The Sound of an Arrow

by thecomebackkids99

Summary

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Twenty years ago, Felicity Smoak's father kissed her on the forehead and disappeared from her life.

Now, she is the nanny for the six adorable Queen children, fighting to restore love in the mansion and trying to deal with the difficult-to-get-along-with Oliver, all the while as she continues to stumble upon evidence that could drag the Queen family further into darkness.

Notes

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Chapter 1

“I’m what?”

“Fired. After that little stunt you pulled on Monday, we can’t afford to keep you on at the company. Your work ethic has deteriorated over the—”

“Deteriorated?”

“Miss Smoak! You need to calm down or I will call security to escort you out of the building. Listen to me. We have to let you go. If we don’t, other workers will think that they can do what you did and get away with it. This is a disappointment for you, I understand, but you have to realize that we have to do this. And also, you have to leave the computer here.”

Felicity Megan Smoak, renowned IT girl, possibly involved in some questionable hacking…stuff, and expert at dealing with children, slammed her computer down onto the desk. The screen shattered and the battery fell out. The manager swore. “Serves you right. This is your computer technically, and hopefully I damaged it enough that you will never be able to use any of my work again.”

“Miss Smoak!”

“Goodbye!” She slammed the office door and strode down the hall, ignoring the looks of her coworkers. Some snickered and some cast sympathetic glances her way. Maybe on a good day she would acknowledge the nice ones, but today could not be categorized as a ‘good day’. She’d been fired from the only job she ever actually earned money at—thank you, dear Mother—and her landowner pounded on her door every night asking for rent money. How could she ever live in even a dingy apartment again? No one would hire her after that little run-in with the law. Maybe she could get paid more money if she turned herself in and asked for a prison job.

Felicity exited the big building and headed towards her soon-to-be-evicted-from apartment. Maybe her mother would be okay with her moving back in.

The very thought brought a shiver down her spine. That wouldn’t be happening until she didn’t have another change of underwear. Possibly even longer. Might as well start looking for jobs. Most things paid minimum wage, right? If she worked thirteen hours for six days straight, she would be able to pay the renter, pay the utility bill, pay her phone bill, and get one bag of Big Belly Burger.

“Oh dear God.”

She spun around and headed for the library. Thanks to her little tantrum, she didn’t even have a computer to search for a job. Meaning she would have to use a public computer. One of her many nightmares. Having to expose herself on one of those creepy things.

As she took a seat at the library computer after waiting for twenty-five minutes, her phone rang. Muttering an off color word that she immediately regretted, she swiped it on.

“Hey, Felicity.”

“Barry.” A sob lodged in her throat at the sound of her best friend’s voice. Even though they shared nothing more than a kiss on the cheek, they’d been friends for over ten years, and his voice either soothed her or brought all the pent-up emotion into her face. And nose. “Oh, Barry.”

“What’s wrong? Did you get fired?”
“I did. Actually. I’m sitting at a library with people watching me looking for a job. I honestly don’t blame them. I did nearly get arrested two days ago. But I’m going to be homeless, Barry. Dead soon. I’m going to lose everything. Who would ever want me?”

“Wow. First of all, I’m so sorry. Second…” Barry sighed. “I know someone who would want you. Actually, he would take anyone. Possibly even someone who’s spent time in prison. So you’d work.”

“He?”

“Oliver Queen. He’s looking for a new nanny. Again.”

She let out a disbelieving laugh. “Isn’t he the richest guy in Starling and Central City? Got his name on Queen Consolidated? Not happening.”

“I feel like he’ll pay well. His wife died five years ago, leaving him with six kids. With the loss of their mom, they need some help, and the prior nannies have not been able to give them that. You could do that; you’re good at that. I can give you the number.”

“Six children? That’s a lot of kids!”

“Yeah. But you like kids. You’ve told me a bunch of times.”

“That’s so many kids.”

“Last time I heard, it’s a thousand a week. And boarding at their mansion.”

A thousand…a week? The idea of six kids dwindled from her mind. If she could make it six months, she would have enough money to live with for a while. During that time, she could search for a real job. One that didn’t involve taking care of lots of children.

“Uh…what’s the number?”

“Hello, is this the Queen residence?”

“Yes, it is. Who am I speaking to?”

“Felicity Smoak. I’m calling about the nanny opening.”

“Oh, thank God. I’m glad you called. Yes, we are looking for a nanny. Mr. Queen needs an answer in the next few days, as he is leaving soon for a trip. We need one by then. Are you qualified for this job? I spoke to a friend of yours and he said that you would have no problem with this.”

So Barry Allen somehow knew Oliver Queen. Big shocker. “Don’t you need to see some credentials or something? Background check?”

“Barry Allen’s word is all I need. And frankly, I’m desperate. We’re desperate. Your job starts tomorrow. Be here at eight. Thank you, Miss Smoak.”

The lady hung up. Felicity stared at her phone and shook her head. What did she get herself into? No job interview. No background check. Only an assumption that she could handle six kids. Was this family that desperate?

Probably so.
She surveyed her bedroom, mentally packing her belongings. Not much needed to go along; she owned an endless amount of cardigans and knee-high skirts, but that was it. A few valuables could maybe go with, but everything else would stay here and go back to the owner.

A nanny. She laughed. What would her mother think of her now? Here she sat, on her bed, planning to pack for a job that paid a substantial amount of money, and she would earn that by making sure kids didn’t die. There was a reason why she wouldn’t be calling her mom to tell her about the job. She didn’t even accept her job as an IT girl. Would she even believe her when Felicity told her about this?

Donna Smoak already left at least twenty voicemails asking about the event two days ago, demanding to hear the facts. Felicity left that world behind a long time ago, and until something bad happened, she didn’t need to go back. She still had her last name, but she stopped being a ‘Smoak’ three years ago.

“That’s enough, Felicity.” She bounced off the bed and went to her closet. The three suitcases would do. Everything needed to be packed up before bedtime, which would be in an hour. In kindergarten someone told her to never be late the first day. She took that to heart, and no one could accuse her of being late. Or early.

Three hours later, she collapsed onto her bed, all her bags packed and sitting at the door. She would stop by her apartment later this week and pick up her valuables that shouldn’t ride in a taxi with her.

Tomorrow she would have a job again, after only being unemployed for two days. Thanks to Barry Allen. It made her wonder how well he knew Oliver Queen. Could he just call him and say that he had a girl who lost her job and could take care of his kids? It seemed very unlike him to know someone that…rich. Clearly he trusted him, because Oliver or the woman she spoke to had to have looked her up and saw the article about her from earlier this week.

Part of her wanted to call Barry and ask, but the rest of her wanted to go to sleep.

Her alarm went off at six thirty. She rolled out of bed and showered, called a taxi, and dragged her three bags into the car. The man glanced back at her and asked, “Where are you going?”

“Uh, the Queen Mansion. Do you know where—”

“Everyone knows where that is, ma’am. May I make an assumption about why you are driving there?”

“Sure.”

“You’re the new nanny.”

Creepy. “Yes, actually I am.”

“Oh, wow. That didn’t take long. And she seemed like she had a shot.”

“What?”

“Oh, sorry. You didn’t need to hear that. I’m sure you’ll do fine.”

This just got worse. “Please tell me. I already committed so I can’t back out now.”
As he pulled onto the interstate, the man gave a long sigh. “I drove a woman out here two days ago. She was confident that she could handle everything and everyone, but obviously that didn’t work out.”

She wrapped her arms around her stomach as the feeling off needing to puke swept over her. No wonder they were desperate. How awful could it be that the nanny didn’t stay for more than one day?

When she voiced her question, her driver scoffed. “I don’t know how much you know about the family, but you’re getting into a whole lot of stuff. More baggage than any other family.”

“I had to take this job given the fact that I was relieved of mine. I know very little, besides that his wife died five years ago.”

“And he’s never been the same since. Some people can move on and continue to live, something that his children did their best to do, but not Oliver. He still acts like her death happened yesterday.”

Baggage. Death. Heartbreak. How was she supposed to deal with that? She still hadn’t dealt with her own, and now she would be pushed into someone else’s. How could she… “God, help me. Help me, help me.”

In fifteen minutes the taxi pulled up into the driveway. The man lifted her bags from the car and set them on the steps. “Best of luck, ma’am. I hope I don’t have to bring another nanny up here again.”

“Thanks, sir.” For those encouraging words. Felicity stared at the doors, willing them to open. She didn’t want to knock. Maybe someone would see her and open it instead. Clearly that wasn’t happening.

“C’mon, Felicity. You can do this.” She had the best computer skills in the entirety of Starling City. She could do this then, right? There was no reason she couldn’t.

Don’t even think of it. Her brain couldn’t remind her of all the reasons she couldn’t do this right now.

“Have confidence in yourself, Felicity Smoak. You can do this. Have confidence!”

She hit the bell and bounced on her toes until an older woman opened the door.

The lady smiled and pushed the door wider. “Come in, come in. I’m assuming you’re Felicity Smoak.”

“Yes.” Felicity managed to push her three suitcases into the foyer. “That’s me.”

“I’m Raisa. The housekeeper. It is very nice to see you here, Miss Smoak.”

“Nice to meet you too, but please call me Felicity.”

“Alright. Please wait here and I will go find Mr. Queen. He wanted to meet you.”

Raisa left, leaving Felicity to survey the expansive room. Just this place alone was bigger than her apartment. How could a house be this big? There had to be a few more rooms around that she could peek into before Oliver came along.

Oh, this was stupid. Very, very stupid. Felicity tried to convince herself not to do it, but she shook her common sense off and went to the first door.

Locked.
The second and third door were locked too.

She weaved around a corner, and another, trying a door here and there, but they were all locked or contained vacuum cleaners. At the end of the hall, she tried another door and pushed it open.

“Oh, dear God, help me.”

A weight room. It had to be a weight room. How could she do this? Oh, how stupid. She would be fired fifteen minutes into her job.

A weight clanked back in its place, and then he huffed. And stood.

Oliver Queen stood ten yards away from her, sweat streaming down his forehead, chest heaving. And shirtless. Oh, he was shirtless. Why did he have to be shirtless? How could he have a six-pack? He had six kids, right? Wouldn’t he be older?

“I thought you’d be older.” Felicity!

Oliver’s eyebrows arched as he reached for his shirt. “Oh? What exactly were you expecting?”

“Less abs.”

Dear God. That had to be the top of the what-not-to-say list. Tell you ‘boss’ that he had a six-pack. She should take her bags and leave right now. Save Oliver the time and energy to fire her.

Instead, a small huff of laughter escaped Oliver’s mouth. But then his face and eyes tightened up, and he yanked his shirt on and then directed her out of the room. “I’m assuming you are the new nanny. Felicity Smoak?”

“That’s me. And you’re Oliver Queen. I’m so sorry for intruding on your workout.”

“I’m not used to the door flying open like that. How did you get over here?”

“I…uh, wandered.”

“Oh.”

“Mr. Queen!” Raisa scurried up to them. “I was looking all over for you. I see you have met Felicity.”

“We have.” Oliver glanced at her, his face giving her all the confirmation she needed. A broken man walked beside her, and all jokes aside, he hid his pain with a hardened body. And face.

This would be even more work than she ever imagined. But she could do it. Just like she persevered through all her trials. She could help them through this.

“I’m assuming you know that I have six kids. Correct?”

“Yes…sir?” Did he have a history in the military? Oliver marched around the floor, each foot placed an exact length of a carpet square. After he walked twelve squares, he turned and went down the other side. Each move strategized, just like it seemed he did with his life. Nothing strayed out of order, from what she’d seen. Even the weight room, often grounds for disastrous habits of equipment everywhere, had nothing out of place.

Oliver Queen controlled his life by the way of this because he couldn’t control it. That’s what it seemed.
“They are home today because of an...incident, but Monday through Friday they are at boarding school. My driver, Mr. Diggle, takes them at six thirty in the morning and brings them home at six thirty, just before dinner. On Saturdays and Sundays they spend their mornings doing homework and the afternoons are spent either reading or exercising.”

“When do they play?”

“If you let them play, they’ll never finish tasks, and it leads to them causing trouble.”

“Maybe that’s part of the problem.”

Oliver spun towards her, eyes glowering. And slightly curious. “Excuse me?”

Felicity ignored the nagging feeling that she would be fired any minute now, but what did have to lose? Nothing really. Clearly someone needed to put him in his place. What idiotic thinking. “Kids don’t need education half as much as they need to blow off energy. If they aren’t given proper time to play and actually have fun, they wouldn’t be a pain.”

His eyes narrowed, but he replied in a calm voice, “They’re my children, contrary to popular belief. I will decide what’s best for them, not some nanny who explored half the house after she’d been told to wait.”

“I have never seen a house this big. I couldn’t just sit and wait.”

“I would have been happy to give you a tour.”

Felicity swept her eyes over his body. Rigid, eyes a cool unblinking blue, hardened jaw. “Clearly.”

Someone snickered behind them. When Felicity glanced back, Raisa stilled and cleared her throat. “Would you like me to get everyone?”

“Please.”

They stood in awkward silence for two minutes. Oliver paced; Felicity stood with her back against the wall, willing up some sort of apology. None came. Raisa found it funny, and that’s all that mattered to her. She didn’t owe him one; she was right.

A door opened and slammed, and then another. Six kids, all raging in height and age, rushed to the balcony and stood in a line, hands behind their backs, chins up.

Definitely ex-military.

“Come down, please.”

They didn’t break line down the stairs, and when they reached the bottom, they went back into military mode.

“This is Felicity Smoak. She will be your new nanny for the time being.” Oliver nodded to the oldest. “Go ahead and give her your name and age.”

“I’m Ellie. I’m seventeen, and as much as my dad says I do, I don’t need a nanny.” The girl shifted her gaze to Oliver, her chin turning up even more in defiance. She no doubt had her mother’s blonde hair. It cascaded over her shoulders and down her back. She too had been hardened. Felicity could see it in her eyes.

The next one stepped forward. “I’m William and I’m fifteen. You won’t be staying very long.” He
had his father’s…good looks, with a chiseled jaw, and brown hair. His hair curled over his collar though, opposed to Oliver’s short, cropped hair.

“I’m Harper, and I am thirteen.” This girl gave her the smallest of smiles before William nudged her and she shifted her gaze straight ahead.

“I’m Clayton. I’m eleven.” He didn’t inherit height – yet – but his glasses and young face made up for that.

