Broken Arrow
by fuzzy_paint

Summary

Post 'Insecurity.' When Artemis takes her father up on his offer, not as the protege Sportsmaster expects, but as an undercover agent for the Justice League, Batman assigns Red Arrow to be her handler.

Notes

Special thanks to Becca for looking this over, and especially to hariboo for the fabulous art! 
Broken Arrow: Be What She Needs

Also, "Disordered" implies that Apokolips isn't (as of yet) a big player in the YJ universe. I, uh, fudged on that a bit.

Fawcett City
December 8, 0345 CDT

She wears tiger stripes on bright orange gear, her bow custom to match. She goes by a different name now; only days in and she’s already shed the old one like she’s shed her team. Later, he’ll wonder if she’s still called Artemis in private, but right now Roy is more focused on the arrow she has pointing at his chest.
He has half a mind to prove Bats wrong, to show that she’s really playing them all for fools, but he’s not ready to die just yet, so he jerks his chin up. “The Huntress is on the rise,” he says. Her gear lacks a full mask, only a large orange flame over half of her face; he can see everything, her shock, and how quickly it devolves into anger, and irritation, a myriad of emotions he shouldn’t be able to see. Letting them run wild like that isn’t going to do either of them any favors, but at least she does keep the bow up and the arrow strung, pointed at him despite the code phrase he’s offered.

He keeps his hands away from his own bow and the knife in his belt. “Batman thinks you need a handler.”

She glances sharply over his shoulder, toward the street, and then scowls at him. “Say it a little louder, why don’t you? Not like it’s a secret or anything.”

Roy opens his mouth, but a loud crash interrupts them; it’s outside the alley. Kaldur using his magic to throw something, probably, but it’s far too near for Roy’s comfort.

“I think your new friends are rather distracted,” he says, backing further into the shadows.

She lets her arrow dip a few inches, glancing over her shoulder before she follows. Not that dropping the Tigress act seems to dim her suspicion or anger at all. “They chose you? Kaldur, maybe, I could understand. Or M’gann. We could link up telepathically from a couple blocks away and no one would know! But you?”

“Sportsmaster can sense Martian shielding. Or have you forgotten that?” Roy lowers his voice. “It could be anyone on the team, but you and I both know that secrets on this team don’t stay kept.”

“I thought there was no mole.” She smiles, showing her teeth. “But maybe that’s why you’re still on the team and not in the League.”

His mouth twists. “I’ll be in the League soon enough. Don’t worry about that.”

Her expression flickers, goes harder. “If you hurt them-"

“I’m not the one running around pretending to be Sportsmaster’s protégé.” Roy says. “If there is no mole, then what are you doing?”

“That’s none of your business.”

“Wrong. The League made it my business.”

She leans forward, eyes narrowed. “Tell them I want someone else-“

“Batman chose me for this! Just like he chose you. If you think I’m going to let you jeopardize this mission-"

Red Arrow!

Roy jerks his head up and away from Artemis, taking in his surroundings, ready to make this look like anything but what it actually is, but it’s only M’gann over the psychic link. He shakes his head, as if to get her out of it. Busy! He lowers his voice. “For this to work, you have to trust me.”

“And here I thought working with him-” she jerks her head toward the street. “-was gonna be the hard part of this mission. Trust you. Are you kidding me?”

“We don’t have time for this! Start taking this seriously; we have work to do.”
“Taking it seriously-” Her fingers twitch as they tighten around her bow. “You have no idea. You know nothing.”

Something hits the side of the building closest to them, breaking into pieces. Parts of it slam against the dumpster while the rest litter the ground in front of them, only feet away. They both back further into the shadows but turn toward the mouth of the alley. The fighting’s almost closed in on them. M’gann’s in his head again, the others linked in through her, several of them calling his name. Wondering where he’s disappeared to.

Roy touches her shoulder; she flinches away. He ignores it. “I’m with you on this,” he says. He slips a piece of paper in her hand, an address and number and a six digit code underneath. With it, he also gives her a keycard, glossy white on the front and a black magnetic strip on the back.

As much as he wants to grill her for information, to find out anything she’s learned, the team is on the outside of the alley. No good for them to be seen together, even in a fight. Roy cups his hands and offers her a boost to the roof. Maneuver seven, slightly subdued. She pauses when she’s up, looking back at him. The shadows cover her face. Then she’s gone.

M’gann is in his head shortly after; he turns and rejoins the fight, stepping right in to cover Kaldur’s back, pushing him out of the way of one of Cheshire’s darts.

She laughs, face obscured by her mask. “Little Arrow need to fly?”

Cheshire is too close for his arrows to be effective. She’d be on him before he could even string one up, but he reaches for his quiver anyway. She steps close and knocks his bow aside, then his fist. She throws a punch, knocking him in the jaw and forcing him back before kicking out his leg. He goes down but while he’s low to the ground, he sweeps her legs out from under her. She rolls with the motion and is on her feet again in seconds.

She tilts her head, waiting, just waiting for him to close in on her.

He’s becoming too familiar with the sense of impossibility whenever he goes up against her. He catches her fist; she throws her left, cracking him against the jaw again, once, twice. Quick, easy, one-two. Hurts like a bitch. She’s not pulling any punches, but he can’t shake the sense that she’s holding back. That she’s playing with him, even if she’s oddly silent tonight.

If she wanted him dead, truly wanted him dead, he’s not sure she wouldn’t manage it somehow. A sharp yelp pulls his attention for a split second, and he misses catching her foot when she strikes him, hitting him in the chest, knocking him back. Roy staggers and hits the corner of the building. Further behind him, Kaldur and M’gann’s attention is focused solely on Sportsmaster. To his right, Wally is bent over, hands holding him up. Something grey anchors his feet, wrapped thick around his legs to his calves, getting thinner as it snakes halfway up his thighs.

An arrow shaft sticks out, feathers green and bright against the snow and ice on the road. Roy catches Artemis’ silhouette atop the roof. It was a nice shot, to catch KF in mid-run; she’s gotten even better since the last time he’d seen her in action.

Cheshire cracks him across the face again, knocking his head against the building. Dazed, his attempt at blocking her kick is feeble, embarrassing, and he staggers back into the alley he’d just been in minutes ago. She kicks him again. Roy tips back and thumps against the dark green dumpster. He bites his tongue, blinks the jolt away as best he can. Shake it off.

Get up. Shake it off.
Despite her height, Cheshire looms at the mouth of the alley, backlit by the streetlamp. Roy struggles to his feet, reaching for one of his arrows. He knows immediately that the one he holds is a mess; there’s a large crack down the center. It’ll never fly straight.

She laughs, tossing her sai in the air and catching it again. “Gonna stop me with your broken arrow?”

Roy blinks -

Something explodes in the street, flames licking out and lashing partway into the alley. Cheshire’s forced against the far building, arm up to shield her face, even though she’s wearing that mask. Roy has to turn his head from the heat.

It licks at his face, unbearable and then... his name. He hears his name.

_ARROW! Red Arrow!_ It’s M’gann; the others must already be accounted for, only him hidden away and out of her sight. He lets her know he’s still breathing, feeling her relief rushing through the psychic link. He shakes his head again, trying to block it off. Cheshire’s already running out the alley. He stands, swaying slightly, but forces himself to follow.

In the street, two nearby cars are upturned, glass shattered on the pavement. Fires burn in both of them, and the flames catching the street banners above, green holly and silver bells, all of it turning to ash. Kaldur holds a shield of water in front of Wally where he’s still cemented to the ground, the material setting to a dark grey. Quick dry. Nice.

The flames die down, tamed by Kaldur’s magic and the water he pulls from the melting snow, dirty grey with the normal grime in any city. Roy scans the entire area just to be sure but there’s no silhouette on the rooftop. Sportsmaster and Cheshire have disappeared, and the case they’ve been fighting for, something from one of the buildings on the block, is gone too.

The source of the explosion becomes clearer when Kaldur picks up the remains of a trick arrow, just a bit of green fletching and a part of the black shaft. Roy’s worked with this kind before. He feels the corner of his mouth twitch up, unbidden.

M’gann settles at Wally’s feet. She touches the grey material that holds him. “It’s inorganic,” she says. “I’m sorry, but-”

“It’s cool,” Wally says, waving her away. “I’ve got this, babe.”

He starts to shift, like he’s trying to run, one knee forward, then the other, and again until he’s nothing but a blur from the waist down. He gets his arms going too; grey dust starts to float into the air around him. M’gann backs away, covering her mouth.

Kaldur puts his hand on Roy’s shoulder. “You have been injured.”

Roy touches his head where it still throbs a bit on the back. His fingers come away tacky and dark red with blood. “It’s fine,” he says, but Kaldur takes out the simple first aid kit they all carry with them. It’s light-weight and easy to tuck into a pocket, nothing more than a resource for small on-the-spot triage, but they’re stuck here until Wally gets free. Kaldur takes the gauze and presses it to the back of Roy’s head. Then he reconsiders and forces Roy to sit at the bus stop bench. He lets Kaldur play nurse without much protest, wishing, not for the first time, that he had the durability of his friend as he rubs his jaw. It’s probably going to bruise.

Such is the life of a hero.
“You disappeared on us,” Kaldur says. It’s even, and phrased like a statement, but it’s a question. There’s really no sense in hiding it. He’s never been really good at lying to Kaldur, anyway.

“I went after her,” Roy says. Kaldur’s reaction is so slight that Roy almost misses it, the stiffening and the increase in pressure against his head. He winces, and it abates. Kaldur’s expression is probably as stoic as ever, but for the slight tightening of his mouth. Anyone who didn’t know him well enough would miss it.

Roy doesn’t turn around to see it. He doesn’t need to. Wally stops trying to break free, the cloud of dust around him dissipating slowly. M’gann doesn’t hide her interest, locking eyes on him and refusing to break away.

Roy looks away first. “We were right. It is her. I guess it’s a plus she didn’t put an arrow in me when she had me. I thought she might.”

“Perhaps turning on us is not so easy as she makes it seem,” Kaldur says after a long moment. M’gann looks at her hands, and Wally looks straight ahead, starting to move once more. Faster now, so that the dust form a thick haze, and it’s difficult to see even the blur of his body.

Roy looks up at the rooftop. There’s nothing but shadows up there now, empty spaces where she’d been just minutes ago. “Yeah, maybe.”

Midwestern USA
December 8, 0414 CDT

Him! Why him?

Artemis tightens her arms across her chest, scowling out the window of the helicopter. It never stops shocking her all the resources Sportmaster has at his fingertips. He lacks access to the zeta beam - except, of course, through her, but she’s not about to tell him that she still has access - but he always seems to have an exit strategy. Even after his first, second and third have fallen through. He doesn’t have the kind of juice for this sort of thing.

Next to her, Cheshire shifts, shoulder bumping against hers. Her smile matches the sharp curve of the one on her mask. "Keep this up and you'll be infamous soon." It's loud enough to be heard over the steady beat of the blades, loud enough for everyone in the helicopter to hear exactly what she's saying, Artemis, the pilot, Sportmaster.

She looks back out the window. "I did what I had to." She did, and she's covered, too. They can't suspect anything because of that. She couldn't let her exploding arrow strike too close to Sportmaster or Cheshire, which means it wasn’t close enough to the Team either. They had to have time. She’d seen the flare of Kaldur’s magic, bright and blue, as she’d lead Sportmaster and Cheshire across the rooftops, but she hadn’t seen what happened them, to M’gann and Kaldur, who couldn’t cope with heat like that, to Wally, unable to move because of one of her arrows, to Red Arrow who hadn’t even been in the street.

They could’ve been hurt. That they weren’t, that’s cause for a losing score, but they could’ve been, so she hopes it counts for some points at least. Plus, the case they came for sits at her feet. Whatever’s in it is theirs now. Still, she’s been keeping an eye on Sportmaster since they got away. She remembers her training very clearly: precision, organization, flawless execution.

Tonight was messy, sloppy, and attracted far too much attention. That the team showed up is bad
enough, but then she goes and disappears at the same times as Red Arrow? Not good. So not good.

She tucks tighter into her seat, arms crossed as she glares out the window, even if she keeps glancing toward the front where Sportmaster’s sitting. The city lights have given way to the suburbs, but they’re nothing but yellow-orange blobs against the darkness.

Red Arrow. What’s Batman thinking? Of anyone he could’ve chosen, why him?


Artemis narrows her eyes. "Nobody really believes them either. What are you saying, sister?"

Cheshire shrugs. "You're the one who's saying it."

"I'm not saying anything."

"Funny how that works-"

"Enough." Sportmaster says, twisted around in his seat next to the pilot to look at them. Artemis can't fight the tension in her shoulders or how her fingers curl into fists, hidden in the crooks of her elbows, but she makes herself hold his gaze.

"You did well," he says finally.

Artemis forces her eyes to stay on his for several moments, waiting for the but, for the criticism she remembers from those years when her mom was in prison and Jade already gone off to become Cheshire. Even before she left, Artemis remembers all those times when he'd favor Jade over her or Artemis over Jade, play them against each other in their training.

It doesn't come.

Cheshire spares her a glance; Artemis can't read it. She doesn’t take the time to decipher it either. She nods and looks back out the window, readjusting her earmuffs. They won't block out all sound, but hopefully they’ll get the picture and leave her alone.

They do, all the rest of the trip, and Artemis can't decide if it's a good thing. Is he going easy on her because he suspects something? Or because she's brand new to his side, his protégé where Cheshire still claims independence? But Sportmaster doesn’t believe in going easy on anyone, least of all his own daughters. The whole thing feels like winning on a technicality, and he’s never been fond of that.

Her mouth dry, she suspects the ground beneath her feet is still as shaky as ever, even after fighting the Team, after her arrow that might have been too close. She hopes they’re okay.

They have to be okay, M'gann and Wally and Kaldur, even Arrow.

She scowls, staring hard at the faraway lights of the city so her reflection blurs.

*Him.*

Artemis clenches her jaw; it feels like she’s being set up for failure. This won’t work unless he trusts her, and Arrow trusts her as much as she trusts the people in this helicopter. She knew going in that she couldn’t rely on anyone but herself. That hasn’t changed, even with Red Arrow’s offer of assistance. She thinks about the slip of paper and the keycard in her pocket.
Trust him. Right.

Mount Justice
December 8, 1317 EST

The image from airport security fits across the cave’s projected screen. Sportsmaster’s face flagged when hers hadn’t. Robin hasn’t set up the system to look for her yet. It’d only been days since they found the note pinned to the cave wall with one of her arrows, her communicator dangling over the shaft. They all knew she was gone, but none of them had expected her to reappear with Sportsmaster.

None of them except Roy.

The rest of the team still wears the shock of seeing her at Sportsmaster’s side, both dressed as civilians and not their alter-egos’ gear.

“It was her,” Roy says. “That’s certain.”

“I saw her too.” M’gann tightens her arms, hugging herself, her shoulders slumped forward. She tilts her face away and Zatanna puts her arm around M’gann’s waist, tugging her closer. “I tried to reach her over a psychic link, but she-”

Roy swallows and looks away, just in time to see Robin watching him closely. Too closely.

“It was her,” he says again. “New gear, new name, but-”

“Why would she do this?”

Roy winces at the edge of anger to Wally’s voice. He shrugs, because this is part of his mission too, and stares him down. “You know how I feel about this.”

Wally shakes his head, like he doesn’t want to believe it, like he can’t believe it, but Wally’s a logical guy. The evidence is all there, right in front of him. In front of all of them. Denial is always more powerful than he expects.

“You really think she’s been the mole this whole time?” Wally asks.

“It would explain a lot,” Connor says. He holds up his hands, as if fending off the dirty looks and even Roy’s suspicion. “What? I’m just saying. Cheshire got away the first time we ran into her. It was Artemis’ first mission on the team.”

“And the last mission,” Wally says, crossing his arms. “I thought she just sabotaged it because-”

Roy nods, not looking at him, but Robin sighs and goes to the cave’s computer terminal. Images of Sportsmaster and Cheshire and another woman pop up on the holographic display. It takes Roy a second to place her: Huntress.

The Huntress is on the rise.

“Her mom,” Robin says, as if reading Roy’s thoughts. “She’s retired. Sportsmaster’s her dad and Cheshire… she’s her sister.”

“What,” Wally says, loudest over the reactions of the rest of the team. Roy tries to look surprised,
certain he’s failed, but it’s not like the team is paying him any attention.

Robin shrugs. “I’m a detective. I didn’t- I didn’t say anything because I didn’t think it mattered.” He has on the same flat look that the rest of the team is wearing.

So Robin knows about her family. What else does he know?

Kaldur puts his hand on Robin’s shoulder. “We all trusted her. We did not know that trust was so misplaced. She proved herself to us, and we took it at face value.”

Roy’s fingers curl against his palm. “This team will have to be more careful in the future,” he says, ignoring the looks from both M’gann and Zatanna, and worse yet, the twitch in Kaldur’s mouth.

The images of her family disappear, replaced by the case they’d lost and a snapshot of its rightful owner. Robin turns back to them. “I’ve been going over Dr. Yang’s files. She’d been working on a new formula for a pharmaceutical for suppressing the chemicals the brain produces during addiction and withdrawal. A sort of wonder drug.”

Zatanna frowns. “Why would Sportsmaster want that?”

Robin shrugs. “I have no idea. As far as I can tell, the formula isn’t even ready for market yet. It won’t even be ready for another five or ten years. As it is, it’s actually kind of useless, except in projected value, and that’s practically meaningless until the results start coming back from the clinical trials.”

“That doesn’t make sense,” Wally says. “So why take it at all?”

Zatanna pulls away from M’gann and comes closer to the images. “A rival? Someone with the resources and motivation to sabotage her information?” She looks at Robin. “Is anyone else working on something similar?”

Robin nods. “A few, but that’s just it. She has backups of her formula. Backups of her backups, even, and those are under lock and key in Spirocore, and any major rivals she might have had in the beginning, she’d reached out and in the past six months they’ve been collaborating instead of competing.”

Roy frowns suddenly. “It’s not like Sportsmaster or Cheshire.”

“Uh,” Wally says. “Dude, they do this kind of stuff all the time. Break into things, hurt people, you know, criminal element.”

“That’s not what I meant.” He nods at Robin. “Can you pull up any footage from the street?”

It’s grainy, and not at the best angle, and it plays through quickly, even when he supplements it with more footage from different cameras. Not that that’s new. All of their missions race at a break-neck speed, and this one was no different: the team intercepting them, the fight for the case, even a shot of Roy ducking into the alleyway after Artemis, and emerging later, the entire thing playing out in mere minutes.

He goes to the terminal and pulls up the team’s file on Sportsmaster, and in another screen, that on Cheshire. “In all our run-ins with either of them, they never get this public. Do we even have footage of any of our missions that involved them?”

“The bioship stored some,” M’gann says. “I can try to interface those through the psychic link.”
Roy nods at her and looks at the others. “Any that aren’t part of this team? Street cameras, surveillance equipment, cell phone videos from civilians?”

“No, you’re right.” Robin’s fingers start flying over the keyboard. “You’re right. We never get them on camera. Not even ATMs, and most people forget about those.”

Roy replays the clips from earlier again. They watch the entire thing in silence until Artemis shoots a trick arrow into the mess and the street explodes. He wonders if anyone else sees how it landed far enough away from all of them, not just Cheshire and Sportmaster.

Not that he’s about to point that out to them. If they do notice on their own, they keep it to themselves.

Roy shakes his head. “And now we get the entire thing, even before the team showed up. What’s so different about this?”

“Well why was this mission so important,” Kaldur says, eyes on the files Robin’s put up on the display. “What is it about this drug that would interfere with their standard operating procedure?”

“I have no idea,” Robin says. “Unless there’s a huge cover-up about the drug’s actual use, or the preliminary clinical trials, it doesn’t make any sense. It definitely doesn’t link up to any of our previous missions. I’ll keep cross-referencing. See what I can find.”

“Not to shoot the elephant in the room or anything,” Roy says. “But there is a difference. Artemis. She’s never been with them before, but I don’t think it’s her lack of criminal experience that’s playing against them.”

M’gann shakes her head. “She knows how to work with a team. She’s always been fine with stealth mode.”

"So stealthy none of you even realized what she truly was."

M’gann flushes, but her eyes are narrowed and her mouth tight. It’s not in embarrassment. "Your own argument contradicts itself. Either she's good or she's not."

“She’s not-”

The screens all blink out and they all fall silent. Only one remains; it’s Batman.

