ridiculously nice. When she sat, things folded and pinched. She liked her body, but that was just the reality of physics and gravity. How was he even real? “What?” he asked, unimpressed by her staring.

“You’re just going to sit there?” she asked.

“That’s typically what one does in chairs,” he said.

“I can think of other uses,” she muttered.

His eyebrows lifted, letting her know that he had heard her, but she chose to ignore him. She walked around the desk and looked over the setup. Everything was the way she had left it, though he had adjusted the chair. She raised it to her level and pulled the keyboard in close. She took the phone and searched the desk or a USB cord. It was empty.

“I need a connector,” she told him.

He stood, and she was ridiculously glad for every shift of muscle she got to witness, and left the room for a minute. He returned with the cord and presented it to her with a flourish. “Will this work?”

She took it with a nod, plugged it in, and immediately went to work. She had finally found something to distract her from the ab hell she was currently living in and she was grateful. The process of getting into the phone was ridiculously easy. Mainly because there was nothing to find. After finally having what she thought would be a solid lead, the disappointment was fierce. She unplugged it and scooted the phone away with a nudge.

“Nothing,” she said, looking at the tech as though it had called her names.

“Burner,” he said with a nod.

“You knew it was a dead end and you let me look anyways?” she asked.

“I had a suspicion,” he said. “We needed to know for sure.”

“Evil,” she decided. She continued to stare at the phone. “But it was purchased somewhere. If I can find where it was bought maybe I can trace it back to someone.”

“It was probably bought with cash.”
“Maybe,” she agreed.

She pulled the phone back and started taking it apart. She found the serial number and hacked into the manufacture’s website with the push of a few buttons. It wasn’t even work, and was a little disappointing. Then she realized she was complaining about something being too easy and rolled her eyes at herself. She traced the delivery to a crappy gas station in Bludhaven. The place didn’t have cameras, which was probably the point, but the ATM across the street from it did. She hacked into it, even as she hacked into the POS the gas station used.

“Oh you could totally use an overhaul,” she complained as she looked through their computer system. There was no way she could sort out the files. The system was that terrible. She would have to line read all of the sales. Fun.

She leaned forward, her hands going to her temples.

“Problem?” Oliver asked.

“I have to line read these to get the date and time of the sale,” she said. “Their system hurts my soul.”

“You take technology very personally,” he decided.

“It’s my joy,” she said simply. “Have you ever heard of the concept of flow?”

“No,” he said.

“I watched a documentary about happiness once. They mentioned that flow was part of a lot of people’s happiness. It happens to artists in particular. They get so into their art that everything else just fades and they are absolutely present in what they are doing. They are in the moment. Nothing else exists. Their pleasure helps their hearts find peace. That’s what computers is for me. Inventing, hacking, coding, whatever…It’s my flow…my happiness. I love other things, but I don’t feel like me without it.”

“Oh,” he said.

It was a little bit of an underwhelming response for the passion she had put into the subject. Until she looked up and saw that he was looking at her with awe, respect, wistfulness, and something very close to yearning.

“Do you have anything like that?” she asked, returning her gaze to the computer. Him looking at her like that was not helping the hot flush that had been firmly in place since he had appeared in front of her.

He considered her for a minute, genuinely seeming to think on it. “I like to cook,” he said.

She smiled at him.

“I also like to put arrows into things,” he said.

Her smile fell. “Well, those two things are…very different.”

“Cooking is more relaxing,” he said. “Arrows are for when I’m angry.”

“I kind of figured that out on my own,” she said.

“Why don’t I scare you more?” he asked.
“Because you’re squishy,” she said without thinking.

“Excuse me?” he asked, looking down at his notably not squishy body skeptically.

“Like a creamhorn. Crunchy on the outside and squishy on the inside,” she added.

“I don’t know what that is,” he said.

“I’ll buy you one,” she said.

“I don’t scare you because I’m a creamhorn?” he said.

“Right,” she said.

“That makes no sense.”

“Well, to be fair, I’m a little scared. You’ve killed people, hurt them, you run an organization that could make life very difficult on me, and you have the type of body that is seriously unfair. I mean… It’s strong. Like, tough. Hard? Ugh.”

“I get your point,” he said.

“But I also feel like you’re good,” she said. “Maybe a little misguided, but good.”

“I hope you don’t think you can change me,” he said with a smile that suggested a secret she wasn’t privy to.

“People don’t change each other, Oliver, they just bring out whatever is already there. Sometimes that’s bad. Other times it’s really good.”

She looked away from the lines of numbers in time to see him looking at her with stunned and absolutely terrified expression on his face. She had never seen terror so clearly etched into a human being’s face before. That didn’t look good. Sure enough, he stood a second later and turned away.

The tension was back, making his muscles ripple, and she let out a sigh.

He was the most emotionally constipated person she had ever met. Or else he was running from something – himself, maybe? His past had clearly not been easy. She related to him for that reason, but it didn’t explain the way he kept shutting things down. What was he so scared of, and why was he scared of it with her? She was nothing to him. The situation would resolve itself and he would go on to bigger and better crimes.

He paused at the door. “Do you need anything?”

“I’m fine,” she said.

He nodded, his face half turned towards her, and then disappeared down the hallway. She shook her head and went back to squinting at the screen. She wished she had her glasses, but they had been destroyed with the rest of her things.

What was she going to wear tomorrow? Could she wear her fire-singed pajamas to go shopping? She sighed again and decided that she needed to tackle one problem at a time. Spiraling about her lack of worldly possessions would solve nothing.

Twenty minutes later she had found the payment, which was done in cash, but it gave her a time and date. They had bought the phone only two hours before the fire. It made her think that the entire
thing was spur of the moment. It felt like it had been arranged sloppily, but the men had been careful. The contradiction was weird, but it didn’t matter nearly as much as the idea that their attack had been reactionary. And the only thing that she had done was put Kord in prison.

How had they made that connection? Unless they hadn’t and someone else wanted her dead.

She rubbed at her temples and refocused on the facts. She found the time the phone had been purchased and watched all the customers carefully. It didn’t take her long. A black van pulled into the parking spot directly by the door and a man got out. He wore all black and had an unremarkable face, except that she remembered it from her lawn. Her stomach rolled fitfully at the contrast of seeing him alive in front of her and dead in her mind. Oliver had killed him.

She shook off the thought and zoomed in as much as was possible on a grainy camera. There were other people in the van but it was too far to make them out.

She fast forwarded and let the video play out as the driver left the parking lot. She paused again, but only saw another man she recognized from her lawn and the tip of a shoe. It looked feminine and black, but that was all she could tell. The van moved out of frame and was gone a second later. She decided to track the vehicle, following it for several blocks before it got on the interstate.

“I’ve always wanted to hack a satellite.”

She cracked her knuckles at the same time the door banged open downstairs. She jumped out of her chair, thinking that it sounded a lot like the front door opening, and felt her heart rate spike. Her thoughts immediately turned toward fire starters and murderers come to finish the job, but decided that Oliver would protect her and might need her help.

She hurried forward and ran down the hall, the pain in her feet fading with her adrenaline. At the top of the stairs she paused, taking in the scene. A man in a red hoodie was at the front door. He was using the door jamb to keep himself upright and he had blood on his hands.

As far as introductions went, it was not a good one.

He swayed a little and she realized he was hurt. He wouldn’t come to the house hurt if he was an enemy, right? That wasn’t very logical. She cautiously approached him and he looked up, his bright eyes defensive and alert.

She caught sight of a large wound on his chest, the blood darkening his hoodie to crimson, and his knees trembled.

“She’s gonna be so pissed,” he decided, then he lurched forward and hit the ground with a solid thud.

Felicity startled, caught herself, and rushed forward. She gently turned him over and put her fingers to his pulse point. It was still there, but it was weak. He had lost a lot of blood. She searched the foyer for something to use, found a blanket neatly tucked in a basket, and pulled it out. She covered the wound and started to search him for a phone. She needed to call an ambulance.

Then, Oliver was there, all calm, poise, and movement. He picked the man up as though he weighed nothing and whisked him to a door down the hall she had not noticed before. Felicity followed after him, her heart in her throat, and Oliver didn’t try to stop her.

The door led to more stairs, which then led to the basement. It was the size of the main floor and was constructed of metal and brick. It was comforting in a way, with exercise mats, gear, arrows, several bows, and five tables. Oliver set the man on a steel table and pulled a cart over to them. He went to
work cutting away the man’s hoodie and shirt, then assessed the damage.

“What do you need?” Felicity asked.

“Gloves,” Oliver said. “Then apply pressure. I need to grab some things.”

She nodded, following his commands, and pressed her gloved hands against the man’s feverish skin. She kept them there, her eyes alternating between tracking Oliver and looking at the man’s face. He was not a man so much as he was a boy. He looked really young, and she didn’t understand anything about the situation or why he had come to the house. Questions could wait for when Oliver didn’t need to focus.

His hands seemed to be everywhere, working, repairing, and doing what he could. He fed the kid something in a bowl before he inserted an IV in his arm. He hung a blood bag on a stand and attached it to the IV. Once that was finished he cleaned the wound and bandaged it carefully.

“That’s all I can do,” Oliver admitted quietly.

“What happened?” Felicity asked.

“From what I can tell…an axe.”


“I guess he pissed off someone with an axe,” Oliver replied.

“Who is he? Why is he here?” she tried again.

“He’s family,” Oliver said, patting his chest.

He meant Bratva.

“Was he…? Is this because of me?”

“No. He was doing something else. Believe it or not, I can manage more than one situation at a time.”

“You don’t have to get snippy. I didn’t axe him,” Felicity returned.

Oliver sighed. “It’s nothing to do with you. Let’s just leave it at that.”

“Fine,” she said.

“Thank you,” he replied.

“Why would Thea be mad he passed out?” she asked then.

He sighed again, clearly exasperated that she kept asking questions. “What?”

“He said Thea was going to be pissed.”

Oliver’s eyes widened. “He’s right.”

“Are you scared of her?”

“That’s not the right word,” Oliver said.
“Uh-huh,” Felicity said. “So…Why?”

“Oh, they’re together.”

“Boyfriend and girlfriend?”

His jaw clenched. “I guess.”

“Smooch buddies?” she added just for fun.

He glared at her. She just smiled and shrugged. “Is…Is whatever got him like this something you need help on?”

“No,” Oliver barked.

She was startled at his harsh tone. It hurt more than it should have. She took a step back and started peeling away the gloves. “Okay. I’ll be upstairs if you need me.”

Oliver didn’t try to stop her. That hurt too. She went to the kitchen and cleaned off the flecks of blood that had escaped to her arms. She scrubbed and scrubbed, but the stains were stubborn and viciously reluctant to leave her skin. She thought of a boy attacked with an axe and a man so damaged by life that he couldn’t handle an intimate conversation without pulling away. Was this what she wanted to be around? Did she want to deal with this while she figured her situation out? Why did she relate to the drama so much? Why did it feel like home to be around these insane, damaged people? She had friends, but they didn’t have the pull on her heart that Oliver, Sara, Nyssa, Dig, and that boy did. They felt like they were something she didn’t know she had been missing.

Was she going crazy? Had she lost her mind? Was this another situation she was walking into without thinking of the consequences? Why couldn’t Oliver do humanity a favor and wear a shirt? Why had seeing him so focused and take-charge been such a turn on?

“Bad thoughts,” Felicity muttered. “Not helpful.”

She cleaned the last of the blood off her skin and decided that there was nothing for her to do but go upstairs and finish her work. Oliver clearly didn’t want her downstairs with him, and she didn’t want to be where she wasn’t wanted.

She did not have the same level of focus as she sat back down in the chair she had formally declared as hers in her head. Her mind kept wandering to the basement, the very shirtless man who was currently guarding the very unconscious man, and hoping that the first would stop being so cranky and the second would survive. She heard the door open several more times and the rumble of voices, but Oliver had made it clear it wasn’t her business. So she focused on hers, desperate to catch a break and figure out how to stop the card houses stacked around her from falling down all over again.

She tracked the van to her apartment, where it promptly disappeared. That lead went nowhere really fast. Disgruntled, she decided to follow the van from before it arrived at the gas station. It was harder since she didn’t have a good idea of where it had come from, but she managed to find a camera to the north that set her on the right path.

“Sneaky van can’t sneak past me,” she declared.

“I’d forgotten you did that,” Iris said from the doorway. “That is one thing about being your roommate I do not miss. It’s kinda creepy.”

Felicity grinned sheepishly. “I thought it was supposed to be endearing?”
“Nope. Creepy.”

Iris rubbed at her eyes. Her makeup was smeared, her hair was sticking up, and her clothes were rumpled. Despite that, she still looked insanely beautiful. She leaned against the wall casually, her eyes burning with curiosity she did not voice. She was allowing Felicity her secrets. She was a good friend.

“How long have you been up?” Iris asked.

Felicity looked at the clock on the computer, surprised to realize that it was just past six in the morning.

“A little while,” she said.

“Well, I’m calling it,” Iris said.

“What?”

“You’ve had enough super-secret spy stuff today. You need a shower, a hot breakfast, and a change of clothes. I’ll get the clothes. You get the shower,” Iris said.

“I don’t…”

Iris marched to the computers, gently pulled Felicity up, and urged her over to the door. She lightly pushed Felicity to get her walking, her arms crossing in a no-nonsense fashion that reminded Felicity why Iris was so scary.

Feeling a bit like she was in middle school and her mom had pried her away from her super computer after an all weekend bender, Felicity slunk back to her room and what she assumed was a very nice shower. Her mind was still lost in code and the origin of the van.

She stripped slowly, surprised to find that everything hurt. Her feet were aching despite not having been on them all night. Her shoulders and neck throbbed, and her hips protested every movement with the refined grace of an elephant tripping.

She sat down on the toilet and gently stripped the gauze off her feet. The bleeding had stopped, but the cuts were swollen and she felt under-the-skin bruises. She wrinkled her nose and removed the rest of the gauze, wondering if she needed to redo the bandages after the shower or leave it be. She shrugged, figuring that was a question for later, and started the water. It was warm within a few seconds and the showerhead was just the right amount of pressure. She groaned when she felt the spray, and pressed her forehead against the stall as the water washed over her body. When she opened her eyes again, she saw the drain swirling with grey and black – the remnants of the fire.

She shook off the pain of the thought and started the process of cleaning. It took her awhile with her aching body, but, finally, she felt cleansed and renewed.

“Ow,” she complained as she stepped out of the shower and put more pressure on her feet.

She hobbled over to the toilet and sat. The injuries looked worse and she wondered if she had done something wrong. She knew who she could ask, but she needed clothes first and the largest cup of coffee imaginable. She looked down at her pajamas, which were the definition of gross, and decided there was no way she was going to put those on. She needed a plan b. She hobbled back into the bedroom and looked inside the closet hopefully. Nothing.

Huffing, she decided that she just needed something to cover her up long enough to go downstairs
and get some salve for her feet. She could hide in her bedroom until Iris returned with clothes. She liked that plan.

She wrapped a towel around her body and went as fast as she could to the closest bedroom, which had crumpled sheets and men’s clothes on the chair by the window. Her brain sent out an immediate mayday. This was clearly Oliver’s room. Seeing his bed and his clothes was severely domestic, and nice, and not where she wanted to linger when he had made it clear that her presence was so unwelcome.

“What are you doing?”

Of fucking course.

She closed her eyes and counted to five before she turned around to look directly into the eyes of Oliver. Oliver who was sweaty, as though he had worked out, and who was still missing his shirt. She couldn’t helping tracking the lines of his chest before finding his eyes.

“Iris left to get me clothes, but I needed something so I could go downstairs and get whatever magic salve you used on my feet, because they are really hurting and I think that maybe I hurt them when I took a shower, because they are really swollen and I didn’t mean to intrude but I—”

He put his hand on her bare shoulder, which was just unfair, and she gulped.

“I’ll get you something. Sit on the bed.”

Nope. That would not be happening. No way.

“I’m okay standing,” she said with a painful wince.

“You should stay off your feet as much as possible. At least for today,” he said. He started leading her over to the bed and it was quite possible she made the sound of a horse dying in the back of her throat.

She kept her hands securely on the towel as she sat, her body coiled inwards defensively, and he disappeared into his walk-in closet. She took in details of the room to keep from freaking out, and was struck again by how sweet it all was. Pictures of friends and family were everywhere. A few paintings were on the walls and accents rested on the bookshelf and on top of the dresser. His bedspread was a steely grey and his sheets were a crisp white.

“This should work,” Oliver said, holding out a black shirt to her. It was simple, long, and it would cover everything she needed it to cover.

She took it from him gratefully even as he continued to stare at her. She looked up at him, trying to decipher his expression.

“I’m sorry for earlier,” he said finally, stilted and awkward. It made her think he wasn’t used to apologizing.

“For being Oliver the Grouch?” she asked to clarify.

“Yes,” he said reluctantly, nose wrinkling at her word choice.

She beamed at him sweetly. “You’re forgiven.”

“You could stand to be mad at me longer,” he said.
“You punish yourself enough, I think. You don’t need me to add to it.”

“You need to stop saying things like that to me,” Oliver complained, his eyes heating slightly.

She frowned. “Like what?”

“Things that make me think you know me,” he whispered, looking almost like a schoolboy who had been caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

“I don’t mean to,” she said sadly. He kept pulling away from her, unwilling to even try to be her friend. She knew that things were complicated, but if they were going to be in this together, she would like for them to be friends. She felt like they would be really good at it.

He crouched down in front of her, his hand finding her cheek as if it belonged there always. “Hey. I didn’t mean…” He sighed in frustration. “As much as you claim otherwise, I’m not a good person, Felicity. I hurt people. I’ve killed. I do all things that any good person, you, should hate. Your forgiveness, your friendship, gives me hope that I don’t really think I’ve earned.”

“Oh,” she said, surprised he had gone there. His pushing her away made so much sense suddenly. He didn’t see the good she saw. That was problematic. She would just have to keep telling him until he understood. She felt like she could wear him down, but right now was not the time to press him.

“Oliver Queen, you are a very strange man,” she said. “But I would very much like it if you didn’t treat me like I was a faucet.”

“What?”

“Hot and cold are for faucets, not people. Get your act together, pal.”

“Oh,” he said. He thought about it, his thumb stroking a soft pattern into her cheek. “I’ll think about it.”

Her eyes dropped down to his full lips and she thought that the hot setting would be well worth everything, even if he ran cold later. She felt herself moving forward, inch by inch, her body responding to his magnetic pull without thought or reason. She really wanted to see how he felt pressed against her. She needed to cut the tension in her stomach and release the pressure that had been building since the moment she had first laid eyes on him. He was inching closer as well, his eyes locked on her lips with the intensity she had noticed in him in all things but focused entirely on her.

Her mind was screaming profanities at her, shouting reasons this was such a very bad idea. She ignored all the reasons. For a moment, she didn’t care about the problems or logic. She just really wanted to kiss him.

His lips touched hers tentatively and she sighed into them happily, applying a gentle amount of pressure back in response. He opened his mouth, moving his lips languidly against hers in response, and switched his grip on her from her cheek to the back of her head. She matched the movements of his lips, wanting more, her chest filling with energy and need. He pulled back very slightly to change the angle of the kiss, then attacked her lips once more, the hesitant softness switching to a faster pace that left her breathless. She pulled him to her, her body thrumming with the feeling of him being everywhere, and nipped his bottom lip playfully when he paused. He took this as invitation to press his body fully against hers, lying her down on the massive bed. She hooked her arms around his neck, bringing him as close to her body as physics would allow. His chest pressed against her breasts, his hand cupped the side of her face, and his leg moved between her legs so that their
pelvises were pressed together. She ran her fingers through the hair on the back of his head as she archer further into him. His kisses remained steady, firm, and passionately serious. He alternated pressure, from hard and fast to slow and warm. It grew the fire in her belly and had her aching all over.

Was she really doing this? How had they gotten here?

As if he could read her thoughts, he pulled his lips away from hers. She inhaled sharply, her chest rising and falling with her pants, pressing him tighter against his body, and her fingers rested on the nape of his neck. He closed his eyes and pressed his forehead against hers. She felt the distance welling up between them. He was already closing off from her. He thought he had made a mistake. She wasn’t certain he was wrong.

She sighed and brushed her hands down his neck, across his broad back, and to his shoulders. She held him there and opened her eyes, amazed to see him looking so wonderfully kissed. His lips were red and his face was a mixture of peace and conflict.

“Please don’t apologize,” she begged him.

He inhaled deeply. “I-”

“It’ll just make me feel like shit,” she warned him quickly.

He opened his eyes and finally looked at her. She saw his pain and turmoil and decided that a good percentage of it didn’t have to do with her, not really. He wasn’t ready. The attraction was there, but it wasn’t enough. They needed more, and she wasn’t entirely certain they should go there with so much on their plates and coming from two very different perspectives. He had too much on his plate. He was terrified his world would blow-back on them both if they started something. He was afraid of his world and himself.

“I really liked that,” she added. “But it’s just a kiss. It doesn’t have to mean anything if you don’t want it to. We can just chock it up to a one-time thing and…”

Why was she so breathless all of a sudden? Was it the idea of never kissing him again? Or was it the fact that she was hoping he would take her up on the idea so she didn’t have to face him running cold on her again?

He reached up and ran his thumb over her bottom lip. She knew it was swollen and that his beard had left marks on her face. She looked as thoroughly kissed as he did. The thought made her squirm slightly, which made him close his eyes again and press into her just a little more, his body betraying him. When he opened his eyes again, she knew he had made his decision. He was stepping back. A part of her was grateful. Another part of her really wanted to kiss him again.

“I’ll get the first aid kit,” he told her.

She ran her fingertips across his cheek, looking at him sadly, and nodded mutely. After a pause, where they stared into each other’s eyes, saying all the things they couldn’t speak out loud, speaking of regret, necessity, and desire, he pulled away, and she knew that he wouldn’t try to kiss her again. The thought left her with a strong surge of regret.
The Right in the Wrong

Chapter Summary

Thea! Lyla!

Conversations!

Felicity making Oliver laugh!

Having a man be gentle and touch her on the arms, legs, and feet after kissing him and knowing that reaching out to him and kissing him some more was not an option was probably how aneurysms were formed. Or ulcers. There was something in her chest at least as she watched him take care of her. It felt like a stone. He refused to look at her, though she noticed his hands lingered without his seeming consent on her skin. She had never been in a situation where she knew someone was attracted to her and she was attracted to him but they couldn’t actually do anything about it because their worlds were full of complications and danger.

“Done,” he said softly.

“Thank you,” she said.

“I should check on Roy,” he added.

She reached out and grabbed his hand before he could pull away. “Would you please not avoid me? I mean, do whatever you have to do, but I really do want to be your friend. I feel like we’d be really good at it.”

He nodded, finally catching her eyes, and she smiled, hope returning to her body. He squeezed her hand once, then stepped away. Her hand burned from the touch, as though he had marked her, and she sighed, knowing it would not be a simple thing of friendship. Everything had shifted. He left the room and she finally stood, testing out her balance. Her feet still hurt, but the pain had dulled. That salve really was magic. She pulled the shirt he had given her down and then hobbled back to the office and the search she had started.

Iris returned thirty minutes later with several bags and an eye roll for Felicity over Felicity’s inability to let the search go. Felicity thanked her before changing into a pair of blue jeans and a camisole. Everything, down to the underwear, fit perfectly. Living with Iris for a year definitely had its benefits. She thanked her friend profusely, and promised to pay her back, but Iris waved off her promises and looked at her watch.

“I have to meet Barry. I’ll see you later?” she asked.

“Definitely,” Felicity replied.

“Will you be here?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t asked Oliver if it’s okay.”

“Girl, it will be. Have you seen the way that man looks at you?” Iris fanned herself and Felicity felt
the ghost of a smile on her face. She shrugged and returned her attention back to her computers.

She worked in relative silence for a few hours, occasionally hearing people coming and going downstairs, but no one bothered her and Oliver didn’t return. She figured he was either avoiding her or he was dealing with the reason a kid had arrived at his house with an axe injury in the chest. Her curiosity was intense, but she was leaving it alone. It was better for everyone that way.

As she worked, flashes of the kiss, of Oliver being pressed against her, his hard a contrast to her soft, periodically chased their way into her mind. They came with hot flushes and stinging regret that their lives weren’t a little less layered.

It was for the best, though. They had gotten their attraction aired out, acted on it, and now they could be friends going forward. There would be no what ifs or intense looks to hold them back. Except for the fact that the memories were really hot and she had no sense of control when it came to picturing him on top of her. Her thoughts kept escalating, taking her places she clearly wanted to go despite logic.

“Not gonna end well,” she muttered.

“What’s not?” Sara asked, walking into the room.

“Why do people keep walking in on me when I’m talking to myself?” Felicity asked.

“Because you seem to do it a lot and the law of averages suggests that in a house so full of people it’s going to happen a certain percentage of the time,” Sara said.

Felicity stared, her eyebrows lifted in surprise.

“I went to college…before I dropped out,” Sara said. “Find anything? Ollie sent me up here to check and ask you to come get some lunch.”

“You don’t really seem like the type to run errands for him,” Felicity said, a pang of rejection and anger hitting her. Why hadn’t he just walked up the stairs and asked her himself?

“I’m not. But I like you, and he’s scrambling right now to figure some things out and is pretty busy, so…” Sara shrugged. “Find anything?”

“I did,” Felicity said. “I tracked the phone and then the man who bought it. I managed to find his name. Andrew Kirk. He was a resident of northern Bludhaven and a known hired muscle in the area. He was contacted for the hit via an email that he thought he hid well but really didn’t. Not from me.”

“You got this off the phone?” Sara asked incredulously.

“No, I got this off a van rental. He had to show his ID for it. Thought it wouldn’t be tied back to him. He was wrong.”

“Impressive,” Sara said. “Does it go anywhere?”

“The email originated in London, which doesn’t seem like a big deal, but I don’t actually know why anyone in London would want me dead. Then I started looking into it a little and realized Kord had interests there. I looked through his files, but the strangest thing about it is that I keep running into one word over and over again without any explanation.”

“What?”
“Consortium,” Felicity said. “Which doesn’t sound that nefarious, save for the mystery of it and the fact that someone wouldn’t name it that without there being more than one person involved.”

“The Consortium?” Sara asked.

“Yeah,” Felicity said.

Sara had lost all mirth. Her eyes darkened and she tensed. She smiled a second later, the tension gone. “Weird. You really should come down and get some lunch. Ollie may be a handful, but he knows how to cook.”

“Have you known him long?” Felicity asked.

“My sister and I grew up with him and Tommy,” Sara said. “You wouldn’t think so, but we all just kind of fell in with one another somehow.”

“Tommy Merlyn?”

“The one and only. Ollie and him are not as close as they used to be. Strained, I guess you could say, but they’re working it out,” Sara said.

“Oh,” Felicity said. She wanted to ask for the reason in the rift, but decided it wasn’t any of her business.

“Why do you ask?”

“Just trying to understand him,” she said. “He’s being so nice in helping me…”

“I said it last night and I’ll say it again, for someone who looked through our Bratva business, you sure did miss a lot.”

“What did I miss?” Felicity asked.

“You’re smart. You can figure it out,” Sara said. She gestured for Felicity to follow her. Felicity stood, uncertain if she really wanted to go downstairs, then decided that her head was starting to hurt and break wasn’t a bad idea.

“That kid…the one with the red hoodie, is he okay?” Felicity asked as they walked down the hall together.

“He’s going to make it. Ollie’s being stupid. Decided not to tell Thea about him until later today. I would expect a fight.’”

“Why wait?” Felicity asked.

“To keep her from worrying,” Sara said with an eye roll. “Sometimes Oliver misses the point on things. He thinks that worry is a burden, when really it just means that someone cares.”

“He does a lot of self-sacrificing, then?” Felicity asked.

“He’s the king of it,” Sara said. “But I suppose a man in his position has to sacrifice some things in order to get the job done.”

“What about you?” Felicity said.

“What about me?”
“What did you sacrifice?”

It surely wasn’t love. The way Nyssa and Sara stared at each other, the way their bodies seemed to always be in sync, let her know that they were madly in love.

“My family, my biological one, thinks I’m dead,” Sara said with a haphazard shrug.

“That’s…”

“The way it has to be,” Sara said.

Felicity didn’t agree, but it also wasn’t her place to say. Sara’s past and the decisions she had made because of it were hers to figure out.

The house was more crowded than it had been the previous night. Dig was on the sofa, a baby resting on one knee, while a toddler played at his feet. A phone was tucked between his ear and shoulder and he was taking notes on a pad. Nyssa was on a laptop, her eyes only flicking long enough to shoot Sara a warm look. Sara smiled at her and continued into the dining room and finally into the kitchen.

The kitchen had an island, a breakfast nook to the right, brand new silver appliances, several stools on the door side of the island, and a thankfully clothed Oliver dividing up food on plates even as he talked on the phone.

“I understand that the paperwork needs to be signed, Jeff, but I can’t do it right now…If I don’t it’ll what? …Oh. So, I don’t have a choice? …I understand…Yes. I understand…Give me an hour…Thank you.”

He hung up, tossing the phone onto the counter in irritation, and continued dividing up the food.

“What’s work trouble?” Sara asked him.

“Always,” Oliver said. His eyes flicked to Felicity uncertainty. She looked back at him calmly, hoping that if she looked unaffected he would stop being so skittish. She really wanted to cross the distance between them and touch him, reassure him that she wasn’t going to do anything to make it weird. It didn’t have to be sexual, but now that she knew what touching him was like, she was hooked. Her skin itched for the connection. She smiled at him and sat down at the island, pretending that nothing had happened between them.

She leaned over the food he pushed toward her and inhaled. “This smells amazing.”

“Cooking is Ollie’s thing,” Sara said, picking up two plates and leaving the kitchen without another word.

“I know you said you liked cooking, but I didn’t think you’d be any good at it,” Felicity said.

“Thanks,” Oliver replied dryly.

“You have to go into QC?” Felicity asked curiously, taking a bite of the pasta and only just managing to suppress a groan.

“Yeah,” he agreed.

“I have been dying to play with your equipment,” she said. She felt like she wasn’t even in her body as the words spilled out of her. She was above it, watching the train wreck and unable to stop it.
horror was unmitigated. “I mean the computers! Barry told me you just developed a prototype processor, and I’ve been dying to get my hands on it.”

“Is this you saying you’re considering my job offer?” Oliver asked.

“No. Maybe. It doesn’t seem like a good idea to go back to Kord after everything with the fire. Not safe. I like safe.”

“That would be correct,” he said. “But I also think that you should stay off your feet. Running around QC is the opposite of that.”

Felicity pouted and looked down at her feet. Traitors. She looked back in time to see Oliver smiling at her. He quickly turned away and focused on the plates. She noticed that there was also a smaller plate for the toddler. It was thoughtful and made her feel things; things she carefully tamped down and put into a carefully labelled box in the back of her mind that belonged to Oliver.

“You could always give me a piggyback ride to all the places I want to see,” she said playfully.


“Fine,” she grouched, hating logic and everything it stood for in that moment.

Oliver shook his head at her stubbornness and left the kitchen with a small huff of laughter. Even if he wouldn’t look at her for longer than a second, at least he wasn’t retreating entirely. It gave her hope.

She ate her food at the island, not wanting to admit to Oliver that her feet were starting to hurt again, and listened to the serious conversation coming from the living room. The cooing of the baby and the excited ramblings of the toddler were a stark contradiction to the grim nature of their discussions. Felicity got snippets. Something about a grudge and someone really powerful? They were really good at talking in code. It was really irritating. She had just finished the last of her food when the front door opened and an angry voice cut through the house.

“Where is he?!”

“Thea!” Oliver exclaimed.

“I know he’s here, and I know you didn’t tell me, Ollie! I so don’t want to talk to you right now! Where is he?!”

Felicity’s eyebrows lifted and she realized this was a confrontation she did not want to miss. She hobbled over to the kitchen door and saw a brunette woman with green eyes and hell in her stance staring Oliver down.

“He’s in your typical room,” Oliver said in defeat.

“We are going to talk about this later,” Thea warned angrily. She turned on her heels and marched upstairs.

“Anyone else have Miley’s Wrecking Ball stuck in their heads now?” Felicity asked the eerily silent room. Everyone except for Dig stared at her blankly. He looked amused but didn’t laugh. “Tough crowd,” she added.

Oliver’s thumb was tracing over his index finger and he was staring at the stairs as if he thought they would help his sister not be mad at him.
“Don’t you have a company to run?” Dig asked Oliver, pulling him back to the present. Oliver glared back at Dig and stalked off, collecting his things for the day. For once, Felicity didn’t have to wonder where he was in the house. His pouting had turned to slamming. A minute later she heard the roar of a motorcycle from the garage and tires squeaking on the pavement outside.

“This family is kinda ripe with the drama, huh?” Felicity asked.

“This is a good day,” Dig said. “Oliver said that I am to make sure you don’t spend too much time on your feet. If you don’t, you don’t get to go play with his equipment tomorrow.”

Heat flooded her face and she narrowed her eyes. Dig held up the hand that wasn’t holding the baby. “His words, not mine. But you really should be sitting.”

Grumbling, Felicity sat on the sofa next to Dig. The toddler, his daughter, immediately crawled into her lap with her Black Widow action figure and started playing. Felicity looked down at the little girl then up at Dig in confusion.

“Guess she likes you. Do you want me to-?”

“No, she’s fine,” Felicity said quickly. She had never been around too many kids, and felt a little uncomfortable, but the girl was absolutely adorable. She felt her heart melt just looking at her.

“Let me know,” Dig said.

Felicity nodded and started talking to the girl, whose name was Sara, named after the woman sitting comfortably on Nyssa’s lap, even as they both made phone calls and threatened people in icy-cold tones. Felicity couldn’t wrap her mind around Dig wanting his girls around that kind of environment, save for the fact that Nyssa and Sara kept getting them things, playing with them, holding them, and otherwise treating them like tiny goddesses.

“Dig…Can I ask you something?” Felicity asked. Nyssa and Sara had left to chase down a few more leads, Nyssa vowing yet again to kill Kane for Felicity, and Sara rolling her eyes in amusement.

“Sure,” Dig said, gently rocking the baby tucked against his massive arm absentely. She was sleeping soundly, little bubbles forming from her drool.

Sara had crawled off her lap and was playing aliens versus Avengers in the foyer.

“I mean this nicely, I really do, but you don’t really seem to fit in with this…What Oliver does seems wrong. Doesn’t it bother you that he hurts people, and that your kids are around it?” Felicity asked tentatively.

“Oliver saved my life, and I his, several times. We’re brothers. It changes how I see him. As far as right and wrong, I’m a soldier. I fought wars for other people’s greed and took innocent lives because of a mission I didn’t really believe in. I tried to do good then. I really did, but I was just one man. I struggled with the morality of the war I was fighting. It weighed on me. While I don’t like all of Oliver’s methods, I don’t ask what I’m fighting for anymore or feel like I’m alone. I can see the change we have on the city. It’s tangible. I’m helping to make Starling City a safer place for my daughters.”

“But you do kill people,” Felicity said. “And threaten them.”

“Only if they try to kill me first,” Dig said. “I don’t go out of my way of roughing innocent people up, if that’s what you’re asking.”
“You guys keep talking like you aren’t part of the Bratva, but I’ve seen the proof. I’ve seen the crimes.”

“You’ve seen what you wanted to see. Doesn’t mean you understand,” Dig said.

“So explain it to me,” Felicity said.

“What do you know?” he asked carefully.

“You guys run drugs, prostitutes, though I didn’t see any slave selling, so that’s nice, and you launder money. You’re into weapons, theft, fencing stolen goods, have gotten into three turf wars in the past four years, and run five illegal gambling houses.”

“There’s a lot of crime in this city,” Dig said thoughtfully, “but not as much as there was when I was growing up. You know why that is?”

“No.”

“Oliver’s father, as well as Tommy’s, had their claws in the heart of the city. They were corrupt, and the people suffered for it. Oliver saw another way – a way to help people, keep business rolling and the Bratva satisfied, and prevent thugs from running the city into the ground. He looks out for the people of this city, goes on patrols to make sure they’re safe. He cares. And his efforts have paid off. It’s an ongoing struggle, but the glades are a little safer and people think a little longer before they try to bring their crime to Starling.”

“I don’t get how your crime is better than other people’s crime. It’s still crime,” Felicity said.

“Ask Oliver to take you to the glades and show you. I know he will,” Dig said. “It’s the only way to understand what he’s trying to do.”

“I don’t know if he’ll want to,” she said.

Dig shrugged. “Then I guess you’ll just have to trust me.”

Felicity smiled at him. “I feel like I already do. You’re very charming.”

“Damn straight,” a woman said playfully from the front door. She pushed the door shut and picked up Sara and kissed her lovingly. Dig stood and kissed her, then turned to Felicity.

“Felicity…Lyla, my wife.”

They shook hands and Felicity laughed nervously.

“I wasn’t hitting on your husband,” she blurted.

“I wouldn’t blame you if you did. You’re right – he is very charming,” Lyla replied lightly, clearly not upset.

Felicity smiled and took in the family. Her smile widened at the scene they made.

“And I need to borrow him for a while,” Lyla said. “Is that okay?”

“Of course,” Felicity said.

They collected their bags and Dig stopped in front of Felicity again. “I have eight guards around the perimeter of the house. You might not see them, but they’re there. If you need anything, or you get
into trouble, here’s my number.” He handed her a card. It had his name, number, and the title of Security Consultant printed in dark ink.

“Thanks,” Felicity.

“We’re right down the road,” Lyla added. It made Felicity think she was well aware of the threats on Felicity’s life. Felicity smiled, though she felt nervous about being alone, and watched the family leave with a wistfulness she was surprised to feel in her heart.

When they were gone, she looked around uncertainly. “Welp,” she said. She hit her hands together in front of her and snapped once awkwardly. “I guess that leaves me to figure out what The Consortium is and maybe sneak a peek at Oliver’s business again and figure out why everyone keeps throwing cryptic hints my way. Yeah…”

She slowly made her way up the stairs, only remembering halfway up that she was not alone in the house. A figure appeared at the top of the stairs and Felicity froze. She didn’t move despite recognizing Thea. She had watched enough nature documentaries to know that freezing was a prey’s preferred method of avoiding detection by predators.

“Are you going to yell at me? Because I have no idea what’s going on,” Felicity said.

Thea smiled and cocked her head to the side, in a way that was very similar to her brother. She looked like she was trying to figure Felicity out.

“Felicity, right?” Thea asked.

Felicity was surprised.

“Believe it not, people tell me some things. Clearly not news about the man I love, but most things,” Thea added.

“I think Oliver was trying to spare you pain,” Felicity said.

“He’s stupid like that,” Thea said. “But we’ve both gone through a lot, so I know why he does it. Doesn’t make it right.”

“And pain always has a way of catching up to you,” Felicity said.

“Right,” Thea agreed.

Felicity ascended the rest of the stairs. “How is he?”

“Roy is an idiot, but he’s an alive idiot. He should make it. Whether or not I let him live afterwards is up in the air.”

Felicity chuckled and tucked her hands into her pockets awkwardly, very curious about the woman in front of her. Oliver had mentioned her, and Felicity knew she was the most important person in his life.

“Did you spend the night here?” Thea asked suddenly.

“Ah…Yes,” Felicity said.

“With my brother?”

“No. I mean technically in his house, but not with him. I actually slept with my friend Iris. And by
slept I mean actual sleeping. She was worried about me after the fire.”

“Fire?”

“My house was set on fire with me in it,” Felicity replied.

“What?!” Thea demanded.

“Yeah. Kinda sucks. My panda hat was in there. I really loved that hat...And you know, I’m homeless now. So there’s that.”

“Do you know who it was?” Thea asked. “Does my brother know?”

“No,” Felicity quickly assured her. “I was just about to go dig deeper.”

“Dig how?”

“Computers. They’re my thing.”

“Really?” Thea asked.

“Yeah,” Felicity said.

“Can I see?”

“If you want, though it might be boring watching me. I’ve never watched myself hack before. I guess I could set up a camera, but what would be the point?”


“That’s such a strong word,” Felicity complained. “I never maliciously hack into things. I just look around...and maybe get you arrested if you’re super bad and trying to kill me. And I might have fixed a few parking tickets and hacked a couple of Federal databases to look around...I think I should stop talking.”

“You’ve picked the right family to admit that to,” Thea said. “I don’t know if you’ve heard, but there be criminals here.”

“I heard something about that,” Felicity said. “But doesn’t Roy need you?”

“Nah, I drugged him with the good stuff.”

Felicity shrugged in acceptance and went back to the office. She sat at her desk and Thea plopped down in what Felicity had begun to think of as Oliver’s chair.

“Want to tell me your deal?” Thea asked.

“It’s complicated. And messy. And I don’t actually have all the facts yet. Want to tell me why Roy was axed?”

“Oh. My brother thinks someone is looking to take Starling from us...start a war. His bet is someone in the Bratva. I think Triad. Dig thinks it Malcolm Merlyn, but we don’t talk about him.”

Thea looked incredibly angry and tense at the mere mention of Merlyn. Strange.

“I might be able to find out for you,” Felicity suggested tentatively, wondering where the urge to be
helpful came from after promising herself not to get involved in Oliver’s business. It was probably her conversation with Dig or the fact that she really wanted to help Thea out. Both seemed logical.

“Really?” Thea asked excitedly. “We’ve been looking for answers for months. That would be so awesome!”

“You can’t tell your brother, though. He clearly doesn’t want me helping.”

“He’s owed a few secrets, I think,” Thea said, putting her feet up on the table and crossing them with a smirk on her face.

“I’ll run that search on Pauline,” Felicity said, patting the far left computer. “Frank and Stitch here are gonna be for looking into my thing.” She pointed at the other two computers. “Tell me what you know.”

Thea looked amused at Felicity’s naming of the computers, but didn’t hesitate in speaking.

“There’s not a lot. Our shipments, our people, and our operations just keep getting interrupted. Whenever we get there, it’s always too late. And they keep hitting things they shouldn’t know about beforehand.”

“Which is why Oliver thinks someone from inside the Bratva is doing this.”

“Maybe one of the other brothers, but no one from Starling. Ollie inspires loyalty in the people who follow him. It’s a weird little quirk of his.”

“Give me some specifics of the attacks. What about Roy? Where was he?”

“He wasn’t supposed to be out on his own last night, but from what I heard, he was at the docks looking into the situation. Freelancing like the idiot he is.”

“And you love him?”


Felicity grinned and went to work searching for Roy, the docks, and anything that might get Thea and Oliver answers.

“Thanks for digging up that breach from ARGUS, by the way,” Thea said. “Ollie told me you found that out.”

“I did, and you’re welcome. You know why they want your brother to owe them a favor?”

“Amanda Waller and Ollie go back. Not happily. And Lyla works for Amanda, but helps us out and Amanda gets grumpy about that.”

Felicity stared at Thea.

“We like complicated around here. It’s sorta our jam.”

“I can see that,” Felicity said.

“You seem to like it, too,” Thea added, her eyes probing and full of intuitive intelligence.

Felicity wrinkled her nose. “Can’t seem to help myself.”
“You’ll do,” Thea decided.

It sounded kind of ominous coming from her, but Felicity ignored the feeling and focused on the search. She ran the programs she could think to run, hacked all databases, and even went back into ARGUS’s mainframe to get a better understanding of Amanda Waller. Thea talked to her the whole time, the young girl behind the businesswoman and Bratva leader poking through with every excited ramble and cackle of unrepentant, free laughter. Felicity liked her a lot.

“Ruh-roh,” Felicity said as her computer dinged and she started going through what it had found.

“What?” Thea asked.

“Definitely He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named,” Felicity said. “He thought he could slip in unnoticed, but I’m better.”

“Malcolm?” Thea asked.

“Afraid so,” Felicity said. “You guys wear GPS, right?”

“In case we get in trouble, yeah,” Thea said. “It was Ollie’s idea.”

“Well, Malcolm has hacked into the system and is watching your people and your shipments. He’s currently in town, and he’s been very busy being very bad. Didn’t I hear something about him dying?”

“It didn’t stick as much as I wanted it to,” Thea said. “Where is he?”

Felicity winced. “I have a feeling that if I tell you, you’ll find him and that doesn’t feel very safe. I would rather wait for Oliver to get back.”

“Pretty loyal for someone he’s known three days,” Thea said.

“It’s not loyalty. It’s concern. For you. I don’t want you to get in trouble.”

“Malcolm won’t hurt me,” Thea said. “He feels a certain level of affection for me. As much as a man like Malcolm can, I guess.”

“Still…” Felicity said.

“I hate when Dig is right…and he is right a lot. It’s a superpower. Honestly,” Thea said, deflecting from the tension of the moment and the sadness in her eyes. “He said it was Malcolm, and he was right.”

“Seems like it,” Felicity said. She hesitated, uncertain of how to continue on with the conversation without crossing boundaries.

“Ollie keeps going easy on Malcolm. For my sake. I think it’s time we stop going easy on him. He almost killed Roy last night. He’s started a war. I’m going to finish it,” Thea added more aggressively. Felicity saw the Bratva in the girl then. More than that, there was steel and strength. It was impressive.

“Why for your sake?” Felicity asked.

Thea took her feet off the desk and stood fluidly, power and grace in every shift. She stared down at Felicity, her expression closed off. “Because he’s my father. I’ll be with Roy. Please let me be in the room when you tell Ollie about Malcolm.”
“I will,” Felicity said.

“Thank you,” Thea returned, sounding genuinely grateful.

She swept out of the room, leaving Felicity to the search that was currently making her life a revolving door of crazy.

“Shakespeare would have such a hard on over this family.” Felicity muttered to herself, feeling like her propensity for layers was nothing compared to theirs. It was like they were a walking soap opera. It was a little bit scary how easily they seemed to pull in layers and attract the likes of evil men like Malcolm Merlyn.

And she had gone ahead and kissed the lead player in what she hoped was not one of Shakespeare’s more bloody tragedies. “I hope this isn’t one of those misogynistic stories,” Felicity muttered. “I’m so dead if it is. A kiss shouldn’t mean I get killed. It’s just a kiss. But it was a really nice one. I’d really like to repeat it. But I shouldn’t. Because I am in the middle of a traumatic experience, and he kills people, and I don’t. And he’s emotionally constipated, and it’s best that he doesn’t want to be with me. Yeah…”

She huffed irritably and allowed the work of the present to take away the worries of the future and the past. It was a good distraction, but she knew she was far from over Oliver. He kept finding new ways into her brain, confusing, surprising, and reeling her in even when he wasn’t in the room. She knew she was already deeply entrenched into the family and him, but that was a problem to face some other time. Right now, she had to figure out why someone wanted her dead.
Miracle on Rose Street

Chapter Summary

Learn more about Oliver’s operation, Oliver and Felicity fight, bullets go-a-flying.

The Consortium was very careful. She found very limited references to them, and even those had the feel of barebones and not at all. Someone was afraid; it was possible a lot of people were afraid. For the life of her, she could not figure out what they wanted from Kord or her. She didn’t know if a battery was enough to invoke the wrath that had been leveled at her, but she was getting scared. They were not like Kord. They were not out in the open, an enemy she could fight in the open. They were hidden and it didn’t look like they would make themselves known anytime soon. Nyssa was right, enemies she could not see were scary.

She kept looking, letting her programs run, but she knew it would take more than hacking. It would take talking to people and hitting the streets. She would have to let Oliver know what she had found and hope that he could help her.

She heard the door open downstairs and knew simply from the sense of presence that filled up the house that it was him. She heard Thea march past the office door and down the stairs. The shouting started soon after. Felicity listened to their growing yelling match, concerned that it seemed to be moving closer. She stood, about to tell them off for yelling in the hall when Roy needed to sleep, but Oliver and Thea came into the office before she could. Oliver slammed the door behind him and turned back around to them both with a look of complete rage on his face. Thea finally stopped yelling at him and gulped.

Felicity was startled. The rage was unlike anything she had seen on his face yet. It was close to the expression on his face the previous night, but let loose, free to roam and terrorize the world at will.

“What gave you the right to look into this?” Oliver yelled at Felicity.

Felicity knew that playing dumb was not the way to go. She straightened her back and rolled her shoulders. “No one did, Oliver. I don’t need your permission for anything. I’m grateful you’re willing to help me, but that doesn’t mean I owe you strict compliance and obedience.”

“I didn’t ask you to obey me!” Oliver roared back. “I asked you to keep your nose out of my business!”

“It’s not just your business!” Felicity yelled, moving around the desk and stopping directly in his space. She put her hands on her hips and stared up at him, her gaze unwavering. “It’s Thea’s. She has as much, if not more, right to it than you do. I’m not sorry for telling her the truth! I’m not sorry for finding you answers! So get your head out of your ass and thank me for getting you an answer to a question you haven’t been able to answer instead of yelling at me for helping you!”

She had poked him several times in the chest during her speech without thinking. His eyebrows had raised after the second poke and he looked stunned he would be so brave and unafraid to touch him, to defy him, to meet him word for word. She scowled up at him, daring him to say something else, daring him to make her madder.
“As much as I dislike it, this is Thea’s life. Yes. I cannot avoid the fact that she is in this. It is not yours, however,” Oliver returned coldly. “You’re an outsider, and you’ve already seen more than you should.”

“Are we back to concrete shoes?” Felicity mocked him. “Gonna make sure I don’t talk?”

Oliver growled at her. “You’re not listening to me!”

“Because you’re not saying anything worth hearing!” Felicity yelled back.

He threw his hands up in the air, making a sound of complete frustration, and paced to the door before pacing back to her as his thoughts finally focused.

“Malcolm Merlyn is the most dangerous man I have ever faced. It’s not just that he can fight. He’s a strategist. He’s always two steps ahead. He will come after everyone in the Bratva, and you just sent up a flare he will not ignore.”

“He didn’t track me,” Felicity said. “I’m better than him.”

“He’s smarter than you think, and he will not distinguish between us and you. And you pulled Thea into it without asking me first.”

“That right there is the problem!” Felicity said. “You keep making it sound like Thea has no will of her own, no ability to reason, think, or protect herself. I get that you want to look after her. You’re a good big brother. But give her some fucking credit! She’s not a toddler, and she’s smarter than you think!”

Oliver looked as if Felicity had slapped him. It took him a minute to formulate words.

“It’s personal with him!” he almost begged her to understand. “And he’s made no secret of his desire to possess her.”

“And you haven’t?” Felicity asked. “Because what I’m seeing right now seems pretty damn possessive.” She inhaled, holding up her hands to get him to stop speaking. “I’m not comparing you to him, but your head is so far up your ass right now that you can’t see daylight. Nothing’s happened; all I did was trust Thea with the truth of what I had found. You should try it. She doesn’t need that kind of protection.”

Oliver clenched his fist and made another sound of frustration. He stormed away from her, throwing the door open, and marched down the hall without trying to answer her. Felicity panted, her face swirling with heat, and her body thrumming with indignation. She knew Oliver loved his sister, but she had hoped he had more sense than to try to mollycoddle her and keep secrets between them. She didn’t know if he was more upset at the potential danger or that he couldn’t keep Malcolm Merlyn’s involvement away from her and spare Thea pain. The entire argument felt like an overreaction, and Felicity was convinced it was because he was terrified and needed someone to take his fears out on. Felicity had been the easiest option.

There was a long pause, and then Thea threw her body at Felicity. Felicity stepped back several times as she caught Thea around the waist. Thea wrapped her arms around her neck and buried her nose into Felicity’s shoulder. Felicity returned the hug, trying to calm down around her lingering anger. How could one man infuriate and intrigue her so much? How could he be so thoughtful in so many ways and then stop thinking when it came to his sister?

“Thank you,” Thea whispered into Felicity’s shoulder. “No one has stood up for me like that before.”
“Sure. No problem.”

“Are you sure he and you aren’t…you know?” Thea asked, pulling away to look at Felicity’s reaction.

“There is no…you knowing,” Felicity said firmly. “That is not happening. Nope. I need some fresh air. Will I be shot if I go outside?”

“Of course not. Just go out the back. There’s a fenced yard. It’s safer.”

“Thanks,” Felicity said.

She squeezed Thea’s hand once and smiled at her before going downstairs and letting herself out through the kitchen door. She was grateful she didn’t see Oliver on the way down. She hoped he had left again. She needed the time to cool down before facing him again.

It was cold outside. The sky was a brilliant blue, thin clouds hovering high above but not so much that they obscured the sun. Despite the rays of light making an appearance, it was freezing. She wrapped her arms around her legs, shivering slightly but enjoying the cold against her heated skin. She closed her eyes, took deep breaths, and counted down from twenty in her head. When she reached one she felt calmer, though she was still going over his words. It was clear that there was a line in the sand when it came to her. There was him and her, no in between. And while he seemed to be trying not to let the kiss come between them, he was also not really letting her in. Maybe he was incapable. Maybe he had seen too much, done too much, and people not in the family simply could not be trusted with all of him. She felt compassion for the terror she had seen in his eyes at knowing that Malcolm was the reason for his most recent problems. She liked the love that guided him to want to protect Thea in all things, but he seriously needed to grow the fuck up and loosen his need to control his environment and the people in it.

She shivered and silently fumed until her body couldn’t handle it any longer. She went inside, getting a glass of water and drinking it aggressively. When she was done, Sara walked into the room. She was proud of herself for actually seeing her this time even though the woman made no sound.

“Hey,” Sara said. “Did something happen?”

“Why?”

“Ollie called and said he was hitting the streets and wouldn’t be back until late. He doesn’t usually go out on Fridays until later…It’s taco and game night.”

“I got into a fight with him because I looked into who has been causing you guys so many problems,” Felicity said.

Sara’s eyes widened then narrowed. Her body made a shift, as though preparing for a fight. “Who?”

“Malcolm Merlyn,” Felicity replied.

Sara hissed and then pulled out her phone. She walked out of the room, talking a million miles a minute to whoever was on the other side. Felicity shook her head, wondering how bad a single man could be, why everyone seemed so freaked out over Merlyn, and decided to push their situation out of her mind. She needed to solve her problems before she did anything else. The sooner she did, the sooner she could go…home.

Where was home? What would she do now that her house was gone? Did the police want to talk to her about the men who had been dead on her lawn? Did they think she had set it? Were they looking
for her? Why hadn’t she thought of the possible fallout sooner? She needed to get ahead of it. How? She didn’t know what to say. She didn’t know how to make falling off the grid look innocent. That complicated things.

She was so screwed.

She sighed and Sara walked back into the room. She looked as pissed as Felicity had felt twenty minutes ago.

“He’s going to get himself killed,” Sara decided.

“He wouldn’t go after Malcolm Merlyn on his own would he?”

“He’s gotten better at depending on his team,” Sara said, “but some habits are hard to break, particularly when he’s afraid. He tends to be reactionary when he thinks he’s saving people. It would be sweet if it wasn’t so irritating.”

“You make it seem like his whole world is Bratva.”

“No. His whole world is his family,” Sara said. “For as many issues that I’ve had with him over the years, there is one truth about Oliver that always rings true. There is nothing he wouldn’t do for the people he cares about. He’d fight the seasons if he thought it was necessary to give us all one more day.”

“That puts our argument in perspective,” Felicity decided.

“You fought with him?” Sara asked.

“A little.”

“It was pretty rad,” Thea interjected, coming into the kitchen to grab some water for Roy. “I recorded it. I’ll show you later,” she added to Sara.

Felicity opened her mouth to protest, but Thea was already gone.

“Ugh,” Felicity complained.

Sara was staring at Felicity thoughtfully. She started speaking when she caught Felicity’s eyes. “Why aren’t you treating us like the criminals and murderers we are?”

“Because you’re more than that. I know you keep throwing hints about Oliver’s business, which I still haven’t looked into because…busy! But from what I’ve seen so far is people who care. You’re on the side of good, even if you have some habits that I don’t agree with.”

Sara shook her head. “I don’t think habit is the right word.”

Felicity shrugged. “I make tiny hats for cats. I don’t have a cat. We all have our thing.”

Sara actually laughed. “Okay.” Her gaze turned thoughtful. “I have a feeling about you, Felicity.”

“Don’t tell Nyssa,” Felicity said. “ Seriously. Don’t. She’s scary.”

Sara rolled her eyes. “I mean I have a feeling that you’re going to be around a little while. Even if you don’t see it yet, you belong here. Can I show you why?”

Felicity took the time to consider Sara’s question. As much as Oliver trusting her with the phone was
a big deal, this was bigger. This was a moment that would change the trajectory of her life and send her spiraling closer to the people around her. She could feel the seriousness of the offer and that fact that she had missed something. No matter how mad she was at Oliver, nothing she saw could convince her that he was a bad person. She wanted to know why. As many reasons as there were to stay away, to stop her growing crush before it went somewhere serious, she knew it wasn’t enough. Too, she was insanely curious about whatever Sara had to say. The need to understand was strong.

“Yes,” Felicity finally decided, looking up and revealing to a Sara a certainty that was unmitigated and borderline religious.

Sara nodded and gestured for Felicity to follow her wordlessly. Sara tossed a leather jacket at Felicity before they left the house and threw her own on without pausing. Felicity stumbled as she hurried after the woman and fought to pull the jacket on without slowing. The second she was in the car, Sara pulled away from the curb and shot Felicity a concerned look.

“I know I told you to ask Ollie to show you this, and he’ll be irritated I went behind his back, but I don’t think he’ll show you. He’s actually pretty humble.”

“I’ve noticed,” Felicity whispered.

“Just don’t tell him I showed you this.”

“You sound terrified of him,” Felicity said.

“Only as someone who was raised with him and knows he could tell all my secrets can be terrified,” Sara said. “There are some things Nyssa does not need to know about me.”

“She’d still love you,” Felicity said.

“You think so?”

“Duh.”

Sara laughed, the sound no longer seeming to surprise her, and they continued on the road in silence. Felicity watched the play of light on the houses switch to the squat buildings of businesses, back to houses that were not nearly as nice as Oliver’s, onto businesses with bars on the windows and mismatched signs and junkyards, and finally onto the glades. The poverty was in every crack, crevice, and broken car. The people in their cars and standing at the bus stops were a strange mixture of human endurance and fortitude and weariness. Life was wearing on them, but they endured, they kept going, they sought better.

Sara took them to an area that Felicity had not seen on her last visit and parked the car. She got out without hesitation and Felicity followed her curiously. She had heard the stories; she knew that they were in the heart of the worst of the area. Despite the time of day, there were prostitutes on the corners, homeless people having animated conversations on the sidewalks, and a small line at the nearby food bank.

“When you first look at this street, you see people who are desperate and at the far reaches of society,” Sara said. “You see crime and darkness.”

Felicity didn’t say anything. Her actions said enough. She had moved to be closer to Sara, feeling a little imbalanced and uncertain. She didn’t think Sara would put her life at risk, but she had never gone this deeply into the glades before. She was intimidated. Sara continued on as if Felicity had answered.
“Ten years ago, that would have been the case.” She pointed at the prostitutes. “Those girls would have been slaves, stolen and hooked on heroin to keep them in line.” She pointed at the grouping of homeless people. “They would fear daily beatings and potential abduction and experimentation from the local criminal organizations to perfect the latest terror or drug. What you see now is the result of years of efforts on Oliver’s part.”

“I don’t understand,” Felicity said.

“Those girls you see might look like any other prostitute. They are sex workers, but they’re protected in a way most are not.”

“Because Oliver is their pimp?” Felicity asked.

Sara shook her head. “Because Oliver set them free. He got rid of the slave industry that thrived here and changed how it all worked. Those who wanted out from the business were rehabilitated and set free, while those who liked the work were given autonomy. They work for themselves. They’re basically subcontractors. No one owns them. They do it because they like it and like the money. Oliver makes sure they get monthly testing and all the medical care they can stand. They pay a nominal fee to us, yes, which ensures the Bratva stays off our back and our work can continue. The rest of the money goes to that food bank and to that learning center over there. The women who want out are given the chance to go to school and do more. It’s actually encouraged. And the women all know that their money goes to that improvement, so they don’t look at it like charity if they choose that path. They’ve managed to send hundreds of people to college based off that one training center alone, and given hundreds more the chance at better job opportunities, and that’s not to mention the people they’ve fed off that one food bank. And we have several around the city. The drugs are another issue I’m sure that bothers you. We’re working on that too. We keep the drug dealers of a decade ago off the streets and in prison. The drugs we import are safe and not laced with poisons. The drugs we sell fund several addiction centers.”