“I’m eight.” The next girl tipped her head to smile. A little.

Felicity returned the smile. “And what’s your name?”

“Oh! Sorry. I’m Piper. And this is Annie. She’s six. She doesn’t like to talk much.”

Sweet little Annie. The girl with the braided hair waved at her.

Oliver cleared his throat. “Be nice to her, okay? You’re going to run out of options soon.”

That brought a smile to the kids’ faces. She hoped it wasn’t genuine. If so…well, maybe quitting now would be better.

*Have confidence. You’ll be fine.*

“Since you’re all here, I will be leaving in the morning for a meeting in Europe. I’m not sure how long I’ll be gone, but at least for a week.”

The little ones groaned, but the older three shrugged.

“Do you have to go, Daddy?” Tears filled Piper’s eyes. “You just got back from the other place.”

“I’m sorry, but I have to. It’s urgent.”

William let out a breath of indignant air. “You always say that.”

“Yeah, Dad.” Clayton moved forward, his adorable eyes begging him to reconsider, but at the same time, he braced himself for the no. “You say that about all of the stuff you have to go away for. You’re always saying that about everything.”

Oliver’s hand twitched and reached out, but he snapped back to military man, not dad. “It’s just the way of the business. I don’t want to be gone. I have to be. Just…just please be good to everyone.”

At that, he pushed past her and walked in the direction of the weight room. The mass of the words said pushed all of the happy air out of the room. Felicity took a deep breath and then clapped her hands. “I promise we’ll have lots of fun. I promise.”

“That’s what they all say, and they all quit after a day or two.” William shrugged one shoulder. “Don’t promise us anything you can’t keep.”

“Well, if you want proof…you guys know Barry Allen, right?”

Ellie finally made a movement, and shook her head. “Never heard of him. We really don’t have many friends.”

So either she lied or the kids didn’t know him. “Well, he’s a friend of mine. And if he were here, he’d say I do keep my promises. Except if they are outrageous and made late at night or early in the
morning.”

“So you’re not a morning person?” Harper slid in closer, a grin spreading across her face. “Or a late night person?”

“I’m more of a between nine and nine person. Anything before or after is iffy.”

“Ahhh, I see.”

William inched forward now, a grin too showing Felicity what a young Oliver had to look like. “So you ever been a nanny before?”

“I have, just not for so many kids.”

“What’s the most you’ve ever taken care of?”

“Two.”

“Two?” Ellie laughed. “You have to have done more than that.”

“Nope. But I am fully prepared for this job.”

“Kids, it’s time for you to go upstairs and work on your studies. Your dad would be very happy, I think, if you showed him you don’t just cause chaos.” Raisa hustled them towards the stairs, and then came down and took one of Felicity’s suitcases. “You should have seen it yesterday.”

“What happened? Oliver…Mr. Queen said that they were out of school for some reason.”

“They put snakes in the vents, and the retched creatures fell through the cracks and landed on teachers and students. Even the principal.”

“Snakes?” Something shifted in her pocket. Something small, and slithery, and… “God help me!” She dropped her suitcases and turned the pocket inside out. A small, garter snake dropped to the ground and slithered towards the stairs. Ellie reached down and scooped it up.

“Sorry, Miss Smoak. It must have fallen from its perch.”

All the kids laughed and then ran up the rest of the stairs and disappeared down the hall, their howls still audible.

Raisa clucked her tongue. “Those children. I should have warned you about that.”

“About the snakes?”

“About how the children try to scare the nanny away on the first day. By any means necessary.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

As you will notice, not all the story lines will be exactly like The Sound of Music, but...I am planning on putting some scenes in there...such as a few of the scenes next! (Please don’t tell me Oliver’s a jerk. We all know that, but I promise he will get better.) I will be posting a chapter every Saturday as long as there aren’t any events or such that get in the way, such as this weekend. Friday is my birthday and I will be with my family all weekend, so I decided that I’d give everyone a treat and post chapter 2! Hope everyone enjoys it! :)

Felicity burst into the dining room, ten minutes late and most definitely not dressed appropriately. Did rich people always wear formal wear to dinner? Oliver wore a suit, and the kids wore dresses and suits. And…she glanced down at herself. A nice blue skirt and purple cardigan. With a stain on it.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t informed that dinner was now.”

Oliver cast a glance in her direction. “The bell rings. That’s an easy way to not show up late. And for future reference, it’s always at seven.”

“What happens if the cook spills the soup and you have to wait ‘til seven fifteen? Does the earth have a heart attack and Abraham Lincoln rolls over in his grave?”

A utensil clattered to the table to cover a laugh.

Oliver lowered his fork and stared at her, his mouth hanging open. “Excuse me?”

Felicity managed a sweet smile. “I was just wondering if it’s alright if I have dinner at seven o’ two instead of exactly seven while you’re gone. I don’t usually run things with exact precision. Except computers. I can run a computer with the precision of an archer shooting an arrow. Which…” What was she saying? “Is completely and totally different than running a computer.”

Her grumpy ‘boss’ shoved a forkful of food into his mouth and mumbled over it, “Are you always this talkative and this much trouble everywhere else?”

“Oh, much more, sir!” She took that moment to drop to her chair. A loud and long fart erupted from most definitely not her backside. How could a sound even sound like that? And judging by the raised eyebrows from Oliver, he believed that the sound came from her and not a Whoopie cushion that she could see peeking out from underneath her skirt.

Most people would yell at whoever did this horrible thing, but not her. Yes, she could feel her face flaming. Maybe it would start fire and burn her to ashes, but she would never let the kids believe that they had her on their ropes.

“I am so sorry, Mr. Queen. My stomach has been feeling very awful today and I guess—”

“Please, Miss Smoak. That’s quite enough. None of us need to hear your graphic way of explaining things.”
“Sorry.” She took her fork and started sawing away at the piece of meat. What even was this? “I have to say that I was very happy with the house warming gift you left me earlier today. It’s so nice to be welcomed into a place that I have never been in before and feel at home. The gift was beautiful, and so thoughtful of you.”

At that, she scanned the room to gauge the reactions. Ellie stared at her place. Harper and Piper stirred their food around. The boys stared at some weird painting on the wall. Annie started crying. Oliver wore a look of pride.

If he only knew.

“Your acceptance of me means more than you’ll ever know. After everything that has happened to me, it’s really great to finally have some friends.”

Piper started crying now, soon followed by Harper.

“Miss Smoak?”

“Yes, Mr. Queen?”

“Do you intend for dinners to always be…” Oliver gestured to his crying girls, “Such an emotional affair?”

“Oh, they’re just happy.”

Felicity shut her door and leaned against it, breathing in the deep smells of the thunder storm. No more awkward exchanges between her and the children. And no attractive, widower with a six-pack. Why couldn’t he have been fifty-years-old and with a beer-belly?

She yanked off her cardigan and collapsed down onto her bed. Soft, plush, and much nicer than any bed she’d ever owned. At least she could look forward to this every night.

Someone knocked.

“Oh, c’mon! I just laid down and this bed is comfy!”

He cleared his throat. “It’s, uh, Oliver.”

Oh, great. It happened again. Embarrassment. She slid off the bed and opened the door. Oliver stood in the opening, disbelief on his face. He probably wasn’t used to getting yelled at. “I thought I was done for the night. Meaning I apologize for the hair and everything.”

“That’s what I was coming to talk to you about.”

“My hair?”

“No.” Oliver shifted slightly. “You are now the governess of Oliver Queen’s children now, and you will be involved in many social events. You need uh…a different wardrobe.”

“I need a—” She looked down at her outfit, and then at Oliver, dressed in his white dress shirt, perfectly creased pants, his jacket tossed on an end table. She clenched her fists and fought off the anger. But then she looked at him again, and she allowed that anger to enter.

“Do you not like my clothes? Are they not sexy enough for you? Do you prefer shorter skirts?”
“Your skirts aren’t that…short.” Oliver sputtered, his gaze shifting away from her. “It’s just that—”

“Just that what? You want to make my wardrobe sexier?”

“Not sexier. I will pay for it. Just—”

“It’s not happening! I signed up to take care of your children, not become a part of your world.”

“When you signed up for this, you became a part of our world. And that means you’ll have to live in it now. Go to parties and such. I’m not saying your wardrobe is bad; it just needs an update.”

“Oh, you smug….” She slammed the door in his face and howled, “Go be a jerk to someone else, Mr. Queen! I don’t care! Don’t talk to me about my clothes. Again!” She half expected him to come flying in, guns a-blazing; instead his hard footsteps echoed down the hall. A door slammed, and now it was official: the nanny who didn’t actually know how to be a nanny made it through one day. Barely.

She opened her closet and surveyed her clothes. If she needed to go somewhere fancy, what would she wear? None of her skirts would work, and most definitely not the three pairs of jeans she owned.

After pushing around jackets and shoes, she found the one thing she needed. Just a reassurance that if push came to shove, there would be something to wear.

Her gold dress.

“Felicity, you need to wake up. There was a tornado spotted three miles from here.” Someone with a panicked voice shook her. Thunder blew the windows, rattling her nerves. “Please wake up!”

_Hmmm, no. I’m enjoying this restful sleep and no bad dream will make me wake up! Let me sleep!_

“Felicity, please!”

_No! Don’t wake me up! I will not be woken up!_

Suddenly, a child’s wail pierced her unconsciousness. Felicity bolted upright, terror sweeping up and down her body, holding her rigid. A cry meant danger. Danger meant possible death. What could have happened? “What? What’s wrong? Why is someone crying?”

Raisa stood above her, holding….Annie? The little girl clutched her blanket to her chest, head buried in the older lady’s shoulder. “It’s the storm, Felicity. We need to go downstairs. There’s a tornado close.”

“Oh!” She slid out of bed, grabbing a blanket to cover her embarrassing pajamas. Who wore PJs with dolls on them? Probably not nannies. “I’m sorry that I didn’t wake up. The bed is nice.” She followed them into the hallway and down a set of stairs that hadn’t been shown to her.

As thunder cracked again, Annie screamed, along with another one of the girls further down the stairs. Raisa glanced back at Felicity. “I need to wake up other people in the house, so if you could continue going down the steps, you’ll see where to go. Take Annie.”

Felicity held out her arms and Annie dove into them, immediately burying her head on Felicity’s shoulder. “You’ll be okay. I promise. It’s just a lot of noises. There is nothing to worry about.”

“I don’t like storms.”
“Neither do I. But they happen, so we have to learn to deal with them, right?”

After the next crack, the lights flickered, and then everything went black. As Annie let out cries of terror, Felicity hid her own and transferred every bit of her bravery into the little girl with her. Using her free hand, she felt for the railing and followed it down, praying that the basement would be close to the landing. Didn’t this kind of house have a generator?

“She whispered to her when they reached the bottom and there were no doors. “Where do we go?”

“I don’t know!”

“We have to get down there. Where do we go?” What if the tornado came right now? What if it was a big one and it took the house away? They would die. She would be responsible for another Queen death.

Someone grabbed her arm. Someone with big hands. A burglar who used storms as cover! She screamed and kicked her foot out, hitting something hard. A bone? When the person groaned and swore, she knew that it was a mistake. No burglar. What a stupid idea. “Oh, Mr. Queen, I’m so sorry!”

“I’m fine. C’mon.” He took her hand and led her around a corner and then opened a door. “Raisa and the others will meet us down there.”

Downstairs the chaos appeared to be contained. Slightly. Two floodlights were in the middle of the room, giving her a full view. The other five kids huddled in a corner together. Oliver slid down a wall opposite them, the area of which he landed another clue for her. He sat in a corner, away from everyone. Someone who didn’t want to be hurt again would do that. They wouldn’t want to surround themselves with people, even their own children.

She took a seat a few feet away from the five, still holding Annie, who shook in fright. “Hey. We’re okay now, right? We’re safe underground, where nothing could ever hurt us. Breathe, honey. Breathe.”

“I’m still scared. It’s loud.”

“It is. But you know what?”

“What?”

“It’s the angels bowling. They’re having a game up there.” She pointed up at the ceiling. “Whenever the thunder booms, an angel hit the pegs with the big ball. So technically it’s not that scary.”

Ellie raised her head, her blue eyes showing a respect that hadn’t been there before. She caught Felicity’s look and smiled.

“Is that really what happens?” Piper scooted closer to her. “Because what’s the lightning?”

That one had to be thought up for a second. “It’s the ‘go’ light. You know how sometimes it’ll lightening and then it’ll take a while to thunder? The lights in the sky are when the TV tells the angels that they can go roll their ball down the track, and sometimes that angel is talking or eating, so sometimes it takes longer for the noise to come.”

“But what about when there’s lightning and then no thunder?” Clayton asked that question. Curiosity killed the cat.
“Well, obviously that’s when one of the angels hits a gutter ball.”

William laughed, but then stifled it.

“But it’s still scary,” Annie whimpered from her spot on Felicity’s stomach. “Really, really scary. And loud.”

“That’s when we have to think of something else. Like…like our favorite things! What’s yours?” She tickled Piper under the chin. The little girl giggled and ducked underneath Felicity’s arm, stealing some of the blanket.

“Cupcakes.”

“What color?”

“The pink ones. I like pink.”

“I do too! How about you, Annie? What’s your favorite thing?”

“I like it when I get to eat macaroni. The whole pan.”

The older ones all snickered at that. Felicity glared at them, but then smiled. “What about you guys? And don’t tell me you don’t have a favorite thing. Everyone does.”

Harper raised her hand. “I like it when I get new dresses.”

“Me too!” Piper howled just as more thunder sounded. This time, no one screamed; only cuddled closer to her. “I like parasols. Pink ones especially.”

Ellie slid over and hauled Piper into her lap. “No, purple ones are prettier. Haven’t you ever seen those ones in the antique stores?”

“Pink!”

“Purple.”

“Pink.”

“Black!” William shot up from his spot against the wall, his enthusiastic response generating squeals from the rest of the group. Instead of curbing his excitement, he bounced towards the rest of them, a grin on his face. “A few of my favorite things are when the girls are in trouble and Clayton and I get the entire house to myself, when Raisa bakes one of those giant cakes for dessert, and especially when we all get to go fishing.”

Everyone yelled, “Yeah!”

Felicity watched in awe as the once depressed, terrified, and hatred-for-nannies-filled children transformed into ones she would actually want to take care of. All with a little love. That’s all it took, and they turned into different kids.