Undisclosed Location
December 8, 1645 EST

Artemis looks up when the door opens. She scowls and hits the punching bag a few more times and then she kicks it instead. She puts her hands on it to steady it. She waits.

And waits.

When the silence stretches too long, she hits the bag once more, pausing as it jerks on the chain, swinging wide. She steps clear of it, flexing her fingers in her gloves. Sportmaster is watching her, expression calm, almost serene.

As if serene could ever be used to describe him.
She shrugs and makes no pretense at not appearing interested. "How was the drop-off?"

"Fine," Sportsmaster says.

"Client happy?"

Sportsmaster raises an eyebrow.

Artemis frowns and turns away from him so she doesn't start yelling or hitting him. She might. He might want her to. Is that what he's waiting for? For her to accidentally reveal her true intentions?

Not going to happen.

“You leave me cooped up here,” she says, feeling tired and trapped and not a little vicious. “You leave me here and you expect me not to ask questions? Like that’s going to happen.”

“You aren’t a prisoner, Artemis,” he says. It makes her so angry how matter of fact he is about it, how long suffering he sounds. “You’re free to come and go as you please.”

“Right.” She starts hitting the heavy bag again. “Sure I am. As long as I provide a detailed report of where I went and who I saw and what I said-”

“I never asked you for that.”

She hits the bag, feeling it all the way up to her shoulder. “You saying you won’t?”

He comes into the corner of her peripheral vision, far enough away that she doesn't startle like she still does sometimes, and she watches as he pulls on his own pair sparring gloves. Artemis turns to face him, watching as he rolls his shoulders, tension tightening all across her back as he approaches her. He's never gone easy on her, even when she was just a kid, and he won't now.

But it's different now. She's trained with Black Canary, with Aqualad and Superboy. With the Team. She’s patrolled Star City with Green Arrow. She's fought opponents stronger, bigger, even faster than her, those with superpowers and those without, and most of them are now in jail.

He’s one of the few that aren’t.

For now.

His attack comes strong and fast, a flurry of movement and hits that drive her backward, herding her into a confined space. It’ll be the end of it if he does.

She gets her own in, feints successfully and jabs him squarely in the jaw. He's grinning when she dodges back, side-stepping out of his lunge, and she can't help it. She grins back. The rush of a fight gets to her, it always does. It'd be difficult to give up, walk away and never feel again.

Her distraction costs her. Sportsmaster knocks her down, foot on her chest, pinning her to the mat. Artemis closes her eyes, swearing in her head.

"You're weak on your left." Sportsmaster pulls off his glove with his teeth, and reaches down to grasp her wrist firmly, but not painfully, not as restrictive as he could've been, as he helps her up. "From now on, I want you to draw your bow on that side instead of your right."

"I like using my right," Artemis says.
"And you do well on your right." He tucks a punch at her side, not hard enough to hurt, or to knock
the wind out of her, but enough to startle her, to make her dodge to the side. "But you're weak on
your left. Work on it."

She frowns and looks at her hands to cover it, studying the green boxing gloves, threads pulling a bit
at the seams. "Fine."

He puts his hands, one gloved and one not, on her shoulders and waits until she looks up. "The client
is very happy. The package is delivered, and our job is done."

"I never took you for the delivery boy," she says.

Sportsmaster just looks at her.

"Yeah," she says finally. "I didn't mean that."

"You better not have; you're smarter than that." He pulls off his other glove, tossing them both to the
side. "Someone called in a favor."

"Someone important?"

He drinks from a sports bottle, watching her and letting the moment stretch. Even when he puts it
down, Sportsmaster takes his time before he says, "You know I'm not going to tell you these things."

She looks away but doesn't try to back down. "You tell Jade."

"What she needs to know."

"Which is more than what I get to know." She strips off her gloves and tosses them on the table,
claiming her own bottle of water. The sweat on her skin is starting to dry, cooling enough to make
her shiver.

"Jade hasn't been running with heroes."

Artemis swallows, sets her water down. Some of it splashes over the mouth and onto the table, all
over her hand. "I know," she says, scowling at the floor.

He laughs; she scowls harder. "You've never been patient."

"I get it," she says. "I do. Doesn't mean I have to like it."

He looks at her for a moment, then gestures to the door. "Come on. I have something for you."

Artemis frowns, but she follows him through the compound. Sorry. House. Home. She can't think of
it like that. It's a big building, bigger than she expected or suspected, tucked away and lavish in ways
she's still not used to. Furnished and well stocked with all the normal things, as well as weapons and
high tech gear. Must be the perks of being a super villain; heroes definitely don't get paid. Artemis
prefers the cave anyway. She thinks briefly about the tiny apartment in Gotham, but Artemis shuts
down those thoughts quickly as Sportsmaster leads her into the armory.

It's filled with knives and guns and stuff she's never seen him use. His preferred javelins line the
walls. Cheshire's sais aren't here, but Artemis' old bow hangs on a rack, green instead of the orange
and black she totes now. She thought he'd destroyed it when he'd replaced it, and a large part of her
wants to pick it up, test the string and the pull.

She stays where she is, settling for looking instead.
Sportsmaster opens a locker and pulls out a box. He sets it on the table in front of her. Artemis stares at it and then stares at him. He gestures to it. "Open it."

Carefully, she pulls the tape off, tearing the surface of the cardboard away even though she goes slowly. Once it's clear, she sets her fingers along the top, taking a slow, deep breath. She opens it.

It's full of arrows. The tips are the same shape and size as her old ones, but the fletching alternates the new colors to match her bow, the stripes of her new outfit. She takes one out of the box, holding it in both hands. The weight is good, what she likes, the fletching identical to her old arrows except for the coloring.

His eyebrows quirk up. "Trick ones, too," he says, rapping his knuckles against the locker, and when she stares at him, he adds, "Called in a favor."

"You didn't have to do that-"

"No," he says. "I didn't, and I won't after this. You can afford them from now on."

He hands her an envelope, white and crisp. Inside is a bank card, a driver's license with her picture but not her real name, some cash and a white slip of paper. A bank deposit slip. With a very large number printed on it, lots of zeros.

His smile is all teeth. "Your share for the last job."

She swallows, folding the deposit slip in half, crumpling it a bit. "That much?"

He chucks her under the chin. She stares at him, fingers crushing the edges of the envelope as her stomach does a slow flip. "That much," he says. "Happy birthday, baby girl."

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São Paulo
December 8, 1759 GMT

Superboy reacts first, turning sharply away from their main objective. “Someone’s screaming,” he says, “No. A lot of people are screaming.”

Almost as one, the team turns and heads in the direction Superboy points. When they get there, the rampage on the bridge makes them pause momentarily. He’s only ever seen mug shots of her before, the flaming red hair, the green costume. It’s hard to tell, but from the costume, it must be Knockout, but she’s much bigger, bulkier in a grotesque way, and part of the skin on both one shoulder and one thigh has ripped wide open to reveal the muscle beneath.

“Kobra Venom,” Wally says as she tears into one of the supports of the bridge.

There are people on that bridge; cars still running, their lights shining like spotlights on Knockout. She abandons the support post and turns toward the honking. She picks up a car the nearest and flings it out into the river.

Superboy leaps.

He can’t fly, what is he-

M’gann, eyes glowing green, rises above them, catching Superboy and using him to catch the car. Together, they bring it to safety. Once there, Superboy opens the door and ushers the three teens out
Knockout screams her rage, overcoming the yells of the civilians who have abandoned their cars, steaming away from her. She focuses against Superboy, because he’s nearest or because he’s the most likely to pose a threat to her, Roy doesn’t know. They get no words from her, no banter, just pure unholy wrath as she pounds against him with her fists, unrelenting, again and again until she throws him into the side of the building, following him and slamming her fist into his gut.

She was a Fury; still is, by all rights except the unflinching loyalty to Apokolips. Whatever or whoever she’s transferred that loyalty to is a mystery. Someone with access to Kobra Venom, clearly.

Roy reaches for a foam arrow as Kaldur comes in from behind, tattoos glowing blue. His water whips bind her, pulling her away from Superboy. They’re not strong enough. She breaks free of it with ease, flexing the bulbous muscles. She turns from her primary target and focuses on Kaldur.

Roy shoots, but she tears through the foam like it’s paper. She’s knocked back by the explosion of Robin’s batarangs, but she gets up and keeps coming, arm stretching out to knock Wally out of the way when he speeds past.

One woman.

The bridge shudders, swaying more than it should. Roy looks up at the support cables. At least two of them are snapped, both ends whipping with no signs of slowing. The entire structure sways, tripping up the masses of people leaving their cars, lights still on, engines running.

Roy turns his head back to the team. “We need to block this area off, now!”

“Do it,” Kaldur says. “We will hold her off.”

Zatanna splits to one side of the bridge. Roy heads in the other direction, ushering people out of their cars and off the bridge as he goes. Once they’re clear, he shoots a foam arrow across the entrance, blocking it off. It won’t hold against something- or someone –that really wants to get through, but most people will think twice before crossing it. He hears Zatanna’s spell in his head, too far away to hear her say it out loud, and then glowing caution symbols light either side.

He looks back at the team and the chaos around them.

One woman. A Fury, responsible for untold chaos in the universe, but one person. One person and all this destruction.

Roy’s blood runs cold. Could they, whoever they are, be creating an army of them? Pushing people on Kobra venom, strength greater than that of the League’s strongest members? Enough of them-

Roy shakes his head. Not time for speculation. Not when everything the team throws at her is thrown right back.

“Dude,” Wally says, pushing up from his knees and getting to his feet once more. He sways, and then shakes his head, determination in the set of his jaw. “This is worse than Santa Prisca.”

Robin lands on his feet nearby. He’s bleeding from the corner of his mouth. “You think they’ve compounded the formula?”

“The current dosage is bad enough, but increasing it like that would kill someone.”
“Not a Fury,” Roy says. “A Fury might survive that.”

Or an Atlantean. Or a Kryptonian. Anyone with extreme durability and super strength. They’d already cloned Superman once. Why not do it again?

And again. And again.

Roy reaches Kaldur’s side. We have to contain this!.

Agreed.

They come forward, but then someone drops from the sky, landing in front of them. She’s tall, black mask obscuring the lower part of her face. Wally’s swerves, a streak of yellow bearing straight for her, his voice yelling Scandal! in their heads.

She raises a gun and fires before Roy can nock an arrow. Gunfire is always louder than he expects it to be. Wally tumbles end over end, landing at Roy and Kaldur’s feet.

The scream of rage feels like it’s going to rip his eardrums out of his skull, but then Wally shifts, rolling on to his back. The screaming continues, all vowels, garbled, strained. It’s not the KF! in his head. It’s not from the team. Knockout’s bleeding from her shoulder, a dart still embedded in her shoulder. She screams again, and starts advancing, knocking Superboy out of her way and then Miss Martian when she swoops too close.

Scandal backs away, leveling her gun at Knockout. She fires again and again, but Knockout keeps coming, tearing the darts out as they strike her.

She ignores it when a dart hits her in the stomach, just brings her fists down, slamming a crater into the road. The bridge wavers, shuddering down its entire length, and then it starts to collapse, cables snapping. Long and powerful, they crack like whips when their weight rebounds. One catches Superboy across the back, knocking him over the side of the bridge.

To hit the water at this height-

One slams down to the left of Roy, nearly crushing his foot. Zatanna spills into the middle of the road avoiding one that bounces far too close. He looks up at the few remaining support beams valiantly holding it up. Not enough.

Scandal dodges out of the way of a cable, nearly into the path of another. “Kay,” she cries, and Knockout turns to her, breathing heavy, but likely not from exertion as much as her rage. She comes at Scandal, with enough force to crush her as easily as she might an insect. Scandal fires another dart, and tries for another, but she’s out.

She starts backing away; Knockout continues coming at her like a tank, not caring as the bridge under her feet starts its slow descent downward.

Scandal turns and runs. She makes it to the bank before the bridge gives out along that side. Knockout, hot on her tail, braces herself. She leaps.

She makes it, too.

Roy shoots a grappling arrow across the gap. It hooks, and he slings his bow across and slides over the gap. He follows them into the city, all the people in their path, the buildings and the possibility of uncontained chaos, but with Scandal to chase, Knockout’s taste for destruction seems sated.
While he runs after them, he reaches for an arrow with a tracker. He knows it’s unlikely they won’t notice it coming, but it’s worth a shot. To know where they’re going and what they’re up to, that sort of intel is invaluable.

He sees the glint of silver before he can shoot; instinct tells him to duck. Roy looks up, staring at the knife stuck in the wall next to his head before scanning the immediate area, but there’s nothing. No movement in the shadows, no signs, and no trail to follow. They’ve disappeared into the city.

He returns to the bridge where the team has gathered, helping the few people still on the intact part of the bridge get to safety. The team is battered and bruised, uniforms torn, a few of the nastier wounds still bleeding sluggishly.

There’s also a crowd of people held back by his foam and Zatanna’s spells, still glowing. Roy ignores the flashes from cameras, the phones held up to get pictures. Kaldur nods at him as he nears, but continues speaking with the first responders.

*So much for covert.*

*That was Scandal Savage.* Wally rubs his shoulder. Roy glances over him. There are no bullet holes, no overt signs of injury. She hadn’t been aiming for him. *Vandal Savage’s daughter.*

*Bad blood there?*

Wally shrugs. *He’s not a fan of the speedsters. Apparently, neither is she.*

Kaldur doesn’t turn from the EMS. *I had not realized there was a connection between Knockout and the Savages.*

Roy looks at the wreckage of the bridge. *There’s a lot of connections we haven’t realized.*

They’re mostly silent after that, all of them thinking. Once they’ve cleared the last of the civilians away from the bridge and finished with the officers on duty, M’gann calls the bioship down to them.

If any of them speak about Artemis again that night, it’s not to him.

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**Star City**  
**December 15, 1505 PDT**

Even before she steps into the zeta beam, she pulls up her hood, tucking her hair out of sight. Once there, she sticks to the crowds, though it feels like she's being watched, expecting to see a green hood every time she turns a corner or glances over her shoulder. It’s like that the entire way. When it gets too much, she heads down into the depths of the subway, where she purchases a ticket and rides for two stops before she gets off and waits for another train.

She could do this all day. Tuck her hands in her pockets and immerse herself in the smell of humanity, surround herself with people, some in suits and some in jeans, those with briefcases and those with their backpacks. Watch them going about their lives, lose herself in the stories she tells herself about them, but she can’t. She was never really meant for a normal life. Not with her parents.

Not with her father.

She only rides for another few stops, and then Artemis walks the rest of the way. The address leads her to the edges of downtown. Here, the buildings don’t stretch to the sky. The one she’s looking for
is a squat unassuming building tucked between a Laundromat and a pawn shop, with white lettering on the door, name and phone number but no hours of operation listed. The sun is starting to set, but the door isn’t locked.

The man at the lobby desk gives her a once over, but otherwise waits for her to come to him. The guard at the door won’t take his eyes off her. She offers the man at the desk her keycard, uncertain of what to say. He stretches over the desk to take it, examines it like a bouncer might a fake ID, and swipes it in a card reader on the desk. For a three second delay, the light stays red, stays red, stays red, and then, it turns green.

From the corner of her eye, she sees the guard relax. The man at the desk- he has no nametag - leads her through a back door, one that needs two keys to open, and then down a hallway. They reach the far end, and once more, he uses two keys but this door also has a thumbprint reader and a retinal scanner.

Artemis glances back the way they’d come. "What happens if you’re not here?"

“We’re always here, ma’am,” he says, and holds the door open. Once she’s in, he shuts her in the room and leaves her to herself.

Behind the door, there are rows and rows of lockers, grey metal. It's a little more high tech than she's expecting. Nothing crazy like a biometric scanner, but there's a numerical keypad on each locker, and suddenly the six digit number under the address makes sense. She finds the locker that matches the information, number seventeen, and enters the key code. The keypad turns green. **Confirmed.**

When she opens the door, a small square of paper slips out and falls to the floor. She picks it up. It’s an address, *for emergencies*. She frowns at it, thinking, and then slips it into her pocket before turning back to the locker.

Inside is a duffle and a box. She takes the box first, a small thing no more than ten pounds, with a push lock and dual clasps on the lid. There are numerous papers inside, including a driver's license with her picture but not her name, an envelope of cash, not a lot but something, a passport with the same name and picture as the license.

There’s a phone inside the box. Once powered up, she smirks when she realizes that Arrow’s already deactivated the signifying power on alert. Or maybe, she thinks considering the place, it's more Batman than Arrow. Where would Roy Harper find the resources to set all of this up? She looks through the contacts list. There's only one programmed, no name, not that it's needed. Her thumb rests on the call button for a moment, but she has nothing to report.

Small talk with Red Arrow is most definitely not her idea of a good time.

In the duffle are some clothes, a little too big, but close enough that she could pass in them, protein bars and a crossbow, not loaded. The bolts are in a case inside the duffle.

She slips the phone back in the box alongside the rest of the contents. She arms the keypad and leaves everything behind, everything except a note to say she’d been there, nothing to report.

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**Mount Justice**  
**December 16, 1750 EDT**

Roy pauses on the threshold, waiting. The training circle is empty, and no one comes down the hall, not even Wolf or the super-cycle. After a few more minutes, he goes to the computer terminal and starts flipping through the files on Sportsmaster, starting with the very first encounter: Santa Prisca all the way to New Orleans and finally, the Fawcett City confrontation with Artemis at his side. There’s more, though, outside of the Team’s activities. There’s more than he’d been expecting, dating all the way back to when Huntress still prowled the criminal circuit at Sportsmaster’s side.

They’d been something else, the two of them, even with all the alleged activities in their file. Shadow players, both of them. Not a lot of their crimes stuck until Huntress was injured and locked away. He walked while she did her rehabilitation behind bars. Roy does the math in his head. Artemis would’ve been nine at the time. Nine and stuck in a house with Sportsmaster.

Roy shakes his head, pulling up newer files, referencing a global map, tracing the path of the team’s encounters with Sportsmaster, supplementing his own where the computer lacks the information. It’s all sporadic, and not as helpful as he’d hoped.

“What are you doing?”

Roy jerks, shutting down everything with a few keystrokes. “What are you doing here?”


“I needed some files.”

She looks at the computer screen, glowing blue and free of any information. “Can I help?”

Roy feels his mouth thin. M’gann looks away, and when she turns back to him, there’s a hardness to her gaze. “I know you don’t trust us. Not really.”

“In my head,” Roy says, crossing his arms.

M’gann shakes her head; she cups her elbows. “I don’t need to be a psychic to see that. And maybe we haven’t—maybe we haven’t proven ourselves to you, but we’re part of this team.”

“Artemis was part of the team.”

She flinches and looks away, seeming much smaller than seemed capable, considering how powerful she really is. He’s seen her work with the Team, her and Superboy both, and they’re both too raw and too tied by emotion that belayed the presence of a mole.

“A second set of eyes could help.”

“Maybe.”

M’gann doesn’t seem quite satisfied with that but she nods and gestures back toward the way she came. “I’m making cupcakes. They should be done soon.”

He thinks maybe he can smell them. “I… really have to get going.”

Her smile is strained. “Of course.” She glances at the computer once more, then turns and walks away.

Roy breathes a little easier. He closes out of all the open programs, hesitating on the file about New Orleans, rereading Wally’s report and thinking about his own. Not a team player, he’d said,
irresponsible and undisciplined. A danger to the team.

He’s looking for a pattern that probably doesn’t exist. The pharmaceutical information they’d taken recently, Bane’s venom months ago, the incident in Rhelasia, Ivo. The Injustice League is behind bars, but their allies are still free, still operating. But Sportsmaster’s latest foray into theft makes no sense that it might connect, yet somehow, something in his gut tells him it does.

*He always has a game plan. He always has a goal and he always wants to win.*

It’s what Artemis had said, according to Batman, before going undercover. He’d still been reeling, trying to process the information about her family connections that he hadn’t thought about it at the time. He’s thinking about it now.

Roy needs to know what the plan is. He needs more information.

He won’t let that happen.

Roy’s never been known for his patience, but he’ll wait. He has to wait for Artemis to come to him. Wait. This is a long game. Going after her could jeopardize everything. In the meantime-

He pauses, thinking about São Paulo, about Knockout and her clear exposure to Kobra venom.

It’s a stretch; he still looks. It takes some digging, but Wally has a file breaking down the chemical formula of Dr. Yang’s drug. Roy’s no chemistry genius, certainly not like Wally, but he’s no slouch either. He plays with the chemical structure for a while, watching the bonds break apart.