“That seems like a contradiction,” Felicity said.

“We can’t stop people from selling sex, taking drugs, or stealing from others. It’s going to happen. If we fought every single instance of crime in the city, we would be fighting for a lifetime. Instead, we’re working to make sure that the crime is done safely, and with programs in place to educate, help, and give back to the community. We give people choices, which most poor people simply don’t have. It’s been a slow walk instead of a fast run, but there is a shift happening,” Sara said. “It’s working…And it’s all come from Oliver’s mind. We help him, but this sprung from him. Yes, we make money from the crime, but the amount of money that goes back into the city is more than worth it. Too, Ollie sends the majority of profit to the Bratva to keep them out of his city. The rest goes to paying us and ensuring people’s safety.”

Felicity felt a little overwhelmed. She was struggling with the morality of Sara’s words. She understood that the world was not a place of black and white. The grey area was not seen by all; it was a thing that only a few realized was there all the time. It usually took a few hard knocks and a hack or two to get them there. She had known it for years. It was how she rationalized hacking to help people and working for Kord when she knew they created weapons as well as tech that could save lives.

The bubble forming in her chest felt a lot like hope. Oliver and his people still hurt others, but maybe they only hurt those who were bad. Maybe he had more restraint than she had assumed.

“And the patrols I’ve heard you guys talking about?” Felicity asked.

“There’s still crime in this city,” Sara said. “We do what we can to chase the worst of it out.”
“So that you’re the only criminals,” Felicity returned.

“Better us than them. Plus, we don’t go around raping, pillaging, and murdering for no reason.”

“But you do murder,” Felicity pointed out.

“When we have to. We’re not exactly in finance here.”

That got a laugh out of Felicity.

“It’s typically because they started it. We don’t pick fights just for the heck of it. Well, I do, but that’s my issue, not Ollie’s.”

They passed a woman in a short dress and high heels. The woman smiled at Sara, asked about Nyssa, and seemed to be genuinely nice and normal. Felicity realized she was staring. The woman wasn’t a stereotype or a cliché. She was a real woman, who happened to work in the sex trade. She felt her long-held opinions shifting.

“Thank you for showing me this,” Felicity said after another few minutes of walking.

“Sure,” Sara said. “There’s so much more, but I thought this was a good way to show you what I mean about Ollie.”

“You seem really concerned that I think well of him,” Felicity decided.

“Just showing you what you already know,” Sara said. “Despite what Oliver might have said to make you mad, we do need you. And maybe he needs you. It’s not my place to say. But as an organization, we definitely need you. You’re good at what you do, and all our hackers are kindergarteners compared to you.”

“You’re not just asking me to understand,” Felicity decided. “You’re asking me to stay.”

“I’m asking you to think about what you want… You care about people. You want to help them. We have an entire system in place to do just that. Can you live your life without helping people? Do you really think you’ll be satisfied without feeling like you’re making a difference?”

Felicity knew in her heart that Sara was right. The urge to help people had been in her chest for as long as she could remember. It had driven her tinkering, with sometimes disastrous results. She had always meant well, but the risk of technology was that there was always a military purpose of some kind if someone looked hard enough. She didn’t want that for her technology. If she helped them, she might be able to make a difference within the city. It wasn’t changing the world, but what better way to make a difference than in the lives of her neighbors? The world was a big place, but her neighbors were within reach.

Her doubts lingered, but she felt the seriousness of Sara’s words. She knew she had some thinking to do, and she didn’t know if she would get it until after she had The Consortium figured out and her life in order. She shook her head contrarily. Even then, she probably wouldn’t get the time. Life was chaos.

Sara walked her in a long circle, pointing out the programs Oliver had started and the plans he wanted to get off the ground to make things better. Some of the things Felicity already had ideas to improve on them and others she listened in surprise and awe. Oliver was definitely a man of many identities. Some she liked more than others, but the side that cared was extremely powerful and attracted her to no end.
They had made it back to the road with their car when Sara stiffened. Felicity had been lost in her head, trying to figure out how she felt about the information that had been given to her, but she noticed the shift in her friend. She glanced over, a question forming on her lips.

Sara grabbed her arm and yanked her hard, all but throwing her into an alley they had been passing. Sara shifted slightly, a pistol appearing in her hand from...somewhere. She crouched in front of Felicity even as bullets pinged over their heads. Felicity screamed and ducked her head down to avoid the shrapnel that was flying. Sara returned fire and Felicity heard a man cry out in pain. Sara’s eyes were in constant motion, but she didn’t turn around.

“Is there an exit down that ally?” Sara asked Felicity, firing back.

Felicity looked over her shoulder immediately. “No. Just a wall.”

“Think you can climb it?” Sara asked.

It was fifteen feet high with no handholds to help her up.

“I don’t think so,” Felicity replied.

“Right,” Sara said. She grinned wickedly, almost as if the fight made her happy, and then popped up from their poor attempt at a hiding space and started firing in earnest. The gunshots filled the air with increased fervor. Felicity heard sirens wailing in the distance. Felicity moved to the edge of the building and watched as Sara boldly fired back at three people, who wearing masks and firing pistols. Bullets pinged at Sara’s feet. One whizzed by her arm. Felicity was sure it hit her, but Sara didn’t falter. Another man went down. Two left. And the sirens were moving closer.

“Is that all you got?” Sara yelled at them.

She fired again and another man crumpled. The last man realized that getting into a fight with a very pissed Sara Lance was the worst idea imaginable. He took off in his SUV, disappearing down the road with a squeal of tires. Sara inhaled sharply, seemingly reining herself in after a brief internal struggle, and turned back to Felicity.

Felicity was gripping the edge of the building, her heart beating wildly out of control, and adrenaline screaming at her to run and keep running until her legs gave out on her and she was a puddle of bones, and skin, and nothing human.

Sara put her hand on Felicity’s elbow and gently helped her stand.

“I can’t decide if I hate being burned alive more than being shot at,” Felicity said lightly, trying to get her thoughts in order and calm her racing heart. “They both really suck.”

Sara nodded and took Felicity’s hand with that same easygoing calm. She pulled her out of the very nice alley that Felicity had learned to love a lot in the past two minutes and towards the relative safety of the car. Felicity stumbled a bit, but Sara kept her on track. They separated at the car and Sara was driving off before Felicity could get her seatbelt fastened. Sara tossed her phone at Felicity.

“Dial Nyssa and put it on speaker for me.”

Felicity did as she was asked and Nyssa picked up after only two rings.

“Felicity and I were attacked on Rose St. I don’t think we’re being followed, but I think a little backup would be helpful.”
“I’m already on my way,” Nyssa replied, the roar of a motorcycle filling up the phone. “Five minutes.”

She hung up without saying goodbye and Felicity saw Sara sigh. Her eyes searched the mirrors nearly constantly, her hands clenched on the steering wheel. It was as she stared at the white knuckles of her friend, impressed that anyone could be so strong, that Felicity saw the blood.

“You were hit!” Felicity said, reaching out.

“Is that what all the pain is about?” Sara asked tightly.

“Maybe I should drive,” Felicity said.

“I’m fine,” Sara said.

Felicity didn’t figure arguing would do any good. Sara stubborn and strong. She would get her way. She knew exactly where she could do some good. A man had escaped. She didn’t know why they had shot at her, but having a pointed chat with the man was better than nothing. She tore down the protocols on Sara’s phone, then used it to connect to Oliver’s system at home. She had the computers running the vehicle’s plates and descriptions within a minute.

“He’s headed north,” Felicity said. “The police have arrived on scene. No one is talking, from what I can see so far. Either they’re scared, or they really do like you.”

Sara blinked rapidly, processing Felicity’s words around her surprise. “North?”

“Yeah.”

“Maybe we could-”

“You’re shot!” Felicity cut her off.

The phone rang. Oliver’s face popped up on the screen. “Uh-oh,” Felicity said. “How angry-faced is he going to be?”

Sara didn’t have to glance over to know who was calling. “It’ll be worse if you don’t answer.”

Felicity sighed. “Sara’s phone. Sara can’t come to the phone right now, but I’d love to take a message for you so she can call you back when blood isn’t coming out of her body.”

There was a long pause. It was so long that she checked to be sure the call hadn’t dropped.

“Where are you?” Oliver asked slowly.

“We’re on Figueroa and 5th. The bad guy just made a turn on Winston, headed north,” Felicity added. “Sara wants to chase him, but she’s been hit, and I think I might vomit if she has another shootout, so…”

“Under no circumstances is she to take you anywhere else but home,” Oliver said firmly, the tension of their fight in every syllable though he seemed focused. “I’m on the guy.”

She felt him moving to disconnect the call. “You should stay on the line with me,” Felicity said quickly, though his bossy tone was definitely not her favorite. “I’ll guide you to him.”

“Fine,” he huffed.
The line went silent, but not dead, and she took that as a win. Ten seconds later he spoke again.

“Are you okay?” His tone was softer, sweeter, more like the Oliver she was beginning to know and less like the jerk who was reacting to things without thinking them through.

“Yes,” she replied seriously.

“Good,” he said, the relief cutting through the tension.

“He just turned onto Simpson. Looks like he’s headed toward Unionville.” She tapped on her phone a few times and logged into the GPS system Malcolm Merlyn had so recently hacked into – a system he could not use again thanks to her – and found Oliver’s tracker. “If you turn left right now you should be able to get ahead of him. But you should go a little faster.”

In response she heard the roar of a motorcycle and the shifting of gears. He didn’t question her directions, or doubt her abilities for a second, and she felt a surge of affection for him for the truth that he seemed to trust her so implicitly. A few seconds later, she heard another roar of a different motorcycle. She looked back and saw the black-clad figure of a woman on a sleek bike. Nyssa. Felicity felt a little safer with the very scary, very capable woman so close by.

“Go straight for another 500 feet, then right. You should cross his path in two minutes,” Felicity added.

Oliver grunted in response and Felicity focused on tracking his GPS in relation to the videos of the man who had attacked them. They were converging. Felicity didn’t know what would happen when they did, but she was filled with a curious mixture of nerves and excitement. Everything seemed right; something clicked in her brain. For once, she didn’t question the feeling.

The car pulled to a slow stop in front of Oliver’s house as she stared at Sara’s cellphone, but she didn’t notice. She was too engrossed in the chase and in the excitement of finding something that felt entirely right. It was the only thing to go right in the past week.

“Blue SUV?” Oliver asked tightly.

“Yes,” Felicity said.

“I see him.”

She sucked in a deep breath and listened nervously for Oliver to catch up to him. The roar of the motorcycle became her entire world, filling her up and tying her to the marvel of the future and the drama of the present.

A loud explosion and tires squealing on the pavement made her flinch. She switched over to the closest camera she could find and watched as the SUV made a 180 on the road before coming to a rough stop, its back wheels nothing more than rims. Rubber bounced across the asphalt in chunks and rolls. Oliver parked directly next to the driver’s side and got off his bike, his helmet still on. For the first time, Felicity saw the animal unleashed and in his environment. It was a mixture of scary and hotness that had her body flushed with heat and her heart racing. The wildness in Oliver was still tamed despite the animal taking over his being. She wondered if that way of being translated to any other aspect of his life.

“Something is wrong with me,” she decided.

“What?” Oliver barked in a voice deeper than his normal register.
“Nothing,” she replied swiftly, a blush blossoming on her cheeks.

Oliver didn’t reply. He broke the glass of the driver’s side door, reached through, and pulled the man out of the seat with a firm jerk and flex of his arm muscles. The man landed on the asphalt with a solid thump as cars screeched and roared past him. Oliver stormed over to him and kicked him in the face without pause. The man went limp. Oliver picked him up, tossing him over his shoulder as casually as one might pick up a small child, and turned. A car came to a stop next to him and Felicity saw Dig in the driver’s seat. Oliver had called him at least. Maybe he wasn’t as reckless as she had assumed. Oliver threw the man into the back of the car with a rough toss, then turned away without speaking to Dig, the animal still thrumming through his body. Dig hit the gas and was gone a second later. Oliver got on his bike and took off after the car, his body tense and coiled, ready for anything. There was another long pause, in which Felicity wondered what they were going to do to the man and if she would ever find out if they got answers from him.

“Thank you,” Oliver finally whispered into the phone, sending a shock wave of warmth down her spine in response to the husky tone.

Surprised by the thank you after everything that had happened between them, her reflexes kicked in and she answered with the customary, “You’re welcome,” before she had thought to say anything else.

The line went dead a second later and she stared at the phone. The thrill of the chase, her nervousness at something happening to Oliver, and her fear for the man had mingled in her chest and sent a foreign brand of adrenaline in to her body. It was welcome and made everything feel very bright and very close. The feeling that she had found something she had been looking for still beat within her chest, solidly informing her that walking away might not be a thing she seriously considered in the future, if only to help mitigate some of the damage Oliver and the others did. The fear of joining the wrong cause, of Oliver’s methods, was also haunting her.

“Please don’t kill him,” she whispered at the phone, hoping that Oliver somehow heard her plea.
Chapter Summary

This chapter is super long, but I couldn’t be bothered to divide it up and do all things that a writer should do to make it a manageable length...so, surprise!

Here are some tropes for you to celebrate a new episode tonight. I hope you enjoy it and my writing.

As always, thank you for reading! The comments and kudos you guys have left have made me so happy, and truly brighten my day! : )

Nyssa met Sara at the car door and immediately pulled her into an intense and rough kiss. Felicity stared at them for a second before she realized that Nyssa had no intention of releasing Sara soon. She blushed, feeling like an intruder, and hurried across the lawn as Nyssa pushed Sara against the car, pinning her with her body, her lips still firmly looked on Sara’s.

Apparently making out post shoot out was way more important than cleaning up Sara’s injury, but to each their own, Felicity supposed. She wondered how Oliver would react if they were together. Would he kiss her? Would he tend to her first? Would he hold her? That was not a safe rabbit hole to fall down. She was not Alice and this was not Wonderland. Real people could get hurt from her situation. Sara had gotten hurt.

Felicity pressed her back against the interior side of the front door and stared at the sweeping staircase in front of her blankly. She had Sara’s phone clutched in her hand. She really wanted to call Oliver back and beg him not to kill the man, to make a choice that didn’t leave someone else dead, but she knew he wouldn’t answer. She fought the urge to go upstairs and track him.

Did she want to know? Would it change anything?

She pushed off the door and shuffled to the living room. She collapsed on the sofa and whimpered when her feet promptly started throbbing. She had forgotten about them around the adrenaline and drama. Going for a walk in the glades and getting shoved into an alley wasn’t exactly good news for the feet she had injured.

Slowly, she pulled her shoes off and tossed them back to the ground. Specks of blood were on her socks. She peeled the fabric away and saw that a few of the larger cuts had started bleeding again, which was probably the exact reason Oliver had told her to stay off her feet.

“Are you injured?” Nyssa asked.

Felicity shook her head and quickly lowered her feet. She looked over her shoulder and saw Nyssa pulling Sara along with one arm around her waist. Sara’s eyes looked a little unfocused, but Felicity didn’t know if it was because of blood loss or the kiss. Felicity stood, wincing a little, and wrung her hands nervously. “Is she okay?”

“She will be. I must tend to her.”

“I can help you if you need it,” Felicity said.
Nyssa bowed her head to show that she didn’t totally hate the idea of her help and Felicity took that as an invitation. She followed the pair into the basement and fetched things for Nyssa when she needed them. It was alarming to Felicity that she had needed the medical equipment twice in one day.

The bullet had grazed Sara’s arm, tearing through tissue and muscle but not doing damage that couldn’t be mended with a week’s rest. Nyssa did not speak as she worked on Sara, but her caresses and loving smiles said enough. Felicity watched the hard woman melt every time Sara turned her blue eyes on her. It was sweet.

“Any luck on finding Kane?” Felicity asked as Nyssa applied the last bit of tape that would keep the bandage in place.

“She has gone to ground,” Nyssa said. “Do no worry. I will find her and make sure she never darkens your doorway again.”

“And the man who was with her?” Felicity asked.

Nyssa shrugged. “I will kill everyone who has threatened you and deliver their heads as proof of your safety.”

“That’s, uh, sweet,” Felicity said awkwardly.

Sara giggled, and Felicity knew that the drugs Nyssa had injected into her arm were working. Sara had tried to protest, but Nyssa had been stronger and faster. Sara giggled again and leaned her forehead against Nyssa’s stomach. Nyssa played with Sara’s hair gently, smoothing the stray hair away from her face.

“Take me to bed,” Sara declared.

“That is not wise right now, my love,” Nyssa said.

“I bet I could make you scream my name,” Sara added.

“As much as I would enjoy that, you are drugged and we have some issues to discuss with Oliver before we leave for our apartment.”

“You’re no fun,” Sara whined.


Sara allowed Nyssa to pull her up and they walked out of the basement together, Sara swaying quite a bit and shuffling her feet with every step. Felicity smiled after them and then leaned against the metal table thoughtfully.

There had been yet another attempt on her life. Someone was seriously trying to kill her and make her dead. She hadn’t really needed another near death experience to prove it to her, but it was proof that the people chasing her were determined. She wondered if it wouldn’t be easier to let them think she was dead. That way, she could look for them without worrying about constant threats against her life.

Pretending to be dead sounded complicated. She didn't know if it would solve anything.

Her feet started throbbing against the cold, hard floor, so she turned her back to the door and slid up to sit on the table. She kicked her legs restlessly and bowed her head, her thoughts returning to
Oliver. She wondered what information he was getting from the man, still hoping that he didn’t kill him. Her fear had her heart aching for someone to comfort her the way Nyssa had comforted Sara.

“Are you okay?” Thea called from the stairs.

Felicity looked over her shoulder and smiled tremulously at Thea. Even though the girl was there, solid and real, Felicity still felt alone. The world, herself, the meaning she had long associated with long held beliefs and loves felt a thousand miles away. She was drifting in a void of nothingness so complete she couldn’t see the other side.

Near-death experiences made her dramatic. Who knew?

“Yeah,” Felicity said.

“Fun fact: yeah said like that is universal for no,” Thea said.

Felicity pointed at her forehead, gesturing aimlessly. “Just processing.”

“Nyssa said that people were shooting at you,” Thea added.

“Sara handled it. She’s pretty scary. And cool,” Felicity said.

“She is,” Thea agreed.

“But I’m okay. Thank you.”

Thea didn’t look very convinced. “Want to come upstairs and irritate Roy with me? He’s on the sofa with Sara and they’re both drugged to hell. It’s pretty funny.”

Felicity hesitated, still lost in the loneliness, but she figured that self-imposed loneliness was far worse than taking up the offer of friendship when it was so glaringly obvious. Being surrounded by people was a far better choice than dwelling in the darkness of a basement lair.

“Balair,” Felicity said.

“What?” Thea asked.

“Basement lair – Balair,” Felicity clarified. “It has a ring to it.”

Thea wrinkled her nose. “No.”

“I’ll keep working on it,” Felicity decided. She hopped off the table, glad that Thea couldn’t see her wince, and joined the girl. They walked up the stairs together, Thea talking to Felicity with no expectation of reply, simply trying to comfort and fill up the weighted silence.

Thea was right. The sight of Roy and Sara, both drugged and goofy, was hilarious. Felicity knew very little of Roy, save for the fact that he sometimes got axed in the chest and was dating Thea, but decided she liked him only after two minutes of him slurring out surprisingly funny quips. Felicity sat tucked on the chair by the fireplace, her feet curled up and a blanket thrown over her so no one would see her feet and get mad at her for them. She smiled, laughed, and let the drama drift away as she watched Thea tease everyone who offered her even the smallest of openings.

“You two should take this act on the road,” Felicity said after a fierce bout of laughter that left her panting. “You could make a lot of money.”

“And Roy would have to stay drugged up and mercy to my will,” Thea said. “I like it.”
“I’ll be at your mercy any time you want,” Roy said with a suggestive raise of his eyebrows.

Thea rolled her eyes, and then leaned her head against his shoulder. She sighed heavily and wrapped her hand around his waist, snuggling deeper into his side. Sara smiled brightly at them and rolled her head to the side. She was snoring a minute later. Nyssa, who Sara had pressed against her, kissed Sara’s forehead and stood.

“I must make some calls,” she offered by explanation, then she was gone.

Felicity watched Thea and Roy for a minute, deciding that they were a good fit for one another. They had their problems, but she seemed to calm him and he gave her direction. It was a good match. She realized too that the entire time she had been with them, she hadn’t thought about The Consortium, the attempt on her life, or what Oliver was currently doing to the man who had tried to kill them both. All of it came rushing back in the silence. She knew she had to go upstairs and look on the computers for answers or the tension would kill her.

She had just thrown off the blankets when the front door opened and shut with a muted click. She heard Nyssa, Dig, and Oliver in the foyer. Oliver was putting Nyssa off with vague replies, his steps quick and lacking their normal stealth. He appeared in front of Felicity, his bulk filling the space, pushing out any lingering loneliness and making her feel calmer and grounded in a glance. His pace didn’t slow. He moved around the sofa and then knelt down in front of Felicity as if he always got that close to her and looked at her so intimately.

“Are you okay?” he asked.

Surprised but affected by his intensity, she simply nodded. His eyes sparkled with relief and warmth and she allowed a small smile to fall through the tense expression that had found her face in the wake of Thea and Roy’s silence.

“What am I, chopped…chopped…? I’m the injured one!” Sara slurred at them.

“So rude. Go hug Sara,” Felicity agreed, needing to deflect the intensity when it wasn’t hers to feel.

Oliver glanced over at Sara as if he was surprised she was sitting there. Felicity got the feeling he hadn’t noticed her, Roy, or Thea at all. The thought had her flushing. Oliver lingered a beat longer, his eyes caressing hers in a dance that was becoming entirely too familiar. He stood and went to Sara next. He didn’t get as close to her but he did touch the bandage over the wound.

“A graze?” he asked, his eyes landing on Nyssa.

Nyssa nodded and Oliver breathed out a deep sigh. “I’m glad it wasn’t worse.” His expression turned hard and his crystalline eyes turned to a mixture of grey-blue that held all the anger of a brewing storm off the coast. “We’re going to have a long talk about you taking Felicity out to the glades when someone clearly wants to kill her later.”

“Yes, boss,” Sara said seriously, looking almost sober against the stark reality of his words.

Oliver nodded, a sense of command and magnetism drawing all eyes in the room to him. If he noticed, he didn’t seem to care. He was probably used to the stares and the attention. He had grown up in the spotlight. Felicity had grown up knowing that blending in was better than sticking out, which made all the trouble she had gotten into comically and tragically ironic.

Oliver stuck his hands in his pockets and turned away from Sara with his head bowed. He found a place next to the fireplace, close enough to Felicity to make her happy but far enough away so that he could still look at her.
“The men were sent by Kane,” Oliver said finally, looking at Felicity only briefly before glancing away as though he thought her eyes would be judging him. “Our source didn’t know if Kane was operating on someone else’s orders, but she’s definitely the one we need to find right now.”

“That will not be a problem,” Nyssa said.

“I need her alive. We need to get to the bottom of this,” Oliver said. “A conversation is the only way.”

Nyssa pursed her lips but didn’t argue. “I’m having trouble tracking her,” she admitted reluctantly.

“Do you think she was the woman in the van last night?” Felicity asked.

“There’s only one way to be sure,” Oliver said. “And that’s by tracking her down. Do you think…?”

“I can certainly try,” Felicity said, a bit taken back by how formal he was suddenly being with her. The intensity when his eyes met hers was the same, but it was like his words were weighted with caution while around the others. She started to stand, but he held his hand out for her to wait. She sat back down and looked at him quizzically.

“I owe you an apology,” he said, his formal tone slipping into a lower register she recognized as the one he used when they were alone. “And you,” he added to Thea.

“For being a gigantic asshole over Felicity helping figure out who’s been targeting us?” Thea asked archly.

“Yes,” Oliver admitted, half exasperated, half serious at his sister’s interruption.

“Okay, go ahead then,” Thea said.

There was a pause, where Thea looked at him expectantly, if not a bit mischievously and Oliver rolled his eyes in a way that made Felicity think he carried an awful burden by loving his sister. She knew it was a lie.

“I’m sorry,” he added.

“You’re forgiven,” Thea said. “Don’t do it again.”

Oliver shrugged and Felicity suppressed a grin at the way Thea’s eyes narrowed.

“We do need to have a serious talk about how to deal with Malcolm Merlyn’s reemergence and what that means for us,” Oliver said seriously. “This puts us all at risk, and Malcolm is a formidable enemy.”

“I say we cut off his head and feed it to the sharks,” Nyssa said. “That will ensure he is truly dead and will satisfy all blood debts he is owed.”

"Plus feed the sharks," Felicity murmured.

“I like that plan,” Thea said, looking as serious as she had ever looked as she pointed over her shoulder at Nyssa.

“Might be a little dramatic,” Dig said.

“We’re jumping over a few steps,” Oliver said. “He’s not an easy man to get close to and I don’t know if killing him…”
“Do it,” Thea said.

Oliver hesitated, looking torn.

“Tommy is already mad at you,” Thea said. “It’s not going to matter if you kill his father again.”

“It might,” Oliver said. “And he’s not the only one I’m thinking about here, Speedy,” Oliver added gently.

“You don’t have to worry about me. The man’s a psycho who is willing to kill thousands of people to make a profit. He needs to be stopped.”

“We could send him to prison,” Felicity suggested tentatively.

“He’ll escape,” came from several places around the room.

Felicity held up her hands and leaned back in her chair, clearly out of her element. Oliver sighed and looked at his watch. “It’s getting late. We should be patrolling and out on the streets looking for any information that will lead us to him.”

“We have people for that,” Dig said.

“And I think that right now is not a good time to lower our guards,” Oliver said. “We’ll think about a plan tomorrow.” His eyes drifted to Felicity’s again. “You’ll look for Kane?”

She nodded and Oliver relaxed a little, as if her affirmation meant more than a simple yes. He considered his sister for a minute. “You coming?”

Thea’s entire body brightened at his peace offering. She nodded eagerly, kissed a dazed Roy soundly on the cheek, and jumped up. Oliver smiled at her fondly and looked at Dig.

“Go be with your family. I’ll call you if I need you.”

Dig didn’t argue with his choice. He said goodnight to everyone and left the house like a man on a mission. Oliver’s eyes found Felicity’s again before skirting away awkwardly. He surged toward the door, Thea following after him, and they disappeared outside. Nyssa left a few seconds later, her expression suggesting wrath, damnation, and possibly hunger. Felicity tried to follow Oliver's conflicting behavior and realized it was more constipated emotions and blah she didn’t feel like puzzling out after such a long day.

Then she realized that the others had left her with Sara and Roy. While she really liked Sara and was beginning to like Roy, she had no idea what to do with them. They both looked really heavy and incredibly stoned.

“I guess you guys would like to go to bed?” Felicity asked.

“I’m hungry,” Roy announced.

“Me too,” Sara agreed. “I want…” She went into a long explanation of the food she wanted. At least Felicity thought that was what she was saying. It was hard to tell. The language she was speaking sounded a lot like Cantonese. Roy stared at Sara blankly, blinking slowly and narrowing his eyes as if Sara was insulting him somehow.

“I’m going to see if there’s anything in the fridge,” Felicity decided. “If not, I’ll order something.”

Sara’s phone rang as Felicity said it and she was surprised to find that she was still carrying it. She
looked at the device for a second before Iris’s number registered. She answered the call with as chipper a hello as she could manage.

Iris was checking in, letting her that she was thinking of stopping in for thirty minutes or so, but couldn’t stay long, as she had to get to work. Felicity begged her to bring food and Iris agreed instantly. Ten minutes later, Iris had enough Chinese food to feed Chinatown and Felicity’s favorite cheap wine in hand sitting on the coffee table.

Roy and Sara didn’t say much as they ate, and Iris didn’t ask any questions about Felicity’s obviously stoned friends. She talked about work, Barry, her dad, Barry some more, and a jerk who cut her off in traffic and then got out of his car when she flipped him off. The talk was soothing to Felicity, a step into normal and a glimpse into her life from only three days ago. Had it really been three days? Everything felt shifted, a seismic event that had changed her foundation and rattled everything that she was and could potentially be. She felt like it was a chance to be better, something more, but she also felt that steady sense of being adrift. Or maybe that was normal after having her house burnt down and not being able to tell the majority of her friends. At least she had Iris. She hugged her friend extra tightly when she had to leave and promised to get a new phone soon so they could stay connected.

When Iris was gone, Felicity was left in the same place she had been before Iris had arrived, only Roy and Sara were now fed and looking really sleepy.

“Time for bed,” Felicity said.

“Carry me!” Sara said, throwing her arms wide.

“Not gonna happen,” Felicity said. “You either sleep here or sleep upstairs. What do you want?”

“Nyssa would carry me,” Sara pouted.

“Here it is, then,” Felicity said, standing and starting to walk off.

Sara stood, swaying a little and blinking owlishly. “I want a bed.”

Roy stood fluidly a second later, impressive for a recovering axe victim, and glared at Sara as if he was eager to prove that he could do anything she could do. Felicity rolled her eyes and tugged on Roy’s hoodie to get him walking. He stumbled, corrected himself, then caught up to Felicity with a strange hop. Sara shuffled after them, the ability to maintain her balance a tribute to her gracefulness and training.

Felicity guided them up the stairs, where Roy went to a bedroom that seemed to be his and Thea’s and Sara went to Felicity’s room, falling face first onto the bed without getting undressed. She promptly started snoring.

“Whatever they’re on, I want some,” Felicity decided.

She closed the bedroom door and slowly walked to the office, her body swaying awkwardly with every step as she avoided the soles of her feet and instead walked on the sides. Proud that she had managed to work around the pain, she sat on her chair and immediately went back to work. Her programs had found nothing on The Consortium, but she knew that she had another way of coming at them now. If Kane was still giving orders despite Kord’s arrest, then…

She paused. Kord. Why didn’t she think of that sooner? All she had to do was talk to Kord. She shook her head at her own stupidity a second later. She would never get in to see him. And even if she did, he wouldn’t answer her questions. She thought about it a while longer, sorting through the
facts. Would he answer Oliver’s? Was that an option?

The thought of Oliver potentially talking to Kord for her made a surge of guilt flood through her body. She felt like she kept taking from him, and he kept letting her without complaint. But she wanted to give back. She found the search on Malcolm Merlyn and realized that she had forgotten to mention that she had found where he was staying.

“Whoops,” she said.

She hacked into Oliver’s phone and sent him a text that couldn’t be traced or hacked, informing him of the address and that she had forgotten about it until that moment, hoping he didn’t see it as a lie and accuse her of doing what she had accused him of earlier. She winced after she had pushed send, her mind not processing the ramble until she hit that faithful button. After a pause, she let it go and refocused on the two searches.

Ten minutes later, her computer lit up with a return message from Oliver.

Are you there?

Yes, Felicity typed back.

I need help. Tracking someone.

Merlyn?

No. A would-be rapist. He slipped away when Thea and I attacked his friends. Find him?

“I do not like this system of communication. No, sir,” Felicity muttered. “We are getting upgrades that Oliver Queen is going to pay for.” She rubbed her hands together eagerly then typed back a swift response even as she tracked his GPS.

Description?

Tall, white, black hair, black jacket, and a scar on his chin that looked like a serrated knife hit him.

Felicity didn’t bother replying back. She used what was becoming her favorite computer, Stitch, to hack into the city camera system and every camera within a two mile radius, figuring the guy hadn’t gone far. It took her three minutes to find him.

He’s hiding under a pile of cardboard boxes on Knox Ave near the CVS. Very poorly, I might add. Everything is covered but his face.

Felicity watched as Oliver and Thea’s trackers darted across the screen as they took off running in the proper direction. Curious at the speed in which they were going, she tried to track them with her handy cameras. When that didn’t work, she hacked a satellite. What she saw was breathtaking. Oliver and Thea were free running across the tops of buildings. They were both seriously gifted, but Oliver is where her eyes were fixed. Watching him leap, roll, and gracefully cross hurdles was mesmerizing. She had never seen anything so beautifully graceful, even the time her mother had taken her to see the ballet. She had been stunned by the dancers and they ways in which they had moved across the stage. They were klutzes compared to Oliver. She would happily call them all that to their faces if it meant getting to watch Oliver even a second longer. She put her chin on her hand and watched him dreamily.

All too soon, he had reached his destination. He pulled the rapist out from the boxes, let Thea rough him up a little in an attempt to further his apology from earlier, and then hogtied him for the police to
find, with photos of his crimes as proof of what he had done pinned to his jacket.

It was further proof, if she had really needed it, that Oliver wasn’t interested in profiting off the pain of others. He was fighting to make his city a place worth being. He was fighting for her city, and she really wanted to help him. He might not be doing it the way she would, the way she thought he could be, but the core of what he was trying to do was placed in good.

*Thanks,* he typed. She smiled as she watched him old-man type the message into his phone, with his index finger and everything. *Going to Merlyn’s to do surveillance. Will you be watching?*

*Always.*

She watched curiously as some of the tension in his shoulders melted away. She couldn’t see his face around the mask, but she was pretty sure he was smiling. She smiled back at him before he and Thea disappeared into the darkness.

Aside from the occasional police car coming too close to Oliver and Thea’s hiding place, the night was quiet. Malcolm didn’t seem to be in his apartment. Watching it told her nothing. After several hours, Oliver and Thea left to help Nyssa track Kane even though Felicity was still looking for her on her computers, and she tried to fight off the growing exhaustion. She really wanted to sleep, but her room was taken and she didn’t know if any of the others were occupied. She didn’t want to go poking around when Oliver clearly had issues with people prying. She yawned and decided that taking a short nap in Oliver’s room wouldn’t hurt anything. She was convinced that she could sleep for twenty minutes and be back at the computers before the bed even fully warmed up. It was a good plan – logical. She was used to power naps. She took them all the time when she was pulling an all-nighter at work.

She stood, hobbled to Oliver’s room, and crawled under the covers before she could rethink her choice of sleeping arrangements, and how she had maybe picked it because after a day of near misses she wanted to feel safe and grounded and he was the only person who could make her feel that way, and carefully placed her head on his fluffy pillow.

The sheets and pillow smelled like him, and the colors reminded her of his strength and personality. It was relaxing. She nuzzled deeper into the pillow, her body relaxing, and she let out a long breath. By the time it ended she was asleep.

*“Felicity?”* the softest voice she had ever heard whispered her name.

*“Five more minutes. I’m napping.”* she replied into the pillow. She turned so that she was facing the door and started to drift off again.

*“Felicity? Why are you in my bed?”*

*“Sara’s in mine.”*

*“There are other bedrooms,”* the soft voice said.

*“I like it here,”* she pouted. *“Stop talking. I’m sleeping.”*

There was a chuckle followed by fabric shifting. *“Okay.”*
She reached out instinctively when she heard the shift and her fingers grasped what felt like a shirt. She sighed happily, the room feeling a lot more familiar with his body warming it up, and pulled the shirt closer. Fabric shifted again and there was a soft oomph! as someone hit the bed next to her. She found what felt like an arm and snuggled it closer to her body. She kissed the arm without thinking, her mind in a haze between sleeping and dreaming, and promptly fell back asleep.

She awoke with terrors of smoke, of pops and whistles of bullets landing just above her head, and a faceless collection of people chasing her through endless corridors. She gasped awake, her heart racing and her mind lost in the past, and felt terror so complete that she knew in her soul it would never leave her. She would feel it for the rest of eternity. She gasped and whimpered and watched in horror as she was burned to death over and over again, a crematorium made out of the four walls she had called home.

Warm hands landed on her face. She clutched at them, focusing on the face that had appeared out of the darkness. It was beautiful, the eyes crystalline and sweet, and she knew that the terror was an illusion. She knew it because those eyes told her so and she trusted them with her life.

“Felicity,” Oliver whispered. That was all it took for her to land in the present and let go of the dreams.

She exhaled sharply and put her head on his shoulder without thinking, needing the closeness of another person more than she cared about the consequences. His hands landed on her back after a brief pause and he pulled her closer protectively. She reached up and grabbed the back of his shirt, clutching the fabric in her hands tightly. She was probably ruining his shirt, but she couldn’t bring herself to care. She needed to know that he wasn’t going to leave her. She wanted to make sure he stayed put.

Oliver didn’t try to comfort her with fake platitudes. He simply held her as tightly as he could without hurting her and allowed her to synchronize her breaths with his. Finally, she felt okay – genuinely and fully okay.

She released his shirt and sniffed into his neck.

“You smell like lemons,” she whispered.

“Not the usual greeting I get, but okay,” he said.

“I like lemons,” she added.

“A man decided that throwing lemons at Thea and me was better than talking to us about Kane. He was wrong.”

The mention of Kane brought the tightness back to her chest and realization to her mind. She was hugging Oliver Queen in his bed in the dead of night. This was either a really awesome work of fiction or she was dreaming. There were no other options.

“This is a really weird dream,” she decided.

“That’s because it’s reality,” he said.


“You’re not dreaming,” Oliver said.

“Okay.”
She jerked upright so that his ridiculously warm hands fell from her body. “Oh!”

He leaned back a little but didn’t go far. She saw the blue of his eyes and the flash of his teeth but all other details were lost to her. Felicity glanced away from him to stem the attraction she felt in her breast and in her belly and saw that it was a little past four in the morning.

“Oh, no! I’m sorry. I was napping. For the tiniest of seconds. I didn’t mean to take your bed from you. I swear. I was going to take a twenty minute nap and get back to searching. That’s all. I’m sorry if-”

“Please don’t apologize,” he said slowly. “It’ll just make me feel like crap.”

“A: You’re a word thief. And B: I don’t think the situation is exactly the same.”

“Is it not?” he asked.

She didn’t see the connection, but she didn’t say so. There was such a mystery to his voice, something that suggested more. It was nice to pretend that it was something having to do with her and not simply the delusion of sleepiness catching up to her.

“I’ll let you have your bed back.”

There was a pause. “Is that what you want?”

She knew the honest answer in her heart, but they did not need a repeat of yesterday morning. They were friends now, not people who shared ridiculously passionate kisses while half naked.

“I want whatever you want. It’s your bed. Your house,” she said. “I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

“That’s not a real answer.”

“It’s the one you’re getting,” she said.

“Which means what?” he asked.

He was so infuriating with his pushing, and prodding, and asking her things.

“That, no, I don’t want to leave your bed, but, yes, we’re friends now and I don’t want to make it awkward.”

“Because we’re severely attracted to each other but don’t know each other all that well?” Oliver asked.


“Felicity…it’s late, I’m tired, and switching beds will just wake everyone up. I promise not to make this awkward if you don’t.”

She wrinkled her nose at him, harrumphed for equal measure, and then flopped back down onto her pillow.

“At least now I can undress. For someone so little, you have a death grip,” Oliver said, pulling off his leather jacket and tossing it into the corner. He toed off his shoes next. She was expecting it, but her heart started beating faster when the flash of skin let her know that his shirt had come off as well. The rattle of his belt being undone had her eyes widening.
“You don’t sleep naked, do you?”

“Is that a problem?” Oliver asked seriously.

“Oliver…” she said firmly, a whole paragraph in that one word.

“I sleep in my boxers. I get too hot otherwise. Just don’t sleep on me again and we’ll be fine.”

“I wasn’t sleeping on you,” she said.

“You were more on me than you were the bed,” he said.

“That’s a lie,” she returned.

“My neck and back say otherwise,” Oliver said.

“Would you just get in the bed and shut up,” Felicity said. “It’s late and you’re tired, apparently.”

He grinned at her, the bastard, and she felt the bed dip and covers shift as he got underneath them.

“Goodnight, Felicity,” he said softly after a pregnant pause that had her wondering if her ovaries were actually bursting into flames. Could someone die of flaming ovaries? She would have to Google it.

“Goodnight, Oliver,” she whispered.

“You smell like flowers,” he added into the night. “I like flowers.”

She smiled, her body unwinding from the lingering tension of her nightmare, and she felt herself drifting off once more, her hand outstretched toward him unconsciously.

“Felicity.”

“I’m sleeping,” Felicity grumbled.

“Felicity!”

“Shhh,” she added.

A deep rumble moved through her entire body. It shook her, but it also made her burrow deeper into the bed. It was warm, comforting, and she liked not waking up in terror. This was the sleep she had needed. The laughter continued as she pressed her nose into what felt like flesh. That was weird. It wasn’t weird enough to get her to move away. She sighed into the skin and squirmed a little with an exhale.

“Felicity…” This time the voice sounded pained and a little desperate.

She mumbled incoherently into the skin – yep, definitely skin – and moved so that she was a little more comfortable on what had become a rather lumpy, hard bed. It was warm though, which was nice. She always got too cold at night.

She shifted again, looking for a soft spot and realized that she was definitely on something fleshy, hard, and human. Not a bed, then. It took her a full minute to remember how she had fallen asleep – with Oliver.
With a wholly attractive snort and inhale of the spit that had collected on her lips, she opened her eyes and pulled back from her muscled, warm bed. She realized her nose had been pressed into Oliver’s neck, and that she had drooled on him. She was also fully lying on top of him. There were no halfsies on that particular fact.

“Mother f-”

“Good morning,” Oliver said. “Could you hold that thought?”

Felicity clamped her lips together and stared down at him, totally frozen in shock, uncertain of what to do about the way she had turned him into a Snuggie. Her hands rested on his chest and her pelvis was firmly pushed into his.

Oh…

His hands were on her hips as if he had been trying to push her away but she had been fighting him in her sleep, reluctant to move away. With the bulk of his arms rippling next to her, she knew he hadn’t been trying too seriously to pull her away. Or else he hadn’t wanted to scare/frighten her. His reasons didn’t matter nearly as much as what she felt between them.

His erection was firmly pressed into her and he looked a little like he had been praying. He didn’t seem like a particularly religious man, so that was strange.

“Right,” Felicity said, still feeling a bit dazed after waking up in his arms.

It hadn’t exactly been what she would classify as a while since she had been with someone, but it had totally been a while. And Oliver was the definition of beautiful. The feelings in her chest were more than dangerous. They were stupid, and she knew that making a quick exit was probably best for them both. Her eyes flickered down to his lips and she remembered the last kiss that had left her breathless and wild. It took everything within her to close her eyes, take a deep breath, and peel her body away from his. She hovered over him for a split second more, avoiding his eyes out of embarrassment, and then rolled to the edge of the bed. She sat there for a long minute, her shoulders hunched and her eyes closed. She pictured her grandmother, puppies, and started to picture her computers before she realized those kind of made her a little hot. She wrinkled her nose and worked on steadying her breathing.

After what felt like the longest pause in the history of the world, she felt a warm hand on her back. It shifted and moved to her shoulder. A second later, Oliver sat next to her.

“I won’t be embarrassed if you won’t be,” he said softly.

“I used you as a body pillow after it was made explicitly clear that we need to hang out in friend territory,” Felicity said. “That’s not okay.”

“You didn’t do it on purpose,” Oliver assured her. “And I think we could both tell that I didn’t mind.”

“Yeah, mazel tov, by the way,” she muttered.

There was a shocked pause, and then he started laughing. It was earnest, sweet, and shook the entire bed. She grinned over at him and the regret faded to enjoyment. Seeing him so unfettered and free was really nice.

He laughed until he couldn’t anymore. When he sobered he looked lighter than she had seen him in days. She couldn’t stop herself from grinning at him, even as she wondered how they would ever be
anything other than insanely awkward around each other. The attraction wasn’t lessening, and her desire to know him better was only growing.

He sobered when he noticed the glint in her eyes that spoke of uncertainty.

“Listen,” Oliver said, turning to face her and taking her hands in his. “You’re beautiful.” She inhaled sharply at the unexpected compliment. “I’m not sorry for noticing that. But I’m not good for you, for anyone, and you’re in the middle of chaos. You need a friend more than you need someone to add to your complications. I can be that friend to you.”

“A friend who gives snuggles?” she asked hopefully.

“That’s a complication,” he said.

“A really nice one,” she said with a sigh. “Are we going to have this conversation after every near-intimate moment? Because that might get tiring.”

“You think we’ll have a lot of those?” Oliver quipped.

“You think we won’t?” she asked.

He stood, his naked chest the first place her eyes went, and she knew that, yep, she would be having a lot of moments. She eventually found her way to his eyes. He was waiting for her, patience and kindness reflected back at her. Something else was there; it looked a lot like heat and want.

“Are you coming to check out my equipment today?” he asked.

“Seriously?” she asked with a laugh.

“Yes,” he said.

“I thought you would be more yell-y about leaving the house and getting shot at yesterday after you gave strict orders to stay off my feet.”

He shrugged calmly and glanced down at her feet. “How are they?”

She pointed her toes to keep him from seeing the bottom. “Fine,” she lied.

“Uh-huh,” he replied.

He knelt down fluidly and lifted her foot before she could stop him. She winced expectantly at the look of anger on his face.

The silence lingered. It made her incredibly uncomfortable. She silently begged him to say something, anything.

“Why didn’t you take care of this?” he asked quietly. “Or ask me to?”

“I didn’t want you to be mad,” she said.

“I’m angry that you neglected yourself,” he said in a tone that left her in no doubt that he really was pissed. “How am I supposed to protect you from The Consortium, from Kane, if you won’t take care of yourself?”

“They’re just a few scrapes,” Felicity protested.
“To you, maybe,” Oliver said. “But I don’t see the distinction between these scrapes and the fact that you keep doing things that put your life in danger. You don’t see the big picture. You don’t think before you leap into things, and that is going to get you killed.”

“I take care of myself just fine.”

“No, you create batteries that could be turned into weapons and then blab about it to your friends, who return the favor by telling people like Kord. And I have a feeling that this isn’t the first time you’ve had problems with things you’ve created and done.”

She stared down at him mutely. Anger was building in her stomach. There was also a mixture of guilt and unwanted knowledge that he was right. She didn’t feel like facing that truth around her anger. She simply narrowed her eyes at him.

“You matter, Felicity,” he added. Her eyes widened at his words. “There are people who will miss you if you’re gone. There are people who care about you. And risking your life, no matter if you’re innovative and changing the world, is not worth it.”

“It is to me,” Felicity said. “I’m not going to stop using my skills to help people. That is who I am, and I don’t care if it’s dangerous to me if it means helping people.”

“And I respect the hell out of it,” Oliver said. “Honestly. But how you go about things matters.”

“I’ve been fine all these years.”

“Until you weren’t,” he pointed out.

“I told you before. I don’t need a babysitter.”

Oliver lowered her foot gently and rubbed at his temples. “You’re not listening to me.”

“I’m hearing plenty,” she said.

“I am begging you to be careful, to value your safety and your importance,” Oliver said. “And to find a different way that includes caution. I’m not asking you to stop. I like the things that make you, you. From what I’ve seen, that’s a person worth knowing. But there are options here.”

Felicity stared at him. She could see his point. Admitting to it felt like eating crow. He smiled gently at her as if he understood exactly what she was thinking. Something told her he really did. He didn’t back down, but he also left her to think about his words without pushing further.

“This is what I’m thinking for the day. Jump in with improvements.” He stood so that he was standing in front of her again, displaying his body for her perusal. She perused away, noticing that he was still half hard. Curious.

“God, so many improvements,” she said, and then pressed her lips together.

He smirked. “Shower, bandage your feet, dressed-”

“Are you bandaging my feet, or am I? Because I think I should be dressed if it’s you.”

“Your choice,” Oliver said with a shrug. “After breakfast, which I’m thinking French toast, we will go to QC and you can take a look around, including all the ongoing projects, whatever you want to see. You can hack whatever you want and make sure I’m not hiding anything from you. Complete transparency. When you’ve fallen in love with my company, we can figure out where you want to be
Felicity’s eyes narrowed. “That’s a lot of arrogance coming off you right now.”

“It’s a good company. I suck at running at it, but the people who make it great are really amazing.”

The earnestness was real and the love he had for the company was sincere. She stood, feeling excited about getting her hands on some serious tech. The excitement faded as she realized that his company was a distraction and not an answer.

“I really want to go,” she said. “But I have searches running…The Consortium, Kane, and Malcolm Merlyn. I should focus on that. The sooner I resolve things, the sooner my life can go back to normal.”

Oliver considered it. She liked that about him. He was measured. He seriously considered things. It wasn’t ice as some might claim. It was deliberate forethought to see where the roads might lead him. He was doing what he said she needed to do. He wasn’t just blowing advice out of his ass.

“QC has a whole bank of computers that can be at your disposal. I don’t even really know how to use one besides the basic things, so you can use the one in my office if that’s your preference.” He stepped closer. “I do know that you need to get out. You can’t hide here. It’ll make the dreams worse.”

“You were just yelling at me for going out with Sara.”

“I wasn’t yelling about that. If you’re going out with anyone, I would prefer it be Sara, or Dig…or me. Mostly me.”

“Control freak,” she said with a fake cough.

He ignored her. “I mean, I don’t think taking you to the glades without backup was the best of ideas. Actually, it was the worst idea possible. That was more on Sara than you. She has the training to know better.”

“Kay…” she said indifferently. “So…QC?”

“Yes,” Oliver said.

“You’re flexing,” Felicity said, her eyes moving back to his chest.

Oliver looked down with a frown. “Huh.”

“Yeah,” she said smugly. She slid off the bed, winced from the pain in her feet, but kept walking until she reached the hall. She closed the door behind her and stopped in her tracks as reality struck her hard.

“What the frack?”

She had no explanation for the past twenty minutes, but she was eager to get out of the house, to feel normal for a minute, and to believe that there was something other than pain, near-death experiences, and attraction to a man who was, while not in the way she thought when first she had met him, wholly dangerous.

She went to her room and started to knock when she heard giggling from inside. Sara didn’t seem like the giggling type, so it was curious.
“So cute,” she heard Thea say.

Felicity pushed the cracked door open the rest of the way and saw Thea and Sara lounging on the bed. Sara still looked a little spaced out but more like her old self. Her arm had new bandages and her lips were a bit red from where Felicity assumed Nyssa had kissed Sara senseless. Thea was showing Sara something on her phone. Thea smiled mischievously when she saw Felicity. The radiance of the toothy grin was stunning.

“What are you two giggling about?” Felicity asked.

“The pictures I took of you lying on top of my brother and him looking like a total dope when I came up to ask what he was cooking me for breakfast,” Thea said matter-of-factly. “He didn’t even notice me. He was too busy being a sap.”

“Oh, I see,” Felicity said calmly. She paused for dramatic effect then dove onto the bed towards Thea. Thea was surprised, but she still managed to keep the phone out of Felicity’s reach. Felicity scrambled and clawed for the phone as Thea pushed her away easily and held her at bay. For a tiny girl she was surprisingly strong. Admitting defeat, even as Sara laughed next to her, Felicity stopped struggling and huffed irritably. She brightened a minute later as an idea came to her.

“It’s fine,” Felicity said. “Totally cool. I’ll just hack your phone later and delete the pictures.”

Thea looked at her all doe eyed and innocent. Felicity wasn’t buying it for an instant.

“You wouldn’t!” Thea said.

Felicity smiled at her and scooted out of the bed with that same serenity in place. She gathered a change of clothes, lamenting internally that she didn’t have any of her work dresses but happy she had something and a good friend willing to buy her clothes when needed, and went into the bathroom without looking back at Sara and Thea, who were exchanging shocked, fearful looks that the blonde ball of sunshine could hack into their lives so easily and with so bright a smile in place.

“She’s scary,” Thea decided.

“Mmmm,” Sara replied.

Felicity rejoined them ten minutes later, fully clothed and drying her hair. Thea and Sara were still curled together on the bed, though Thea had put the phone next to her. They were talking about Malcolm Merlyn and the fact that he hadn’t shown up at his apartment the previous night. Thea was wondering if Malcolm knew they were on to them.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have kicked him out of the GPS system,” Felicity said. “That could have done it.”

“It’s too late to worry about it now,” Thea said, waving the problem away. “We’ll catch him and cut off his head for hurting Roy. It’ll all resolve itself. I really do need to ask if you’re serious about deleting the pictures, though. That’s the serious issue here.”

“Sure,” Felicity said.

Thea thought about it. “What if I showed you the pictures and you let me keep them? Otherwise I’ll delete them right now.”

“Under the proviso that you don’t show them to anyone else?” Felicity asked.
“Cross my heart,” Thea said.

“Okay…” Felicity said.

Thea reached out and took hold of Felicity’s wrist. She gave a sharp tug and Felicity landed on the bed between the two women. Thea put her head on Felicity’s shoulder and forced the phone in front of Felicity.

Felicity felt her breath catch.

Oliver was totally unguarded in the photo. His face was serene, unchecked by the drama of their situations. He was not the leader of the Bratva, the CEO of Queen Consolidated, the man who worked tirelessly to clean up the streets and fight crime. He was a man holding a woman – holding her. He was just Oliver, and she wanted to see the expression on his face. She wanted him to trust her with it. She knew he couldn’t. It was a line too far. A thick emptiness reached into her chest and throbbed with the knowledge that she needed to shut it down. She pushed Thea’s hand away and stared up at the ceiling sadly.

“What? What’s wrong?” Thea asked.

“That is a fantasy,” Felicity said. “One neither of us are going to indulge in. Could you please just… get rid of it? There’s no sense in pretending that is not going anywhere.”

“Why on earth not?” Thea asked.

“No! Ollie never looks happy like that. He tries with me, but that right there is real. I want that for him.”

“Because our worlds are different. Because I’m being chased, and he will always be hunted. Because dating is that last thing I want to worry about when my neck is on the line. Because my house just burned down and I feel adrift. Because…” There were so many damn reasons.

“Sorry, but that sounds like bullshit to me,” Thea said.

“Thea!” Sara warned again.

“She’s listing excuses, not reasons,” Thea replied.

“And they are none of our business,” Sara said.

“Sure they are,” Thea said. “She’s a friend. He’s my brother. I want what’s best for them both.”

“Friend, huh?” Felicity asked.

“Course, stupid. Keep up.”

Felicity frowned, but she didn’t argue with the girl. Thea huffed and then wrapped her arms around Felicity. Her grip was tight and possessive. Felicity had the feeling that Thea wouldn’t let her go without some serious heavy machinery involved.


“Thank you,” Felicity said.
That was when Oliver decided to appear at the door. He paused, looking at the bed as if he had never seen a more surprising sight in his entire life. Felicity would have thought he’d seen worse in his line of work. She could literally grow horns and he would probably look less like the ground he was standing on had been ripped out from under him. There was also a firm longing she didn’t understand.

He realized they were all staring at him and coughed awkwardly. “I have the first aid kit.”

Felicity smiled at him, gently disengaged Thea’s arms after some poking, and moved to the edge of the bed so that he could reach her feet. He knelt in front of her without meeting her eyes and carefully cleaned her cuts, applied the magical salve, and bandaged them. He collected the gauze and salve, stuffed them back into his bag, and then stood.

“Breakfast in twenty,” he said softly, still not looking at any of them.

Felicity nodded. She didn’t know how he saw it when he was so busy not looking at her, but he must have gotten the message because he backed away and disappeared down the hall. Felicity didn’t want to look at Sara and Thea and have their judge-y thoughts in their eyes, so she stood and pulled on the boots Iris had gotten her without looking back.

“I’m going to check on my searches before breakfast,” Felicity said.

“Okay,” Sara agreed softly.

Felicity hurried out of the room, knowing it would take a great deal of heavy breathing, silent panicking, and internal pep talks to move beyond the image of being in Oliver’s arms. The stunning reality of an attractive man wanting her back was not enough to build a relationship. It was a reality she had never faced before. She hoped never to face it again. It was tiring and confusing. She really had no idea how to move forward without making a mess of everything, but more forward she must, and she would do it to the best of her ability and with all the joy and compassion she could bring. There was no other way to make things bearable. She just hoped it would last her until the people trying to kill her were safely put in prison.
Tommy cameo! I like him, but he's not going to be as much in the story as I originally planned. Too much going on and I don't think you guys want this story to be fifty chapters. Also, Barry! I love Barry and Felicity together. It's like a warm dose of coffee and puppy gifs on a Sunday morning.

The next chapter after this one is my favorite. Ask FanMomMer for spoilers. She won't give them to you, but she has them.
(I love to irritate my friends. Is this a problem? I love you Mer. Please don't hurt me.)

As always, thanks for reading! I hope you like it!
“Oh, I have the searches running on the ones at the house and I’ve pinged them to your phone. It should alert if something comes up. I’m thinking I’ll steal one of those prototypes you’ve been working on and link it to both a little later, so I’m all good.”

“You’ll be able to see everything on my phone?” Oliver asked cautiously.

“Only if there’s a ping. Or an emergency. Or a ping emergency. Either way…no looking at your private messages. There are some boundaries I like to keep intact.”

They stepped into the elevators, bypassing security entirely, and Oliver pressed two buttons – one for the twentieth floor, the other for the twenty-fifth. There were several other people in the elevator. Oliver smiled at them politely, they stared, and Felicity felt acutely aware of them trying to figure out how she knew Oliver and if she was competition or something else. She was also aware of how small the elevator felt when crammed next to two very large men. It was a little ridiculous. She couldn’t move without hitting one of them.

The elevator emptied the higher they went. Finally, it was just the three of them. Dig moved away once there was space but it didn’t even occur to Felicity to step away from Oliver. She kept her place, enjoying his warmth and sense of steadiness. The doors opened and Oliver reached out to hold the door open for her.

“Say hello to the Allen kid for me,” he said begrudgingly.

“This is Barry’s floor?” Felicity asked in delight.

“Don’t invent anything that might blow up while I’m in a finance meeting,” Oliver said seriously, as though he thought she could really do it in that amount of time. To be fair, she really could.

“No promises,” Felicity teased him, stepping out with Dig hot on her heels. She waved a goodbye at Oliver, who was in the middle of a retort and looked genuinely concerned, and marched down the large hall towards what she recognized as labs. They were different than Kord’s – the space having less the feel of being in a glass box and more like she was in a hectic college classroom that never seemed to end. She heard Barry’s voice long before she saw him. It floated and bounced off the walls with jovial excitement. She grinned and followed the sound, her heels clicking on the floor loudly in her eagerness to get to him.

A team was gathered at the far end of a large room that had chalkboards and whiteboards instead of the high-tech boards she had gotten used to at Kord. Equations, drawings, and plans were laid out in exquisite, chaotic detail. She read some of the equations even as she listened to Barry talk.

“…the application of bacteria in the microchip isn’t the problem. The problem is stability. The potential is there if we just apply ourselves to the seeing the power within the organic nature of the solution. It will save the company billions. In order to achieve stability, we need to bond the iron oxide onto the conductor without the samples degrading. There are several ways we can achieve this but I believe that the most efficient way would be to build the bacteria around the conductor.”

“Wouldn’t work,” Felicity interjected, her mind whirling with possibilities even as she smiled at her friend. “The problem isn’t bonding. It’s in getting the bacteria to operate like a computer when it wants to operate like bacteria. Now, if you changed the bacteria, altered it at its primal level, you might just get it to act the way you want it to. I’m assuming from this breakdown that you’re using gram negative bacilli?”

Barry’s entire body radiated joy as he looked up and caught sight of Felicity. He crossed the room with a spirited laugh circling them and pulled her into a tight hug. She hugged him back fiercely and
he pulled back far enough to look at her face.

“Are you okay?”

“I keep getting asked that lately. No clue why,” she said dryly.

“Iris told me that your house burned down,” Barry said.

“That’s a good reason why,” she agreed. “Also, she wasn’t supposed to say anything.”