She glanced at Oliver, her cheery mood fading. He had a blanket wrapped around his shoulders, and he stared straight ahead. Unblinking, unmoving. No expression written on his face. At each crack of thunder, his body twitched, but then he stilled again. Not once did he make an effort to calm the kids down; did this man even care? Or was he so deep into his brokenness that he didn’t notice? Yet somehow, he had a softness. Back when he grabbed her hand, she felt it. He did care but the idea of showing it was like the idea of her speaking French.
“I also love it when we can go somewhere. As a family.”

No thunder came, but Oliver twitched.

“And the night we got to play Monopoly with Dad.”

William had an end-game in mind, and it did not involve cheering up himself or his siblings. He wanted to get something out of Oliver. Guilt? Words? More than words. He could say something right now, and it wouldn’t be what William wanted. What any of them wanted, for that matter.

Raisa came around a corner – how big was this house that even the basement had corners? – and cleared her throat. “Mr. Oliver, the storm has passed, and it looks like it would be safe to return to our beds.”

“Good.” He stood up, his expression guarded and almost cold. “Go ahead and head back to sleep. Everything’s all good.”

As Felicity stood up, Annie wrapped her arms around her neck. “Can I sleep with you tonight?”

“Me too?” Piper asked, taking hold of Felicity’s hand.

“That’d be fun. We can cuddle and ignore the storm.”

Oliver led the way up the stairs and then up the next flight of stairs. He paused at Felicity’s bedroom. “Remember they have school tomorrow.”

“Even Annie?”

“They all need to be up at five fifteen.”

“She’s five!”

Oliver spun on his heel and advanced towards her. She set the two girls down and then drew herself up to her towering five foot five height. Possibly shorter without heels on. He growled, “They’re my kids. I can decide what’s best for them.”

“That’s why children need a mom, don’t you think?” She realized what she said as sadness rushed over his face. Dear God. Felicity, think!

“Well, given the fact that you’re here, they don’t have one, if you haven’t noticed. So I make the decisions around here.”

Felicity shut the door quietly and slowly this time, scared to see the faces of the little ones behind her. Instead, she smiled. Annie and Piper lay in the four poster bed, curled up in the blankets.

“Come in here! It’s comfy!” Piper patted the middle part. “And it’s loud.”

With a laugh, Felicity bounded onto the bed, followed by the squeals of excitement from the two little Queen children. As they cuddled up close to her, whispering their favorite things every time thunder boomed, Felicity had one dominate thought:

Somehow, no matter how crazy it seemed, she was home.

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Just like told to, all six children left the house at six twenty-five in the morning, including the five-
year-old. Oliver left even earlier, according to Raisa. Felicity slouched around for an hour, until the kitchen door opened and a big man stepped in. “I don’t think I know you, and if you’re a burglar, I made the mighty Oliver Queen groan last night when I thought he was a robber.”

He chuckled. “I’m John Diggle. I’m the—”

“You’re the driver! Oh, they mentioned you. I’m Felicity Smoak.”

“The new nanny. I know. It’s nice to meet you.” He shook her hand, his smile growing. “The kids are all at school for the day.”

Felicity went to the coffee maker and poured herself another cup. “And you’re okay with that, Mr. Diggle?”

“No need for formalities. My friends call me Dig, and you are welcome to do the same. If you pour me a cup of coffee, please.” He took the cup she gave him and expressed his thanks. “And to answer your question, I don’t. I’ve been around since the beginning. Ellie was six when they hired me. I know how it was back then, and it hurts to see any different. Oliver used to read to the kids at night, and it was actually his wife who had to get them to school because he hated sending them.”

“And her death changed everything.” Why wouldn’t it? “What was her name, anyways?”

A wry smile spread across his face. “You really didn’t do your research, did you?”

“I was desperate for a job. I didn’t care which one.”

“Her name was Annie. And she was the kindest, caring woman you could ever meet. She loved everyone with all her heart. I honestly don’t know if I ever heard her say a bad word about anyone. She was a spitfire at times; Oliver didn’t get away with many things, even leaving dirty dishes laying in his office.” Her new friend took a deep breath and focused in on her. “I still get caught up in the emotions sometimes.”

“It’s okay. I did kinda know what I was getting myself into. Did she like to cook?”

“If Oliver was in there with her. He’d often bring home his work from the office and sit in here and watch her. I don’t know if he ever got any papers done. He just loved watching her.”

She needed a swig of something strong and preferably alcoholic after those words. How could anyone be even partway whole again after they lose someone that important….that special? She could say that she knew how that felt. Twenty years later and it still hurt. “And the kids? Were they close to him? Her?”

“Sometimes Raisa and I would talk about how they should spend less time with them and actually sleep every now and then. Once Annie died, Oliver quit that. He stopped playing with them, and singing them to sleep. He stopped doing anything that reminded him on her.”

“And sent them off to boarding school.”

“You’re really bitter about that, aren’t you?”

“Yes! I am. Robots are created there. The kids aren’t allowed to play, to have fun!” She spun are in a circle, surveying the kitchen; bringing an idea to play in her head that she should not be entertaining. “Mr. Queen says that letting them play causes them to make trouble. I believe exactly the opposite. The reason why they are supposed brats is because they don’t get to use that energy!”
“If you’re trying to get at a point, I’m not catching it.”

“Boarding school is usually for the kids who don’t have parents to take care of them. Fine. But they have me now. I can take care of them. They have you. Clearly you’re a smart man. If you’re not, you can join the classes as well.”

“Oliver will not be happy about that.”

“Oliver…isn’t here. I’m the nanny. I take care of the kids. I don’t have to please him all the time.”

John Diggle stared at his cup of coffee for long enough that she wondered if he would say ‘absolutely not’. But then he chuckled. “I can see why you made it longer than the last two nannies. You’ve got heart, Felicity Smoak. And if your plan means getting those kids out of that prison, I will go along with it.”

“Should we do it now?”

“They’re probably already kicked out of their classes, so let’s go.”

They drove the twenty minutes in silence; Felicity stared out the window, watching the countryside turn into town and then city, then little town again. The information that she received today weighed heavy on her mind. Could something like that truly be fixed? It wasn’t like she knew.

The kids lost their mother; Oliver lost his wife. The agony of that truth haunted her as they climbed the steps of the boarding school. This looked like somewhere a hurting man would send his children.

His abs looked like it too.

“Uh, Dig, I have a question.”

“Go ahead, Felicity.”

“How old is Mr. Queen?”

“Thirty-five.”

“That means…he was eighteen when Ellie was born?”

“He and Annie were high school sweethearts. Possibly even middle school. They got married right after graduation, much to the chagrin of his parents. Everyone said it would never last. I think that’s partly why they had so many kids together. They both wanted to prove that they could go the distance together…with a ton of kids tagging along.”

That explained why he was so…attractive. And ripped. Thirty-five years old. Not bad, and that meant that only seven years separated them. Felicity!

Dig opened the door for her, and she stepped into an official looking office.

“Mr. Diggle. Nice to see you again.” The crisp looking woman gave them a forced smile. “Though the Queens are all behaving in class so far. What can I help you with?”

“I’m…we’re here to pull the kids out of school.”

“What? What could ever possess you to do that?”

“It’s high time that it happened, don’t you think? They don’t belong here. I’m the legal guardian
when Mr. Queen is not present, and I will be signing the papers for them.”

 Barely able to withhold a tirade, the sputtering, red-faced woman began printing papers for Dig to sign. All in all, there were twelve of them to sign, and when they went into a folder, the lady said, “They’re all yours. I look forward to seeing how quickly you will bring them back here.”

 “Well, as she said, play time will solve a lot more than you could guess.” He winked at her as he exited the room.

 “And who is she?”

 Felicity tossed a sweet smile in the woman’s direction as she grabbed the door from Dig’s grip. “Why, I’m the new nanny!”

 “So you pulled us out of school.” Ellie nodded in approval and then shoved another spoonful of lasagna in her mouth. “I can’t say I’ve been pulled out of a class for something good.” Apparently her father’s I’ll-talk-with-food-in-my-mouth-if-I-want habit rubbed off on her.

 William grumbled, “Yeah, well, you’re happy cuz you don’t have any friends there. I actually socialize once and a while.”

 “I do, it’s just not in gangs like your friends. You’ll find new ones. Maybe hanging out with your siblings will be a good pastime.”

 “Shut up, Ellie. I spend plenty of time with you and everyone else.”

 Felicity groaned as the argument between the older girl and boy increased at the table. William had to be the troublemaker and be the only who complained about being pulled from school. Didn’t he enjoy the idea of being able to do a few more things now? He did – of course he did. But William Queen didn’t seem to be one who went down without a fight.

 “I promise we’ll leave the house. We won’t be holed up in here all day. I never had a sibling, but I can imagine that it would be awful to be with them constantly.” She said, directing the comment at William, who went into full sulking mode. Another thing one of them picked up from Oliver.

 “Well, I’m happy that we get to stay at home. The teachers were never very nice.” Harper came back from the bathroom and took a seat next to Felicity. “So what do we now?”

 “We are going to have the most fun you’ve had in years.”

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 A young man extended his hand and opened the door with the other. “Welcome back, Mr. Queen. It is good to see your face again.”

 “Pretty sure lying isn’t one of your good traits, Scott.” Oliver slid into the limousine, and watched as his two suitcases were placed in the trunk. All he needed to know. “Carleton Hotel, please.”

 The driver pulled out onto the highway. He stared out the window, watching the blinding lights of Hong Kong. It didn’t matter how many times he’d gone through the city, they still fascinated him. No one cared about another. Taxis slammed on their horns; on the corner a man ripped a purse from a woman’s hands and took off. No one went after him. Just kept walking.
Just like him. He let that pass by a thousand times. It wasn’t that he didn’t care. He couldn’t care. If he did, he would get hurt again. That couldn’t happen. When Annie died, his heart died, and if he lost someone else, the rest of him would die too.

He closed his eyes, but opened them again when the images flashed across his mind of his children, bloody and bruised, laying on the ground. Dead. He saw them often; imagined them often. Some days he was too tired to fight off the demons.

At least someone could help his six kids with theirs now. He almost laughed when Felicity Smoak came whooshing into his mind. It was a welcome relief. For once blood didn’t cover the face he imagined.

What. A. Woman. She nearly sent him tumbling down a road he hadn’t traveled down in five years. She made him really smile when she burst into his weight room and stuttered her way through an introduction and her shock over his abs. The last time someone mentioned his six-pack, it had been Annie when—

*Stop it, Oliver. You can’t think like that.* These next two weeks, he needed a clear head. He couldn’t think of the kids. He couldn’t think of Annie. And he definitely couldn’t think of Felicity.

“We’re here, sir. Do you need help unloading your—”

“Thank you, but no.” He stepped out of the limo and went to the back to grab his things. With the two suitcases, he climbed the stairs of the hotel and checked in. Room three fifty-five. Just like last time.

When he pushed open the door, a familiar voice spoke.

“Hello, Oliver. How have you been?”
“I hate spelling! I hate words! I hate letters! I hate school!”

When the tears began from her student, Felicity set down the phonics book, sensing that she would have to dig deep into her teaching skills to give this girl the love of reading. At six-years-old, Annie struggled with the alphabet, something that Felicity knew was a direct result of not having enough attention paid to her during the past five years. And having mean teachers. But just like she conquered the first and second day, she could win on this one too. It would just take longer.

She scanned the room, noting the piano and the abundance of books strewn around it. “So Annie. Do you like music?”

Annie rubbed her eyes and sniffed hard. “I like music. I play the piano. For three years. And it’s so much better than this!”

It took her twelve years to be convinced to play an instrument. Annie started at three? “Perfect! Did they teach you the notes?”

“C, D, E…yeah. I know them all.”

“What about do-re-mi?”

“Yes!”

“So those notes are the beginning of all music, right?”

“Along with the other ones.”

“What are the other ones?”

Annie bounced around, her face lighting up in excitement. “It goes do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do!”

“Yes! And just like that is the musical alphabet and is the reason we can play music, the letter alphabet is the reason we can communicate.”

“So ‘A’ is ‘do’, and ‘B’ is ‘re’?”

Felicity nodded, smiling as a light dawned in Annie’s brain. The little girl let out a howl and then started jumping on the couch, yelling, “So that means ‘mi’ is ‘C’, and ‘fa’ is ‘D’ and ‘so’ is ‘E’!”

Ellie peeked around the corner, no doubt wanting to check on the screaming.

“Ellie! Guess what?” Annie jumped off the couch and ran to her sister. “I figured it out! Felicity helped me figure it out! I figured out the music alphabet really easy, remember?” She didn’t bother to let Ellie answer that question. “And that means that I can figure out the letter alphabet easy too!”

The oldest Queen girl wrapped the littlest one in a hug. “I’m so happy for you, Annie. And so proud of you. You got this down!”

Annie whirled around. “Can I go tell Will?”
When she disappeared down the hall, Ellie turned to Felicity, tears in her eyes. “It’s like you turned a light on in her head. I’ve never seen her that excited about that. Maybe anything.” She let out a sob and covered her mouth. “I’m so sorry. Not for this, but for how awful we were to you. I can’t believe I said I didn’t need a nanny. I…” she looked up at the ceiling, her face forming into a smile, and then a laugh. “I don’t need one. But I need a friend, and someone to guide me. I…I haven’t had one of those for a long time.”

How could it have been, to be entering womanhood and the toughest times of the younger years, and to lose your mother, the one who saved a lot of girls from going insane? It hurt to imagine. Poor Ellie; poor everyone. Each one had to go through five years without a mother. No way many nannies stayed long enough to form bonds. Either the kids scared them away, or their father did.

“I know what you’re thinking.”

“Really?”

“I don’t have x-men capabilities or anything, but I’ve certainly developed good senses.” Ellie flashed a smile laced with pain. “Raisa has done more for us than anyone ever could, besides…. It’s not like we haven’t been nurtured. And even though Daddy hasn’t always been here, he’s taken care of us.”

“I know. Which is why if you ever need to talk to me, I’m here.”

The sounds of glass shattering reached their ears, and then loud shrieks. Upstairs! Felicity raced up the stairs, Ellie on her heels. Someone had to have died. Probably stabbed through the heart with a drinking glass. That would explain the yelling.