He doesn’t know what makes him do it, but Roy pulls up the blockbuster formula as well as that of Kobra venom.


“Who?”

Roy starts. M’gann’s standing behind him. She has a plate of cupcakes in her hands, frosted and everything. She frowns at the images. “That’s the pharmaceutical Sportsmaster stole.”

He blinks. Looks at her and shakes his head to clear it. “It’s nothing. I’m just thinking.”

M’gann comes closer, looking closer at what he’s pulled up, her cupcakes forgotten on their plate. She sets them aside. “About Knockout? Who used it on her, and why would Scandal Savage want to subdue her? The team is too.” She gives him a look. “You’re going after Scandal, aren’t you. Alone?”

Roy glances around the cave. “It’s just you and me.”

“And you don’t trust me.”

“I’m sorry,” he says. “That was unfair. You have proven yourself to me.”

“You don’t have to-“

“M’gann.” He sighs and runs his hand through his hair. He looks at the computer. “This is just- I’m still working on it.”

She looks like she wants to say more, but she goes to the computer and pulls up a map instead.
“What’s this?”

She grins, tucking her hair behind her ear. “Robin hacked the Watchtower so this sort of information goes to us first, then to the League.” She pauses, slanting her eyes toward him, flushing. “Oh. You’re going to be League soon.”

“I won’t tell,” he says absently, staring at the map. It’s global and covered in multiple lines in multiple colors. He frowns, reconfiguring it so only the green line is visible. He knows that pattern.

“It’s for Artemis.” M’gann fits her hands together. She looks to the side. “We’re… we’re tracking her too. She’s. She hasn’t shown up again. Not since-”


**Undisclosed Location**  
**December 16, 1900 EST**

Sportsmaster is waiting for her in the entrance of the compound. Cheshire is with him, leaning against the far wall and looking bored.

“Where were you?”

Artemis shrugs. “Thought I could come and go as I pleased.”

Sportsmaster does not seem amused, but the look he gives her is the only thing she gets. “We were waiting for you.” He tosses a duffle at her. “Gear up.”

She does, in and out in less than five, and then she follows both of them out the door. She waits for the questions to start. They don’t come, despite the long flight in the small charter plane, space confined to only four seats in the cabin, with very little leg room.

She didn’t know Jade could fly.

An hour or so in, Artemis leans forward in her seat, looking out the window and down the nose of the plane. “Where are we going?”

Cheshire glances over her shoulder. “Maybe if you’d been there when we’d discussed this…”

Artemis scowls. “Do you want the detailed report now or later?”

“Sure. I’d like it now, please.”

“Girls-”

“Do not,” Cheshire says. Artemis watches the flexing of her fingers on the flight controls. Jade looks straight ahead and not at Sportsmaster, shoulders tense.

Artemis cuts her eyes toward him, but all she sees is annoyance, and she knows better than to push him right now. She’s learned that. She settles back, glaring out the window, at the clouds and the grey sky. Occasionally there’s a break and she can see the fields below, covered in white. The silence stretches, loud over the plane’s propellers and the engine. Artemis holds still, though. Too much twitching would probably be like kicking the back of his seat. She doesn’t need a fight right now.
She shouldn’t have gone to Star City. The locker could’ve waited.

She thinks about the address tucked in her pocket. *For emergencies.* That sort of thing, not smart to have with her, but she’s not about to leave it lying around where a curious cat could find it all too easily. Even hidden away someplace wasn’t good enough. She’d keep it on her person at all times until she could memorize it and then destroy it.

What’s he doing, leaving her clues like breadcrumbs?

And leading to what, though?

For emergencies, indeed.

The cloud cover breaks to reveal the iconic Lexcorp Tower, the Daily Planet only a few buildings over, almost dwarfed by the surrounding skyscrapers. Artemis stares. What are they doing in Metropolis?

They land in an airfield just outside the city. Once they’re out of the plane, Cheshire slips on her mask and heads direction, slipping easily into the shadows and disappearing entirely. Artemis starts to follow, but Sportsmaster puts his hand on her shoulder, holding her back.

“Where’s she going?” His mask obscures everything but his eyes; she doesn’t need to see his expression to sense his irritation. It matches hers. Artemis crosses her arms. “Right. Need to know.” She huffs and gesture in front of them. “Lead on, then.”

He leads her across the tarmac, the runway lights flicker off as they go. Wherever they’re going it’d probably be much easier to catch a cab, even in their full gear, than make their way through the back ways of Metropolis in full gear.

The ridiculousness of the thought makes her smile.

A sleek black car is waiting just around the corner, driver standing by the door, sunglasses on even though it’s the middle of the night. Sportsmaster opens the back door for her, waits until she gets in, and closes it after her. Then he talks to the driver for several minutes, too quietly to hear through the car doors.

Artemis

The privacy screen is up, but Sportsmaster keeps his mouth shut. The soft strains of jazz fill the car. Artemis taps her toe, crosses her arms and tries not to push it. Not that she’s ever been good at that.

“You used to talk a lot more when you were still around,” she says.

“You used to talk a lot less.”

“I just needed some air,” Artemis says. Yesterday-”

“You don’t have to explain it to me.”

“Don’t I? There’s no way you could trust me.” She settles back into her seat. “Not like I could tell anyone anything anyway.”

“We’ve talked about this.”

“Yeah. I know.” She shrugs, looking out the window at the city as they pass. “You left before I started the sullen teenager thing.”
It makes him laugh and that catches her off guard and leaves her staring at him.

“In time, baby girl. In time.”

The car drops them off at a corner of a block, still on the outskirts of the city. She’d been expecting downtown. Thinking too Hollywood.

When the car comes to a stop, she turns to him. “What do I need to know? What should I expect here?”

“Nothing.”

“I don’t like going in blind.”

“Then it’ll be good for you.” Sportsmaster opens the door and gets out. Artemis thinks a few choice words and then follows.

He doesn’t go to the closest entrance. In fact, he doesn’t go to any nearby door or building in particular. Apparently, their car service only went so far. Sportsmaster leads them through an alley and around the corner, and then right down the street, like they’re not Sportsmaster and Tigress, wanted criminals.

She keeps glancing over her shoulder, fingers seeking out the crossbow in her pocket, just to reassure herself that it’s still there and then scowling because why wouldn’t it be? It seems like he has no regard for the fact that anyone they pass could recognize them and call the cops, or worse, the Team, but then Sportsmaster tucks back against the wall, waiting for a couple of pedestrians to pass, backpacks and a skateboard. She wonders how close MetU is.

The kids pass, and then Artemis and Sportsmaster continue on their way. They’re down a few more blocks when a chill runs down her spine. Artemis stops. She turns and scans the area, looking at the nearby shops, the man waiting for the bus on the other side of the street, clutching his brown paper bag and the alcohol inside.

Sportsmaster clears his throat; Artemis pulls her attention away from the shadows.

“I thought I heard something,” she says, hands on her hips.

He pauses, looking out into the shadows. His senses are better than hers; he always knows when the bioship is around, able to pick up on Martian cloaking like she can’t. But he shakes his head and looks at her, eyebrows raised, waiting.

“Guess it was nothing,” she says.

She doesn’t know Metropolis like Gotham or even Star City so she can’t even make a guess at where they’re going. She’d almost say they’re wandering aimlessly, and she’s starting to wonder how long they’re going to keep doing this mockery of a patrol when he stops at the mouth of a narrow street between buildings.

There’s a back access to one, two men standing at the door, one with a lit cigarette dangling from his fingers, the other toying with his phone, the light giving his face a ghoulish cast. It’s almost like they’re just hanging out, but the forced casualness, the haircuts, the muscle on both of them: definitely hired guards.

Sportsmaster turns to her, hand held out like she’s a dog to bring to heel. “Wait here.”
“What-”

“What-”

“Tigress. Wait here.”

He disappears into the light of the doorway, and then that too is gone. She glares at the goons at the door, but they just ignore her. Artemis leans against the wall, arms crossed tightly over her chest, and waits. Like a good little minion, waiting for the boss to come back out from meeting with-

With what? A client? A bigger fish? She wishes she dared to plant a bug on him.

She should have planted a bug, no matter the consequences.

She has a mission to do. Infiltrate, uncover, report. Which she can’t do if Sportsmaster doesn’t tell her anything. Or even let her in the building. She has yet to see a pattern. She has yet to even earn more than the most basic details to everything they’ve done. She can’t even trace a logical path from the places they’ve been, hopping from city to city, but she knows better than any that no agenda is truly random. Sportsmaster, Cheshire. Both of them are too organized for that.

Something rattles on the rooftop. She looks up, listens for more, and when she doesn’t hear anything else, she looks at the guards at the door. It’s just her and them, and they’re not being very interesting, talking about the Metropolis Meteors. They’re hired thugs, nothing she hasn’t seen before, muscle anyone with enough money could easily employ. Dressed in black, nice heavy boots, tall and identical enough to be mistaken as twins except the smoker has a scar over his eye and down his cheek; Cellphone has no hair, the dome of his head catching the stray lights from the streetlamp at the corner of the building.

She’s stuck here, with them, waiting at the door. Take some time to get involved in the family fun times of criminality. She knows that. Artemis breathes in, tries to relax, regain her calm and wait like she’s supposed to. Earn it.

A noise comes from the roof. Artemis looks up; the guards don’t. Some security.

“Hey,” she says, pointing up. “Give me a boost?”

Smoker raises an eyebrow, contorting his scar, but he drops the remains of his cigarette, stubbing it out with his boot, and then comes over to her. She’s expecting to rely mostly on herself to get up, but he tosses her with enough strength that it’s easy to clear the roof. Maneuver seven.

She sees Cheshire first, but her attention isn’t on Artemis.

It’s on Red Arrow.

Artemis yanks out her bow, but she doesn’t pull her elbow right; the arrow won’t fly straight, but hopefully Cheshire won’t notice that, not with Red’s arrow strung and pointed at her. What is he doing here? At least he’s wearing a hoodie over his Red Arrow outfit. It might’ve offered some semblance of obscurity and helped him blend into the night. If he wasn’t standing right in front of them.

“What are you doing here?”

Roy’s arrow stays pointed at Cheshire, but he can’t pull his attention from Artemis. “Can’t a guy say hello to an old friend?”

“Not you,” she says. Her eyes flicker to Cheshire. “And not to me. We were never friends.”
Cheshire tilts her head. “How strange. He’s been looking after you all night. I actually think it’s almost sweet.”

Her blood runs cold, thinking of all the sounds she’d heard while they’d made their way here, of Sportsmaster gazing into the shadows.

Stupid. How could he have been so stupid?

“Sister, huh,” he says. “That explains a lot.”

“You don’t know anything.” Artemis shakes her head. “You don’t know anything at all.”

“I think I know enough.”

“How fascinating,” Cheshire says. "It’s like my own personal soap opera.”

“I knew she’d go bad,” he says, and it sounds false to her ears, but he says it anyway. “I knew she couldn’t be trusted-”

Cheshire stills, testing the edge of her sai against a gloved finger, tilting her head back so the light highlights the smirk on her mask. He’s trapped, Artemis realizes, nothing but the end of the roof and a long stretch of open space behind him, Cheshire to his left and Artemis coming up on his right.

He must know she can’t-

She can’t.

“Come on, Cheshire, let’s go.” Artemis’ eyes flicker to him, then back to her. “We don’t have time for this! Sportsmaster’s waiting-”

Cheshire turns to her, and she can’t see her face, but she can hear the malice. “Look at you. Quite the little soldier you’ve become. Not so long ago, you were chastising me for working with him.”

Her attention diverted, Roy starts edging away, but as soon as he shifts, Cheshire turns her head back to him. Of course she hasn’t forgotten him. Artemis can’t tell what she’s thinking at the best of times, and certainly not with the mask she wears obscuring her face.

She can’t.

“Cheshire, we have to go!”

She taps the edge of her sai against her mask. “And not play?”

“We can’t waste time-”

“I think we have all the time in the world, little sister. Dear old Dad will understand; we can’t have him following us either.”

He has no time to switch his arrow to something a little flashier; he lets it fly at Cheshire. Then he runs, runs right between them. It’s a nice try, but both Artemis and Cheshire are too good for that.

Still, he makes it past them; they’re both on his tail within seconds. Roy leaps to the nearest building, rolls with the momentum, all the way back to his feet and he’s sprinting away, right to the far side of the roof. He disappears over the edge, and when they reach the alleyway below, he’s gone.

For a second, she lets herself feel relief, bit then -
“There!” Cheshire points, and takes off after the shadow Artemis only catches.

Arrow does his best, doubling back and zig-zagging randomly through the city, but it takes hours for him to shake them. The anger she feels, will feel, toward him is overcome with the relief. She doesn’t know if she’d be able to hold Cheshire back, and even if they worked together to take her down, villains still talked in prison. Villains still get word to the outside world; she’s seen it enough.

It’s late, almost late enough to be early, the horizon starting to fade into a dull gray. Even Cheshire’s starting to show some fatigue, and they’re silent all the way back to their rendezvous point, though Artemis almost says something multiple times. Her hands shake as she racks her mind for ideas on how to spin this, how to turn this to her advantage.

Her brain stays blank. It’d be smart to jump right in, to get the words out before Cheshire can, but Cheshire doesn't say anything to Sportsmaster when they meet up. Artemis waits and waits and waits, shooting her looks out of the corner of her eye the entire ride back to the compound, but Cheshire still doesn't say anything. She’s closed off and quiet, sure, and even when Sportsmaster asks where they disappeared to, Cheshire simply shrugs.

"Artemis heard me following her, thought I was someone who shouldn't be following us, and decided to take the initiative. Shaping up to be a real good little soldier, don’t you think?"

Artemis presses her lips together, fingers clenched into fists in her lap. Cheshire simply smiles at her. "She chased me through the city."

Sportsmaster looks like he's pleased, but not surprised.

Artemis stares at him. “You knew?”

She really doesn’t need to ask. She remembers the way he’d looked at her earlier. It seriously makes a lot more sense, now. But it doesn't explain Cheshire lying to him about it, about Arrow. As if it wasn't grounds for breaking any trust she might've garnered since she took his offer. The way he’s looking at her makes her think she might've just gained some.

From him at least. Jade looks like she's swallowed a lemon, but she says nothing as they head back to the compound, says nothing when they arrive, says nothing when Artemis asks what tonight was about, as if he'd tell her who he was meeting or why.

She says nothing as he tells Artemis, no, he won't tell her anything. Cheshire slips away sometime between one thought and the next. Sportsmaster leaves in a shiny black car shortly after that. He doesn't tell her where he's going or who he's going to see and Artemis doesn’t ask.

Artemis thinks about going to the range in back, to shoot some arrows at targets pinned to posts or be young and stupid and set up cans on the fence and knock them off. She goes to the gym instead because she wants to hit something. Preferably something red and archer-shaped, but she has to settle for the punching bag.

How dare he? How dare he?

The anger feels like it should've burned out hours go, sometime in between seeing him on that roof and losing him in the shadows of the city, but it burns bright now, stronger and more reckless the more she hits the bag. She does it until she’s exhausted and needs to sit down.

She showers afterward, water so hot it feels like it burns, and when she's done, she yanks a comb through the tangles of her hair, dripping water everywhere. She leaves her uniform crumpled on the floor, water drenching the fabric, and wraps a towel around her before going to her room.
Jade is sitting on her bed, legs crossed and chin resting on her fist.

Artemis bumps against the doorframe. Then she frowns. “There’s this thing called knocking? You could try it.”

“Sounds boring,” Jade says. "Why was Red Arrow following us?"

Artemis shrugs. "How should I know?" She goes to her closet and yanks on a t-shirt, a flimsy worn out thing she’d brought with her. One of the few things she’d brought with her.

"Maybe I should rephrase that," Jade says. "Why was Red Arrow following you?"

“I don’t know.” Artemis finishes getting dressed, not looking at Jade until she’s done. “I. Don’t. Know.”

Jade stares at her for a moment. "It's not in your best interest to lie to me," she says finally.

"I'm not lying."

"Okay. Maybe you’re not lying. But you're hiding something," she says. "I can see that. And if I can see that, Sportsmaster can and will."

“I don’t know what you’re talking about-”

Jade leans forward. “Stop! Artemis. Artemis, you can’t keep doing this. Dear old dad won’t just let this go-”

"Jade, you can't tell him. He can't know-" Artemis swallows, trying to hold back the desperation that's clawing its way out of her mouth. “Jade. Jade, please.”

Jade stares at her. “What is he to you?”

Artemis covers her mouth, looking away. She pushes her hair out of her face; her hands are shaking. Get traught.

Get traught.

"Oh," Cheshire says, her face softening. "Oh, Artemis. Is that why? You were so angry when you thought I might be dating him."

Artemis stares at her, uncomprehending. Then it clicks.

"No! It's not- it's not..." She trails off, staring at her hands.

It's a perfect way to get Jade off her back and off the trail of the truth. It's a perfect way, and it's completely false. It twists her stomach into knots, considering using this when Arrow doesn’t even trust her, and she has no reason to trust him, especially not after tonight.

“You can’t tell him. Dad can’t know.”

“I’m not going to tell him. I’m not going to because I don’t need to. You really think he’s not going to find out? Red tromping around, after you all the time.” She tilts her head back. “I did think it was funny when you disappeared into that alley with him in Fawcett City.”

"We- It's complicated," Artemis says.
Jade laughs. "Isn't it always?"

Artemis shakes her head. No. Yes. She doesn't know. She liked the hat he used to wear as Speedy, sure, and when she'd overheard Mom telling Sportsmaster she wanted better for Artemis, a life on the straight and narrow, and she'd starting going out into Gotham alone at night, first in a hoodie and jeans, then in her Artemis outfit, it'd been natural. Logical.

She sits down and puts her head in her hands. "This was never supposed to happen."

"I get that you're conflicted," Jade says. "I understand that. Artemis, you have to pick a side. Either you're with them. Or you're with us." She takes Artemis by the shoulders. "You can't trust him, if you're with us."

She can't trust them either. But Jade’s been working with him for longer, for reasons Artemis still doesn’t know, but then, Jade was only there for the first six months their mom was in prison. Jade has no idea what it was like after that.

"I. I know that," Artemis says. Then, straightening and shaking off Jade's hands, she says, "I have made my choice. I'm where I'm supposed to be."

"Are you?"

"Stop it," Artemis says. She gets up and goes to the door, holding it open. "I made my choice. I can't go back. Stop questioning it."

Jade shrugs, like it hardly matters to her one way or another.

Maybe it doesn’t.

She turns in the doorway, tilts her head. "Watch your back little sister. In this household, it’s every girl for herself."

"Yeah," Artemis says. "You’ve made that perfectly clear."

She slams the door and locks it for good measure, certain it won’t keep Jade out if she really wanted to get back in.

**Star City**

**December 20, 2214, PDT**

"Thanks for the assist," Roy says, only slightly sarcastic. Green Arrow lifts his eyebrows, but doesn’t call him on it.

"Glad to help," he says, almost jovial. They stare at each other over the bank robbers before they tuck them together in the corner, all tied up and ready to go when the police arrive. He can already hear the sirens. Only a minute or two.

Once everything is taken care of, their statements given to the officers, and they’re ready to go, GA tilts his head towards downtown. "Shall we? For old times’ sake?"

Roy considers. It’s the first night he’s been back home in Star City for some time instead of working missions with the team or going solo further afield. He’s never really had a routine; he’s not had enough time to settle into any sort of pattern after he split from GA, but he usually spends his nights
skipping from any of the cities he can reach by zeta beam.

His lack of a clear patrol pattern is probably one of the reasons Batman came to him for Artemis’ handler.

He hasn’t seen her in weeks, hasn’t even heard from her except the information he’s been piecing together, the sightings and tips and the blogs about the better known criminal element of the world, of Cheshire and Sportmaster and his new protégé Tigress.

Roy shrugs. “Why not?”

Why not, indeed.

It’s easy enough to step right back to GA’s side. Some routines are too hard to shake, years of fighting together ingrained, even after months of solo work and weeks with the team. It really is almost like old times, not that Roy is at all nostalgic.

It’s quiet, between them and in the city, nothing more than a few muggings and some thugs terrorizing pedestrians down near the city park. It’s well past midnight, only an hour or two before the city starts to wake and he’s starting to think about his bed when Ollie breaches the silence, asking tentatively about Christmas and Roy’s plans, and then the talk starts to flow, about Dinah, about Roy going solo and about the team.

Not that he tells Oliver, but there’s an archer-shaped hole there, and Roy doesn’t quite fit. It’ll take time to acclimate to them and they to him, but it’s not long until he’s inducted into the League. And once again forced to find his place in another team. It really is almost like old times, not that Roy is at all nostalgic.