“Iris and I share everything…sometimes for the worse, but that’s just the way it is.”

The pain that was hidden in the far depths of his eyes was mitigated by the joy that even talking about Iris caused in him. No matter how long he lingered on his crush for her or if that crush faded throughout the years, he would always love her. Felicity took strength from that depth of concern. They didn’t need to be romantic to matter to each other. There was a simple beauty in that kind of strong affection that no amount of unrequited feelings could weaken.

“I’m okay,” Felicity said. “Or I will be. But I’m not here for that. Oliver said I could look around.”

Yeah, Iris said you were friends with Mr. Queen now. Then she spent twenty minutes talking about the size of his arms and chest. It was thrilling.”

Felicity laughed and pulled Barry back to the members of Barry’s team and the boards they were working on. “I think you should go with cyanobacteria,” Felicity added. “It’s going to make your work way easier.”

“And just like that you walk in and solve all my problems,” Barry teased her. “Why do I even try?”

“It’s your idea, Barry. And a good idea,” she assured him. “I’m just making it workable.”

They turned to the boards, and the other scientists in the room, and just like that, everything that wasn’t the problem faded from Felicity’s mind. It was soothing, perfect, and the harmony of her flow soon enveloped her as she struggled to find Barry answers and workshop the problem.

Felicity soon realized why Applied Sciences was struggling. The people on Barry’s team lacked imagination, scope, and the true talent of innovators. They were science drones, which was good for many things, but not innovating things that could advance the world and the company. She wanted Curtis. He would understand. He would build on the ideas of Barry and her had and make them not squeak when they turned too quickly. He would support, challenge, and make the projects she knew Barry wanted to get off the ground a reality.

When they finally decided to take a step back from the problem and Barry showed her around he mentioned his recent promotion.

“Mr. Queen came to me out of the blue and promoted me to head of Applied Sciences like it was nothing. I don’t have the experience a lot of people here have. It’s caused quite a stir.”

“If Oliver promoted you it’s because you earned it and because you’re better,” Felicity said. “I’m so happy for you.”

“I feel a bit overwhelmed. There’s so much I want to change and the department is in a mess. My predecessor was not good at his job. I’ve spent half my time just trying to pull us away from projects that would never work, organize things, and liaising with the suits who have absolutely no idea what I’m talking about when I explain things to them.”
“You need a liaison,” Felicity said. “Someone to focus on the big picture while you focus on directing the teams.”

“You offering?” Barry joked.

Felicity looked around the messy, crowded, beautifully chaotic lab and smiled. “Maybe. Tell me more about their computer sciences department. I want to tear everything down and make it better right this instant.”

Barry took her to the elevator without arguing and pushed the button for the eighteenth floor. “You are going to make so many people mad.”

“Nah,” Felicity said.

She did initially make a lot of people mad, and several insulted her straight to her face when she asked if she could take a look at their work, but the anger didn’t last long around her warmth and candor, and the insults were dealt with silent capability that no one could deny.

When she saw the firewall, however, she knew she couldn’t walk away. Chimpanzees had designed it. It needed to be fixed. It offended her personally just by existing.

Oliver found her at the main terminal in the server room as her fingers flew across the screen. Dig was in a nearby chair playing on his phone and looking bored out of his mind. She hadn’t talked to him in an hour. She had forgotten he was there.

“I was thinking about grabbing lunch,” Oliver said to Felicity as he leaned against the nearest server. “Would you like to join me?”

She didn’t reply right away. She was still working, her bottom lip tucked between her teeth as she squinted at the screen. She was getting a major headache from her lack of glasses, but the work was everything she needed and more.

“Felicity?” he tried again.

She turned and looked at him blankly. It took her a minute to realize he had asked a question.

“Lunch! Yes.”

He was smiling. It was the real smile. It was her smile. She smiled back at him brightly, her mood soaring with her work, and asked him in a glance where he wanted to go. He touched her arm to get her to follow him and nodded at Dig.

The three of them left together, their bulk warming her in the elevator once more, and she got the strangest feeling as they descended. It wasn’t déjà vu. It was more like she felt the future in front of her. It was never certain, never something that someone could see until it was past, but she knew deep in her bones that the two men beside her were part of her now. And something about being in the building had helped her see that she had already come to the decision to allow them into her life. She could not step away now that she knew what having their friendship felt like. Whatever it was that bound her to them, it was powerful.

Lunch was simple, low key, and full of Dig and Felicity bonding and teasing Oliver, who was quieter than he had been on Felicity’s last lunch with him. He seemed to be lost in his thoughts. Felicity and Dig left him to them for the most part, only pulling him out of it when he seemed to be at his broodiest.
They were in the lobby of QC when they were interrupted by someone Felicity had only ever seen in
the tabloids. Though he had moved away from the antics of his youth, he was still in the tabloids
often, mostly because of his business dealings at Merlyn Global and his engagement to Laurel Lance,
Starling’s premiere Assistant District Attorney.

Oliver nervously adjusted his jacket when he saw Tommy but his expression didn’t flicker at all.
Felicity didn’t know if he had been expecting him or if Oliver was simply that unflappable.

“Tommy,” Oliver said.

“Is it really him?” Tommy asked without any preamble, tension on his face and in his shoulders.

“We should talk about this in my office,” Oliver said.

Tommy looked like he wanted to argue, but then he realized that there were quite a few stares being
directed at them. Some were lust filled; others were looking for a story or a bit of juicy gossip.
Everyone knew that Oliver and Tommy were not seen together the way they had once been. Their
rift had been noticed and speculated upon in the papers.

“Right. Sure,” Tommy agreed.

Oliver led the way to the elevators and Tommy finally noticed that Felicity and Dig were there. He
reached out one hand to Dig as they walked. They shook hands the way friends did, and Felicity saw
that Tommy did not hold tension with all of them. His issues were with Oliver.

“Lyla called me yesterday, but I haven’t had the time to call her back,” Tommy said. “Please tell her
that Laurel and I would love a night with the girls this weekend. You know we will always be
available to babysit.”

Dig smiled. “Thanks, man.”

“Anytime,” Tommy said, and Felicity felt that he meant it. His blue eyes switched to Felicity as they
stepped into the elevator. He frowned curiously. “Tommy Merlyn,” he said.

“Felicity Smoak,” she returned politely.

Tommy had questions. Lots of them if the look on his face was anything to go by. Oliver headed him
off at the pass.

“I did something and now a shadowy organization wants to kill me with no less than three attempts
on my life in the past three days. I was rescued by someone in Oliver’s organization and he was kind
enough to offer me a place to stay two nights ago when my house was set on fire with me in it,”
Felicity said. “Does your office have chocolate anywhere in it? I am dying for the good stuff.”

“It’s a global corporation that makes technology, Felicity, not a doctor’s office,” Oliver said.

“So you’re hiding some in your desk and don’t want to share,” Felicity said. “Rude.”

“I’m not hiding anything,” Oliver said.
“Of all the things you could have picked to say, you just had to go with the most ironic one, huh?” Felicity asked.

Oliver pressed his lips together to keep from retorting and the elevator doors dinged. Oliver, Felicity, and Diggle stepped out, but Tommy stayed in place. He looked utterly confused, a little shell shocked, and definitely like he was doing some heavy thinking.

Dig held the door to keep it from closing.

“Tommy?” Oliver asked. “You wanted to talk?”

Tommy snapped out of his thoughts and finally stepped out of the elevator. He looked more closely at Felicity, the curiosity only growing as he tried to reconcile what he saw post-babble with what his original impression of her had been.

Oliver greeted the man at the front desk with a nod and went into the glass room where billions of dollars had been made and turned into a future for thousands of employees. It was a room with secrets, pain, news, and a whole heap of history. It felt regal and broad, especially with the windows that surrounded the entire room.

She felt like she was in a glass cage. For all its transparency, it was a place of hushed conversations and whispered words between only a trusted few. It was where Oliver’s father had led the Bratva and helped ruin the city. The room had probably seen more secrets than the CIA.

Despite what she knew of the room, she liked it very much. It was modern, sleek, and the sofas were really comfortable. She leaned back on the dark cushions, happy to get off her feet, and hummed in contentment. Oliver sat next to her, while Tommy and Dig sat on the sofa opposing theirs.

Tommy eyed Felicity again, clearly wondering how much she knew.

“She’s the one who realized Malcolm was back in town,” Oliver said. “You can trust her.”

Tommy had more questions, but he couldn’t hold off on the one that was eating away at him. “I thought you killed Malcolm,” he said.

“I guess we were both wrong,” Oliver said.

“You shot him in the chest. Did you miss?” Tommy pressed.

“No,” Oliver said. “But I also didn’t sit around and wait for him to bleed out. The cops were at the warehouse. It’s possible he had a contact in the hospital or morgue who helped him recover while pronouncing him dead. Enough money can buy you anything.”

“Enough money sometimes buys you layers you have to deal with later,” Felicity corrected.

Oliver narrowed his eyes at her in irritation.

“Continue,” she said apologetically.

“My thinking is that he gave himself plenty of time to recover and re-gather his allies, and now he wants the city back. He’s looking to start a war.”

“My Bratva father wants to start a war with my Bratva best friend over both of our Bratva fathers’ past dealings,” Tommy said. “This is starting to sound like a party.”

“Shakespeare boner,” Felicity agreed.
Oliver narrowed his eyes again in irritation. She clamped her lips together, though she was fighting the urge to laugh. He looked so ridiculous when he was being all grumpy face. He looked like Grumpy Cat. He even had the whiskers.

“Not to mention my sister, who is your sister, who is also happily in the Bratva because you allow her to be,” Tommy said.

“I don’t allow her anything,” Oliver said. “She picks her own path. Whether I want her to or not. If I had it my way, she would be in college and happily single until the day she dies. But she’s not, and I can’t force her into anything.”

Tommy sighed, agreeing to the point without saying so.

“Pardon me for asking, but why aren’t you Bratva?” Felicity asked, hoping to cut some of the tension.

“Malcolm didn’t feel like I was enough of the heir apparent…apparently. He never told me, never brought me into the brotherhood before he ‘died.’”

“That’s one thing he did right,” Oliver said softly.

“No, I had to find it out from you while you were in the middle of rescuing me from assassins that your mother had hired to kill me,” Tommy retorted.

“Are you here to rehash the past, Tommy?” Oliver paused, letting his gaze linger on Tommy’s with a mixture of seriousness and steel. “Or are you here to ask what I have planned for your father?”

Tommy lost all joviality as he looked back at Oliver. They were two lions circling each other, though Felicity had the very real feeling that it would take a whole hell of a lot to get Oliver to raise his hand against his friend. Tommy looked consumed by anger. Then, the anger shifted and he crumpled, his entire body caving in like he was made of paper. He sighed again and lowered his eyes.

“You have to kill him,” Tommy said.

“I don’t have to do anything,” Oliver said.

“Don’t play coy, Ollie. And don’t patronize me.”

“I’m not. What do you want?”

“He’ll start a war. He’ll come for Thea – the child he feels is worthy of his empire. He’ll ruin everything we’ve built up these past few years. You have to kill him.”

“But what do you want?” Oliver asked, pushing, prodding, and crossing a line too many.

Felicity reached out and put her hand over his. He didn’t move it away, nor did he visibly react to it. Instead, he shifted his fingers and squeezed her hand twice – reassurance that everything was going to be okay. He knew Tommy’s limits.

“I want you to stop him. Whatever it takes. However you have to do it,” Tommy admitted bleakly.

“I will,” Oliver promised.

“I’ll help you however I can. Merlyn Global’s resources are yours.” He held out his hand for Oliver to take. Oliver looked startled, then he swiftly joined his hand with Tommy’s.
“Thank you,” he replied quietly, looking at his friend with a cautious hope brewing in his stormy eyes.

Tommy looked nearly as cautious, though the tension she had noticed at the beginning of the meeting had faded away. His was more relaxed and looked eager to make a step that looked to be years in the making.

“Now…I want you to explain, at length, everything you’ve said in the past ten minutes,” Tommy said to Felicity. “You can start back at the point right after you said your name.”

“That sounds absolutely ghastly,” Felicity said.

“Fair enough,” he said. “Then tell me something else. I am incredibly curious.”

She knew that he was trying to find a middle ground with Oliver. She didn’t get why he was choosing her as that middle ground, but she was eager to play along and help with whatever healing the two of them could share.

“Giraffes only sleep thirty minutes a day, in five minute increments, and always standing up,” Felicity said.

“What?” Tommy laughed.

“You told me to tell you something,” Felicity said. “I went with giraffes.”

“About yourself,” he said.

“Oh. Not much to tell. IT girl, MIT, Kord Industries until yesterday, Jewish, and a lover of panda hats.”

“Those are the important things, huh?” Tommy asked.

“Yes,” she said.

He smiled, and then immediately started talking about technology, showing a surprising aptitude and understanding. She couldn’t go full nerd on him, but he was definitely in the know of at least the basic principles involved. They talked work, tech, Laurel, Dig’s kids, Lyla, and Thea. They avoided anything to do with Malcolm or Felicity’s situation. By the end of forty minutes, Oliver’s assistant was knocking on the door to inform him of a meeting and Tommy was already half out of his seat. They said their goodbyes and Tommy left them with a serious handshake between him and Oliver, a lighter handshake between him and Dig, and a cheeky smile for Felicity.

Felicity stood as well, not wanting to linger when Oliver had things to do. “I’m going to go steal a phone, tablet, and laptop from R&D. They’re mine now. You can’t have them back.”

Oliver laughed. “Okay.”

She smiled at him brightly and marched out of his office with a flourish that would have been more dramatic had she been wearing one of her dresses. Dig followed her silently, and she returned back to her improvement of the firewall and the Zen of work that meant something more than running for her life or fearing the worst.

It was a little past six-thirty when Dig finally shook her out of her coding stupor and insisted they
She pouted at that, but she did as he asked, knowing he had a family to get back to and that her time was not her own. As she walked to the elevator with him, she did what she had been dreading doing ever since she had claimed one of the shiny new phones from R&D. She listened to her messages in her old phone’s inbox.

“Hey, baby girl! It’s Mom! Just checking on you. A man at the casino bought me flowers today. He said they were lilies, but they weren’t. It was sweet. I hope he doesn’t come in again. Oh! I finished that—”

Felicity pressed the next button, knowing her mom would continue talking until the end of the message, where it would cut her off, and she would simply wait for Felicity to call and say everything all over again.

The next message was far less friendly.

“Ms. Smoak, this is Detective Lance from the Starling Police Department. I’ve been trying to contact you for the past day. I need to speak with you about your house and the events of the night of the twelfth. Please call me back immediately.”

There were three more messages from her insurance, her mortgage company, and her neighbor. The next message was from Caitlyn; she was checking on her and freaking out about the company. The one following one was from Curtis, who didn’t sound as freaked out but was still wanting to know what was going on and if Felicity had any information.

The last message had her heart pounding erratically.

“Ms. Smoak. I don’t know how you found out. I don’t care. You did. They’ll be coming for you. You’re going to die. I hope it’s slow.”

Kord. Her former boss. Her mentor. Her friend. His voice was laced with anger and hate. He had called her from prison just to say he hoped she died. She frowned at the thought even as her heart raced with fear. That couldn’t be right. They recorded all calls out of prison. He had to have used something else. Maybe it was something she could track.

“Felicity?” Dig asked.

She startled and pulled the phone away from her ear. She canceled the call and pressed the phone against her chest, as though afraid he was going to take it from her. She looked at him with round eyes – a doe caught in the crosshairs of a rifle.

“Are you okay?” he asked softly.

She nodded furiously. “My mom called.”

“Ah,” Dig said with a smile.

She willed herself to act natural, not wanting to add more fuel to the fire. They were being so kind to her, and she didn’t feel like it was fair that she kept worrying them. Besides, she wanted to trace the call before she went raising any alarms.

The fact that Kord had figured out that she was involved was troubling, though. How? She had kept her hacking hobby from him. He shouldn’t have known. Maybe logic had led him there. He had hunted after her battery, threatened her, and his company fell the very next day. It didn’t take a genius like her to figure it out. That meant he was the reason The Consortium was trying to kill her. He had given them her name.
As soon as she traced the call, she was definitely sending Oliver in to have a very pointed chat with the man. She didn’t agree with violence on most cases, but she really wanted to watch Oliver punch Kord in the face at least once.

It would be the one and only time she enjoyed the blood of others.
Oliver didn’t join them when they got to the car. Dig didn’t wait for them, and Felicity figured that Oliver had another way home. She didn’t dwell on it. She was too busy embedding the sound of Kord’s threat into her memory so she could be sure it terrorized her later, probably sometime during the night. That seemed like a good time. Dig wasn’t the chatty type, which meant that she was left to dwell and freak out in silence. That was fine, too. She needed the time to get her thoughts in order before she was expected to be human adjacent.

Her phone rang, startling her, and she unclenched it from the fist she had made around it. She saw Iris’ face and immediately answered.

“Hey,” Felicity said.

“Hey! So, Thea Queen, huh?” Iris said.

“What about her?” Felicity asked.

“She’s sort of half awesome, half terrifying,” Iris replied.

“Yeah,” Felicity agreed. “How did you meet her?”

“She called me on Sara’s phone today and asked me all sorts of interesting questions,” Iris said.

“What did you tell her? You didn’t tell her about that snake charmer guy, right? I knew I shouldn’t have told you that story.”

“That story is not something I think about often, Felicity,” Iris said. “Doesn’t even crack the top fifty things I know about Felicity Smoak list.”

“You’re right. There are worse things. I’m making Caitlyn my new best friend. She knows less.”

“Words hurt, Felicity,” Iris replied.

“You didn’t tell Thea anything, right?”

“Oh. No. I told her everything. She gushed about you, I gushed about you. Gushing was done on all sides. Sara giggled some. That was pretty terrifying, too.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Felicity said.

“Because you’re going to be surprised, and I know how you feel about surprises when people are nice to you. You freak out and try to give things back. Thea likes you. Take that for what it is and don’t be a dick to her because she did something nice.”

“I don’t like the sound of that,” Felicity said.
“Trust me on this. That girl needs some serious sunshine in her life, and I can’t think of anyone more sunshiny than you.”

“Aw. Also, shut up.”

The sound of raised voices hit Felicity, and she thought that Iris was maybe in a coffee shop somewhere.

“I have to go,” Iris said. “Just be cool.”

“Barry said hi, by the way,” Felicity said.


She hung up the phone and Felicity pressed it back to her chest. She didn’t know much about panic attacks, but it certainly felt like a rubber band had been wrapped around her lungs and that they were slowly squeezing the life out of them. She had seen those viral videos with the watermelons. She knew what rubber bands could do. She knew things. She had seen things - watermelon things.

Kord’s voice was still in her head.

The voice was a thing of nightmares. It was terrifying. It made her feel like the world had stopped spinning and they would drift into the sun at any moment.

Snow started drifting against the windshield as they slowly moved through traffic. The stop-and-go nature of the ride was far from soothing, and the snow reminded her of the night Kane had broken into her apartment and sent Felicity scrambling for her life. She was tense, wired, and ready to explode at the smallest of triggers.

She needed a distraction.

She pulled out her tablet and went to work tracing the call. It took her twenty minutes. By the time she was done, they were out of the city and nearing Oliver’s house. She stared at the name in front of her. It made sense that Kord’s lawyer would let Kord use his cell phone, but he didn’t know if the lawyer knew about Kord’s connection to The Consortium or not. It was worth investigating. She considered telling Oliver, but she wasn’t sure what he had done with the man from the shootout. If she sent Oliver after the lawyer, would he die, too? Would Oliver kill him? Would that be on her? Her conscience wouldn’t allow her to take the chance.

The car rolled to a stop and she gathered her things. She smiled at Dig. “You don’t have to walk me in if you want to take off and go home. I’ll be fine.”

“I’ll wait until you’re inside,” he said.

She smiled at him in parting and stepped out into the snow that was swirling with greater abandon and purpose. It was starting to come down harder, hitting the ground with a sizzle and crunch. The flakes settled on her hair and shoulders, the ice stinging where it touched her skin. The chill added to the one that had settled in her veins and made her shiver violently.

She hurried to the front porch and stepped inside the house without looking back. She closed the door behind her and was met with the silence of what seemed like an empty house.

That was kind of depressing.

She paused, startled.
Being alone had never depressed her before, and she certainly wasn’t going to let it now. Just because the house was always bursting with life and the unexpected didn’t mean that the reverse was depressing. It was just different. And that was okay. Right? Why was she secretly hoping someone somewhere in the house would make a noise? Why did she want the laughter and joy of her first visit to return? Where was everyone? Seriously.

She went to the kitchen, unloaded her tech onto the bar, and stood at the fridge. She opened the door and stared at the contents. It was a well-stocked refrigerator. Oliver’s love for cooking meant that there was always something to make inside. But she didn’t reach for anything. She simply stared, allowing the glow of the light to lull her into a trance. It was almost mediation, save for the fact that in the back of her head was her mother’s voice telling her that she was letting all the cold out, to shut the door, and quit wasting energy that could go to starving children in Africa.

She was about to close the door when she noticed a bottle of wine tucked in the back. It wasn’t an expensive wine by any means, but it was one she liked very much. She hadn’t noticed it there before, so she figured it was a recent addition, but the temptation was too much. She would buy Oliver another bottle. Right now. She needed booze – all the booze. She needed to relax a little and allow something, anything, to take away the sound of Kord’s voice in her ear threatening her with certain death.

She found a ridiculously large glass in the cabinet and poured a good portion of the bottle into it. She started sipping almost immediately and sat down on the stool closest to the refrigerator. She looked down at her tablet as she took another long sip and decided that the searches could wait until she felt human again - or at least until she was a little bit more buzzed.

She sat in silence, allowing for the beats of stillness to hum in the present without distraction or interference. She needed the pause, even if she usually worked best with some kind of noise in the background, even if it was just the sound of her talking to herself.

The only sounds to break the stillness were her lips meeting the glass in her hand, the slow sips she took, and the contended hums as the liquid went down her throat. Her belly started to feel fluttery and her chest warm. It was better than flirting.

When the door opened thirty minutes later she didn’t even flinch. She just swayed a little and hummed a mixture of three different songs. She had passed buzzed a while ago. She was in that warm, floaty place where she wasn’t drunk but also just didn’t really give a fuck. That was a nice place to be in she had found.

She knew even in her buzzed state, and with her back to the door, that it was Oliver. No one else moved in the space the way he did. She felt wholly connected to him in a way that made absolutely no sense.

“Felicity?” he asked softly as he stepped beside her. He set food he had brought with him on the counter and turned to look at her curiously. His eyes lingered on the wine bottle before landing on hers again.

“Porcupines have it rough,” Felicity replied. “They probably just want to cuddle, but, bam! Pointy things! I want to give them all hugs. They deserve it.”

“Okay?” Oliver laughed.

She banded her arms around his waist and rested the side of her face on his stomach without thinking. Not giving a fuck was really nice. She sighed and held him a little tighter as he shifted slightly to accommodate her sudden movement.
“You’re kinda like a porcupine,” she added. “I can give you hugs whenever you want, you know. No questions asked.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” he replied, fighting laughter the sound rumbling under her ear warmly.

“Although you do have less pointy things. Well, there’s the one.” She shrugged, accidentally rubbing against the pointy thing in question. “All of your quills are internal. They’re inside pointy things that make it hard for you to let people love you…How cool would it be to have quills?”

“I think we’ve established that it makes hugging difficult,” he said after a startled pause, no longer sounding amused.

“Mmmm,” she agreed.

She continued to hold him, swaying gently as another song popped into her head. She hummed along quietly.

“Felicity…”

She ignored him. He pulled away from her and she pouted, but his hands landed on either side of her face. That was good, too. She hummed happily. He forced her to look at him. She did, her eyes a little unfocused, and smiled brightly at him.

“Felicity.”

The way he said her name grounded her and made her smile turn warm.

“Oliver.”

“Why have you been drinking?”

“I just had a little,” she said.

“Half the bottle,” he replied.

“Yeah,” she retorted in a way that switched it to, “duh.”

“Why?” he repeated.

She pouted up at him, then nuzzled his hand happily. She closed her eyes and allowed for the closeness, knowing she wouldn’t get another shot at it for a while.

“You’re stressed out…about a lot of things right now,” Oliver said. “But you have a friend. I’m here if you need me.”

“I know,” she whispered, sobering slightly. “I don’t want to tell you this.”

“Why not?” he asked.

“Because you kill people, and I have no idea what unspeakable things you did to that man who tried to kill Sara and me…I’m afraid if I tell you, you’ll kill someone else and it’ll be on me.”

His hands fell from her face and he took several steps back. “Oh.”

“I’m not trying to be mean,” Felicity added quickly, seeing the pain on his face and hating that she had caused it. “But there are certain things I just can’t…”
He knelt down in front of her, taking her hands in his large ones, and stared up at her seriously. “And I really like that about you. You might be naïve as hell, but you have a good heart. That’s rare.”

“Not in this house,” she returned.

The smile returned to his face and her heart sang.

“How drunk are you?”

She listed off a series of hacking terms for him. In her mind it proved that she wasn’t that drunk. A drunk person couldn’t remember all that, right? He blinked slowly at her, waiting for her to finish. She smiled proudly at him when she stopped.

“I don’t know if you could have said all that drunk or not,” he admitted. “I’ll just take it on faith that you’ll remember this.”

“How could I forget? You have very nice hands. And eyes. And face.”

“Um…thanks,” he said. He looked down at their joined hands for a moment, gathering his thoughts and working through what he wanted to say. “I didn’t kill that man.”

“The man?”

“The one who shot at you. I didn’t kill him. I handed him over to Lance.”

“Oh!” she said. “Why?”

It took him a full sixty seconds to form the words. She waited patiently, knowing he would get there eventually.

“Because I knew you wouldn’t like it.”

And just like that the fluttery feeling returned to her stomach and made her feel drunk all over again. Tears welled in her eyes and he looked nearly panicked until she jumped up and slung her arms around his neck, sending them both to their knees on the kitchen floor.

“That’s the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me!” she exclaimed.

“I can think of nicer,” he replied.

She wiped away her tears even as she clung to him, and tried to puzzle out how her opinion had come to mean so much to him that he would not kill just because he knew it would upset her. Very strange.

“I have to pee,” she whispered into his neck.

“Yeah, like that,” he said, his voice heavy with sarcasm.

She started to stand, felt wobbly, and then found herself on her feet, Oliver’s hands holding her steady.

“Whoa,” she said. She put her hand on his chest and just…looked at him. She gazed and appreciated, her mind getting lost in the contours of his face.

“Bathroom?” he asked.
“Right!” she agreed.

Shuffling her feet to keep herself steady, she went to the bathroom in the hall. When she was done, she shuffled back out to him and saw that he had set out the food for them. There were more portions, she assumed, for the guards she couldn’t see lingering around the house. Oliver put the leftovers in the refrigerator and sat down on a stool next to the one she had claimed. She collapsed next to him and he nudged a glass of water pointedly. She wrinkled her nose, not finding the water nearly as sexy as the wine, and obediently took a sip.

“It’s hot in here,” Felicity said.

Oliver’s eyes widened, following her chain of thought. “You’re leaving all of your clothes on,” he said.

“Oh, because you’re the only one who can strip at will?” she demanded.

“Yes!”

She pulled her jacket and shirt off before he could stop her, dropping both behind her on the floor. She looked at him smugly, as if she had proven something profound to him, and focused on the food he had set out. It looked delicious. She pulled as much as she could directly in front of her and started eating. Oliver’s body language had turned tense, and he refused to look at her. His hand gripped the knife forcefully, and it trembled slightly. She didn’t mind his reaction. She had food. That was better than any boy.

“Felicity…” he said after a moment. There was a plea in there somewhere, but she refused to acknowledge it.

“It’s funny that inappropriateness is an antonym for my name. Isn’t it funny right now?” she asked.

“I’m having trouble seeing the humor,” he admitted. He shifted slightly. “Felicity, why were you drinking? Please tell me the truth. I can help.”

She sighed and took a spectacularly long time to finish chewing her food. She carefully placed her fork down, and then pulled her phone closer to her body. She hesitated before she opened her voicemail.

“Promise me you won’t do anything rash? That we’ll come up with a plan together?” she asked.

“I promise,” he said instantly.

“You have to mean it. No take backsies.”

“Felicity,” he huffed.

She brought up Kord’s voicemail and pushed the speaker button. Kord’s voice echoed off the shiny appliances of the kitchen and created ice where only moments before there had been warmth.

A vein pulsed alarmingly in Oliver’s forehead as he listened to the rather brief message. The fork in his hand had become a weapon, lethal and sharp. She stared at the veins bulging out of his forearm in fascination. It took her a minute to realize that he was really upset. She hadn’t wanted to upset him. She put her hand on the arm holding the fork.

“It’s okay,” she said.
“No,” he disagreed.

“You have my permission to punch him a little,” Felicity said. “Does that help?”

“He just threatened your life. He just admitted to being involved with The Consortium. There’s a warrant out for your life and he has the gall to be smug about it.”

“Prison changes a man,” she said sagely.

Oliver huffed irritably. “I think I’m going to have a chat with him,” Oliver said.

“That sounds nice,” she said. “I want a recording if you punch him.”

“I also think we need to make it public that you are under my protection. I might not be as shadowy or powerful as this Consortium, but Starling is my city. It does what I say. No one will hurt you here.”

“What are we going to do? Put out an ad in the paper?” she asked.

“I’ll think of something,” he replied. “How did he call you?”

She was learning not to be surprised that he made connections so easily. She was also learning not to be surprised that he knew her well enough to realize she had already looked into it.

“Kord’s lawyer. I was gonna research him, but then I…”

“Got sloshed?” Oliver said.

“Nobody says that.”

“What do they say?”

“Fershnikit?” she asked.

“Yes, much more fashionable,” he replied.

She nodded, missing his sarcasm, and looked down at her hands, which she couldn’t feel as well as she could an hour ago. “I’m scared.”

He put his hand on her bare shoulder. It did things to her, but, mainly, it made her feel like she wasn’t alone. She felt bolstered by his support.

“I’m going to go find the lawyer, Malcolm, and solve the energy crisis,” she decided.

“I thought you already did that last one.”

“But this time I’m going to find a way that doesn’t have an end result of a bomb.”

“Do you typically get your invention ideas while drunk?” he asked.

“No,” she said defensively. “I usually get them in the shower…or during sex.”

He froze and she snickered that such a harmless word could turn him into a fourteen year old.

“Of course, the sex is never usually all that great. If it were, would I be thinking about my inventions? Nope! Have you ever had truly great sex?”
“You need to finish eating,” Oliver said with an awkward cough.

“I mean…good sex, yes. But isn’t great sex marked by being fully in the moment? Not thinking about anything beyond the person you’re with? I’ve never had that. Men don’t want to take the time to do more than get themselves off. What’s that even about? They want that to be the way they’re remembered?”

“Please give me strength,” Oliver muttered.

“And don’t even get me started on touch. Do men think we’re crocodiles? Do they think that the only way we can feel is through awkward fumbling, rough touches, and pinching things? I don’t want to be pinched!”

“Can we talk about mass murderers again?” Oliver asked.

“I thought we were friends,” Felicity said.

“We are,” he replied. “But I think we can find other topics that are a little less...”

“Sexy?” Felicity asked.

“Yes,” he said.

“I’m cold,” Felicity decided.

Oliver rolled his eyes heavenward and picked her shirt off the ground. She turned to him and held her arms over her head expectantly. He looked to be having another crisis of conscience, but he helped her pull it on without comment.

“I’ve never been dressed by a man before,” Felicity added brightly.

“Me either,” Oliver replied.

“It’s better than you think.”

“Eat,” Oliver commanded, sitting back down next to her.

They ate in comfortable silence. When their plates were clean and her belly was full, Oliver stood and started clearing the dishes. She tried to help him, but he made her sit again, which was lucky, as balancing was being a tricky little bastard.

“I think you should probably turn in early tonight,” Oliver said.

“I’m not a child,” Felicity said, blinking up at him slowly. Now that he mentioned it, she did feel sleepy, but she had searches to run, and problems to solve, and baby porcupines to look up on the web.

“Your choice,” Oliver said.

“That’s right,” Felicity said. “I am every woman. Hear me roar.”

“Please don’t sing.”

She did anyways. She was still singing when he helped her stand and guided her up the stairs. In the room he had given her, he pulled back the duvet and sheets for her to get in the bed. She collapsed with a breathy exhale and he reached down to cover her with a twinkle shimmering in his eyes.
When the covers were safely tucked under her chin she leaned up and caught his lips in hers. It was nothing more than a peck – the kind a married couple might exchange before leaving for work in the morning, almost routine and nearly clinical. It was nothing special, but Oliver looked totally wrecked when she pulled away and smiled at him sleepily.

“You have nice lips,” she pronounced.

“So do you,” he replied.

“Thanks,” she said.

Then, she was asleep.

She had known his voice would haunt her, but she had not known how real it would feel in her dreams. She heard every inflection, every smug moment of certainty that she was going to die. She believed him. She well and truly believed him.

Her eyes flashed open as the dream ended with her death and she stared directly into the face of her clock. 11:00 p.m. She remembered drinking too much wine after hearing Kord’s voice and Oliver bringing her dinner. He had been sweet and she had…

“Oh my god. Oh my fracking god.” Nope, not good enough. “Fuck!”

She hadn’t even been able to go a day without making a pass at him. What was wrong with her?

She pulled the blankets over her head and decided that she was going to spend the rest of her life tucked under them. It wouldn’t be such a bad life, really. It was warm, fluffy, soft, and Oliver might check in on her from time to time.

She stayed under the blankets until the reality of life hit her. She needed to pee, get a glass of water, and find a distraction before Kord’s voice unravelled her entirely. She reached out and picked up her glasses from the nightstand without thinking, slipped them on, and went to the bathroom. She would be lying to herself if she claimed she wasn’t sneaking when she walked out into the hall after listening for signs of movement. She didn’t want to run into Oliver. She had embarrassed herself beyond anything she had ever known. She had stripped in front of him. She had talked about sex and pinching. She had sung a 70s song at the top of her voice, and then she had…

She had kissed him. Again. Like an idiot.

She crept down the hall, placing her feet carefully, hoping against hope that he had left to go out on patrol as he had the previous night. She cautiously glanced into his room, where the door was half open, and stopped in her tracks just past the opening. She debated with herself for only a nanosecond before she leaned back slightly to get a better look.

Oliver was at the foot of the bed, his back turned towards the door. A wet towel was resting on the bed and a pair of underwear were in his hands. He had clearly just gotten out of the shower. He was gloriously naked and his ass was fantastic. It was muscled, round, and just the right amount of perky. Greek statues wished his ass was their model. He bent down a little, everything contracting, and she realized with a jolt that he might turn around at any second. There was no way in hell she was compounding on her embarrassment. She scampered away before he could notice her and hurried down the stairs without looking back.

She leaned her forehead against the refrigerator when she reached it and took a minute to lower her
heart rate.

“Bad thoughts are bad,” she told herself firmly.

She opened the door and grabbed a bottle of water. She took a long drink and decided to give Oliver ten minutes to get dressed before going back upstairs to work. She stared at a picture of Thea, Tommy, and Oliver on the fridge as a distraction. It took her an embarrassing amount of time to realize that the faces weren’t fuzzy and looking at them didn’t make her head hurt. She reached up and touched the bridge of her glasses. She took them off a second later and stared at them. They were like her old ones, though a slightly newer design, and the prescription was exactly right.

“What the what?”

“Hey,” Oliver said from the doorway. He was wearing pajama bottoms and a t-shirt. At least he was clothed this time. That was nice. Wait, was it?

“Hi,” Felicity replied, slipping her glasses back onto her face and fighting the tightness in her chest. Embarrassed couldn’t even begin to cover how she felt. She wanted the ground to swallow her whole.

“How are you feeling?”

“I’m okay,” she said quietly, staring at her feet. She was still in the clothes she had worn to work. Her feet ached, her mouth felt like someone had stuck a dirty sock into it, and sweat had soaked her shirt from her nightmare. She wasn’t known for lying, but she didn’t figure he wanted to know all that.

“So...Are you every woman?” he asked lightly.

She groaned and leaned forward so that her head was on the counter. She wished she could take back the past five hours of her life. Everything was just wrong.

“That’s a great song,” Oliver added.

“I’m sorry for everything,” Felicity said into her hands. “I really am.”

“Why? It was great.”

She sighed. “Don’t mock me.”

“I’m not. It was nice.”

She looked up at him skeptically and saw that he was smiling happily. At least he had enjoyed himself. There was no awkwardness in his face. That gave her hope. Maybe he wouldn’t hold a grudge.

“Do you need anything for your head?” he asked.

“I’m fine.”

“You’re feet?” he asked.

She pursed her lips.

“Yeah,” he said. He took her elbow and urged her to sit. She did with a sigh and he disappeared briefly, only to return with the kit he was so fond of using on her. He peeled off her shoes and socks
and took care of her feet with his typical gentleness.

“I have some people following Kord’s lawyer...basic surveillance. I’ll go visit Kord tomorrow morning. If he gives me nothing, I’ll talk to the lawyer.”

“You’re just going to stroll into the prison and get a meeting with Kord without an appointment?”

“Haven’t you heard? I’m Oliver Queen.”

“Who?” she teased him.

He finished with her feet and stood again. She focused on his hands to keep from looking into his eyes.

“I’d like to come with you,” she said.

He crossed his arms and set his stance. “Absolutely not.”

“Absolutely yes,” Felicity said, finding his eyes at last.

“Have you forgotten that Kord just threatened you? Have you forgotten the attempts on your life? How about the fact that Kord may have called you in an attempt to lure you out? Thought of that?”

“I won’t be there alone. You’ll be there,” Felicity said.

“The answer is no.”

“Okay. Tone. Also, I don’t have to ask permission.”

“He wants you dead!”

“I absolutely do not need to be told that!” she said.

“But you want to put your neck on the chopping block anyways? What sense does that make?”

“I’m going. With or without you. It’s not a discussion.”

Oliver closed his eyes and clamped his lips together to hold back a retort. He gave it a full twenty seconds. “It should be,” he replied. “These are real stakes...It’s your life.”

“Exactly. My life.”

He paced away from her. He was a mixture of irritated, concerned, and understanding. He was considering the options. She trusted he would come to the right decision. He was too practical not to.

He turned back to her finally, his expression unhappy.

“I have conditions,” he said.

“I’ll probably have conditions on your conditions.”

“One: you will stay by my side the entire time. No wandering around.”

“It’s a prison, Oliver. I’m not there for a spa day.”

“Two: if I tell you to do something, you do it.”

“Bossy, but okay.”
“Three: you say as little as possible. I’m there to get information from him, not coddle him, not give him information. We will not give him more than he has at the beginning of the conversation.”

“No babbles. Got it.”

“Four:-”

“I didn’t take you for a lister.”

“Four: you have to understand that I am not there to be his friend. Anything I do…”

She nodded. “I get it. I won’t judge you for what you to do with Kord if you promise not to judge me for the past five hours.”

“Felicity...I’ve pissed on a cop car. I think that all of your drunk stories combined can’t really compete with the ass I’ve made out of myself in the past. Plus, it was funny.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it.”

“Someone should,” he said.

She rolled her eyes and then started fidgeting. She was terrified. Seeing Kord legitimately scared her. She quaked to her bones. But she was going. She would face him. She would look him in the eyes and face her demons with a straight back. She would do it because she had the strength. She knew her worth and her capabilities. She had been tested before and knew what she could handle now. If that failed, Oliver would be sure to support her. That mattered a whole lot.

She fidgeted with her glasses and realized that they were part of the problem, too. It was all Thea Queen. She debated taking them off, but it was such a blessing not having things be fuzzy that she just couldn’t. But everything else, everything that was tucked away in the alarmingly large closet, was absolutely being returned to the store.

She understood Iris’s warnings now. She got why Iris had insisted Felicity see things from Thea’s point of view. That didn’t mean she agreed with the logic. She would not be wearing any of the clothes or the amazingly beautiful shoes that made her want to create a shoe carrier like they had for babies, just so she could always be close to them. She didn’t care that there was a dress at the very front that looked as if it did nothing but swish. She was not having it.

It was totally inappropriate, and she wasn’t going to let anyone make her feel indebted to them. Oliver’s house was still a mob house. She would leave as soon as she could. She didn’t want nice gestures and expensive clothes to confuse things.

She sighed at the thought.

No matter how much she hated that Thea had bought her things without asking, there was no doubt in her mind that she hadn’t done it to be manipulative. Thea had money to spend. She had chosen to spend it on Felicity. She was trying to do a good thing. Even if it irritated Felicity, she saw the kindness in the gesture.

She found her phone and sent a quick text to Iris.

F: I hate you for helping with this madness.

It took Iris only a minute to text back.

I: You’re welcome.

F: I’m sending it all back.

I: Remember what I said. Thea likes you. Be nice.

Felicity tossed her phone onto the bed without replying and looked at the closet full of clothes again. She really needed to be moving. She had a date with a psychopath that she absolutely could not miss. It was a big day for her. But she also couldn’t get around the fact that the clothes were just so…there.

“Nope. Nuhuh. Not happening.” Oliver called through the door.
“Did you notice that Thea collected Roy, went home, and hasn’t been back yet?” Felicity called back.

“Yes,” Oliver said. “But she’s also been busy with the club. She doesn’t drop by every day, you know.”

“It’s because she’s avoiding me,” Felicity said. “For good reason. I’m going to kill her.”

“Why?”

“She bought me things,” Felicity whined.

“Okay?”

“A lot of things.”

“Right…”

“I should have noticed last night because of the glasses, but I was just so overwhelmed…and then I was tracking the lawyer, Merlyn, digging up dirt for you to use on Kord, trying to find Kane…I didn’t really get a good look at it until today. And, I mean, who stares at their closet anyways? Not me!”

“Can I come in?” Oliver asked.

“I’m in a towel,” she said.

“You really need to get dressed.”

Felicity stomped over to the door and threw it back angrily. “That’s the problem! She bought me things and I can’t wear them because I’ll fall in love and she has to return them!”

Oliver’s gaze landed on her bare legs, which the towel only sort of covered, and traveled up the length of the towel, pausing on her neck, before landing on her eyes. His eyes were darker than normal, but his expression was stoic.

“Felicity. I appreciate the complexities of figuring out if you’re going to accept a gift from someone. Knowing my sister, she bought you a lot of whatever it is. But we don’t actually have time for you to freak out. You can yell at her later. Right now, we need to be moving.”

“You’re no fun when you’re logical,” she said.

“I could always go without you,” he offered sweetly. “Save you the hassle.”

“I’ll be down in five.”

He smirked, she narrowed her eyes, and he closed the door without giving her the chance to say anything else.

She picked the swishy dress to wear because she could, and if she was going to keep anything it was that, and a pair of purple heels to match. They were glorious, didn’t pinch, and she wanted to wear them forever. A red coat was tucked at the back. She pulled it out as well, knowing she would need it, and gathered the rest of the things she would need for the day.

Downstairs, Oliver was making them scrambled eggs and toast. He was finishing up the last of the eggs when she sat. The whole thing was incredibly domestic. She hadn’t realized that it would be
just the two of them in the house once Roy and Sara went home. People were probably in and out all
day, but at night and in the mornings, there was just them. It was disconcerting, but it made her
realize that she had more self-control than she had imagined. It was not a lesson she really felt she
needed.

She checked the news on her tablet as they ate, and he got a phone call where he spoke entirely in
Russian. His words were quick, his words pronounced harshly, and his tone full of command. The
conversation didn’t seem to go his way, but he didn’t seem to linger on the tension past the phone
call. She knew in a glance not to ask about it. He wouldn’t answer.

Dig arrived as Felicity was loading her plate in the dishwasher and stole a piece of toast from the
pile. He said good morning to them both, Felicity asked about the girls, and he immediately launched
into a story about Sara and her inability to say flock.

The good humor left the trio the moment they were in the car. Felicity’s leg bounced nearly
constantly and she hacked into the prison’s camera feed just to pinpoint all the exits and feel in
control of the situation. Oliver simply stared out the window, the only obvious tension resting in the
slight crinkle of his brow. She wished she had his calm. She was nervous, strung out, and ready to
snap and flutter away.

Dig looked nearly as calm; it only faded when someone did something stupid on the road and he had
to react to it. There was a lot of swearing when that happened.

Finally, they arrived at the prison and she reached the point where she could either stay in the car or
go inside. She knew Oliver wouldn’t blame her for staying. Dig got out. Oliver must have signaled
to him, because he didn’t open either of their doors. He paced away, pretending to make a phone
call. Felicity turned to look at Oliver, her heart in her throat.

“What’s the call?” he asked softly.

“I’m going in,” she said.

He nodded, no longer trying to talk her out of it. He simply wanted to reassure her that he had her
back. She appreciated that. He held his hand out to her – an anchor in the storm. She took it only
after a second’s worth of hesitation, her eyes lifting to meet his gratefully. He smiled softly at her and
pulled her after him as he got out of the car.

The prison was stark grey and looming stone. It had five levels, and looked like something out of a
vampire story. It was an archaic castle meet cute with a modern fortress that had the feel of
impenetrable. No one was getting out without a few superpowers, and since those were few and far
between, it was safe to say that the prison was secure. She eyed the barbed wire over the fence as a
security guard let them in through the first of fifteen barriers between the outside and the visitor’s
entrance.

She realized she was still holding Oliver’s hand when they finally walked inside. For once she didn’t
care about complications. She didn’t care that it was stupid to cling to him. She allowed herself the
strength of leaning on him when she was scared. She would worry about boundaries and lines when
things weren’t so terrifyingly terrifying.

The walls were a pale white and the overhead lights were a phantom green. She refused to look over
at Oliver and Dig. She knew they would look like skeletons, hollowed out to fit the madness of a
place consumed by death, pain, and destruction. She did not want to see either of them that way.

“I’ll be here if you need me, sir,” Dig said as Oliver signed the visitor’s log.
“Thank you, Mr. Diggle,” Oliver said just as formally.

It was Felicity’s turn to sign. The pen floating across the page felt like she was signing her approval on a death warrant that would absolutely be collected come hell or high water. Oliver didn’t take her hand again when she was done. It was just as well. She didn’t want Kord to get the wrong idea. He had enough leverage as it stood. Not that she ever thought Oliver could be anything other than the levergee. Leveragist?

He couldn’t be used – at least not easily – was her point.

A guard guided them through four more doors and into a private room that looked like it was primarily used for lawyers to meet with their clients without prying ears listening in to the conversations. There were windows up high, with bars blocking them, and three exits. One led to the hall. She didn’t know where the other two went. A table was in the center of the room and four chairs were pushed underneath them. The whole thing looked so sterile and polite. She knew the conversation would be anything but civil.

The guard closed the door behind them without speaking and Oliver went to the table and held a chair out for her. She sat gratefully, her legs feeling like jelly, and he settled in next to her.

“Remember my conditions,” he said.

“I will,” she said.

Under the table, he gave her thigh a quick squeeze, another reminder that she was not alone. Her return smile was tremulous at best, and she swallowed thickly to keep the nausea at bay.

Five minutes later the man who had taken her entire life and rattled it around like a Magic 8 Ball was sitting in front of her. His eyes remained glued to hers from the moment he stepped through the door directly across from them. She let her rage radiate out as the stared back. She trembled with it, but she held her ground.

“Felicity Smoak. Thought I might be seeing you,” Kord said, his tone urbane and measured.

“How’s prison?” Felicity asked. “Enjoying the food?”

“I won’t be here much longer,” Kord said confidently.

“They have enough on you to sink a country,” Felicity said.

“I have friends,” Kord said. “They usually get what they want.”

“Like devices that don’t belong to them?” Felicity asked.

“Or if a bug is annoying and they want to squash it, they usually do,” he said.

The table rattled as Oliver slammed his fist down. It was enough to bring Kord’s attention to him for the first time. Kord instantly lost a bit of his gloating light. He was cautious suddenly, aware that he may not be the biggest predator in the room.

Oliver allowed the ringing metal of the table to sing out for a long beat. The tension circled the room and Kord’s eyes flickered over to the door nervously.

“There are a few things that we need to get straight at the front of this conversation we’re going to have,” Oliver said, his gaze fixed and unwavering. “The first is that the guards you’ve been bribing
no longer work here. Layoffs, you understand. Troubled economy and all that. The second is that I am not here to verbally spar with you. You will tell me what I want to know or I will take it out of you in blood and bone.”

“The third?” Kord asked, sensing more.

“If you threaten Miss Smoak even one more time, I will kill you at the end of this conversation. Your good manners are literally the only things holding me back.”

Looking sufficiently rattled, Kord looked at Felicity again. “I had no idea that you ran with such a… dangerous crowd.”

He knew that Oliver was Bratva. How did he know? No one knew. Of course, Kord had his hands in a lot of criminal pies. It made sense that he had a few secrets tucked away in his head. They were secrets he could use to lessen his jail time. Maybe that’s what he meant. Maybe he was going to talk. That meant trouble for Oliver. Felicity felt her breath catch. Kord was still leveling threats, only he wasn’t aiming them at Felicity any longer.

“They run with me,” Felicity said tightly.

“Yeah. She’s definitely the scary one in this partnership,” Oliver agreed. He leaned forward slightly and Kord jerked as if Oliver had hit him. “The Consortium.”

Kord’s eyes darted to the door again. He looked caged in, though he was trying to appear unaffected. Sweat had gathered at his temples. The good thing about his fear of Oliver was that he didn’t try to deny the organization’s existence.

“I can’t,” Kord said. “They’ll kill me.”

Oliver smiled, showing teeth. The lion was back at the hunt. It was all he needed to get Kord talking.

“There are things that are larger than me,” Kord added. “I’m nothing in the machine they have built. I’m not even a cog or a wheel. I know my place in their hierarchy. They will come for me, and the only thing I have going for me is my silence. When I’m safe, then we can talk.”

Oliver gently tugged on Felicity’s chair to get her to stand. She did, feeling confused. Were they leaving so soon? Oliver walked her over to the corner and looked down at her dress. “It really is a pretty dress. I don’t want to ruin it.”

She was entirely confused. The confusion left her a second later when Oliver marched back over to the table, knocked it out of the way, and bodily pushed Kord against the wall, his forearm against his throat. Kord grasped at the arm, his toes just barely tapping against the ground, and fought to free himself. He might as well have been kicking at a wave for all the good it did him.

“The Consortium. Who are they?! What do they want?! Why are they after Miss Smoak?”

Kord made a strangled noise. Felicity didn’t know if he was trying to speak or not. Oliver took it as another attempt to deflect. He tossed Kord onto the ground and immediately stalked over to him. He hit him in the sternum once. Felicity didn’t even flinch. Something in her gut reared up and the only thought in her mind was: good. Oliver hit Kord again, this time in the stomach.

“If you’re wondering why no one is rushing to your aid, it’s because the men who work for me did not get laid off. It’s a wonder of the business world. A miracle, if you will. I could quite literally beat you to death and no one come to you until the coroner was sent for. I suggest you start talking.”
Kord tried to scramble for the door, not done fighting. Oliver grabbed his leg and jerked him back to the middle of the room with a firm tug. He punched Kord in the nose, blood spurting. Felicity understood why Oliver was so concerned about her dress. Blood was messy. Kord screamed, clutched at his face, and tears tracked down from his eyes. She had seen pictures of some of his victims. She didn’t know if he deserved to be beaten to death, but she was really glad that Oliver was affording Kord some measure of pain. For them. For everyone who had suffered his brutality.

Kord’s eyes landed on hers. “Help me,” he begged.

“Help yourself,” Felicity said, trying to keep her voice even and serene. “Tell Oliver what he wants to know.”

More tears leaked down Kord’s face. “I don’t know that much. I know that they are a private interest group who deal in profit. They don’t particularly care how they get it. Some of their enterprises are legitimate. Some are not. They have their hooks in most companies, governments, and police forces around the world. They are ghosts. I know of five, though I’ve never seen their faces. There was talk of another one – someone known by the name Circe. It is said that Circe is the mind behind the machine, but if that’s true, no one who has seen her has ever lived to speak of it.”

“Greek legend. You people sure do love your drama,” Felicity said.

“Why are they after Felicity?” Oliver demanded.

“Because they’re afraid of her,” Kord replied. “At first they just wanted her battery. I don’t know why. That’s why they sent Kane and Z to find it. When Felicity escaped what was supposed to be a home invasion gone wrong, it was fine. When Felicity managed to air my very secret business to the world and collapse my company in a day, they were concerned. They don’t know what she found or what she saw in my records. They don’t really take kindly to people poking around. And they especially don’t take kindly to people knowing that they exist. Even the words The Consortium on your lips is a death sentence. I hope they take their time.”

Oliver punched Kord again, more blood spurting, and then took a step back. His muscles were rolling and rioting, a reflection of the storm brewing in his eyes. Felicity stepped forward, her hand raised cautiously, to warn him of her intention before it landed on his bicep.

“Oliver,” she said, in what she hoped was a grounding tone.

He turned to her immediately and seemed to check her for injuries, which was weird considering that all she had done was stand in a corner and watch him beat the crap out of a guy.

“We should go.”

Of course that was when all hell broke loose.

Alarms started blaring, the sickly green turning to bright and willful red, and running feet passed by the door. Shouting was followed by metal clanking and the rough sound of bone and flesh meeting. Oliver tensed, his head cocked to the side as he listened to the sounds outside the door. He reached out and took Felicity’s hand. She held him back, her lips parting in surprise as the door opened and inmates from what looked like the psych ward started piling inside. There were too many of them to face at once.

Oliver kicked away a man who tried to grab him and pulled Felicity over to the only door that had not been opened during her stay in the room. She stopped Oliver with a tug.

“Kord! We can’t just leave him!”
Kord’s screams filled up the room. Blood was spurting and Felicity knew they had to do something, and soon.

“He’s already dead,” Oliver told her gruffly, punching a different man in the throat. He slammed the door behind them and bolted it shut with a heavy bar. “And if we had tried to rescue him, we’d be dead too.”

“How do you just shut it out?” Felicity asked, tears starting to fall.

“What?”

“Caring?”

“I prioritize,” he said tightly.

“And at what point will I... will innocent people... be at the bottom of that list?” she asked.

He turned to look at her and she saw so much. There was truth, and raw emotion, and honesty she could not deny. “Never,” he replied. “I would rather die first.”

She was startled, but she did not doubt him. She nodded slowly, still feeling the weight of leaving a man behind to die, and refocused on what was in front of them.

The hall they had stepped out to was narrow and was flickering with the red emergency lights. Large metal doors were every five feet. They were a pale grey and had locks the size of her hand in the middle.

“Where are we?” Felicity asked.

“Prison,” Oliver said.

“Ha. Ha.”

“I think we should probably not linger here,” Oliver said, sounding a little worried.

“I think I like the plan that involves not hanging out in the creepily silent murder hall,” Felicity replied.

Oliver nodded and pulled her along without caring that she was wearing three inch heels and a swishy dress she wished would stop swishing now that she needed to run somewhere. She did her best to keep up, and he did his best to slow down for her. At the end of the hall was another heavy door. It was unlocked. Oliver pushed through it and ran down another long corridor of creepy, silent cells.

Finally, they came to a door that looked like it went somewhere that had an exit. She liked the idea of exits very much. Oliver tested it. It was locked. Of course.

That was when the locks on the creepy murder cells disengaged all at once.

“Ruh-roh,” Felicity said.

Oliver pushed Felicity behind him, pinning her against the door, his body preparing for violence. For the first time, she was really happy about that. He kept his position in front of her, his knees bent and his arms held loosely at his side. He was waiting, prepared to move however he needed to in order to survive.
Slowly, the people inside the cells started trickling out into the hall. The majority immediately got into brawls, all sense and reason missing from their eyes. They liked the violence; they enjoyed the chaos. They were locked away in solitary confinement for those very reasons. And now they were in a hall with Felicity – and Oliver was the only thing standing between her and them. It didn’t take them long to get noticed.

The first of the prisoners reached Oliver. He spun the man, knocking him against the hard wall without shifting his position from in front of Felicity. A second came, and a third. Oliver met both of them with grace, fluid speed, and determination. The prisoners started coming at them faster. Oliver had to move away from her. There was no choice. He kicked, punched, kneed, elbowed, and went full-out rage monster on the men in the hall. Blood was everywhere. It was on him, on the men, on the walls. He kept moving, kept going, staying as close to her as he could.

It wasn’t enough. One of the men reached her, her arm curving around her neck and his body pressing against her back.

“I’m going to have fun killing you. I bet your arms taste just like chicken,” he whispered against the shell of her ear.

Great. She had to get the cannibal crazy guy. Just her luck.

She kicked back blindly, her heel landing on his shin, and he loosened his grip. She stepped out of his hold and kicked him in the shin again. He yowled in pain, recovered, and then reached out for her once more. Oliver pulled her out of range with a sharp tug and stepped forward. He kicked off the wall and used the momentum to make the punch he had aimed at the man’s face twice as powerful. The man went down. He didn’t get back up.

Oliver spun, to face a new wave of prisoners, just as the door behind Felicity buzzed. She flinched, expecting more danger, and actually let out a tiny cry of relief when she saw Dig. He fired his pistol twice, putting down two prisoners who had been in the process of reaching out to Oliver, and gestured for them to follow him.

Felicity didn’t need to be told twice.

The three of them ran out of the prison together. A guard who was clearly on Oliver’s payroll met them in the hall and escorted them out through a side door. Oliver nodded at him appreciatively, and then helped Felicity into the car.

She was shaking so hard that her teeth were chattering. Oliver slid in on the other side of the car, still calm, still collected. He took one look at her and pulled her into his arms. Her shaking rattled his body, but he didn’t loosen his grip. Dig turned the car around and directed them towards home.

The silence stretched out.

“I’m sorry,” Felicity said.

“For what?” Oliver asked, gently pushing away some of her hair from her face.

“For saying you don’t care. You clearly do. You always will.”

“You were right. I’m a monster,” Oliver said.

“You are not!” Felicity said, looking up at him in shock. “You’re a man. A good one. One I believe is capable of so many great things, one who has done so many great things. You are not a monster. You never have been.”
“How easily you exonerate me without knowing my past,” he replied quietly.

“I don’t need to know it to see what’s in front of me,” she said.

“If you knew even half-”

“I saw a man who was willing to fight to the death to keep me safe - who did what he had to do to get out of there alive. I saw a survivor, and I owe you my life several times over now.”

She leaned up and kissed him on the cheek.

“Thank you.”

She was still shaking, but their conversation had reduced the panic. She kept her body pressed against his and leaned her head against his chest. The images of the men attacking her were disturbing, but not nearly as bad as hearing Kord’s screams as he was torn to pieces.

Ten police cars passed the car, headed toward the prison and the riot that was raging within its halls. The sound brought Felicity out of her stupor.

“I’d like to go to QC now please,” she told Oliver.

“That’s not a good idea,” he said.

“I need the computers there to run the searches I would like to run on The Consortium. I have a name now. I intend on doing what I can with it.”

“I think Kane is our best lead. Kord said that she was actually sent from The Consortium. She might know something Kord didn’t.”

“I still need to track Circe. I need all the speed and power I can get for the kinds of searches I intend on running on her. QC has what I need.”

“Felicity…”

“Oliver,” she replied sternly.

“Felicity.”

“Diggle!” Dig interjected from the front seat. “We need to swing by the house and pick up a change of clothes for Oliver. Then we can head to the office.”

Felicity smiled smugly, knowing that Oliver wouldn’t argue with Dig. Oliver frowned, but he didn’t reply. Instead, he held her closer, as though her presence was the only thing keeping him from flying off in a thousand different directions.

They only stopped holding each other when Dig pulled up to the house and they had to get out. Felicity’s teeth had stop chattering, and though Oliver still looked haunted, he no longer had an expression of complete dejection and self-loathing on his face. They were both recovering, and they had the other to thank for it.
The Downsides Of Fighting With Swords

Chapter Summary

Things are ramping up. Felicity gets some great ideas. Iris has a better one. And we discover exactly what went down with the snake charmer.