“What happened?” She burst into a bedroom—couldn’t really tell which—prepared to see blood. Instead, Annie, Clayton, and Piper all stood around a window, mouths wide open. Clayton held…a baseball bat.

“Oh, no.” Ellie rushed ahead of Felicity, and yanked the baseball bat away. “What on earth are you doing in Daddy’s bedroom? And with his bat?”

Oliver owned a baseball bat? Did that mean he played back in the day? Could she find pictures of him in those tight—Felicity Smoak! She regained her composure. “Guys, exactly what happened?”

Clayton crossed his arms over his chest and mumbled, “We were using Daddy’s bat to play crochet. His room is really fun to use for the game so we thought we’d use it again since he isn’t here.”

“Use it again?” Ellie groaned. “Are you serious?”

“No. Yes. Maybe. Anyways, I might have hit the ball a little hard and it went through the window.”

“And now we’re gonna have to replace the window. Nice one, guys. We’ve both told you many times not to play in the room! There are a lot of nice things around here! How many times do you need to hear something before you listen?”

And here came the hurt. Ellie, just like her father, took out her pain on other people. To a smaller extreme. It still crushed her heart to see the looks on the little ones’ faces. They knew they did wrong; did they need a screaming to cement it? Felicity finally stepped forward and put her hand out to silence Ellie. “Guys, let this be a lesson. No need to create raucous and break things. There are other games that don’t involve breaking windows. Okay?”

“Sorry, Felicity. Sorry Ellie.” Clayton pulled his shoulders back as he walked out of the room, followed by a similar looking Piper, and a still-bouncing Annie, both who apologized.
When they left, Felicity walked to the window and peeked down. A blue ball could be seen in the bushes. It almost made her laugh. Playing crochet in their dad’s bedroom. What kind of kids did that? Not her. At their age, she busied herself with ripping apart computers.

“Maybe you should deal with discipline from now on.” Ellie said, sinking down to the bed. “Especially when it involves this room.”

“What do you mean?”

“This was my parents’ room, obviously. Daddy didn’t change a thing, and there’s a lot of her stuff around in here. I’ve tried convincing him to put some of it away so none of it gets broken, but he won’t ever do that. So I might guard this room a little more than the others.”

Felicity looked around the two-of-her-apartments bedroom. It had a feminine taste, something Oliver definitely didn’t have. Pictures of roses and lupines hung on the walls. Knickknacks sat on the desk and the end tables. An old bouquet of flowers, the color long ago fallen from its leaves, stood on the dresser. “I’m assuming most of this is your mom’s.”

“Daddy used to whine about the extraordinary amount of stupid things that she bought. Whenever we went to a different state she would buy something, and put it up. Even if we’d gone to that state a million times.” A smile formed on Ellie’s lips as she picked up a mug with several African animals on it. “It was a good thing we had money, because she would buy enough crazy things that we would’ve gone broke.” The next phrase came rushed. “And I didn’t mean to brag about our money. It doesn’t help with anything.”

“I know. Money only buys a nice house and nice clothes. And I didn’t mean that in a sarcastic, rude way. I mean that in a Yoda way. But I don’t like Star Wars. I grew up a few years after that whole drama, and I have never seen the second trilogy either.”

Ellie laughed. “You don’t have all your ducks in a row sometimes, huh?”

“If you’re referring to my expert talking, yes. Or no. I talk myself into a hole. A lot. You better hope that you’re never with me when I get into a fight with a cashier or someone important because I will become very embarrassing. You might think it’s impossible, but it is.”

“Does that mean you’re staying?”

“What do you mean?”

“One nanny lasted a year, but that was because Daddy paid her an enormous amount of money, and she didn’t do anything to earn it. But you…you’re so different, and you just said that I wouldn’t want to hang out with you when you get into fights. Does that mean you’re staying?”

“There’s no way I would leave you.” She’d never had a real family before. Well, kind of. But nothing like this. No siblings. Even though the Queens lost their mother, at least they had those precious years with them. Her mother never supported her in anything—heck, she didn’t even know that Felicity had a nanny job for rich people!

Even after only three days, she found something here that she’d never found before. These kids, despite their tragedies, already adored her. She found love here, and a home.

“Felicity?” John Diggle stood at the door, his expression one of most definitely not surprise at seeing the broken window. “You should probably come downstairs.”
And a friend. It took several years, but she found another friend. Barry Allen could only keep her happy for so long.

And that’s who stood at the door when she got downstairs. With a giant grin on his face, he dropped his bag and wrapped her in a hug. “Oh, Felicity, I’m so proud of you! I knew you’d do fine. Though I was a little surprised to find out you made it through the first day. That’s always the worst, and Oliver—Mr. Queen—is not one anyone can easily get along with.”

“Barry…” He finally stopped, meaning she could get a word or two in before he went off about the decorating. “Why are you here? I haven’t called you since I got the job.”

“I wanted to check in on you. And congratulate you in person.”

“But…how did you know where the house is?”

“Everyone from Starling to Central City knows where this place is.” He let go of her and walked into the living room, his arms outstretched. “Whoa! This is bigger than Joe’s whole house! You can now say that you live in a bigger house than me. Which was true to begin with because you actually owned something.”

Something was wrong with him. He always jabbered, but right he sounded like he was trying to perform a cover up. Did he not want her to know that he somehow knew this family? She already discovered that. Suspicion flooded through her as she watched Barry go to each picture and stare at it.

If he did know the Queen family—or at least Oliver—why would it be necessary for him to hide it? “Barry, you really need to calm down and stop looking at their artwork. That six by six picture there is probably worth a million bucks, so don’t touch it.”

“Felicity, who is that?” Piper stood on the steps, her finger pointing at Barry. “We aren’t supposed to let strangers into the house.”

“This is my friend Barry. He came all the way from Central City to see me.”

Barry waved at her. “What’s your name?”

“Piper. Ellie would like you. Don’t tell her I said that. She likes cute boys, and you’re cute.”

“I heard that!” The eldest Queen burst into the room, a threatening look on her face, but it softened when she caught sight of Barry. “Oh. Hi. I’m Ellie. I heard you’re a friend of Felicity’s?”

No, no, no. That did not have to be a rumor floating around this gargantuan house. Her in relationship with Barry Allen? She would date Oliver Queen before she and Barry ever went out on a date. Which, given the fact that she would never date a grump like that—even an attractive grump with a six-pack—she would never, ever date Barry. Ever. “He and I are old friends. Really long time friends. Like Fall-Out Boy was still cool when we met. Like the Boston football team had just won their first Super Bowl. Which I know nothing about. I just remember seeing it on the news one day, and I think I met Barry after that. Maybe before.”

She took a deep breath and glanced around. Barry had his back turned, supposedly studying a sculpture, but his shoulders shook with laughter. Ellie put her hand over her mouth, but she couldn’t hide a grin.

Felicity felt her face widen into a smile as the giggles reflected onto her. “That didn’t mean to become a ramble like that. But at least now you get what I was talking about. After several
Barry turned around, his eyes filled with humor. “This is what I’ve had to put up with for the past eight plus years. I also brought some helpful stuff for you.” He snatched his bag from the floor and opened it, discarding several books. Big books. “Lots of science stuff from the science guy. I heard from—well, I assumed that someone in this big family someone would like to know about weather…lightning, and such. There’s also some chemistry. Biology. Whatever anyone wants to learn.”

After introductions were made with a couple of the other children and they ran off with the books, Felicity walked with Barry to the kitchen where she found him a beer. As he drank it down at an alarming rate, she asked, “Why are you here? And don’t say that you’re here to congratulate me or whatever. You’re not being honest with me, and it’s getting obvious that you’re trying to hide something.”

“Me being dishonest? When have I ever done that with you?”

“There’s a first time for everything.”

“Oh, come on. Felicity, I wanted to come over here because I got a day off. I know Oliver from a CSI case that both our cities took care of at his company a few years back. Raisa’s daughter was the victim, and I solved the case. We got the killer behind bars. That’s why I know where the house is.”

“Why don’t you know the kids?”

“Because Oliver didn’t want them to know about the murder. It wasn’t long after Annie’s death, and he thought that if they knew about what happened, it would cripple them forever.”

“Well, that’s probably the best decision he has made.”

“Huh?”

“I was around Oliver…Mr. Queen for a day, and it became obvious that he wallows in his own grief and he doesn’t care about his kids. He sends them to school for ten hours a day, for heaven’s sakes! Give me that.” She yanked the bottle away from Barry and took a swig, instantly regretting it. It reminded her of why she stuck to martinis. And such. “Yuck. Anyways, he’s rude too. He told me I need to update my wardrobe!”

Barry spit beer all over the countertop. He covered his mouth with one hand and held up a finger. “I’m am so sorry.” His laughter continued and he doubled over, howling.

Felicity tapped her fingers on the countertop, waiting for him to stop, annoyed that he would find the situation and story funny.

“I’m so sorry, Felicity.” Barry wiped his mouth as he took a seat. “That was just hilarious. I never thought any man would say that too you. Did you punch him?”

“I slammed the door in his face.”

“Bravo, my friend. Bravo. You slammed a door in Oliver Queen’s face and you didn’t get fired. What were you wearing? Your miniskirt?”

“Barry Allen!”

He raised his hands in the air. “I’m kidding, I’m kidding. But you have to give him some slack. He
grew up in the limelight, and he’ll be in the limelight for the rest of his life. Imagine all the gossip and such that goes on in the city. Even before Annie died, there were rumors that he cheated on her and stuff. He needs, probably for more of his own comfort, to know that even the babysitter will be able to handle herself in a manner that brings the Queen name dignity.”

“That was literally the most un-Barry like speech you’ve ever given me. But,” she reached across the table and grabbed his hand. “I will try to remember that when I get forced to wear some ten thousand dollar dress that still manages to be ugly.”

“For someone with a gorgeous smile, you are such a pessimist.”

“And you’re too talkative.”

He chuckled as he stood. “I gotta head outa here. It was good talking, but it’s a couple hours home, and you have kids to school. Put that brain of yours to good use.”

“Go before I make you teach them yourself.”

With a wave, Barry left. Felicity shut the door behind him and sank back against it. Why did life have to be complicated? She understood some stuff; living wasn’t for wimps, and it certainly wasn’t all sunshine and rainbows, but some stuff, like today’s moments, could’ve been scratched from existence. Barry didn’t lie well, so if he did, he had done some practicing. Still, the situation made her feel sticky.

He did definitely speak the truth on one thing, though: she did need to get used to being in an almost-royalty family. That meant she would have to suck it up and find a way to live in the limelight. And enjoy it.

“So that was Mr. Allen. He hasn’t changed a bit.” Dig strode into the foyer, a smirk on his face. “I never knew you were friends with him. He didn’t mention you when he worked here.”

“When he’s focused, he keeps his work life…his work life. I didn’t even know that he worked the case. Neither did I know that Raisa’s daughter was—”

“It’s something that was another heartbreaker in a long line of them. We’ve all recovered in our own way. Now I think we should get back to doing lessons. I called an old friend who is a tutor and she is willing to help us until we decide on a different plan.”

“Sounds good. But for now, let’s go.” She swiped a Civil War history book off the end table and headed up to the boys’ room. Apparently Clayton studied this period at school, and that meant he needed the book up there, not downstairs.

She knocked on the door, surprised when it swung open. Clayton sat on his bed, holding a whacky instrument. He dropped it below the comforter, but Felicity pointed at where it disappeared. “What’s that?”

“Just an experiment. Nothing much.”

“Can I see it?”

His hand burrowed underneath the blanket, but his eyes rose to hers. “You really want to see it?”

“Of course I do. I like science.”

The instrument of use came out from its hiding spot. Clayton set it on the bed with great gentleness,
and a small smile. “W-Would you like to see how it works?”

“Yes!”

“Okay. So, this is the little switch. It’s rigged like a crossbow. You’ve seen those, right? Anyways, I pull this back.” He tugged on a string and clipped it on a contraption Felicity could only marvel at and wish she could have come up with something like this back in the day. “And then I can aim this suction cup at whatever I want. Like the closet door. And watch!”

He released the string and the suction cup went flying forward onto the door. Using his own reel, he pulled the door back, and then clicked another button that released the suction. Clayton turned to look at Felicity. His hands rubbed against his thighs; his eyes sparkled with unshed tears. Tears that had been shed so many times before. Finally, he choked out, “Did you like it? It’s okay if you didn’t, it’s kind of weird, and really stu—”

“Clayton.” Felicity put her hands on his shoulders, steadying his shaking. “It’s amazing. That is seriously the coolest contraptions I have ever seen. If I had one of those when I was little so I didn’t have to get out of bed, it would’ve spared me a lot of problems.”

“You really think it’s cool?”

“Cool enough that I need to ask if you can make me one?”

“You like it that much?”

“I do! It’s awesome. Really, Clayton. I love it.”

He picked up his contraption again, his nimble fingers studying each part. “No one’s ever said that about it before. About any of my stuff.” He pushed his glasses back on his nose and lifted his head. “Thanks, Felicity.”

“You have more stuff like this?”

“Kind of. They’re all in the closet. Do you…do you want to see them?”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

Clayton disappeared into the closet and came back with a box. A big box. “I don’t look at these very often. They might be all broken. Or the mice got into them. But a few of them are cool. This is one that I built a few months ago. It looks boring, but you can put this plastic part on yours books so when you don’t have a bag and it’s raining, the library books won’t get wet.”

“You definitely have to make me one of those. Maybe I won’t have such a big library fine.”

He giggled.

As each invention came out of the box, her little friend gained confidence. Each reaction from Felicity made his smile and the brightness in his eyes grow. How did no one know about his love for inventing? Or the skills he had? Most of the ideas he showed her surpassed her brain, and she had a decent one. At least that’s what she thought. Maybe her brain just extended as far as computer knowledge. But this little boy, at eleven years old, had more ideas in him than most human beings.

And no one noticed.

“That’s it.”
“There’s still one left in the box. Is that one broken?”

“No. I don’t think so.” Clayton reached inside the box, but didn’t pull his hand up. “It’s one that my mom made. And Daddy. He helped a little bit, but he mostly just watched us. He said he wasn’t very good at anything with his hands, but he could use his eyes to watch.”

“I’m sorry, Clayton.” What else was there to say?

“It’s actually a nightlight.” He pulled it out and set it on the nightstand. After several hard blows on the fixture to get the dust off, it stood proud. Superheroes lined the sides, but the words around the frame forced Felicity to look away.