“A few more weeks,” he says. A few more weeks and he’ll be beside Green Arrow and the rest of the League as an equal. End of the year, GA had said. Time is running out.

GA laughs. “You’ll be in the League before you know it. You’ve done well. Not that it’s a surprise to me.”

Roy opens his mouth, about to ask if his mission with Artemis would change that - Batman said it’d be easier with a non-League member - when his blood goes cold.

“Yeah,” he says. “Soon.”

Look at him, worried about her blowing the gig when he almost does the same thing. Roy can't make that same mistake, the mistake of an ignorant sidekick. He should walk away and say nothing, not even broach the subject, but he clears his throat and looks at him out of the corner of his eye. “How are you handling it? This thing with Artemis?”

Even in his hood and mask, Ollie’s eyes are dark, his mouth pressed thin. Not well, then. GA always had a soft spot for his strays, Roy included, though Roy’s never really understood it.

“It’s not your fault, you know. You shouldn’t feel guilty about her.” Ollie doesn’t say anything. Roy presses forward. “She had all of us fooled, not just you.”

“Not you, though.”

Roy looks away, shrugging. “You know me. Not exactly the most trusting guy you’ll ever meet.”
It gets him a smile, loosening something in Roy’s chest. Oliver grips Roy’s shoulder. “You have good instincts.”

Roy has to look away, to hide his face, not sure if he’s smiling or grimacing. He lets the lull overcome the conversation, lets GA outpace him, taking the street level while GA takes to the roof.

He turns the corner and that’s when Artemis drops right in his path, eyes blazing like her mask. She grabs the straps of his gear and jerks him off the street and into the alley between the buildings.

“Are you trying to get me killed?” She jabs her finger into his chest, hitting him between ribs. “Back off, you idiot. Do you know how hard it is to talk her down? She was ready for blood!”

He brushes her finger away. “She suspect anything?”

“Are you kidding? Of course she does!”

“How much? What does she know?” It makes her stop, look away. Roy’s mouth goes dry. “What did you tell her? Artemis!”

She rocks back like he’s hit her. Her eyes narrow and she gets back in his space. “What I had to.” She sighs, shoulders slumping as the anger drains out of her. “I know it’s difficult for you, but you have to trust me. When I get something, I’ll give it to you.”

“I do-”

“You can’t keep showing up. Jade thinks- I think I’ve distracted her from the truth, but you can’t keep doing this.”

“I wasn’t- I wasn’t following you. I was actually following-”

Artemis’ entire body stiffens. “The other guy. Who was he meeting?”

Roy stares at her. “You don’t know?”

“Yeah,” Artemis says. “I’d probably have a lot more information for you if he actually told me anything.”

“He’s not- He took you in,” Roy says. “From what Batman said, he came to you. He clearly wants you with him.”

“Yeah,” she says. “Sure he does. But you know what, he’s never exactly been forthcoming.” She puts her hands on her hips. “You’ll know what I know when I know it but that’s going to take time. This is a long game.”

He knows. He opens his mouth.

“Red?”

Her eyes go wide, looking over his shoulder, and then she flattens herself against the wall, ducking behind the dumpster. Just in time so Green Arrow doesn’t see her when he appears at the mouth of the alley.

He stares at where she’d been standing just seconds ago.

“Roy?” It’s softer, coming closer.

Green Arrow nods. “Well, come on. We’ve a request for aid from SCPD.”

“Be right there.” He bends as if he’s about to pick something up, uses it as an excuse to check behind the dumpster.

She glares at him, mouth pressed tightly into a thin line, curling tighter into the corner she’s tucked herself in.

“Okay,” he nods at her, but she just continues to glare. “Come to me when you can.”

“What?”

Roy straightens, looking at Green Arrow. “Nothing. I’m coming.”

It’s hours later before everything is cleared up with the SCPD and they’re done bantering with the cops on duty, hours later when he bids farewell to Green Arrow, with tentative plans to patrol together again in the coming week, and Roy wanders back to the zeta-tube, a bit aimless, a bit shocked.

What happened that night can’t happen again.

He goes back home and resolves to wait for her to come to him. She doesn’t that night. Or the next. Or the next or the next. He checks in with the team, but they have no missions, none that require more bodies than they have at their service. And whatever his recent shenanigans have displayed, Sportsmaster has gone quiet.

Roy’s not sure if it should worry him, this return to normal operating procedures, so he starts to piece together their movements in the past months, since Artemis joined her family. He looks for anything that might reference the three of them individually or as a unit, and starts to compile the information: newspaper clippings tacked to his wall, blogs dedicated to criminal sightings bookmarked, the team’s on going files on all three of them.

He lacks the revenue for the computer system at the cave, the access to the justice league’s files and the talent to hack into them like Robin probably could, if he tried. But Roy makes it work. He highlights and circles, tacks post-its to the stories that directly mention Artemis, Tigress, making lists of what’s been stolen or who owned it.

It starts to look like a map, stories and clippings and printouts on his wall.

It’s all so random.

**Star City**

**December 25, 1756, PDT**

Kaldur comes by after the Haly circus mission. Whatever he came to say gets lost when he sees Roy’s map.

“It doesn’t make any sense,” Roy says.

“Perhaps there is no pattern, my friend. Sportsmaster and Cheshire are mercenaries. Logically, they
do not work for only one person.”

“Only the highest bidder,” Roy says, a little startled by the edge of bitterness.

Kaldur touches a color image, surprisingly decent quality, of Artemis in her Tigress gear. Her form is good in it, arrow knocked, stance poised and ready to shoot.

“You have found focus on this,” he says.

Roy’s fingers stumble over one of the newspaper articles, tearing the edge. He retacks it so it’ll stay up. “She betrayed the entire team,” he says, though in reality, it’s not truly his team. It’s only temporary until the League. But Kaldur is his best friend. The others are his friends. They were- are. Are hers, too.

None of them can know. He can’t let their affection for her get in the way of her mission.

He says, “I was right about the mole. It was someone on the team. It was one of the three-”

Now it’s one of two.

He shakes his head, clearing his thoughts. “Moles don’t quit their missions until they have what they want. Sometimes not even then.” He turns to Kaldur. “What did she take from the team?” He turns back to his wall, touches one of the pictures, a more blurry one that can’t differentiate between the edges of her mask and the reality of her face. “What did she learn that completed her mission?”

“Until the latest mission, her actions inspired nothing but trust.”

“I know,” Roy says. “But she’s out there with them.” He jabs his finger on one of the newspapers. “She’s out there doing this. You’d defend her even when she’s betrayed you?”

Roy knows how to read Kaldur, knows when he’s happy or upset, when he’s attempting to hide it, when he’s offended. He reads anger now. At him, at the situation, or at her, he’s not sure.

“You suspect that I would hesitate?”

Roy hesitates. He keeps his gaze on his map. “Would you.” It’s supposed to be a question, but it doesn’t come out that way.

“I believe I would not.”

Roy nods, ignoring the lost sound to it. “That’s all I need then.”

They pour over Roy’s map for a few more hours, tossing around theories, each more absurd than the last, and when the grimy underbelly of the city starts to wake, they gear up and patrol the rooftops, just the two of them. He thinks about stopping by Oliver’s, but that thought passes quickly. It’s a good night, nothing horribly exciting, but a good night all the same. A night with nothing but Kaldur’s edged sarcasm and a few robberies, one masked gunmen and a few goons causing problems for any night-time pedestrians.

He’d barely thought about her all night.

Roy slips into his apartment through the window, just like he left. There’s no sense in letting his nosy neighbor, a thin, bespeckled man that stares at Roy when he gets the mail or they pass each other in the stairwell, across the hallway see Red Arrow go into Roy Harper’s apartment.

Roy doesn’t need or want the attention.
He’s barely two steps into the apartment when he knows he’s not alone. He yanks an arrow out of his quiver and has it strung seconds later.

There’s a shadow on his couch. It’s more than a shadow.

“Gonna shoot me?” Artemis says.

He relaxes his shoulders, lowers his bow and stares at her. She’s sitting rigid on his crappy street-corner couch, the one he’d roped Kaldur into hauling up when he moved here. Her hands rest on her knees, fingers clenched, knuckles white. She turns her head slightly in his direction when he takes another step, but it’s not enough to actually look at him straight on.

He puts the arrow back in his quiver, sets the bow aside, and comes to sit on the table in front of the couch, facing her. She still won’t look at him, turning her head so he can only see the side of her face. There’s a line of dirt, maybe soot, that traces the edge of where her mask would be.

She says nothing,

Roy shifts to the couch. “What do you know? What is it?”

She crosses her arms and tilts even further away from him. “Can you just... can you just not talk?”

“Artemis-”

“Please. Five minutes. I just... five minutes.”

He scowls, ready to push, but she slouches back, shoulders rounded in, and props a foot up on the coffee table. She rocks her knee back and forth, back and forth, knocking the table legs against the floor. Thu-dump, thu-dump, loud and erratic until she really gets going, settling into a rhythm.


He sits back, saying nothing else, listening to the rocking of his table fill the room. He rests his head on the back of the couch, staring into the darkness only broken by the city lights from the window.

An archer waits. An archer finds the mark and strikes true, but he’s never been known for his patience. His own leg starts bouncing in time to the sway of hers, something he only notices when she stops. She shifts suddenly, sitting straighter. Roy copies the movement, thinking, this is it, finally, but she says nothing. Just sits there.

It really is an uncomfortable couch, cushions too thin, frame too prominent. He should get another one, but being a hero isn’t exactly the best paying job, and Roy hasn’t touched the trust fund he knows Ollie set up for him years ago. She stares hard at the far wall. The wall of his photos and clippings.

It’s not something he’s going to hide. He needs to know where she is. Where they are. It’s part of the mission.

“Your couch smells.”

It does. He’s not here often enough to really notice it, and after some of the places patrolling a city tends to lead him, he’s definitely smelled worse.

“Don’t you even have a TV?”

He shrugs. “No time for one.”
“That’s sad.”

“Like you have time for it either. The one at the cave still isn’t set up.”

She flinches and turns her head away, curling up even more. Like a porcupine, Roy thinks, defensive, protecting the underbelly.

“They’re fine,” he says. He lowers his voice when she stiffens even more. “Confused about you, but-”

“But they’ll get over it.”

“That’s not what I meant.” He sighs, rubbing at his face. Of all the things he ever thought would happen to him, comforting someone supposed to be working for the other side wasn’t one of them. “Just. Watch your back if you run into them.”

She glares at him. “I’m not stupid.”

“I didn’t say that.” Roy adds, more to himself than to her, “I think they’d all hesitate.”

“But they’d do what’s right. I know them well enough to know that.”

He’s not entirely sure about that. Most, if not all of them, might let themselves be swayed by their feelings for her. Not that, in this case, it’s a bad thing.

In the silence, he thinks about his bed. Roy rubs his eyes. He’ll never be used to seeing the sunrise from the wrong end. It’s been a long time since he’s gotten more than a few hours sleep at a time, such is the life of a hero, and it’s unlikely that he’ll be getting some any time soon, not with Artemis here.

They’re quiet for some time longer, staring at his wall. Whatever her thoughts might be about it, she keeps them to herself. He sighs roughly, running his hand through his hair, pausing when she shifts. He watches her pull her legs up to her chest, making herself as small as possible.

He needs her to talk, to tell him what she’s here for, but pushing her might make her clam up even more. So he ignores her and goes to his wall instead, staring at the pieces, moving them around, standing back with his hands on his hips. He finds himself staring at the whole thing instead of the individual parts, as if seeing it as a whole will make it all fit together, bring out what’s troubling him about all of it, but it’s just a clutter of images and notes written in ink, in marker and pencil, whatever was closest at the time.

“Is it worth it,” Artemis says suddenly. He glances over his shoulder at her, and then he looks again, much harder. She meets his gaze, and for the first time since he found her here, she holds it. “Tell me I need to be doing this.”

Roy swallows, still staring. “We need to know what’s going on. If Bats is right and there’s more going on than the injustice league; if these thefts are connected somehow, if there’s some bigger picture... we need to know.”

She’s silent for a long time. “Okay.” She uncurls from the corner of the couch and stands. Artemis rolls her shoulders and nods. “Okay,” she says again.

He’s not sure what makes him do it, but Roy reaches out. He doesn’t take her wrist, doesn’t catch it at all, but he touches it, fingers resting on the bone, letting them linger there.
She stills, looks at him, at his chest, and then finally at his face.

Roy inhales sharply. “What happened?” He steps closer. She flinches away, turns her face so he can’t see her expression anymore, hiding the shadows there from him, but he can see the dirt, can guess at the stories it tells.

“What happened?”

She shakes her head, stepping back and breaking the point of contact between them. “I should go.”

“You need to trust me,” Roy says, anger flaring suddenly. He tries to swallow it. He’s only partially successful. “This will never work if you don’t.”

“This will never work anyway! I went to Batman, not you! You know what, never mind. Forget about it. I’m gone.”

He almost lets her go. Almost lets her walk away.

He can’t let her go. Not like this. “I can’t help you if you don’t,” he says.

She turns on him and glares. “And I can’t do my job if you don’t trust me.”

“So tell me what’s going on.”

Her gaze skitters away. She looks suddenly tired. “It’s not. It’s nothing you can do anything about.”

“You don’t know that.” He steps closer, a little surprised that she lets him, and also a little relieved. “I’m here to help you. I’m here to be what you need.”

She rubs at her face, smearing the dirt there. “Thanks anyway,” she says, and then she’s gone, slipping out the window and into the early morning mist.

Roy gets a few fitful hours of sleep on the couch - she’s right. It does smell - before his communicator chirps.

It’s Kaldur. Team meeting. Now.

Star City
December 26, 0445, PDT

She wonders if he even noticed the blood still crusted under her fingernails.

Mount Justice
December 26, 0750 EST

They’re all there already, from Wally to the cave dwellers, even though it’s late enough in the morning that some of them are supposed to be in school.

All of them form a semi-circle in the main hall, facing Kaldur and the screen. It’s backwards, and he has to focus to actually make sense of it. The pit of his stomach rolls over and grows while sweat begins to prickle on the back of his neck and in his armpits.
Tell me I need to be doing this, he thinks before Kaldur even begins to speak, before Roy’s even fallen in line with the rest of the team. There’s a buzz in his ears; he doesn’t need to know what Kaldur is saying.

He already knows.

Robin goes to the computer terminal. Roy’s mouth goes dry. He closes his eyes, but they open seconds later. There’s footage.

It’s of her and Sportmaster in the hallway; in reality, it’s nothing but placing them at the scene. He thinks of her, small on his couch, tense and unapproachable. He thinks of her coming to his place in civilian clothes. He hadn’t thought about it at the time.

It’s nothing you can do anything about.

And she was right. There isn’t, there won’t be, because people are hurt.

People are hurt.

“I don’t understand,” M’gann says. Connor takes her hand, puts his arm around her and holds her against his side. Roy wonders if he’s offering the strength to her, or if he’s taking some of hers for himself. He looks angry, angrier than usual.

But then they all look a little bit shell-shocked.

Robin takes his fingers away from the keyboard, the footage paused on her face. “I guess I really didn’t believe that she...”

People are hurt.

Roy clears his throat. He does it again. “What’s the League saying about this? Are there- is GA on site? Batman?”

“I have heard nothing concrete as of yet,” Kaldur says. “I believe the League is responding to it as we speak. That is not why I called everyone here. In the end, she is our responsibility. She was part of this team and that makes it our duty to bring her in.”

Roy feels like he’s been punched, like he’s had all the air sucked out of him, like his chest is caving in.

“We can’t put aside our missions-”

“We will not. We will continue to work our missions as they come. In the meantime,” He turns to Roy. “You have been tracking her these past months. What can you tell us?”

Roy ignores the shocked looks from the others. “There’s no pattern to it. I can’t make sense of it.”

“Perhaps, together, we can.”

Roy nods. He feels numb.

He has to warn her.

The decision comes easily, even knowing what it means. He’s her handler, her only source to the truth. She needs him. To abandon her now, to leave her to the mercies of Sportmaster and Cheshire, should they ever find out to truth, to let the team get to her and jeopardize her mission.
He can’t do it.

He has no way to contact her. No way to get her attention.

He stops at the drop box immediately after the team meeting’s dispersed. If she’s been there since last time, he can’t tell, but Roy leaves a note anyway: *the team is after you*. And after that he’s not sure what to do. Really, there’s nothing he can do but wait. Roy has no idea how likely she’ll be to come to him either, now that it’s certain he knows about the hospital, about the dead.

She came to him before. Immediately after.

_Tell me it’s worth it._

Undisclosed Location
December 26, 1117 EST

“The first is hard,” Sportsmaster says.

Artemis nods. She checks her arrow again, testing the shaft for any bends or breaks. It’s not the carbon fiber she’s used to, but some other material she’s never seen before, a composite that she can afford now that she’s making money all the times she dons her tiger stripes.

“I don’t have a first yet.” Like it matters. She feels nauseous, unable to swallow past the lump in the back of her throat that won’t go away. “It’s fine.” She tests the point of the arrowhead against her thumb until she cuts it open, blood welling up in thick red drops. “I’m fine.”

She sets the arrow down with a click, picks up a cloth and presses it to her thumb. It’s white, and the blood starts to seep in, staining the fabric. She thinks of hospital gowns, of pale blue dots that look like flowers but aren’t flowers, the snaps up the sleeves.

Details that don’t matter but she can’t ever forget, tubes and wires tangling around her arms and wrists, hands around her throat. She feels it, where she’d tumbled against the IV pole, the monitor beeping. The bruise has already formed along her side. Whenever she moves too quickly or tries to draw her bow, it aches, muscles protesting.

She looks at the cut on her finger, still bleeding but sluggish. “Why were we even there?”

He gives her that same look, the one she’s getting too used to, and it makes her sick. She wants to throw up, purge the twisting in her gut.

“I think I deserve to know.”

“Soon, baby girl. You’re earning it.”

She nods, not really hearing him. She drops the cloth on the table, letting her finger bleed. “Yeah, whatever.”

He takes her arm, turns her around. “I’m serious. You’re doing better than I thought you would.”

“You know me. Hate to disappoint.”

“Artemis.”

She pulls away from him, away from the _concern_ on his face. Who is he to look at her like that? Like
he understands, like he gets her. He doesn’t know the first thing about her.

She shakes her head. She thinks about Arrow, about how she lingered outside his apartment for hours, trying to figure out how to make herself go there.

“I remember my first,” he says. “She was young. Older than you, but young.”

Artemis swallows. “Why’d you do it?”

His smile isn’t pleasant. “It was your mother’s idea.”

Artemis flinches. Her mother’s going to hear about this. Does she know already? What Artemis—What Artemis has become? Tigress and Sportsmaster.

Her mother’s not dumb.

“It was her contact. We needed the money, and… he was willing to pay a great deal.”

She nods. “I…”

“Baby girl. It comes easier with time. It did for me. For your sister. And if it doesn’t. You can be other things.”

She stares at him. “Why are you being so calm about this? You practically raised me to do this. And I-”

“You’re stronger than you think. But you’re young.”

Artemis nods, tries not to flinch when he grips her shoulder, shakes her like a pit bull might its pup. “This is what you are. It’s what you’re meant to be. It’ll come.”

He leaves her, claiming some unfinished business.

She doesn’t ask.

She holds it together for long enough to get out of his presence, down the hall and to her room. She briefly leans against the door, searching all the shadows for Jade and finding nothing. Then she goes into the bathroom and she stares at herself in the mirror.

Mount Justice
December 27, 1555 EST

There are screens up, information glowing in the holograms’ blue. It’s starting to look like his apartment wall, if much neater and much more expansive. Kaldur and Robin are in front of them, with M’gann hanging back. She comes to him when she sees him.


Roy looks over her shoulder. “Taking it that hard?”

She shrugs. “You know Wally. I think we all are. Except, you of course.” She freezes, looking a bit horrified, blushing pink on her cheeks. “I mean, I didn’t mean it like that.”

“I know. I didn’t know her as well as you did.”
M’gann looks at her hands. “Sometimes I wonder if we even know each other at all. I just.” She looks to the screens. “I still can’t quite believe…”

“Yeah, me either,” Roy says. Then, a little louder, turning slightly to include Robin and Kaldur, he adds, “Have they heard anything?”

“The doctors say he’s critical,” Robin frowns, looking hard at the data. “And… and he might not make the night. If he does, his chances are better, but…”

Roy nods. “Who is he? Did they target him?”