She had changed, showered, reapplied her makeup, and breathed heavily into a brown paper bag. She was golden. She was perfect. Except for the fact that every time she closed her eyes she either heard Kord screaming in agony or saw men with death in their eyes crowding Oliver in the tiny hallway she had discovered was called a kill box.

Oh, the things you learn when your life is under constant threat.

Leaving to go to QC was not as easy as she wished it. Dig and Oliver had called to let the people in the know about their work know about their visit with Kord. Everyone seemed to arrive at the house at once. They gathered in the living room, talking, worrying, and otherwise bringing life back to the house. Yesterday she wanted it. Today she wanted the silence. She wanted to be able to freak out on her own without having to keep up a brave face. But she would do it, because she liked everyone in the room and they deserved to know what happened.

She hovered near the kitchen as Oliver filled them in. They listened in silence.

“I’m so glad you’re okay,” Thea said.

Oliver smiled at her, but it was not as warm as his standard smiles. It was weighted, worried, and fleeting.

“It wasn’t an accident that there was a total system failure at the same time you were there,” Lyla said. “We have to look at it like this was another attempt on Felicity’s life.”

“She is right. Kord may have been hoping to draw out Felicity with his call, expecting his guards to do the job, and someone used that as an opportunity to kill Kord and attempt to kill Felicity,” Nyssa said.


“Likely,” Oliver said. “Though we don’t know for certain.”

“Yeah. Lots of people would love to kill you, Ollie,” Sara said.

“That’s true,” Thea agreed sagely.

“I feel like killing you every other day,” Dig added.

Oliver narrowed his eyes but didn’t rise to the teasing.

“We must follow the leads we have. Everything else is speculation. I will speak with the attorney and see if Kord was put up to drawing Felicity out for a hit from The Consortium,” Nyssa said, rising from her seat.
“I’ll come with you,” Oliver said. “A minute.”

Nyssa hesitated, then acquiesced with a bowed head. She sat back down and patiently waited for Oliver to finish.

“We’ve been cautious. I understand that this was felt to be the best course of action by a great many of you. I respect your caution. However, I am done. Today has taught me that I need to unleash the full power of our Bratva. I’m declaring Felicity Smoak family. Make it known. Overturn every rock, go to every length. I want the city to think fear when they think about hurting her. The cost is the same if any of you are hurt.”

The room was thick with stunned silence.

“That doesn’t include killing anyone, does it? Felicity asked nervously, breaking the silence of the room. Everyone turned to look at her, but she only had eyes for him. She appreciated what he was doing, but she didn’t want anyone to get hurt for it.

“Your way,” Oliver said softly. He looked at the others. “You heard her. Let’s get this done. I’m tired of tiptoeing around Malcolm and The Consortium. They wanted my attention…Well, they have it.”

He marched out of the room, Nyssa following him, and the others looked at each other solemnly. They felt the weight of what Oliver was doing. It was war. Felicity didn’t want it, but she didn’t know how to stop him. He had already declared it. If she knew anything about him it was that he had wheels in motion the others didn’t know about. He had contacts that were already doing things to find him answers. She just hoped he wouldn’t lie to her and put a bloodbath in the street simply because he was getting frustrated with the attacks and the lack of answers.

“I’ll reach out to Tommy,” Thea said. “He’ll want to know.”

She pulled out her phone and walked upstairs to chat with her other brother.

“I’ll see if any of my contacts at ARGUS can give me anything,” Lyla said, bouncing the baby on her hip as she stood.

“Yeah,” Dig agreed. He was already pulling out his phone. He followed Lyla to the dining room.

“Who are they all telling this to?” Felicity asked. “Me?”

Sara smiled from her place on the sofa and shifted her arm awkwardly. “Didn’t you hear? You’re family now.”

“That was not a discussion I had with anyone,” Felicity groused.

“But it’s a choice you’re not going to argue with, right?”

Felicity shrugged. She blinked and men with crazed eyes were rushing the room. She blinked again and everything was normal. It was going to take her a little while to get over that, but she knew she would. She felt safer already.

“Hey…” Sara said softly. “How you holding up?”

“I’m great. Never been better. Dandy.”

“Felicity,” Sara added. “You don’t have to do that with me. It’s okay.”
Tears welled in Felicity’s eyes. She wrapped her arms around Sara and hugged her tightly. Sara was surprised and a little stiff, but she patted Felicity’s back awkwardly with her good hand. Felicity didn’t cry, but she did let out some of her demons through the touch. She felt like Sara of all people could shoulder them.

Felicity wiped away the tear that had escaped and pulled away. “How much did you help Thea with the clothes thing? If you say a lot there will be pain.”

“I tried to talk her out of it,” Sara said. “But she really likes you. I think she’s not used to people being so…bright. She’s that way when the rest of us…aren’t. She’s better than all of us, really, and I think she wants to believe that she doesn’t have to lose her spark just because some things have happened to her. You’re proof that maybe she doesn’t have to after all.”

Felicity didn’t agree, but she couldn’t see the point in arguing. “Thanks,” she said.

Sara nodded and left Felicity to ponder the big questions like: how was she going to get back to QC if they wouldn’t let her leave the house on her own? Why were pandas so cute? What would happen if she did find The Consortium? Was there a viable solution in there that didn’t include a lot of people dying? Was she going to take a job at QC? Why were mushrooms so disgusting?

She could only answer a few of these questions without tangenting and going on a rage spiral.

She decided to go with the QC question first. It seemed to be the most pressing. She had to quit hanging out on the fence and either pick QC or find another way to pay the mortgage on a townhouse that no longer existed. Kord Enterprises was failing. The news kept reporting on how investors were pulling out and factories were being shut down all over the world. The company was in a freefall. She definitely couldn’t stay there.

An idea occurred to her that had her skin tingling with excitement. She went to the kitchen and sat down. She took a second to collect her thoughts, then she started planning, looking through every last bit of data she could find, culling it via a program she had written ages ago. And then she sent the entire thing to Oliver’s email, knowing he would probably look at it later that night. That was perfect. It gave her time to get her thoughts in order and plan her pitch.

That just left one thing. She needed to start her search for the elusive Circe and do all the things Oliver planned on doing, except she was going to do it online. There were far more stones to overturn there than in a city the size of Starling. Oliver was thinking small. The Consortium was large. She had to figure out a way to either draw them out or put them in a corner large enough to make them stop chasing her.

Was that good enough? Could she just get them to back off and that be it? Or was it her responsibility to stop them for good? She had the talent to track them down and possibly stop them. Could she leave it to someone else?

Everything within her said no.

At least that was one easy answer.

Her phone rang and she picked up only when she saw Iris’s face.

“So…there was a riot at the prison,” Iris said. “A source I talked to said that it was started by guard error and that it happened at the same time a blonde woman was visiting Kord. There was also a very mysterious problem with the visitor’s log. Would you happen to know anything about that?”

“No. Of course not. That’s preposterous. Silly even!” Felicity said. “There was a riot?! Weird.”
“You’re so subtle,” Iris retorted. She sighed. “I get that you don’t want to involve me in this thing. I appreciate that it’s coming from a place of love. But this is serious. Kord is dead and you almost died. This makes three attempts?”

“Four,” Felicity said.

Iris nearly groaned. “You break this story, whatever it is, and it brings the situation to light. They won’t have a reason to kill you if their name is being spoken by every media outlet in the world. The secret is what they are trying to keep...Once it’s out,” Iris said.

“I could be arrested. Oliver could be arrested for helping me,” Felicity said.

“We can find a way to keep both of your names out of it,” Iris said. “I’ll protect you.”

“I have to think about it,” Felicity said. “And I don’t know if it’s as simple as a story. Right now I have several things I absolutely need to do before I can decide.”

“I understand,” Iris said. “But you should know...I’m not going to stop looking.”

“I love that about you,” Felicity said.

“I’ll need an answer soon,” Iris replied.

“I’ll try to have one for you soon,” Felicity said.

“I love you,” Iris said.

“I love you, too,” Felicity returned.

They hung up and Felicity held her phone to her heart, wishing she had a way of knowing the right thing to do. Was Iris right? Was exposing The Consortium the right way to go about things? Would that help? Was it naïve to think that one article could potentially tear them down? Her eyes brightened. What if said article came with a lot of proof of their misdeeds? It would have to be irrefutable proof, with names, locations, and dates. But Iris had given her a path she hadn’t considered yet. It was on her to find what she could, and allow Iris and the paper do the rest. That could certainly work.

Finding anything on The Consortium was proving difficult, though. They really were that good at covering their tracks. She just needed a loose thread, a single bit of yarn, and she would tug with all her might.

As she thought about the whirlwind of suck she needed to manage, her phone lit up again. It was Detective Lance. She had ignored his voicemail and one further call. He was persistent and seemed fixated on having a chat with her. If she was going to do what she thought she was going to do, then she needed to settle the affairs at her house.

“Hello?” she asked.

“Miss Smoak?” Detective Lance returned.

“Speaking.”

“This is Detective Lance. I’m calling about your house.”

“What about it?” she asked.
There was a startled pause.

“I’m sorry to tell you this, but your house has been involved in a fire. It’s completely destroyed.”

“Oh my god! Seriously?!”

She was not a great actor. She could feel herself threatening to go into babble mode to cover.

“Was anyone hurt? Are my neighbors okay?” she asked breathlessly.

“Your neighbors were fine, but there were bodies recovered.”

“From the fire?”

“From your lawn. As much as we can determine, the men started the fire and were killed for their trouble.”

“That’s awful!” she exclaimed.

“You can see why I have some questions.”

“Yes, of course,” she replied. “I have questions, too.”

“May I ask why it has taken this long to get ahold of you?” he asked.

“After the whole, ‘My boss is evil and the company I work for is falling apart,’ fiasco, I decided to take a vacation. I’ve been in the country with limited reception and internet. Chance to unplug.”

She cringed even as she said it. Anyone who knew her knew she never really unplugged. There were always things to hack into that made any travel experience far more convenient. Lance didn’t know that, though.

“I need you to come back immediately,” he said.

“Of course. Anything I can do to help,” she said.

“Thank you.”

They arranged to meet the following day, said their goodbyes, and Felicity hung up feeling nervous and a little wired. She pressed a button on her tablet and brought up the cameras from the prison. She deleted all the footage, knowing it would look suspicious but unable to think of a better solution. She didn’t need Lance to see the recording and know she was lying. She then went through and made sure that her alibi was airtight. Her work was better than magic. It was perfection.

When Dig found her in the kitchen, she had erased one potential problem from her life, talked to her mortgage and insurance people, and called Curtis and Caitlyn, to let them know her fake story of a vacation and to allow them a chance to spend a little time worrying over where to find work next. If she had it her way, they would be celebrating in the next few days.

She was feeling incredibly productive and proud of her time management skills.

“You okay?” Dig asked.

“I’ve never been in a prison riot before. Guess I can mark that one off the bucket list,” she said with an awkward laugh, hoping to divert.
“Mmm,” he agreed, staring at her with his kind eyes and analytical knowingness that made her feel like he knew everything all at once.

“I’m focusing,” she said. “And I would appreciate it if we could leave it at that.”

He nodded and looked at his phone. “Still want to go to QC?” he asked.

“Definitely,” she replied. “Although I need to sneak in, and then delete all footage of me being there yesterday. Long story.”

“I can sneak you in. The rest is on you,” he replied.

She smiled at him and gathered all her things, feeling grateful Thea had gotten her a massive purse as well to stuff the profound amount of crap she suddenly needed to carry – even if she wouldn’t admit it out loud – and followed him to the car.

It felt different riding in it without Oliver, less safe, but the ride was far from eventful. She spent the time solidifying her pitch to Oliver and scrolling through camera feeds surrounding Malcolm Merlyn’s house. She didn’t see anything shady, but she wanted to find Oliver something, anything.

Dig took her to the server room via a freighter elevator most people didn’t even know existed. No one looked twice at Dig, and consequently her, and she was left alone once she was entrenched in front of a bank of computers that took up one wall.

She wasn’t left to her work for long. Forty minutes after she started to cull through every lead she could think of, her phone rang. Oliver. She picked up absently and tucked the phone between her shoulder and ear as she allowed her fingers to flow across the keyboard.

He didn’t speak right away. She finally turned away from the computers.

“Oliver?”

He panted heavily for a second longer. “Track me.”

She pulled up his GPS without questioning him, fear uncoiling and spreading tendrils into her stomach and heart. A dot appeared on her screen, bright and reassuring. Nyssa wasn’t with him. Nyssa’s tracker wasn’t working. Either it had been turned off or…something had happened to it. Dig had stood up at the fear in her tone. He put his phone to his ear as they locked eyes.

“Oliver…what’s wrong?” Felicity asked.

“Hurt…” he rasped.

“Dig’s on his way,” Felicity said.

“No…” Oliver replied.

“Stay on the phone with me,” Felicity said. “Go!” she yelled at Dig.

Dig hesitated. “I can’t-”

She put the phone against her chest to keep Oliver from hearing her. “I’m not going anywhere. He needs your help! Go!” she added in her loud voice.

Dig looked conflicted, but the urge to save his friend was strong. He couldn’t ignore it. He nodded at her and ran out, his expression deadly serious. She put the phone back to her ear. Oliver’s heavy
pants filled her ear. He was in pain. She felt helpless, terrified he was injured to the point that Dig wouldn’t be able to save him, and desperate to do something.

“Oliver,” she said softly.

“Here,” he grunted back.

“Help’s coming. Just stay with me.”

“Talk…to…me,” he said.

She could do that. She figured he didn’t want to think about the drama that had been circling them, so she decided to go with personal information. She felt like she owed him an explanation.

“You’re right, you know,” she said. “I have created things that have hurt people before. In college I created a super virus that my boyfriend used to hurt people. He used it on the wrong people and, well, they did not react well to it. He died and I destroyed the virus. I’m absolutely terrified that it’s still out there somewhere and will one day hurt someone else. In high school I got wrapped up in a mob war because of my neighbor. I tried to help him get out of the life with an invention of mine. It got out of hand, spiraled, and, suddenly, there was a full on war that got a lot of people killed. After college, I focused my attention on creating things to help the world. One of those things is now used in anti-aircraft weapons...It kills people. I should have known it wouldn’t be used for what I designed it for. And that’s just one thing I know of. The others are classified. Everything I make gets twisted to hurt. I don’t know why I bother.”

She hadn’t meant to get so serious on him, but she was worried, and freaking out, and all of her thoughts were fixated on darkness as she listened to his shallow breaths.

“That’s why I’ve held back. I see the good in you, Oliver, in what you’re trying to do, but I’ve spent so long making the wrong choice for the right reason that I don’t know how to find a new way. I just want to help people, to make a difference. I don’t need a legacy - I need to leave hope.”

She sighed.

“And now my situation has gotten you hurt. Please don’t die, Oliver.”

“I’ll...try,” he replied.

She wiped away the tears that had dripped down her cheeks with quick movements and tried to push the darkness out. This wasn’t about her. It was about him. She needed to distract him.

“I also once ate a cupcake off the floor,” Felicity said, wiping away the rest of the tears. “You can’t tell anyone.”

He huffed a weak laugh.

“It was a really good cupcake. I mean...sin level good. It was made by my neighbor. German chocolate with the most amazing frosting she made herself. I mentioned never having truly great sex before...well, that cupcake was better than all of the sex I’ve ever had combined. And I dropped it. I stumbled and I dropped it. It was there and then that I took a long look at my soul and realized I was exactly the kind of person who would eat a cupcake off the ground. So I did.”

He laughed weakly again and she smiled, the tears glistening in her eyes as they threatened to fall over once more.
Oliver didn’t reply. She didn’t mind. She pictured him at the prison. He had seemed so unstoppable – a force of nature that no man could win against. Hearing his breath stuttering on the other end of the line had her stomach twisting in knots. What kind of monster could do this to him? What darkness was spreading in her city? She sucked in a fortifying breath.

“I once accidentally tripped and sent a snake charmer to the E.R. Long story short, he got bit. I’ve never been more mortified in my life. The poor guy was in the hospital for three days. It’s not that I’m clumsy by nature, but there was a whole chain of wild events that led up to that trip. It included a moped, a fruit stand, an old lady, and a really aggressive squirrel.”

He grunted, to show that he was listening, and she took it as proof that he wanted her to continue. She did, her heart racing faster and dread growing thicker the longer she kept talking about whatever popped into her head. Her hands flew across the keyboard as she guided Dig to Oliver. It felt like ages before she heard Dig on the other end of the phone. The line cut off and tears slipped down her cheeks once more. With shaking hands, she slipped the phone onto the desk and braced herself against the edge. She stared at the mouse, not seeing anything other than Oliver’s face and envisioning him in a coffin, broken and lifeless.

Her computer dinged. She shook off the fear and got back to work. She looked at the search her computer had been running and froze. Just outside of the lawyer’s office was a camera that had been put in only the day previously and on the screen was Malcolm Merlyn walking with Nyssa. Nyssa was clearly not under duress or being held captive. She was walking of her own free will and seemed calm enough.

Had Nyssa betrayed them? Why was she with Malcolm Merlyn and not trying to kill him?

Nyssa looked over her shoulder, her concern betraying her as she looked in what she thought was Oliver’s direction. She may be walking with Malcolm but she knew she was leaving Oliver to die. That was weird.

Felicity tried to follow their path, but they were really good at avoiding the cameras. They were ghosts in a matter of minutes.

She stared at the screen. She didn’t understand it. Nyssa was devoted to Sara. She had seemed loyal to Oliver and the family. Why would she go with Malcolm? What was she doing?

She considered every possibility. The only one that seemed to matter was that she had left Oliver to bleed out. She had abandoned him when he had needed her most.

Three very long minutes later, her phone rang.

“He’s okay,” Dig said. “Lost a lot of blood, but he’s okay.”

“Thank god,” she breathed.

“I’m coming to get you. Stay there until I do,” he added.

“I’m fine here. Take care of him,” she said.

“I’m not leaving you alone right now. Either he comes to you or you come to him,” Dig said.

“Okay,” she replied. “But we have a problem…”

“What?” Dig asked.
“I just saw Nyssa…with Malcolm Merlyn.”
Oliver was asleep on the gurney in the basement when she finally arrived at the house. She felt like it had been a lifetime between the last time she had seen him and now. She itched to hug him. Instead, she put her hand on his forearm, where a blood bag was expertly pumping all the blood he had lost, and looked at him, etching the details into her mind. He had bruises all down his torso and a deep cut on his abdomen. It was narrow and looked like it might have been from a sword. What kind of people carried around swords?

“Malcolm did this?” Felicity asked Dig.

“As far as I can tell. There’s something else…” Dig said.

She looked at him, sensing she wouldn’t like whatever he had to say.

“Kord’s lawyer was dead. Throat slit. It was pretty gruesome. And the man you described who was with Kane. He was dead, too. I don’t know what happened, but I know it wasn’t Oliver.”

“You think Malcolm did it?” she asked.

“I have no idea. We’ll have to ask Oliver when he wakes up.”

“He will wake up, right?” she asked.

“Absolutely,” Dig said.

“Malcolm really wants him dead,” Felicity replied. “You don’t think he’s holding a grudge over the whole Oliver killing him thing, do you?”

Dig smirked and rolled his eyes. “Maybe.”

“What do we tell Sara?” she asked.

“I think we should wait for Oliver,” Dig said. “He’ll want to be the one.”

“It could be anything,” Felicity said.

“Yeah,” Dig agreed. “That’s what worries me.”

Oliver blinked one eye open, followed quickly by the other. He stared at the ceiling for a second, gathering his senses and figuring out where he was, and then turned his head to look at Felicity. She smiled at him.

“What kind of snake was it?” Oliver asked groggily.

“What?” Felicity asked.
“The snake charmer. What kind of snake was it that bit him?”

She laughed and squeezed the arm she had been holding tighter. “How are you feeling?”

“Sore,” he grunted out.

She rolled her eyes and caught him as he sat up.

“Should you be-?”

He stood, swaying a little, but maintaining his balance with impressive strength. He turned to Dig and frowned seriously. “The lawyer and the Italian were dead when we got there. Had been for hours…my guess is that it happened not long after the riot. Someone is cleaning up their tracks.”

“It wasn’t Merlyn?” Dig asked.

“Definitely not. He tracked us there. Ambushed us. We got into a fight. He won.”

“Next time you kill him, aim for the head,” Dig said.

Oliver grunted and winced as he touched the cut on his side that had been stitched together. It oozed a little. Felicity scrunched her nose up in disgust. Oozing was bad; even the word was awful. Dig retrieved a bandage and applied it for Oliver.

“Nyssa?” Dig asked cautiously as he placed the last of the tape on Oliver’s side.

“She and Malcolm crashed through a window fighting. I stumbled out a minute later. I don’t know what happened between them.”

“Shouldn’t you be sitting?” Felicity asked as Oliver winced again.

His eyes searched the room. She saw what he saw. The basement was cold and practical. It was not built for comfort. He didn’t want to be there anymore than she wanted him to be there. She tugged on his hand once and gestured toward the stairs with her head.

“We can freak out upstairs. C’mon,” she added.

They only started talking again when Oliver was safely cushioned by the fluffiest pillows and a warm blanket draped across his knees. Felicity hovered near him for a second as she tried to think of anything else she could get him, but he shot her a look of such reassurance and calm that she finally decided to sit on the chair near the fireplace. She hated being so far from him after nearly losing him, and she didn’t really want to look into her reasoning for that. She was just going with the truth that she had spent ten minutes listening to him slowly bleed out and not the growing fluttery feeling in her chest whenever his eyes connected with hers. It was less complicated.

The door slammed open and Dig was off the sofa with his pistol in hand a second later. He pointed it at the intruders, only to lower it with a pissed off glare at Sara, Thea, Roy, and Tommy. Sara charged ahead, passion and anger in her expression, the sling not looking like the handicap it had the last time Felicity had seen her.

“Nyssa did this? She betrayed us?!” Sara asked.

“How did you-?” Oliver tried to ask.

“Dig was being coy on the phone. I can put two and two together,” Sara said. “Has she betrayed us?”
“We don’t know,” Oliver said calmly. “I know as much as you do at this point.”

“Nyssa wouldn’t do this. She wouldn’t betray us,” Thea spoke up. “Something else is going on. It has to be.”

“So…we’re not talking about the fact that Tommy clearly knows about Sara and Laurel doesn’t?” Felicity asked, pointing at Tommy in confusion, her eyebrows lifted questioningly.

“Nyssa hates Merlyn,” Thea added, her heart in her eyes. “More than she hates Kane. And that is saying something.”

“No, on the talking part then,” Felicity said.

“Her actions speak pretty loudly,” Dig said to Thea. “She left Oliver to die.”

“I’m going to kill her,” Sara said.

“Sara,” Oliver chastised.

“Are you okay?” Tommy asked, finally stepped forward and looking at the bruises forming along Oliver’s body and the bandage that was hiding all the bleeding he had previously been doing.

“Yeah,” Oliver said seriously.

“Malcolm did this to you?” Tommy asked quietly.

“I got a couple hits on him,” Oliver said.

“Are you counting the bruising on his knuckles as hits?” Tommy asked.

“I hate him,” Thea said, crossing her arms and pacing angrily. “I really hate him.”

“I have searches running,” Felicity tried to reassure Thea.

“And I have people on the streets looking,” Oliver said.

“We need to be out there!” Thea said.

Roy stepped forward and put his hand on Thea’s shoulder. She stopped pacing and took a deep breath. His touch seemed to ease some of her anger.

“I’m going back to Malcolm’s apartment. I’m gonna toss it. See if he’s hiding anything,” Thea added.

“Thea…” Oliver tried to start.

“I have my cell if you need to call me,” Thea added. She stormed out again, Tommy trying to catch her, but she was too quick and too graceful. She dodged him neatly and was gone.

“I’ll look after her,” Roy said, marching out after her.

“Does anyone else think the man who took an axe to the chest shouldn’t be looking after anyone?” Felicity asked.

“He’s tougher than he looks,” Oliver reassured her.

“She’s going to get herself killed!” Tommy said, pacing back over to them.
“I have three people watching the apartment,” Oliver said.

“Malcolm almost killed you. Do you think three men will be enough?” Tommy asked. “I’ve seen you fight!”

“I can’t exactly go after her,” Oliver said, jaw clenched.

Tommy threw his hands up into the air and took up Thea’s pacing. Oliver watched him with hooded eyes, but he didn’t say anything else. He seemed to turn inwards, lost in a memory that had all the light and all the goodness fading from his eyes.

Sara swayed a little from where she had stopped to demand an explanation. She also seemed lost, like her entire world had been shattered. Felicity sensed her planning something. Before anyone could say anything else, a shadow appeared behind Tommy and Dig raised his pistol again. Nyssa appeared around the spotlights of darkness, her hands raised. Everyone tensed, and Sara whipped around so quickly that Felicity winced as a sympathy phantom whiplash pang washed through her.

Nyssa only had eyes for Sara.

“Where have you been?” Sara growled.

“I was trying to track Malcolm,” Nyssa, shaking her head when Sara started to protest. Sara narrowed her eyes, but she held her tongue. Everyone else just stared at Nyssa in shock.

Did Nyssa not realize that Felicity had found footage of her? What were they supposed to do? Let her lie to them? Should Felicity say something? Nyssa reached down and fiddled with a button on her coat nervously. She took a step closer to Sara.

“Beloved, are you well? You should be resting,” Nyssa added.

Sara lost all surprise at Nyssa’s return and smiled demurely. “I was worried. When you didn’t return…”

“Did you find him?” Dig interrupted.

“Sadly, no,” Nyssa said. “I chased him to the warehouse district before I lost him.” Her eyes landed on Oliver. “I thought you were dead.”

“Is that why you left?” Oliver asked tightly.

“Yes,” she said. “I saw no point in lamenting. Revenge was on my mind.”

“I understand.” Oliver replied. “I think you should resume your search. I’ll have Felicity track him from where you last saw him and go from there.”

“He’s a ghost,” Felicity said. “He knows how to hide from cameras.”

“Finding him might not be the answer,” Tommy said, looking over at Oliver with a sudden idea. Oliver shook his head and Tommy stuck his hands in his pockets nervously. “I mean…shouldn’t we be figuring out what he wants instead?”

“We’ll do both,” Oliver said. “In the meantime, we need to understand why the Italian and Kord were killed.”

“Is that really a priority right now?” Tommy asked.
No one looked at Felicity, but, “yes,” came from several places around the room with the sort of fervor she had not expected in them. She felt her heart catch in her throat. It was…sweet.

Tommy held up his hands in defeat and then stuck them back into his pockets.

“I’ll come with you,” Sara told Nyssa.

“There is no need,” Nyssa said. “Someone should still be looking for Kane, and I trust only you.”

“If she’s still alive,” Sara said.

“She’s probably the one slitting throats,” Felicity said. “She seems to enjoy the creepiness.”

“Maybe,” Oliver agreed.

Silence fell over the room. Felicity didn’t know what was going on, but she didn’t want to be the cause of more trouble. She kept her eyes on Oliver and her gaze stoic. Despite almost dying, Oliver still looked every inch the leader. His magnetic charm had not faded. Where others would look weak and vulnerable, he looked like a survivor willing to do whatever he had to in order to protect the people he loved. It was strength and determination. She loved that there was such visible proof of his strength. It bolstered her own strength and told her that she could keep her fear that Nyssa had turned on them off her face.

Oliver looked at Dig. “Check in with our people. See what’s in the air. Sara…you really should be resting.”

“No,” she returned.

“Then I want you on Kane. If Nyssa thinks she can track Merlyn, then I believe her. We can’t lose Kane, though. She’s our only lead left. We have to get to her before The Consortium does.”

Sara fidgeted, and then glared at Oliver. She nodded and turned back to Nyssa. “Be careful.”

“You too, love,” Nyssa said, leaning forward just enough to press a soft kiss onto Sara’s lips. When they parted, Sara looked calmer and Nyssa looked determined.

“I will report when I have news,” Nyssa said.

Oliver bowed his head and Nyssa left the house. Felicity let out a relieved sigh and Tommy let out an explosive breath.

“What was that?” Tommy asked.

“Did you see it?” Sara asked Oliver.

Oliver nodded, and Sara held up a microchip. Felicity perked up a little at the sight, her hands already itching to see what was on it. Sara caught Felicity’s eyes. She hesitated only briefly before she tossed the chip to Felicity.

“What’s this?” Felicity asked.

“Nyssa gave it to me,” Sara said. “She’s decided to get close to Merlyn to kill him…My guess is that he offered her a chance to play traitor and she took it,” Sara said.

“He sent her in here to do reconnaissance,” Oliver said. “That button cam was slick.”
“I am so confused,” Tommy said, looking between Sara and Oliver.

“Have you ever known Nyssa to fidget? She touched her bottom button to bring my attention to the fact that the top button was different - it was a camera. Then she passed the chip along. She also signaled that Merlyn had eyes and ears on the house, so…” Sara said.

“That is a whole lot of nonverbal communication for one conversation,” Tommy said.

“She could still be lying,” Felicity said.

“Maybe,” Oliver agreed, “but Nyssa knows what she’s doing. We’ll keep our minds open and our stance light. Now, if you don’t mind, I have some work to do and calls to make.”

Felicity pulled a laptop close to her at the command, hearing the others file out as she did.

“Are we seriously not going to talk about the fact that Tommy knows Sara is alive and hasn’t told her family?” Felicity asked dryly when everyone but Oliver was gone.

Oliver shrugged. “You didn’t think there was tension between us because of a lack of secrets, did you?”

“You guys are insane,” she said, poking her glasses back up her nose absently.

“Mmmm,” Oliver said. He pulled out his phone and dialed a number. He started speaking Russian, his eyes locked on hers. His tone was commanding and brisk. His eyes were soft, though. It was a really weird contradiction, and was, without a doubt, very sexy.

She shook off the strangeness and focused on the chip. It was full of pictures and the interior of what looked a converted warehouse. It also held a few documents pulled off Malcolm’s phone. Nyssa had done a little hacking. Felicity was impressed. She got the name of a company Malcolm apparently owned, a few names of allies of his, and an address.

“I’m going to kiss that scary assassin on the mouth,” Felicity said.

“Good news?” Oliver asked, hanging up the phone.

“A way to track Merlyn and maybe mess with him a little…And by mess with I mean potentially make him really angry.”

“Are you sure you should?” he asked. “It’s not your-”

“I’m sure,” she said firmly.

He stared down at the phone he was twisting restlessly between his fingers. He looked weighted and tired. He should be resting. Instead, he was consumed by the burdens of leadership.

“Where are you with Circe?” he asked.

“Greek legend. Scary. A few mentions of her in highly redacted files that tell me nothing, but the searches are still running.”

“If we could get a name or a even just a sliver of a hint…” Oliver said.

“What about your Bratva brethren? They ever hear of The Consortium?”

“They think it’s an urban legend,” he said, “but I’ve put some feelers out.”
“Feelers…” she said. “Makes you sound like a bug.”

He didn’t smile, he didn’t move, he didn’t even look up from his phone. Felicity pushed away the laptop and tentatively approached him. She knew he was afraid. She could see it so easily. She was amazed the others didn’t seem to. She sat next to him, her knees pressed against his thigh, and took his hand without thinking.

“We’re going to win,” she said.

“You sound so certain,” he said.

“Because I am. I’ve seen what we can do as individuals. And I know what we can do together. We’re going to do something meaningful, Oliver. We have the skill and the determination. We might still be in the process of becoming friends, but I feel like we’re already a team.”

Oliver sighed and she watched in fascination as his muscles released and he sank deeper into the couch. Her eyes drifted to the bandages. He had almost died. She knew that she had already accepted Oliver as a part of her new life, but she wasn’t sure she was prepared for a life where she might potentially have to listen to him die. She could handle the stress of everything else. She didn’t know if she could handle that.

“When I first saw you, I thought I could protect you. I promised I would, whether you accepted my help or not,” Oliver said. “Now I realize that you never needed protection.”

“No?” she asked.

“No,” he replied decisively. “You simply needed an outlet.”

She laughed nervously. “An outlet?”

“A place that could help you protect yourself. You’re better than me at it.”

“I don’t know…” she said. “Watching you protect me from crazy rioters was pretty comforting.”

“It wasn’t anything special.”

“Yes it was,” she said. “We’re weirdly complementary when you think about it. You do the punching, I do the hacking. We both scare people in our own special way.”

Oliver grinned and finally stopped fidgeting with his phone. “We should get back to it. There’s a lot to do.”

“You need to rest,” she said.

“I don’t want to be alone right now,” he said quietly, as though he had confessed to the murders she knew he had committed and not to a fear of being alone. “The demons are loud tonight.”

“Then I’ll rest with you,” she decided.

“You don’t have-”

“I’ll order food. You pick out a movie.”

“I don’t really watch movies.”

“What a perfect time to start! I’m thinking spaghetti, so…Italian?”
Oliver sighed. “Paulo’s,” he said.

“No. Uh-huh. Luigi’s or bust.”

“Luigi’s! Have you tasted their meatballs? I’ve gotten sand in my mouth that tasted better. Paulo’s.”

“You’re obtuse,” she said.

“You really want to talk about obtuse?” he asked. “I’m surprised you don’t have the word stamped onto your forehead.”

“If you’re picking the restaurant, I’m picking the movie.”

“Deal,” he said.

“Did you just…?” She narrowed her eyes suspiciously. “Are you manipulating me, Mr. Queen?”

“I have far too much respect for your intelligence, Miss Smoak, to even try. But if I were, I totally won.”

She huffed, grabbed the phone off the table, and held it out for him to order the food. He did with a stupid grin on his face, as she picked the sappiest romantic comedy she could find for them to watch and retrieved a bottle of wine and glasses from the kitchen. Their food arrived really quickly - perks of being Oliver Queen - and she started the movie with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

To her absolute disgust, he was unaffected by the choice. He sat relaxed and contented, his muscles still doing that gravity-defying thing they loved to do, his eyes only moving away from the screen to eat his food and drink the wine. She was far less engaged in the film. She watched the play of emotion on his face as he watched the movie, and stared at the injury on his side, and thanked everything within her that he was alive.

When the movie was over, he looked insanely tired and she felt nearly as weary. Her body ached and her head throbbed. She needed a night’s rest to attack the problems of a day more effectively. Information would have to wait.

“I’m beat,” Felicity said. “And you look like a zombie. Bed?”

He nodded sleepily, and she cleaned up the food and returned to find him staring off into space. He was lost in the past again. She could tell from the crinkle around his eyes and the weight in his frown.

When had she learned his crinkles? They were really nice crinkles, but still…

“Do you need help up the stairs?” she asked.

“I might need to lean on you a little,” he said quietly.

“Lean on me as much you want,” she returned.

His eyes shot to hers in surprise, but he didn’t reply. He simply took the hand she offered him and grunted in pain when she helped him stand. She guided his arm around her shoulders and they walked up the stairs together. It was slow going, but she didn’t mind the effort involved. Being pressed into his warm side was really nice and unsurprisingly alluring.

“Thank you,” he said once he was sitting on the bed. He looked so earnest and his expressive eyes told her that he was thanking her for more than helping her up the stairs. He was thanking her for the
distraction and knowing that he needed a friend more than he had needed a partner to move beyond his demons.

“Sure,” she replied. “Do you need anything?”

Words formed on his lips, but he clamped them down before they could escape. He simply shook his head instead. She smiled at him, said goodnight, and went to her room and stopped in front of the stupidly full closet she had been lamenting only that morning. She absently found a pair of pajamas – a t-shirt and a pair of shorts – and pulled them on. She washed her face, brushed her teeth, and carefully climbed under the covers. She folded the tops of the sheet and duvet under her armpits and gently smoothed out the wrinkles. She stared at the ceiling and immediately saw the men from the prison rushing at them in her mind. She saw Oliver fighting them, which quickly switched to him lying dead and bleeding on the floor.

“Nope,” she said to the empty room.

She pushed the covers back and stepped out into the hall. She paused to give credence to the lie that she had actually considered other options that didn’t include Oliver and went to his door. She knocked lightly and his answering call was a little concerned.

She opened the door and pushed at the bridge of her glasses awkwardly.

“You okay?” he asked.

“I figure that you’re at half capacity, and I’m at full capacity, which is like half capacity of your normal fighting ability, but I’m a really good screamer, so I could alert you to danger, which means that I think we should probably both be in here in case of an emergency. For safety.”

Oliver, who was under the blanket, silently patted the bed, a knowing look in his eyes. She exhaled in relief and almost melted into the sheets when they touched her skin.

“Want to talk about it?”

“No. Why does Tommy know and not Laurel?” Felicity asked.

“He found out by accident. It’s Sara’s choice not to tell her family.”

“Why on earth would she do that? It’s so mean.”

“She figures it as kindness. She doesn’t want to burden their light with her darkness.”

“She’s an idiot, then,” Felicity said. “Loving someone isn’t a burden. It’s a privilege.”

His breath caught and he didn’t reply. She turned to look at him and saw that he was already staring at her. She smiled.

“Even if it means listening to my mom describe in detail every tiny dog she happens to pass every time I talk to her. Or putting up with Barry and Iris being idiots and not getting together. Or even being aware that one of my friends probably blabbed to Kord about my battery.”

“Curtis Holt,” Oliver said.

She frowned, surprise moving through her.

“You’re not the only one with resources.”
“But he didn’t know, right?” she asked hopefully.

“It’s the only reason he’s still alive.”

“Talking murder while in bed with a woman, sexy,” she said dryly.

“We’re not in bed together,” he said.

She patted the bed. “Technically…we are.”

He didn’t look convinced.

“We’re even sleeping together,” she said. “Platonically.”

“I did catch that part.”

“Good.”

“I’m turning off the light now,” he said.

He started to turn toward the lamp on the bedside table and immediately stopped with a pained grunt and several deep breaths. She reached out to him, her hands trying to soothe away the pain, and he sighed in regret over the injury. He clearly did not like being limited. She took pity on him and reached across his body, her hair dragging across his naked chest, her breasts hovering just above him, and flicked off the light.

His hands moved to her biceps and just…stayed there. They started tracing lines up and down, and it was incredibly soothing to her – a lullaby as well as a message of want. She didn’t move away, though her mind was screaming at her to put some distance between them. The hands moved up, dancing lines and circles across the skin. His fingertips traced up one side of her neck and her eyes closed as bliss moved through her.

The pads of his fingers, slightly rough but wholly welcome, traced her chin, danced up the side of her face, and then threaded their way into her hair. He slowly started to massage her scalp as his other hand rubbed soothing circles on her back.

How was he so sweet and erotic at the same time?

She resisted the touch for a minute more, logic telling her that it wasn’t a good idea, then collapsed against his uninjured side with a contented moan. The hand not massaging her scalp dipped down, his fingers grazing over the hem of her camisole before lifting it slightly and brushing along her lower spine where her shorts began.

He traced the line, his index finger dipping ever so slightly under the waistband, and she pressed closer to him unconsciously.

“Are you still scared?” he asked.

He knew why she had sought him out. He had seen the terror on her face. He read her far too easily.

“No,” she admitted huskily, wanting to scream at him that this was not how friends behaved but too happy with the touch, with him, to really give a damn.

His hand slid across her back and to her hip. It settled there, possessive and warm. His other hand kept massaging her scalp, lulling her away from the growing arousal and towards sleep.
“I’m here,” he whispered.

“I know,” she returned, her hand moving to cover his heart and the steady beat that proved he was alive. It should have been too much for her. Instead, it felt perfect. A sleepy sigh escaped her and she knew that if the nightmares did return and she fell into them, he would be there to catch her.
Showers Are For Daydreams

Chapter Summary

Angst, Awkwardness, and Surprise lunch guests.

Light filtered through the blinds Oliver had partially closed. It was hazy and the room was warm. Streaks of golden heat touched his face and torso in irregular patterns. Sound was muted, and the world outside the room was indistinct. Nothing else existed in the framework of the scene they made as they lay tangled together in the oversized bed.

She didn’t trace his skin with her hands the way he had the previous night. She didn’t move at all. She knew that the slightest shift would wake him. He may have been comfortable enough – or injured enough – to sleep, but she also knew without a doubt that his body was hardwired to wake at any perceived danger. His scars were proof of a life spent in pain. She knew he would startle awake if she touched him, and she wanted the peaceful moment to linger. She wanted to feel his body pressed against hers, the sheet soft against their skin as it followed the contours of their bodies. She wanted to feel his breath moving through his body.

 Mostly, she just wanted to see the absolute peace on his face for even a second longer. Seeing him truly unburdened was akin to a spiritual experience. It was bizarrely satisfying and wholly hers to enjoy.

The peacefulness shifted and his eyes started moving restlessly under his eyelids. He was dreaming. His body tensed and a small whimper escaped him. She finally pushed away from him slightly and looked down at him curiously. He didn’t wake, but another whimper startled the sun-dappled room. She didn’t like the whimpering. She didn’t like the pain. She wanted to help him. She didn’t know how.

Before she could make her mind up on to approach his pain, Oliver’s eyes snapped open and he sat up. She was forced to move with him because of their proximity, ending up sitting on his lap, her legs spread to accommodate his torso. She gasped at the sudden movement and his body rippled with violence. His breaths were coated with latent fear.

Her hands landed on his sides to keep herself steady and she leaned back slightly to look at his face. Fear, anger, and sadness were lingering in his eyes. He was also still lost in the past. He was not in the room with her yet. She knew the feeling. Her recent bout of nightmares was in her head, informing her of his present state. She needed to let him find her way back to the present on his own. She knew he would eventually.

She stayed very still and calmed her breathing for him to use a guidepost for his. She waited, watching the haze swirling against the golden light and hoping he didn’t pull away from her.

She felt it when he returned. His shoulders slumped and let out a long sigh that rattled the breathless moment of post-dawn expectation. It was such a morbid way of starting the day. She had the feeling it was normal for him. The sigh held all the weight of normal. She pushed her fingertips into his skin lightly, to let him know that she was touching him, and then gently traced the skin on his back soothingly. After a moment, she put her chin on his shoulder and settled her palms onto the broad expanse of skin on his lower back. She needed to pull him away from his demons. She needed a
“I think you should buy Kord Enterprises before someone else does,” Felicity said.

“Huh?” he asked, all eloquence and poise.

“I have all the data. The stocks suck, the going price is less than chump change for a company like QC, and QC would really benefit from the research Kord was doing…Plus, you would keep thousands employed. And we both know how much you like to white knight things.”

“I don’t…I don’t do that,” he said, seeming to really focus on her for the first time since waking.

“Sure you do. It’s super naïve, but super cute.”

“That’s a big step,” he said. “Buying a whole company…”

“More like a slow shuffle. Maybe a Foxtrot.”

“I don’t know if buying a company should be the priority right now,” he said. “We do have some issues currently threatening to kill us all.”

“For all we know, The Consortium will buy up Kord Enterprises and use it for their nefarious…nefariousness,” she added sweetly. “We wouldn’t want that, right?”

There was a comfortable pause as he considered it. She felt smug that he was thinking along the lines she wanted him to think, as well as for the fact that he seemed wholly distracted now.

“How did you get so good at manipulation?” Oliver asked.

“I’m horrible at it, but you’re logical, I’m logical. Logic wins. Yay!”

“So wrapping around me like a baby koala while trying to convince me to buy Kord Enterprise isn’t manipulation?” Oliver asked archly.

“I wasn’t the one who moved us here, Oliver,” Felicity said. “I’m just choosing to enjoy the ride…Which has no sexual…You know what? It’s too early for faux pas corrections. I need coffee.”

“I need a fresh bandage,” he said.

She released him and looked down at the now blood-red bandage that covered his wound. It was frightening and just a little bit gross. She gulped, nausea swimming again.

“I do not like blood. Well, I like it. It’s good, it keeps us alive, but it should stay inside of things. Outside blood is bad.”

“I’ve noticed that from time to time,” Oliver said.

“I’m sure you have,” she replied.

His hands moved to cup her elbows and he looked up at her with such longing it physically hurt her. “You’re beautiful,” he said.

“You’re just saying that because I’m straddling you,” she replied.

“No,” he replied.
“Oh. Thank you.”

She stared at him, wondering why he was telling her that and what it meant for them. He stared back, his thoughts inscrutable. She didn’t want to know what he was thinking; she just wanted to kiss him. A lot. She looked at his lips, wondering what he would do if she caught them with hers. Would he kiss her back, or would he pull away? Then she caught sight of the bandage. It ruined the mood instantly.

“I’m sorry. That’s killing me. I’ll go get your first aid kid,” she said, gulping and turning away so she wouldn’t have to see the blood longer than necessary.

He caught her wrist. “I seriously want to hear more about your idea for Kord Enterprises.”

“I’ll talk while I patch. It won’t be distracting at all,” she said dryly.

His lips twitched and she hurried out of the room before he could say or do anything else to draw her attention back to all the icky blood or his very not icky lips that she seriously still wanted to kiss. She found his bag and went through the sales pitch she had thought through yesterday.

“Okay, so I have a bunch of pros and cons that I’ve listed out for you on a document I can forward…”

Oliver wasn’t on the bed. The bathroom door was ajar and the sound of water hitting the glass doors of a shower caught her attention. Her eyebrows creased in confusion. He knew she had gone to get the first aid kit. Deciding on a shower when she was trying to help him was just…rude.

She stepped into the open doorway and saw the dark shape of Oliver moving under the spray of a very expensive showerhead. She could see the outline of his body – the framework of his muscles and the taunt skin that moved as he did were on full display. A warm flush blossomed in her belly and unfurled with delicate arousal she did not try to stamp down.

“Is this your way of saying you don’t want to talk about buying Kord?” she asked, leaning against the doorframe and deciding that he wasn’t going to let him distract her. She had something to say and she was going to say it. “Kord Enterprises is a really good deal. We could shift the research away from military design and to the public sector. We would have to cancel some grants, but it would be worth it. The tech alone that’s in development would see the company solvent in seven months.”

There was a pause.

“We?” he asked slowly.

She had to admit to liking the way that word rolled between them.
“You, I guess,” Felicity said awkwardly. “I didn’t mean-”

The door rolled back far enough for him to stick his head out. “Does that mean you’re saying yes to the job?” he asked.

“What job are you offering?” she replied.

“Well, I just called my lawyers and people smarter than me to buy Kord Enterprises. Someone’s going to need to unravel that mess. Happy birthday.”

“I didn’t mean I wanted to do that!” she exclaimed.

“Your idea,” he reminded her.

“I hate you.”

“Is that a yes?”

“Anyone else would just mess it up. I hate messes.”

He smiled at her. “I have a feeling it’s going to be a lot of fun working with you, Miss Smoak.”

“I hope you can keep up, Mr. Queen,” Felicity replied.

“I look forward to trying.”

“Mmm,” she agreed, her lips quirking up as she watched the water run down his arm and the side of his torso she could see.

“Felicity?” he asked.

She slowly dragged her eyes up his body and found his eyes almost reluctantly. She knew he would see through her lust. He seemed to see through everything.

“Yes?” she asked.

“I’m taking a shower.”

“I know,” she replied.

He rolled his eyes playfully and closed the door. She watched the shadows and lines dance as he continued to clean himself. This was better than HBO. She sobered as she considered the responsibility of what he was asking of her on top of staying alive long enough to stop The Consortium.

“I can’t fix the company while running for my life,” she said. “And I really want to make staying alive a priority.”

He turned the water off and she was fully unprepared for him to push the door all the way back and wrap the towel around his waist. His movements were swift, but not nearly swift enough. She only caught a glimpse, but it made her stomach flutter happily. Her body flushed and her heart raced as he stopped directly in front of her.

“We both know you’re not going to let your fear keep you from doing what you want to do. You’re too brave.”
“I thought it was irritating how I put my life at risk,” she said.

“It is,” he said. “I didn’t say it was smart. I just said it was brave.”

“Thanks?”

He touched his side, which was starting to bleed again. She jumped, startled, and immediately pulled out antiseptic and bandages. He inhaled sharply when she stepped into his space. She ignored him and cleaned him up, impressed at how well she had learned to control her gag reflex. She left her hand on the bandage when she was done and stared up at him. Memories of yesterday, of the days before, crashed over her at once. She took a step back and wrapped her arms around her stomach.

“What if I can’t stop them?” she asked. “What if I never stop them?”

He knew she didn’t want to be approached. Somehow, he knew. So he kept his distance and looked at her earnestly. “You’re not alone,” he said.

And, for the first time in a long time, it really felt like it.

The door downstairs slammed open as a smile formed on her face. Oliver moved to the bedroom door, passing her with the aggressive grace of someone trained to kill, and put himself between her and the danger. He listened for a second, his body shifting with impending violence, and then turned away swiftly and pulled on a pair of sweatpants. She was so worried about the sounds she heard coming from downstairs that she didn’t even notice his naked body in front of her.

“Go to the bathroom and close the door,” he said, pointing at the room in question. “Don’t come out unless I tell you to.”

She nodded, went to the bathroom, and closed and locked the door. She pressed her ear to the wood and listened breathlessly for any signs that Oliver had left the room, a fight had started, or that she needed to make a run for it.

Silence slithered through the spaces in between her and him. It waited, coalesced, and tortured her with all the things she did not know. Two knocks startled her from her perch and she scrambled away from the door, clutching at a bottle of hairspray defensively, and hit the shower door. The bump was enough to send her tumbling straight into the shower, which was still wet. She hit the tile inside ass first, quickly followed by the back her head against the wall. She did, however, manage to keep the hairspray pointed up. She would blind anyone who came within reach. She could do that.

“Felicity?” Oliver asked.

She started to spray the bottle, but he twisted it out of her hand and tossed it to the other side of the room. A second later he was kneeling in front of her, his hands searching for a possible injury on her head. She wrinkled her nose at him angrily.

“You could have called out.”

“Are you okay?”

“Nope. I’m dead. You are talking to ghost Felicity.” She raised her fingers and wiggled them. “Booo.”

He sighed. “Did you hit your head?”

“It’s fine,” she said, a deep blush spreading from her chest all the way up to her face.
His hands went to inspect her head anyways, probing, and prodding, and reminding her of the massage he had given her. Last night had felt so normal. She knew today would be anything but. The light of day was focused on Malcolm Merlyn, Circe, Kane, and finding clues that could lead her to any one of those people. The touch also reminded her that they really needed to stop acting like they were more than friends. They weren’t. They’d had several talks about the impossibility of being something more. Those had all ended with the, “You’re great, but I can’t.” She didn’t mind. It was logical. She wasn’t invested in a future with him.

Except that she really wanted to know how being Oliver Queen’s girlfriend felt. Except for the whole murdering people and her not agreeing with it, she would bet anything they would have a lot of fun and be great together.

Plus the sex would likely be awesome.

And now she was thinking about sex with the man who was currently getting close and personal with her scalp. She pushed his hands away lightly and smiled to show that she wasn’t angry at him. “I’m fine,” she repeated. She tried to stand, started to slip, and he pulled her up with a pained grunt and a small wince.

“If you make a weight comment, I will drop you,” she warned.

One eyebrow twitched, as though he had only just repressed the urge to raise it, and he stared at her blankly. That was probably the best course of action possible to him. She hated that he was so sensible about it.

“Who was it?” Felicity asked.

“The mailman,” Oliver said.

She glared at him. He caved fairly quickly.

“The Bratva has heard about declaring you family. They were curious. I sent the guy they sent back to his master. It’s fine.”

“By master you mean Bratva ruler and not some higher being, right?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said.

She sighed and sat down on the bed with a flop. “This keeps getting complicated.”

“I really hate that word,” he decided.

“Protecting me is not something you should be doing,” she said. “I know you think I should let you, but it’s becoming more and more clear that I’m being selfish.”

“Let me make this absolutely clear,” Oliver said. “If you leave, there is no stone I won’t overturn, no bridge I would not cross, to ensure that The Consortium didn’t come after you. I would continue to make sure they never laid one single finger on you.”

“I can disappear,” she told him simply. “I know how.”

“And I wouldn’t stop looking,” he replied. “Not until I knew you were safe. Plus, I’d still go after The Consortium. They’re dicks.”

“Yeah, I know…” she whispered. “I hate dicks.” She froze, then sighed once more, the sounding
ending with a whine. “I need coffee.”

He pulled her up and led her to the door without saying anything else. The front door was closed and the house looked as serenely perfect as it had the previous night when they had contemplated Nyssa’s betrayal and the location of Malcolm Merlyn. She stared at her laptop as it sat on the coffee table looking so innocuous, and metal, and laptop-ish, and felt the weight of her day come crashing over her. It was nothing she couldn’t handle, but she really didn’t want another layer. She’d been layered up. Layers were officially shitty, and she was 100 percent over them. She also knew that her life wasn’t the only one in the balance. Layers had to be dealt with and she was the only one who could figure it out.

She sighed and picked up the laptop and sat on the sofa, her legs kicked up on the table. She went through everything she knew about Malcolm Merlyn, tracking him through the address Nyssa had given them. It was a warehouse in the market district. She had been down there once. She had bought bad fish and vomited for a day. She had never been back.

The exterior looked a lot like it belonged to the pictures Nyssa had provided of the interior. She had found Malcolm’s hideout. The question was what to do with it. Nyssa was undercover. Or else she was a double crosser pretending to be under cover. Either way, Nyssa’s life mattered to Felicity. The woman was scary, but Sara loved her. No betrayal on earth could make Felicity long for her death.

Oliver sat next to her, his eyes on his phone and in his hand a gloriously large cup of coffee that he offered to her. She smiled at the cup, barely registering Oliver, and took an immediate sip. She balanced the cup in her hand, continued to look through all the cameras surrounding the warehouse, and started to dig into the dummy corporation. It was super sketchy. After a little digging she knew how Malcolm had managed to survive the past few years. He had squirrelled away quite a savings.

“Can I steal millions of dollars from Malcolm Merlyn?” Felicity asked around another sip of coffee, ever so casual and only a little eager.

“Come again?” Oliver asked.

“Nyssa gave me the name of a dummy corporation. I tracked it to several layers and found your friend Malcolm’s accounts. Can I steal it and give it to charity? I’m thinking some youth programs in the glades could benefit from millions of dollars.”

“It might expose Nyssa.”

“She might be lying.”

“She’s not,” Oliver said.

“I’ll have to take your word for it. She’s as easy to read as something written in ancient Hebrew. FYI - it’s hard.”

“I don’t see how taking his money would do anything,” Oliver said. “It doesn’t give us him, and just lets us know we’re on to him.”

“It would also really distract him, rattle his cage, make him focus on something other than Nyssa.”

“Or it’ll make him kill her.”

“So...not worth it?” she asked.

He stared at the screen for a minute, deliberating. “Do it,” he decided.
“Are you sure?”

He nodded decisively and she cracked her knuckles. She lowered them to the keyboard and went to work. By the end of five minutes seven reputable charities in the glades were happily able to afford rent and lights for the next six months.

“Malcolm Merlyn - almost good deeder since 2015,” Felicity said.

“There’s a charity gala tomorrow,” Oliver said, still looking at his phone. “Tommy just reminded me of it.”

“That’s cool. You two should work on your bromance a little more.”

“Bro-” He sighed, stopping himself from retorting. “It’s very public. It’s very important, and I think you should come with me.”

“Oh. No.”

“I’ve declared you family, but unless they see you with me. Unless I make a statement, my people might not understand the lengths I’ll go to keep you safe. I want them to understand. Once they see you as family, your place within us is guaranteed and there won’t be any pre-dawn business meetings with my associates.”

“It’s past dawn. The sun’s up,” Felicity said.

“We need to be public about this.”

“And I don’t think you’re thinking about how arriving on your arm is going to look. I have a reputation to uphold,” Felicity said. “I have a career that I don’t want people to think I got by spreading my legs. Which, in case you didn’t know, women do have to worry about.”

“But it’s totally appropriate to take the woman who is going to be the V.P. in charge of whatever I decide to rebrand Kord Enterprises as.”

“Smoak Inc has a nice ring to it,” Felicity decided.

“So does Queen Inc.”

“S before Q.” She frowned. “I didn’t agree to be V.P.”

“Kay,” he said. He set his phone down on the sofa next to her and went to the kitchen to start breakfast. She hadn’t seen him eat a bowl of cereal yet. Everything was a meal with him.

“I didn’t agree to be V.P.!” she yelled at him to be sure he heard her from the distance.

He didn’t reply. His phone buzzed a second later. She glanced over at the sound and her heart skittered to a stop at what she saw on the screen before it went black.

Veronique: I can see you today. Noon works. I thought you wouldn’t want to see me again, but I appreciate you giving me a second chance.

Veronique? The Veronique whose name she had found scrawled on a piece of paper only four days ago? The Veronique who may very well be dating Oliver? Veronique, who had the name of someone leggy and beautiful; Veronique, who clearly predated Felicity’s interests in Oliver.

She tucked her hair behind her ear and chastised herself once more. Who was she kidding? Oliver
Queen was never single for long. He always had someone on his arm at parties and functions. She had almost agreed to be his date - not that he had asked. He has simply stated that it would be a good idea. Well, he could forget it now. She was not a plaything or a convenience.

If he was with someone else, even casually, she didn’t want to even think about him romantically. She wanted to think about him in the same space as park benches and the holders that went around coffee cups at Starbucks - convenient and necessary but not something she daydreamed as much as beautiful spring days in the park and warm coffee enjoyed in a bookshop, where she was surrounded by words that transported and transcended her.

He was slowly becoming that coffee, that bookshop, that spring day, despite her best efforts, and the text message was a flashing neon sign that she needed to shut it down and allow him the chance to truly be her partner without the layers she seemed to create by crawling into bed with him, and lying on top of him, and watching him as he showered, and taking her shirt off...and a dozen other things.

“Felicity?” Oliver questioned, standing in front of her with a plate and an amused smile.

She startled and looked up at him, a knot of anxiety settling into her chest. “Yes?”

“Food?”

She took the plate from him and stared at it unseeingly. “Thanks.”

She set the food on the table and refocused on the laptop. “I think I might be able to trace Malcolm’s cellphone now that I know he’s been staying in this building. If I can get it narrowed down, we can track him. He’ll have GPS. Starling doesn’t believe in straight roads, so even the people who grew up here get lost constantly. I mean, I was on a road I knew, absolutely knew, and I got lost. Just give me a second.”

Oliver sat down next to her silently, allowing her the chance to work without interruption. His fork scraping against the plate was the only sound in the entire house aside from the clacking of the keys on her keyboard.

“I think I got him. I sent you the GPS signal...to Dig as well. That should help. It might not lead to anything, but it’s more than we had yesterday. Nyssa really did help big time. I don’t like her standing there with her head in the lion’s mouth if she isn’t a traitor, but I guess I can’t do anything about it now. Speaking of lion’s mouth, I have a date with a certain detective about dead men on my lawn and my house burning down. I need to shower and change.”

She stood, carefully placed her laptop next to her untouched plate of food, and rushed out of the room before Oliver could say anything to reel her back. She also made sure not to look at him. She didn’t want to see his face and know what he was thinking. She didn’t want any of it. She ran up the stairs, hurried into her bedroom, locked the door behind her, and pressed her back against the wood regretfully.

“If there’s one thing a text from another woman that’s good, it’s that it’s a reality check,” Felicity said. “Reality is important. It makes things real.”

She shook her head at the fact that she was talking to herself and went to the closet and prepared for the day. She didn’t know where she was going, aside from the detective’s station, but she knew that she needed to be prepared for work. She picked out a bright red dress and hurried into the bathroom, figuring that the faster she got ready the quicker she could get out of Oliver’s house and the memory of the way she had watched him bathed in sunlight only thirty minutes ago.
That was clearly a lie.

When she was dressed, she went downstairs and gathered her things, surprised at how they had merged with his things without her noticing. She left the laptop but took the microchip, stuffing it into her bag with the rest of her crap, and typed out a quick message to Dig. Oliver was nowhere to be found. She doesn’t go looking for him. She doesn’t want anymore glimpses or maybes or moments of him telling her she’s beautiful. She just wants to go talk to a detective, who was clearly convinced she has something to do with the murders of those men. It was a much safer discussion to have.