*You’ll always be my hero.*

The words yanked her back to seven-years-old when he left. His rough hands curled around her own little ones and his whispered, “You’ll always be my greatest achievement.” And then she never saw him again.

“Felicity? Felicity, are you okay?” Clayton grabbed her arm. “You weren’t breathing.”

“Sorry. I was just thinking. I’m okay now. Th-That’s really cool. And very special. Why don’t you keep it out?”

“Cuz it reminds me of my mom.”

“Don’t you….want to remember her?” *Idiot.* It wasn’t like she tried to remember her father. Did she keep any of the birthday gifts she’d been given? No. Did she try to contact him after her fifteenth birthday? No. If she received word that he passed away, would she mourn? *Don’t think like that.*

“I think about her a lot up here.” He pointed to his head. “But I don’t like doing it too much, because it makes me sad. But Daddy says she’s up in Heaven and she can see and hear us, so I like that. Whenever I’m sad I remember that she sees me being sad, and she wouldn’t like that.”

The need for someone to hold on to overwhelmed her. “Clayton, can I hug you?”

“What for?”

“Just because.”

“You probably don’t squeeze my organs out like Raisa, so okay. But I get to hug you.” He bounced forward and landed next to her. His arms encircled her back and he pulled her close. “Thanks for liking my inventions, Felicity.”

How could a hug from such a small human be so precious? Felicity let him fall back against her, gathering him in her arms as he started to cry. His little body shook with sobs as he whispered, “I miss Mama.” His arms tightened around her neck. “No one ever tucks me in at night…like she did. *Ever!* I want my Mama!”

******

That night, Felicity shut the last bedroom door and trudged towards her own room down the hall. What a day. So many emotions, and memories dragged up. It felt as if life wanted to smash her down to the ground, and make her cry. Maybe she should.

“You alright?” Raisa walked down the hall towards her, carrying a stack of pristine white towels.
“You look a little down.”

Felicity dropped herself against the wall. “How do you do it, Raisa? Living in this house all the time? I’ve been here three days and I already feel more depressed. It’s like there’s a dark cloud of pain and loss over this whole place.”

“It’s gotten worse, Felicity. Over the years as Mr. Oliver sinks deeper into his own despair, the house has gotten quieter. Annie loved music and laughter, and he doesn’t want any of it here. Nothing that reminds him of her. Even if that means avoiding the children.”

“Have you ever tried to make it a little sunnier again?”

Raisa shook her head, a sad smile forming on her lips. “Sometimes tragedy is impossible to reverse. No matter how hard one tries. Good night, Felicity.”

The woman who seemed like a glimmer of hope disappeared into one of the bathrooms and shut the door. Felicity groaned and peeled herself off the wall. She bypassed her room, instead heading down the stairs, stopping at one of the landings to look at the pictures. Seven of them lined the walls. Six were photos of each child at different stages in life; she could guess that they hadn’t been updated in five years. The middle one was a family photo in a hospital room. Annie lay in the bed, a baby cradled in her arms. Piper and Clayton curled up next to her. Oliver held Harper, William and Ellie peeked out from over his shoulders.

Every single one of them had a smile on their face.

What would that family picture look like now? Would love be oozing out of that photo, or would it show the world their pain?

She tore herself away from the photo and continued down the stairs. In the kitchen, Dig had a cup of coffee sitting on the counter.

“Thought you’d probably like some after today. I’m assuming you’ve had better moments.”

“Most of today had good moments. It’s just that they were taxing moments. Like when you sent that final paper in for school and pass out for twelve hours. It was a good paper, but boy oh boy did it hurt like the dickens while it was being written. If I were a sports geek, I’d have made some analogy to that but I know nothing about nothing.”

“That’s okay. I get my fill of Oliver talking about sports. It’s nice to have a different conversation once and a while.”

“Oliver talks?” She warped her face into a shocked expression. “Does he grumble about everything the whole time? Mumble into his muffin?”

Diggle chuckled. “Oliver does have his moments. They’re rare, but he does talk. Sports are something that he never associates death with, and that means he can talk about them.”

“What kind of sports does he like?”

“Anything really. I think he watches it as a distraction.”

“And he’s lived like this for five years?”

“There’s more heartbreak in this family than you could ever imagine. The worst is that no one really knows how to solve it. Oliver is very controlling—he is going to throw an absolute fit when he
comes home—and no one ever wants to challenge him.”

“He’s very intimating; I’ve noticed. But that’s what this family needs. Oliver is crippled in his grief, and I understand why. However, it’s been five years. Five years, and this family has fallen into patterns that could ruin the rest of their lives.” Fire spread through Felicity as it became clearer as to what she needed to do.

It was simple, really. Something that she’d done a hundred times at home and at work. It wasn’t ripping a person down. It was called challenging the person to be a better one. It hurt, because sometimes it meant going through deep waters and fire, but they would find themselves again. And they would be better. “He thinks that he knows what’s best, but he doesn’t. He’s not been thinking clearly. I’ve been defying people for years; I might as well do this too.”

“I’m glad we hired you, Felicity.”

A knock sounded on the back door. Diggle groaned as he left his seat and peeked through the window. “Oh.” He unlocked the hatch and opened the door. “Hey.”

“Is Ollie here?” A woman spoke, her tone giving Felicity a picture of a strong woman. But Ollie? Did she mean Oliver?

“No. He left this morning. Come on in. Felicity’s here.”

A woman with brown hair cropped to her shoulders stepped into the kitchen and hugged Diggle. She turned and smiled at Felicity. “Hi. It’s nice to meet you.”

“I’d say ditto, but I honestly have no idea who I’m meeting.”

“Oh! Sorry. I’m Thea. Thea Harper.”

Harper? Thea? Was she supposed to know this girl? Because nothing gave her any idea to who she was, except the uncanny resemblance to…Oliver?

“Thea, I think you might need to use your maiden name.”

“I’m not used to introducing myself to anyone, John. Be quiet.” Thea tossed him a grin and then extended her hand. “I’m Thea Queen.”

Chapter End Notes

I really enjoyed writing this chapter. There's some emotional moments (especially with Clayton) that I really enjoyed. And I don't normally get to write about Barry Allen. There will be more about the do-re-mi and Annie - I just wanted to touch on that and then there will be more schooling later. I should note that she is six - I made the mistake of putting her down as five in the last chapter. :P

Hope everyone is enjoying this! Update coming next Saturday!
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Surprise, surprise! New chapter is here early! :P I will be without wifi for the next few days, so I decided that I'd post it today instead of making people wait until Sunday. Hope everyone enjoys this! The next chapter is going to contain a Smoak vs. Queen showdown! :)

Oliver…had a sister? When did that happen? Clearly a long time ago. Why hadn’t she seen any pictures of her around the house? Why did Thea come through the absolute back door? Where she and Dig running an underground drug dealership?

Felicity focused back in, realizing that she stared at nothing for ten seconds. “Sorry! It’s nice to meet you. And I’m very sorry I don’t know who you are. I didn’t do my research on anything, and that means I’m at a loss for everything but that this family has a lot of money.”

“It’s okay. My husband and I have stayed out of the tabloids for a long time. It’s hard to find evidence that I am a Queen.” Thea moved with ease throughout the kitchen, finding coffee grounds and a cup. She started her drink and then went to the fridge and pulled out a plate of cake. “I thought you’d have eaten this by now.”

“You need to stop bringing treats. Raisa bakes enough of them.”

“Well, Roy is obsessed with his six-pack so I have to give food to someone.”

“So, uh…you two are good friends?” Felicity clasped her hands together to signal a ‘friendship’. “I’m assuming you’re two upstanding citizens who don’t sneak back and forth and exchange drugs, right? You’re not sneaking crack into the cakes?”

Thea’s brow furrowed, but then she laughed. “Drugs are several years in my past, thankfully. So no to the drugs. However,” she grabbed her coffee and took a seat at the counter. “These visits aren’t allowed.”

“Are you on probation?”

“My brother doesn’t allow them. He and I haven’t seen each other for five years.”

And five years ago Oliver lost his wife. The dates lined up. “Oh. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s something that I have to live with. A week after the funeral Ollie disappeared for two weeks, leaving me, Raisa, and Dig to care for the kids. When he got back, he looked…awful. I’ve never seen someone look like that. He claimed he was drunk in a bar the whole time, but I knew better. Even if he was drunk, I still yelled at him.

“Coupled with the grief and his overall outlook on life at that point, he practically dragged me out of the house and told me never to come again. I tried, but he kicked me out.” Thea dragged a painted fingernail across her face, brushing away a tear. “He wouldn’t even let the kids come to our wedding.”
“No disrespect but your brother is kind of a jerk.”

“A damaged jerk. And I take no offense to that because it’s true. My brother went from being a man Starling City admired to one who the city never wanted to see again. It was too heartbreakingly of a tale, and Ollie agreed. So he gave up. Became a man that our parents would’ve been embarrassed to know they raised. He’s never thought that he could live after Annie’s death. So he decided not to.”

Thea took a deep breath. “But we don’t need to talk about that right now. There’s better things to talk about. Like the kids. I heard you pulled them out of that juvenile prison. Good for you. It takes guts to do that. John used his all-controlling power to pull them out, I heard.”

“A few weeks ago Oliver said that he was happy I was in charge of the kids.” Diggle crossed his arms and leaned back against the fridge. “He might revoke my privileges when he gets home.”

“Well, Ollie can’t survive without you so don’t be too worried. I wish I could help, but me being here is treading dangerous ground already. Anyways, I’m not exactly a pro at anything school. It’s probably a good thing that I don’t work at the company anymore.”

Now she had another ally. One who would hide in the shadows but still manage to shout encouraging words that she needed to hear. With Thea now on her side, Felicity’s confidence grew. Clearly this woman had gone through tragedies; and she still stood tall. If she figured it out, that meant other people could. “I’m really glad you stopped by. It’s nice to meet a less grumpy Queen…Harper.”

“If you ever need to call me, don’t hesitate to do it. I can help a lot from the sidelines. More like, from the coaches’ booth up in the balcony.”

“You like sports too?”

“I’ve picked up a lot from Oliver over the years.” Thea winked at her and then stood. “Roy said to not wait too long, so I’d better go. Goodbye, John.” She hugged him and then she hugged Felicity. “I’m so glad I met you. Hang tight, and don’t let anyone push you around.”

“Aunt Thea?”

“Oh, dear God.” Thea spun towards the kitchen door. Felicity had her eyes to the opening, and she groaned. William stood there, surprise and delight written on his face. He stayed rooted in his spot, his mouth open.

“Hi, Willie.”

“Worst nickname ever. I’ve missed you so much!” He ran at her, his arms going around her back, as he stood several inches taller than her. “You haven’t come here since...since—”

“I know.” Thea’s voice broke. “And I’m so sorry.”

They broke apart, and William scrubbed his eyes. Thea sniffed, and ran her hand up and down his arm. “You’ve gotten so big. You look like a teenage version of your dad. Do you work out twenty-four seven?”

“Uh, um...I like to be in the gym every couple days, yeah. It’s a good way to burn off stuff. Aunt Thea...why haven’t you been to see us for five years? We’ve all missed you a lot. And Roy. Y-You didn’t even invite us to the wedding.”

“It’s complicated and something that you don’t need to know anything about, lil’ Willie. A-And you
can’t tell anyone that I was here. Not even your siblings.”

“Why not? They’d love to see you!”

“I know they would. But it’s complicated. They can’t know. No one can. Do you understand that?”

“I’m old enough to know when I should listen to an adult about not telling the truth.” William hugged Thea again. “I won’t tell anyone, but I won’t forget about this. Please, once you figure everything out, come over again. You’re some of the only family we have left. And we all want you back here. I especially miss seeing you at the office annoying Daddy.”

Thea laughed, but the sound came out as a sob. “I miss you too. We’ll try to come soon. I have to go now. I love you, Willie. Be good for Felicity, okay?”

With a last look at Felicity and Diggle, Thea left. The door banged behind her. William went to the fridge and pulled out the cake. “I was hungry. I’ll go back up to bed.” He glanced between the two, a grin spreading on his face. Whatever he had to say, he found it hilarious. “You three aren’t running a drug ring are you?”

“No!”

“Good to know. See you in the morning.”

Diggle expelled a deep breath when William left. “That was almost as terrifying as my years in Afghanistan. Oliver didn’t tell them that he banned Thea from coming.”

“Why would he? Make himself sound more like a jerk?” Did Oliver’s surprises in the dirt-bag-i-ness category extend any further? Kicking out his sister for giving him a lecture, and not allowing the family to never see her again? Tell them that she didn’t invite them to her wedding? The lecture she would give him grew by the minute. Seconds even.

“I honestly don’t know anymore. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Felicity sat in kitchen for several minutes, but staring out the windows to the vast lawn creeped her out, so she trudged up the stairs to her bedroom. On the nightstand her phone blinked, signaling she had messages. Multiple of them probably. All from her mother.

Seven more voicemails, actually. She avoided her phone for two days because of this.

Sitting here, thinking about how the Queen family fell apart, made her pick up the phone and click on her mom’s number. They might not see eye-to-eye on anything, but Donna Smoak deserved to know that her daughter slept with a roof above her.

She got the phone to go straight to voicemail, wincing when Donna rambled for a minute about things on her messaging system. Finally, it beeped. “Hi Mom. I’m sorry I haven’t contacted you lately. I’m fine; really fine.” She almost laughed as her eyes panned around the bedroom. Four-poster bed, velvet curtains, expansive closet. Her boss said he’d order a whole new wardrobe for her. So yeah, she was living okay. “Whatever you read in the paper or whatever is not true. Don’t worry about me. Seriously, don’t. I’m doing great. I’m currently—” Felicity, no. “I’m currently laying in bed with a bottle of red wine. It’s great. Talk to you later. Bye.”

“Wake up! Wake up! Felicity, you gotta open your eyes. Now!”
“What?” Three days difference and she could wake up much quicker than she could the first night. *I’m becoming a nanny.* Felicity let out a sigh of relief when Annie stood above her. No blood, no tears. For the most part. And light shined through the windows. “Is everything okay?”

“No, it’s not! Someone ate my cereal!”

“Ate…your cereal?” *And you woke me up for this?* “Just eat some other stuff.”

“It’s mine. No one is supp’d ta eat my cereal!”