“It’s too early to say,” Robin says. “I can’t find any connections. Anything in his past that would indicate the attention of Sportsmaster. Or his known associates.”

Roy nods; he’s seen the photographs, read between the lines of the press release. The official League statement isn’t available to him, as a non-league member, but he doesn’t need to read it.

There are more screens up; the one closest to him is a series of lines overlaying a grid of the planet. It’s a map. An actual map. Green for Artemis, blue for Sportsmaster. He points to Artemis’ line.

“What’s this?”

“The zeta beam activity since she joined the team to… well, until she left.”

“You really think that’s going to tell us something?”

“It really doesn’t,” Robin says. “She didn’t go outside of team activities or deviate unexpectedly from her patterns at all. Except, she still has access.”

“What?” M’gann blinks. “What does that mean?”

“I’ll bring it up with GA,” Roy says. “Let the League know.”

“Maybe we shouldn’t,” Robin says. “I can set up an alert when her designation is activated. It’ll tell us where she’s going and when she’s using them.”

“We have already talked about it. She was a part of this team. It is only natural that we feel responsible,” Kaldur says. “We are going after her.”

“That’s…” Roy says. “That’s good.”

As soon as he can without attracting suspicion, Roy ducks out of the cave. They’re all too enthralled in their Artemis hunt to really notice anyway.

He needs to see a Bat.

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**Gotham City**
**December 27, 0815 EDT**

The Gotham zeta beam is a broken down telephone booth, tucked away in an alley. There probably wasn’t ever an actual booth there, and definitely not this wreck, boarded over, out of use sign tacked to the door. The voice still calls her Artemis, familiar in an absent sort of way, and she misses it. She hadn’t realized how much, this stupid inconsequential thing she used to hear every day. Recognized: Artemis B-zero-seven.
It's a relief, in a way. The League can track her zeta beam usage, but her father can't. Her sister can't. only the people with access to the computer mainframe – likely in the watchtower, orbiting the planet – have that sort of capability.

She likes to know that all she has to do, should things go south, is make it to the nearest zeta beam.

She walks to the nearby park, picks a path at random, passing runners and walkers, most with earbuds in and music blaring, some with dogs and one with a baby stroller, piled high with blankets, a red mitten hanging over the side. Artemis tucks her own hands into her jacket pockets.

The pond is iced over, and a pair of skaters carves lines over the surface, holding hands as they glide. One wobbles more than the other, a novice but still too good for a first timer.

Her mom used to take her here, both her and Jade. That was before the accident and the prison sentence, before those six long years alone with her dad. That was before either of them really started training her or Jade.

She'd never really gotten the hang of skating, but her father did, and Jade did.

She turns her head and heads in the opposite direction. It looks like more snow, the sky overcast and gray.

She walks, aimless and without purpose, for a long time, pausing at the north end of the park, where the pathways and trees give way to stoplights and streets. She could keep going, walk right through the city, and pass only blocks from home. Stop in to see her mom.

Artemis turns around and heads south, further into the park. She circles around the play set, a simple jungle gym and slide, a set of swings on the far end. There's only a handful of kids and their parents, talking and laughing. Children shriek their joy loud enough for everyone in the nearby vicinity to hear them.

She keeps going.

It's the hair that catches her attention. He's in civilian clothes, jeans and a leather jacket, sunglasses despite the cloud cover. She almost doesn't recognize him.

She hangs back and watches him talk on his phone, and wonders what he's doing in Gotham. He rarely patrols here, from what she knows of his routes. Which is admittedly very little; he'd never really been a concern of hers until he joined the team.

It's a different feel, to be watching someone instead of constantly feeling like she's being watched. It's just her, now, and him. She's picked up a few tricks from Jade, from Sportsmaster, and she wants to see how long it will take him to spot her.

A while, apparently, with his attention on his phone, though it's not enough that he doesn't glance at everyone that passes, give them a quick once over.

She comes up behind him, falling in step with him, smirking when he double-takes.

“Hey,” she says.

“What are you doing here?”

“What, no hello?” Artemis shrugs. “Even villains have downtime.”
“Sportsmaster?”

“Gone since… He’s gone. Cheshire too.” Artemis looks away. “I had to get out of that place. There’s only so many times I can beat up that punching bag before I start to lose it.”

Or before her mind starts to wander.

He stares at her; she tugs on the cuffs of her jacket, tucks the strands of hair under her cap. She brushes the snow off a nearby bench and sits. It’s cold through her jeans. Her fingers curl around the edge of the seat.

“Henry Miller died,” she says. “This morning. He stabilized. I thought—”

She falls silent. Roy sits next to her, leaning forward, elbows on his knees. His hands dangle between them.

Artemis looks away. She kept waking up in a cold sweat, hands shaking. It’s starting to show in the mirror, these things she's done. These things she's still doing though Sportsmaster hasn't pushed her for more than what she's already given. He hasn't asked her to do it again, for all that it was mostly an accident.

It’s only been a day. The leniency he’s showing her is only temporary.

She feels like something is crushing her, his expectations that she can't predict or anticipate, the non-answers he keeps giving her. It feels like a game; one she’s losing.

“It happened so fast. I couldn’t—” She puts her hands to her face, heels covering her eyes. “It happened so fast.”

“Who was he?”

She jerks a shoulder up. “I don’t know. I don’t even know why we were there.”

Roy clears his throat. For an alarming second, she thinks he’s about to pat her on the shoulder, but he laces his fingers together instead. He clears his throat again. “Do you want out?”

Her breath catches in her chest. She considers it; for a second it’s all she can think about: being back with the team, back with her mother. There is no mole. She knows her team and she knows her friends, and there isn’t.

She swallows. Shakes her head. “He’s up to something. He’s not telling me anything, but I can tell he’s up to something.”

“Okay,” Roy says. He leans against the back of the bench. “Okay.”

“I don’t have anything to tell you,” she says. “He’s… mastering the art of keeping me in the dark. But he goes away a lot. Usually takes Jade with him. Except this last time. He went alone.”

Roy nods. She doesn’t know when he became Roy. Probably since his apartment. Probably because he’s not reacting like she expected.

He clears his throat. “The other night. I was following Scandal Savage—”

Artemis frowns. “Why?”

“Didn’t you hear about São Paulo?” Roy frowns when she shakes her head, then he tells her the
whole story.

She sits back, staring across the park. Kids still play on the play set, but they’re too far away to hear. “You think they’re building an army. Sportsmaster and Scandal. Whoever they’re working for. Another Injustice League? But we don’t have the kind of juice to front that sort of thing.”

“So who does?”

She shrugs. “The League of Shadows? He’s worked for them before. In Rhelasia. And Jade- Ra’s al Ghul trained her.”

“He has the League of Shadows. Shadows like to stay hidden. There was nothing subtle about Knockout.”

“Who knows.” Artemis sighs. “You know you can’t bring the team into this. They’ll put the connections together too fast.”

“I know. You work on Sportsmaster,” Roy says. “I’ll shadow Scandal and see what I can find out.”

Artemis nods, shifting to get to her feet. Roy catches her shoulder before she does. “You should know-“

“Oh great,” she says before she can stop it. “I do not need bad news right now.”

He hesitates.

Artemis stares at him. “I wasn’t exactly kidding, but what? What is it? What happened?”

“The team. They know you still have access to the zeta beam. And they plan on using it to track you.”

She laughs, shaking her head. “Batman scrambled my tracker.”

“Yeah. I spoke with Batman; that’s why I’m-“ He gestures to the city, aborts it halfway through. “But just in case, he’s putting the alert on a delay, and.” Roy digs in his pocket, pulls out a device and offers it to her. It looks like a cellphone. “I was going to leave this in the dropbox, but since you’re here. It doubles as a cellphone, but more importantly, it’ll let you scramble the locations before and after, but just. Be careful with how often you use it.”

She takes it, turning it over in her hands. “Robin’ll catch on too quickly anyway.”

“Better than them finding you before you’re ready.”

She tucks her hands in the pockets of her coat, fingers closing around the device. She looks at him for a long moment, then nods. “See you when I see you.”

New York City
December 27, 1943 EDT

They’re dressed to the nines, no gear in sight, though Artemis has a few things tucked away. She doesn’t doubt that Cheshire and Sportsmaster do too. It’s a private room, blocking out the sounds of the slots in the room one over while Sportsmaster plays cards with the high rollers. Artemis recognizes none of them. Proxies, maybe, of the men he normally works for?
There’s a recording device tucked under his tie. She’d put it there when she’d straightened it for him earlier. She can’t listen now, but later. Maybe later it will answer a few things and she’ll have something to tell Arrow.

But for now, Artemis keeps her questions to herself.

Jade does not.

“Your boyfriend going to show up tonight?”

“He’s not.” Artemis closes her mouth.

Jade’s smile is a touch mocking. “I’d like to know these things in advance, little sis. It’s nice to be prepared.”

She shakes her head. “We’re not. I’ve chosen my side. I’m where I belong.”

Jade shrugs. “Keeping saying it. I might start to believe it.”

Artemis huffs, crossing her arms. She looks the other way, as if that will persuade Jade to drop the subject. She leans close to Artemis’ ear. “You need to stay away from him. White hat like that? It’s not going to turn out well. Believe me I’ve tried.”

Artemis shrugs. She watches the dealer, the players. Poker isn’t her game. Maybe, considering her recent career move, it should be.

Jade turns fully to look at her, leaning forward and partially blocking out the table. “You’ve seen him since St. Jude’s. Artemis!”

“Yeah. Yeah, I have. It’s not easy. For me to do this. Do you realize that?”

Jade looks taken aback. Artemis sets her mouth.

“I was good at the hero thing. I was really good.” She looks down at her hands. She touches the calluses on her first three fingers. “But it’s not where I belong, is it. I think… I think he’s starting to see that.”

Jade touches her shoulder, her face oddly serious. “Artemis, there’s something you should know about him—”

“You don’t know anything about it,” Artemis says. “Or me. You haven’t known anything about me since I was nine.”

She walks away, circling around the table, keeping Sportsmaster in her attention. He raises an eyebrow at her, frowning, but when she glances at Jade- glares at Jade, really, his frown shifts into a smirk.

She stays on the other side of the room for the rest of the game, paying enough attention that she doesn’t fall asleep against the wall. When it’s done, Sportsmaster comes to her. They linger to the side as the others mingle. He introduces her to a few of them as they pass through, but overall they’re left to themselves. Jade’s still frowning at her from the other side of the room.

“You’re very quiet tonight,” he says.

Artemis shrugs. “Patience, right?”
He smiles, offers her his arm and guides her through the room and out into the main room of the casino.

“This really isn’t your scene, is it? Your risks seem a little more high profile. But hey,” she gestures to the whole of the casino. “If I’d known this was one of the perks…”

He smirks, then low, clearly only for her ears, he says, “I’ve picked up a job.”

Artemis starts. “What?”

“Delivery of a particular shipment to a very particular client of mine. I’ve picked it up and now we go.”

“I’m guessing if I ask who and what and where, you’re not going to tell me.”

“You’re mostly right.” He steps around a couple of newcomers, stopping at the doors. He holds his hands out expansively, smiling. “We’re going home, baby girl.”

**Gotham City**
**December 29 0037 EDT**

“Batman territory,” Roy says as they’re running along the rooftops of the wharf, side by side.

There’s an edge to Robin’s smile. “My territory.”

“Batman know about this?”

“Need to know.” Robin says, and then they lie in wait, crouched in the shadows of the roof, above the lamps on the edge of the docks. Robin runs down the inventory lists in all of their heads, typical cargo, nothing that raises any flags.

Kaldur, hidden beneath the surface of the water, alerts them that he’s in position.

Perhaps this is something Sportsmaster brought with him

The image M’gann sends him burns in his mind. Strong enough that he has to step back, as if physical distance will shield him from the depth of their psychic link, but there it is, the tiger stripes and the flame obscuring half her face, hair knotted into a braid.

They come into view seconds later. Sportsmaster looks up, Artemis too, but not at them. Whatever they see has nothing to do with them, tucked away and out of sight like they are. Not with M’gann hanging back, away from Sportsmaster’s senses. He jerks his head at Artemis; she nods and slips away.

“I need a better vantage point,” Roy says, though this one is fine. “I won’t get a clean shot from here.”

Robin catches his arm. “Wait for the signal.”

Roy shrugs off Robin’s hand and heads to the other side of the roof, leaping the gap to another building, and slips down to the ground as quickly and quietly as possibly. He sneaks out from the building’s shadow, heading in the direction she went.

*Red Arrow*, Kaldur says. *Back into formation.*
Roy ignores him. He can’t break the psychic link, but it’s just a surface intrusion. The team can’t see the thoughts he keeps to himself and they won’t hear anything he says out loud.

He turns a corner-

-and is pushed against a wall, knife to his throat.

Artemis relaxes a bit when she realizes it’s him, but she glances over her shoulder, still tense. “What are you doing here?”

He opens his mouth, but she jerks away, yanking him after her and behind a stack of crates. It throws him off balance, embarrassingly, and he nearly flattens her against the wall. He stares down at her, arms braced on either side of her, but she’s looking around him.

That’s when he hears the footsteps. One of the henchmen, hardly trying to be quiet at all. It’s not long before he’s gone.

Roy rights himself and touches her shoulder. “The team is here.”

She nods. “You can’t let them interfere with this. He’s finally telling me things.”

Damn. This time, she gives him a boost. Roy crawls up the crates, careful, and catches the edge of the rooftop. It is, at least, a truly better location for him. Or would have been, if Sportsmaster hadn’t disappeared into the warehouse already.

He makes his way down the roof access, slipping along the catwalk. He’s alone up here- Artemis should still be outside, and-

“Looking for me?”

Sportsmaster. At the far end of the catwalk.

“Yeah,” Roy says, nocking an arrow, but then there’s a sharp point at his neck.

“Easy,” Sportsmaster says, and Roy can almost hear the smile. “Search the warehouse.” He looks over his shoulder. “There might be more.”

“There are,” Artemis says, coming up behind him. “I can’t be sure but I think I saw Robin darting around after this one.”

“The Boy Wonder. Find them.”

Artemis hesitates; she looks at Roy. “What are you going to do to him?”

“Tigress,” he says. “Find them.”

She nods and slips away, glancing at Roy once more before she’s gone.

“I wonder,” Cheshire says, the point of her knife sharp against his neck, “How long will your friends stay hidden?”

“Not long enough,” Sportsmaster says. “Who’s going to want a broken arrow?”

Gotham City
December 29, 0059, EST

She’s at the doors when she stops and looks back. He’s not dead. Not yet. Cheshire still has her knife to his throat, and Sportsmaster’s just standing there. Are they waiting for something?

Anything she does will blow her cover.

Someone grabs her arm. Artemis jerks, throws a punch, but Scandal Savage deflects it easily. She tamps down on the gut instinct to fight, to take her down and put her away where she belongs. But they’re supposed to be allies now, at least somewhat.

“You have what you came for?”

“I do,” she says. She shakes her head, pulling Artemis closer. “I don’t need word of this getting out.”

“No one will hear it from me.”

“Hear what?” Robin appears in front of them.

Scandal lets go of her, but Artemis is already surging forward. Don’t go easy on him. It takes everything not to pull her punches, not to give him the upper hand. They know each other, how they move in combat, the two non-superpowered team members, and he’d be able to tell right away.

Like she can tell how focused he is. She’s not getting any of his laughing taunts, the easy banter he has with friend or foe. He’s more serious than she’s ever seen him before, ducking, dodging, hitting and blocking. She has Scandal at her back, though she’s more focused on Kaldur and Wally as he speeds by.

Artemis turns in time to crack Robin across the chest with her bow, wincing even though it’s custom built to handle impacts like that. Robin sidesteps, shaking it off, and then he comes at her again.

Just when they come back into close quarters, the side of the building explodes, knocking them both to the ground. She lands on her back. The worst of it goes over both of them, hot but too high to burn. Part of the wall lands near them, on fire, and Artemis rolls to the side to avoid.

“nice to see you finally joining us,” Wally says, turning out of the way just in time to avoid the blades at Scandal’s wrists. It puts her right in Roy’s path. He’s bleeding from the side of his neck. It’s all she sees before Robin’s back, demanding her attention. He still gets a hit in, knocking her back.

When she looks up again, it’s not Scandal that’s after Roy, it’s Jade, and he’s on his back and she’s kneeling above him, one of her knees planted in the middle of his stomach. Her arm is up, sai in hand, and she’s about to, she’s actually going to-

Artemis cries out, senseless; it gives Robin the in he needs, and she tumbles to the ground.

He doesn’t come at her again, hanging back and staring at her.

Scandal’s already gone. Her father, she has no idea where he is. She yanks on Jade’s sleeve, ripping it. “C’mon!”

Cheshire gives a snarl, wordless, and then, voice filled with rage and none of her normal taunting, “Be seeing you, sweetheart.”

When she’s up, she kicks him in the face.

Then they run.
The team doesn’t give up easily, but they’re slowed down by the fire and the hired help they’ve left behind. Except for Robin, Artemis knows Gotham better than any of them. They run through the streets, across the rooftops until there’s no sign of pursuit.

Jade hangs back, mask firmly in place. “I have some unfinished business,” she says.

Artemis calls after her, first her alias, then her name, but she’s already disappeared.

**Star City**  
**December 29, 0405 PDT**

He’s in the alleyway below his apartment, about to climb the fire escape when he hears a noise, too faint and too close, and then there’s a blur of green and white and black, Cheshire, too close and too fast for him to draw an arrow. Roy swings an arm up, catching her downward strike, point of her sai way too close to his face for any sort of peace of mind.

Her other sai cuts across chest, biting through his straps, his shirt. The pain is sharp even if the wound is shallow, and she pulls back, reverses it, like she’s about to drive it into his chest.

He’s about to dodge, about to step aside, but she cracks him across the jaw instead, using the hilt of it instead of the point. He can’t see her face, not with her mask, but he’s always known her to be calm, collected, to sound somehow mocking and somehow flirting, but there’s only rage when she says, “Stay the hell away from her!”

He knocks her swing away, comes in for a quick jab at her torso, but she twists away. The blow is only glancing, not enough to slow her down at all, and she sweeps his legs out from under him. He sees her boot before he feels it, tries to roll away. He’s not fast enough.

There’s a crunch of his nose; he bites down on his tongue. Copper fills his mouth and he’s swallowing around it, nearly gagging, spitting it out, saliva and blood.

She’s standing over him. Her hands are shaking. He’s never seen this.

She kicks him again, this time in the chest. “Artemis needs you to stay away from her,” she says, shockingly blunt. “Stay away from her, or I come back and I finish this.”

Roy blinks, still on the ground. He hooks his foot behind her knee and brings her down. She grunts, rolls away when he scrambles for her, and she kicks him again for good measure. Roy wipes away the blood coming out of his nose, and when he spits again, there’s still blood in it.

He looks up. Cheshire is gone. Simply gone, disappeared into the shadows. The alleyway is dark, always is no matter how many times the city replaces the street light. He took out that light so no one would see Red Arrow sneaking into Roy’s apartment, and now it’s being used against him.

He can’t see any sign of her whatever direction he turns.

He looks up at the fire escape and thinks about all the people that know where he lives: Kaldur, Ollie and Artemis.

Numb, mind blank, he starts to climb. Once he gets into his apartment he goes for the first aid kit, the only thing that’s not second hand or taken from a street corner. It’s something all the sidekicks have, all the heroes who need it, the frail and fragile, the normal people. He strips off his top, wincing when it pulls at the wound, reopening what had started to clot over. It bleeds more, leaking down his
He spits into the sink; it’s still bloody. Roy wipes at his mouth and winces. He touches his nose and holds kleenexx there until it stops bleeding. It doesn’t feel broken, but it sounded like she’d done it, that crunch.

He presses gauze to his chest and tapes it down.

His window opens.

He picks up the first aid kit’s scissors, half-sized and hardly worth using as a weapon, and he crouches low behind the counter, ignoring the pain in his chest, or the wound that starts bleeding again.

The light is on.

He changes his grip, listening to the footsteps as they draw closer.

“Arrow?”

Artemis. He closes his eyes and lets his weight sag against the counter. He breathes out, slow.

“Roy?”

He just wants to sit, wants to not move. Sometimes being a hero sucked. He stands, places his hands on the counter when all his blood rushes to his head.