Dig arrived at the same time Oliver was coming down the stairs. Both were dressed in suits, though Oliver’s was the one that drew her eyes. It was gray, with a blue tie that matched his eyes, and patent leather shoes worth more than her car. Dig’s suit was a sharp black, with a purple tie that didn’t bring out the colors of his eyes at all. She likes looking at Dig. Dig is handsome, but he hasn’t called her beautiful or confused her with lingering touches, morning cuddles, feelings of being safe, and all-encompassing desire. Dig is sort of the best thing ever.

“Good morning, Dig!” Felicity chirped brightly.

“Morning,” he returned as Oliver lingered a little bit away from them, clearly sensing the distance she is carefully and purposefully building between them.

“I need to have a chat with Detective Lance. Care to take me?”

“I would love to,” he said.

“Thanks,” she replied.

“Oliver?” Dig asked.

He hesitated, fiddling with his jacket unnecessarily. He shifted from one foot to the other, then firmed. She saw the hardness take over his stance and his body. She imagined it would be in his face as well - she was avoiding that sin trap entirely.

“I’m coming,” he said.

“There’s no need,” Felicity said to Dig. “He just wants to ask a few questions.”

“Detective Lance is very clever and very determined. Plus, if I’m there, he’ll be so busy hating me that he won’t have the presence of mind to ask you certain things.”

She didn’t feel like arguing with him. She couldn’t get away from him the way she wanted to, but she also knew that they were working on a friendship. She didn’t want to spoil that because she had come to the wrong conclusions. Being mean was different than taking a step back, and she would absolutely not show him that sort of rudeness.

“Sure,” she said with a shrug.

She missed the frown that crossed Oliver’s face, but Dig didn’t. He caught Oliver’s attention and asked with a look what was wrong. Oliver shrugged and marched over to the door. He held it open for Felicity and Dig, and she hurried through without looking at him. She picked out her phone from her bag again and decided to check in on the searches she had left running. They were coming up empty. Surprise! There were no threads, nothing to unravel. The Consortium was incredibly careful. It was ridiculous. She didn’t know if a corporation had ever scared her more.
She idly wondered what life-threatening situation they had planned for her today. Car accident? Men with guns? Ninjas with throwing stars? Baby raccoons with flamethrowers? What?

“Stupid raccoons,” she muttered.

“What?” Oliver asked.

She blushed and waved one hand dismissively. “Nothing. It’s silly. Oh, yay! The police station.”

She stepped out of the car before Dig could get to her side and hurried across the sidewalk and into the building. It was bustling with police, administrative staff, lawyers, and criminals. She went to the front desk and smiled politely. “I need to speak with Detective Lance. He’s expecting me.”

The woman behind the desk didn’t reply. She simply picked up a phone and dialed Lance. She hung up and went back to her paperwork without looking up at Felicity once. Lance came out from the back thirty seconds later. He had a paper cup that held cheap-looking coffee and looked rumpled, as if he hadn’t slept in days. When he reached Felicity, his expression hardened and he stared directly into Oliver’s eyes, as if he thought staring hard enough would kill him.

“Queen,” he said tightly.

“Good morning, Detective,” Oliver returned politely.

“I don’t remember asking you to come here,” he said.

“He’s with me,” Felicity said brightly. “Needed a ride to work. Oliver was kind enough to offer me a job at his company since my old one sort of...imploded with the company.”

Lance gave a sarcastic smile and gestured between Oliver and Dig. “They can wait out here.”

“Is she under arrest?” Oliver asked.

“No, of course not.”

“Then she can have a friend sit in with her,” Oliver said. “For her own protection.”

“You think she needs protection?” Lance returned.

“I think you like to go on witch hunts,” Oliver said. “And since she’s my friend, you might be a little more aggressive than normal…”

“Do I need to remind you of the crimes you’re guilty of?” he asked.

“Do I need to remind you that only you’re the one who thinks I’m guilty of them?” Oliver asked.

“You can’t go in,” Lance said.

Oliver pulled out his phone and dialed a number.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m doing the adult thing. I’m telling on you to your daughter,” Oliver said.

Lance gestured at Oliver to end the call, which he did with a smirk. “Follow me,” Lance added.

He took them to an interview room that was bright and sunny. It looked rather informal, and not the
place where hardened criminals got grilled, which gave her hope.

Oliver, Felicity, and Lance settled around the table, while Dig took up position near the door. He crossed his arms and looked at them stoically, but when Felicity caught his eye he winked.

Lance reached into a folder and pulled out several pictures. “Do you know these men?”

Felicity recoiled at the pictures of the dead men, sliding the pictures back to Lance and trying to keep the bile down.

“No,” she said.

“Why would they pick your house to be at on the same night it goes up in smoke?” Lance asked.

“I’d say ask them, but that might be difficult,” Felicity said. “I don’t know why they were there, but before you go getting all accusatory, I did bring proof that I was out of town. I don’t know what’s going on, and I have nothing to do with all...that.”

“Let me see it,” Lance said.

Felicity pulled out her own folder, a little impressed that it nearly matched Lance’s, and held it out to him.

He opened it gingerly, his expression still sour, and read through all the documents she had forged, knowing he would check up on the times and dates.

“I know that several of those stores have cameras. They should have a record of me if that’s not enough,” Felicity said.

“You keep a lot of receipts,” Lance said.

“I like numbers. And records. Both are awesome,” Felicity replied.

Lance’s eyes flickered to Oliver’s, then back to hers before landing on the papers again. “You do know that if you’re in some sort of trouble you can tell me. If someone is coercing you...or threatening you, that is not a crime. I know you didn’t kill those men, but I think you know more than you’re saying.”

“I’m not,” she said.

“And if that’s all, Detective, Miss Smoak and I have work to do. QC doesn’t run itself...much to my chagrin.”

“Chagrin. Word of the day toilet paper?” Lance asked.

Oliver smiled his fake smile, his eyes shining with dislike. “Is that all, Detective?” he asked more firmly.

“Stay in town,” he barked.

“No more trips. Got it,” Felicity said.

Lance slammed his way outside the room and disappeared into the bullpen without looking back. When they were safely locked away in Oliver’s ridiculously expensive car, Felicity sighed.

“I’m glad that’s over.”
“How did you have all those receipts? How do you know he won’t check the cameras?” Oliver asked.

“Oh, I doctored the footage and created the documents I needed.” She shrugged at the look of shock on his face. “I had an hour to kill.”

Oliver stared at her. Even Dig looked ruffled. He never ruffled. He was the anti-ruffle. She didn’t get it. It was just some hacking. It was easy. Why were they acting like it was something profound?

“I’m going to work more with Barry today since you’re still in the process of buying Kord out,” Felicity said. “Let me know when you want to foist that headache on me.”

“Knowing my people, Monday,” Oliver said.

“I’ll bring in the team I want in charge of development then,” she said. “If that’s okay?”

“Yeah,” he said.

“Dandy,” she said, wincing immediately at her word choice. She was definitely not acting normal. She pulled out her phone and went back to her searches. A minute later, Oliver’s hand tentatively landed on her forearm. She sucked in a deep breath to keep from showing how much she liked the touch and looked at him questioningly. He paused, letting the touch linger, before pulling his hand away and dropping it back in his lap.

“‘The charity gala?’” he asked.

“I don’t really feel like going. With everything…” She sighed. “I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“I don’t agree,” he said.

“You can’t make me go,” she shot back.

“No. I can’t,” he said. “Your call. Whatever you want. I just think that it sends a clear message that you are not one woman against The Consortium’s army. You have an army now too.”

“I’ll think about it,” she said.

He nodded, allowing that she could make up her mind without any further convincing on his part, and stared at the city slipping past them - his city, her city, a city that she was going to help change….if she survived The Consortium.

When Dig pulled up to Q.C., Felicity was out the door like a shot. Dig and Oliver caught up to her at the elevator, neither mentioning the fact that she was behaving incredibly bizarrely. She had pulled out her tablet and was going over the schematics for Barry’s microchip, her mind whirling with possibilities and dreaming up new solutions that may or may not work. She liked focusing on work. It did not leave her with overwhelming feelings of anxiety the way the searches did. It was her happy place, and she was going to enjoy it for as long as she could.

She said only the briefest of goodbyes to Oliver when she reached her floor and hurried to find Barry, who, while cute, did not leave her feeling warm, tingly, and hopelessly confused. Barry was Iris’s and vice versa, whether the other knew it or not, and that truth made everything easier on her. Oliver being a mystery woman’s simply did not help her at all. It left her cold and depressed. She was glad he had offered her the job as she considered what not having one would feel like. She knew she would have to stay busy to forget the truth that she was falling head over heels for a man she shouldn’t even look at, let alone fall asleep wrapped in his arms.
At noon, Dig pulled Felicity away from her computers with a firm tilt of his head and a raised eyebrow and took her to a restaurant that had white linens on the tables, napkins that had to be washed, and silverware that sparkled prettily in the winter sun. She had a fun time talking to Dig. He was funny, and his calm and radiant sense of knowing absolutely who he was and what he stood for helped ground her. They talked for forty-five minutes over overpriced dishes she couldn’t name, then Dig went to the bathroom after many assurances from her that she was absolutely not going anywhere and that she would be fine for a couple of minutes.

She wondered if she would ever tire of being wrong.

Dig wasn’t gone thirty seconds when a man unceremoniously sat down across from her. He leaned back in the chair and stared at her with a wildly amused arch of an eyebrow. He was dark, mysterious, and absolutely murderous.

Malcolm Merlyn had come to visit. She gulped as he assessed her with his sharp, intelligent eyes.

She was so dead.
Malcolm stared at her for a beat longer. She stared back, her hand wrapping around her knife defensively, though she didn’t know what she planned on doing with it. Unless Malcolm Merlyn seriously wanted to be buttered, the knife was useless in her hands. It made her feel better, so she kept her hold on it even as she kept eye contact.

“Good afternoon, Miss Smoak,” Malcolm said. “Can I call you Felicity?”

“Miss Smoak,” she said.

He nodded, as if she had made an excellent point in the boardroom. “Miss Smoak, it is has come to my attention recently that you have joined a certain organization with no blood or breeding to your name. How do you account for that?”

“I got chased out of my house?” she asked, her eyes flickering over to the bathrooms and to the other people in the restaurant. Malcolm wouldn’t try anything in a crowded room, would he?

“Oliver didn’t even declare Laurel Lance family, and he dated her for three years. What do you have over him?”

“I have a really nice smile,” she said,

“No, you have a great capacity to stick your nose where it doesn’t belong,” he said.

“I probably have that, too,” she said lightly.

“Where. Is. My. Money?” he demanded, leaning in close and scaring her with the sudden crazy light that pierced the normalcy of his eyes.

“Gone - donated to several charities in the glades - you know the glades right? You tried to ruin them and kill a bunch of people in them? They’re super grateful for your contribution.”

“I don’t have much time, Miss Smoak, so I am going to make this very clear very quickly...I am not the sort of man you mess with. I will get my money back, and I will carve it out of your bones. If you help me get it back, if you help me bring down Oliver from the throne he usurped, I may very well forgive you for being led astray by his...wiles. You have one chance to make amends with me before I slaughter every single person in Oliver’s life and in yours. I suggest you take it.”

There was no sense in denying it. She was trembling. She had no doubt that he meant exactly what he said. He would kill everyone in her life. Oliver’s problems had become hers the moment he had declared her family. He had not thought of Malcolm when he had sought to protect her from The Consortium. Claiming her as family had come with more problems than solutions so far, but she found that she didn’t mind. Being claimed was more than nice - it made her feel like she was home.
She leaned forward, the lioness within her roaring to life even as she trembled under his murderous stare. He could scare her, but he would not convince her to turn traitor. He would learn to fear her.

“Why are you here, Mr. Merlyn? To convince me to turn traitor, or because you’re terrified of what I’ll find next?” she asked. “Believe me when I say that I have only just begun to make your life a living hell. You might be able to murder me, but the damage I can do to you before that happens is something out of your nightmares. I can erase you. I can have a dozen agencies beating down your door in an hour. I can unravel your world and send you spinning. You come here, you threaten me, you think I’ll cave, but you have only just touched the surface of the chaos I can throw into your life. My offer to you is to run - run now and leave Starling to Oliver for the rest of your miserable life. Since your legacy is the only thing you seem to care about, I will make sure that you have nothing left of it by the time I’m done if you don’t. I will do all this if you so much as lay one hand on the people I care about.”

She was still trembling, but it was with rage now. How dare he threaten her? How dare he walk in and sit so casually in front of her and act like he had the right? How dare he make her feel afraid for herself and her loved ones? How dare he ruin her digestion with his evil smirk? She kept her eyes wide, knowing they were full of rage, and dared him to look away first.

He looked startled, impressed, and just the tiniest bit afraid. He smirked to hide the fear and let their mutual stare linger. She didn’t know what he was thinking, but she had the feeling that she hadn’t scared him off. He was determined.

Well, so was she.

His smirk still firmly in place, he excused himself politely, stood, and, ever so casually, walked out of the restaurant. She was already tracking him on his phone, wondering if he knew that coming into such close proximity to her with it was the stupidest thing imaginable. She found him only a minute later. She stared at the red dot, genuine hate in her heart. She felt so bad for Thea and Tommy; she wondered how two people with such goodness in their hearts came from...that. It was a miracle neither of them were sociopaths.

Dig stopped next to her chair and looked down at her with a warm smile. “Ready to go?”

She looked up at him tapped her phone with her index finger as she considered her options. She could either tell him and have him freak out majorly, or she could not and run the risk of him finding out later and being angry with her. She figured a minor freak out was the best, as she did not want to betray his trust.

“Malcolm Merlyn was just here,” Felicity said.

Dig took hold of her elbow and almost tugged her out of her chair. He threw down a couple of bills on the table hurriedly, and then marched her out of the restaurant, his eyes moving constantly as he scanned the faces of the people eating, serving, and walking on the street directly outside the restaurant. He forced her into the car he had driven them in and hurried to the driver’s seat, tension radiating. She clutched at her bag fearfully as he peeled away from the corner and merged into the midday traffic with practiced ease. He kept up his cautious scanning, even as he touched the button on his visor to make a call.

“Dig?” Oliver asked.

“Malcolm Merlyn paid us a visit at lunch.” Dig said.

“Is he dead?” Oliver growled.
Dig didn’t reply right away.

“Dig!”

“No, he’s not dead.” His glanced at Felicity, shame, regret, and total self-flagellation evident. He was blaming himself for the fear on Felicity’s face. She could see it. She didn’t feel like it was deserved. Malcolm would have found a way to talk to her alone one way or another. He was too resourceful not to.

“I-”

“He had to make a choice between protecting me or getting Malcolm. He chose me,” Felicity said, glaring at Dig long enough to tell him to keep his mouth shut.

“That was the right call,” Oliver said, sounding less aggravated. “Where are you headed?”

“QC,” Felicity replied.

“The house,” Dig replied.

“QC,” Felicity said. “I need the computers. I’m tracking Malcolm now. We might be able to-”

“Where is he?” Oliver asked.

Felicity didn’t reply. Her teeth went to worry her bottom lip and she heard again the sound of Oliver slowly bleeding out on the phone. She couldn’t do it a second time. He was still hurt. He would die if he sought out a fight with Malcolm.

“Felicity!”

“I’m not going to tell you,” she said.

“What?” Oliver demanded.

“You’re injured. I’ll tell someone else...Someone like Dig. He’ll track him without letting his emotions run away with him,” Felicity said.

“That’s not your call to make,” Oliver hissed.

“It is now,” she said. “If you want to argue about it, you can come find me.”

She hung up and immediately had a freak out. “Did I just boss around my boss?” she asked Dig. “Did I just boss around the leader of the Bratva? Did I just tell Oliver Queen what to do?”

“Yup,” he agreed.

“I’m gonna hyperventilate,” she said.

“It was cool, though.”

“I know!” she agreed, still breathing heavily.

“He’ll be angry.”

“But he’ll be alive. That matters more,” Felicity said. She glanced over at him. You can track Merlyn without getting into trouble, right?”
“I can, but I don’t think it’s necessary right now. Nyssa is doing what she can. We have to trust her. Oliver is just upset because...” He trailed off.

“Because dot, dot, dot?” Felicity goaded him.

“Not my place,” Dig said. “Let’s just leave it there.”

“Yeah, cause that’s not cruel and unusual punishment,” Felicity said.

“How?”

“My imagination is far worse than the truth,” she said. “And it’s really unfair when you say things that let it wander.”


“Whatever you think,” Felicity replied grumpily.

“Thanks,” Dig said, his tone laced with the sort of sarcasm that could win world competitions.

She watched the dot that was Malcolm Merlyn travel south, her thoughts scattering in a dozen different directions as she considered their options. The dot wasn’t moving particularly fast, and she could only assume he was stuck in traffic.

The memory of their conversation overrode the rest of her thoughts.

The urbane politeness he had used with her was a stark contrast to the absolute fear that had consumed her when she had realized who it was in front of her. He was a strange mixture of manners and absolute barbarity. She knew why the others feared him so much. He was worthy of such terror.

She also realized something else. She scared him. There was no other reason for the visit other than to get a feel for the level of damage she could bring to his life. She had the very real feeling that stealing his money had painted a target on her back. She also knew that Malcolm would proceed with caution. She had the potential to make him pause, to make him take a moment of consideration before he acted. She was suddenly the only thing standing between a full attack on Oliver, Thea, and Tommy. It was a duty she did not shy away from despite the danger.

Oliver had declared her family. She didn’t agree entirely with the Bratva’s mission statement, but she did like the people who ran it very much. In a very short amount of time they had worked their ways into her heart and had become family. She had to make the declaration a two-way street. It was the only way to slow down whatever Malcolm had planned and give Oliver time to win. She had to go to a charity gala, make their affiliation public, and make sure that the world knew that if they came after Oliver, they would have to deal with her as well. She had faith that it would be enough for the interim. It was a power play that Malcolm would certainly understand.

When Dig pulled to a stop in front of the QC building, Oliver was waiting for them. He was standing impossibly still. She took that as a bad sign. Stillness in him meant he was fuming. It meant he was preparing to spring into action. Movement meant he was working through the problem.

She frowned. How did she know that? Why did she know that? Her brain seriously needed to stop knowing things.

Oliver opened her door for her and held out his hand for her to take. She was surprised that he would
want to touch her around the anger, but she decided to associate the hand with the gentlemanly gesture it was meant to be. He helped her stand, and then waited with that same stillness for Dig to join them.

The ride up to Oliver’s office was probably the most awkward in the history of the elevator. She was certain that the elevator had seen lots of moments it would blush to repeat, but it wouldn’t even talk about the tension that radiated between the trio if it had the chance. It was horrible, and had her shifting impatiently. When the doors opened, she felt momentarily free and happy, before the knowledge that there would be growling and yelling in her future hit her.

Oliver stalked over to his assistant, told him to take a break, and then went to the office and held the door open for Oliver and Dig. She stood in the space between the desk and the sofa and waited for the hammer to fall. Dig sat down, looking as unaffected as if Oliver had called him in to talk about the weather.

“Do you want to explain to me why I’m standing here instead of chasing down Malcolm Merlyn?” Oliver asked the second he had firmly closed the door.

He stared at her, stern and unyielding. He may not be yelling, but she knew with enough pushing he would get there. She hoped it wouldn’t; she knew it would.

Felicity set her bag down and crossed her arms, staring at him with the same sort of anger that had swirled in her gut when she had faced down Malcolm. While the anger came from two very different places, it did the same thing - it made her say what she was thinking.

“Because I care about what happens to you, Oliver, and chasing after Malcolm Merlyn when you are still recovering is about the stupidest thing in this dimension.”

“Dimension?” Dig asked.

“If you follow Superstring theory you’ll know that it posits-”

“That was not your call to make!” Oliver growled at her.

“Maybe not,” she said. “But it was the one I made! I may be new to this world of grrr you guys have going on here, but that doesn’t mean I don’t understand it. Every single time you go out there, there’s a very real possibility you won’t come back. I see no need to add to that by sending you out on missions when you’re not thinking clearly!”

“I’m thinking just fine!” Oliver snapped back.

“Really? So you don’t plan on tracking Malcolm and getting into another pissing contest with him while injured?” she asked.

He didn’t reply. He simply rubbed his thumb and forefinger together roughly and stared at her impatiently.

“I won’t sit by and watch you kill yourself because you think you’re better than him or have no other choice!” Felicity said. “You wanted to bring me into this life, you claimed me as family, you say that you want to be my friend, well this is the cost, mister. This is me telling you that I’m going to look out for you in every single way I can, even if you don’t like it. Suck it up!”

The ice in his expression shifted to shock, then to awe, and finally on to disbelief so pure and unfettered that her heart ached for him. He didn’t look as if he knew what to do with her words or the fact that she wanted to look after him the way he spent his life looking after others. They had
caught him off guard. She moved toward him, unable to keep the distance of the morning in the face of proof that he seriously did not believe himself worthy of anyone’s concern. She touched the hand that was twitching with his anxiety.

“Now is not the time. We have a way to get him, to track him. But you need to heal. That’s all I ask.”

His fingers wrapped around hers, though he still seemed to be processing her concern. Something in her chest told her that he was used to being the bad guy. He was the punching bag, the person everyone blamed for the things that went wrong in their lives. He was not used to being so absolved, so looked after. It made her resolution to be his friend, to keep things uncomplicated, stronger. No matter how much she wanted to see what they could be, he didn’t need that from her. He needed a friend.

“She’s right, man,” Dig added. “Nyssa’s got it.”

Oliver nodded and he squeezed her hand in thanks before releasing it. He passed her and sat down at his desk. “Where are we on Circe?”


She let out a long sigh as she plunged ahead with what she needed to say.

“And, yes, I will go to the gala with you,” she said.

He blinked several times, then perked up slightly. “Really?”

“Yes,” she said. “I think we have a couple of messages to send.”

“Messages?” Dig asked.

“A couple?” Oliver asked.

“I hope you like dress shopping,” Felicity said to Dig. “Because that is the evening you have ahead of you.”

Dig sighed. “I suppose I owe you one.”

She smiled and went to the door; Dig stood and traile after her.

“Oh what one?” Oliver asked.

“Bye, Oliver,” Felicity said.

“What does he owe you?” Oliver called after them.

“He’s really nosy,” Felicity said as she pushed the button to call the elevator.

“One of his flaws,” Dig agreed. “Just one suggestion. If you need a dress, call Thea. She’ll cut your time in half.”

“Okay,” Felicity agreed.

They descended back to the twentieth floor and the searches, work, and people that were quickly becoming her entire life.
Felicity sat down on Oliver’s sofa, put her feet up on Oliver’s coffee table, and put Oliver’s wine to her lips. A week ago it would have bothered her. Today, it was part of her comfort. She was exhausted. Her feet hurt, a headache was softly pulsing, and her lower back was talking to her feet with mutual hatred. Two sips into the wine and the pain dulled ever so slightly.

The house was empty, though she knew people were watching it. Dig had dropped her off and had left to take Thea home. A new dress hung in her bathroom, matching underwear to go with it was in her top drawer, and a pair of absolutely gorgeous shoes were perched at the end of her bed. She was ready for the gala. She just didn’t know if she was ready-ready, though. It was a big step. Her face would be all over the news. Her mother would absolutely freak. She would not be able to take it back. It was a permanent declaration.

She looked down at her phone and the blinking light that was Malcolm Merlyn. It was definitely worth it.

The door creaked open. For the first time since coming to the house, she didn’t startle or feel a wave of fear at the unexpected noise. She felt safe finally. She didn’t know why. She did, however, know that the person at the door was Oliver. She didn’t even have to look.

“I’m drinking your wine again,” Felicity called to him. “No shirt removal tonight, though.”

“Hard day?” he asked, stopping behind her.

She snorted. “A little.”

“Thea texted. Thanks for calling her. I know she enjoys hanging out with you, particularly now with Malcolm and everything...”

“I had fun. Well, I didn’t have fun shopping, but I had fun with her.”

She craned her neck around to look at him and saw that he had his jacket draped over his arm and a white bag in his hand. His expression was also a mixture of guarded and warm. She smiled up at him and waited for him to reply. His lips moved but no sound came out.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“Did I say something wrong this morning?” Oliver asked, looking a bit like a little kid asking as he laid out the awkwardness on the table.

Felicity fidgeted, not wanting to get into this discussion...ever.

“No. You didn’t,” she admitted.

“Okay, but I felt like I did,” he said. “You don’t have to tell me if you-”

The absolute sadness and want to be okay with her touched her heart and made her speak.

“I saw a text message on accident,” Felicity said. She closed her eyes and forged ahead. “I meant what I said. Privacy matters. But it was there, and I was there, and kismet meant we were in the there at the same time.”

“What text message?” he asked slowly.

She sighed. “This is embarrassing. Can we drop it?”
He moved around the sofa and sat next to her. He put the bag on the table and took the wine out of her hands and set it next to it. He took her hand seriously. “No, we can’t. I don’t want there to be unsaid things between us.”

She shot him a skeptical look.

“More, I mean.”

“It was from Veronique,” she added tentatively.

He stiffened and he removed his hand from hers. He leaned back. “Oh.”

She hurried to explain, not liking the way he had turned inwards.

“I know it’s not your fault that I feel complex things about you. That’s not on you. There’s no obligation here to make me feel better. And I maybe overreacted by pulling back so hard, but I want you to know that you don’t owe me anything. Your dating life is none-”

“You think I’m dating her?” he interrupted.

“Well...yeah.”

“Oh,” he added.

He hadn’t lost his tension, but he looked like he finally understood something.

“Like I said. It’s none of my business. I didn’t meant to make it weird. Just because we’ve had a couple of kisses and I’ve seen you naked and you’ve seen me in my bra and I’ve felt you really, super excited and-”

“I’m not...She’s not...There’s nothing…” he fumbled for the right words.

“Are you going to finish that thought?” she teased him gently.

“Yes,” he decided, the tension clearing as suddenly as it had come. He turned to face her again and looked at her earnestly.

“I’ve had about five years of seriously traumatic...crap, Felicity,” he said. “I’ve struggled on my own to make it right in my head. I wasn’t managing it very well. Dig and Thea have been on my ass for years to see someone. I finally heard them rather recently.”

“Veronique is a psychiatrist?” Felicity asked, embarrassment in her belly.

“Bratva friendly,” Oliver said. “So I don’t have to lie to her.”

“I am simultaneously so happy and so mortified. Happy that you’re getting help and mortified that I am such an idiot.”

“You know what they say about assuming…” Oliver said.

“Thank you for trusting me with that secret. It is a secret, right?” she asked.

“Yes. I would appreciate it if it stayed between us.”

“Oh. It is so staying between us. The between us part is super locked down. Like a fort. Fort Knox fort.”
He chuckled. “Thanks.” He tilted his head and looked at her questioningly. “Does this mean your reaction this morning was because you were jealous?”

“Jealous...please,” she scoffed.

He continued to look at her. She measured out a small amount.

“A little jealous. Yeah,” she said, flushing.

His smile was so incredibly bright that she was offended. No one should take that much joy out of her jealousy. She pouted at him, which only made his amusement grow.

“I got something to make amends, but I think I shouldn’t have since you’re the one who was looking at my text messages and invading my privacy,” Oliver said lightly, still teasing her.

“I am sorry,” she said, her eyes shifting to the bag. “I don’t need a present. Just as long as you’re not mad.”

“I’m relieved,” Oliver replied softly. He picked up the bag and held it out to her in a peace offering. She took it from him eagerly and pulled it close to her body without giving him the chance to take it back.

“Good, because the curiosity was killing me,” she said.

He chuckled and put his arm on the back of the couch to watch her unwrap his present.

She yanked out the tissue paper covering the top of the gift and tossed it over her shoulder without looking, causing another huff of laughter to escape him, and looked inside curiously. The interior of the bag matched whatever it was. It wasn’t until she reached inside and felt the soft fabric that she knew what it was. She knew it because it was just so entirely him. She pulled the gift out slowly, her heart thumping wildly with the certainty of what she was feeling, and unfolded the hat. It was different than her old hat - nicer and with less mistakes in the design. It didn’t have Caitlyn’s love in the stitching, but it did have Oliver’s thoughtfulness and concern in the threads that held it together.

It was a panda hat - her panda hat.

After everything that had happened, after the absolute terror that had followed her around the past week of her life, the fact that Oliver had thought to buy her a panda hat around all the things they had to worry about, because he was simply worried he had upset her, it felt like a cleansing. It was a fresh start and a hopeful message that told her Oliver believed in a better future than the prison of worry the present had become.

It was hope, pure and simple, and he had brought it to her when she had needed him to the most. She brought the hat to her chest and felt tears well up in her eyes. She found his eyes, which were looking back at her with such tenderness and concern she wanted to melt. Instead, her hat gripped tightly in her hand, she flung herself at him.

He caught her with a grunt, his arms wrapping around her body with familiarity and ease. She tucked her nose into the crook of his neck and breathed him in with such openness and joy that the things that had been plaguing her - the things that had tension tightening around her heart - dropped away.

She pulled back just enough to be able to look him in the eyes again. “Thank you,” she said.

His gaze lingered on her lips as the words escaped her. His pupils dilated and his blue eyes shifted to warm color that reminded her of days at the beach and those spring days she loved so much. With
the unraveling of the worry in her stomach, she felt clear and levelheaded. She felt like she was final
able to look at him and see that he was not the problem she had imagined him to be. Yes, they would
be complicated. Yes, they might not make it past sleeping together. Yes, they could fall and never
recover. But for the love of everything technical and computer related, she was not going to let her
brain get in the way of the very real possibility that sleeping with him would be the start of something
amazing.

She leaned forward without giving him the chance to recover from the lust she knew was reflected
back at her and caught her lips with his. He was surprised, but, like always, his reaction time was
incredible. He met her lips with his after only the briefest of startled pauses, his hands tightening on
her back, adding only the slightest of pressure against her skin.

He was being gentle and delicate. It was sweet, but she wasn’t really looking for the slightest of
pressure. She was looking for more. She was tired of the teasing and the almosts that kept slipping
away from them. She wanted him - she had wanted him since their first kiss.

She settled her hands on his pecs and pressed into him harder, pulling away from his soft lips long
efficient in the present and focused on the feelings of pleasure that guided every movement. His
hands caressing her back, moving up to play with her hair before skirting down to her waist and on
to her hips, which he grabbed when he reached them, pushing the pads of fingers against her
hungrily, were second only to meeting of their lips. They were all she knew, all she needed.

She rolled her hips, seeking friction for the growing need within her, and he groaned into her mouth.
She took the chance to slip her tongue into his mouth, pulling back before his tongue could connect,
and nipped him gently on his bottom lip.

He settled his hand onto her shoulder and gently nudged her to turn her head with his nose. She did,
exposing her neck to him, and he pressed warm kisses from the spot just under her ear all the way
down to her collarbone, which her dress had left exposed. He spent a great deal of time teasing the
skin on her collarbone and neck with his lips and tongue.

It was bliss, and pain, and power beyond reason.

She continued to grind on him, her fingers scraping through his hair as he kissed her. She wanted
him closer. She needed him to be wearing way less clothes. She tugged on his hair to get him to look
up at her. He did, his pupils completely blown and a look of such want on his face that it made her
gasp.

She kissed along his jawline, just because, and then pulled away again.

“Shirt,” she whispered.

The word was like a release. He started to fumble with the buttons, got irritated, and tugged hard.
With a rip and a tear, the shirt came apart. She pushed the fabric back delicately, her fingers sliding
across his shoulders and down his arms as she helped him take the shirt off.
She was at his wrists when he leaned forward suddenly and started kissing her neck again. She moaned and lost the thread of what she was doing at the overwhelming sense of pleasure that ripped through her body.

She heard another rip as the buttons around his wrists gave way, then his hands were on her again, stroking, caressing, surrounding her.

He found the zipper at her side a minute later. She caught his lips as the live wire under her skin intensified, and he slipped his tongue against hers. She met him stroke for stroke, the coiling heat increasing her desperation to feel more than she could through layers of fabric.

He pulled away abruptly and looked up at her. It was like he was looking for permission. She didn’t have to search within herself if she wanted to give it to him. She smiled tenderly and he carefully spread the dress at the zipper and pushed it down, exposing her bra to him. He kissed the swell of each breast tenderly, making her arch into him with a small cry. His stubble rasped against her, but his soft lips were a warm contradiction to the gentle pain of his beard.

She pulled away and he tried to chase her skin with his lips, and she smiled once more. Before he could protest, she stepped out of her dress and looked at him expectantly. He took her in, mostly naked and fully vulnerable, with such awe that any awkwardness she might have felt collapsed and swirled away.

He stood as well, and she followed his eyes without daring to glance away. He was the only thing that was keeping her in the present. He was the key to feeling nothing beyond the moment she was in. She didn’t want to lose him, lose the moment. She didn’t want her thoughts to get in the way of what she absolutely knew she wanted.

There was a pause, then they both surged forward and met in the middle. Her hands went to his belt as his hands went to cup her face and pull her as close to him as possible. She shucked his belt and tossed it over her shoulder as she had done the wrapping paper. Neither noticed where it landed.

She had never been more grateful as the moment she popped the button on his pants, pulled the zipper down, and forced his pants over his hips. The pants absolutely had to go. They dropped to the ground with a soft rustle. Her fingers traced the elastic band of his boxers as his fingers played with the clasp on the back of her bra.

She couldn’t handle the teasing. She’d had plenty. She was one hundred percent done. She slid her hand under the boxers along the side of his legs, slid them down his toned legs, and very firmly grabbed his bare ass. He nearly growled at her, but returned the favor by pulling her underwear down and away.

She smiled as he pushed his pelvis against her belly, his penis pressing into her, noticeable and very, very hard. He released the clasp of her bra, pulled it away from her body, and tossed it in the same direction as his discarded belt. He didn’t give her time to adjust to the cold air hitting her breasts. He simply bent his knees and took her right nipple into his mouth. Her pleased groan was so loud she was surprised the neighbors didn’t hear it.

He licked, teased, and lightly scraped the bud with his teeth. When he had given it the full treatment, he kissed his way across her chest and took the other breast into his mouth. He played with it for a minute, working her up and turning her on to the point where she had no idea what she would do if she didn’t find a release soon. She would probably combust.

He tugged on his hair again, and he released her nipple with a pop. She pulled him back to her lips forcefully, wanting that connection more than she wanted him on her breasts. He bent his knees as
their lips met and tugged her up roughly. She went with the movement, knowing what he wanted instinctively, and wrapped her legs around him as he held her close. He walked them over to the nearest wall, the one separating the dining room from the living room, and pressed her back against it gently.

She slid down slightly against the wall, searching for his hard length to fill her even as she demanded silently for him to keep kissing her. He paused and pressed his forehead against hers.

“Condom,” he panted as he felt her clit slip against him.

“IUD,” she panted back.

He sighed and thrust against her slightly, sliding between her folds and coating himself with her wetness. “My new favorite thing,” he whispered.

She smiled and put her hand against his cheek. He nuzzled it, his whiskers bristling against her palm, and she reached down with one small hand. She gently took him into her hand and tentatively pumped him once. He stilled, hissed, and then pressed her harder against the wall to keep her in place. She pumped him again, the velvet smoothness tracing along her palm, and then moved him so that he was poised at her entrance.

He pulled back enough to look into her eyes and brush a strand of hair from her face. She appreciated the tenderness, she really did, but right now she had so much longing within her that she just really needed…

He thrust up as she moved down and her mouth opened in a silent scream as he stretched and filled her completely. He was larger, larger than she could really contain, but so, so perfect. He sunk into her almost to the hilt and she tried to adjust. There was no adjusting, just the need for movement. She braced her hands on his shoulders and pushed up at the same time he pulled back. There was another pause, and then like a spring uncoiling, they both released their tentativeness and began to move.

His lips moved back to her neck and her hands explored his shoulders and chest. She couldn’t stop touching him. She couldn’t bring herself to pull away from his skin and muscle. He slipped back into her, burying his full length inside her once more and started moving at a faster pace, foregoing the full stroke in favor of staying inside her more completely. She liked that plan very much.

His hands shifted up and he grabbed her ass as tightly as he could without hurting her, his fingers pressing into her skin forcefully. She rocked back into the wall with every upward stroke, not caring that their movements were becoming rougher and less controlled. The pictures rattled. The bookshelf next to them teetered and then fell as Oliver continued to pound into her and she into him. Again and again they met in the middle.

Her mind was blank, her skin was on fire, and, better yet, the heat that had been building since the initial meeting of their lips sparked, and flamed, and licked its way up her belly. It kept growing and feeding itself with every upward thrust of Oliver’s hips. She had not always had an orgasm with all of her partners, but she had no doubt she would find one with Oliver. He seemed to know exactly what she needed.

She caught his lips again, forcing her tongue into his mouth, urging him to duel with her even as his hips snapped upwards once more. He shifted them ever so slightly, pressing her harder into the wall and a spot she didn’t know was there rippled with an alarming amount of pleasure as if to say, “Hi, I’m your friendly orgasm waiting to torture you.” He found the spot again and she had to break away from their kiss to breathe.
With incredible focus, he kept them firmly in place and kept targeting that mystery spot. Over and over again, he pushed against that pleasure center and the warmth turned vicious.

“I can’t...Oh, god...Just...” she babbled at him.

He started moving harder and faster, never violent but teetering on the edge, both of them overwhelmed with the all-encompassing need. She meet him thrust for thrust, edging him towards that passionate pace without holding back or reining him in. She didn’t want to stop. She wanted more. She could handle anything he sent her way. She knew he would never cross the boundary between pleasure and pain. She trusted him.

He found the spot directly under her ear that always sent prickles of goosebumps down her body at the same time he thrust upwards. That was all it took. She clenched, he thrust once more, and then her entire body shattered around him.

She knew she screamed. She could feel the rawness of her throat, but everything else was a hazy mixture pleasure and heat. He continued to milk her, gentle and seemingly without thought. Though she had gone limp on him, he did not seem to mind. He held her in place without seemingly being phased by her weight and waited for her to come back down to the present. She did slowly, her hands moving to trace patterns on his cheeks, nose, forehead, and chest.

The orgasm wasn’t just strong. It was the kind of thing that people wrote songs about and made national holidays for and bought private islands in honor of their happening. It was the single most perfect moment of pleasure in her life. And it wasn’t over.

When he was confident that she had returned to the present, he started moving again, slowly at first but with increasing fervor as he grew more confident that she was right there with him. Her clit rubbed against his skin and her walls continued to milk and constrict around him. He pushed her back ever so slightly against the wall, creating space between their chests and looked down at where they were coupled, stilling for a moment, before he slowed his pace and looked up at her with those stupid, twinkling eyes that she liked so very much. He brushed his thumb against her cheekbone, thrust up one more time, and then goosebumps erupted at once as she felt him spill inside her. His release trigger another baby orgasm that had her shuddering helplessly against him once more. He stroked her until he was spent, and then pulled out with a pleased shudder.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, tightened her legs around his waist, and breathed him in as he lowered his lips back to her collarbone. He kissed her slowly, delicately, a seeming promise that she didn’t quite understand.

The silence surrounded them, but even then, Felicity didn’t think of consequences, or possibilities, or even inevitabilities. She just thought of the way he felt in her arms and the safety that had descended on her mind. She felt warm, protected, and absolutely okay.

“I get the wall sex fetish now,” she whispered into his skin.

He laughed, her body moving with the rumbles that escaped him, and she knew that she would never find a moment more perfect, more complete, and so totally theirs. She never wanted it to end. She hoped that it was just the beginning. She hoped it was something more. She would have to wait and see. She knew first hand that layers had a way of creeping up when they were least welcome. With their lives, there was no guarantee of anything.

But, for right now, she was going to see how long it took him to be ready for round two.
Chapter Summary

A little bit of sex, a little bit of angst, a little bit of sticking heads into sand, a whole lot of psychopaths, mix, stir, enjoy.

Thanks for the love last chapter! I'm glad you liked it so much! Hope this one lives up to the hype. : )

When her feet touched the floor, she sensed a change in the air. It was big. It was life changing, and she really did not want to follow it to its end when she was still floating from a spectacularly awesome orgasm. She was determined to keep things light and away from the emotions pulsing inside her chest like a living beast.

“I’m hungry,” she announced brightly.

Oliver didn’t move from his place in front of her, keeping her pinned against the wall. A hand reached up to brush a strand of hair from her face before both hands landed on her shoulders. They trailed down her skin, goosebumps rippling in their wake. He smiled at her softly.

“I can fix that,” he replied.

“My hero.”

He stared at her for a beat longer and she drank in the simple beauty of his eyes shining back at her with peace and contentment. She knew the weight, uncertainty, and cost of being together would find them soon, but they were both allowing for the pleasure to extend beyond the truth of amazing sex.

Tomorrow would be another summit to conquer.

She smiled back at him, put her hands on his stomach, just because, and then danced around him, stepping over the fallen books, noticing some broken glass as well in the mix. She blushed, not quite remembering how they had knocked over a bookcase, and went to the sofa, determined to keep him distracted, hoping the other shoe would not drop soon. She knew how quickly he turned inwards. She wanted him focused on her; focused on the fun.

She reached down and picked up the panda hat from where it had gotten squished into the cushions. She shook it out and stuck it on her head, smoothing the frizz that had become her hair and warming her head instantly. Oliver cocked his head to the side as he turned to face her, curiosity in his eyes.

“I didn’t want to get cold,” she added, passing him with a mischievous grin, headed for the kitchen.

He was right behind her, seemingly pulled after her like a magnet charged in a storm. She sat at the stool primly, her hat firmly in place on her head, and looked at him expectantly as he moved around the kitchen island. She leaned forward a little to get a better view, liking that she could appreciate him without having to blush, stammer, or look away. She followed the v of his stomach down to where he was still half-hard and licked her lips unconsciously. He twitched and her eyes zoomed back up to his. He smirked.
“The hat looks good on you,” he said.

“Good. I’m never taking it off,” she replied.

“I’ll have to arrange it so that all of the members on the board gets one and make them mandatory for meetings, then. Don’t want you to feel awkward about your new fashion choice.”

“Sounds like a sound business model to me,” she replied.

“What do you want for dinner?”

Her eyes skimmed his body again. “Is that a trick question?”

“Dealer’s choice, then,” he said, still smug.

He went to work pulling out food and moving around the kitchen, seemingly unconcerned that he was as naked as the day he was born. She felt a little exposed, but it had been her choice to continue the nakedness in the hopes that if she stayed naked, they would maintain the fun and the pleasure and not realize that they were both not in a good place to start a relationship. She associated clothes with the real world. Sitting naked in Oliver Queen’s kitchen while he made her dinner was certainly something out of a fantasy. It was a fantasy she had never even considered becoming reality. It made watching him feel surreal.

“Can I help?” she offered.

“Nope,” he replied. It was his turn to slowly rake his eyes down the parts of her he could see that weren’t hidden behind the counter. “I like you where you are.”

She smiled sweetly, the knot that had been growing - a knot that told her their time together had been a one time deal that would never see a repeat and that she had made a major mistake by finding out how good he could feel - shriveled, though with the promise of later scrawled across her heart.

So, she kept her seat and they bantered through Oliver whipping up a quick meal she didn’t understand how he had put together so perfectly. Watching him must be the way normal people felt when they saw her hacking, coding, or doing complex math. He set the plate in front of her with a flourish, then sat next to her, moving the stool close enough that her thigh brushed his every time he shifted, which was often.

“Do you think we should talk about this?” Oliver asked finally, sobering as he played with his food.

“I don’t want to,” she said quickly.

“Why not?” he replied.

“Because I don’t want to decide that now is not a good time, or that there’s too much separation between our lives, that we’re too dissimilar, or that sleeping with my new boss is a bad idea.” She made a face. “Oh, god. I just slept with my new boss.”

He refused to look at her as his body tightened in dejection. “I thought you had sex with someone you liked.”

“No! I do like you! I really do! I just…” She groaned. “You have to admit that it’s com-”

“Please don’t use that word,” he interjected.

“Why not?”
“Because it doesn’t have to be,” Oliver said.

“Well, it is,” she said.

“So…that’s it then?”

“I don’t know,” she admitted. “What do you want?”

“I want several things,” he said evasively.

“And those are?” she pressed.

“I want to be able to eat the rest of this meal the way things were a minute ago - light, happy…everything you are. Then I want to take you again. This counter seems steady enough, but I’d also like to see how you look naked in my bed. I really can’t make up my mind which sounds better. After that, I want to fall asleep with you in my arms and not think, for once, how I’m not deserving of someone like you.”

“That’s ridiculous,” she scoffed.

He turned to look at her with such seriousness and weighted darkness that she sucked in a deep breath and refused to let it go. She waited for him to reply.

“No. It’s not,” he said slowly.

“We could just pretend that everything else doesn’t exist tonight and deal with all this tomorrow. If at first you can’t resolve the problem, foist it off on another day,” she said.

“That doesn’t sound like it will anyway come back around to bite us in the ass later,” he said dryly.

“Not at all.”

“Okay,” he agreed.

“Okay,” she replied softly.

There was a lonely pause, so ridiculously full of what could be that it made her ache, then he returned to his food and their easygoing banter of before. The banter led to heated looks, which led to them not finishing dinner and her discovering that Oliver’s stamina was truly a gift from the gods as he made love to her against the kitchen island as promised.

When she had her fifth orgasm that night, she collapsed against him, her eyes slipping shut and her entire body feeling like melted goo. She was exhausted, sated, and really just wanted to sleep.

He pulled her up and into his arms and carried her upstairs, his steady heartbeat against her ear soothing her and providing all the encouragement she needed to slip into unconsciousness.

She woke briefly when she felt him remove her hat. She pouted sleepily at the loss and he huffed a laugh. He kissed her on the cheek as he quietly slipped under the blankets next to her.

“I’m not going to be able to look at you wearing that hat now without getting aroused,” he whispered in a way that made her think he wasn’t aware she could hear him.

“Good,” she murmured before falling back asleep. His arms wrapping around her and pulling her close was her last memory of the night.
Waking up without a stitch of clothing on while pressed against a similarly naked Oliver was transformative, and just a little bit sticky. She had sweated in the night. He had the thermal capabilities of a heater, and her body had definitely noticed.

He was awake, but he was breathing very deeply to keep from moving her too much. His hands were firmly settled on her lower back just before the swell of her ass and between her shoulder blades. He was keeping her close, almost desperately. The desperation reminded her of their agreement last night. It was morning. That meant dealing with the realities of whatever was happening between them.

She didn’t move, though she was firmly aware that he knew she was awake. He had started tracing gentle, soothing patterns into her skin, and his heart pounded harder. It was nice to know that she had the same kind of effect on him that he had on her.

“Oliver?!” Footsteps on the stairs, hurried and full of concern met their ears. “Oliver!”

Felicity pushed away from Oliver, looking into his eyes in a panic. He stared back in amusement, not seemingly concerned. The footsteps moved closer and Felicity reacted in the time-honored tradition of her people of spazzing the fuck out.

She jumped, twisted, and fell off the edge of the bed. Oliver tried to catch her, which meant that she didn’t hit the ground with as much force as she could have, but it was still wildly humiliating. The ground rattled at the same moment that Dig barged in. She squeaked and pulled the entire duvet off the bed and hid under it.

“Oh hell no,” Dig said.

The door closed again, but she didn’t move. She was never moving. She was going to either die of suffocation or mortification. Both sounded dandy.

A minute passed, which she imagined Oliver realizing he had made a horrible mistake in having all the sex with her, then the duvet shifted and she was freed from its not inconsiderable weight. She sat up, a blush heating her entire body.

“Can we never speak of this again?”

“I can’t make that promise,” he replied seriously.

“Great,” she grumbled.

“How are you so cute all the time?” he asked, sounding genuinely perplexed.

“I’m only cute if you find charm in awkward babbles, falling over things, and being able to assemble a supercomputer in a day given enough parts and coffee.”

“Yes to all and more,” he said. He held his hand out to help her up. He stood with her, so that their bodies were flush when she finally regained her feet. His hands landed on her back, keeping her close. “Good morning,” he said.

“Definitely,” she replied dreamily, her hands landing on his sides. “I mean...good morning.”

“I’ve been thinking,” Oliver said.

“Did that get in the way of all the brooding?” she teased.
“I know that we said we needed to be realistic today. There are issues...There are…”

“I prefer the term layers,” Felicity added helpfully.

“But I don’t see why we can’t pretend that it all doesn’t exist until after the gala,” he said lightly, as though suggesting a menu item for breakfast instead of dealing with complex emotions and their futures.

She looked at him hopefully. Pretending sounded like more trouble, but being held by him, being close, feeling his naked body pressed against hers were all things that she absolutely did not want to give up yet, if ever. “I’m good at pretending. One time I pretended my way into NASA during an MIT field trip. Long story. Totally fixed a camera that were having trouble perfecting. Noobs.”

“Okay…” Oliver said, his smile a mixture of impressed, intimidated, and intrigued.

“My point is that I’m game for not making decisions until after the gala. That sounds fun and not like we’re avoiding anything at all.”

He smiled and bent his knees enough to catch her lips. She wrapped her arms around his waist and melted against him eagerly. It took her a while to remember that Dig had interrupted them and that he was probably waiting downstairs. She also really needed a shower. As much as she was afraid that letting him go would mean really letting him go, she knew that she couldn’t avoid the day. They had things to do, and she had searches to get lost in and bad guys to stop.

She pulled away from him, her eyes still closed, and whispered, “I should get a shower.”

“I won’t be here today. I have a couple of meetings with some arms dealers, a drug kingpin, and a board member who is being a little fidgety about the Kord Enterprises thing.”

“And I have some federal databases to hack, some hackers to intimidate with my online alter ego, and some hair and makeup things that Thea promised to torture me with so…”

“I can pick you up here at seven-thirty,” he said. “If you’d like...I mean, if that would…”

She kissed him again, raising up onto the balls of her feet, and stole his words from him. He smiled into the kiss and she pulled away. “See you then.”

She gathered up the duvet, wrapped it around her body like a cape, and then went to the door. She double checked that there was no one in the hall and tiptoed over to her room, hoping that Dig wasn’t prone to gossip. It wigged her out to no end that Dig had walked on her naked cuddling with Oliver. It doubled wigged her out to no end to imagine Oliver’s family and friends knowing that they were sleeping together when she had absolutely no idea what she was going to do about it or if it even had a chance of going beyond the amazing sex stage.

When she closed the door to her bedroom she allowed herself a moment to bask, to glow, to giggle, and then she went to prepare herself for the day.

She had dressed and was toweling off her hair when she walked back out into her room. On the nightstand was a tray of food, her panda hat, and a short note.

See you tonight.

Oliver Queen, softy extraordinaire. She smiled, touched the panda hat lovingly, and picked up her phone to check her messages.
Barry Allen: *Have you heard from Iris?*

Mom: *R U avoidin me?*

Barry Allen: *She hasn’t called me.*

Caitlyn: *There’s news that someone bought Kord Enterprises. I know you don’t plan on coming back, but I might not be jobless. Yay! Ronnie says hi.*

Barry Allen: *It’s not that she has to call me, of course, but she always does. I’m a little concerned.*

Unlisted: *We need to talk.*

That was weird. Was the unlisted number an accident or specific? With the way things had gone lately, she was going to go with specific. She needed her laptop and a good search to be sure. She picked up her tray of food, feeling ravenous again for some reason, and went downstairs. She didn’t notice that the mess had been cleaned up or that there were people in the kitchen. She had a phone to track, and it was the focus of her world.

She worked her magic and found the phone rather quickly, which was surprising and just a little bit suspicious. Kane was standing on a corner of a busy intersection. Felicity watched with a rapidly pounding heart as Kane sent the message, tossed the phone into the trash bin, and looked up at the camera with a knowing smirk. It was a challenge for Felicity to track her. It was one Felicity was up to without a doubt.

“Hey, Felicity!” Thea said brightly.

“Happy Halloween,” Felicity mumbled.

“It’s almost Christmas,” Thea said.

“She’s doing her search thingy,” Sara said, moving to stand next to Thea. “Her nose gets all crinkled and her eyes super focused.”

Felicity took a bite of fruit, one hand continuing to type, and had three programs working at once as she tracked Kane through the city. It took a surprisingly short amount of time to track her to a coffee shop in midtown. Kane had kicked her boots up on a table, stolen a newspaper from another table, and seemed content to wait in that spot until the end of time. Felicity searched the area and realized that Kane had purposefully picked a place with lots of phones. She fast forwarded the video to be sure Kane was still there in the present and saw her in pretty much the same position, though minus the newspaper.

“Okay,” Felicity said, taking another bite of her food and feeling her expectation grow. Kane had called her out. But for what reason? What did she want? Was it a trick?

“Earth to Felicity,” Thea said.

“Hmm?” Felicity asked blankly.

“Are you okay?” Sara asked.

Felicity focused on them, finally registering that they were in the room with her. “Oh, hey guys. I didn’t know you were here.”

“Have been...” Thea said, shooting Sara an amused look.
“I’m about to call Kane, who is currently sitting a coffee shop on Wilson Street,” Felicity said nonchalantly. “Wanna help?”

“What?!”

It came from both of them at the same time. The shout startled Felicity. She pointed at her screen without replying as an answer and Sara and Thea sat on either side of her and looked at Kane in amazement.

“I need to tell Ollie...We need to send someone to pick her up,” Sara said, pulling out her phone and dialing.

“Why is she just sitting there?” Thea demanded.

“That’s a really good question,” Felicity said. “One I intend to have answered.”

She found the number to the coffee shop and dialed it, holding the phone to her ear and trying to squash the building fear. Kane had become part of her nightmares. Seeing her so casual and in the light of day had terror she didn’t know she could feel clawing inside of her. But she had to face her; she had to face the demon and conquer it. Plus, Kane wasn’t capable of hurting her through the phone. At least she didn’t think so.

“Java the Hut Coffee Shop, Mandy speaking,” a perky voice on the other end answered.

“Hi, Mandy. There’s a woman sitting outside the shop looking kinda scary...”

“Oh, my god! I’m glad it wasn’t just me. She is totally fierce. Everytime I try to ask her what she wants to drink she glares and growls at me to go away.”

“Can you give the phone to her? I need to talk to her. It’s super important,” Felicity said.

“Oh, I don’t know...”

“Mandy, lives hang in the balance,” Felicity said.

“Oh. Okay. Hold on.”

Felicity put her hand over the mouthpiece. “I’ve always wanted to say that to someone.”

“Badass,” Thea said dryly.

“Thanks,” Felicity said.

They all watched as Mandy nervously walked outside and handed the cordless phone to one very unimpressed Kane. Kane took the phone and looked into the camera.

“Felicity Smoak, I presume,” Kane said.

“Kane,” Felicity returned.

“It’s nice to finally talk to you. I’ve been itching to have a discussion for days.”

“I noticed that,” Felicity said.

“I underestimated you,” Kane said, an eyebrow arching. “When I first got the dossier on you I assumed you’d be a pretty easy job. I’ve seen poodles who’ve looked tougher.”
“Poodles are dicks,” Felicity said. “My neighbor had one.” Thea huffed and Sara shot her an exasperated look. Felicity covered the mouthpiece again. “What? They are!”

“But you managed to evade me and find protection with that she-bitch, Nyssa,” Kane said. “Smart move. Though you should probably know that life expectancy is never long in the Bratva. Ask Oliver Queen’s parents.” Kane laughed fondly, enjoying the bloodshed that had apparently found Oliver’s parents.

“Did you have something to say?” Felicity asked, watching the screen like a hawk and trying to decide what Kane was playing at with the call. She seemed so casual and poised, but she had to know that the second Felicity found her, people would be on the way to capture her. It didn’t make any sense.

“I need to talk to you. It’s about the people who hired me to find your battery and kill you.”

Felicity gulped. At least now she knew in earnest that Kane had not been planning on letting her go. That was...nice.

“And you’re being helpful why?” Felicity asked.

“Because they are not the sort of people who appreciate a job unfinished. Nor are they the sort who like their names spoken.”

“You have a name?”

“I have to go,” Kane said, standing gracefully and smiling up at the camera. “This was a courtesy call. When I find you again, listen to what I have to say. It’s both our lives on the line. I expect amnesty and protection in return. This is nonnegotiable.”

“No, wait!”

Kane hung up the phone, set it on the table, and then stepped out of the range of the camera. Felicity went to work searching for her, but it was clear after several minutes hard work that she had disappeared once more.

“Freaking ninja,” Felicity said.

Sara stood and paced in front of the sofa. She put her phone to her ear and started speaking rapid-fire Russian. Felicity felt like it was a way to hide whatever they had planned for Kane, but also a way to vent her frustration. Russian seemed primed for expressing anger.

“That was odd,” Thea said. “Do you think she’s trying to draw you out?”

“It sounded to me like The Consortium is cleaning house and she’s aware enough to know that she can’t hide from them without a little help,” Felicity said.

“She wants Bratva protection?” Thea asked.

“Sounds that way,” Felicity replied.

“Not happening!” Sara snapped around her phone conversation.

“If she can give me a clue, a name, anything...I might be able to unravel The Consortium from the inside out. There’s only so much I can do when I don’t know where to start. They’ve been super careful. I can’t just keep poking the big lake with a small stick hoping to find an alligator. I need
something real to chase down. She might have a name.”

“Yeah, or else she’s screwing with you,” Thea said.

“I guess we’ll see,” Felicity said with a shrug.

“She is not getting within fifty feet of you,” Sara promised.

“I thought Oliver was supposed to be the overprotective one,” Felicity said.

“No, he’s much worse than this,” Thea said.

“This isn’t a game,” Sara said. “This is your life. Kane is a killer. She’s vindictive, psychotic, and she will hurt everyone and everything she touches. You’re not…”

“I’m not in the same league as her, or you, or any of you. Oliver and Thea can scale buildings and treat the city like it’s their own personal jungle gym. I get it. I’m useless when it comes to fighting, but I am good with facts and what I can see.”

“And what do you see?” Sara asked.

“She was afraid,” Felicity said. “And as much as she terrifies me, The Consortium scares me more. I’m going to hear her out, and I would appreciate it if you didn’t kill her before she gives me a clue.”

“I can’t promise that I won’t,” Sara said darkly. “But I can promise to make her talk first.”

She stormed off, making another call, and Felicity looked over at Thea with wide eyes. “By talk she means over a cup of tea, right?”

“Torture,” Thea said.

“Oh,” Felicity replied.

“Don’t worry. It only hurts the bad guys,” Thea said.

“I’m not even...I can’t...” Felicity sighed. “I’m beginning to remember my differences of opinion with the Bratva.”

“What made you forget? It wouldn’t by my brother, would it? A brother who seriously grossed out some guards last night and Diggle this morning?” Thea asked. She wrinkled her nose. “And me if you ever mention any details.”

Felicity put her face in her hands and gave up. She didn’t know what she was supposed to do. They tortured people. They killed them. And apparently there was always someone around to hear her making love to Oliver - which she had to learn from his sister...in the very same room he had taken her against the wall.

“Are you upset over the torture thing or me knowing about the sex thing?” Thea asked. “It’s hard to tell from your reaction.”

“All of it!” Felicity barked back. “How are you okay with torture?”

“It protects my family,” Thea said quietly. “The Bratva is a world of sink and swim. You have to do things that aren’t always right in order to swim. It’s not good or nice...but it is what it is.”

“There are other ways, better ways,” Felicity said. “You guys just don’t want to see them. It’s easier
to stick your heads in the sand and pretend like you have to do it to survive.”

Felicity stood angrily, passed Sara without looking at her, climbed the stairs to her room, and closed the door with a snap. She paced, fidgeted, and otherwise tried to keep herself from freaking out and leaving. Leaving was childish. It solved nothing. It just added to the issue.