“Do you have your own stuff?”

“Yes. Uncle Tommy buys me my own every Saturday.”

“It is…Saturday.”

“But he doesn’t come until noon!”

And the clock read eleven thirty. “Okay.” Felicity sat up, bringing up the covers to cover her chest. The one night she decided to sleep topless. It would be a total Felicity bad-luck moment to have Oliver barge in at this moment, outraged about…everything. And she’d have to fight him while being mostly naked.

So this ‘Uncle Tommy’ bought the kids their own cereal. Did she even want to meet this guy? Probably not, if she were being honest. Was he one of those men who spoiled his nieces and nephews incessantly? She hated those kind of people.

“Felicity, are you going to punish the culprit?”

“We don’t exactly know who it is, do we?”

“I have a fingerprint kit. I’ll find him. It’s going to be a *him*, and then you can ground him!” Annie whirled out of the room, her cereal box tucked close to her.

Felicity moaned and rolled out of bed. With ‘Uncle Tommy’ coming, she would have to shower. What a great start to her Saturday.

Half an hour later, she sidled downstairs just as the front doors flew open and a booming voice yelled, “In exchange for treats, Uncle Tommy wants a hug!”

A handsome man with black hair, and remnants of a baby face stepped into the foyer, several shopping bags hanging off his arms. He spotted her and made an attempt to wave. “You’re the new nanny, I’m assuming?”

“Felicity Smoak.”

“Tommy Merlyn.”

“You own Merlyn Industries?”

“Pffft. My dad does. I sit at a desk and play Pokémon.”

“I thought you have to walk around to do that.”

“My droid carries my phone around.”
“Uncle Tommy!” Piper rushed at him. Tommy dropped the bags and caught her mid-jump.

“Helloooo, Miss Piper! How are you today?”

“Since I gave you a hug do I get my cereal?”

“Yes, my dear. There is your bag. Now come give me a hug after you eat your lunch, okay?”

Each kid came up to give him a hug, grabbed their bag and ran off. Tommy handed Ellie a book and William a comic. To Ellie he said, “Don’t tell your dad that I gave you a romance book. He might have a heart attack.”

“If he only knew.” Ellie winked and left with William.

“Now that that is done, I can formally say hello.” Tommy shook her hand. He seemed to give her a once-over, taking in her exotic way of dressing, no doubt. Most of the people tootling around the Queen Mansion owned a mansion of their own. The clothes Tommy wore now had to cost more than her entire wardrobe.

“Please excuse me for checking you out. Your clothes, I mean. Raisa told me that Oliver said you had to get a new wardrobe.”

“What do you think?”

“Oliver was definitely wrong in that matter. Though if you ever want to go shopping, grab the credit card and call me. I know my way around Coach stores.”

“I would never spend that much money on a purse or a coat.”

“They always say that.”

“Are you hitting on me?”

“No!” Tommy held his hands up and took a step back. “I’m sorry it sounded like that. I have a girlfriend. A very wonderful one, actually. I’m not a two-timer anymore.”

So Thea used drugs in the past. Tommy two-timed. Did she even want to guess what Oliver used to do? Felicity waved off the apology. “I know. I don’t know know, of course. I don’t stalk you. I’m not one of those insane girls who wants to kiss you. I don’t get obsessed with that kind of stuff. Unless we’re talking about me at thirteen.” There she went again. Rambling about something ridiculous. Would her brain ever shut up?

“It’s nice to meet someone who doesn’t fling herself on me, in tears because she’s so excited. I’m assuming Oliver’s not home?”

“Don’t tell me you’re banned from the house too.”

“Who else is? And no, I’m not. We are still on decent terms. We never talk enough to be best friends like old times, but he certainly doesn’t hate me. He might after he finds out I’ve been bringing Ellie romance novels.”

“She’s seventeen. I was reading those at ten.”

“He doesn’t want her to get any ideas in her about love being a fairytale.”

“Of course he wouldn’t. Whoever stays married to the same person anyways? I was being sarcastic,
for your information.”

“You don’t have a very high respect for Oliver, do you?”

“Should I?”

“No. For the man he used to be, yes. And the business man he is. No one will argue he is good at that. But not for the person he’s become. Raisa!” Tommy enveloped the older lady in a hug. “I’ve missed you.”

“It’s only been a week, Mr. Merlyn.”

“I know. It’s been a long one though. I bought you some flowers, but I left them in the apartment. So you will have double the bouquets next time, I promise.”

With a smile, Raisa placed her hands on her heart. “Thank you, Mr. Merlyn.”

“Anytime, Raisa. Now where’s Dig?”

Felicity climbed the stairs again. No need to stick around. These people went way back; she went back four days. Today would be for relaxing and enjoying a few moments by herself. Maybe even with a book.

She stopped at the boys’ room. The door was cracked, and William sat on the bed, his fingers moving across a phone. What did he think about Thea’s…appearance last night? His reaction made sense, but he got over her not showing up quicker than most people would.

She knocked, and he dropped his phone to the bed. “Come in.”

“Hi. Willie.”

“Augh, please don’t call me that. That is an awful nickname.”

“I think it’s cute.”

“Exactly why it’s a bad nickname.”

“I guess it’s hard for a man like you to ever be associated with the word ‘cute’. Unless it’s a girl.”

“Our puppy was cute.”

“You guys have a dog?”

“Not anymore. Daddy got rid of it. Said it caused too much commotion.”

She should keep a diary called ‘things to be mad at Oliver about’. Calm, Felicity. Calm. “What kind of dog was it?”

“A golden retriever. We named her Roxy. She used to rotate sleeping in our bedrooms. It was the only time that we slept with our doors open, because she’d start the night off in one room, go to the next, and end in our room every night.”

“I bet she was cute.”

William nodded, and picked up his phone again. He sent several text messages, checked his email, and clicked on Instagram before he tossed it to a chair. “Daddy sent Aunt Thea away too, didn’t he?”
This boy held his father in contempt already. She’d heard it in his voice and words that night in the basement, and in his attitude ever since. What would this truth-reveal do to him? Their relationship?

“Just tell me. You obviously know.”

*I’m sorry.* She whispered the answer. “*Yes.*”

He collapsed against the backboard. “I should have known. She spent so much time with us after Mom died, and then she and Uncle Roy disappeared. And Daddy took the pictures of them off the walls. He took a lot of them off, but it was obvious. I figured it out last night when I saw her reaction to stuff I said.”

“I wish there was a different answer to give you, William.”

“There’s nothing else to say but my dad’s a jerk.”

“No. No, he’s not.”

“And how do you propose that new concept?”

What on earth did she just say? Oliver wasn’t a jerk? Wasn’t that what she’d been telling herself all this time? He ignored the kids, took away their dog, banned his sister from his house, and told her to get new clothes. His actions rivaled most dirt bag ex-boyfriend stories in romances.

And she just told his son that his father wasn’t one of those men.

He *couldn’t* be. Someone who wooed a woman since middle school and stayed with her until her death couldn’t be a jerk. Annie wouldn’t have stayed with him if he growled at her, and the kids wouldn’t talk about memories in such fondness if he avoided them.

Oliver became a different man when Annie died. It was the direct result of circumstances. The man everyone loved was still there. Just buried deep inside the mask he put on every day. And if someone could convince him to take the mask off, it would reveal that Oliver Queen still lived.

Felicity didn’t take William’s hands; boys thought those kind of things were weird, but she did lean forward to emphasize her point. “You ever shatter a flower vase? Or one of those Hummel’s? They can shatter, and there’s a big ‘oh, crap’ moment after that. You probably stand there imagining how mad your grandma’s gonna be. But there’s professionals who can put it back together. Most people can’t, but there’s people who *can.*

“Your dad broke five years ago, and because no one thinks they can put him back together that’s still how he looks. Just like that vase that accidentally got shattered while playing baseball. Some people aren’t going to be able to help him, but a few can. And that’s mainly his kids.”

William looked away. He gulped, and then sniffed. “I’ve never thought of it that way before. We all lost Mom, but what he doesn’t realize is that we lost him too. He’s gone so much that I don’t think he knows us at all. One of us could have died and he wouldn’t know about it. For days. Weeks, even.”

“Maybe he just needs a little fixing.”

“We all do. And I know I’m gonna sound like Ellie when I say this, but thank you for coming here. We didn’t like you at first, and I’m sorry. But you’re helping us, Felicity. And I hope you’ll keep doing that.”

“I have every intent to do that.”
And she did. For the next two weeks, four tutors, Diggle, Raisa, and Felicity schooled the kids at home. Every couple hours they had ‘break time’ which involved swimming, Monopoly, freeze tag, and many more games. Felicity watched in awe as the house transformed into a place of happiness, with music blaring throughout the halls, unable to cover up the giggles coming from the bedrooms. Several times water balloons exploded from the balconies. Something that would never be mentioned to Oliver when he arrived. Unless he asked about the disappearance of a certain picture.

“Miss Smoak?”

Felicity looked up from her new computer—Tommy Merlyn bought it for her—to see one of the tutors, Rachel, rushing into her room. “Everything okay?” Probably not with that look.

“No! No, it is not! I just had a snake dropped onto my foot. A snake! What kind of twelve-year-old girl likes snakes?”

Ahhh, Harper. How shocking. “She’s actually thirteen.”

“That doesn’t make a difference!”

“Felicity?” Diggle peeked his head into the room. “We have a little mess in the ballroom.”

“Oh, no. What?”

“Paint.”

“Oh, no!” She shoved away from her desk and ran down the hall and stairs to the ballroom. It looked like someone died. But the blood was yellow. And blue. And….there was the red. The paint extended several yards, and then petered out. At least it stayed within boundaries. “Uh, guys? What happened?”

Clayton took off his glasses and wiped them on his white shirt. “I was doing an experiment.”

“An experiment that caused all this to blow up? What were you doing?” She spotted a blow torch. “Oh, dear God.”

“It wasn’t bad! It just got a little close to the paint. I didn’t think it would happen.”

“Do you have a death wish, Clayton? Because that’s what could have happened!”

Piper and Annie ran past, howling. “That’s my book! I bought it and that means only I can use it!”

Oh, God, help me. Felicity ran her hand on the wall, letting out a sigh of relief when the paint whooshed off. If they got it off soon no one would ever know what happened. Calm, Felicity. “Okay, Clayton. Please go get all your siblings and say that they can have a school break. Now.”

Diggle dropped a bucket of rags on the ground. “I’ll go get some water.”

Harper stormed in and grabbed a rag as Felicity directed. “What the heck did you do in here? Blow something up? This is ridiculous!”

“It doesn’t matter what happened. We just need to get all the paint off the walls so—”

“So Daddy will never know. Got it.” William walked in, carrying a bowl of water. “Come on guys.”
Felicity wet a rag and rubbed it again the wall. The paint came off, and left only a smear. Thank goodness. Oliver would never know that one of his sons blew up paint all over the ballroom. Not that they had many dances here. That didn’t seem likely. So maybe they should forgo cleaning and leave it be.

“Give me my rag back!” Piper reached over and yanked a yellowed rag from Clayton’s hands. “That’s mine.”

“No, I took that first. I like that one. So give it me.”

“No!”

Clayton grabbed the rag and pulled it out of Piper’s hands. They both stumbled back; Piper slammed against the painted wall and Clayton fell into the scaffolding. A series of loud yells followed. Felicity rushed over and helped Piper up, fully aware of the paint now covering both of them.

“That was all your fault!” The little girl hissed at her brother. “Now you wrecked my new shirt!”

“Well, you were being a stubborn—”

“That’s enough!” Felicity took a deep breath to ward off her anger. “You all need to calm down. We had a snake on someone’s feet, blown up paint, and now a nice push-and-shove contest that was anything but nice!

“I think what we all need a little break. Has anyone ever gone rollerblading in this house?”

“We’ve thought about it.” Ellie said.

“Perfect! I’ve seen one pair of rollerblades here, so everyone drop your rags, and get into the van. Raisa, can you get the other housekeepers to finish this please?”

“They’d be happy to help.”

“Perfect!”

As they walked out, Harper pried her shirt from her stomach. “Shouldn’t we be changing? We’re all covered in paint. Daddy would be mad.”

“Well, I’m here, and I say that it doesn’t matter. We all look like we’ve been painting.”

Harper grinned. “This sounds like fun.”

Twenty minutes later, they marched into the sports store and headed for the skate section. Several cameras clicked photos. Felicity laughed. They looked like a bunch of rag-a-muffins. She could see it now. The tabloid header would read: ‘The Queen Family’s Steady Fall From Society’. It would be hilarious, really. Especially if Oliver saw it.

“What can I do for you, Miss; Mr. Diggle?” An attendant with the nametag ‘Garry’ asked them.

“We would like to buy rollerblades for everyone.”

“Including you, Mr. Diggle?”

“Excluding me.”

“Right this way then!” Garry led the way to the section of blades. “I’ll just do this youngest to oldest.
Uh, go ahead and sit down, Miss Queen. I guess we can clean the paint off later. What shoe size do you wear?"

“I have no idea.”

“We’ll measure you then.”

Garry went through the measurements and the selection of skates at record-pace. Piper sat down next, then Clayton, Harper, William, and Ellie. Felicity sat down last, and gave her sweetest smile. “Thank you for your help, Garry.”

He wiped sweat off his forehead. “You’re welcome, ma’am. This family doesn’t come in often, but when they do, it’s always something like this.”

“Something like what?”

“Big. Potentially dangerous. Though they’re never dressed like that. They’re usually in school uniforms.”

*Well, they don’t go to school anymore.* Maybe not a good thing to announce. “We were painting and decided we want to do something else.”

“I can tell.”

“Felicity?” Piper tugged on her t-shirt. “Could we go get ice cream?”

“Yeah! We should!”

“Please, Felicity? Please?”

She would never admit it but the thought crossed her mind before. “That sounds like an awesome idea. Dig?”

“I don’t see why not.”

*Yaaaay!* The two little girls ran down the hallways, howling at the top of their lungs. Shoppers exchanged looks, and some pulled out cameras. The girls continued their celebration until their reached the doors.

Diggle chuckled and turned towards their direction. He carried four boxes of rollerblades. “Part of me wants to yell at them, but most of me wants to let them play. It’s high time that they do that.”

Garry muttered, “Maybe do that in your house then.”

“Excuse me?” Felicity spun around. “Are you saying that you would duck-tape your kids’ mouths shut in public so they could never have an ounce of bad behavior?”