Artemis freezes, staring, and then comes to him, studying the marks on his face, then the tape on his chest, too loose, red starting to stain the gauze. She takes the cloth from his hand, runs water over it and starts to clean the blood from his face. He wants to snarl at her, push her away, but his mouth hurts, and he’s tired.

He closes his eyes and lets her do it.

She peels off the tape, and she cleans the scratch. He holds still, only wincing when she puts anti-septic on it. She makes an apologetic noise, grimacing when she puts more on.

Roy slumps against the counter and stays like that until she’s pressing an ice-pack to half his face, and he takes it so she can focus on cleaning the other side.

“What happened?”

He looks at her with his good eye and thinks she already knows. “Your sister.”

No surprise, not really, a grim twist to her mouth, eyes hard. But then she pauses. “Jade did this?” she asks, her fingers still on his chest. “Roy!” she says, pressing in until he winces. “Roy, she dips her sais in jellyfish toxin.”

“I know.” He pulls her fingers from his chest, alleviates the pressure. “I know that. But you know how fast jellyfish toxin works. I’m still standing.”

He lets the words linger on his tongue, hesitating. “And I think she wants me alive.”

Artemis pauses, fingers lingering on the last strip of tape. “What for?”

The look on her face makes Roy narrow his eyes. “I’m not dating your sister.”
Artemis shifts away, starts to clean up the first aid supplies. Her manner’s too studied and too focused to ease anything in Roy. He clears his throat. “What’s going on?”

“She. May think we’re dating.”

Roy stares at her. He blinks, and stares some more.

“What! You keep showing up everywhere, and she just assumed! It was way better than admitting the truth.”

He can’t find the words. He doesn’t even know what to do or what to say. Her glare gets more and more irritated the longer he says nothing, the more he stares. She puts her hands on her hips and looks like she’s about to lay into him, and then he kisses her.

He kisses her.

Artemis freezes. Roy freezes, both of them too startled too move. Toward, away, either. He’s not sure what he wants. He’s not sure what she wants. What she needs. He’s not sure of anything.

She pulls away first, staring. She clears her throat, finally, looking away. “I didn’t know that you…”

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t-”

She touches the side of his face, thumb sliding along his jaw before she backs away, flushing, hand over her mouth. Then she starts to laugh, leaning against the wall for support.

Roy feels the corner of his mouth quirk up. “Bad idea?”

“Very bad. I didn’t know you-” She grins at him, but then her amusement fades quickly. She sighs and peels off her mask, dropping it on the table where he’s left his quiver and arrows. She picks one up, testing the fletching. She doesn’t look at him. “So they’re after me.”

Right. Ignoring it and moving on. Roy can work with that.

“They think you’re their responsibility. You were one of them and now you’re not,” Roy says. “They feel like they should’ve seen your treachery before.”

“Bought it pretty quickly.” She sets the arrow down. “Didn’t they.”

“I don’t think most of them really believed it,” he says. “At least, not until the hospital.”

She flinches away, wrapping her arms around herself and putting as much distance between them as the little room allows. She slumps against the wall and slides down until she’s sitting, knees drawn up to her chest.

He stares at her, waiting, but she stays silent, offering nothing more. So he sits next to her, ignoring the protest of his wounds and not touching, but close enough that she’s gone tense. After a while, he can feel her ease up. They stay like that for some time, sitting side by side, waiting.

“You have to get back?” Roy sits up suddenly, alarmed. “Should you even be here?”

She shrugs. “We got separated.”

“And you came here? I’m touched.”

She raises her eyebrows and tilts her head. “I didn’t think you’d appreciate it, but apparently I was
wrong about that.”

Roy flushes and looks away. Out of the corner of his eye he sees her grin. He rubs his jaw to hide his own. Artemis makes a sound of amusement but otherwise lets it go. He rests his head back against the wall. There are painkillers in the drawer. They’re not strong enough to knock him out, but they’ll ease the pain into a mild discomfort. He’s had worse before. He’ll have worse again.

Next to him, Artemis shifts. Roy looks at her, and looks at her, feeling off beat, out of his own control. He swallows, mouth strangely dry. “Can I ask why you’re doing this? Why you agreed to do this when Batman brought it to you?”

“That’s not what- I went to Batman with the idea,” she says. “After Sportsmaster came to me.”

Roy blinks. He didn’t know that.

She peels off her arm guard and turns it over in her hands. She sighs. “He expects me to just... be like him.”

“Your- Sportsmaster?”

“Yeah. He started training me a couple years before my mom got out. He taught me to shoot.” She shakes her head. “Sometimes, I think it’s the only good thing he ever gave me.”

“Yeah?”

She shrugs, hands closing around the arm guard. “If I didn’t have my arrows...”

He presses his shoulder against hers. He knows what it’s like. She looks at him. Her eyes are grey, he realizes, and he can see the faint imprint left by her mask, a thin pink line.

She lowers her voice, as if afraid of being too loud for the space they’re in. “Why’d you pick up a bow?”

He hesitates, leaning his head back. “When my father died, I was... angry.”

“You? Angry? No.”

He snorts, then rubs his mouth to cover it up. “Big surprise, right? Brave Bow took me in-”

Artemis jerks forward, sitting up straight and staring at him. “Brave Bow. The Brave Bow? No kidding.” She stares at him. “Was he as good as they say?”

He nods. “Better.”

“Huh.” She rests her head against the wall. “No wonder you’re so good. He train Green Arrow too?”

“It’s how I met him.”

“And so comes the hero life.” Artemis looks at her hands. She sighs. “He keeps saying I’m finally where I belong. It’s in my blood, isn’t it? I’m never going to get away from it.”

“Pretty sure that’s not how it works.”

“Yeah? If I’d told you back then, about my family, about Jade and my dad, you’d have been totally cool with it? The team? I don’t think so.”
He’s quiet for a long moment, then he shifts, just the slightest bit, to press his shoulders against hers. “You’re right about me. I would’ve. The team, though. Robin didn’t think it mattered.”

“He knows-”

“They all know.”

“That’s great. That’s just-”

“What about your mom? Huntress, right? She went straight.”

“For me,” Artemis says softly. “I think it was for me. And Jade, but she left when- I was just a kid. Teddy bears and.” Artemis shrugged. “I’d slow her down. And… and someone had to be there when mom got out. With Jade gone and me-”

Artemis falls silent, mouth tight, tension back in her shoulders.

“You got me,” he says.

She laughs, bumps against his shoulder. “At least we’re finally getting along.”

He looks at her mouth, feels the heat in his face. She laughs again and he feels like a kid, like some unprepared teenager with a crush. He doesn’t have a crush.

“Shut up,” he says, but she only grins, laughing some more.

They stay like that until he falls asleep, right there against the wall. When he wakes again, in the gray of the early morning, Artemis is already gone.

Undisclosed Location

December 29, 0826, EST

Sneaking in is a lot easier than she thought it’d be. There’s really no reason for her stealth. They’d split up. Getting back wouldn’t be easy for any of them, but she’d dozed in Roy’s apartment. Wasn’t hard with him so warm against her side, his shoulder more comfortable than she’d expected. Or ever thought about.

She’s thinking about it now. After last night. It seemed impossible to ever imagine that he’d ever think that, or feel that, or whatever made him kiss her like that.

She starts to bring her hand up to her mouth, halting halfway through.

"I can't believe you," Jade says.

Artemis hesitates; she’s nearly to her room. The door to the dining room they never use is slightly open, and voices drift from inside. She edges closer to the door, pressing her back against the wall. She touches her thumb to the door frame, leaning as close as she dares.

She can’t see anything at all.

"You need to calm down," Sportsmaster says. His voice is even, but she knows what he sounds like when he’s holding anger back. What are they talking about?

“Calm down. You’re seriously telling me to calm down. After-”
"Don't forget who you're working for, little girl. You have debts to pay."

Jade speaks, low. Artemis edges closer to the opening to hear her say, “…you’re up to? What you’re using their prized lynchpin for?”

She hears a thump, something hitting a wall or a table. “Enough.”

“You-“

“Enough. Artemis.”

She jerks, thankfully not making any noise. Sportsmaster says her name again. There’s no use pretending she wasn’t listening, so she pushes the door open and comes in the room.

Jade glares at her, picks up a case from the table, and pushes past her out of the room.

Artemis stares after her before turning to Sportsmaster. He’s sitting at the table, drumming his fingers and watching her. She points over her shoulder. “Did I…”

“No.”

She’s not sure she believes him. "What was that about?"

He shrugs. "You know Jade."

She looks back, out the door. Jade's already gone. "I'm starting to think I really don't." She stiffens suddenly. “That was the case from New Orleans. The one-”

“I know what it was.”

“You’re not going to tell me, are you?”

She doesn’t get an answer. He sets something down in the middle of the table. It's the phone. The phone from Batman with the zeta beam scrambler.

Artemis looks at it, and then looks at him. She crosses her arms. "Going through my things?"

"What are you doing with it?"

"I can't have a phone now? I didn't call anyone, I didn't tell anyone anything. What would I say to them? You don't tell me anything."

"You're stalling. Where were you?"

Artemis sets her mouth, glaring. All she can think about is Roy kissing her, of all the ridiculous things to get stuck on.

"Artemis," he says, warning clear in his voice.

She shrugs, looks away, feeling her face heat. "I went to see Mom."

It surprises him; he actually stares at her, not saying anything for a long time. "Your mother. What did she say?"

She crosses her arms, cupping her elbows. "I didn't talk to her. She didn't even know I was there.” Artemis lets her hands hang at her sides, fingers flexing. “I know what you’re thinking. I didn’t tell
them anything. How could I? I was with you the entire time.”

“I’m aware of that.” Sportsmaster frowns. “Your team has a habit of turning up where they’re not wanted.” The look he gives her is calm despite the tension in his shoulders, the way his hand clenches his mask. “Did you tell them?”

“No!”

He comes to her, taking her by the shoulders. She tilts her head back without prompting. Something flickers across his face, there and gone again before she can even process it. “Of course they’re tracking you. Heroes hold grudges like the worst of us. Almost as bad as most of us.”

She looks away. “I didn’t-”

“You didn’t think it’d be like this?”

She breaks away from him. “I don’t know, okay!” She sighs, cupping an elbow. “I didn’t know. There was- it was a training exercise. A mental simulation. A no win scenario. I died. I died and they… It’s hard to walk away from that. I’m trying. Dad, I’m trying.”

“I know.” He chucks her under the chin, curves his fingers over her shoulders. “You’re not as alone as you think, baby girl.”

“What do you mean by that?”

His smile makes her blood run cold.

**Star City**

**December 29, 2339, PDT**

He’s fixing the fletching on one of his arrows when the window opens and Artemis slips through. She leaves the window open behind her.

“What’re you doing here,” he says. Then he looks away and clears his throat. “You weren’t followed, were you?”

She glares at him. “Of course. Cheshire’s right on my tail. You better get a move on Arrow; they’ll be here soon. Five minutes should be enough of a warning, right?”

His fingers curl around the shaft of his arrow as he stares at her. Something’s different. It’s not that she’s glaring – Artemis tends to do that more often than not, and if all of his assignments are going to involve this amount of friendly fire, he might start rethinking joining the League. “What’s going on? Did you find something out?”

“Is it really too much to ask that you hold off on the interrogation for five seconds?”

“Artemis-”

“Shut up. Shut up,” she says. Then she softens. “I just got here. Can we just-”

Roy nods even though he should know better than to trust it. Artemis is very rarely soft. She’s all hard edges, forced that way by her father, by her sister. By the League. But he holds his tongue, thinks about what she said last night, about dying for the team, about how she’d sat next to him and
told him about her childhood.

He sees her throat work.

“Hey-” He catches her wrist and waits until she looks at him. “What do you know?” She pulls away, cups her elbows, and turns almost completely away from him. His hand is touching her elbow before he can think. “Artemis.”

She shifts out of his reach, back still to him. She breathes in, loud in the silence of the room, broken only by the sounds of the city. It all seems so far away; the pit in his stomach spreads slowly, steadily, threatening to push him into action. Every part of him wants to poke and prod until she tells him everything, but with Artemis, he’s learning to be still. She’s been fighting for so long; it’s easier when she feels she only has to fight herself.

Instead of answering, she turns and kisses him.

For a second, he can’t move. For a second, he can only think that this is not what Batman meant when he assigned Roy to be her handler. But then she touches his jaw and tilts his head back, pressing her mouth more insistently to his and all he can think about is giving her what she needs. If this is it, it’s no hardship for him.

He ignores the way his mouth has gone dry and the way his hands shake.

He clears a space on the rickety coffee table, shoving the supplies to the floor. He settles his hands on her waist, if only for a moment, and then hauls her closer, splaying one hand at her back, between her shoulder blades. Roy moves to pick her up, ignoring the protesting of his muscles, the wounds not quite healed. She helps anyway, hoisting herself onto the counter.

He spares a moment to think about letting her wrap her legs around him and carrying her to his bed, unmade, laying her down in the tangled sheets but then Artemis claws at the back of his shirt, pulling it up. He gets lost in the fabric while Artemis pulls herself from his grasp and reaches for the clasp of her pants.

She has her zipper down before his shirt is off; he grabs her hips and pulls her close, settling her between his legs. Roy noses up the middle of her stomach, splaying his hands on her back and mouths the spot below the bottom of her bra. Artemis cards her fingers through his hair, scratching at his scalp as he slides one hand down and tucks his fingers in the back of her pants. He looks up at her.

The bruising on her shoulder is deep. It’s fresh in a splotchy blue-black way. He puts his fingers to the edges.

“It’s nothing,” she says, pulling away. Looking away, closed off and guarded. She pushes him back and stands. She shoves her own pants down, underwear with it; she’s only wearing a bra now, black sporty thing. Something shifts in his chest.

He takes her hips and guides her to his ratty couch. There’s a bit of a challenge in her eyes- when is there not? – as she settles back, pushing her hair out of her way.

He puts his fingers in her, first one, then two, like she clearly likes, in a way that makes her arch her back, eyes closed, and bite her lip. He braces a hand above her shoulder, and his fingers tangle in her hair. He wonders who she’s thinking of now Wally, maybe, or Superboy or Kaldur-

What would Kaldur say about all of this? His best friend. Her teammate, leader, friend?
But she’s looking at him, gaze steady. She’s here, not anywhere else, and she hooks her arm around his neck, draws him down to kiss him, body pressed flush against him. This is when he doubts his own cynicism. More than that, he wants to put his hands on her, follow the planes of her body, to recognize her in the way he knows her best, to find her out in ways he doesn’t.

Roy hoists her up the couch so it’s easier to lift her hips and put his mouth to her. He keeps at it, fingers and tongue, until she’s shuddering and quivering in his hands, thighs tight to his ears.

She pushes him away, forces him back until he’s lying and then she’s climbing on top of him, a challenge in her eyes, in the set of her jaw.

Roy catches her hips before she-

He doesn’t have anything, so he ruts against her, slick, and she makes a sound she didn’t meant to make, clenches her teeth to muffle any more that might escape her. Roy grins, then clamps down on it, eyebrows drawing together as everything begins narrowing down to this, to her. He shakes it off before it’s too late. He does pick her up and carry her to his bed. Her arms curl around his shoulders and neck, mouth ghosting over his jaw.

She’s restless, after, shifting and twisting in the sheets. They aren’t touching, either of them, though Roy’s bed isn’t so large that it’s a simple feat.

“Hey-” He catches her wrist and forces himself to look at her face, even if he gets a bit distracted along the way. Roy ignores her smirk; he was mostly look at the bruising on her shoulder anyway. “What’s going on?”

Artemis turns on her side, curled away from him. She sighs. He has to strain to hear her. “Queen Bee is blackmailing M’gann. I don’t know what she knows. And Connor- Superboy has a code word. I don’t know what it is, but it shuts him down. You say it, and he doesn’t even know who he is anymore. What he’s telling them. What they’re telling him to do.”

It takes a moment to register; the bruise on her shoulder wraps around to her back. Like a handprint. A large handprint. Roy swallows.

She’s turned around; she’s watching him.

“We need to tell the League,” he says.

“I know.” Then she laughs, bitter. “You must love this. You were right all along.”

“No, Artemis,” he says. Her name, the call sign she should be using and not a name that practically demands animal print. Not a name that means she’s just another pawn tucked away in villains’ cages, let out only to cause carnage. “No. I’m not happy about it.”

He’s not one for offering comfort, but now, after watching bits of her chip away under the stress of lying to everyone, of having to trust him and only him, of working with her father-

She hasn’t said anything, not really, but Roy knows enough to suspect, to taste bile in his throat whenever he thinks about accusing her of being the mole, of being so sure of it. She wants nothing more than to be the exact opposite of her father, of even her sister, for all the reasons she keeps tightly hidden away but can’t stop from showing through the cracks he’s learning to see.

She slips from his grasp.

“I have to go,” she says. He watches her dress, watches her put Tigress back on. When she’s done,
she meets his eyes for a moment. There’s a flush on her neck and on her cheeks, but there’s also
determination. And a bit of a challenge. “Good luck tomorrow. With the League.”

The Induction ceremony. He’d almost forgotten about it. Strange when he’s been waiting for most of
his life, plus six months.

Before she slips away, he catches her behind the knees and pulls her back unto his lap, only her
clothes and the tangle of sheets between them. He cups her face, the side without her mask, and
looks at her, feels something expanding in his chest, nearly unbearable, and then kisses her to ease it.

She rests her hand on his chest, palm over the bandages covering the wound her sister left there.

And then she’s gone.

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**Star City**
**December 30, 0635 PDT**

Okay.

So that happened.

Artemis lifts her hand to cover her smile, not sure if the mess of emotions inside her will come out as
a smile or a grimace.

Her body feels more relaxed than it’s been in ages, but each step that brings her closer to the zeta
beam and closer to returning brings that same old tension right back.

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**Star City**
**December 30, 0716 PDT**

A knock at the door wakes him up.

Roy rubs his face, trying to clear the grit out of his eyes, and then picks up a tee-shirt on the way.
He's still pulling it over his head when he answers the door.

It's Kaldur, dressed in civilian clothes, and more awake than anyone has right to be at this time of the
day.

He steps back to let him come in, yawning and covering it up with his hand. His neck is sore and his
muscles ache, a good ache, but really, Roy just wants to crawl into his bed and not move for a few
more hours. He's used to getting rest where and when he can.

Kaldur surveys the room, looking over Roy's map on the wall, and lingering on the medical supplies
on the counter that he still hasn't put away. "You are injured?"

"It's nothing. What's up?"

Kaldur's expression betrays nothing. "I must speak with you as leader of the team and also as your
friend."

"Everything's fine."
"No. I do not believe that is truly the case. The last mission, you deliberately acted against the plan and put the team's mission in jeopardy."

"I saw an opportunity and I took it," Roy says.

"We work as a team. You have known that since you joined us." Kaldur shakes his head. "And it is more than that. You are distracted, my friend, and have not been yourself for several weeks."

Roy shrugs. He absently looks over his map, though he hasn't put anything new up for some time, hasn't felt the need for it. He thinks about Artemis. About last night. "Lot on my mind."

Kaldur grips Roy's shoulder, looking worried. "Perhaps I can ease your burden."

It could be easier to tell Kaldur the truth about everything, to lessen the chances of the team interfering with her mission, their mission. Would it truly be so dangerous for Artemis to have another ally outside of Roy?

Roy opens his mouth. He shuts it, swallowing, and rubs his jaw. "No," he says. "Not yet."

"Soon," Kaldur warns. "But for now, I shall accompany you to your induction ceremony. The whole team will be there."

Roy nods, already turned away from him. He can speak with Batman in the Watchtower, tell him the truth about the moles in the team, and maybe, just maybe bring Artemis home.

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**Santa Prisca**  
**December 30 1757, ECT**

The whole thing goes south so fast.

She stares as Connor freezes under his code phrase. Red sun, she thinks, mouth dry. Red sun.

But then M'gann knocks out Queen Bee and calls for the rest of the team to join them. Backup. They’d planned this. For a minute, she’d been joined right into their psychic linkup. For a minute, it was almost like old times. Hearing them in her head makes her falter. Makes her lose her footing.

Kaldur turns his head. Their gazes meet and hold.

They’d known. They know, and act like it, taking on all the power players present. Luthor and his Mercy, before they disappear with Queen Bee in a helicopter. Blockbuster. Bane and his thugs.

Wally goes for Sportsmaster.

It’s Jade that pulls them into the shadows, Jade that leads them away from both the Team and the alliance of super villains that make the Injustice League look like recess. It’s Jade that does all of that because Artemis’ mind is elsewhere.