The foundation for good was in the spaces between, of course, it just bothered her that they were all so blase about things like torture. They didn’t see the problem with their actions. They only saw necessity. It seemed to her that was exactly the way Kane thought, and shouldn’t they be better than a sociopathic organ harvester?

Ten minutes into her pacing, there was a knock at her door. She sighed and opened it. Thea was on the other side looking awkward and worried.

“I didn’t mean to upset you,” she said immediately.

“I know,” Felicity said. “It’s okay. It’s just...I’ve done things that have hurt people but never on purpose. The fact that you do, that you try to do so much good and then chase it with torture is...”

“I know. You’re totally right. I see your point. It’s hard to take the crime out of the criminal sometimes...Bad joke. I promise we’ll just talk to Kane. If she’s legitimate, then we’ll protect her.”

“Doesn’t Oliver need to make that promise?”

“He may be the face of the Bratva, but we co-chair mostly. And it’s not like he’ll ever actually deny you anything.”

Felicity blushed.

“You have turned the growly beast into a kitten. I’m so impressed,” Thea teased.

“There’s...It’s...”

“He’s been doing that a lot, too, when I bring you up,” Thea added with a smile.

“I should probably try to track Kane,” Felicity decided, giving up on trying to explain herself when it came to Oliver. She had no explanation, just butterflies where there used to be organs.

Thea looked at her watch. “I think we have girly stuff to do before the gala.”

“It’s not going to take all day,” Felicity scoffed.

“You are adorable,” Thea said. “You should grab your things. We have an appointment in forty minutes.”

Felicity sighed at the inevitability of being primped, polished, and hammered into respectability and glamor and grabbed her bag and hat. She firmly pulled the hat on and tucked Oliver’s note to see her that night into her pocket for safekeeping and as a reminder that she something to look forward to around the madness of beauty salons.

Sara was on the phone again when Felicity joined her downstairs but quickly ended the call and did her best to look like the darkness wasn’t at the forefront of her thoughts. “I’ll be your bodyguard today. I’ll have to stay in the car, but I’ll be just outside if you need me.”

“Why can’t you come inside?”
“Because of me,” Thea said, walking into the foyer wearing her jacket and carrying a heavy-looking purse. “The paparazzi isn’t a great mix for someone who’s dead.”

“Does that make you a zombie?” Felicity asked. “The dead but not dead thing?”

“Zombies have to be bitten,” Thea said sagely.

“But technically…”

Arguing over Sara’s zombieism, or lack thereof, they stepped out of the warm house and into the brand new experience of a girl’s day out spent preparing for a charity gala that was way over her pay grade.

Despite her fear, Kane did not pop up at any of the places Thea felt absolutely necessary to take Felicity to in preparation for the party. The day was quiet and almost perfect. Thea was good company, and getting ready made Felicity a little more eager to see Oliver’s reaction to her.

The only room for concern was that all of her texts and calls to Iris went unanswered. She agreed with Barry. It was worrisome. She sent a remote trace to the computers at home…Oliver’s home…and spent the rest of her afternoon hoping it was nothing serious.

All that was left when Sara and Thea dropped Felicity off at the house was to get dressed. She could do that. She didn’t need Thea’s warnings to beware the hair. She had no intention of even thinking about touching her elegant curled updo for the next three hours.

With a lot of dancing around, shimmying, and back arching, she managed to get her dress on without touching her hair or makeup and was slipping her shoes on when she heard the front door open. She looked at the clock and realized that Oliver was ten minutes early.

Butterflies swam and her lips and skin tingled with the expectation of him touching both. She really wanted to feel him against her, to reassure her after a long day of worrying.

It was strange how easily he seemed to calm her down.

She gathered her clutch and phone and walked down the hall, pausing at the top of the stairs to prepare herself for the coming hours. Going down the stairs was her point of no return. Once at the threshold of the house, she wouldn’t turn back, and the world would know the name Felicity Smoak. She didn’t like that it would be because they thought she was dating Oliver instead of creating revolutionary tech, but she was determined to follow her decision through to the end.

There was a sharp intake of breath as Oliver came back into the foyer from the living room and caught sight of her. She suddenly felt a burst of confidence. His reaction was flattering. It was a mixture of the warm twinkle and absolute pleasure and want. He clearly liked what he saw.

Thea had been right when she suggest Felicity go with the red dress. It was fabulous, and felt like second skin on her body.

“Hey,” Oliver said.

She took in his black suit, white shirt, and black bow tie and wondered if drooling was a bad way to begin the night.

“Hey,” she returned.
“Maybe we should stay in tonight,” he said speculatively.

She smiled shyly. “Message to send, remember?”

“Mmm,” he replied, his expression still full of incredible warmth.

She finally walked down the stairs and joined him at the bottom. Her grin turned wicked as she settled one hand on his chest. “Ready to go?”

He looked conflicted. She could see him warring with himself. For the first time since meeting him, the war was of the good kind. He wanted to take her back upstairs. A part of her wanted to let him. But thoughts of Malcolm Merlyn pushed all lust out of her brain. She had to make him understand the trouble he would find if he messed with Oliver. There was no room for error when it came to that horrible man and the pain he could bring to Oliver and his family. She moved her hand to cup his cheek, stroking him once along his jaw, and then went to the door.

Oliver hurried to open it for her, picking up her coat as he did. He helped her put it on and took her hand in order to lead her to the car, where Dig was already waiting.

She slid inside, Oliver following her, and the warmth of the car hit her cooled skin. She looked over and realized that Oliver was still holding her hand. He didn’t seem eager to let it go. She felt the same way. She rubbed soothing circles into his skin absently, even as her eyes found Dig’s in the rearview mirror.

“Dig...About this morning—”

“We will never speak of it,” Dig said firmly.

“I can live with that,” Felicity replied.

“Are you okay?” Oliver asked.

“Scarred for life, but thanks for asking,” Dig replied.

“I was talking to Felicity,” Oliver replied without looking away from her.

“I mean. Scarred, yeah. I never thought I would have anyone—”

“Are you upset about Kane?” Oliver interjected quickly.

“Oh. Heard about that, huh?”

Oliver shot her a look that suggested she was silly to think he wouldn’t be and that he wasn’t going to let it go until she gave him a real answer.

“It’s fine. I’m fine. It actually gives me hope...if she isn’t just messing with me, I mean. She could help us.”

“Oh. Heard about that, huh?”

“Or she just wants to lower our guard so that she can get close enough to kill you,” Oliver said.

“Well, there’s that,” Felicity replied. “Can we just focus on getting through the gala? You can terrify me with what could be later.”

Oliver released her hand and swept his arm behind her. He disengaged the seatbelt with his other hand and pulled her closer so that she was tucked into his side. At the same time, Dig raised the partition separating them with an unamused sigh. Jazz music started playing louder, drowning out
any inadvertent sounds that may reach him. Felicity barely heard it over the pounding of blood in her ears.

Oliver kissed her neck, and then took the outer shell of her ear in between his teeth and gently nipped at it. She pressed harder into him, forgetting about her hair and dress with the sudden growing need inside of her.

“I’ve never considered myself a particularly good man, Felicity,” he growled into her ear. “But I am a patient one. That patience seems to have fizzled out tonight, and I’m blaming you.”

“That’s hardly fair,” she returned dazedly.

He pressed more kisses along her neck, teasing, testing, reminding her of last night and the fun, warmth, safety, and absolute comfort she had found in his arms.

“I know tonight is political - it has a reason - but all I can think about is the way that dress would look on you as I taste you,” he said. “The edges of it ridden up onto your belly, your skin flushed to match its coloring, your feet and those shoes wrapped around me....”

Felicity inhaled sharply. “Like you’re making it easy on me,” she replied.

She carefully moved so that she was straddling him, her dress riding up, and reached under his jacket to play with his suspenders. Her hands landed on his belly and she looked at him so lustfully that he had to blink away his surprise before lurching forward again and kissing her neck, chest, and ear. She was grateful he had the forethought to avoid her lips. She didn’t want to get out of the car looking thoroughly mussed.

“We should probably talk about tonight,” she gasped as his tongue darted out to taste her neck.

“Mmmm,” he hummed into her skin.

The thought of what to expect dulled some of her need and she pulled away from him. She caught his face with her hands and urged him to look at her.

“If we’re not going to be...If this isn’t…”

“You don’t want people to see how wildly attracted I am to you,” Oliver said, his expression falling.

“I just…”

“I get it,” he said. “It’s a good idea. You have a career to think about, and there’s no sense in getting the media involved in our personal lives when we’re not actually sure…”

“What’s going on?” Felicity questioned.

“No, I know what’s going on,” Oliver said seriously, firmly. “And I don’t regret it, but right now isn’t the time to have that discussion or allow for speculation. We need to be a united front, and if we’re looking at each other like we’re uncertain or missing a couple of steps, anybody watching will pick up on it. We need to be a team.”

“I can do that. Team me up, Scotty,” she said.

He stared at her blankly.

“It’s a quote...Well, it’s a version of the quote. You know what? Buy a TV, Oliver.”
“I have a TV,” he said.

“Then watch something other than hockey on it,” she said.

“Why?” he replied.

“Because!” she said, affronted on so many levels.

“Thanks. Clears that up,” he said.

She pushed away from him with a huff and settled back on her end of the car. She crossed her arms and focused on the coming hours. After only a twenty second pause, his hand crept across the space, slid down her arm, around her elbow, and gently landed on the top of her hand. His touch was warm and he seemed to be begging her to allow him that touch before they had to separate. She was desperate for it as well. She unhooked her arms and turned her hand so that his larger hand could wrap around hers.

She turned to smile at him and saw him looking at her with such tenderness and respect that she wondered how in the world she was going to get through the gala without touching him, kissing him, or dragging him into a back room and taking him the way she wanted to. If it was meant to be a test of her self-control, it was a really good test. While things might be complicated between them, while it may never be a really good time to start something with him, everything else drifted away when she was actually in front of him. It made it difficult to remember that they may very well end up burning the world down if they actually moved beyond the spark stage.

But they would figure it out. She had faith in them. She had faith that having sex, dating, or something in between would not stop them from being friends. A foundation had been laid and a connection beyond anything she had ever experienced had been made. They belonged in each other’s lives, and she would be damned if she would let something as simple and wonderful as sex take it from her.

She just begged whoever was listening to help her get through the next three hours. If she could handle Oliver Queen in a tux, she could handle anything, including Kane, The Consortium, and Malcolm Merlyn.

She knew she would eventually have to handle all four.
Gala. Felicity is a golden goose. Oliver scowls.

Releasing his hand was tricky. It wasn’t that his hand was particularly hard to unclasp physically. It was the fact that she knew it would be the last bit of comfort they could offer each other through touch for the rest of the night. She struggled with it for a while, but finally managed to slip her hand out from his as they pulled up to the Starling City Natural Museum. It would have been an odd choice for a gala had it not been one of the most gorgeous buildings in the city. With marble columns, scroll work that was difficult to find west of the Mississippi trailing along the cornices and in crevices, and stately solemnity it had beauty that the steel and glass buildings of the majority of downtown lacked.

Two rows of wide white stairs, separated by a handrail, went to the front entrance from the road, and a red carpet had been unfurled for the attendees to walk and feel special as photographers took pictures and the press asked questions. There was a long queue of limos and people in black suits opening doors and directing people towards the red carpet and the press. It was organized chaos that suggested the people in charge had been doing such events for a long time.

She looked at Oliver’s door as they pulled to a slow stop in front of the press line. She was nervous and certain she was going to mess things up somehow. She had been to events, given speeches, won competitions, liaised with seriously powerful people, survived a house fire, lived through Kane trying to kill her, managed to get through a car ride with Oliver Queen in a suit, and she still didn’t think she was prepared for a simple press line where the worst that could happen would be someone asking her if she was sleeping with Oliver Queen, which she would deny very badly, and then blush and stammer, and be transparent to anyone looking...

“I’m gonna vomit,” she said.

“You can hold my hand again,” Oliver said with a twinkle in his eyes.

“No,” she said. “No. I just need to…” She swallowed heavily, took a deep breath, and focused on code. She started mentally creating an app that popped up with highly rated pizza places whenever you got near them. It was just the sort of thing the world needed. There was a void. She could fill it.

“I’m okay,” she reassured Oliver, keeping her thoughts on the design.

He gently rested his hand on the side of her neck, stroked just under her ear with his thumb, and then nodded, trusting that she really did have it covered. She liked how much he seemed to believe in her capabilities.

He pulled away just as the door was opened. He stepped out, buttoning his jacket, and a serious, calm expression on his face. He reached back for her and she slid across the leather seat and set her palm against his, thinking that his warm hand was a stark contrast to burst of cold that hit her.

Flashes of light started almost immediately at her exit and she lowered her gaze long enough to get her equilibrium back. Oliver dropped her hand immediately and moved out of the way of the man attempting to close the car door. The distance between them, though normal for friends, was the
Grand Canyon of gulfs. She wanted him closer. She wanted to be pressed against his side and feel the strength of his body and know without a doubt that they were truly a team against the press. She had to settle for the calm belief in her she saw in his eyes whenever he looked at her. They stopped at the first camera, Oliver maintaining a respectable amount of distance between them, his expression open but carefully so, and mystery dripping from every pore. She didn’t try for mystery. She went for steel. She refused to stammer. She refused to blush. She made jokes, she laughed, but she also made it clear that she was nobody’s conquest. She knew Malcolm would be watching. She hoped he got the message.

The press line ended twenty minutes later and Felicity was numb from how many times Oliver had been asked the same questions - about the event, the charity, the other local celebrities, and about her. Over and over again he had made it clear that she was a close friend who might be considering working for QC. He talked about her intelligence and capabilities with that same mask of professionalism in place.

“How do you put up with that?” she asked quietly as they finally walked inside.

He laughed and moved just a little closer than was respectable, though he still didn't touch her. He kept his pace slow as they crossed the space between the front door and the room where the crowd had gathered. He was in no hurry to get to the party.

“It’s such a minor thing,” he said. “With all the things I get to do and the experiences and privilege I have, taking twenty minutes to answer the same questions over and over again is nothing. Perspective is everything.”

She smiled. “Good point.”

“You were great,” he added. “Shockingly good for it to be your first press line. I think next time you should be a little less good.”

She frowned, not understanding. “Why?”

“Because the city is going to be in love with you by tomorrow and I don’t know how I feel about that,” he admitted with a soft smile.

“Tough,” Felicity returned with a wicked grin.

“The upside is that stocks are going to soar once we announce you joining the company. The downside is that I’m going to be doing a lot of scowling.”

“How will I tell the difference?” Felicity asked.

“Because it will happen primarily when you’re around other men,” he offered, still smiling.

“That is a serious turn of events. Is there a cure?”

“No cure. Just me trying not to be a gigantic dick and probably failing.”

“That sounds like incredible fun,” Felicity said.

“Not for me,” he said.

“I didn’t mean for you,” she replied.

He narrowed his eyes at her, but his reply was cut off by a older woman, who was eager to thank
Oliver for supporting the cause, asked him to join them in the silent auction, and then tried to pull him away from Felicity within a moment of speaking. He fixed a polite smile, introduced her to Felicity in a tone that suggested the woman should show her respect, and the woman finally turned to Felicity and included her in the conversation. They chatted for a couple of minutes before they were joined by four more women, all focused on Oliver.

Felicity didn’t blame them. He was beautiful, and charming, and did amazing things with his tongue that she was positive no one else in group knew about. It was the sort of banal conversation that had her fantasizing about banging her head against a steel door repeatedly, though. She could deal with press, but she couldn't deal with small talk all aimed at getting Oliver to raise their skirts. It was not her idea of a party.

“Excuse me,” Felicity said quietly when a red-haired woman stopped talking about herself long enough to interject. She stepped away from Oliver, who eyed her with a frown, and went over to the open bar. She definitely needed to be drinking. She ordered red wine and swirled it around absently as she took in the growing crowd with humor in her heart.

There were so many faces, so many people trying to be seen and obsess over who was wearing what, and there were people she had only ever seen on her television. The mayor was sharing a scotch with the captain of Starling’s premier hockey team - a team that was barely in the NHL and last in the league. The district attorney was schmoozing with a Miss America winner. The weather woman she particularly liked was laughing at a joke the owner of Unity International had made. It was a little overwhelming. A week ago she wouldn’t have imagined she would be in the same room with any of these people, let alone all of them.

Weird.

A man with grey, wispy hair approached the bar, ordered a glass of white wine, and turned to look over the room as well. He paused next to her without speaking. Her eyes wandered back to Oliver, who was still being swarmed by the desperate, the flirty, and those looking to have some of his power, wealth, and money magically transferred to them by proximity. His eyes caught hers immediately. He looked resigned but also alert, as though no force on earth could make him stop keeping an eye on her. He was worried and protective, though he was giving her the space she wanted without pulling her back into the conversation. She liked him very much for that even as she realized the source of his concern. It hadn’t occurred to her until that moment that her life was still at risk. The Consortium wanted her dead.

How had she forgotten? Was it because of Oliver? It felt like it had been because of Oliver.

Panic swirled until she saw Dig near the door and several other agents she recognized from around the neighborhood. Even Lyla had made an appearance. She was flirting with Dig but Felicity didn’t miss the way her eyes kept searching the room professionally. The room was surrounded. It made her feel safe.

“Stryker,” the man with wispy hair said.

“Pardon?” Felicity asked.

“My name...William Stryker.”

“Oh. Felicity Smoak.”

He smiled and sipped his wine. “Nice to meet you.”
“Mmmm,” Felicity replied.

His phone beeped and he pulled it out of his coat. He shook it and then groaned. She eyed it, seeing that it was fritzing out.

“Did you want me to…?”

He glanced over at her, skepticism etched into his expression. “You think you can fix it?” he asked.

“Sure,” she replied. She held her hand out for the phone. He hesitated, and then put it into her palm. She looked at it for a minute, fixed it with a simple hack, and gave it back to him. “Good as new.”

“I...That’s...”

“That model has always been glitchy. Flaw in the microprocessor. Just needs a little talking to.”

Thirty minutes later she was the one who was surrounded by people clamoring for her attention. She had been given more business cards than she knew what to do with, several men were flirting with her via mutual love for tech, and Stryker kept asking for her opinion on the latest technology and her thoughts on investing in certain projects in development.

A hand landed on her shoulder right as a man was shooting her bedroom eyes while talking really prettily about the Nano Cloudstorage he was perfecting and she jumped. It was Oliver. The group quieted at his arrival, then immediately started greeting him with far less warmth in their tones.

“If you’ll excuse Miss Smoak, there are a few people I would like to introduce her to before the ceremonies start.”

“Of course,” Stryker replied, looking really irritated but not as though he would dare deny Oliver.

Oliver placed his hand on the small of her back, making no move to hide the touch, and steered her away from the group and the fans she had made within it.

“Aw, I was having fun,” she teased, secretly grateful. The attention had started to be a little overwhelming, no matter how flattering it was on her ego.

“I noticed,” he replied tightly.

“This isn’t part of the scowling thing you promised, is it?” she asked brightly.

“Only a little,” he said.

“It’s sort of sweet in the, “If you take it any further than scowling I will plant fake pictures of you making out with a horse on social media,” way.”

His lips twitched. “Understood. I just thought you might like to see Tommy and meet Laurel,” he added, sounding a bit nervous.

“Right. Laurel,” she said.

“Thea is also around here somewhere with…”

“His name is Roy. We both know you know it.”

“Her boyfriend,” he corrected tightly.
Oliver guided her to the far corner of the room, where a tall woman was standing with Tommy. Felicity had heard of her of course. It was impossible not to hear about the Assistant District Attorney. Oliver introduced her to Laurel solemnly and stiffly, still clearly not accustomed to dealing with his old flame on a daily basis, and greeted Tommy with a warm handshake. Oliver’s left hand did not move from her back once. She pressed against it without fixating on possible meanings. She was surprised how much she had missed it despite so little time passing. She wanted more. His thumb started rubbing soothing patterns against her spine and she felt some of her anxiety at meeting Laurel drift away.

“This is Felicity?” Laurel asked with a smile.

“Present,” Felicity said.

“I thought you would be…” Laurel considered her words, shrugged, and smiled a smile that seemed a little forced, “taller.”

“She just seems that way to everyone who knows her,” Oliver replied swiftly, displeasure swimming in the depths of his eyes.

Tommy took Laurel’s hand and smiled, trying to break the ice that had descended. He brought up an old memory that Felicity knew nothing about, that had Oliver laughing and Laurel looking as distant as the moon. Felicity knew that the laughter was more genuine than some of his laughs but it was not really the Oliver she had come to know. She still liked the way it crinkled his eyes and made the twinkling in his eyes brighter. It wasn't right, though. It wasn't him. She knew the huff of laughter he’d release when he was truly amused. She wanted to see that version of him. She knew she wouldn't see him while around Laurel. He was too uncomfortable.

“I need to pee,” Felicity said when the laughter had calmed. She closed her eyes. “I mean...I need to go to the restroom.”

“I’ll walk you there,” Oliver said.

“I know where it is,” Felicity said.

“It’s just that…”

“Dig can see the bathroom from where he’s standing,” Felicity said. “I’m sure I’ll be fine.”

Tommy leaned back and knocked on a wooden case that looked extremely old. She had a feeling no one should be knocking on it and was half convinced it was cursed. Old things were always cursed. She knew it for a fact. She had seen The Mummy a dozen times. “She just jinxed herself,” Tommy added.

“I did not!” she replied. “The only time it’s a jinx is if you say, “Nothing bad will happen now.” Or possibly, “What’s the worse that could happen?””

“You just said them,” Tommy pointed out.

“Crap,” Felicity said. She smiled at Oliver. “Two minutes. If I’m not back before then, you can storm into the bathroom and scare the pee out of a whole bunch of women. Deal?”

He nodded slowly and finally slipped his hand away from her back. She rolled her eyes at him playfully and stepped away from the group with a relieved sigh. She was totally not into awkward reunions. They killed her vibe.
There was no line in the bathroom, which was nice. She went into the farthest stall from the door, had a long chat with her dress about not tearing, and she carefully maneuvered it to a point where she could pee. She had just finished her business when she heard the door open. The footsteps didn’t sound quite right. They were heavy and had the clatter of a man’s shoe rather than a woman’s.

“Geez. I said two minutes. You gave me one. I don’t know how I feel about-”

A heavy grunt was followed by the hard sound of flesh hitting a nearby stall door. The walls around her rattled heavily, before the sickening thud of bone and skin hitting the floor met her ears.

Well, that sounded...bad.

She was lucky all the pee had just come out or she would be peeing herself. She finished lowering her dress and took a tentative step forward. Her hand trembling with nerves and adrenaline, she undid the latch and pushed the door out of the way. The thought of Oliver being hurt was her guiding force. She would willingly put herself in danger for him. It was not even a thing she had to question.

She walked out of the stall slowly, her feet moving without her actually being able to feel them, and paused in front of the stall closest to the door. She pushed the metal barrier out of her way and saw...William Stryker. He had a knife in his chest and his nose was bleeding.

The water to the sink cut on, making Felicity jump, dread pumping through her once more. She took three more steps, steps she was certain would be her last, and caught sight of a very calm Kane washing the blood of her hands with a contented smile on her psychopathic face.

“Frack,” Felicity said, gulping.

“Hi, honey. I’m home,” Kane said, turning off the water with her elbow and grabbing a paper towel. “I know what you’re thinking. I should use the automatic dryer. Paper towels are not good for the environment. But they take way too long for the girl on the go, you know?”

Felicity whimpered, realized she hated that sound crossing her lips, and focused. “Mr. Stryker…”

“Oh, he’s fine,” Kane said, flapping her hand dismissively. “He’s just a little bit dead.”

“You killed him.”

“You can thank me later,” Kane replied.

“Thank you?!”

“Yeah. Consortium...ring a bell? He worked with them. They sent him here to slit your throat so I took his knife from him and stabbed him. Fair is fair. Keeps the world balanced. We really should be going.”

She grabbed Felicity’s arm and pulled her to the door. Felicity didn’t try to fight her. She knew she wouldn’t win. She simply went with the tide, wondering if Dig had seen Kane enter the bathroom. He had to have noticed something.

“Sent your bodyguard and his lovely ARGUS wife on a bit of a chase,” Kane said by way of explanation. “They are super attached to you. It must be your smile. You do have a nice smile. I bet everyone you meet falls in love with that sweet little smile. I could totally get a fortune off those lips of yours.”
“My lips are happy where they are,” Felicity said. “And I would like it very much if you would stop gripping my arm. You’re hurting me.”

“I’d love to, but I’m afraid you’ll run off and get Oliver. I’m not exactly eager to have him try to kill me before I get the chance to say what I want to say.”

“You’re afraid of him,” Felicity realized.

“Of course I am. Your boy is a very bad man. Have you seen some of carnage he’s left? Juicy. I knew a girl once who kept a scrapbook of his kills. She was a bit...unwell.”

“That’s absolutely terrifying coming from you.”

“Hey, why do they always serve canape at these stupid things anyways?” Kane asked, pulling Felicity towards the back exit.

“Tradition, I guess,” Felicity said, her eyes darting around for Oliver, Dig, or anyone that could offer her a dashing rescue.

“Tradition is such a terrible word. Why do we want to do things the way we’ve always done them? If history has taught us anything it’s that our ancestors were ignorant sluts who thought mass murder, racism, sexism, and ethnic suppression were acceptable methods of everyday living. I mean...ew.”

“You harvest people’s organs for a living,” Felicity pointed out.

“Not anymore. Nyssa put a stop that. It was so much fun, too.”

“Is this what going crazy feels like?” Felicity asked.

They pushed through a heavy door Felicity thought was really supposed to be locked and she found herself in the dinosaur display. A T-rex stood tall and proud in the shadows of a starry sky so brilliant Felicity was startled. The clouds had cleared once more - for her death, apparently. So, that was nice.

Kane released Felicity’s arm and circled around so that she was on the side of the T-rex bones. She smiled at Felicity smugly. “If I was here to kill you, your people would have made it entirely too easy.”

“I’ll make sure they get the memo.” She thought about Kane’s words. “Wait. You’re not here to kill me?”

“I told you why I was here on the phone. I thought you were supposed to be some kind of super genius.”

“Doesn’t mean I’m smart,” Felicity retorted. “But I am. Like, really smart. I’m just having trouble believing anything that comes out of your mouth.”

“Yeah. I have a thing with lying.” She laughed. “I just really love it a whole lot.” She sobered. “But I’m not lying about this. The Consortium is cleaning house. They have something big planned for Starling and they don’t want anyone to blab about it before they can quietly take over the city and do whatever the hell they want.”

“City - possibly world - domination. Got it,” Felicity said. “What does that have to do with me?”

“You escaped,” Kane said. “You lived. And then you did the unthinkable. You took down Kord in an afternoon with a computer and a little trickery. They’re afraid of you. They are afraid of what you
“dug up when you were looking into Kord’s files.”

“They shouldn’t be afraid of that unless…there’s something to find,” Felicity added thoughtfully.

“I have a name,” Kane said. “I’ll give it to you but you have to promise me protection.”

“You have to ask Oliver about that,” Felicity said.

“I don’t want Oliver’s help. He’d stick me in some hole in the ground then probably let Nyssa kill me. The fight would be a lot of fun, but I’m not looking to party. I’m looking to disappear. I want an identity so foolproof that when The Consortium kills you, they can’t find me.”

“You want me to forge you an identity?” Felicity checked.

“And help me disappear. No records, no cameras. Nothing. I want a dossier so complete that no one looks at me twice. Only you can do that. Oliver certainly can’t.”

“That’s a big deal,” Felicity said.

“The answer is no,” Oliver said, pushing past the heavy doors with rippling muscles, steely resolve, and unquenchable anger. He stormed over to them, angrier than she had ever seen him.

“The answer is yes,” Felicity said firmly, stopping him from attacking Kane with a hand on his forearm.

He looked down at the hand darkly, and then seemed to rein himself in when he looked into her eyes. He sucked in a deep breath. “Felicity,” he warned.

“The answer is yes,” she repeated. “She has a name. I can’t continue to live like this…hunted. So...yes.”

“You can’t honestly trust her.”

“I didn’t say I did,” Felicity said. “I just said that she has something I want, I have something she wants, and we both could benefit from not being dead by The Consortium. Trust never entered into the equation. Though she did kill a guy for me...so there’s that.”

“You killed someone?” Oliver demanded.

“Just a little,” Kane retorted.

“Growly face isn’t solvey face,” Felicity told him.

Oliver glared at her. She shrugged at him and turned back to Kane.

“I’m assuming you have how we’re going to do this all mapped out?” Felicity asked.

“Of course,” Kane said.

“What’s first?”

“We leave this party, get somewhere secure, and then you’ll work me up a new identity, I’ll give you the name-”

“Name first, dossier second,” Felicity said, taking a step closer, so that Oliver was behind her and to her left and Kane was slightly to her right.
“I don’t care,” Kane said. “Safe place first, haggling later.”

“Are you serious about this?” Oliver asked Felicity softly, his words just for her, though the grit had not yet left his tone.

“I am,” Felicity said. “She needs our help. She might be evil, but I don’t want to see her-”

The glass above the dinosaur shattered into a million pieces and a buzz of something passed her and cracked into the nearby tile floor. At the same time, blood splattered on her face, coating her hair, her dress, and her cheek and forehead. She looked down, wondering if she had been hit, then saw Kane crumple.

Oliver grabbed Felicity and tossed her behind a display case as another buzz zoomed past her and the falling glass crashed and skittered across the floor and over the dinosaur. The dinosaur rocked violently, losing its equilibrium with the weight of the glass, and then lost its footing. It teetered and fell, joining the chaos of glass with a resounding boom. The sounds seemed to continue for a long time - buzzes, booming, clattering, and sharp cracks of stone merged together endlessly over the rapid-fire sound of her breathing.

Felicity was in shock. She looked around the edge of the display and saw Kane, her feet moving slowly as she slowly bled out. She was still alive, but was fading fast. With her death, Felicity’s only lead would die. Kane was her last hope. She had to try. She had to do something.

Without thinking, Felicity jumped back around the display, staying low to avoid the bullets still buzzing, Oliver scrambling to pull her back, and crawled over to Kane.

“I need a name,” Felicity begged Kane. “Please! Anything!”

Kane’s lips moved soundlessly.

“I’ll get them. I’ll make them pay. Just give me a name!” Felicity added, tears streaming down her face.

“Planctae,” Kane whispered. The light faded from her eyes as another bullet whizzed into the space Felicity had been only a second ago. Oliver was done playing games. He picked her up bodily, his grip unequivocal and strong, and carried her to the opposite side of the room from the way she had entered. Her eyes locked on Kane’s lifeless body as Oliver pushed back the door. The bullets followed them, persistent, until they were out of the room and safely ensconced in a hallway with no windows. He set her down, gripped her face, and checked her for injuries, the stone and steel man replacing the soft, gentle man she had come to know so well. He was in battle mode. He was ready for a fight. He was afraid he would find one and end up like Kane. Kane had seemed so undefeatable. All it had taken was a well-aimed bullet and death calling her number at just the right time.

Felicity took a deep breath, then another. The tears continued to stream down her face, and she knew beyond anything else in that moment that Kane’s death had ruined any chance she had of finding The Consortium before it was too late. She was going to die. The only thing she had to figure out next was when and where. She stared into Oliver’s eyes and knew that she would not be the only casualty. Accepting his help meant that she had put him in danger. She had potentially ruined his life. Would they kill him before they killed her? Would she have to watch him die? The thought of him lying lifeless on a stone floor surrounded by blood, glass, and bones tore her to pieces. She didn't know to stop it. She didn't know what to do.

She was officially out of answers.
Aha! Can Be Awkward In The Right Light

Chapter Summary

To those of you who read but don't comment, I see you, I thank you, you smell like sunshine.

To those of you who do comment and leave Kudos. I love you. Let's take this relationship to the next level and go out. I'll bring the wine, you bring the romantic movies.

Warning, this chapter contains cute, naked Felicity.

She was covered in blood. It was everywhere. It was on her hands, her arms, her neck, and her face. She could feel it drying, caking against her skin, and she really didn’t care. All she knew was that she couldn’t stop seeing Oliver’s body lying next to Kane’s. They had come so close to losing. It was the first time she had been faced with the reality of someone she knew dying instead of her.

She was shaking.

But she took the fact that she wasn’t throwing up all over Oliver’s shiny shoes as a marked improvement from her other encounters with near death. She was getting used to this whole almost dying thing.

Yay.

Oliver pressed her against the wall, barked at her to stay put, then ran to the end of the hall. He disappeared for only a second before he returned and skidded to a stop in front of her, his expression clouded with his tension.

“I think I have an eye on the shooter. I’m sending Dig after him. We’re going out back. Can you run?” he asked.

“You can go and get the shooter. I’m fine here,” Felicity told him.

“Felicity...I’m not leaving you alone.”

“I’m totally fine,” she said weakly.

“You keep saying fine,” Oliver said. “You don’t seem very fine. I think we should put a moratorium on the word.”

“Fine,” Felicity replied absently.

His hands landed on her shoulders and squeezed gently to get her to focus. She stared at the top button of his shirt as if it contained the universe. It was mesmerizing, shiny, and really quite perfect. She reached up and touched it. It was hard and small, not big like the meaning she had given to it.

“Felicity,” he whispered gently, so much emotion behind that one word that she knew whole paragraphs of worry, concern, and urgency.
It grounded her. She sucked in a deep breath. “Escape. Right. We should do that.”

“Can you?”

“Of course!” she scoffed.

She released the button she had focused all of her attention on and grabbed his right wrist. She squeezed it once to reassure him - or maybe herself - and he slid his hand into hers and turned them. Together, they ran down several dark halls and to the back entrance. Oliver made her wait in the hall when they reached the metal door. He opened the door slowly, searched the horizon carefully, and pulled her close.

“Stay with me,” he said.

“Always,” she replied without thinking.

He rushed her to a beat up car in what looked to be the employee parking lot, his eyes on a tall building that overlooked the museum. He broke the window on the driver’s side, unlocked her side, and the hit the gas the second she was inside. She clung to her arm rests and watched in fascination as he wove them around traffic. There was no hesitation in his movements, his grip was strong and practiced, and she hated how hot she found the entire thing. It was probably because he was so entirely focused. She liked his focus. It spoke of his ability to do anything he set his mind to - whatever that may be.

He took them in the direction of the closest safe place - QC. He parked in the underground garage and pulled out his phone, letting the car idle so that the heater could stay on, though it did very little against the reality of a broken window and the chill of a subterranean garage in winter.

Oliver dialed a number and had a quick chat with what sounded like Lyla about taking Thea and Roy home. He dialed Dig next, but Dig didn’t pick up. Oliver dialed him again. No answer. Oliver stared at his phone like it had failed him.


She opened the car door, was surprised that she was still trembling and couldn’t feel her legs, and was incredibly grateful when Oliver appeared in front of her suddenly and caught her before she toppled forward.

“Thanks,” she said, looking up at him with wide eyes, impressed again by his strength and grace.

His eyes were darkened by the need to be moving, to be hitting someone, anyone, but he was also concerned and attentive. He was worried about her, about what she had seen and the near miss. He was drowning in frustration and anger that they had come so close, that they had been ambushed under his watch. She touched his cheek to bring him away from the anger and he blinked rapidly in response, as though he couldn’t understand how anyone would want to touch him with such hate in his veins.

“Punch later. Find now,” she said, tracing his cheek gently.

He nodded, and he slid his hand into hers once more. She didn’t know whose benefit the touch was for - his or hers. She didn’t really care. It helped her stay present, and she really needed that more than she needed to understand. He guided her to the elevator and up to the computer room she had begun to think of as hers.

She sat down at the table and allowed her work to push out the past thirty minutes. She found Dig
fairly quickly into her search. He was on top of a tall building and fighting for his life. He was not alone.

Two women were on a rooftop with him. One of the women was short, wearing heels and a dress, and looked completely pissed off and nearly feral - Thea. The other woman was dark skinned, had her curly hair pulled back with a headband, was wearing leather pants, a black jacket, and truly gorgeous boots, and was fighting with fierce determination on her face. The broken rifle at her feet was proof that Dig had surprised her.

Thea and Dig managed to corner her against the edge of the building. It was give in or jump. She didn’t have the chance to do either. She threw her hands up as an electric charge went through her body. Her eyes rolled back into her head and she dropped to the ground. Blue sparks continued to move across her skin for a minute, then they stopped and the woman remained motionless, her eyes staring up at the majesty of winter stars.

Dead.

Felicity bit her lip and watched as Dig knelt down and checked for a pulse. He clearly didn’t find one, though his hands did reveal a small device on her stomach that looked as if it had been surgically implanted. From what Felicity could see of it, it was designed to shock a person at varying degrees of intensity. Whoever controlled it had turned it up to eleven. They had killed her rather than let her be captured. They had been controlling her actions.

“She was being coerced,” Felicity told Oliver. “The Consortium was using that device to shock her into obedience.”

“That might be why she missed,” Oliver said.

“Missed?” Felicity replied. “She seemed to hit her mark just fine.”

“Unless she was aiming for you,” Oliver replied.

“Oh.”

“Why fight then?”

“They clearly have a way of watching her.”

“She had no choice,” Felicity said sadly, hating The Consortium even more.

“I’d wondered where she went,” Oliver said.

“You know her?”

“We’ve met a few times. She called herself Cheshire. She wasn’t all that bad for a world-renowned assassin. She bought me a whiskey in a bar in Rio once.”

“Is world renowned really the right thing to say?” Felicity mused. "Wouldn’t infamous be better? I mean it’s not like they give out medals to assassins for killing people. Wait. They don’t, do they?”

“The annual assassin awards got called off this year. The head judge got poisoned,” Oliver said in that same even tone.

“Was that a joke?” Felicity said. “I can’t actually tell.”

Oliver pointed at the screen, where Thea and Dig seemed to be having a tense conversation. “Get
them back here,” he demanded.

She hacked into Dig’s phone and started playing *Never Gonna Give You Up* on repeat. He finally answered, his irritation noticeable from the stratosphere.

“What?” he demanded.

“Hi,” Felicity replied. “Oliver would like it very much if you would bring Thea to QC so that he may better yell at you both without having to go upstairs and yell off the roof and hope you hear him.”

“Howdy,” Dig replied, hanging up.

“I wouldn’t yell off the roof,” Oliver replied defensively.

“Okay,” she said with a shrug.

“I wouldn’t,” he added.

“Mmmm.”

He paced away from her, his arms crossed and his head lowered as he considered the situation and the next steps they needed to take in resolving it. Felicity stared at the screen. Dig and Thea had walked out of frame, but Cheshire was still there, her eyes focused on the heavens and her face a blank mask. The pity in her gut was strong and threatening to distract her. People kept dying in front of her. She wanted it to stop. She needed it to stop.

It wouldn’t. It couldn't.

She would drown in a sea of blood. She was already covered by it. What was a little more? How much would it take until she was up to her neck in it? What would she do when the current of blood pulled her under and there was nothing left but sorrow and death?

She was turned in her chair and Oliver knelt in front of her. Her took her hands, folding his large ones over her smaller ones in her lap, and looked up at her with so much compassion in his eyes that she knew, absolutely knew, he had the very same thoughts before. Perhaps he was even having them now. She allowed her fears, her terror, her helplessness to reflect in her eyes. He took them all in, channeling strength, understanding, and absolute trust back at her. They spoke whole conversations in their shared stare. He finally nodded and pulled her up.

“Come on,” he said.

“But the searches…”

“You can’t stay like this,” he said.

He meant the blood. He would never say it out loud, but she sensed that it really bothered him to see her so covered and trembling. He wanted to erase the macabre vision. She just didn’t want to be covered in blood. It was gross and a truly terrible reminder of watching Kane die.

He took her to the elevators and pressed up instead of down. He went to the top level and they walked out into a penthouse, complete with a living room, kitchen, several bedrooms, and a bathroom. The view outside the floor-to-ceiling windows was jaw dropping. She had too much turmoil to do a full jaw drop, but her eyes did widen at the splendor and wealth on display. Oliver didn’t linger. He guided her to a bathroom and the curved walls of a shower with two entrances, a short wall that held the faucet and shower head, and no doors. It was roomy and exceptionally
He stepped in front of her and put his hands on her shoulders. He asked if he could undress her with a look. She nodded numbly and his hands trailed down the backs of her arms, back up, and then on to the zipper at her back.

She stared up at him, feeling broken and shattered, but not alone. He made her feel like they were standing on the brink of the end of the world, holding hands as they took in the darkness that was approaching.

It was nice to have that hand to hold.

The zipper slid down slowly, his free hand settling on her waist as he took his time to bring the metal handle to the end of its path. He paused, letting the twinkle of his eyes reach out and touch the part of her that was still picturing the bullet whizzing into Kane’s body, and then he moved his hands to her shoulders once more. He peeled the dress away from her skin, his eyes still locked on hers as it hit the tile floor, and moved his hands to take out the bobby pins that had kept her hair in place. He was gentle, a small frown puckering his lips as he did his best to remove them without pulling her hair. Once her hair was free, he offered her his hand to help her step out of her shoes. She lost three inches, but she didn’t feel small. That was mostly his doing and the way he was looking at her like she was the strongest thing he had ever seen.

His eyes returned hers; they were still weighted, taking what she had been through seriously. She appreciated the seriousness, knowing that banter was beyond her. She was wrecked. She had never wanted someone to take care of her more.

His right hand moved to the clasp of her bra. He unhooked it with a graceful snap, which was unintentionally incredibly hot, and then helped her remove the bra and her panties. Still, his gaze did not waver from her eyes. He was invested in her stare in a way that not even a naked body could undo. He wanted to drink her in, but soul first, body second. He needed the conversation they shared in silence more than he needed the pleasure of seeing her body naked.

Was he trying to kill her? If so, he seriously needed to get in line.

She didn’t fight the intimacy of the moment. She didn’t try to break it the way she would have had he been anyone else. She allowed it to be just as it was, perfect in its strength and uncertainty. In some ways, it was more intimate than the sex and kisses they had shared. They were connecting around the grief, attraction, and fear. They were coming to an understanding she did not feel like she had the words to express. His hand moved up and cupped her face. She leaned into it, closing her eyes as fresh tears threatened to fall. She held them back, determined to keep her promise to herself, and she felt him pull away. She opened her eyes again, but he was just guiding her to the shower. He turned it on, allowing the water to heat, and bent down enough to kiss her just below her ear.

“I’m going to go find you a change of clothes and make a couple of calls. I’ll be right outside if you need me.”

“Okay…Okay…” she replied.

He found her gaze again and smiled. He pressed a gentle kiss against her lips, then he waited for her to step around the wall. She did, feeling more human the moment the water hit her. She turned a slow 180, the water streaming down the back of her head, neck, onto her shoulders and down her back. Red and black swirled against the drain as the blood and dirt reluctantly left her body. She didn’t try to help it. She simply stood and tried to get the last week out of her mind. Trying to push it out just made it seem closer. She shook her head and started cleaning herself, using the overpriced...
soap liberally and scrubbing harder than she normally would have. She scrubbed until she was pink and raw.

Once her face and hair had undergone the same treatment, she stood under the spray again and tried to get her mind to go blank. It disobeyed. She was pulled in ten directions at once, science, facts, inventions, her situation, and words swirling, dancing, and creating a disconnect she wanted to quiet. She put her hands over her ears, and, as if it were a rubber band snapping against her skin, a word popped into her head.

Planctae.

She had thought it was Kane being a jackass, a final middle finger raised to Felicity. What if it was more than that? What if she had been giving Felicity a clue? What if she had spent her dying breath giving Felicity a way to track The Consortium?

“Holiest of fracks!” Felicity exclaimed.

She fumbled with the faucet, turned the water off, and ran out into the hall without toweling off. Her heart was hammering and her mind was whirling. Oliver was standing at the windows, his hands clasped behind his back, and a thoughtful frown on his face. He seemed like Atlas in that moment, carrying the world as a perpetual torment. Felicity skidded to a stop in the middle of the room, dripping wet and focused entirely on the revelation her brain had provided.

“Planctae!” she yelled at Oliver. “Planctae!” She started pacing, her thumbnail catching in her teeth as she chewed on it nervously. “I don’t know why it took me so long to see it! It’s right there. Obvious. All the clues were sprinkled in between the not clues, like fairy dust. But evil fairy dust!”

“Felicity, I-”

“No, but I-”

“The Wandering Rocks!” Felicity said. “Circe! The Odyssey!”

“Circe is in charge of The Consortium! The Wandering Rocks is related directly to Circe. It has to be the clue we’ve been looking for. Logic follows that they are The Consortium.” She could see that he wasn’t getting it. She stopped pacing and looked at him seriously. “When I was digging around Kane’s business, I came across a logo a couple of times. It was of three rocks and the sea breaking around them. I didn’t think anything of it. Weird but not suspicious. They weren’t linked to his illegal dealings, not even a little. They had a couple of contracts with him, all on the up and up. So I ignored it. But the logo is a clue. It was there all along. The Wandering Rocks, Planctae, is a logo for a company I can absolutely track back to a source.”

“Are you sure?”

“It’s everywhere! They’re everywhere! Argo Global - largest conglomerate in the entire world. Richest, scariest company to go up against ever.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“Go up against them!” Felicity said.
“That’s your choice? You’re not going to change your mind?”

“No,” she said firmly.

“Okay. Whatever you need. Count me in.”

The relief she felt at his words was sharp. “Thank you,” she replied.

He nodded, looking uncertain but determined to support her. He may have been a mob boss, but he respected people’s choices and their need to follow a path to the end. He respected her. She liked that very much. She smiled softly at him, wanting nothing more than to feel his body pressed against hers.

“I love Nyssa. I am faithful to Nyssa. Nyssa is the love of my life. She is the sexiest woman in the world. Nyssa, Nyssa, Nyssa,” a voice overrode their stare contest.

Felicity jumped, whirled, saw Sara standing in the kitchen, and immediately dove for the sofa. She rolled over it, gave a startled, “Eep!” and pulled the blanket hanging over the edge around her body with a haphazard flutter of her hands. Oliver, to his credit, watched with a perfectly stoic expression. The only sign of his amusement was in the twitching of his lips and the sparkle of his eyes.

“Nyssa, Nyssa, Nyssa…” Sara repeated firmly.

“Sara’s here,” Oliver said.

“Oliver!” Felicity complained.

“I tried to tell you, but you were in full aha! mode,” Oliver said.

Felicity jerked the blanket so that it covered her body fully, stood primly, and marched out of the room with a dark blush, splotchy and heated, over her entire body. She didn’t know where anything was in the apartment, so she went back to the bathroom and sat on the closed toilet. She looked at the dress on the floor absently, working to push down her embarrassment at Sara seeing her naked.

“Poor dress,” she lamented. She sighed, but felt some of her good humor return with the fact that she had a real lead. She knew deep down in her gut - the part of her gut that really knew things - that Argo Global was a solid way to get to Circe and the entire Consortium. She could talk to her computers and find that thread she had been looking for since she had learned about their involvement. She was no longer the only one who would be hunted. She was in charge now. She would bring them down the way she had brought Kane down. She would make them all pay for their evil.

If she could find something to wear.

A soft knock pulled her focus back to the door. “Yeah?”

“It’s me.”

“Kay,” Felicity said.

There was a pause. “Can I come in?” Oliver asked.

“I guess…” she grumbled.

The door creaked open and Oliver poked his head around the edge. “I have clothes. They probably don’t fit very well, but they are cloth-like and cover things that you would probably like covered.”
“Yes, please,” Felicity said.

He dared to come the rest of the way in, a pair of sweatpants and a baggy t-shirt in his hands. He held them out to her like a peace offering.

“Thanks,” Felicity said.

She stepped out of her blanket, put the clothes on the counter, and unfolded the shirt. It had a logo for the Starling City Police Athletic League on the front.

“At least you have an appreciation of irony,” Felicity said.

He chuckled and she caught his eyes in the mirror. He had a soft blush on his cheeks and he looked a little...bothered. She didn't know why.

“Are you okay?” Felicity asked.

“Fine,” he said.

“I thought we weren’t using that word.”

“I should probably...”

She watched as his eyes raked her body. The want she saw was tempered by some hidden thought that kept him from reaching out to her. She figured it had to do with the fact that they needed to be moving instead of having glad-we’re-not-dead sex in the bathroom of a penthouse. Or else the pretending portion of their relationship had ended and they were no longer going to be intimate...or whatever was happening between them. They really needed to have a discussion. And soon.

She pulled the shirt over her head quickly and smiled a little at the way it swallowed her body. The pants were next. He was still watching her, though he had tucked his hands into his pockets. His lips were lifted and his expression had lost some of the weight.

“You impress me, you know,” he said.

“I don’t understand,” she replied, her brows crinkling.

“Other people would be way less put together after everything. But the danger and the risks just seem to make something inside of you come to life. It keeps pulling strength out of you instead of squashing it. That’s...rare.”

“Not so rare,” she tried to deflect, gripping the sleeves of the too-long sweater in her palms awkwardly.

“Yes, it is,” he said firmly. “I know that you don’t like what we do, or the ways in which we do it, but sometimes it feels like you belong with us...like maybe we’ve been waiting for you all along. Do...Do you-”

Were they having the talk now? Was she ready for the talk now?

“Ollie?” Sara called from down the hall.

Felicity almost groaned. Instead, she bit her lip and looked away reluctantly.

“Yeah?” Oliver called irritably.
“Thea and Dig are here. Tommy called. Laurel’s handling Dad and keeping the investigation away from you. Are you going to stay here or go back to the house? I need to add to security here if you’re staying.”

Oliver didn’t look up at Felicity. He stared at his shoes. “What do you need?”

Well, that was a loaded question.

“I’d really like...I mean...I feel safer…”

“Can the computers at the house do everything you need them to do?”

The fact that he knew what she was saying without her having to say it hit her in the gut like a baseball bat. She deflated and breathed out a sigh of relief.

“I think so. I can remotely access the computers here.”

“How? Do I need to add better firewalls, or…?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Oliver. The first thing I did when I got here was improve your security. But I also made a little door that only I can unlock. You’re safe.”

He nodded. “We’ll be going home after I yell at Thea and Dig,” Oliver called back to Sara.

“Roger,” Sara responded.

Felicity turned away from Oliver and went to the bathroom door before Sara could leave. She caught sight of Sara at the end of the hall. The woman stared back, not looking nervous or awkward from their previous encounter. That was nice. Felicity eyed her sternly.

“If you tell anyone about me, I will-”

“You really think I want Nyssa to know I saw you naked?” Sara asked. “She’ll be jealous for a year. You do not want to see her jealous.”

“I really don’t,” Felicity said. “Also...Thank you.”

Sara smiled and disappeared into the shadows of the penthouse. Oliver slipped out behind Felicity and marched towards the living room, where she knew Dig and Thea were waiting to get their asses handed to them by their fearless leader.

She followed Oliver, absently fidgeting the sleeves again, surprised to find that her mind was more preoccupied with the question he was going to ask than the knowledge that she finally had the key to stopping a group of totally insane world-enders from ending the world. What had he been about to ask? Where had his thoughts gone?

If he asked her to stay, would she? Hadn’t part of her already agreed to stay by agreeing to work at QC?

She didn’t know if she could be all-in, though. She didn’t think there was any way that would ever work. She had to be logical, practical, and think about the future. Not thinking about consequences had gotten people hurt and Oliver involved in the situation to begin with. She had to learn from her mistakes. She needed to grow. She just had no idea what that meant. The right thing seemed illusive. She wasn’t sure if there was a right thing - maybe there was just a right for her thing. She had absolutely no idea what that meant other than the fact that Oliver’s eyes left her feeling like he really,
truly knew her, and his actions with her had been guided by concern, compassion, and faith in her abilities. Those things were rare. He was rare. And he made her feel like she was not invisible. He saw her, believed in her, and had enough faith to make her VP of the newly purchased Kord Enterprises.

Was that good enough? Why was she still so afraid to jump in? Why did people always refer to it as jumping when a good stern walk got you there without broken legs? Why were people daredevils when it came to falling in love but safety captains when it came to taking on global groups of mass murderers?

And where the absolute frack did the L word come from? She wasn’t falling for anyone. No, sir. She had just enjoyed two rounds of amazing sex, some truly excellent hand holding, transformative snuggles, and...

Yeah, frack. She was already in deep.

She pushed the revelation of growing feelings out as Oliver went into full protective brother/angry leader of the Bratva mode as he confronted Dig and Thea about their fight sans backup, the recklessness of Thea’s decision to sneak away from Lyla and Roy, especially with Malcolm Merlyn on the prowl, and Dig’s running in to face Cheshire without keeping Oliver updated.

They screamed at each other a little, then they all seemed to calm down, apologize, and it was decided they would drive together back to Oliver’s house since their car was stolen and all. It was all very mature, and Felicity was impressed with how normal it seemed - minus fighting the deadly assassin part, of course.

The drama passed and Felicity turned inwards again as she followed the others to the elevator, feeling like she was far better prepared to deal with The Consortium than the swooping in her chest and the knowledge that if Oliver truly needed her to do something, if his life was on the line, she would do it without question.

It frightened her. She didn’t want to face it, face him. She knew it would only end in heartbreak. She had to suppress. She would find a way, because the problems of the day were far more important than a man who could undress her without looking away from her eyes once; a man who could make her feel naked with simply a look that crossed the boundaries of her soul.

She wrapped her arms around her body as Oliver pressed the button for the parking garage. Maybe if she kept telling herself that her feelings didn’t matter it would come true. The alternative was mystery she didn’t think she had the strength to unravel. She had a feeling, though, that Oliver wouldn’t leave her to her pretending. He had been about to ask her something. He would find his way back to that moment. She needed to be ready for it. She had no clue how to be. All she knew was that she was dying to touch him. Wasn’t that better than plain old dying?

She formed her hands into fists and decided that any conversations that might need to have would wait until tomorrow. Tonight belonged to The Consortium.
The clouds were back. They covered the stars and brought darkness to the night that went beyond a normal moonless night. She watched the clouds slowly cover the town as they drove away from QC and back to Oliver’s house. She kept her forehead pressed against the glass and worked through the searches she needed to run in order make Argo Global an empty pile of nothing.

“For the record,” Thea stated into the silence of the car, “I heard nothing about Felicity being naked.”

“Noted,” Felicity said. “Or not noted. Because you didn’t hear it and we’re all forgetting it.”

“What was up with the assassin?” Thea asked after a pause. “I mean, that was freaky, right?”

“She was being controlled. The Consortium,” Felicity said.

“I’ve never known Cheshire to let anyone get the drop on her,” Dig said. “I guess no one will again.”

“The device has to be connected to muscle and nerves for Cheshire not to just cut it out,” Oliver mused. “They had to have surgically implanted it.”

“And used a camera of some kind to monitor her actions,” Felicity said.

“I wish I could have gotten to her first,” Oliver said.

“What would you have done?” Dig said. “Nobody could have known. She’d still be dead, man.”

“How scary would it be to have one of those shock thingies on you and not be able to get it off?” Thea asked. “And to be forced to hurt people without being able to stop, because if you did you’d die?”

“Thanks for adding that to my nightmares,” Felicity said.

“You’d have to kill anyone. You’d have to kill the people closest to you,” Thea said.

“Tea…” Oliver said softly.

Thea held up her hands in apology and closed her mouth. Felicity shivered and tucked her hands around her body tightly. The clothes Oliver had given her were warm, but her hands, feet, and head were still uncovered. She didn’t think that was the source of her chill. It went bone deep. It was excruciatingly close to her heart.

Oliver pulled to a slow stop in front of his house and looked over his shoulder at Dig and Thea. “We’re on quiet mode until Felicity gets us a lead. I want everyone rested and ready to take on The Consortium when the time comes. Patrols are absolutely forbidden for you two and Roy. I need you
close,” he added before Thea could interject. “If we’re going to fight them soon, I’d like us all to be prepared.”

“I’m not moving in with you right now,” Thea retorted. “Not with the love shack running hot.”

Felicity’s face flamed brighter than it had ever flamed. It was so bright that she assumed some nearby planes were automatically diverted. Oliver cocked an eyebrow at his sister, unimpressed.

“I didn’t say you had to,” he replied. “Just no patrols, and double the bodyguards until we know what Malcolm has planned...That means no running away from Lyla, or whoever else.”

“You’re one to talk!” Thea complained. “You never take bodyguards with you!”

“I have Dig,” Oliver said.

“I have Roy!” Thea returned.

Oliver didn’t snort, but it was a very near thing.

“Please?” he asked.

She stared into those puppy dog eyes for only a minute before she caved. Felicity understood where she was coming from exactly. Well, maybe not exactly, but she knew the power of Oliver Queen looking at you with a world of emotion in his eyes. He was pretty damn irresistible. Thea nodded, and got out of the car without saying anything else. Dig waited, unimpressed by the puppy dog eyes Oliver was now directing his way.

“I’ll be with my family if you need me,” he said. “Don’t need me until tomorrow.”

“Yes, sir,” Oliver replied.

Dig got out of the car and Felicity stared at Oliver’s house with a glazed expression, still trying to work her way through the hacks she needed to do. She was well aware that The Consortium had the best people working for them. It was probably how they had caught on to her identity and seemed to know so much about everyone. They had to have some very smart people under their employ. She couldn’t just be good. She had to be a ninja. She had to better than awesome. She would have to test her skills in a way she had never been forced to test them before.

“Felicity?”

“Mmm?” she replied.

“I need to ask you a very serious question,” he said.

She turned to him, eyes wide and heart in her throat. They were going to have their conversation now? She didn’t want to, but if he was ready then she would find the patience and the words. She could do that for him.

“What?”

“Would you like a piggyback ride from the car to the house?” he asked solemnly.

She squinted at him, then shook her head, sticking her pinky finger in her ear to dislodge an imaginary obstacle. “Could you say that again, but slower and with more enunciation on the piggyback part?”
“Felicity…” He nodded towards the yard, where snow was still clinging to the edges. “It’s cold out. You’re barefoot. Can I help you inside?”

“Can I video it?” Felicity asked.

“No.”

“Can I take pictures?”

“Also no.”

“Can I make a mental note of it to share with future generations at inappropriate times?”

He shot her a look of such complete exasperation that she couldn’t help herself, she smiled broadly back. His lips twitched, his eyes brightening with joy, and finally smiled back at her for the first time since the bullets had started flying. He stepped out of the car and met her at her door swiftly. She didn’t miss the way his eyes raked the streets or the defensiveness in his gait, but she chose to ignore it in favor of enjoying the view of him in his tux. When he reached her door, he turned and offered her his back. She huffed a laugh, and then wrapped her arms around his neck without further commentary. He stood with only a small grunt to remind her that he was not officially healed from his fight with Merlyn. He turned swiftly, closed the car door, and then hurried across the yard. She held him tightly, wanting him to be as close as possible. She buried her nose into his neck, breathing in the cologne he had chosen was fantastic. When they were inside it took her a minute to realize that continuing to cling to him while sniffing him was getting awkward. She unlocked her legs from around him and slowly slid down his body, her feet touching the ground tentatively. His floor was cold, but it did not have the ice of outside.

“Thanks,” Felicity said.

“Do you need anything?” he asked. “How can I help?”

“I don’t think there’s anything you can do right now,” Felicity said. “I just need to be alone with the girls for a while.”

He frowned.

“My computers, she added.

“Your computers?” he asked. “You mean my computers?”

“It’s not like you know how to use them,” she retorted.

“That’s not the point…” he said.

She waved a hand dismissively and headed for the stairs. “I’ll let you know if I find something.”

“Please don’t do anything serious until we’ve talked about it,” Oliver added, reaching out to stop her at the foot of the stairs. She turned back to him, surprised at the seriousness in his tone after all the teasing. “I know you’re used to looking out for yourself, but…”

“I won’t,” she promised. “We’re a team, right?”

“Yes,” he said.