“Well, n-no, ma’am.”

“Then don’t accuse the children of anything.”

******

“Thanks for the ride, sir. I have bags in the back.” Oliver handed the taxi driver a fifty and stepped out of the cab. Several garbage bags lined the exterior of his house. What could possibly fill up that many bags? Dead bodies?
He grabbed his duffel bags from the back and walked along the outside corridor. Every time he arrived home, he loved to take in the sights of the property. The house...that held too many bad memories, but the flowers, brick sidewalks, and the pool somehow still made him smile.

He dumped his bags on a chair and scaled the fence leading to the water. Dig always locked it, and never told him the combination. Thankfully he learned to go over a fence. He paused on the pool deck, squinting at the backside of the house. Why on earth were the sliding doors open? Dig and Raisa never opened them as it led to mosquitos in the house. He told them multiple times never to open them, actually.

And music. Music was blaring on the kitchen speakers. It had been five years since that last happened.

Whatever. He hadn’t called, meaning they didn’t expect him home. The house keeping got tired of peace and quiet, apparently. Oliver turned around and looked out at the pool. Someone went swimming recently, as the ground was slippery. A thing he never had fixed. Annie hated the look of cement, so she insisted that they do tile instead. They regretted it immediately, but didn’t care enough to switch it.

“Daddy!”

_Daddy_? It was Thursday!

He whirled around and took a step backwards in surprise. Annie, six-year-old Annie, stood five feet away from him with rollerblades on. Why would she have those on? She didn’t even know how to roller-skate! And why in heaven’s name would she be wearing those in the house?

“Daddy, I’ve missed you!” She teetered on her skates, but kept going towards him. “Like, a whole lot.”

“Oliver—Mr. Queen! You’re home!”

_Oh, God._

Felicity’s skates slipped on the tile, sending her sprawling towards Annie. His daughter screamed and launched herself at Oliver, catching his legs just as Felicity smashed into her. Oliver took a step backwards to avoid falling also, but his foot got caught on a pool toy.

“Frack!” Felicity screeched as they tumbled backwards. Oliver tried to regain his balance, but the wet floor would have none of it.

Both little girl and nanny screamed as they all hit air and fell into the pool.
The cold water sent shivers down his spine, sending him in a momentary state of shock. He shook himself out of it and grabbed Annie and pulled her to the top. No one ever taught her to swim. She recovered quickly—too quickly—and flung her arms around his neck, nearly dragging him under again.

“You’re home! Look what Felicity taught me!”

Ah, yes. Felicity. Felicity this, Felicity that. This had to be her fault. The kids home during the day—they all now appeared outside, all on rollerblades. She was responsible for the loud music; the pool toys out. Everything.

Oliver hoisted Annie out of the pool and dragged himself out after her. Felicity could help herself. Which she did, and proceeded to take off her rollerblades. “What are you all doing home? Shouldn’t you be at school?”

Harper shrugged, then smiled. “Oh, yeah, well, Dig and Felicity pulled us out. We haven’t been there in two weeks!”

He whirled on the nanny, who closed her eyes and scrunched her face. “Pulled. Them. Out?”

Felicity’s eyes snapped open and she took a step at him. He took a step backwards. “I realized that that ’school’ you sent them to is and was nothing but a child prison and excuse to get them out of the house. So with the help of Mr. Diggle, I pulled them out. And they’ve been having a great time since.”

“They…” he couldn’t find words to express his anger. He clenched his fists, trying to control himself. But it was useless. He never should have hired this woman. Just looking at her picture and seeing the resemblance to Annie should have told him the truth right away. Bad idea. Awful idea. “You can’t just pull them out!”

“Given the fact that they’re standing right here, obviously I can.”

“Who do you think you are? Their mother?”

“Well, someone’s gotta do something good for them!”

“I am doing what’s good for them!”

“No. No, you’re not.” Felicity continued to move closer to him. “Have you ever been to that school? It’s a prison. Ask any of your children. If you know their names. You might want to freshen up on that. But those teachers bully kids. Your kids. Annie, and Piper and—”

“I know who my children are.”
“No! No, you don’t! Maybe it would help you to pay attention to your kids. Because you don’t! I did what I thought was best for the kids, but maybe if you did, I wouldn’t have had to do that!”

“I don’t know who you think you are, but you’re the nanny, Miss Smoak. You don’t get to decide what’s best!”

“And you just admitted that I was right.”

“I did not!”

“Yes, you did. See, Mr. Queen, I made the children laugh and sing and have more fun in two weeks than they have in five years!”

“It’s called distraction.”

“I think you should probably rethink that statement. Ask them. Ask them, Oliver! They had fun today. I bet they haven’t had fun going shopping and—”

His gaze shifted from Felicity to the kids. Harper wore leggings and a tank top. Ellie had on the tiniest shorts he’d ever seen with a…half shirt that didn’t cover her stomach. Her blue stomach. The others wore a variety of clothing. Yellow, red, and blue paint covered everything. I bet they haven’t had fun going shopping. No one owned a pair of rollerblades. Meaning they had to be bought. And that meant—

“Do you mean to tell me that my children have been parading around town dressed in these clothes while covered in paint?”

Felicity flashed him one of her irritatingly sweet smiles. “And having a marvelous time.”

“We have a reputation to uphold!”

“And congratulations, Mr. Queen. You have done an outstanding job in upholding that reputation.”

It took everything in him to not curse her out, but they were done. Oliver gritted out, “You’re fired. Pack your bags and go.”

“No.”

“Do you not understand what ‘no’ means? You’re fired!”

“If you want to get rid of me, you’re going to have to hear something then.” She slammed her finger into his chest. She lifted her head and stared straight at him. Her gaze ripped into him, pulling away pieces of his stubbornness and lies.

“I don’t know you very well, Mr. Queen. I’ve talked to you three times, and all of those times I’ve wanted to wash your mouth out with soap and then smack you across the face. But I know you love these children. I’ve seen it in your eyes. I know you’re hurting. But it was five years ago.”

“It was yesterday to me.”

“And so do you think that it was five years ago for your kids? Because they might still be dealing with it too. So go.” She took one step back, still holding his gaze. “Go ahead and send me away. But let me do one more thing for you. You should know that you are the most selfish, spoiled, dirt-bag—”
“That’s enough!”

“I am not finished!”

“Yes, you are, Felicity. Pack your bags and get out of here. Now!”

“What? No!”

He whirled around to see Annie racing across the deck. Her padded feet slipped, and she fell into Felicity’s arms. “Daddy, you can’t send her away. Ever!”

“I agree.” Piper had taken off her skates; they all had; and ran to Felicity’s side. “She’s the best nanny we’ve ever had. You can’t fire her, Daddy.”

“If she wants to leave, then let her leave. She has every right to, after we’ve all treated her. After how you treated her.” William didn’t leave his spot by the door, but he glared at Oliver and then smiled at Felicity. “She’s done more for us in two weeks than anyone has done in a long time.”

“She taught me how to read, Daddy!”

“She looked at my invention.”

“She didn’t get too mad at us when we broke a window.”

“And she didn’t yell at me when I showed Rachel my snake!”

“Daddy.” As Ellie took her spot next to Felicity, she turned tear-filled eyes to him. The old connection he’d always had with his daughter rekindled for just one moment as she transferred all her feelings into his heart. She didn’t need to say anything; he knew. He knew how much she loved Felicity; how much she’d changed their lives. Somehow, for perhaps the last time, Ellie believed in him; trusted him to make the right decision. He knew that.

The anger deflated as he looked between each child. They all wanted her to stay. Did they ever want anyone else to? They tried to get rid of every other nanny, but this one changed everything.

His eyes flitted to Felicity. She wrapped her arms around Piper and Annie, pulling them close as they cried. “It’s okay. Everything’s okay. Don’t cry; I’ll be fine.”

His gaze wandered to William. His son leaned against the wall, his arms crossed, and when he realized Oliver was looking at him, he raised his chin, his eyes never leaving Felicity. Oliver dropped his head back and stared up at the sky. Help me. The only way to ever bring his children back to him; to their own happy lives, was to keep Felicity here.

“Fine. She can stay.”

Annie launched herself up, her arms wrapping around Felicity’s neck. Piper squealed and flung her arms around Felicity’s waist. William nodded and disappeared inside, his rollerblades dangling in his hands.

Ellie smiled as she walked away. Her hand rested on Oliver’s for a moment before she pulled away. “Thank you.”

Felicity said something to the kids, and they dispersed, picking up their rollerblades on the way and then running into the house. She smoothed out her skirt and then straightened her mostly see-through shirt, thanks to the water. “I’m not going to apologize for what I said. I was right, and I will stand by
that until something changes. But thank you for letting me stay. For the children’s sakes.”

“Yeah.” He entered the house, shutting out the screams of delight from the kids as they whizzed around on the rollerblades. The noise brought the anger back. Felicity brought this chaos into the house, and for some reason, he let her stay.

“Watch out!” Harper slammed on her brake—he could just hear the floor being ruined—but threw her arm out to grab him for support. He grabbed her shoulders to keep her from falling and then pointed at the door.

“Outside. There’s no rollerblading in the house. Is that understood?” He raised his voice for the second round. “If you want to keep skating, you need to go outside. Now!” They wouldn’t all go outside; now way they enjoyed it that much.

But they went outside. Even Ellie and William.

He swore under his breath and stormed off to the weight room. Even these walls couldn’t block out his children’s joy. He slammed his finger on the stereo button and cranked the music up. Nothing could seep through now. Even his thoughts.

******

Felicity watched as Oliver left the pool deck, and then collapsed to a lawn chair. When she pulled the kids out of school, she knew that Oliver would come home and blow up at her. But she hadn’t expected this. Definitely not coming through the door and nailing Oliver and then falling into the pool.

He tried to fire her.

And the kids stood up for her. She didn’t know which one caused the tears. Probably the latter. It took work to keep from sinking to the ground with a sob when Annie and Piper ran at her, begging Oliver to keep her with them. She knew they cared about her. But nothing could have prepared her for much they cared.

They dared to defy their father to make sure she stayed.

Felicity wiped the tears off her face. Oliver probably didn’t like tears, and if he caught her crying, she was done for.

Speak of the devil. She hadn’t meant to call him a selfish, spoiled brat, but in that moment, it seemed like the best option. If he wanted to kick her out, he would have to live with what she told him. Words that would have included stubborn scum-bag if he let her continue. And if the kids weren’t around. She still believed that deep inside Oliver wasn’t any of those words, but he was on top. That’s where the jerk resided.

He didn’t tell her outright that the kids couldn’t stay home and do school. He had to have thought it. Maybe if she showed him the plan that she and Dig—and Thea—created for this very emergency, he would okay the decision to keep them here. It was a well compiled folder, with the tutors’ résumés, grades, etc.

Might as well try. He’d be easy to find; depressed Oliver worked out, and so did angry Oliver. Basically any version of him would be lifting five hundred pounds. Shirtless, probably.

She went inside and followed the hallway to the weight room. The loud music proved her theory right. Of course he’d go in here. She pushed the door open and stepped in. He hadn’t even bothered
to change clothes. Sweat and pool water dripped from his face as he pumped the bar over his head, and then lowered it down again. He grunted and pushed it up. And again. Again.

Wouldn’t he hurt himself if he kept doing that? She moved forward, scanning the room. Dig kept it locked up when Oliver wasn’t here, citing safety concerns, so she hadn’t been in here since she walked in on the shirtless billionaire. Unlike most gyms, only one horizontal mirror lined a wall. The other three walls held pictures of the kids. And Annie.

Oliver didn’t go in here just to blow off steam.

He went in here because it was his own personal prison. One that he willingly went into every day to push a ridiculous amount of weights above his head while he stared at pictures of his deceased wife. How could someone live when every morning that person was reminded of all he’d lost?

Oliver swore. Felicity ripped herself back to the present day. Her “boss” balanced the bar an inch from his chest. She hadn’t been in one of weight rooms for a while, but his arms shook like he couldn’t push it up again.

It wasn’t like he would say ‘help’. What man that arrogant would ask for it? Felicity got behind the bench and gripped the bar, her small hands right next to Oliver’s big ones. When he didn’t attempt to push it up, she put her knees on the bench and strained to yank it up. “C’mon, Mr. Queen. I don’t know what you’ve been lookin’ at, but I can’t get this up by myself.”

He grunted, and then strained to push it up towards the rack. Avert your eyes, Felicity Smoak. How could a man have that many veins in his arms? Hopefully he couldn’t see her drooling. More figuratively than literally.

For the most part.

They got the bar back onto the rack. Felicity slid off the bench, aware of how close she sat to him. “I don’t know who gave you lessons on how to survive the weight room, but they did not do a very good job.”

“I was fine.”

“A simple ‘thank you’ would suffice.”

He let out a breath in a huff and then looked up at her, a tick of a smile on his lips. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Before I had to save a life, I came in here to explain the school plan Dig and I have been using. I know you won’t approve, but I thought I might as well try to calm you down a little bit.”

“I’m listening.”

“We hired three tutors.” She dropped a folder onto the bench, forcing herself to not cross her fingers when he picked it up. “Ellie is continuing her schooling online, and so is Willie. Harper—”

“Willie?” The file dropped to Oliver’s lap. He fumbled to pick it up again, his hand twitching. “Where’d you pick that up? No one calls him Willie.”

Only Thea did. It made sense. Why would William have reacted that way when she called him that? Unfortunately she didn’t have the smarts to realize it. Now Oliver demanded an answer from her. It couldn’t at all tip him off to his sister. That would ruin everything.
“I loved Little House on the Prairie when I was little. I started calling him Willie because there’s a character in there who was always precious.”

“Don’t call him that.” Oliver continued going through the file as if nothing happened. “So Harper, Clayton, and Piper have tutors. What about Annie?”

“I’m teaching her. She learned her ABC’s a while ago, and now she’s learning some words.”

“She didn’t know how to read before?”

“No. I was told she’s struggled since preschool to even learn the alphabet. Didn’t you know that?”

“No.”

She squinted at him. His reaction didn’t seem right. Clearly William’s nickname shook him. The chance of him still being rattled underneath that tough skin was high. But it did deserve some investigating. Why wouldn’t he know about Annie’s struggles at school? “Did you know that the teachers weren’t nice to the little ones?”