It’s not them. M’gann and Connor-

“‘It’s not them,” she says. Hearing it makes it seem more real, somehow.

There is no mole.

There is no mole and it’s likely that her own cover is burned, but Artemis wants to laugh, to throw
her hands in the air and shout her joy to the world. She wants to find Roy and tell him. Celebrate with him. She can’t fight the grin, doesn’t even try to push away the bright ball of euphoria in her chest. It’s not them.

“Artemis,” Jade says, and Artemis freezes in her tracks.

Jade’s standing half in the shadow, half in the light. She’s holding her mask in her hands, and she’s looking at it. Artemis watches her turn it over once, twice, and then Jade lets it fall to the ground. Her expression, what Artemis can see of it, is grim. Her hands shake, and when she shifts her weight, Artemis goes for her crossbow.

She has it up and aimed before she realizes Jade didn’t go for her sais or her sword. Slowly, carefully, Artemis backs away anyway, putting space between them.

“Artemis,” Jade says. “You’re right. It’s not them you have to worry about.”

“Every girl for herself, right?”

“That’s not what I mean.” Jade turns her head, disappearing further into the shadows.

Artemis takes another step back, keeping her crossbow centered on Jade’s chest. “How long have you known?”

“That you’re a mole yourself?” Jade shakes her head. Her mouth thins. “Long enough.”

“Yeah.” They’re in the middle of nowhere, the far side of the island. Jade must have a way out, but Artemis doesn’t. Hail the team, hail Roy-

“How’d I mess up?”

“You didn’t. Not really.” Jade spreads her hands, palm up, and gives a half shrug. “Red Arrow told me.”

“Always with the lies,” Artemis says. “Don’t you ever get tired of it?”

“I tried to tell you about him earlier but you wouldn’t listen. I’m not the only one he told,” Jade says. “Dear old Dad has known since you came to him.”

Artemis laughs. “Now I know you’re lying. Sportmaster would never tolerate-”

Cheshire grabs her shoulder. “Arrow’s not what you think he is!”

She tries to knock Cheshire’s hand away. Little good it does; even when she shoves her away Cheshire won’t let go. They tumble to the ground.

“Listen to me,” Cheshire says, but Artemis ignores her.

She jabs her thumb into Cheshire’s side, right above her hipbone. She hits her in the stomach, uses her momentary shock, winded state to push her off and over. Artemis straddles her, shoves her in the dirt when she tries to sit up, fight back. “You’re lying! You think he’d- you think-” Artemis shoves Jade’s shoulders down. “He’s-“

“Artemis,” Jade says, no longer fighting, not even moving. Artemis digs her fingers in, feels nothing when Jade winces.

“You’re very good at lying,” she says. “You survive on lies.”
“Yes,” Jade says. “But not about this. Not about you.”

“You attacked him,” Artemis says. She feels hollow. Jade just looks at her, and Artemis feels bile rising in her throat, a thick empty feeling growing in the pit of her stomach. She rolls off, back to Jade, and pulls her knees to her chest.

“Artemis,” Jade puts a hand on her shoulder; Artemis shrugs it off, ignoring the way Jade sighs. “Artemis, you have to know that he—”

“Shut up.”

Jade is quiet, but Artemis couldn’t even hear her over the rushing in her head, the jumble of thoughts and growing realization she wants to deny, deny, deny. She never would’ve thought he’d, that he’d do this, and maybe that’s why it worked, for him, for Sportmaster.

He’s going to the League. He’s in the League.

Artemis pushes to her feet, but then there’s a sharp pain in her neck, almost like an insect bite, and her vision goes hazy. She blinks once, twice to clear it. She thinks she hears her name, she thinks she hears panic, but that might be the sudden racing of her heart, and then everything goes black.

The Watchtower
December 30, 23:55, EST

Roy’s mind clears when he’s surrounded by the League kneeling before Vandal Savage. It’s a bit like waking up, though waking up has never been this painful, even when he’d broken his ribs-

He’s never broken his ribs. That was the other Roy, the real Roy. These are not his memories. They feel real, and he remembers the pain, the anger and idiocy during training that put him in that position, but none of it is real to him.

Everything he’s told them, everything he’s ever said, that only in this moment does he remember. Sportmaster knows that Green Arrow is Oliver Queen, that Dinah is Black Canary, that-

He knows the team, now, too.

It’s not a rush of information, and most of it is hazy, but the memories are familiar in a way that they shouldn’t be, not when he’s reliving them for the first time. He remembers the mission in Rhaelasia, standing on that roof with the two of them, answering every question they put in front of him. He remembers Seoul, Beijing and San Paolo. Istanbul.

He remembers releasing the Starotech and infecting the League with it; he remembers cornering Batman only minutes before, not with the intent to tell him about Superboy and Miss Martian, but to take out the last holdout. All of the League under mind control, now kneeling before Vandal Savage.

He made it happen. He is the mole.

He remembers-

*Can I trust my daughter?*

No.
Make her trust you. Be what she needs.

Roy runs.

**Washington D.C.**  
**December 31, 0700 EDT**

With luck as his only ally, Roy manages to evade Aquaman, Flash and GA. He smells of sewer and sweat, ripe with the realization of what he is. What he’s done. Roy has a cache in every major city. The D.C. one is close, but he zig-zags through the sewers until he’s certain he’s lost the League members after him.

Once he gets there, he tends to his battered body and tries to plan. Artemis. He has to find her. He has to warn her. Sportsmaster knows about her, so more probably do too.

Cheshire.

Roy drops the bloody gauze into the sink. He has no idea where to start.

First things first. He pulls out a backup bow and restocks his quiver. Out of habit, he goes through his cache, doing inventory and checking the arrows. They’re good, but better to check then not. A broken arrow could mean the difference between victory or loss, survival or death, and it’s been awhile since he was here last.

It’s more like a closet than an apartment, just a small room, two windows and a crappy kitchenette. He has nothing but the basics: a plate, a cup, some non-perishables in case he has to hole up for more than a day. He has no time for decoration, no time for the niceties of leisure. It’s a pad for when he has to crash, when he needs to hole up, when he needs to resupply his arrows or any of his usual weapons. There’s another ratty couch, one he’d brought in himself, that smells just as bad as his other one. He’s always been able to ignore it before.

He’s not there long when a there’s rattling at the doorknob. It only takes seconds for his bow to be up, arrow strung, and then the door is kicked in.

It’s Kaldur.

But is it really Kaldur? Have they gotten the team too? It sounds like Kaldur, with his promises of restraint and his demand for answers. It sounds like him, it looks like him, but Roy doesn’t even know his own self, how can he trust his best friend?

“Tell me something you haven’t told anyone else. Tell me who broke your heart.”

Kaldur sighs. “Tula. The girl I love chose my best friend Garth over me.” His expression tightens, resolve clear. “While my best friend on the surface aims an arrow at my chest.”

Roy lowers it, still tense. “I have to-”

“Whatever it is, we will solve it together. With the team.”

Kaldur doesn’t understand. How could he? Roy never told him anything. Roy never trusted him enough with the truth. Was that all him, or part of his programming? He doesn’t know that Roy, that he-
It's outweighing any other thought, the knowledge that Artemis trusts him, more than she trusts anyone else right now, and it's all his fault. He has to find her. She has no idea that they're coming for her, that they know everything.

He remembers how he'd said it, how he said anything they asked for, gave anything Sportsmaster wanted.

His bow drops to his side, arrow clenched in his other hand.

“Roy, come with me.”

“I can’t,” he says. He drops his bow on the table and rubs his hands across his face. “I can’t. They know. They know about Artemis. I don’t know where she hides out. She can’t know they’re coming. She doesn’t know that they know.”

Kaldur’s eyes go wide. Shock, relief, quickly followed by concern and then resolve. "They have the Justice League.”

“I can’t abandon her!”

“I do not suggest that.” Kaldur puts his hand on Roy’s shoulder. “I would never suggest that.”

He’s right. He has to prioritize. But how? The League or Artemis. The impossible choice between the mess he’s made and the consequences that she’ll pay for. His fault.

Roy knows she’d never forgive him for not going with the team, not helping the League when they need it. He knows he’ll never forgive himself if something happens to her because of him.

He knows he’s the only one that she’s letting herself trust.

He knows nothing.

He follows Kaldur into the bioship where he explains, in as few words as possible, the truth, what happened in the Watchtower. And when they’re joined by the rest of the team, but Red Tornado has already clued them in on the League situation.

Wally turns to him. “And Artemis?”

Roy tells them all of that too, summing up everything since the beginning of the month.

Only a month.

“I am glad she is not truly lost to us, my friend, just as you are not.”

Roy looks away. “She may yet be.”

“Let us retake the League,” Kaldur says. “And then, then we well go for her.”

Black Canary screams, still tied up in the back. The bioship wavers and starts to drop. They’re all clutching their ears, curled over in their seats or on their knees on the floor.

It stops suddenly, and the bioship rights itself, M’gann’s eyes glowing green.

“You…” Superboy says, sounding faint. “You just brain blasted her.”

M’gann just looks flushed and determined, piloting the bioship right through the uneasiness in the
team. Once they get back to the cave, Roy lets the team make their plans and reach out to their contacts both on the surface and in Atlantis, scientists and experts who might be able to synthesize countermeasures against Savage’s Starotech. He stays out of their way. Perhaps the less he knows, the better.

A clone.

It brings another thought to his mind. Where is he? The real Roy Harper?

He’s still thinking about it when M’gann comes to him. She sits next to him on the bench and waits for him to speak.

“Need to go into my head?”

“I did this for Conner,” M’gann says. “I’m sorry, Red Arrow, but I need to see everything.”

She enters his mind carefully, but she still rends the walls he’s put up, the barriers he fights to keep up even though he doesn’t actively do it.

He has secrets. Artemis has secrets.

In the plane of his mind, the pieces fall together, all the moments when he’s lost time and never even noticed, more too, the latest circling around Artemis. It’s unavoidable, M’gann seeing this: Artemis moving against him, his hand tangled in her hair, holding her forehead against his.

Oh, M’gann says as Roy despairs and together they relive it all. All of it, including be what she needs, Sportsmaster said, again, in a warehouse in Gotham, sound of the bay filtering in. Make her trust you.

He feels anew the jab of Cheshire’s weapon against the vulnerable side of his neck, the blood dripping down his skin, and the first time, after he’s spilled valuable secrets, after he told Sportsmaster the truth about Artemis:

It takes minutes, hours. Seconds maybe. Roy’s lost track when M’gann retreats quietly; she sits by his side and says nothing for a long time.

“We’ll find her,” M’gann says, voice a balm to Roy’s mind, calming the turmoil in his head. “We’ll free the League and then we’ll find her.”

Roy nods, says nothing, and waits until a team of teenagers is ready to slip into the Watchtower and take back what’s theirs. In the end, it takes an hour, tops, to take back the League, to beat off Vandal Savage and retake the Watchtower.

An hour too long, compounded by the time necessary to synthesize the vaccine.

When it’s over, for a few brief minutes, they ignore him, or forget about him, or play denial. He slips to a terminal and opens the Watchtower’s database. Like he thought, there’s an address listed for both Artemis and her mother, Paula Nguyen, aka Huntress, now retired.

Gotham. She’s a Gotham girl. He thinks it should surprise him, but it really doesn’t.

He’s not barred from the zeta beams; no one’s taken his access yet. He slips away before anyone can and walks into an alleyway from a broken down telephone booth.

He walks past the park without stopping, without pausing to remember or think.
She lives only blocks away. The latch on her window is easy to unhook; it creaks only a little as he pushes it open and slips inside. It's her room, judging by the quiver of arrow leaning against the near wall, the textbooks piled haphazardly on the desk. A few are open, but obviously haven't been used recently. The bed either, for that matter, and Roy knows Artemis hasn’t been here in the last few days.

It’s been weeks.

He heads back to the window when the Alice in Wonderland poster catches his eye. He stares at it for a long moment.

The light flares on.

Roy blinks and shields his eyes, trying to make out the shape in the doorway – a woman in a wheelchair, baseball bat in hand. Artemis’ mother.

“Hi,” he says, then mentally kicks himself. Hi? Really?

She glances over him. “She is not here.”

“Who- Artemis?”

“She has not been here for weeks.”

He opens his mouth to ask, but stops when he sees the grief around her eyes, the tension in her mouth. She lays her bat across her lap and leaves the room.

After a second, Roy follows her.

The living room is small, the furniture old but well cared for. His eyes are drawn to the newspapers on the table, some of them turning yellow with age. He doesn’t have to get closer to know why they haven’t been thrown away. He has a lot of those same articles and pictures tacked to a wall in his apartment.

He looks back at her. “Mrs…”

The frown stops him. He can’t doubt any longer that this woman was once Huntress.

“Ma’am,” Roy says. A fist clenches around his heart, and he goes to her, falls to his knees before her. He reaches for her hands. She starts to pull away, but then stops. “It’s wrong. They’re lies,” he says. Her grip on his hands tightens. “She’s been working with us. With me. To take down her father and his allies from the inside.”

He can’t bear to look at her face; Roy keeps his head bowed.

“Where is she? Where is my daughter?”

“I don’t know. But I’m going to find her. I’ll bring her back to you.”

With that promise, he leaves her, unable to bear it. How could he stay when this is his fault? He goes out through Artemis’ window, the same way he arrived. Out on the roof, he’s not alone. Cheshire waits for him, her sword at ready. She’s not wearing her mask.

“What are you doing here?”

Roy stares at her. “Looking for your sister.”
The scowl tightens. “Why?”

“What’s it to you, anyway? Every girl for herself, isn’t it?”

“You think I want her hurt? I never wanted that.”

Roy spots Kaldur emerging from the shadows. Jade’s eyes flicker between them. She angles her body to keep both of them within her field of vision.


That startles her. She stares at him, sword lowered a few inches.

“Yeah,” Roy says. We know all about the light. We know all about what I am.”

“She doesn’t.”

“You told her I was the mole and that’s all she needed to know, right? Not that I didn’t know, or that I wasn’t… that I didn’t… Was it just another game, Jade? Always playing. You should have killed me in that alleyway,” Roy says, ignoring the way Kaldur stiffens.

“I wanted to. I was going to-”

Because you found out what he was doing with us. To her through me. You still care about her.”

Jade stays silent a beat too long. Roy’s eyes narrow. “Or is the criminal too strong in you, even for your sister?”

She hits him. He tastes blood from his mouth, and he holds up his hand, stopping Kaldur in his tracks. He straightens. “How old was she when you bailed? Young, right? Still had a teddy bear she slept with every night-“

“Shut up! You don’t know what it was like.”

“But you did! You did, and you left her there-“

She hits him again, knocking him down on the roof; Roy pushes himself into a crouch, ready to spring at her again.

“Enough!” Kaldur comes near enough to step between them should either of them strike for the other. Roy stays down. He knows goading her like this is counterproductive. He knows that; this whole mess isn’t her fault. A large part of him doesn’t want to find the energy to care.

He sits back on his heels, tasting blood in his mouth. His lip stings when he touches it with his tongue.

The fight is gone from Jade, too; her shoulders slump forward. “They took her. I got her away and they- They were waiting for us and I couldn’t. I couldn’t help her.”

Kaldur steps in. “Do you know who it was?”

She shrugs. “I don’t think the Light knew what Sportsmaster was up to with her. But they were shadow players.” There’s real fear on her face. “If the League of Shadows has Artemis- We can’t go to Ra’s al Ghul.”

“No,” Kaldur says. “We will go right to the source.”
Belle Reve  
January 1, 0746 CDT

He’s never actually been to Belle Reve, for all that he’s helped put a lot of people here.

It takes some wrangling, Warden Strange showing clear reluctance, but eventually, they lead him into a visiting room. There’s a mirror on the wall, probably one of those two-way things, a table in the middle and Sportsmaster in one of the chairs.

Roy sits in the other. He waits, despite the hard edge of impatience growing in his gut. Sportsmaster leans back in his chair, mockingly insolent. He’s not handcuffed, but he is wearing an inhibitor collar despite his lack of superpowers.

“I was wondering when you’d show up,” he says. “I guess the arrow is no longer broken.”

Roy clenches his jaw.

Clear M’gann says.

“Where is she?”

Sportsmaster shrugs, the corner of his mouth turning up. “Artemis? I haven’t seen her since I was taken. How should I know?”

“You knew. You knew she wasn’t on your side.”

His smile flatlines. “She’s where she belongs.”

Roy shakes his head, one hand fisting on his knee, hidden away under the table. “She belongs with the team.”

“With the team? Or with you?” His smile is nasty, edged. Roy curls his fingers into his palm. “Tell me, Red, what exactly my daughter needed you to be. What was it?”

It’s startling, this mockery of a father threatening his daughter’s-

His fingers curl into his palms. What. His daughter’s what? Roy isn’t anything to her except someone she thought she could trust, and can’t. He’s a traitor. He’s a clone, a fake, nothing but a copy.

Roy.

Sportsmaster looks past him at the mirror. “You brought the Martian.”

Roy ignores him as she says his name again, nothing else. M’gann’s voice is gentle, and it eases some of the tension in his shoulders. Do Martians have some sort of emotional manipulation in their psychic abilities? He shakes his head. That’s not fair to M’gann.

“What secrets do you hope to discover here?” Sportsmaster smiles, mocking. “I’ve lots of them.”

Roy sits back, staring. "It was you. At the hospital."

Sportsmaster raises an eyebrow, shrugging. "You think so? Pretty story, don't you think? Wraps everything up all nice and neat. After all, it's what you're going to want to believe. Let's her off the
hook, too. And maybe she'll believe it because she's going to want to believe it so badly. That way, she can go back to her little fantasy of playing hero, being the good guy." Sportsmaster leans forward. He taps a finger on the table. "Maybe I did and maybe I didn't. But it's just speculation. All of it. You could have your Martian friend read my mind, but…"

He smiles, spreads his hands in front of him, palms up. Roy wants to hit him.

"Made sure of that. You never were one for getting caught on camera. Not until Artemis came along. Then you were everywhere."

He smiles. "Notice that, did you?

"Did you tip them off? Take photos and send them to those blogs and newspapers yourself?"

"Does it matter? In the end, Red, blood will tell."

Roy shakes his head. "She's not like you."

"She's more like me than you're letting yourself see. You really think she'll trust you? You got her real close and then betrayed her. Her precious team. The League. That's all you hero-types care about. Your League. Think she'll honestly believe you after all of that?"

"No. Not me she won't." He looks to the glass. "But she'll believe Miss Martian. Aqualad, the rest of the team. Them, she'll believe." Roy leans forward, tired of the runaround. "I have a very angry Martian behind that glass that wants her friend back."

He snorts. "You won't."

_We’re teenagers_, M’gann says. Sportsmaster winces and so does Roy. _We do stupid, irrational things every day._

The ferocity of it burns, how far she’s willing to go for the team, for Artemis. It startles him though it shouldn’t, that it nearly matches his own. She shields him, but Roy still feels her push, feels the strength of it against his mind.

“Last I saw her,” Sportsmaster says, sweat on his brow, looking pale and bruised under his eyes. “She was with Jade.”

“Jade.”

_He’s telling the truth. Artemis and Cheshire disappeared at Santa Prisca_, M’gann says. _I can’t get more from him. Not without…_

Roy looks into the glass. He doesn’t need to see her to know that she’d do it. For Artemis, she’d rip open his mind for the secrets he’s holding from them, the truth about her, about the real Roy Harper.

He gets up and turns toward the door.

“You really think she can go back to that life after what she’s done?”

He feels M’gann react, but Roy gets there first, fist hard against Sportsmaster’s jaw, knocking him over.

He’s still on the floor, tangled up in the chair and laughing, as Roy leaves.
Undisclosed Location  
December 31, 0400, NST

Artemis comes to suddenly, alert with no grogginess to fight off. She’s on her knees, head down, somehow upright instead of collapsed on the floor. The room she’s in looks like nothing more than a typical office: a desk, books on shelves, art on the walls. The details slip past her; she’s more interested in the people in it.

Ra’s al Ghul is a tall thin man with piercing eyes. She’s only ever truly seen him in photographs before, but she’s read his stats. She knows what he is. No man that powerful ever gets where he is on good will and mercy.

But he’s not paying her any attention. All of his is on Queen Bee, standing beside him. And Lex Luthor beside her.

Oh, this is bad. So bad.

Her hands are tied behind her back, tight enough to hurt and the nearest door is on the other side of the room, the three of them between it and her. There’s a window, but bound like she is, it’s not going to do her any good. She has no weapons but the knife in her boot, no allies to call on.