She smiled and he leaned down swiftly, as though afraid she would pull away if he moved too quickly, and pecked her on the lips. When he pulled away, she smiled uncertainly, not knowing what
to do with the intimacy when she was still so confused and wrapped up in the drama surrounding
them. She turned away before he could sense her awkwardness and hurried up the stairs. She paused
when she reached the landing and made a quick decision. She went to her room and found her panda
hat. She pulled it on firmly, taking comfort in it when nothing else seemed to work, knowing it only
did because Oliver had gotten it for her, and settled herself behind her three favorite computers in the
world.

Oliver didn’t come find her or try to talk. He left her be. She appreciated that very much. She knew
she would not be able to focus if he was sitting across from her, watching her, his serious eyes taking
in her every movement and making her feel all the things.

She focused on Argo Global, her attention narrowed to their dealings and anything that might lead
her to a face, a person, a way in that showed her their dark underbelly. There had to be something.
Evil conglomerates loved to keep records. It was a compulsive thing with them.

Or not…

She was going slower, taking her time, but first glances told her everything looked entirely
legitimate. She couldn’t see cracks in the facade. They had not left their dirty business for anyone to
find. She knew that she just had to keep digging, look harder. They weren’t as sloppy as Kord. That
was all. There was something. There always was. No amount of legitimate business and clean tax
returns could make her forget the last week of her life.

So she dug, and she searched, and she pulled out all the stops. It felt like it took her forever.

Then she found it - a reference to Starling City so inconsequential anyone else would have
overlooked it. She did not. It came with a company name, a subsidiary of Argo Global. She dug a
little deeper and, suddenly, the entire thing was unraveling before her. She had found her way in.
She realized that she wasn’t digging a hole. She had been uncovering an entire ancient civilization.
She was the anthropologist on the world’s scariest find. Mummies and ancient curses had nothing on
the shit storm The Consortium had brought to the world. Their bad deeds had bad deeds. Their
people in power had people in power who had people in power at their backs. It was a spider web of
connected names, companies, soldiers, politicians, presidents, billionaires, and secret dealings that
only The Consortium had the full picture on. She didn’t even have the full scope of their dealings
and she was looking at it. It was too much to process. She would never be able to bring the entire
organization down. There was no way. They were too connected.

She leaned back in her chair and stared at the screen. She blinked owlishly and realized dimly that
everything hurt. Her back, her shoulders, her neck, her head. She felt weak, exhausted, and fuzzy
headed. Maybe that was the reason she couldn’t see an answer. She needed to sleep. She glanced
away from her computer and saw the remnants of a meal she knew she must have eaten but couldn’t
remember. From the leftovers it looked to be dinner. Hadn’t she already had dinner before the gala?

She shook off the thought and stood, stretching out the kinks and willing her body to work again.
She tossed her panda hat onto the table and scrubbed through her hair, the roots tingling as if she
hadn’t touched them in days. The windows in the room were shaded by the blinds, but she could tell
from the lack of light behind them that it was still night. She paced around the room for a minute,
stretching, thinking, trying to get her mind to focus around the problem.

It didn’t work. Her mind was too fuzzy and she was far too overwhelmed. She had found the two-
headed beast behind the myth, but the heads kept re-spawning. They were growing, and she was not
enough to slay the monster.

She went to the door and hesitated, her hand hovering over the knob uncertainly. She didn’t want to
open it only to find more confusion, but she also wanted to see Oliver. She knew she would feel better once she did - which was not a sentence she was going to examine too closely. She may not have been a beast slayer, but he was. She knew that he could handle whatever she had found. He would help her. He would organize her fears and allow her to conquer them. She finally opened the door and stepped out into the hall. The house was silent, all movement missing.

Had he left? Had he gone somewhere else with the others? Why did that thought feel like such a punch to the gut? Why did she need him so very much right that moment? It went beyond fear. It was something that swirled in her gut. It was total longing.

She listened for a minute, trying to decide what to do. Ultimately it came down to the fact that she was excruciatingly tired. She needed sleep. She had to recover from the search before she did anything else. Once her head was on straight, she would figure out the rest.

She didn’t entertain the idea of going anywhere other than Oliver’s room. Her tired brain was like her drunk brain and making her act on what she wanted without considering consequences. She opened his door and flopped on the bed heavily, not expecting anyone to be in it. She was wrong. She hit flesh with her elbow.

“Ow!” Oliver complained.

“Ssew the deseaawa see,” Felicity muttered back.

“What was that supposed to say?” Oliver asked.

She huffed in exasperation and readjusted her head on the pillow. It was soft and fluffy, but everything still hurt and her body was refusing to get comfortable. She still couldn’t unwind, though her heart was singing with his nearness.

“Felicity?” his voice floated across the dark room a minute later.

“Uhngh,” she replied.

“Does you being here mean that you found something?”

She sighed and sat up, propping herself on her elbows to look at him. She knew she looked wild, with smeared eyeliner and mascara, hair in need of a brushing, and exhaustion coloring her face. Oliver didn’t seem to see it. He was waiting for her answer patiently, his eyes locked on hers.

“I found them, but I also realized that they have a lot of help. They have some of the most powerful groups and people on the planet under their spell. I can’t see a way to go after them. They’ll just rally and slither away. It’s not like Kord. They’re protected. They’re careful.”

“Did you find Circe?” Oliver asked.

“I was too tired to look anymore,” she admitted.

“I should imagine so,” he said.

She frowned. “It’s only…” she caught sight of his clock, “one in the morning. That’s hardly exceptional. I don't know why I'm so tired. Maybe getting shot at.”

He smiled at her as if he knew something she didn’t. Her frowned deepened. She liked to know things, too. She was a knower. She was really good at it.
“Felicity, it’s Monday. You worked through all of Saturday night and Sunday.”

“I did?”

“I had a bet going with Sara on whether or not you noticed.” He frowned, disappointed. “Sara won.”

“I didn’t,” she told him.

“I thought you just agreed that you did,” he said.

“No, I questioned if I did. I couldn’t possibly have...Well, I could have. I have a tendency to focus when I get into a mystery, but I only get super focused when I’m coding or Buffy is on. I don’t want to talk about the week I lost last summer to that show. I don’t mean that, actually. We can talk about it if you want to. But I couldn’t have worked that long, because that means that it’s Monday and I have to go into work in a couple of hours and deal with Kord Enterprises, and announcing that I’m going to be your V.P. and I still haven’t figured out the perfect way to yell, “Surprise, bitch!” at The Consortium now that I have their number, or, well, their company name. Is it really Monday?”

Oliver’s eyes had grown increasingly wider with her speech, watching her breathlessly as she found her way to the question. He blinked three times before finally landing on his answer.

“Yes.”

Felicity whined and settled her forehead against his arm.

“Why didn’t you stop me?”

“I took it as miracle you ate what I brought you to eat,” Oliver said. “Anything else was like talking to a very attractive wall.”

“You and walls…” Felicity sighed happily at the memory.

“Yeah,” he agreed, a shadow creeping across his face. That didn’t look good. She moved away from his arm and shimmed down with a lot of grunting and annoyed huffing until her face was even with his abs, which was the only logical place for anyone to ever be ever.

She settled her head on his stomach, sighing happily, and draped her arm across his pelvis, her hand landing on his hip bone. He was shirtless, like always, and she nuzzled against his skin. She wanted to blame the sleepiness on the snuggling, but the truth was that she felt better close to him. She liked the contact and the feeling that she was touching something real, something immutable.

She caught sight of the injury on his side. He had forgone the bandage. It was still swollen, angry, and red, but it was healing. He was getting better. She feared what he would find when he no longer had it holding him back. Another long scrape was an inch below it. She didn’t remember it from before. She traced it with her index finger and he hissed.

“Did you go patrolling?” she demanded, connecting the facts.

“What answer keeps you from getting mad?”

“Not a single one,” she replied, taking his answer as a yes. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“You were busy and I had Dig with me. I can’t neglect the city just because we have problems right now, Felicity. Helping people matters to me, even if I don’t do things the way you think I should.”

“You don’t do everything the way I think you could,” she corrected. “Doesn’t mean I don’t see the
good.”

That quieted him. His hands moved to her hair. He started twirling it around his fingers, letting it slide and slither around his fingers. She rubbed soothing patterns into his stomach in return, avoiding his injuries but otherwise exploring his body. She hadn’t done much exploring yet. Everything with him had been fueled by passion and lust. To actually get to feel his skin against hers, to touch every dip of his stomach felt like another intimacy beyond anything sex could offer. She was learning him. She didn’t know if this would be her only chance. With the way things were going, it very well could be. Her sleepiness faded slightly at the thought that she needed to take her moment.

His hands continued to weave through the silky strands of her hair, twisting, turning, letting the golden curls fall through his fingers as she turned her face and started kissing the skin directly in front of her. His hands paused and his body locked up. She smoothed a path under his navel and back to his hip with her hand and slowly, firmly, kissed his stomach once more. His hands tightened slightly in her hair before they started playing with the curls once more.

She wasn’t feeling particularly aroused as she kissed her way across the dips and folds of his stomach, merely calm and warm. Doubt had found a ceasefire in her head. She didn’t know if it was because she was sleep drunk or simply right where she wanted to be.

His hands fell away from her hair as she moved so that her pelvis was pressed against his side and her leg was wrapped around his. She didn’t increase her pace, but she allowed herself greater access to his entire chest, arms, and stomach, kissing whatever she felt like kissing and taking her time exploring him with her hands.

“Felicity…” he whispered after five minutes of her gentle caresses and soft kisses, his eyes on the ceiling and he had a deep, emotional weight in his eyes.

The emotion in his voice made her stop instantly and look up at him. He sounded upset. She wondered if she had done something wrong. She had hoped that he had liked her touch. She had wanted it to be for the both of them. His expression suggested it was making him uncomfortable. She had not wanted that at all. She never wanted him to feel like he didn’t want to be in his own skin. He hated himself enough as it was, though he seemed to be learning to like himself again from what she had seen of the past week.

She started to pull away. “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean...I mean, obviously! I just…”

His hands landed on her shoulders and he kept her place over him, though his eyes remained on the ceiling.

“Intimacy,” he blurted.

“Okay?”

“I struggle with intimacy...according to Veronique, and my sister, and Dig, and Tommy, and everyone who knows me apparently. I keep people at a distance. I had hoped that he had liked her touch. She had wanted it to be for the both of them. His expression suggested it was making him uncomfortable. She had not wanted that at all. She never wanted him to feel like he didn’t want to be in his own skin. He hated himself enough as it was, though he seemed to be learning to like himself again from what she had seen of the past week.

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“I struggle with intimacy...according to Veronique, and my sister, and Dig, and Tommy, and everyone who knows me apparently. I keep people at a distance. I don’t mean to, but I don’t see how I can live the life I do and have such good people in my life. It doesn’t seem right. The intimacy problems that I’ve faced with my friends and family have manifested in various ways we don’t really need to go into right now. My intimacy issues with women have manifested in a very specific way.”

He struggled with the words. She gave him the time, watching the play of emotions on his face without pushing, without trying to put voice to the concern and sorrow she felt for him. She hated that he had been broken in this way, that the world had showed him demons, but she knew it wouldn’t have if he wasn’t strong enough to face them all. And he was the strongest person she
knew. He would find the words, because he was exactly the monster slayer she had imagined him to be.

“I don’t invite women back to my bed. Their beds, yes, mine, no,” he said.

“Oh,” Felicity said, the truth that she had popped his safe haven with her crawling into his bed, taking over his space, and kissing him dawnning on her with a wave of horror. She had never meant to do that to him. It was invasive and wrong. She respected boundaries. She liked them. She tried to pull away again, the thought of adding to his unhappiness making her feel sick, but he kept her in place with a slight tightening of his hands. He was definitely sending her some mixed messages.

“Wall sex is another safety thing for me,” he said. “It’s hard to feel intimate with someone when you’re up against a wall and…”

“I get it,” she said softly.

“It just feels less overwhelming when it’s not in my room, in my bed, in the place I live and sleep. I can shut them out easier. I can pretend like it means nothing. Here, though, in my bed, I can’t.”

“Oliver, I can go,” she said.

“That’s not…” He growled and shook his head, his eyes slipping shut. “The first time I saw you in my bed, sleeping, so…” He shook his head again, struggling with the words. “I didn’t feel nervous or scared. I felt...happy for the first time in a really long time.”

“Oh!” she gasped.

“For some reason, I don’t feel invaded or like I need to be pushing you out when I see you in my space. I just end up feeling like I want you closer, like everything is okay when you're in my arms. That has only gotten stronger the longer you've stayed. I’m not saying that I’m good with everything exactly. It’s taking a readjustment. I don’t know if I’m doing it right. Part of me is panicking, and I don’t know if the panic will be stronger than the urge to pull you closer. I don’t know if I’ll end up pushing you away. I just know that I’m tired of pushing out the things that make me happy. I’m tired of fighting a war with myself. Things are different with you. I don’t know why. I don’t know how. I shouldn’t feel this way after so little time. But I do. And my question to you right now, Felicity, is this: Will you let me make love to you in my bed?”

The question was so much more than that. It was affirmation. It was a promise. It was proof that her growing emotions were not one sided. It wasn’t the same as having a conversation about how they came from two very different places, or a discussion of the challenges that were so glaringly obvious, or even acknowledging the fact that they were in a shit storm of monumental proportions, but it was a vow, a request, a desire to continue on instead of shut things down. He was asking her to let him in and to trust him with a future that may very well break her heart. She didn’t want to give him so much. She was afraid. No, she was terrified. Her life was in chaos and she had just spent a day discovering how truly scary The Consortium was. She shouldn’t let anyone in around the very real threats on her life. It should go back to the way things had been. It was safer. It would protect them both.

Even as the thought floated through her head she knew it was a lie. He had been honest with her. She needed to be honest with herself as well.

She was afraid because she could very well learn to love him and she hadn’t trusted anyone with her heart in a very long time. She had done the same things Oliver had done, though less dramatically. She had limited her intimacy, hiding behind her humor and the laughter. Even her babbles had been
a shield. She let the awkwardness push people away. And it had worked. Except with him - never with him.

He saw her. He liked what he saw. He desired her. He wanted to break down his shield of protection and make love to her in his bed.

She really wanted to let him.

She closed her eyes and took all of her fears and let them float through her head. She aired them all out internally, assessing them, feeling them, and then she did what Oliver had claimed her to be so good at. She took her fears and allowed them the chance to make her brave. She found the courage to put herself out there. She stepped around the pitfalls of her past and allowed herself the chance to either make a mistake or change her life for the better.

She opened her eyes again. He was waiting for her, patient and understanding, sensing the broken bits that had left tatters of her heart and instinctively knowing that her hesitation wasn’t about him but about her.

She nodded slowly, a small smile breaking over her face at the acknowledgment of what she wanted. He didn’t look like he quite believed it. It took him a couple of seconds, then he smiled back. Still smiling, he rose up and met her lips in the middle. He pulled her to him as he deepened the kiss. The pace turned frantic, desperate. He pulled away and shook his head. She stared at him, lips swollen, hair mussed, and eyes wide. Had he changed his mind already?

He closed his eyes again, and then hugged her tightly, pressing kisses into her shoulder. A second later, she was on her back and he was hovering above her.

She had no idea how he had done it or if she really even wanted to know. She stared up at him, a flush moving through her body as he stared down at her. He was very serious and speckled with red dots on his cheeks. Though his look was heated, she sensed a change from the last time they had been together. There was weight to the moment, emotion that went beyond desire and lust.

Very seriously, he leaned forward and pressed a kiss under her ear. Goosebumps erupted on her neck and cascaded down her arms. He trailed kisses down her neck, each one placed precisely, as though he wanted to remember their placement forever.

She slid her palms up his arms, back down, and then moved them under his arms to caress his back and shoulders. She was exploring him again, marking out the lines of muscle, tendon, scar tissue, and the way his body came together to make him so incredibly yummy. He had been keeping space between their bodies, interested more in taking his time than appeasing his arousal. She appreciated the sentiment, but she wanted to feel him pressed against her, have his weight on top of her, and feel his body fitted against hers. She wrapped her legs around his and drew him as close as he would allow.

He didn’t pause despite the change of position. He continued his kissing - down her neck, across her chest, up the other side of her neck, along her jaw and finally back to her lips.

She caught his lips with hers eagerly, opening to every shift of his soft lips in a rhythm that did not need perfecting. They moved together, reading needs before the other person even realized them in themselves. Their kisses were open mouthed, full of pants, and moans, and hums of pleasure. Occasionally their tongues would tangle, but their lips meeting was the true goal. Everything else was irrelevant.

He kept the pace slow, intimate, and she followed his lead, knowing that he needed this slow,
intimate pace more than she needed it fast. He wanted his first experience with a woman in his bed to be a moment of care and passion. She respected that. She liked their slow pace and delicate exploration for what it was. She wanted to drown in the care he was directing her way. He went back to kissing her neck, his tongue darting out now and then, causing moans to fill the morning air with sound and need.

He pulled back enough to look her in the eyes again, his hand moving to cup her face, his pelvis firmly pushed against hers. She could feel his erection. She knew he could feel her warmth. They were both ready. She had a feeling it was going to be slow torture to remember.

The hand not cupping her face moved down and he followed its path with his eyes, his gaze heated and eager. He tugged on the hem of the sweater and she arched her back. He took that as the permission it was and dragged the shirt up her body and over her head. She wasn’t wearing anything underneath. She had left her underwear with the dress in the penthouse. She hoped someone had burned them all by now.

His thumb stroked her nipple, pulling her back to the present and she squirmed a little, the goosebumps moving down her body and circling her breasts and stomach. He kissed the swell of her right breast, the scruff marking her and sending her overheated flesh into overdrive. She was sensitive, wired, and ready to explode. Restraint was killing her. She moved her hands back to his body, knowing that it was the only thing that would keep her calm. She raked her nails across the flesh on his lower back and pushed his boxer briefs down enough to grab the top of his ass firmly. He arched into her with a stuttering exhale. She grinned up at him saucily and stole the smile without another lingering kiss.

She tugged on his underwear again to get them out of her way so she could fully enjoy the very important task of cupping his butt and he obligingly pulled them away and tossed them across the room. She took advantage of the space between them and pulled off the overlarge sweatpants and tossed them as well.

They were both now completely naked, and that was just dandy.

He didn’t immediately press his body against hers. Instead, he took to exploring her body the same way she had explored his. He caressed, he discovered, he kissed, and he slowly worked her up, wetness pooling at her center and heat building along her spine. She responded to every touch, every kiss with one of her own on his body. He kissed across her stomach for a while, until a gentle tug on his chin had him climbing her body. He took extra care with her breasts, squeezing and kissing, seemingly enamored with them, then found her lips once more.

He pressed against her again, his penis resting on her folds but not entering her. He was waiting, allowing to the pressure to build further. She wanted to tell him that she was not a pressure cooker and did not need to reach a certain boiling point before exploding, but his lips kept stealing the words.

His hand drifted down, following the lines of her arm, and then caught one of her hands that had been clutching at him. He brought it up, pressing it over her head, and held it there, their fingers intertwined. He pulled away briefly and she nearly whined, but it was just so he could line himself up with her entrance.

He paused, hesitating, and she saw his fear. He was stepping across a line he had put in place long ago - a line that had kept his heart safe. She knew that line. She had lived it. She was more than willing to help him step across it. She shifted up deliberately, giving him to pull away if he wanted to, and he slid into her, slowly, perfectly.
Her eyes slipped shut and he paused, adjusting the feel of her, allowing her to do the same. He kept their hands together over her head and used his elbow to prop himself up enough not to crush her.

Then, he moved, pulling back, but staying within her nearly fully. She had the thought that he didn’t want any level of separation between them. She shifted under him, just enough to follow his movement, and then met him in the middle with a surge of complete pleasure billowing inside her. She opened her eyes just as he found that spot under her ear once more. Her eyes closed again and her thoughts completely frizzed out. She knew she should be worried and tense after her discoveries with The Consortium, but all she could think about was meeting him thrust for thrust and the way her body was recognizing his in a way that went beyond comprehension. Once again, he drove all thought that wasn’t the present out of her brain.

They kept the pace slow, languid, kissing each other on the lips, chests, shoulders, and necks whenever they came together, but allowing their joining to be the focus of the moment. He released her hand at one point and started caressing her, feeling across her hips, her stomach, her legs as he continued to fill her up and rock into her gently, deliberately.

She kept pressing up, his pelvis rocking into her clit, his tip hitting a spot inside her that kept making sparks shoot through her core. A sense of being valued, taken care of, adored, swirled in her chest, adding to the heat that was growing inside her belly. She clung to him as the feeling took root, not wanting to let him go, not wanting the moment to end. She wanted to draw out their time together for as long as possible. She wanted to be close to him in this way until their bodies could handle it no longer.

“Felicity,” he moaned against her flushed skin, his tongue darting out once more to taste her. She screamed his name back to him, her back arching off the bed and her legs clenching around him as she came hard and fast. Her entire body rattled and fought the pleasurable pain of the orgasm. It took her over, control beyond her. Oliver was the only thing that kept her from exploding and shattering into a million different pieces. He held her, his hand wrapped under her back as she continued to shake, stilling completely as he waited for her to come back to him. She did eventually, slumping back onto the bed with a lazy flop, her mind hazy and thoughts indistinct.

Oliver cupped her cheek again and bent down to press chaste kisses against her lips. She met the kisses lazily, the contentment making her drift in a sea of warmth and what she could only describe as pure happiness.

After a minute, he started moving again, and the sensitivity made her shake before the pleasure took over and erased her thoughts again. She leaned up as he rocked into her and kissed his chest, paying special attention to the Bratva tattoo and the spot between his shoulder and clavicle that made him gasp. She nipped him occasionally, feeling torn between wanting to touch him everywhere and rocking into him more. She settled for touch, knowing it was far more important than meeting his thrusts.

His pace remained slow, unhurried, and he kept closing the distance between their bodies, as if it actually pained him to be away from her. She found his eyes, reassuring him that she was there, finding joy and pleasure reflected back at her.

Their gazes locked again and she smiled at him, warm and true, and his eyes rolled back in his head as he spilled inside her with a quiet grunt. He shook, his muscles straining, before the orgasm passed and he sighed dreamily. He slowly slid out of her and pressed his nose against her neck, inhaling what she was certain was two-day-old stink. He didn’t seem to notice. He kissed her again, and then leaned up to look down at her once more.
The happiness that had curled in her chest danced and sparked and she knew that the sex wasn’t the end of the feeling. He wasn’t going to run. And she finally realized she wasn’t going to either.

“Things just changed, didn’t they?” she asked softly, stroking his face.

“Yes,” he replied.

“What do we do now?”


“We have some things we need to talk about,” she told him.

“We will,” he promised. “One by one, but not tonight.”

“No, not tonight,” she agreed with a sleepy yawn.

He rolled away from her and padded to the bathroom. He returned with a washcloth and gently cleaned her up. She was half dozing by the time he finished, her movements lazy and incredibly sluggish.

“Oliver?” she murmured.

“Yes?” he returned, his voice thicker than normal, weighted with something, but something good.

“Thanks for not mentioning how bad I smell.”

“You always smell like flowers to me,” he returned, pulling her into his arms so that she was curled against his body, her nose pressed against his chest.

“Liar,” she returned.

He laughed and the sound followed her into her dreams.
Chapter Summary

Happy Halloween!

She had wanted to talk to Oliver in the morning about the issues that would definitely be between them going forward. She didn’t feel like they really needed words, but they definitely needed words. It was better to work through issues than to let them fester. But waking up in his arms had turned into a bit of a makeout session, which had turned to realizing they were running late, that had then turned into them hurrying around the house, showering, eating a quick breakfast, and then Oliver having to leave before her on QC business.

He promised to meet her at Kord Enterprises later, but she knew the re-introductions would belong entirely to herself. She knew everyone that would be there, those that were still around at least. She had worked with them. She had seen them everyday. It was weird to go back as the boss. She also knew that she had a lot of work to do. She had to restructure things, get rid of the people she knew to be unequivocal assholes, promote the intelligent, back away from projects that were sketchy, and…

She took a deep breath.

She didn’t have to manage everything all that day. She had time. Her phone dinged. She looked down at the text message.

Oliver: I’ll be by in a few hours. Please stay with Dig. I know you’re tempted to argue, but I promise bribery in exchange for you being safe.

She smiled at the message, the warmth that had been in her chest since making love to him the previous night only growing stronger. She knew logically that she should be terrified over The Consortium and Malcolm, but she couldn’t find it within her. She was enjoying her moment. She was going to bask. Or maybe float. She was definitely going to gloat a little. Doing all three sounded pretty awesome.

It would be eternal gloating, but that hardly mattered. Having Oliver, sharing his bed when he didn’t share it with anyone, seeing the sweet man behind the beast, and finally feeling like she could relax around him without having to have answers had her somewhere in the vicinity of cloud nine and the town of Holy Frackville, populace: her.

She texted him back.

Felicity: Depends on the bribe.

Oliver: I have a couple in mind.

She flushed, not missing the subtext behind the actual text.

Felicity: Food or wine, Oliver. I don’t mess around.

Oliver: Noted.
She tucked her phone into her purse just as Dig walked into the living room with his phone pressed to his ear. He said his goodbyes to what could only be Lyla and looked at Felicity expectantly.

“Morning,” Felicity chirped.

“Oh-huh,” Dig returned.

His eyes scanned the room, lingering on the furniture in a way that made her blush. When his gaze returned to her, no hint of his thoughts was in his eyes.

“Are you ready to go?” he asked.

“Yep!” she replied. “Time to go realize how much paperwork a failing company has.”

“I’m sure that won’t be your whole day,” he consoled her. He smirked. “There’ll also be people to fire and emergencies to mitigate.”

“Yay,” she said waving her fist less than energetically, her expression sarcastic.

He gestured for her to go first and followed her to the car. He held the door for her, which wigged her out a little, and then joined her on the driver’s side.

They were in the car for a couple of minutes before Dig spoke. “Oliver said you found The Consortium.”

“I did,” she replied.

“Does that mean you’ll be leaving?” Dig asked.

“Leaving?” she replied.

“Yeah.”

She realized his real question after a moment’s thought. “The Consortium thing will take a lot more sorting. And I do mean a lot. But even when it is over, if it ever is over, I’m not going anywhere. I’m going to have a long talk with Oliver about his smashy-death-grrr-torture thing, but I think we can work something out.”

“Do you now?” he asked, sounding amused.

“He’s changing, Dig. I don’t know what he was before, but I can see that he’s in the middle of becoming someone different. He’s looking for another way to be, to do, and I have faith he can find it, whether I’m around or not.”

“Mmmm,” Dig replied, though she could from his expression that he was pleased.

“Though I would really like to be around.” She picked at her dress thoughtfully. “I’ve felt closer to all of you in five days than I have around most people I’ve known for a year.”

“Are we bonding?” Dig asked, a small smirk on his face.

“Drive your stupid car,” Felicity returned, though with a smile.

Kord Industries was not how she had expected it to be. She had assumed there would be buzzing
and excitement. Instead, the front lobby was like walking into a tomb. There was only one security

guard left - a tall woman who looked tense and certain that she wouldn’t have a job tomorrow. Felicity knew her vaguely from before. The woman gave her and Dig badges and went back to

staring at her monitors blankly.

The elevator was deserted, which was a rarity, and Dig stayed silent the ride up. She was left to her

thoughts in a way that rarely ended well. Her body tingled with nerves, and her heart hammered with

the fear that she would say or do something wrong. She went over her qualifications - none of them

included management. She was out of her depth. She was overwhelmed. It was a chance to build a

company from the ground up, but she didn’t know where to start.

She stepped off on the executive floor and went to Kord’s office. She thought of her last visit to the

office with a triumphant smile. Then she thought of Kord being slaughtered by the prisoners and her

smile fell. It wasn’t the best image to have right before starting work at the company she had

basically, accidentally stolen from him.

She pushed the door out of her way and stared at the room.

“Needs some flowers,” she decided. “And air freshener...to suss out the lingering smell of evil.” She

shook her head. “Which is not the point. To work!”

She sat down at the desk and opened up several windows on the screen. She moved through the list

of people who had actually showed up for work that day and was unsurprised to see Caitlyn and

Curtis at the top of the list. Caitlyn was always on time and always showed up to things she was

getting paid to do. It was her nature. And Curtis couldn’t go a day without tinkering. He needed the

labs because his tinkering tended to explode. He would keep coming in until they kicked him out.

She figured she owed her friends an explanation first. She called Caitlyn up, who went from

confused to delighted as Felicity explained her idea to buy the company and repurpose it under the

Queen banner. She hugged Felicity tightly and promised her celebratory drinks. Felicity offered her a

promotion over the biological engineering department and Caitlyn accepted with a squeal and

another hug.

They talked for another twenty minutes, though Felicity mainly asked about Ronnie and introduced

Diggle to her. There was so much she couldn’t say now. She didn’t regret it, but it created a chasm.

Caitlyn could never know the full extent of Oliver’s business and the way The Consortium was

targeting her. She had a normal life, a good life, and her morals would never reside in the fuzzy grey

area Felicity had come to know all too well. Curtis came to her office next, a confused frown on his

face. Oliver’s words were in her ears when she saw his face. Curtis had blabbed to Kord. His

babbling had set everything in motion. She didn’t know if she wanted to thank him or yell at him.

“Felicity!” he exclaimed, eyeing the office and her placement behind the desk in bewilderment.

“What’s up?”

“Oh. I’m in charge of what was Kord now. Under Oliver Queen. Not under, under, just, you know, one rung down.” She sighed. “I’m V.P. of what Oliver tells me will be Queen Inc. once the re-

branding happens.”

“So the company was purchased. That was you?”

“Yep! So, you want Head of Development? You’ll have to liaise some with Barry at QC, but you

two will hit off. You’re both giant, nerd, puppy dogs.”

“I don’t really know if puppy-“
“But you earned it. We both know you would have been promoted sooner if your old boss hadn’t been such a giant d-bag,” she said.

“Vice President,” he said to himself, rolling his eyes and seemingly flabbergasted with her promotion.

“Before you accept I want to be sure that we’re on the same page,” she added, sobering.

“About what?” he asked.

“Any projects that get worked on, that I’m working on and share with you, whatever, will be held in the strictest of confidences. If someone isn’t directly involved with the project, you don’t get to talk about it unless that person is me.”

“That’s an oddly specific addendum.”

“That’s because your blabbing had Kord sending people after me to steal my battery!” she chastised him. “Not to mention the attempts on my life! Which is, of course, way worse than the theiving. But the theiving was pretty annoying! And the whole burning down of my home...Yeah, I’m maddest about that.”

“Oh my god!” he exclaimed, moving closer. Dig shifted slightly and shook his head in a warning. Curtis took a cautious step back. Curtis’s thoughts turned inward, shifting through everything that had happened the past week. “You’re the reason Kord was arrested?” he exclaimed.

She knew that answering that question was a very bad idea.

“Do we have an understanding?” she asked in her best scary voice.

He blinked several times in surprise and shifted awkwardly. “It’ll never happen again,” he vowed.

“Good,” she replied sternly.

He hung his head and tucked his hands into his pockets. “This means you own my soul now, doesn’t it?” he asked.

“Pretty much,” she replied happily.

“Okay!” He smiled and waved a goodbye before ducking out of the office. She spent the next few hours working her way through the files that were still in chaos, talking to the people she wanted to stay, and firing the people she didn’t. She felt divided and pulled in five different directions at once. It was stressful and she was definitely frazzled. She didn’t feel like she was managing things well and it had only been a few hours. There was just so much. And on top of that she was still checking on her searches and looking for a way to bring down The Consortium. She was faltering. She was not prepared. All of her experiences combined could not make her feel better about her choices and her judgment calls, which all felt wrong even as she made them.

“I see that a bribe isn’t actually necessary,” Oliver said.

She looked up, pulling her hands out of her hair, and felt a rush of heat. The tension didn’t disappear, but Oliver somehow pushed it back a little. She smiled at him.

“No bribe today. Dig is too stimulating a conversationalist for me to sneak away from him,” she said.

Dig was on his phone in the corner, looking bored again. She knew he was taking care of Bratva
business. It was the unsaid thing between them that she refused to ask about and he refused to burden her with. Dig arched his eyebrow but didn’t look away from his phone. He didn’t greet Oliver. Felicity was learning that they weren’t the types of men to exchange pleasantries. That probably had something to do with being around each other so much.

Oliver stepped into the room and looked around, impressed. “Nice office.”

“It was Kord’s,” she said.

“Symmetry,” he replied with a smile. He held up a large bag. “Lunch! We have to share with Dig and Thea.”

“Thea’s here?” Felicity asked, looking around him and not seeing the whirlwind of a girl.

“Bathroom,” he returned. He set the bag on her desk and glanced over at Dig. He hesitated, and then walked around to her side of the desk. His eyes glued on hers, he bent down and pecked her lips. When he pulled away, he smiled, soft and warm, and her heart started pounding harder. So they were doing the open affection thing now.

Neato.

He went back to the food and started passing it out, chatting with Dig and her with unreserved openness and practical calm she wouldn’t have expected a week ago. The conversation was easy and familiar. They avoided topics relating to the things that gave her a headache and instead focused on the mundane. It was nice and normal. The feeling was only compounded when Thea came in and was a whirlwind of humor, snappy comebacks, and lovingly mocking her brother. Lunch was over far too soon for Felicity. For the first time all day she didn’t feel like she was out of her depth, being judge for her words, and making the wrong decisions. Thea had to get back to her club and Oliver had a meeting with Nyssa. Dig clearly wanted to go with Oliver, as did Thea, but Oliver wouldn’t let them. It was a typical meeting to check in and it would look suspicious if they all arrived for it. They couldn’t take the risk that Nyssa wasn’t still being watched by Malcolm.

“Sara will be there,” Oliver added.

“Oh. Okay,” Thea said with a shrug.

“Fine by me,” Dig replied.

“She’ll protect you,” Felicity agreed.

Oliver nodded and finally stood. Felicity stood with him, not liking the fact that he had to leave so quickly but knowing she would get absolutely zero work done with him around. He was very distracting.

“Oh! Before I forget!” Felicity said. She opened her desk drawer and pulled out three cases. She handed them out.

“What’s this?” Oliver asked.

“Ear pieces for patrolling. I have one too. I can sync them later. They need a little tweaking, but this whole texting thing while out on a mission is so 2012.”

“Cool!” Thea exclaimed, picking hers up and staring at it with a smile.

“Thank you,” Oliver said quietly, taking the gesture for the sign she had meant it to be when she had
pulled them out of development. It was more proof that she wasn’t going to disappear in a puff of smoke. It was affirmation. It terrified and exhilarated her.

“You’re welcome,” Felicity replied.

He stepped into her space again and took her hand, squeezing it gently. His eyes were twinkling and she knew the thank you went straight to his soul. The gesture meant more to him than she had expected. He kissed her cheek gently, obviously not wanting to kiss her full on with Thea watching, and then dropped her hand.

“I’ll see you after work?” he asked.

“It’s a date,” she agreed.

“Their children will be brilliant and broody. And giant saps, apparently,” Thea said to Dig, who chuckled.

“Thea!” Oliver barked.

She raised her hands in mock apology and he pushed her out of the room as she tried to argue the fact that she at least had a point. His exasperated expression was the last thing she saw before he disappeared down the hall.

“Well, that was awkward,” Felicity decided.

“Mmm,” Dig returned.

“Wake me up when it’s time to go,” Felicity added, sitting back down at the computer, her mind already getting lost in the data, facts, and horrifying task of making an evil company good again.

An hour and three long conversations with two different members of QC’s board later, Felicity received another visitor. A soft knock pulled her eyes away from the screen and she smiled broadly when she saw Iris hovering near the threshold.

“Iris!” Felicity exclaimed, genuinely startled. While they had dropped in on each other a lot at their various jobs, Felicity didn’t know how Iris knew where to find her. She hadn’t been able to get in touch with her since Barry’s text. “I was worried about you. Barry was freaking out, so I tried looking for you, but all your tech went dark. I was pretty sure you were chasing The Consortium thing down and decided to leave your tech behind, which was probably a good idea, though not great for my blood pressure, and-”

“Felicity!” Iris exclaimed with a laugh.

Felicity clamped her lips together and looked at her friend, her eyebrows raising. “Hi.”

“Hi,” Iris returned.

“Are you okay?” Felicity asked, closing the distance between them and looking her friend over.

Iris hesitated. “Yeah.” Her eyes slid over to Dig, who was watching the exchange curiously. “Do you mind if I talk to you privately?”

“I’ll wait in the hall,” Dig returned, standing and buttoning his jacket.

“Thanks,” Iris said.
He nodded and left the room. Iris closed the door behind him and started ringing her hands, all composure lost. She looked terrified, an emotion Felicity had not seen on her friend often. She couldn’t remember the last time she had seen Iris genuinely afraid. Maybe the time a mouse had taken up house in the laundry room at their old building? To be fair, that thing had been a ninja - a cheese eating, scurrying, evil ninja.

Felicity grabbed her arm and forced Iris to stop pacing. Iris came to abrupt halt, tears swimming in her eyes. “Felicity,” she whispered.

“What’s wrong?” Felicity asked.

Iris shook her head.

“Iris...tell me. Is it Barry? Is it Joe? What?”

Iris sniffed and wiped away an errant tear, pulling away from Felicity and turning so that her back was to her. She wrapped her hands around her body and Felicity thought that her friend was almost vibrating from the tension and anxiety.

“Iris…”

“I made a mistake,” Iris said. “I dug where I shouldn’t have.” She turned back to face Felicity. “You were right. The Consortium is no joke. I thought I could take them. I thought they were like everyone else. I’ve faced corporations and politicians before.”

“What happened?”

“I found them. Or they found me. I tried to hide from them, but they’re everywhere. I couldn’t. I tried so hard...For you, for Dad, for Barry...”

“You’re not making any sense,” Felicity said.

“They found me. They took me to an office on the other side of town. A woman was there. She was scary, to put it mildly. She threatened me with all sorts of horrible tortures. In the end, she decided it wasn’t necessary, not when they realized my connection to you. I tried to keep it from them, but they know things, so many things.”

“Did they hurt you?” Felicity asked.

Iris sighed and slowly moved her hand to her shirt. She raised it and Felicity’s blood chilled. The device that had been locked on Cheshire, the one that had electrocuted her to death, was embedded in Iris’s stomach.

“Oh my god,” Felicity whispered, horror clawing at her insides, tearing down her walls and leaving her mind a blank mess of primal emotions. Her friend, her best friend, had a device that could kill her embedded in her body. A dull whine sounded in her ears and her focus narrowed to the device.

“There’s a camera too. They can see and hear me,” Iris said. “They said I could tell you. They wanted you to know that you had no choice. The woman...she’s sick.”

Iris paused, as if expecting the device to go off, but it didn’t. Felicity took a step closer, her hand reaching out for the device.

“If you touch it they’ll set it off,” Iris said. “I’m not here for you to rescue me.”
“Then why are you here?” Felicity asked. “What are they making you do?”

“I’m supposed to kidnap you,” Iris sobbed. “They’ve been having trouble getting to you so they decided to send me in. Something about Oliver having an army? That part was never really clear. They’ve tried, but you keep escaping. Bad ass, by the way.”

“Thanks,” Felicity said.

“I’m supposed to walk you out of the building and take you to a car waiting on the street. We’ll go together and they’ll remove the device when you’re in their custody.”

“Where they will kill us both,” Felicity said.

“I got that vibe from them,” Iris said. “But I don’t know what to do. I don’t want to hurt you. God, I don’t want to hurt you, but I’m so scared, and this thing…” She growled, the terror dulling somewhat with her anger.

“I understand,” Felicity said slowly. She stared at Iris, her friend, the person she had felt comfortable telling her secrets to above all others until Oliver arrived - and even still, she would tell Iris some things that would never reach Oliver’s ears. Like, ever.

“What do we do?” Iris asked, putting her faith in Felicity’s intellect.

“There’s no choice,” Felicity said. “We have to do what they say. They know there’s no other option. It’s why they sent you.”

“But the whole killing us when they’re done with us part?” Iris asked.

“I’m fairly certain they’ll wait until they see what I know and who I’ve told,” Felicity said, looking at the device. “And they’ll know that if they lay one hand on you before I’ve told them, that they’ll never figure out who exactly knows about Argo Global, the ever psychotic Circe, and that tidy little subsidiary that tracks back to all of their dirty secrets.”

She knew it was stupid, but she needed to bait them. She needed them to understand that she knew things and wouldn’t give up what she knew without a fight. It was the only bargaining chip she had. It was the only thing that could keep Iris alive long enough for them to figure a way out.

“You’re baiting them,” Iris said.

“Yeah,” Felicity said. “You think they’ll be mad?”

“A little,” Iris replied.

“Oh well,” Felicity said.

“How do we plan on getting past that wildly large, gorgeous man currently protecting you with those absolutely fascinating arms of his?” Iris asked.

“I think we might have to knock him out,” Felicity said.

Iris arched an eyebrow.

“We’ll do it gently,” Felicity added, not liking the judgey look.

“How?”
“There’s a prototype shock weapon in the desk,” Felicity replied, thumbing over her shoulder. “Found it this morning. I may have almost set my desk on fire.”

“Your brain is a carnival ride with funnel cake on the side,” Iris decided.

“I’ll get him in here, shock him, then we’ll go downstairs and get ourselves kidnapped,” Felicity said.

“That sounds like a good plan,” Iris said. “Unfortunately.”

The terror was still swimming, heightened by the truth that Felicity didn’t have a better answer for them. It was go or die, and Iris didn’t want to die. Felicity wanted to do violence upon whoever had forced Iris into this ridiculously difficult situation. It was just rude, and painful, and not anyway to start a Monday. Felicity nodded at her, and smiled reassuringly, though the smile fell quickly. She turned to the desk, her movements wooden and stiff at the idea of evil people watching her, and opened the drawer. As she did, she slowly unclasped one of the box with her ear piece and palmed it. A second later, she pulled out the circular device and held it up for Iris to see.

“I’ll call Dig in. Act natural.”

“Sure,” Iris retorted, rolling her eyes at the absurdity.

Felicity wrinkled her nose, but didn’t reply. She opened the door and stepped out into the hall. Dig was leaning against the wall, looking totally unconcerned, though she sensed he was back to dealing with Bratva business. He looked up and cocked his head at the sound.

“We’re done talking if you want to come back in. I know standing might throw you off, what with the sitting you’ve been doing all day. You might get a head rush. Or restless leg syndrome.”

“I’m fairly certain I have neither of those things,” Dig said.

“Better seated than sorry!” Felicity returned.

Dig pulled a face, teasing her, and moved around her. When his back was to her, she pressed the device against him and pushed the button. The result was pretty spectacular. He jerked, shook for a second, blue sparks dancing along his back, and then dropped to his knees. He hit the floor with a thud and a long exhalation of air.

“Sorry!” Felicity squeaked. She rolled him over and checked for a pulse to be sure. “You are super dense,” she added as she felt his weight. “I mean strong.”

“He’s unconscious, Felicity,” Iris reminded her. “He is, right?”

“Yeah,” Felicity assured her. She hurried over to the desk, collected her purse and phone, knowing they would confiscate both but wanting to look natural, and grabbed Iris’s hand. “I don’t know how long he’ll be out. We should hurry.”

Iris squeezed her hand three times in response, her brown eyes swimming with an apology, but Felicity shook her head. She didn’t need it. She needed her friend to be safe. That was the only thing that mattered to her.

They hurried out of the office, down the hall, and into the elevator. She was never more grateful for Kord having half the employees than when trying to escape. There was no one around to see her sweating bullets and majorly freaking out. There was only Iris, who was having a similar moment of panic. They were joined by their absolute terror. It was not the way she wanted to bond with her best friend.
The security guard in the lobby barely looked up when they left and Felicity decided she was going to have a long chat with her about her indifference and lack of attentiveness...if she survived. Surreptitiously, she stuffed the earwig into her ear. Hopefully Oliver would think to check it. Hopefully he would see the signs of its absence and know what it meant. She believed in him. She had faith he would find her. If they didn't search her and take it, then she would lead the Bratva right to them.

They stepped out into the brittle air, the chill hitting her like a slap across the face. It made her flinch and blink, before Iris tugged her forward once more. She stumbled across the plaza and stopped at the edge of the sidewalk with a rough skid, bumping into Iris, who steadied her.

She was officially scared. The thing that had chased her so long had finally found a way to capture her. They had Iris’s life in the balance of their machinations. They knew how to make both of them hurt. She didn’t know what to do or how to go about making things right. She just knew that forward motion was the only way to save lives and potentially see the face behind the ghost for the first time. Her entire plan rested on Oliver’s willingness to track her down. After last night, there was no way she could doubt her importance to him. He would look, but she didn't know if that meant it would make a difference. The Consortium was powerful. She didn't know if Oliver was just as powerful.

She had a feeling that his type of hunting left a lot of carnage in its wake. It’ll mean war for sure. She doesn’t want to know what he’ll do if she dies. She has a good idea. He would burn the city to the ground before he’d let The Consortium get away with killing her. The thought made her shiver far more than the cold ever could.

A black SUV pulled up in front of them. The driver was a woman with sunglasses hiding most of her face and a blue dress that looked like it belonged to an office building and not a kidnapping. The door was thrown open by a man. He was a vision in nondescript. Lineups probably used his picture as the average Joe American. He was unremarkable. She had a feeling that was the point. He waited patiently for them to enter, seemingly in no rush. He knew who held the power.

“This is the worst second first day of work ever,” Felicity complained, stepping up into the SUV with Iris at her heels.

Iris closed the door with a snap and the woman pulled away from the curb. They merged with traffic and Felicity cuddled as close as she could to Iris to keep her distance from the man.

“I’m going to inject you with a sedative that will make you sleep,” the man said. “Do not fight me.”

Trembling, Felicity held out her arm, hoping against all odds that the syringe he had pulled out of a metal case didn’t have cyanide in it.

“I’m gonna barf,” she added as the needle closed in on her arm. It pressed into her skin and she felt the effects nearly immediately. The nausea swam and danced even as her vision blurred. She blinked once, twice, three times, the man’s face looking like something out of a hell house, and then everything went blank and her body collapsed against the seat.
The Things You Know and The Ones You Wish You Didn't

Chapter Summary

I got sick. I'm still sick. Things are swimming. I don't what I'm doing. I thought I was better. I am not. That's okay, though, because these words say stuff that you might enjoy.

The only reason this chapter is here is because FanMomMer nagged me. You should know that about her - she nags. I don't know if that means you should thank her or what. You can decide after you reach the end of the chapter.

I'll try harder to be better about the rest of the story, because I had hate long delays between updates, too. I'm gonna try and wrap this up soon. Ish. Hopefully not another thirty chapters. That would be awkward. And unfeasible.
Also, being sick causes Felicity to have angst. Or maybe I'm just mean. I dunno.
Enjoy!

Felicity had learned over the course of her life that when things were blurry she had either misplaced her glasses or she was about to have a really bad time. Bad times usually ended up with her head over heels romantically involved with the bathroom toilet, or the memorable back alley with the clown she vomited all over, or passed out in her bed. Sometimes the passing out was worse. That usually meant a bigger mistake than vomit.

She absently checked for the weight of her glasses on her face. She couldn’t move her arms but after a little bit of focus, she felt the familiar frames perched on her nose, which was a mistake. She never realized her glasses were there anymore. They had become a second skin. Realizing they were there was horrible. It was suddenly all she could feel. She wanted to pull them away, but her hands were still too heavy. Or maybe they were too light? They were too something, and she didn't like it.

She pouted even as she tried to figure out what she had taken that had resulted in the blurriness. Maybe there had been nuts and she was in the hospital. No, hospitals had bright lights that you weren’t supposed to walk into when you saw them. This room had lights, but they were further away. The ceiling was in shadow. Maybe. The blurriness was being really bitchy with the details.

She blinked heavily and tried to take stock of her body, wary now that she knew the power of knowing things. She didn’t want to feel her skin too much and know that it was there. That would just be freaky. She squinted as she focused on the details. Everything on her body felt like it was in the proper place. A slight pinch in her toes suggested she was still wearing her shoes, which never happened when she got drunk. They were usually the first things to go.

The truth dawned on her in the mother of all cold chills. Her heart started hammering violently in her chest and her fingers tried to twist themselves into fists. They moved only fractionally. Her body was still waking up from whatever drug they had foisted on her.

“Iris?” she called.

There was no response.
“Iris!” she called louder.

Still no response.

That was just...not good.

Felicity went through the litany of drugs she knew could cause temporary paralysis. Her research on WebMd may not be as profound as a medical degree, but listing out things helped her feel better. Or worse. It distracted her at least.

She drug slowly drained away as she worked her way through her pharmacological knowledge and she was finally confident enough to stumble out of the chair, feeling like a rag doll as she moved, almost fell when her feet hit the floor, then stumbled to the door. She pressed her side against the opening, surprised that they hadn’t closed the door. What were they playing at? Weren’t they supposed to be kidnappers? Why not lock her door and threaten her with batons clanking on the window bars? That was what always happened in the movies.

That was when she heard the noises. Laughter, screaming, and a dozen voices raised in pain swirled together in the hall. There was so much pain and anguish. She wanted to cover her ears, but her body was focusing all of its effort into not falling down. She had to find Iris and get away. That would get them away from the pain.

She pushed away from the door groggily, the world spinning once more, and stumbled down a concrete hallway with heavy doors and no distinguishing marks on what looked like cells. It reminded her of the prison she had visited, only the prison had light and actual sane people around the crazy men wanting to kill everything in their path. They had not been shadows.

The laughter haunted her, trailing behind her, not seeming to get any further away as she walked. It was her personal ghost, taunting her with the truth that she was as trapped as the people behind the doors. An open door did not mean freedom. She could feel it in her bones. She didn’t call out Iris’s name again. She didn’t think she would be heard around the screaming and the laughter. The doors were all closed, save for the one at the end of the hall. She stumbled toward it, hopeful yet terrified. She didn’t think she would find anything good inside the room.

She reached it and she paused, nausea doing a slow Tango in her gut.

She really hated being right.

Well, she didn’t hate being right. She just hated it in the moment, because yuck.

A man in a lab coat was calmly injecting a needle into a man’s eye. The man was still but he was awake. Quiet moans and small shifts gave away his terror. He didn’t want to be in the chair. The doctor had no intention of letting him up. Without looking away from the needle, the man in the lab coat addressed Felicity.

“I believe they are waiting for you in the next room down. Don’t dwindle. They don’t appreciate tardiness.”

Felicity meant to retort. She really did. Instead, she gulped as the needle plunged into the man’s eye and he started whimpering in earnest. The man in the lab coat nodded pleasantly before pushing the plunger down. She scrambled away from them both. She didn’t know what was waiting for her in the other room, but it was definitely better than needles in eyeballs.

The long hall on the other side of the room felt like it was way too short. She didn’t want to reach the end of it. She had felt terror when she had been inside of her house as it burned down. She had
known fear when she had run from her life when Kane had tried to kill her. Stepping into the bright room at the end of the hall transcended terror. She felt numb, and hot, and painfully present even as her body felt like it belonged to someone else.

The room was full of scary sights. Five people, three men and two women, stood around the room. They were wearing the typical clothing of business, but they were all clearly capable of fighting. Felicity could tell in the way they held themselves. It was the same way Sara, Thea, Oliver, Nyssa, and Diggle held themselves. The people standing guard in the room knew how to kill. They would kill her without any signs of remorse. It was their job. She would just be another task while on the clock. They would forget her as soon as they punched out their time cards and went home.

Did killers have time cards?

Iris was sitting on a chair. Her head was hanging limply and her hands were folded neatly in her lap. She was clearly not entirely awake yet, though the small moans that escaped her were signs that she was nearly there. Felicity stumbled over to Iris and knelt in front of her, wobbling only a little. The adrenaline had pushed most of the drug out of her system. Felicity instantly knew why Iris was in the room instead of in one of the cells. They had been proving a point. They had wanted Felicity to hear the screams and laughter, to see the doctor experimenting on that poor man.

They were waging a psychological war. It was stupidly effective. But she had Iris to worry about, as well as the dawning realization that her earwig was still firmly in her ear. They hadn't taken it. They would have had they known it was there. It was off. She needed to turn it on. She hadn’t had time before the elevator had opened.

She grabbed Iris’s face and looked at her searchingly, checking to be sure that she was okay, her eyes straying to her friend’s stomach, where the device was barely visible. It was really incredible tech - made possible by the worst assholes in the history of ever. She wanted to rip it out of friend. She was certain that would hurt quite a bit. She would have to figure out another way.

“Ms. Smoak, please have a seat,” the same man from the SUV said to Felicity politely.

Felicity glared at him and he raised his eyebrows slightly. He was amused. She saw his point. She gently lowered Iris’s head again, eliciting another moan from her, and sat in the only other chair in the room. She gripped the chair under her to keep herself upright and stared at the man hatefully. He touched his ear.

“She’s ready whenever you are, ma’am,” he said.

He nodded to no one and stepped back so that he was closer to the wall and away from the center of the room. The others did the same, creating a lopsided circle that had her feeling like she was about to be in the worst cheer circle ever. She would not be leading the group in a cheer session. Her knowledge of cheers were down to, “Go, team, go!” and that was just guessing. Also, evil.

She looked at Iris again, worrying her bottom lip with her teeth, and jump slightly as the door directly across from her opened.

The first place Felicity’s eyes went was the woman’s shoes. She was afraid to look up and see her fate clearly etched in her eyes. She didn't want the proof. Her stomach clenched as she eyed expensive black shoes. They were just like the ones she had seen in the van the night her house had been burned down. They were all business. Any other day of the week Felicity would have loved them. Now she just really wanted to burn them. The woman had been there. She was responsible for Felicity’s pain - at least part of it. Felicity followed the pantsuit up, hating how pretty the loose white fabric was, and finally focused on the woman’s face.
The woman was Mediterranean, maybe Greek, possibly Italian, and her dark hair was curly and pinned back with a diamond clasp. Her eyes looked black in the light, and her makeup was immaculate. A long scar ran from the side of her face, along her hairline, across her cheek, and down to her collarbone. More diamonds were perfectly placed in the gap between her breasts that the suit exposed. Her lips were a sweet pink.

She spoke words to the man in a language Felicity couldn’t understand, but was really quite beautiful. She wrinkled her nose at the thought as the woman refocused her attention on Felicity.

“I understand you were looking for me,” the woman said in an accented voice.

“Was I? I look for lots of people. It’s what I do. I’m a looker.” Felicity thought about it for a second. “Which makes me sound voyeurchic. I am not. Just so we’re clear. Well, everyone is a little on the internet, because glass houses and all that. But I don’t enjoy spying on people...or get off on it.”

The woman frowned at Felicity, clearly perplexed. She looked at the man again and said a few more words in the language Felicity was really starting to wish she spoke. Laughter sounded around the room and Felicity blushed.

Save for the feeling that she was going to die, it felt like high school. No, scratch that. It was exactly like high school. Mathletes could be brutal, especially when you were twelve and kept beating them in competitions.

“I thought you were supposed to be brilliant,” the woman said.

Felicity shrugged. “So...we were getting to introductions. I don’t mean to make assumptions, but I’m guessing you’re Circe. If you’re not her, then you know her. Either way, we’re introduced. Yay! Can you let Iris go now?”

“Iris is such a lovely name,” the woman said, stepping closer to caress Iris’s face. “In Egypt Iris was once the goddess of health, marriage, and wisdom. She also married her brother, which is a whole other topic we can talk about later. Do think your Iris is wise, Felicity?”

“I do,” Felicity replied.

The woman circled Iris and Felicity, and then grabbed Felicity’s face roughly. “Then why is she involved in my business?”

“Because she’s also brave. And hates when people cheat.”

The woman released Felicity with an exaggerated eye roll. “It’s not cheating. It’s filling a niche. For as much complaining as you do, you forget that I am necessary. I do the things that would be done otherwise, only I make sure it’s clean, effective, simple. I do nothing more than ensure that my business stays in business. That’s hardly a crime.”

“No...you have the murders, slavery, child labor, experimentation, mutilations, and other various crazy crap to account for the crimes bit,” Felicity said.

The woman shrugged. “World’s a dark place. I just exist within it.” She smiled. “I am Circe. You’re right. You managed to drag me all the way from London just to deal with you.”

“Liar,” Felicity replied. “My guess is that you’ve been in Starling for a little while now. Trying to take the city. It’s next on your list from what I can tell from your records. Plus, you would never bother with me unless you were nearby. You'd just keep sending soldiers until I'm dead.”
“Oh, don’t sell yourself short,” Circe said, looking a little surprised at Felicity’s reasoning. “I would have flown in to torture you. You’re just too scrumptious not to make the effort.”

“Not a sentence I thought I would ever hear,” Felicity retorted.

“What do you say to us cutting out the foreplay and getting down to business?” Circe said.

“If business means you torturing me, then we can definitely foreplay some more,” Felicity said.

Circe smiled, her black eyes sparkling. “We can skip the torture if you tell me what you know.”

“If I tell you what I know, you’ll kill Iris and then me.”

“Yes, but it’ll be quick.”

“What if I’m holding out for a rescue?” Felicity asked.

“By that Bratva abomination? The boy who play at being king. Or is it Queen? He is no royalty. Starling does not belong to him. It is mine. He just doesn’t know it yet.”

“Why do people always want to own a city? I mean...headache. All the logistics and time management concerns. Why can’t you just take up painting or something?” Felicity asked. “I mean you’re clearly wealthy. You don’t need another city.”

“Because I want them all,” she said. “And Starling is a port city that links Asia and America, and a perfect spot to smuggle all sorts of fun things in.”

“Oh. That actually makes sense,” Felicity said.

“Don’t look so disappointed,” Circe said.

“I like when the bad guys are illogical. Helps with my morality code.”

“I’m not bad,” Circe said, crossing her arms. “I’m as logical as you can get. The things I do are because the world has made them possible.”

“Kay,” Felicity said.

“I don’t think you fully understand your position here,” Circe added.

“I don’t?”

“I don’t think so. I think you’re holding out hope. You think that you can escape, that you are smarter than me. While I have no doubt that you are intelligent, you can not get out. This facility has locks that cannot be picked or hacked. The doors are watched 24-7. We are below ground, with only one way in or out. Your technical expertise is useless. This is a fortress you will not escape from. Mr. Queen will not be able to track the SUV that brought you here, as we have people to scrub footage the same way you can. For all he knows, you abandoned him. His therapist’s records indicate that he has some abandonment issues. All that death…” Circe tisked sadly.

Felicity’s stomach twisted with agony, not with fear of her fate but fear that Oliver would truly believe that.

“No one is coming for you. My only promise is that I will leave you somewhere where your family and friends will eventually know what happened to you. I promise to allow them a funeral. Anything more is a fairytale.”
“Unless they happen to know what I know,” Felicity said.


That meant Oliver, Dig, and anyone else who knew the truth was in trouble. She couldn’t give them away. She couldn’t give anything away really, because she would die. She didn’t have any proof, but she was certain that would suck.

“So where does that leave us?” Felicity asked.

“With a greater understanding that you have no choice,” Circe said. “And that telling me what you know is inevitable. The length of time in which I torture you and your friend will be on you. Your choice.”

“Surely someone of your ilk has things to attend to,” Felicity replied. “You know, business meetings, puppies to hurt, mustaches to twirl.”

“Don’t worry. Someone is always around,” Circe said.

“Goodie,” Felicity replied.

She was trembling. Her entire body was rattling the metal chair. She was scared, tears were threatening the corners of her eyes, and the numbness was still making her feel like she was not part of her body. She wanted the nightmare to end. She wanted to go home, go to Oliver. She wanted to feel his arms around her; she knew she would feel safe only then.

“I understand that you might be feeling a little brave. That’s because you don’t fully understand the situation. I’m going to give you a little time for everything to sink in. I’ll be back soon. Well, soon enough. I have a meeting with an absolutely divine seamstress I can’t miss. After that, though.”