“Someone’s awake.”

The voice comes from her left, a fourth person in the room. It’s Scandal Savage, mask down and arms crossed. She’s lounging against the wall like the big players in the room are nothing to her.

She’s the daughter of Vandal Savage. Of course they’re not.

She licks her mouth. "What do you want with me? You have your mole; you don't need me."

Part of her hopes for a denial.

"Ah,” Queen Bee says. “Someone has been sharing secrets. Your father?”

Artemis shrugs, watching her warily as her heart sinks. "Does it matter?"

"Perhaps your sister, then."

She clenches her teeth, holding back the instant denial. "What do you want?"

"It isn't about what we want, my dear.” Luthor looks at his companions. “It's about your father.”

Ra’s al Ghul looks at her like she's a puzzle he's already figured out. "Your father spent a considerable amount of our resources on you."

“For what?”

The looks they give each other make her mouth go dry. She feels like she can't breathe. “What’s going on? What do you mean?”

Was Jade right? But if Sportsmaster knew all along, why would he

She doesn’t understand.

"Indeed,” al Ghul says, as if he's read her mind. The stories she's heard, she wouldn't put the ability past him. "I rather think that was the point."
“I think the point is what we should do with her.” Luthor settles back against the desk like some sort of lounging playboy. “We have potential for an opportunity here.”

Queen Bee does not look impressed. “The last opportunity like this did not pan out like we planned.”

“Unfortunate as recent events are, my dear, the Light still shines.”

Artemis jerks when Scandal crouches down near her, settling a hand on Artemis’ elbow. “Listen to them. Talking like you’re not even here. Irritating, isn’t it?”

Artemis keeps her mouth shut, fingers curling into fists as Scandal’s hand slides down her arm. She feels a jerk and a quick stabbing pain, and then the pressure around her wrists is suddenly gone. Artemis freezes, trying not to give it away, but she can’t help turning her head to stare at Scandal. Scandal looks up.

The window just beyond the desk. It’s closer than the door, but also closer to the others.

Artemis stares at her. “Why would you-”

Scandal leans closer, mouth near her ear. "Your father betrayed you much as mine betrayed me."

Artemis hears the rage and sees it in her eyes even if it isn’t visible on the rest of her face when she pulls back. Hiding it and good at it. She’s missing pieces, but a picture starts to form.


Pain, anger, a myriad of emotions flit across her face. They’re gone just as quickly. Artemis gets it. If Sportsmaster had done it to M’gann or Zatanna or any of the team…

Scandal pushes on her shoulder, just a light tap. "Save your thanks, hero. Should we meet again, it won’t be like this."

Artemis grins, just a little, ducking her head to hide it as Scandal retreats to the far side of the room.

Then she looks up, mouth set, watching Luthor, Queen Bee, and Ra’s talking quietly. They’re going to notice the second she moves. She’s relatively sure she can handle Luthor. Maybe. And Queen Bee’s enthrallment shouldn’t work on Artemis. Hopefully. If she stays far enough away.

She has no doubts about Ra’s al Ghul. He trained her father, her mother, her sister. He puts his Shadows to sleep with only a thought. He might be a problem.

Scanning the room and only half listening to the conversation that continues as if she’s not even in the room, the lamp on the desk catches her attention. The base is a metal bar that turns in on itself, the shade a simple white. That’ll work.

They all react as soon as she moves, but Artemis sidesteps, hooks her hand around the base of the lamp and throws it. It smashes the glass. Despite the shards left, it’d be easy to just dive right through, but at the last second she changes her trajectory, planting her feet on the window sill and using it as leverage to leap up and out and grabbing the edge of the roof, and hauls herself up.

She’s not fast enough; the throwing star cuts across her cheek. Artemis hits the roof, rolls across the tiles, and shoves to her feet.

She runs.
There's a zeta beam in every major city. She just has to find it. Or find another way through, but not even shadows can track her through a zeta beam. It'll be somewhere downtown, like they all are, because no villain likes a showdown in the open countryside.

She leaps from the rooftop unto a truck as it passes by. The momentum nearly carries her over the edge. She clings there by her fingertips, scrabbling to keep her grip, and then uses her elbow to give her the leverage to get to the top.

A thump comes from her left, up near the cab of the truck.

"That's awfully loud for a ninja," she says, but he's silent, coming at her with his sword. She ducks, stepping to the side, but he mirrors it. His sword slices across her arm, tearing open the skin. It burns; jellyfish toxin?

No time to worry about it. He comes at her again.

Artemis steps in to his space, catching his arm and shoving it away. Her punch knocks him back; she follows, kicking him in the face. While he's still staggering, Artemis jumps from the truck as it passes over a bridge. She catches the light pole and swings around. Her grip slips. She flies free, landing on the sidewalk in a crouch. Two pedestrians stare at her, startled from their walk; she ignores them searching the shadows for only a handful of seconds.

She runs before anything can materialize out of it, shoving into the thick of the people in the street, going about their business. It's still early, but enough people are out that she faces a decent chance of blending in. That is, until one kid points at her, saying something to his friends and she realizes that she needs to stay out of the crowd until she can ditch the Tigress costume.

Artemis turns around; there are two of them this time, like she's facing a revolving door of ninjas. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees a man in uniform drawing near.

Great. The cops too?

She spins on her heel and sprints through the crowd, pushing past them and ignoring their angry words. She doesn't speak Rhaelasian, but their meaning is more than clear. She keeps going, dodging through the people until she slips between two buildings, runs past the dumpster that seems to be in every alley ever, past the photo booth that's out of order, written letters large and blocky, in English and in Rhaelasian, into the cross street and a new crowd full of new people that aren't looking for her and haven't recognized her yet.

She's tired, breathing hard, but Artemis pushes herself forward, weaving between the groups of people in front of her. She freezes in front of a restaurant, the smell of tea and rice reminding her that she hasn't eaten in a long time.

Out of order.

Artemis jerks back. She turns around.

There are three of them behind her. No. Four. One lingers just out of the reach of the light. They're like a damn hydra. Cut off one head and two more pop up. And they're in her way. Shortest route back is through them. She could go around the block, but there might be more of them ahead of her.

She crouches, as if tying her shoelace, and pulls the knife from her boot. Then she walks toward them.

All she has to do is slip past four ninjas, four League of Shadows ninjas, get a thirty second gap
between them and the zeta beam and pray that Red Arrow hasn't deactivated her zeta beam access.

Get traught.

She changes the grip on her knife and walks forward. They watch her, moving back with her, falling into a formation that'll close around her too soon. Do they know where she's headed?

A movement catches her eyes. There's one on the roof. Fine. Five ninjas.

She breathes in. Then out. Get traught.

She runs towards them, using one as leverage, stepping on his shoulder to give her a boost, a forced maneuver seven. She’s almost to the alley when another catches her arm and jerks her around. He hits her in the chest; all the air leaves her lungs. Doubling over, she uses the momentum to push him down to the ground where they tangle together, hands and limbs caught. It's nothing like the nice easy fight scenes in the movies, messy and painful.

They roll to the side, her head hitting the pavement, dazing her for a moment. Only a moment. Then she bites the shoulder nearest to her. The grunt of pain is muffled by his mask and clenched teeth. She shoves her fingers into the tender expanse of throat before her and hears him gag. Her knee comes up, and when his grip loosens on her arms, she rolls them over. Sweat and blood drips into her eyes, blinding her. She wipes them away and staggers to her feet.

They have her surrounded, the other three, photo booth behind them. The one she'd just taken out stays on the ground. For now, at least. Not much of a ninja if he doesn't get back to his feet soon.

"Not dead yet." Her voice sounds hoarse, worn out. She tests out her shoulder; strained and painful isn't enough to cover it. "Guess that means your master wants me alive."

She sees two nearest look at each other, the shift of their eyes in the holes of their masks. Yeah, she'll make it difficult for them. Even if... even if she goes down, it's not going to be without a fight.

She hopes she's not wrong about that.

Artemis dives forward, sidestepping one and stepping right into another’s fist. Dazed, she stumbles into the third. It throws them both off balance, and they both fall against the booth. She shoves her knife into the soft wood of the photo booth, catching through the fabric of his shirt. It won't hold, not for long, but she doesn't need long. She pushes open the door to the photo booth and shoves it closed behind her.

She leans against the back, foot up to wedge the door shut. It's a full door, instead of a half one or just a curtain. Probably to mask the true purpose, but she’s not going to complain about it. Not when it’s keeping them out and away from her.

They're hitting against it, trying to push it open. She just needs thirty seconds.

"Star City," she says.

A scratching comes from the other side of the door, then the tip of a knife shoves through the wood inches above her foot. Another comes through, nearly at the tip of her boot. They're figuring out where the resistance is coming from. They're going to shove a knife in her foot. Artemis closes her eyes, bracing herself. "Come on, come on-

Then comes the sweetest sound a girl could ever hear: Recognized: Artemis B-zero-seven.
She closes her eyes, breathes out, and is about to give her destination when:

*Access denied.*

“No!” She slams her fist against the wall. “No, no, no, no, no!”

Damn it. Red Arrow.

Outside the booth, everything suddenly goes quiet.

Calm down. She breathes in. Lets it out slowly. Shifts her feet on either side of the door. Her knife is outside, possibly still lodged in the wood of the photo booth but more likely in the hands of a Shadows’ ninja. She has no crossbow, no bow, no arrows. No money, except a bank account that’s probably being watched. A cache half a world away in Gotham, but no keycard to access it. No phone, either, but who would she call anyway? Not like the league has a 1-800 number.

Getting stranded somewhere with no weapons or money or allies isn’t as daunting a prospect when the League has zeta beams in every major city.

She has her fists and her feet. Her body.

And a whole gang of ninjas on the other side of the door. It’s too quiet outside, and no one has tried to get in. Do they think she’s made it? Or are they simply waiting her out.

She gets to her feet.

They’re on her as soon as she’s out the door, grabbing her arms. She uses their hold on her to swing her feet up and kick the one in front of her in the face,

The one on her left twists her arm almost too far, forcing a cry out of her and nearly sends her to her knees. Artemis kicks out, catching the one on her left in the shin. He goes down and she goes free.

Run.

Through the streets, through the people, not caring who sees her or recognizes her. She keeps going, pushing past them and ignoring them when they yell at her. It leads her onto an overpass, a pedestrian bridge with bike symbols painted into the ground.

There’s one at the end of the bridge.

Two. Two at the end of the bridge. She can’t tell if they’re the same ones from the booth, somehow moving quicker than her, or if more of them have joined the party. She turns her head. Two at her back. At least.

She scales the security fence and leaps.

The car roof buckles a bit under the impact, pain radiating from her knee to the rest of her leg. The car swerves, and she slides right off, onto the road and into traffic and the bright lights of the truck bearing down on her.

She hears the squeal of brakes, the blare of a horn. She rolls, feels it rush past her. Too close.

Run.

It hurts to run, her knee screaming every time she puts weight on it. She’s bleeding down her forearm where she hit the road and where she’d been cut. Her entire body aches.
Down a few blocks, Artemis veers into a park. It’s too open, too far away from the people providing a semblance of cover. No one’s around except the couple necking on the base of the giant statue. She rushes past them, through the trees, down the pathways, and soon she’s at the other side.

Her side aches and her knee feels like it’s about to give and her arm is slick with blood.

She hears no sound but her own breathing. No movement in the shadows. Nothing.

She’s not fooled; they’re here. It’s like running from the sunrise, no way to outpace it, no way to escape it. With her knee, she can’t run much longer.

She reaches up and breaks off a branch, wide as her wrist and about as long as her arm. She strips it of its leaves and holds it like a baseball bat. She gestures with her hand, the universal ‘come at me’ sign. “What are you waiting for?”

From behind her, one grabs her arm. She whacks him hard enough it cracks her branch, but he goes down. And stays down.

One down. Three left.

Maybe.

She breaks the branch in half and looks at the sharp point of one. Something ugly curls in her gut; she shakes her head. Facing them, she gestures to her face and then to the one in the middle. “Got a little blood on your mask.”

He doesn’t say anything. Instead, he looks at each of the others in turn and then they split up and disappear in three separate directions.

“Oh great,” Artemis says. “I really don’t need this, guys. Can’t we just fight in the open?”

Of course, they don’t answer her.

“Fine. You wanna play games in the middle of the night? We’ll play games.”

She grips her broken branches tighter. She’s Artemis, goddess of the hunt. Tigress, the predator of the night. A Huntress.

She creeps forward. Coverage sucks; the trees are planted in even lines. Even if their canopies stretch tall and wide, there’s too much visibility. But it also means there’s not a lot of places for them to hide. Nothing but the shadows, uneven from the city and the lights along the walking paths.

He blindsides her from behind, shoving her against a tree, his forearm under her chin.

Artemis can’t break away, can’t breathe, not with how he presses his arm up against her throat. He catches her wrist and holds her arm down. She tries to club him with the branch in her other hand, but he shrugs it off and pushes harder. Her vision begins to blur. She kicks, feeling lightheaded. The guy takes the hit and barely seems to feel it until she brings her knee up, sharp and with as much strength as she can.

Artemis goes down with him, gasping, hand pressed against her throat.

Get up. Get up. There are more. Get up.

She does, somehow. Finds her feet though her legs shake and everything hurts. She relieves the guy of his knife and picks up the bigger piece of the branch. He stirs; she kicks him without thinking, and
he stills.

Two left.

She turns, looking across the park. They’re out there somewhere. Waiting. For what? She tries to filter out the city sounds, the traffic and the people. She’s been trained for this.

If Sportsmaster can sense Martian shielding, she can find two lousy ninjas.

Listen, Artemis.

There!

She spins, knife raised, but it’s not a ninja. It’s worse.

Red Arrow catches her arm when she strikes out at him, pushes her back and steps away immediately.

She stares at him, too shocked. Then she throws the branch at him. He catches it. Drops it to the ground and holds his hands up like he’s trying to placate her.

Her eyes narrow. Red and his ninja buddies. Fine. She can handle this. She can handle him. His bow isn’t out, and it’ll take him a few seconds to get it. She has that, at least. There’s a cut on his cheek and his lip looks swollen.

After a few seconds of this ridiculous standoff, he lowers his hands. “You activated the zeta beam. It’s how I found you.”

“Yeah, did me a lot of good, didn’t it!”

“Artemis—”

“You’re a mole!”

He sighs, shoulders rounding forward. “I am. I was.”

She blinks. “Didn’t think you’d admit it,” she says, but he won’t look at her. Won’t even give her that courtesy. She wants to hit him, to get answers, to take off and never look back.

“What are you even doing here?”

“I.” He looks at her and then away. “I promised your mother I’d take you home.”

Her grip tightens on the hilt of her knife. “My mom. What are you doing with my mom?”

He doesn’t touch her, doesn’t come near her like he’s almost afraid, hands hanging at his sides. “I didn’t know. I didn’t know I was the mole. I’m like Superboy. Like Connor. I… I’m not Roy Harper. I’m his clone.”

“I really tried to tell you, Artemis.”

Artemis turns. “Jade?” She’s seeing things, brought on by not enough sleep, not enough food and too much running. She’s hit her head too hard. This cannot be happening.

Arrow and Cheshire.
Cheshire comes closer.

“I didn’t know what I am,” Arrow says. “I never would’ve. I wanted to protect you. In the end.”

His earnestness burns. She shoves her reaction to it away. “I don’t need you to protect me.”

“I know that.”

It’d be so easy to believe them. So easy to let them in. Her body hurts and she’s tired, and all she wants is to go home.

But it’s one thing she knows for certainty. She can’t go home.

“I am not-” She shuts her mouth, glaring at both of them. “There are ninjas. I have to go defeat them.”

Both of them call after her, but she ignores them, waving them off. Her knee feels like it’s getting worse, but tracking the other two ninjas isn’t hard. Not with the sounds of a fight filling the park.

The first thing she sees is the remaining bad guys, trapped in foam. She stares at them. It won’t hold them for long, not with how they’re struggling, already breaking free, but it’s long enough that Zatanna can spread her hands out, and say a garble of words Artemis can’t follow.

They brought the team with them.

The foam is gone, replaced by glowing chains around them. It doesn’t stop their struggles, and the chains start to creak. Zatanna sighs and puts her hands to their foreheads, says something and they both slump.

She sees Artemis and gives her a half smile. “They’re a lot easier to handle if they’re asleep.”

M’gann lands next to her. She hugs Artemis like she isn’t… like she hasn’t…

Red Arrow told me everything. We know the truth. You’re okay. You’re safe now.

Safe.

Artemis starts to shake. M’gann holds on and won’t let go, not even when Wally comes from the left and hugs them both as best he can, tight enough that the wound on her arm, the ache in all of her muscles start to protest.

Kaldur comes to them and somehow finds her shoulder in the tangle of them. “Can you ever forgive us for doubting you?”

Mount Justice
January 4, 0000 EDT

"I can see why you like it here,” Jade says.

Artemis nods absently. She missed it here. She missed the team more. Being back in the cave just makes her feel like she’s not wearing her own skin anymore.

“He meant for this to happen,” she says. She’s spent the last few weeks so focused on her mission, that none of this feels real anymore.
Jade looks at her like she knows what Artemis is thinking. “Soon your little hero friends are going to remember that I’m one of the bad guys. Come with me.”

For a second, she’s tempted; she really honestly is. Jade gets it, even if she might think Artemis is being overly dramatic. But she shakes her head. “I can’t do what you do, Jade. I can’t be that person. It’s not who I… it’s not who I want to be.”

“I know.”

Artemis lets the team take her away. She lets Zatanna do healing spells on the worst of her injuries, easing the pain in her knee and sealing the cuts on her arm and her face. She lets M’gann offer her cookies, fresh from the oven.

They don’t push her for information, but they’re definitely hovering a little bit, like they’re afraid to let her out of their sight. She feels like she can’t breathe.

For most of it, Roy hangs back, out of the loose circle of the team. She looks up at some point, and he’s gone.

“I need some space,” she says, getting off the couch and leaving the room.

He’s already at the zeta beam.

"Going somewhere?"

He just looks at her, silent and serious.

She tilts her head back toward the living area. "Never thought I'd see Jade getting along with the team. Hanging out in the cave."

He says nothing, and she almost lets it go. He’s frustrating and irritating and she hates that she

They don’t owe each other anything.

“I don’t really belong here anymore,” she says, but he looks at her like she’s crazy.

“Of course you do.”

She shakes her head. "The things I've done..."

"Art-"

She holds up her hand. She knows what he’s going to say; Jade’s told her everything. Almost everything. "Does it really matter? He's dead." She looks down, cupping her elbows. "Heroes are supposed to protect people. What I've done. What I've let him make me do..."

"You did it for the mission.” When she looks away, his voice softens. “You're going to have to tell me... tell someone sometime. They'll understand. But you know you have a place here. You'll always have a place here.”

She thinks about all the things he doesn't know. About all the things the team doesn't know. She feels odd, out of place, like this isn’t the world for her anymore.

Her mom said it suited her. She hopes one day it might again.

“My father stole your life.”
“His life.”

“Roy-”

He looks away, jaw clenched.

"I have money," she says, and then frowns at him. "Don't look at me like that. It's just going to sit there otherwise. And you're going to need it. We're going to need it."

He turns his head; his mask obscures his eyes, making him hard to read, even now. Especially now. "He wanted to ruin you."

She shrugs. It's easier than delving into that bag of worms. “I’m tougher than that.”

“I know you are.”

She comes to him and takes his hand, stilling his fidgeting. He turns it, spreads his fingers so hers can fit between his. “I don’t know what I want from you. Or if I even want anything. I just know I don’t want you gone.”

“Artemis, I can’t.”

“Just,” she interrupts, using her free hand to poke him in the chest. “Just shut up. This will be easier if we don’t argue all the time.”

His mouth turns up at the corner. "Like that’s going to happen."

“Okay. If I’m going with you,” Jade says, hands on her hips. “We’re going to have to talk about the PDA.”

Artemis stares at her. "What happened to every girl for herself?" Then she taps her thigh, right above her knee. “Might slow you down.”

“Yeah, you will.” Jade shrugs. "But someone has to keep this family from falling apart."

She can’t help it; Artemis lets go of Roy and hugs her. From the stiffness of her body, Jade wasn’t expecting it, but soon enough she relaxes enough to pat Artemis’ shoulder.

Artemis laughs and holds on tighter. When Jade starts to grumble, she opens her eyes and looks at Roy over Jade’s shoulder. For a long time, they stay like that, staring at each other until finally, she reaches out her hand to him.

He takes it.

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