“Take your time,” Felicity said.

“I want you to promise me that you’ll think about giving in easily. Someone that’s supposed to be your level of genius should know better than to delay the inevitable.”

“I don’t think I’ll be able to think of anything else,” Felicity promised.

“Good. I’d really hate to get the doctor involved. He always makes the worst messes...Feel free to wander this floor. Anything else will get you in trouble. We wouldn’t want that.” She smiled brightly. “I’ll see you later.”

She turned on her heels and sauntered out of the room. Felicity swallowed heavily as the rest of the soldiers filed out with her. It was proof that they had no fears of her escaping. They had been there to protect Circe, as if Felicity could do more than throw a very sloppy punch. Felicity leaned over to Iris and touched her face.

“Iris?”

“Felicity?” Iris groaned.

“Are you okay?”

“A little sleepy,” Iris replied.

“Come on. Let’s take you to bed.”
“Did I drink too much?”

“You’ll catch up in a minute. Come on.”

She slung Iris’s arm over her shoulders and pulled her up with a grunt. “Have you been working out?”

“Soulcycle,” Iris slurred.

“Cool,” Felicity replied.

She carried Iris back through the halls of hell, past the table with the man, where the doctor had disappeared, and into the cell that she supposed she would have to share with Iris. She was very aware of the camera on Iris as she laid her down and gently fixed her hair. Iris couldn’t be part of Felicity’s attempts to contact Oliver, Dig, or Thea. She just couldn’t. For the second time in a week, she couldn’t involve her friend in her plans. She had to trust the new family she had found in the weirdest of places. She had to trust Oliver.

She left the room and went in search of a bathroom, figuring it was the one place there wouldn’t be cameras. No one wanted to see what went on in the bathrooms of a crazy-pants fortress that houses clearly unwell people and dangerous doctors. The bathroom was probably the Vietnam of toilets - brutal, bloody, and messy.

She found the bathroom not far from her room. The door was metal and the floors were cheap tile. The ceiling was the first bit of ceiling within reach. It looked like the kind that could be lifted away. She knew it went nowhere. They wouldn’t be that stupid.

She closed the stall door and sat on the toilet. It wasn’t as nasty as she had assumed, but she could tell that it had seen things, horrible things, things that she would never imagine even in her worst moment.

She reached up and tapped the button on the earwig that connected her to the others. The line was silent, full of static, but no words were coming through. She hesitated, uncertain if she wanted to speak and have more silence be the response. She was pinning all her hopes on a dashing rescue. If it didn’t come, she would die. She knew Oliver would never find her. She had not been able to find Circe until the woman had walked into the room and leveled threats. The woman knew how to hide things. She knew how to stay under the radar. She had been doing it for years. She was scary.

Felicity sucked in a deep breath to steady herself. Whatever happened, she would face the future bravely. She would not let Circe break her. She would find a way to get Iris out. It was the only way to keep up hope in the madness.

“Oliver?” she whispered.

There was no response. The static remained. She closed her eyes, her worst fears materializing. She kept them closed as a traitor tear escaped.

“Oliver?” she repeated.

Then, like a sliver of light in the dark, a prayer in the darkest moment, she heard the softest, most perfect sound in the world.

“Felicity?”

She nearly cried out. Instead, she smiled and wiped away her tear.
“Oliver,” she said one last time.

“Are you okay? Are you hurt? Where are you?” he asked.

“I don’t have much time,” she said. “It’s Circe. She attached one of those electric thingies on Iris and made her kidnap me. I couldn’t say no. They’d kill her. They gave me some drug, knocked me out. I don’t know where I am.”

There was a pause.

“I should have slipped that tracker on you when I wanted to,” he complained.

That irritated her a little that he had even considered it without asking, but it also sparked a memory.

“Oh! I put trackers in the earwigs. You just need to open the program and see. It might not work. There’s a lot of steel and concrete around me.”

“What program?”

“The one on my computer.”

Oliver sighed irritably. “You have nine of them,” he pointed out.

“Oh. On Stitch.” She realized that probably wasn’t helpful. “Your office. Middle computer. There’s a little icon with a lightning bolt. Click it on it and you’ll see the different colors. Mine is pink. I like pink.”

She heard rustling as he moved, and was confident he was running up the stairs. It was the only sign, as he wasn’t even breathing heavily.

“Felicity...are you okay?” he asked as he moved, his voice lowering into the registers of concern and fear.

“Scared, worried about Iris, but okay,” she said.

He sighed, releasing his terror into the world for her to hear.

“One way or another, I will find you,” he promised.

“I know,” she said.

She just wasn’t convinced that he would reach her in time.

“I see it,” he said slowly.

“But?”

“There’s no signal.”

“Okay...okay...” she said. She thought about it. “The program stores the memory for twenty-four hours. It hasn’t been that long, has it?”

“Five,” he said.

She winced. She hated losing so many hours, but it was better than days.

“That’s good...We can work with that. This is what you need to do...”
“How will this help?” he asked, starting to sound frustrated around his calm.

“We’ll see where the last place the signal was before it got cut off. It should get you close.”

“Right,” he agreed eagerly.

She walked him through the steps even as she squirmed on the seat. Being in the bathroom made her realize that she really did need to pee. The urge to go was pressing on her bladder, telling her pointedly to take advantage of her location. She finally couldn’t stand it any longer, she pulled her underwear down and finally succumbed, a happy sigh escaping. She hoped that Oliver wouldn’t hear, but she also really didn’t care if he did. She was being held prisoner. He would have to deal.

“It stops at the ocean,” Oliver said.

“I don’t feel like I’m on a boat. The walls are too thick. We’re lucky I enhanced the signal for talking, though, in hindsight, I should have done that for the tracker. Next on my to-do list.”

“Is it built a bit like a bunker?” he asked slowly.

“I think it would definitely survive a couple of bombs,” she agreed, looking at the thick walls.

“I know where you are,” he said, a tremble entering his voice.

She was not used to him sounding so shaken. Dread followed soon after.

“Where?” she asked as calmly as she could manage.

The door banged open, scaring the last of pee out, and she jumped, kicking the stall on accident.

“Are you trying to escape via the ceiling? It’ll take you nowhere, you know,” the creepy doctor said.

Felicity flushed the toilet and opened the stall door, her heart hammering with worry at the fear she had sensed in Oliver. She scowled at the doctor and went to the sink to wash her hands. The doctor watched her, looking like he was thinking about putting needles in her eyes as well. She wouldn’t put it passed him. He escorted her out and disappeared only when she was at the threshold of her cell door. She couldn’t speak, not with Iris so close. She didn’t trust that her words would go unheard. Oliver seemed to realize her dilemma.

“I’ll get you out, Felicity. I swear it. Whatever it takes.”

The silence that followed did not fill her with confidence or joy like it should have. He clearly expected the search to end with his death. He was going to get himself killed. And she would be the reason. Maybe she should just tell Circe what she knows. Better a quick death than subjecting Oliver to days, maybe weeks, to the sounds of her torture. She knew he would try to stay with her throughout it all. He would listen, give her comfort, and slowly drive himself insane. She couldn’t allow it. She had hoped he would help her, but it was clear to her now that it was up to her to save the day. She had to figure it out before he did something stupid.

The alternative was a world of pain for the people she cared about most - primarily for a man she was beginning to realize she could love like no other before him.
Is It A Matter Of Trust or Knowing?

Chapter Summary

As many of you know, my body decided to go ahead and get really sick. Which is awesome. I am finally feeling a little better, if not tired as heck. Thanks for the well-wishes! I don't know if this chapter makes sense, because sick, but I have something and wanted to give it to you for all your patience. It's all winding down now. I hope 30 chapters at max. Thanks for sticking around.

One thing that's headcannon for me is that Oliver has at least a photographic memory, maybe eidetic. He has a scary good memory is what I'm saying. That's how he remembers a place he's visited once, and remembers building schematics and all that. He simply looks and remembers.

Another thing is that I really thought about leaving this on a cliffhanger. You're lucky my illness and not writing made me feel bad for you guys and guilty. Otherwise, I would have left there. I'm nice like that.

As always, thanks for reading.

Felicity didn’t believe in resting on her laurels. She liked being active; she liked problem solving. She didn’t know how to problem solve her way out of a bunker that had only one exit that was surely guarded by assassins and serial killers.

Even if she could find a way to delay them, that left the problem of escape. She might be able to make it so that the room door locked so that it could only be opened from the inside, but that would ensure that she and Iris died of dehydration.

“Felicity?” Oliver asked quietly.

She glanced over at Iris. She was staring at the dark ceiling blankly, the drugs wearing off enough to allow her to catch up to what was going on and to be in a complete panic over it.

“Iris, are you okay?” Felicity asked pointedly.

“Iris is there. She’s being watched. You’re being watched,” Oliver said, letting her know that he understood.

“No,” Iris said. “I’m seriously questioning my life choices. I’m questioning that stupid notion I had to go into journalism, then taking all my classes, doing my thesis, getting that internship, getting the best job in the world. It all seems pretty stupid now.”

“I’ve been there,” Felicity said with an understanding nod.

“I think you’re in a bunker near the northern shore,” Oliver added. “A military bunker that ARGUS initially used for operations in the era before they abandoned it. It makes sense.”
“I love my job, and I accept risk as part of the work, but I never wanted to put your life in danger.”

“I think you’ve got that wrong,” Felicity said.

“I’m pretty certain I’m right,” Oliver said.

“How?” Iris exclaimed. “You’re here because of me.”

Felicity was getting confused by carrying on two conversations at once, but she focused on answering Iris. She was the only one she could answer without getting in trouble.

“If I hadn’t tinkered around with a certain device, Kord wouldn’t have taken an interest in me and I wouldn’t have had to dig into his files and then expose him and in doing so gain the attention of The Consortium because of what they were afraid I’d seen. Which… I won’t talk about.”

“It’s not your fault they’re evil, Felicity,” Oliver whispered, sending shivers down her spine at the caring she heard in his voice. “You couldn’t have prepared for that.”

“You didn’t know,” Iris said. “No one could have known.”

“I don’t want to be vindicated,” Felicity said.

“Well, I am still angry you refuse to take your safety seriously. Knocking out, Dig. Seriously?” Oliver demanded instantly.

“It isn’t your fault,” Iris said softly. “You were just trying to do the right thing.”

“You could have at least warned him. Instead, you had to play the hero,” Oliver said.

“Pot meet kettle,” Felicity said.

Iris smiled. Oliver snorted.

“I’m terrified they’re going to make me hurt you,” Iris said.

“Let’s cross that terrifyingly flimsy suspension bridge when we reach it,” Felicity said.

“What do we do?” Iris asked.

Felicity looked pointedly at Iris’s stomach. “There’s nothing we can do. We just have to…”

“What? Let them torture us?” Iris asked.

“Not happening,” Oliver growled.

“I don’t know!” Felicity yelled. “I don’t…”

Oliver seemed to know that she needed facts. It was the only way to calm her.

“The problem with the bunker is that they decided it was a good idea to put it under the water. It’s the perfect place to hold prisoners. I’ve only been there once, but I remember the basic layout. Do you know where you are in the building?”

“I wish those lunatics would stop laughing,” Felicity said. “I just wish they would be quiet…”

“Third maybe fourth level down. The would keep the insane in cells for safety. Those are the only levels with cells.”
That meant three or four levels under the fracking ocean. The weight started to press against her, making her skin itch and tightness crawl into her chest. All that water could come rushing it at any second and squish her to pieces. Not good. She crossed her arms and started rubbing her upper arms soothingly, wishing that it was another pair of hands soothing her. His voice would have to do.

“I don’t know how many people are between the top and you,” Oliver admitted. “Not to worry you…”

“You don’t have to know,” Iris said quietly, continuing their conversation. “I know you’re used to finding solutions, but neither of us have been held captive before. It’s okay to be out of your element. I don’t know what I’m doing either.”

“It’s okay. It’s better that we’re honest,” Felicity said.

Iris looked at Felicity and seemed to realize with a flash of understanding what the faraway look on her face meant. She didn’t need an explanation. She knew her friend well. Her eyes widened before they filled with hope. She sat up on the bed for the first time and stared at Felicity meaningfully.

“I think we’ll just have to save ourselves, huh?” she asked.

“Circe seems to think it’s impossible,” Felicity said.

“Maybe,” Iris agreed.

“Don’t do anything that’s going to put yourself in danger,” Oliver said.

“I do have some really crazy ideas,” Felicity said.

“Felicity…” Oliver warned.

“I like your crazy ideas,” Iris said.

“You’re not going to like the first one,” Felicity said.

“Ominous words are ominous,” Iris said.

“Felicity…” Oliver warned.

Felicity took a step closer to Iris, wondering what her window of opportunity was. She knew that someone was watching, but how quickly would they use the shocker on Iris? Would they make sure there were no other options first? Felicity knew there was only one way to find out.

She searched the room and found it be empty. She knew where she could get what she needed. She ran out into the hall, down to where the doctor was back to experimenting, and grabbed a scalpel off the medical table. Iris called after her in confusion, but Felicity did not stop.

“Hey!” the doctor yelled.

Felicity ignored him and ran back to Iris. She pushed a protesting Iris back on the bed and raised her shirt roughly, exposing the device. Without pausing, without thinking about whether or not it would work, Felicity cut two wires and yanked out a cord. Iris screamed when the device sparked. Felicity stared in horror as it sparked again and then dropped away from Iris’s skin, leaving only a thin metallic line that was the connection to Iris’s nervous system. It would have to be removed medically, but at least the device was out. Iris’s life was no longer being held over her. At least not remotely. It would take a little more to kill her.
“I really didn’t think that would work,” Felicity said.

“Felicity?!” Oliver demanded.

“Wh-what?” Iris asked, staring at Felicity in shock.

“Pretty cool,” Felicity added, feeling proud of herself.

“How did you-?”

“I got a good fifteen second look at it,” Felicity said calmly.

“That’s barely a glance,” Iris protested.

“Yeah. A fifteen second one,” Felicity repeated.

“What did you do?” Oliver asked.

“Was the camera on there?” Felicity asked, searching Iris.

Iris shrugged off her jacket and held it out to Felicity. Felicity saw a button that looked different than the others. It was very small and very clever.

“I want it,” Felicity muttered, running her thumb over it. She tossed the jacket down and stomped on the button. The crack of the camera was really satisfying.

“That’s one problem down,” Felicity said. She rushed over to the door the second the doctor reached it. She kicked him in the shin and closed the door behind her. She pressed her back against it as he started hammering on the other side angrily.

“Hand me the shocky thingy,” Felicity said, snapping her fingers at Iris as the door popped open slightly behind her. The doctor was determined to get inside. Luckily, he was not as strong as the soldiers she had seen.

Iris picked up the device and held it out to Felicity, then put her weight against the door to help keep the doctor out. Felicity stripped the wires with the scalpel and reattached them with two others. She didn’t know if it would work, but she hoped. The alternative was a whoopsie daisy moment of the generations.

Felicity pressed a button and the device came back to life. She looked over at Iris and raised her hand. She counted down from three. Iris moved away from the door at the same time Felicity did. The doctor fell inside, stumbled a bit, then started to recover. Felicity put the device against his shoulder and twisted slightly. Just like with Dig, blue sparks danced across the man’s back and then he fell.

“You are getting way too good at that,” Iris said.

“You think I could be a professional shocker?” Felicity asked.

“I think I would like to leave now,” Iris replied.

“Felicity!” Oliver growled, clearly not like being ignored.

“Did I kill him?” Felicity asked.

Iris knelt down and checked the doctor’s pulse. “No.”
“Good. Grab the keys on his belt,” Felicity said.

“If you don’t answer me in three seconds I’m going to-”

“What? Storm an underground fortress?” Felicity retorted.

“Yes!” he said.

“You were going to do that anyways,” she replied.

He sighed. “What’s happening?”

“I’m dreaming up an escape plan that doesn’t include dying,” Felicity said.

“Who are you talking to?” Iris asked, the keys jangling heavily as she stood.

Felicity held up her finger for Iris to wait.

“I’m not in position,” Oliver said. “I don’t have...with Malcolm...It would be me, Dig, Thea, Roy, and Sara against an army.”

“I just need to get to the front door,” she said. “We don’t have to fight them all...just clear a path to the door.”

“You are eternally optimistic,” he replied.

“Don’t make it sound like an insult when I know it turns you on,” Felicity retorted.

“Oh. Oliver,” Iris said. She wrinkled her nose. “I hope. Wait. How are you talking to Oliver? How is the CEO of a corporation going to get us out?”

“It’s...a long story,” Felicity said. “I’m going to head up to the main levels, see if I can find what passes as a control room.”

“I can get you there,” Oliver said. “It’s suicide, though.”

“Not unless I have a really serious distraction,” Felicity replied.

“What?” Oliver demanded.

“Remember the prison?” Felicity asked. “That was sort of...distracting, right?”

“No!” he barked.

“If you were here you could make another call,” Felicity said sternly. “You’re not, though, and I have to do things my way. I’m sorry.” She started to reach up to her ear, to take the device out, not wanting him to be barking at her to stop when she needed to focus on the rescue mission, but Oliver must have read her as he always seemed to read her. Not being able to see her face didn’t matter. He knew where her thoughts had gone.

“I’ll guide you,” he said, still tense but not nearly as roughly. “I promised I would come for you, but if we work together, we might actually survive.”

“Gee, that would be swell,” Felicity said.

“Even when you talk to him over...however you’re talking to him, your face does this thing.” Iris
said. “It’s like new tech mixed with mint choc mixed with a day at the beach.”

Felicity scowled at her friend, warning her to shut it all up. Iris raised her hands, the keys clattering again, and Felicity refocused. They were on a clock. Whoever was in charge of the cameras would be telling the guards very soon that Felicity had freed Iris. They needed to be moving.

Felicity took the keys from Iris and turned towards the hall. She ran out, her heart pounding wildly at the thought that she had absolutely no idea what she was doing. She knew she needed to find stairs and walk up, hopefully finding Oliver at the front door waiting for her like he had the night of the gala. He had looked so handsome then - there had been such naked emotion in his eyes as he had stared up at her. She kept that expression at the front of her mind as she went to the first door and unlocked it. She didn’t pause to see if someone was inside, she kept moving down the hall, the keys clattering as she unlocked the doors.

“What are you doing?!” Iris asked.

“Baking a cake. Batter’s a bit runny, though,” Felicity retorted dryly, as she opened another door.

A man stepped out of the first cell. He was cackling heavily. He didn’t move to attack, but Felicity figured it was only a matter of time. She continued to work her way down the hall as the first sound of boots pounding on the floor hit her ears.

“I think that’s enough,” Felicity said.

“Uh, yeah,” Iris agreed, grabbing Felicity’s arm.

They took off running, Felicity’s trembling hands only slowly her progression on the locks slightly. She kept up a running commentary of where they were to Oliver and his calm voice kept them moving forward and out of danger; the sounds of aggression and screaming patients faded behind them fairly quickly. The thick walls did more than keep the sea at bay - they were isolating, a fortress in the deep.

Oliver was panting now, his breaths coming in sharp spurts that told her he was also running. It felt a lot like they were running to each other. She didn’t question where he was or why he was running. She knew. She had trust that he was coming for her. Iris kept up a strong pace next to Felicity. She was scared, but she was also incredibly focused. Felicity had never seen her friend at work before, but she suddenly understood why she was so good at her job. She had a backbone of steel that matched her intellect. Felicity loved it, and was glad that it was her and not someone else at her side.

A metal door opened above them. Felicity and Iris stopped on the landing and looked up and then at each other.

“Someone’s above us,” she whispered to Oliver.

“Go out into the hall,” he said.

“But there’ll be-”

“Trust me,” he said.

“I more than trust you,” she replied. “I believe.”

“Then go!” he urged her.

She pulled the heavy door to her right out of the way and stumbled into a hall that was eerily silent.
after the screaming, laughing, and dull hum of her heartbeat sounding in her ears. She didn’t stop. She kept tugging on Iris, searching for a hiding place that wouldn’t get them immediately discovered.

“I need you to go to the very opposite end of the hall,” Oliver said. “The control room is there. I should be able to make my way down to you.”

“How far away from the entrance are we?” she asked.

He didn’t reply.

“Oliver?” she added threateningly.

“A level.”

“That’s too far,” Felicity said.

“No. It’s not,” he replied grimly.

“Oliver…”

“Please,” he replied.

“I don’t want you to die.”

The silence on the other end was telling. He didn’t want to promise her anything that he couldn’t deliver. He may not tell her everything, but he never lied to her. He didn’t think he would survive.

“Felicity,” he said quietly, softly. Goose bumps erupted along her arms and neck. His voice was not full of darkness. It was full of warmth, hope, and emotion she took very seriously. “I promise that I will get you out. I won’t let you die down there. I’m coming for you, and nothing and no one will stop me. Do you understand?”

“Yes. I understand,” Felicity replied.

“Get to the control room and lock yourself in,” he said.

“What if someone is in the control room?” Felicity asked.

“I’ll take care of it,” Iris said.

“Nevermind, apparently I have a bodyguard,” Felicity said dryly.

“If you can’t get in, find another safe place to hide. I’ll find you,” Oliver added.

She didn’t reply. They had reached the control room. The door was open and she could see a woman working inside. She was watching the camera monitors and directing the troops in their attempts to find Felicity and Iris and quell the uprising among the patients.

The woman was so intently focused on the screens that she didn’t see Iris’s punch to the face until it was too late. The woman spun and hit the ground, but she didn’t pass out as Felicity had seen it happen in the movies. She groaned and started to stand again, determined to fight back. Iris punched her one last time. The woman went limp and Iris shook out her wrist.

“Oh! Ow! Ow!” she complained.

“Oh my god, Iris!” Felicity cried out in shock.
“Boxing lessons. Dad,” Iris replied, rubbing her hand.

“Nice,” Felicity said. She closed the door and locked it, then turned to the monitors along the wall. At least she could direct Oliver away from danger. There were no digital locks or even a digital anything outside of the cameras. Circe hadn’t been lying. It was Felicity’s worst nightmare. There was an intercom system, though, and plenty of cameras throughout. There was even one on the exterior of the only door that led outside - well, one that led to a huge ramp that could fit a Humvee. She figured it came out on the beach somewhere.

“We’re in,” Felicity said.

“We’re five minutes out,” Olive promised her. “I’m going to have to get a plan together with the others.”

She knew that he didn’t want her to hear all the maybes and near-death things that would certainly have to do to get to her. It was probably better not to know.

“Okay,” she said.

“I won’t be long,” he added.

“I’ll be here,” she replied.

He huffed a short laugh, and then the line went dead. She braced her hands against the table and let out a long sigh. She was operating on adrenaline and fear. She knew that the knowledge that he was coming should make her happy. The knowledge that they had made it to the control room should make her feel ecstatic. Instead, she felt sick and like the whole world was waiting breathlessly to tilt far enough off its axis to send them careening into the sun - which was a lot more burny than she wanted to imagine in the coming moments. She had a bad feeling. It was torturing her with the knowledge that the rescue would not be as smooth as their escape from the torture hallway had been.

“So...you’re sleeping with Oliver Queen,” Iris said, breaking the silence.

Felicity blushed and closed her eyes, willing away Iris’s words. She opened one eye, to see if her friend had forgotten the topic change, but she was staring at her expectantly, patiently waiting for an answer.

“Oh, look Storm Troopers from hell,” Felicity said, pointing at the screen where the guards were rushing down the halls like ants. They were all freakishly aligned and connected. They moved without having to speak. It was scary. Felicity didn’t like it.

“Lamest subject change ever,” Iris scolded her. “I need details. All the details. The kind of details that you don’t even talk about to yourself alone. I have to know.”

“I will tell you all the details the very moment that you tell Barry Allen that you are helplessly in love with him,” Felicity returned.

Iris gasped, blinked rapidly, and then stared at her shoes. “What?”


“I don’t...I haven’t...I don’t think…”

“Those are fascinating ways of agreeing with me,” Felicity said.
“It’s not like that between us,” Iris said.

“Why not?” Felicity asked.

“It’s just...not,” Iris said.

“And is that what you both want? Is that better than what could be?”

“I…”

“Also, Oliver Queen’s body is a blessing from every deity in the history of the world, the cosmos, and that’s not mentioning the things he does with his hands.”

There was an awkward cough followed by the slow sound of what could only be a very pleased Oliver smirking. She didn’t know smirking could have a sound. It definitely did. It was annoying.

“Um,” Oliver said by way of introduction.

Felicity froze, her eyes widening. She stared at Iris accusingly, because it was all her fault, really. Iris was too busy thinking over Felicity’s words and turning over the revelation of possibly loving Barry. It was a big moment.

“Is there any way you can provide a distraction?” Oliver asked, the smirk implied in the spaces between every word.

Felicity didn’t reply.

“Felicity?”

“Right. Um. I can try.”

Felicity searched the office and saw the button to the P.A. system. She pressed it down and cleared her throat. “Attention all agents, the prisoners are currently on level seven. I repeat, the prisoners are on level seven. They are armed and have locked themselves in a room. Full forces needed.”

The soldiers on the screens immediately started running for the seventh level.

She released the button. “That’ll probably do a little good. Won’t last, though.”

“It’s better than nothing. I’ll see you in a minute.”

He made it sound like he had stepped out to the store for a jug of milk and was returning to her. It was stupidly casual. She wanted him to take it more seriously.

It was at that exact time that the woman decided that she was not as passed out as she probably could have been and jerked awake. She reached for Felicity, who was closest, and ripped her away from the monitors. Felicity hit the door with a hard thump, sharp pain resonating throughout her back, as the woman kicked Iris in the shin. Iris cried out even as the woman reached up tried to engage the P.A button. Iris grabbed her and pulled her away and they started rolling around the floor, hitting each other, grunting in pain, and otherwise beating the crap out of each other. Felicity surged forward to help Iris, but the woman kicked her away, and then flung Iris off of her. Iris hit the ground as the woman scrambled to her feet. Felicity did the only thing that made sense to her. She ripped the P.A off the table and yanked the cord out hard. It sparked and the monitors died alongside it.

Oliver was yelling in her ear, clearly recognizing the sounds of fighting, but she couldn’t answer him. The woman hissed and wrapped her hands around Felicity’s throat. Felicity gagged and was
dragged to the wall, the woman tightening her hold with a snarl. Iris surged forward and wrapped her arms around the woman’s middle and pulled. They both went tumbling into the table, the monitors sparking and everything crashing to the floor with a clatter. At the same time, a red light started flashing in the corner.

“Self-destruct sequence engaged,” a mechanical voice chimed in. “Ten minutes to evacuate personnel before self-destruct completes. There will be no further updates. Ten minutes.”

The voice cut off and Felicity stared at the blinking light in terror. “What did you do?” she yelled at the pair.

The woman jumped to her feet, looking nearly as panicked, and unlocked the door. She limped outside, clearly planning on a quick retreat. Felicity closed and locked the door behind her.

“What just happened?” Iris asked.

Felicity looked at the wreckage in confusion. That’s when she saw a bright red button lying in the wreckage. It had been torn away from the walls along with the monitors. Written in blocky letters were the words. Self-destruct Protocol.

“Who keeps buttons like that just hanging out on the wall?” Felicity complained.

“Goddammit, Felicity!”

Felicity touched her ear reflexively at Oliver’s snarl of rage.

“I’m fine!” she replied. “Only we may have a tiny problem.”

“What?” he added in that same snarly voice.

“Something about a self-destruct protocol and ten minutes to live?” Felicity replied.

“Go towards the front entrance. Do it now,” Oliver said.

“But-”

“This is not a discussion!” Oliver snapped back, the sound of bone on bone meeting her ears. He had reached the bunker. He was working his way to her. That thought drove her forward.

Felicity took Iris’s hand and ran out of the room, her heart aching to be done with the drama and to be curled around Oliver. She was never going to let him go again. Well, maybe to go to the bathroom. And to eat. And definitely for coffee. But that was it.

The problem with the escape route was that it was full of people who all had the same idea in mind. They wanted out. It made sense. Getting blown up in an underground bunker sounded kind of awful. No one was stupid enough to want to linger. Even the insane were making their way out.

Soldiers were mixed in with medical personnel and patients. There wasn’t a lot of organization, but many of the soldiers still seemed to be trying to do their jobs. They were focused on keeping the patients inside, evacuating the doctors and nurses, and containing some of the madness. The front doors, large, metal, and as tall as a house, were hanging off their hinges. It looked as if someone had blown it out of the way. From the sounds of fighting in the tunnel, she had a feeling she knew who it was.

That explained where the rest of the soldiers had gone. They were a barricade between her and
And the other soldiers in the room had just caught sight of her and Iris. That was doubly crappy. A man with a square jaw and a large machine gun yelled out the order to restrain them. At least they didn’t want to kill her on sight. That probably had something to do with Circe wanting to know everything Felicity knew. She had no doubt that they would kill her if they saw it as necessary. It was in their eyes.

Felicity pulled Iris away from the front door reluctantly, as the man started pushing his way through the crowd of people. Several other soldiers followed after him. They were converging. Felicity tightened her hold on Iris’s hand, squeezing it so tightly that she started to lose feeling in her fingers. Iris whimpered, but didn’t pull away from Felicity.

Then, the man was in front of her, his machine gun raised and his dark eyes telling her to obey.

“Where do you think you’re going?” he asked.

“Out for pizza,” Felicity said. “I’m dying for a slice.”

“No olives on mine,” Iris said.

“That’s so weird,” Felicity complained.

“You don’t like mushrooms. Mushrooms on pizza are an American staple,” Iris retorted.

“You’re coming with me,” the man added gruffly, reaching out for Felicity.

His hand was hard, steely, and when it wrapped around her upper arm she knew that he could break the bone with very little effort on his part. She almost cried out from the strength of his hold, but she was more concerned with getting away from him. Iris reached out to her, trying to separate the man’s grip from her arm, but the man flung her away with a sharp backhand. She careened into the wall and hit the ground, dazed. Felicity tried to reach for her, but the man was already pulling her towards the door. She kept losing her balance, but that didn’t matter to him. He kept her up and moving forward. She was certain there would be bruising. It didn’t matter nearly as much as Iris getting lost in the chaos behind her. Felicity screamed her name. The sound was deadened by the terror and fighting that was all around her.

Felicity planted her feet, her heels skidding along the floor, and the man turned to look at her with darkness in his eyes. He pulled her closer, tightening his grip further, and she whimpered. He started to say something, a threat no doubt, but it was lost as all the air left his body in a rough exhale. He teetered for a second, then fell forward into the crush of bodies, a silver knife firmly planted between his shoulder blades. Felicity flinched, but looked up into Sara’s eyes. Her arm was still in a sling, but that didn’t seem to matter. One hand could do what two people could not. She took out two more soldiers with a different knife - blood spurting, screams ringing out, Sara’s face remaining impassive all the while - and then Sara reached her.

“You okay?” Sara asked gently, the bleak emotion melting away at the terror on Felicity’s face.

Felicity nodded mutely and scanned the room.

“Iris!” she called.

“Where was she?” Sara asked.

Felicity pointed and Sara nodded. She said something softly - it sounded like a name, then a hooded
figure appeared next to Felicity - Thea.

“Go with her. I’ll get Iris,” Sara said.

“But-!”

“Go!” Sara commanded, giving them both a small push.

Thea threaded her fingers around Felicity’s and guided her through the desperate people all looking for escape. She kicked one soldier who got in the way in the gut without pause, and kept pulling Felicity onward. They finally made it over the threshold of the door and into the dark hall that was lit with flashing red lights and dim flood lights. Shadows of people fighting took up the periphery of her vision, but the press of bodies kept her from being able to see details. She thought she saw one figure she recognized - all grace, power, and masculinity - but Thea did not give her the chance to be sure. She kept pulling her, kept marching her forward, her gaze locked on the exit. The minutes were ticking forward. The bombs were set to go off. They had to get out. Felicity didn’t want to leave without the others, but she had no choice. They were trapped in the long line of people all pushing forward. The movement had power - it was a tidal wave of humanity and strength via the fear and the need to escape. They were stuck in a riptide, and Thea didn’t seem all that concerned about fighting the current.

It felt like an eternity until the first spray of ocean breeze hit her face. It was cold and sharp, but it was the first clue that they were ascending out of the dark. Thea squeezed Felicity’s hand twice when the air hit them and increased their pace, though she did look over her shoulder in worry, clearly terrified that the others wouldn’t make it in time.

Light hit them with a startling gleam of grey reflection and smoky dusk. Night was falling. Even still, Felicity blinked back the light as they stepped off the cement path and onto the rocky shore of the beach. They were in a less populated area - one she knew of summer trips she had taken on her own. They weren’t far from the city, but it was far enough to make walking awkward. She had no intention of going back until she knew every last person she cared about was out of that bunker and safely at her side.

Thea and Felicity turned once they were on shore and out of the riptide of desperate people, and looked at the stream of people leaving the bunker. There were more than Felicity had thought. Most of them were the victims who had been experimented on and the people who had done the experimenting. They didn’t fight. They were all too similar in their need to flee. They ran into the woods and down the road, not looking back, not pausing, content to get as far away from the looming explosion as possible.

The winter wind whipped Felicity’s hair into a frenzy, and the cold water played at the toes of her shoes, but she ignored both. She couldn’t feel the cold, not with the way her body was buzzing with terror and billowing heat that was focused entirely around her heart.

Some of the heat washed away the second she saw Sara and Iris come running out of the bunker. Sara looked worried, her blue eyes darkened by fear. Felicity couldn’t remember her looking so terrified. Thea called out to her and Sara immediately gestured them back.

“Back up! Back up!” she yelled. “Away from the water!”

Thea obeyed her instantly, but Felicity lingered. Oliver, Roy, and Dig were still down there. Now that she didn’t have the fighting and scrambling people around her, she could hear him over the earwig. Oliver was fighting. He was fighting for her, keeping the soldiers off their backs long enough for them to get away.

She didn’t know if he heard her. The grunts, the sounds of flesh hitting flesh, and the sharp crack of bone filled her ear as much as his pants and low sounds of pain. A minute later, Roy and Dig ushered the last of the people out of the tunnel, shooting five soldiers who had been trying to stop him as he did. The soldiers hit the ground and Dig spotted the others converging on the beach. He gestured Roy forward, who looked at the opening of the tunnel reluctantly. He didn’t want to leave Oliver. He had no choice. Time was out.

Iris reached out to Felicity, drawing her attention away from them, and wrapped her arms around her neck. She held her tightly, crying into her neck and laughing a little hysterically. Felicity held her back tightly, her eyes on the entrance.

The fighting in her ear continued.

“He’s not coming! We have to help him,” Felicity said, releasing Iris.

“He’s on his way. He was right behind-” Roy started to say.

They all hit the ground as a large whoosh of water exploded upwards, followed by a shock wave that rippled and flexed in the air like a living thing. It pushed Felicity down, taking all her air from her. She gasped into the rock pressed against her face and struggled to regain her feet. She couldn’t stay down. She couldn’t. He had been there. He had been inside. She touched the earwig habitually. It had gone dead.

Oh God.

She stumbled back to her feet, her entire body wobbling and her heart pounding harder than she had ever felt it pound. She watched as the water hit the surface of the waves with a resounding slap, the droplets sounding like bricks as it returned to the ocean, watched as the resulting tidal wave washed across the shore and drenched her shoes and calves, and the others who were still lying down from the blast, watched as the water cracked and shifted as the bunker caved in on itself, watched as the waves continued to batter the shore.

She watched in horror as the water evened out and bodies started to bob to the surface.

Was one of them his? Would she have to search through the bodies until she found him lifeless and pale, consumed by the ocean he had tried to rescue her from? A dry sob escaped her as shock melted into recognition.

He was gone. He was dead.

“No!” she heard Thea yell. She felt the girl collapse, her cries ringing out with disbelief and rage and Roy moving to comfort her. The others were quiet. They were stunned. The man who had led them for so long was suddenly just...gone.

Felicity took a step deeper into the water. She hadn’t known him for as long as the others had, but she felt so connected, so certain that she would be in his life. There had been something there and now she was just supposed to watch him become a victim of a bomb in a bunker? Hell no. She was going to save him. He had to be there somewhere. He was stronger than a bomb. He was stronger than anyone she knew.

She took another step, prepared to dive in after him and search until all the air left her body. Before she could, another swell of water hit her legs, and then a head appeared out of the water twenty feet out from shore. It did not bob and drift as the other bodies. It came with motion and intent and a long
exhale of air and water. She squinted, the grey clouds swirled more intensely, bracketing the waves and sending more chills across her body.

The person moved closer and the cold wind, the angry sea, and the wails of grief stopped and shifted to the outskirts of her awareness. There was only him.

He was bloody, tired, and clearly injured, but he was alive. How, she didn’t know. She honestly didn’t care. She just wanted to get to him. She wanted proof that he was not an illusion. His pace was quick and deliberate, his strokes coming with all the athleticism she had come to expect from him. He wasn’t quick enough. She splashed out to meet him, desperate to feel his skin, feel his heart beating, feel him pressed against her.

The water was up to her hips when she finally reached him. Tears were streaming down her face, her breathing was chaotic, and her body was a mixture of lingering tension and overwhelming relief. She tugged his face to hers without giving him a chance to catch his breath and caught his lips on hers. She didn’t linger there long. She was too full of energy. She kissed across his lips, his face, his forehead, and his neck, then she pulled him tight against her body. His hands drifted down as she held him, and then pulled her up. She wrapped her legs around him and held him tighter, the waves pushing and pulling against them but insurmountable against the strength of their hold on one another. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and gripped the back of his head tightly to her body, keeping him in place.

“You’re alive,” she whispered. “You’re alive.”

“I’m here,” he promised her. “I’m okay.”

She cried into his shoulder and he started to walk them toward land. She didn’t want to let him go. She wanted to hold on to him forever, but he was clearly tired and the water was freezing. They had to get out, and she had to help him. She unhooked her body from around his, dropped down, and wrapped her arm tightly around his. He kept looking at her warmly, as if he couldn’t believe she was really there. She looked right back, a happy smile replacing the fear and worry. She couldn’t walk an inch further without letting him know how happy she felt.

She turned and kissed him again, ignoring the fact that his entire family was watching. When she pulled away, she pressed her hand against his cheek, her eyes sparkling with all the warmth and affection she had for him. He nuzzled her nose with his and pressed his forehead against hers with a deep sigh.

“Thank you for coming for me,” she said.

“Always,” he replied.

She traced his bottom lip with her thumb and sobered. She pulled away just enough to look him in the eyes. “We’re not done yet, though.”

“No,” he agreed.

“We have to get her. We have to stop Circe.”

He nodded grimly.

“I might know where to find her,” Felicity added.

His lips twitched with a smile. “Only you,” he said.
She smiled back.

“Come on...you’re freezing,” he added.

Together, they walked out of the ocean and to the family waiting to welcome them.
Chapter Summary

I have been so uninspired lately. This has a lot to do with the soul-sucking task of looking for a job. If any of the Arrow or Flash crew wants to hire me, I am fully available currently. That's how you get jobs, right? Ask for them in fanfiction forums. I read that somewhere...Might have been HuffPost Business.

The reason you have this masterpiece of a sorta good chapter is because of @geniewithwifi. She bribed me. You can blame her for everything that happens in this chapter if you want.

Next chapter is all about the dangling bits of Malcolm and co. Heh...I said dangling bits.

I love you all.

She wasn’t exactly comfortable. Comfort would be a warm shower and cuddling with Oliver. She had the cuddling down, but it was more clutching, because she really didn’t want to fall. Her hands were as numb from holding onto him as they were from the cold whipping past. Neither of them had talked about her riding with the others. He had gone to the bike stashed along the road and she had followed. It was that simple. The others had divided up into bikes and cars, but she couldn’t focus on them. All she cared about was the fact that he was breathing. Her body pressed against his allowed her to feel every intake of breath and consequent exhalation. He was cold, dripping wet, and breathing heavier than normal, but it was so better than all of the alternatives she had entertained.

The wind whipped at her clothes, her legs, and her hands, but she was able to bury her face into his back, staving off the worst of the chill. He did not have the same reprieve. They shivered together, their body heat only fractionally staving off the cold that had arrived with the setting sun.

They drove on his bike for what felt like hours. She savored every shift in his body, every breath he took, every clench of his muscles. Finally, he came to a slow stop and cut the engine. She didn’t have to look up to know that they were at his house. She could feel it in her bones. The roads and trees had become overwhelmingly familiar to her in the past week.

“Felicity?” he asked after clearing the cold from his throat. His voice was still raspy and weak. He had swallowed more water than he wanted her to say. She knew it all. She just had to look at him to see his pain.

Felicity didn’t move. She kept her arms wrapped around him and her hands clenched in his shirt.

“We need to get warm and change so that we can go catch Circe,” he reminded her. “We’re on a timetable.”

She groaned. “I don’t think I can actually move,” she told him. “I’m frozen. I’m Elsa from Frozen. I’m so frozen that people are complaining like they do when that song comes on because it’s just so Frozen and so everywhere.”

“Okay,” he said calmly, not sounding as if he entirely understood her meaning. He reached around
and gently placed his hands on her hips. He lifted her silently and set her on the ground. He got off
the bike next, looking all the world like he was in a GQ photoshoot for Jack Frost instead of like he
had been half drowned in a secret military bunker. He looked down at her seriously, a secret
blossoming in his eyes. She knew he would get around to telling her eventually. It also really needed
to wait.

Shivering on his lawn was not where they needed to have any kind of serious conversation. And he
wasn’t lying about needing to get to Circe. If they weren’t quick, she was slip away once more and
they would have to worry about another kidnapping...which was just so five hours ago.

She patted his arm, stroking along it twice, then led the way into the house. He followed her up
the stairs silently and into the bathroom. She didn’t fight him on needing privacy. She was too tired and,
weirdly, too wired. Her thoughts were focused on exposing The Consortium and Circe. She knew
what she needed to do and how to face them. Right after she took her shower.

They silently helped each other out of their clothes, touches lingering, glances full of warmth
whenever they met. It wasn’t sexual. Sex didn’t even register to her in the moment. It was intimate
and so very normal that it scared her a little.

When they were both naked, Oliver turned to the water he had thought to turn on and pulled her
inside the shower with him. He held her for a minute, letting the water warm them both and calm
their shivering, and then they washed off the day and the drama.

His large hands made quick work of her shoulders and back, spreading his bodywash with warm
strokes and gentle squeezes on her sore muscles. He turned her slowly and did the same to her
stomach and breasts, his gaze not heating at all. In fact, he seemed determined to only see her eyes.
His expression was close to a puppy dog’s as he stared at her, almost as if he had been shown the
world and had nearly lost. She liked that he looked at her that way. She smiled back at him and they
quickly finished up.

She knew, though, that there had been another shift - ineffable and daring. She would examine the
shift later, when she wasn’t determined to end a global terror group.

When they were warm and clean, they hurried out into the room and she pulled on a pair of pants
and a nice shirt she wouldn’t have bought for herself but she liked very much. She put on boots
instead of heels, just in case she had to do more running, and shrugged on a jacket.

Oliver came out of his closet wearing all black and a dark hoodie she took meant something to him.
She also knew without asking that he was armed. She could see the outline of a pistol at his waist
and figured that was not the only weapon he had on him.

She averted her eyes when they connected with the outline. She didn’t want Circe dead - she didn’t
want another life on Oliver’s conscience, but she didn’t know how to change the future. Oliver
fought and parkoured. She hacked. He was the expert on what they were about to do, and she could
not hobble him if it meant his life, because Circe would most definitely try to kill him. She didn’t
know what to make of her shifting morals, but she knew it had everything to do with caring more
about him she was ready to say out loud.

Dig was waiting at the front door. He walked Felicity and Oliver to the car and held the door for
them. He stopped Oliver and muttered something to him she couldn’t hear from her place inside the
car. Oliver grunted contrarily but didn’t argue with Dig as he so clearly wanted to from the tension
Felicity saw in his frame.

Iris was sitting in the front seat of the car. She was furiously typing on her phone and had on what
Felicity described as her work face. Felicity knew that she was writing an article about The Consortium. She knew they needed to work together for what she had planned for Circe. She leaned forward with her tablet and started talking, pointing out what she had found. Iris immediately focused, improved, and helped Felicity with logistics, cutting through Felicity’s technological logic with real-world logic of how the news and people’s perceptions of events worked. By the end of the ten minute car ride, they had cracked open The Consortium and laid it to waste. All that was left was to inform Circe of the change in circumstances.

Thanks to Felicity, they found her very easily.

They pulled up to the front of a seamstress shop in the fancy part of town and Oliver and Dig immediately got out, with only a lingering glance from Oliver. They disappeared into the shadows, but the earwig in Felicity’s ear and the sense of being watched made her feel confident. They had her back. They would be there if she needed them, but they were also letting her face Circe on her own. She was grateful that Oliver was trusting her to face her demons.

She no longer feared Circe as the monster under the bed. She had won. Circe just didn’t know it yet.

Feeling nervous, if not more confident than her last meeting with the woman, Felicity inhaled sharply, nodded at Iris, and then walked into the shop as calmly as she could manage. She was smiling when the bell tinkled and a saintly woman with curly hair and dark skin looked up from where she was carefully pinning the hem on a stunning pair of pants. Circe was standing on the platform in front of her, her expression stoic and at peace. Felicity breathed a little easier at the expression on her face. She hadn’t heard about the bunker yet. She wasn’t prepared for the confrontation. Whatever guards there should have been with Circe were missing. It made Felicity wonder if this moment was meant to be private, a reprieve from all the murdering and mayhem. Even sociopaths needed a break, she supposed. The seamstress smiled brightly at Felicity, though her eyes were wary.

“Sorry. This is a private fitting. I’m not actually open.”

Felicity smiled back. “I’m here for her,” she said, pointing at Circe.

Circe’s dark gaze landed on Felicity in the mirror. Her eyebrows knitted together for a second before her brow smoothed back out. Felicity in no way missed the fear that settled in the depths of Circe’s eyes, however. She was hiding it well, but Felicity was also looking for it.

“Give us a moment, please,” Circe said in a level tone.

The seamstress didn’t need to be told twice. She stood and slinked into the back room silently, all peacefulness fading with her. Felicity knew the others would get her out if it came to a fight. It was time. She had some things to say and some pretty big irritations to get off her chest.

“Forget to bring your bodyguards?” Felicity asked.

“No. They’re up the block getting coffee,” Circe said, straightening her top primly and glancing down at her watch.

“Counting the seconds until they’re due back?” Felicity asked.

“Waiting for you to get to the point,” Circe said.

“Fair enough,” Felicity said. “But just so you know, this is me gloating. This is my gloat-y face. It’s very similar to my ‘I’ve won!’ face and my ‘Yay! There’s pizza!’ face. Just so you know.”
Circe arched an eyebrow and shifted impatiently, coiling with tension and expectation. She was clearly trying to work out what was going on and if she was in danger. Felicity turned and gestured back toward the glass door. Iris walked inside and crossed her arms, looking as fierce as Felicity had ever seen her.

“Iris and I didn’t have a lot of time to drag your organization through the mud, but we’re both really good at our jobs. You may have noticed. You did kidnap her and everything for finding out more than she should have. So, on the ten minute car ride over we doxxed you. I mean, seriously doxxed you. Everything you have ever done or have planned for your organization is out on the internet. Iris wrote a nice article with the main plot points that I then helped trend worldwide. It caught on from there. It is currently…” Felicity checked her phone, “the second most read article on the internet. The first is about Taylor Swift. She got a new cat.”

“Oh. What kind?” Iris asked, perking up at the news.

Felicity started to answer, then waved her hand to clear the thought, proud of herself for staying on point. Circe’s glare had a lot to do with it. “Later…” She eyed Circe sternly. “People are talking about you now. From the way you were trying to kill me a whole freaking lot because of how I knew too much, I feel like this might be a problem for you. Oh. I also sent all your files on ongoing cases to every single law enforcement organization in the world, along with your picture and current location.”

Circe had gone deathly pale. There was so much rage in her eyes that Felicity felt the heat. She kept her place in front of her, but she was afraid. Her confidence had melted a little with the intensity of Circe’s hate.

“What’s keeping me from killing you right now?” Circe asked in a deadly quiet voice.

“I don’t know...shock?” Felicity asked. “You could try, I guess, but the people I brought with me are a little upset that you abducted me so…”

The door opened again on cue and Oliver stepped inside, seemingly not able to stay outside with Circe’s threat hanging in the air. He crossed his arms and stared at Circe with such darkness that his face was transformed. He looked like a skeleton, a mask of the man that had been. Felicity didn’t recognize him, but she found that she didn’t mind. It made her feel safe. Circe stared right back, and Felicity sensed her contemplating a fight.

“You’re finished,” Felicity said, hoping Circe would be logical. “You’re done. The police are on the way.”

“I underestimated you,” Circe said slowly, some of the heat fading as she realized her mistake. “I made the call to kill you instead of recruit you. It was a mistake.”

“The mistake was coming after her at all,” Oliver replied.

Circe nodded thoughtfully. “Years at this and I’m unraveled by a girl with a computer and a hero complex,” Circe said.

“And an intrepid reporter,” Felicity said, pointing at Iris.

“Thanks,” Iris said with a sunny smile.

“Sure,” Felicity replied.

“You really think this is the end?” Circe asked. “You think this is the last you’ll hear of us? We’re
everywhere. We are in every city, every major business. We are you and me. There is no way you
captured us all. How many politicians do we own? How much of the world’s wealth is in our hands?
The world will forget us in a month. Things will return to normal. Balance will be restored. It’s naive
to believe otherwise.”

“I’m not looking to fix the entire world,” Felicity said, “just my corner of it. And you messed with
it.”

Circe shifted slightly, her eyes darting around the room analytically, and Oliver uncrossed his arms in
response. Felicity didn’t miss the escalating tension. Circe was working herself up to a fight. Circe
knew, as everyone else in the room did, that the only way to get out of the situation was to run before
the cops caught up to her. She would regroup, re-establish The Consortium, and find her way back
to crime and hurting people. Felicity had no doubt that the woman in front of her would come back
stronger than ever. And she would come back with a vendetta.

“It doesn’t have to come to a fight,” Circe said. “You won fair and square. You took the rules and
made them yours. I have a lot of respect for that. It’s irritating, but I do appreciate intelligence.
Because of this respect, I’ll leave you be. Starling is yours...so long as you don’t interfere with my
business elsewhere.”

“We both know that I’m not letting you leave this shop,” Oliver said. “I’m not the cops. You
attacked a member of my family. You brought war to my house. Blood for blood.”

Felicity’s stomach knotted tightly at the violence of his words and the promise of death in his eyes.
She didn’t want it to come to that. She knew that it was officially out of her hands. She had gloated.
She had let Circe know that she was not going to get away with her crimes. Now, it was Oliver’s
turn to act. She stared at him, noticing that he refused to meet her eyes, and waited with baited breath
for the moment to extend to movement.

“Well…” Circe said, exhaling heavily. There was an expectant pause, then she turned on her heels
and ran for the back door.

Oliver surged forward - a shot fired across the room - and met her at the door. He grabbed her
shoulder to stop her and she elbowed him in the stomach. He grunted and released her just as her
foot connected with his gut. He caught her foot and pulled her closer. She jumped up and tried to
kick him in the face. He blocked the kick and slammed her into the wall. She rolled and regained her
feet instantly, looking unfairly put together even mid-fight. She jumped up again and met Oliver’s
approach with two more kicks that connected with his side. He reared back and punched her in the
face. Blood blossomed on her lip, but it didn’t stop her. If anything, it just seemed to make her
madder.

The fight shifted from Circe trying to escape Oliver to her trying to win the fight and hurt him as the
blows became harder and faster. She had realized that killing him was the only way to escape. It
meant chaos for the tiny shop, as neither of the seemed particularly concerned about mitigating the
violence.

Felicity pulled Iris over to the front door as they circled the space with grace so beautiful it seemed
supernatural. The fracturing of skin and the bruising of flesh filled her ears as they beat each other up
with landed blows and glancing hits. Circe’s lip was cracked. Oliver’s nose was bleeding. They kept
hitting and kicking and swirling around the space, breaking, tearing, and seeking what weakness the
other could give them.

The mistake Circe made was so minor that Felicity wasn’t even sure it was a mistake. Oliver was just
better and faster. He caught her arm and slammed her into the ground. Something popped - a broken
bone most likely. Circe cried out in pain as Oliver reared back, fist raised, eyes wild and darkened by years of doing what was necessary to survive. Circe was squirming in pain, but her eyes were full of hate.

“Finish it,” she said. “Kill me now. Please. I would rather die than be tortured, per your usual methods.”

Oliver’s fist didn’t waiver from where he was holding it in the air above her face, but his eyes did. They shifted to Felicity’s before quickly returning to Circe. His anger slipped away like water being held in the palm of a hand. Very slowly, very deliberately, he lowered his fist and leaned back on his heels. He paused and then stood, giving Circe some space. She didn’t try to stand. She clearly couldn’t.

There was silence. It was eerie stillness that made no sense after the violence of the fight. Felicity looked down at her tablet habitually and realized from the beeping that the police were on their way.

“The police are coming…” she said to Oliver.

He nodded, though he kept his gaze on Circe.

“I need to take care of her,” Oliver said.

“Take care of her?” Felicity asked.

Oliver’s gaze shifted to Iris and he shrugged.

“Oliver…” Felicity said.

He finally found her eyes, sincerity shining back at her. “I promise you...no harm will come to her,” Oliver said.

That was all it took for her to believe him. He would not torture her or kill her. He would not perpetuate more violence in the name of violence. She could feel the truthfulness of his promise. He might not be exactly where he needed to be yet, but she also knew that he was trying.

Felicity stepped closer to Circe so that she could look the woman in the eyes. She gave it a beat, allowing herself the closure she knew was in the moment to circle her heart. She allowed the seriousness and gravity to hover, then she pulled Iris out of the shop. Dig met them on the outside and ushered them to the car. He didn’t wait for Oliver to catch up. He drove away silently.

“What’s he going to do to her?” Iris asked. “Why does it feel like more is going on here? How did he fight like that?”

“Self-defense classes?” Felicity offered up.

“Felicity…” Iris complained.

“You just released the story of a lifetime,” Felicity said. “Can you just let it go for once? Please?”

Iris sighed and clamped her lips together. She nodded, her expression weighted with the truth of the secrets and questions. Her hand moved down to her stomach and she winced. “I don’t feel so good,” she added.

Felicity jerked violently, as though Iris had hit her instead of spoken, and urgently leaned forward to talk to Dig. “We need to go to the hospital! I forgot that she had that thing in her still!”
Iris blanched and leaned back on the seat. There was no blood, thankfully, but it was pretty clear that she needed a real doctor, pain medicine, and not to have wiring tied to her nerves. Dig didn’t argue or ask what was wrong. He simply took them straight to the hospital and made sure that Iris got the Queen treatment immediately. She was ushered into a private room and the doctor swooped in with a serious expression and a tall nurse at her side. Felicity knew that there was only one person Iris would want to see once she got out of surgery. She walked a little ways away from Dig and dialed Barry.

“...Don’t put the monkey in there! It’ll eat all the doughnuts! No!” Barry called into the phone. He added, “Hello?” a second later.

“Why do you have a monkey and why does it like doughnuts so much?” Felicity asked curiously.

“Felicity! Hi!” Barry said. “Have you heard from Iris? I’ve looked everywhere and I really don’t think this is one of her typical dives into a story...You said you would call. You didn’t call.”

“First, she’s totally going to be okay,” Felicity said. “No question about it.”

“Okay?” Barry questioned, sounding nervous.

“But she’s a little bit in the hospital right now,” Felicity said.

“Oh my god! Oh my super god! Where? Which one? I’m coming there. DON’T LET THE MONKEY IN THERE! IT WILL EAT ALL THE DOUGHNUTS! No!” Felicity heard the sound of something crashing and Barry sighing. “I’ll be there in a minute. Maybe ten. Where are you?”

She told him which hospital and he hung up without saying goodbye. She knew that he would be there soon, monkey problems or not. She returned to Dig and leaned against the wall next to him. She fought with the question for a while before it finally poured out of her.

“What’s Oliver doing? Do you know?” she asked.

Dig shrugged one shoulder nonchalantly. “That’s a question for him.”

“I know...I just...” She sighed.

“You know what we are,” Dig reminded her gently.

“I do. And it scares me that I’m starting to care less and less the more I see what you guys have to deal with on a daily basis. It’s bad that I just want him to be safe and survive, right? I mean, I want him to be more, not to kill, but I just...”

“Trust me...I know.”

There was another round of silence, weighted with the situation and the last six hours. She went through everything that had happened and winced.

“How long do I have to grovel about the shocking you thing?” Felicity asked.

Dig shook his head in mock seriousness, his eyes twinkling with suppressed humor. “Never gonna be okay.”

She sighed and went back to waiting anxiously for news of Iris’ prognosis, knowing it would be a long night.
It was eleven when she finally got back to Oliver’s house. Her feet were dragging and her eyes were doing that thing where one was more open the other but she wasn’t sure which one that was supposed to be. The cold air had woken her up a little on the walk inside, but she still felt like everything was fuzzy and dark. Iris had sent her home - the surgery had been a success and there was nothing left but for Iris to sleep it off. Barry was with her. It was the only reason Felicity could bring herself to leave and get some sleep.

It had been a long day.

The door opened for her before she reached it and the warmth of the heat touched her face instantly. She sighed happily as Oliver ushered her inside and Dig got back into the car and drove away. She took hold of his forearm after he had closed the door behind him and looked up at him with a mixture of concern and gratefulness. He caught her elbow and started tracing soothing patterns with his thumb along the fabric of her jacket.

“How’s Iris?” he asked.

“Better,” she replied.

“Good.”

There was a pause.

“I didn’t kill her…” He huffed slightly and got a distant look in his eyes. “I have a prison. It’s not a four-star hotel, but she won’t be mistreated there.”

Felicity frowned. “You have a prison?”

“Yes.”

“With guards and bars and cannon balls on the ankles?”

“Two thirds of a yes,” he replied.

“Where?”

“Ten miles outside of Starling.”

“Why not just turn her over to the cops?”

“Because she knows I’m Bratva and she would use that to reduce her sentence.”

Felicity nodded. She understood his reasoning. She knew that he was right to protect himself, and his family, and she was intensely happy that he had refused to kill Circe. The tension melted away from her heart and a bubbling sense of euphoria hit her hard.

She was free.

She could finally walk around without her death hanging over her head. She had conquered the dragon, and she had done it her way, using her tech, her brain, and via depending on her friends. The weight released from her had an eager energy humming in her veins.

She shifted closer to Oliver, the warmth he radiated adding to her energy, and raised up on her toes. She caught his lips in a kiss and immediately felt him wrap his arms around her body. He pulled her to him, unwilling to leave even an inch between them, and she melted against him. She wrapped her arms around his neck and deepened the kiss when she realized he was keeping it chaste out of
respect to her traumatic day. He was surprised, clearly assuming she was too rattled by the night for anything beyond sleep, but he didn’t push her away. They had both nearly died. They needed affirmation and physicality more than they needed any discussion on feelings.

She pulled him to the floor roughly. He grunted, the pain of the fight lingering, but the grunt turned to a groan when she straddled him and kissed him once more.

The floor was hard and cold, but neither felt it as they continued to kiss and relearn each others bodies with nearly desperate touches and rough kisses. Thinking would happen later, but, for now, there was this perfect moment where nothing else and no one else mattered. They were two souls linked by something greater than either of them, both overwhelmed by the pleasure of the other at the tailend of another near-death experience and overwhelming victory.

Felicity hoped like hell that, for once, the good would last - that it would fall into the places in between and make a home in heart forever. It was different with him, and she didn’t want to give him up as she had so many good moments before him.

She knew for certain that she was willing to fight for him. She was willing to see where their present would lead them. But that was for tomorrow. Tonight, there was only him and the pure adoration on his face as they made love.

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