“No.” Oliver tossed the folder to the side and stood up. “You and Dig did a good job with this. Keep doing it until it fails. Then they need to go back to school.”

“What if it doesn’t?”

He turned back around, his expression blank. Cold. “All good things do, Miss Smoak.”

The door slammed, and Felicity spun in a circle twice to keep from screaming. What was with him? Thundercloud would be a more accurate name for him. A hovering, depressing bolt of lightning that was always there. He needed a kick in the seat of the pants. Hard. Repeatedly. Didn’t he realize that he alone was dragging his family down to the depths of hell with him?

******

She called him Willie.

Willie. His sister called William that. He hadn’t heard that name in so long. Not since Thea left. After you kicked her out. He tried not to think of her. It reminded him of all he’d lost. Sometimes he did miss her; he only gave Diggle the impression that he didn’t. Because if he did, his bodyguard turned close friend would give him a lecture that would end badly. For both of them.

Still ‘Willie’ brought back happy times. Thea would sit on the carpet and call the toddler over to her, begging him to try to walk. When he grew older, she would dish secrets out on how to get Oliver to say yes to ridiculous things. Apparently puppy eyes worked on him.

And they did. He could never resist his scantily-clad little kids’ bed hair and puppy eyes, begging him to let them sleep in the ‘special’, as they called it. When the bed creaked and at least one child would bounce into the middle, Annie would groan and mutter as she curled her arm around the little one, “You’re such a softie, Mr. Queen.”

“That’s enough, Oliver.” He gripped the railing, trying to squeeze out all the good memories. Stop. He couldn’t think about this right now. He could never allow himself to think about this. About Annie. Either of them.

“Daddy?” Piper appeared at the top of the stairs. “Are you okay?”
He cleared his throat and then looked at her. “I’m fine.”

“You look kinda pale. Felicity told me that when people are white as cauliflower they’re about to faint. I don’t know what to do if you do that.”

“I’m okay, Piper. Thanks for asking. Head off to bed. Sweetheart.”

She wrapped her arms around his waist, resting her head on his stomach. Wasn’t it just a few months ago when her head only reached his thighs? He rested his hands on her back and pulled her close. He didn’t remember the last time he hugged her. Any of them.

As she cuddled against him, he remembered Felicity’s words about the school. He’d never been there; only did his research and sent them there five years ago. Never had he heard about anything being bad. He knew that Annie would have thrown a temper tantrum if she knew where they spent their days, but she wasn’t here anymore. “Piper?”

“Yes?”

“Did the teachers…were the teachers mean to you?”

“They certainly weren’t nice.”

“What do you mean?”

“We did have the last name Queen. It was okay. Don’t worry about it.” Piper pulled away from him. “Ellie and Will watched over us, and they did a good job. Good night, Daddy.”

“Night.” Oliver watched her descend the stairs to the kids’ bedrooms before he continued upstairs to his office. The truth that Piper revealed threatened to unseat everything. He sent them to that school in hopes that it would distract them from him being gone. He had to be gone. It’s what kept them all alive. He hated leaving for three weeks at a time, and then after a day home, leaving again, but he did it for his children.

Because he couldn’t lose anyone else.

Oliver jerked awake, his hand reaching out for the other side of the bed. Like he did every time he awoke from a nightmare, his fingers closed around nothing. She used to calm him down after dreams about the death of his parents, and everything in between. Now no one did. Over time he learned to deal with them, but there were days when it took hours to calm down.

And this was one of them.

When his eyes closed, his body begging for one last bout of sleep, Annie’s body lay in front of him, riddled with bullets. Blood seeped down the face he used to cradle at night; her emerald eyes stared at him, but never seeing him. Her left hand held no wedding ring. Why would it?

Oliver, stop it. He shook himself awake and rolled out of bed, hitting the floor hard enough that it hurt. He grappled around for his sweatpants and t-shirt and slid them on. The only way to get rid of her face was to rip it out. The reason why his house contained a weight room.

He padded down the stairs, skipping the two that creaked, normally waking Dig up. Not today. He didn’t need his bodyguard’s words this morning. He didn’t need anyone. Just weights and loud music.
“You stupid, stupid thing! I just want food, not some charred remnants of it!”

He slowed down, and then stopped. *C’mon, Felicity. Say something else.*

“Oliver is not going to be very happy—again—when he discovers I used a dozen eggs to make one omelet. And now I’m talking to myself again!”

So the nanny couldn’t cook. At least omelets. And she called him Oliver. He slipped down to the first level and headed to the kitchen. The swinging door didn’t squeak when he pushed it open, and neither did Felicity turn around. Music played from her little speaker next to her.

All of him said to run, to get out of here, but Oliver forced himself to stay. He’d already seen a glimpse of the tough, never-budging version of Felicity Smoak, but he hadn’t seen this side yet. Something made his kids fall in love with this woman. Part of that reason had to be right here.

She cracked two eggs into the fry pan, and cursed. “What is with you little chickens today? You trying to remind me that you were little chickies before I cracked you in here?” She grabbed a spoon and fished out the eggshells.

Now he knew why the kids begged him to keep Felicity here. For one, no other nanny wore pajamas like that. And no one ever smiled like that. She hummed along to the music, swaying to the beat, as she waited for the egg to cook on one side. He knew it would be burnt by now.

When she flipped it, another curse word was said. More like yelled. “How hard is it to make one of these things?”

He chuckled and stood up. “You want me to show you how?”

She screamed and spun around, her spatula raised in defense. The utensil lowered to her side. “Mr. Queen! You’re really quiet.” Heat rushed up her face. “H-How much of that did you hear?”

“Enough to know that you can’t make an omelet.”

“I’m really craving one right now. Not like a pregnancy craving. I’m definitely not pregnant. No babies for me for a few more years. I don’t even have a boy—I’m going to stop talking right now.”

Oliver tried to hide a smile, but to no avail. This woman was really something. “I can make you one, and while we’re at it, I’ll show you how to do it so I don’t have to hear you yelling at the poor chickies again.”

“You heard *that*?”

“I’ve got good ears, Miss Smoak. Now don’t tell me you used all the eggs.”

“There’s more in the fridge.”

“Don’t drop them.”

“Hey!” She gave him a pout. “I’m not completely useless in here.”

He took the carton from her and beckoned her over. “First of all, you don’t need to recreate Madagascar in the pan. No wonder you’re burning everything. Do you have anything you want to put in it?”

“Onions, peppers, carrots—”
“Carrots?”
“I like them. And they’re pretty.”

Women. He shook his head as he cracked two eggs into the pan and tossed the shells into the sink. “The key is to not burn it.”

“Thank you for those words of wisdom, Mr. Queen.”

“You can call me Oliver if you’d like.”

“Okay, but then you have to stop making it sound like we’re in the 1800s, and call me Felicity.”

“Deal. Also, you were using the wrong spatula.”

“There’s a specific spatula?”

“If you’re asking Dig, no, but I hate this plastic thing. Metal works better.” He flipped the omelet, letting out a silent sigh of relief that it held together. It had been many years since he made one of these. Just like riding a bike, right? “What are you doing up at four thirty?”

“Couldn’t sleep. My mother tried to call me four times and unfortunately woke me up.”

“I know the feeling.” To what he referred to, he wouldn’t let her know, but she got the idea. Let her guess. She seemed like one who could figure things out without help, meaning he didn’t need to give her anything to investigate.

“And you? Do you wake up this early every morning?”

When I have nightmares. He pulled a plate from the cupboard and slid the eggs onto it. “Sometimes. I don’t need much sleep.”

“That’s what they all say. Thank you, Oliver.” Felicity took the plate from him. “I didn’t know you could cook. Dig said…well, you don’t seem like someone who could.”

“Because I’m a spoiled brat billionaire?”

“I’m sorry I said that. You’re not so bad. And I’m not just saying that because you cooked me breakfast. When you’re not soaking wet after I took you into the pool with me, you’re nice. And I realize that that phrase sounded bad, but please don’t take it the wrong way.”

Oliver chuckled and reached out to squeeze her shoulder. It was an old habit from his married days, but as his fingers came close to her skin, he jerked his hand back and grabbed an apple sitting on the counter. It had been so long since he touched a woman. Not since Annie, not counting his sister. He couldn’t bring himself to do it now. It seemed foreign to do it. In fact, he didn’t know how he made it this long with her.

He gave her a smile. “I understand, Felicity. Enjoy your omelet.”

“I will. I might even make myself another one. I’ll try not to burn the house down.”

“I would appreciate that.” He headed down the hall to the weight room. Today he wouldn’t make the mistake of lifting too much. Felicity wouldn’t be here to ‘save him’. In fact, right now he needed a nap.

But he forced himself to jump up to the pull-up bars, and after he slipped off in exhaustion, he went
to the salmon ladder. If he could do ten, he’d be done.

It wasn’t until thirty minutes later when he lay on the ground, catching his breath, that he realized that he hadn’t turned the music on.
Chapter 6

“I’m going out for tonight.” Oliver entered the kitchen and swiped two apples off the counter. He really liked apples. That’s all he seemed to eat. “Dig will lock the doors before he heads to bed. Try not to burn the house down.” He winked at her and then exited the back door.

“Bye.” Felicity set down her book and swiped her phone off the counter. Hi Thea. Your brother is going out for the night. If you want to come over. Two minutes later, the phone binged. I’m on my way! With Roy this time. He wants to meet you J.

Perfect. Her nice day would be complete. It started out with the Almighty Grump spying on her in the kitchen, which after getting over the embarrassment of him hearing her call the eggs ‘chickies’, she realized it had been absolutely adorable that he decided to sit in on her babble episode. And then he made her an omelet.

The tastiness of it contradicted what Diggle said about Oliver not cooking and just watching. He had to do some, because that was the best omelet she ever tasted. Or maybe she made such bad ones her whole life that this one tasted especially good.

Her brain went back to what Dig said on the first day. He’d just sit there and watch her cook. Today he did the same thing, for a while. Annie must have been a better cook, because Dig never mentioned Oliver having to jump in a rescue an omelet. Or maybe it hurt too much to watch someone again.

She shooed the thought away and started coffee for the Queen-Harpers—Thea hyphenated, right? Or maybe she just wanted to get out of the Queen family, and take her husband’s name. Either way, Thea liked her coffee, and Roy would too.

A phone rang from somewhere downstairs. Given the fact that it wasn’t a cheery song about life, it wasn’t hers. She left the kitchen and followed the tone to the bathroom. Oliver’s phone sat on the counter, ‘unknown number’ on the screen.

Don’t answer it. Didn’t her mother teach her to never answer other people’s phones? It always led to trouble. Eh, what the heck? He left his phone here; it would be Oliver’s fault if she answered a call from someone creepy or high-powered. She picked it up and swiped to the left. “Hello?”

“Felicity?”

“Barry? Why are you calling Oliver?”

“I just…umm…I guess it’s safe to assume that Oliver doesn’t have his phone with him right now.”

“He left it in the bathroom before he left for the night.”

“Any idea when he’s coming back?”

The urgency in his voice brought her level of suspicion to a new high. “Why do you need to know?”

“It’s—never mind. No need to tell him I called. It’s nothing to worry about. As I said, we knew each other a while ago, and I was just calling to catch up.”
“You sure you don’t want me to tell him I called?”

“Nope. All good. He hates voicemails. I left him several when I was working that case and Dig had to tell me how much he despised me. And if you think it sounds weird, that’s apparently how Oliver is. So I call him later. Don’t wanna mess with the bull. You doin’ alright?”

Oliver hated voicemails. Interesting. People hated leaving voicemails, but hating receiving them? That was new.

“Felicity? You okay?”

“Oh, sorry! Yeah, I’m good. We had a couple interesting days, but we’re cool now.” *Until you, my best friend, called my boss’s phone.* “I have something going on in a second, so I gotta go. Hopefully you get ahold of Oliver at some point. Bye Barry.”

“Bye Felicity.”

She set the phone down and stared at herself in the mirror. Not at her complexion—best to be ignored—but at her relationships. Her *life*. What a disastrous one she led. No father. Barely a mother. She had bad luck from day one. But Barry? Her best friend? He acted fishy, yes, but that didn’t mean he was involved in something bad. Right? Maybe he did just want to catch up.

That didn’t explain the unknown number.

“Felicity, stop it.” At the moment, she had to focus on Roy and Thea. Why worry about something that she would over exaggerate anyways? The doorbell rang then, wiping away her suspicion and worry. For the moment at least. Tonight, when they left, she would figure this out. Right now she wanted to enjoy herself.

When she opened the door, a handsome young man stepped in and extended his hand. “Roy Harper. It’s nice to finally meet you. Thea’s told me a lot.”

“Hopefully not too much. I made coffee. I’m assuming you like coffee? Everyone likes coffee, right?”

“He’s more a tea drinker.” Thea patted her husband on the shoulder as she entered the kitchen. “Kidding. He hates anything that’s not caffeine. How’ve the past few days gone?”

Felicity gave them the story of the past day. As soon as she reached the fall-in-the-pool part, Roy choked on his coffee and rushed to the sink to spit it out. Thea slid out of her chair and patted her husband’s back as he dry-heaved.

She shouldn’t be smiling right now. Her story just caused her new friend to choke on coffee. Steaming coffee, as luck would have it. But watching them interact, Thea giggling next to Roy’s ear, and then his smile when he could properly breathe again, brought back bottled-up memories of her parents.

Always fighting. There were no small smiles between husband and wife, no back-rubs. No laughter. She never had a good definition of love. Did people fall in love and then watch it slowly fade in the form of fight after fight? Some marriages made it; were those held together with glue?

Good luck to her to ever find love with her knowledge of it.

Roy gave Thea a peck on the cheek and then tugged her back to the table. “I’m so sorry. I haven’t seen Oliver for a few years, but I can imagine his face. And his reaction. Please give details.”
Felicity told the story, smiling in pride when the Harpers clapped twice when she told them her responses to Oliver’s grumping. It felt good to have people praising how she handled things.

“Wow.” Roy sat back in his chair, a chuckle low in his throat. “Sounds like you need to take some notes, honey.”

“Roy…”

“Maybe if you stood up to him like that he’d listened. He listened to Felicity.”

Was this an argument? She didn’t want to be a part of this. “Maybe you should… discuss this on the way home.”

“No. Don’t worry about this. I just think—”

“Roy’s always been very vocal about his disapproval of me giving up so easily.” Thea slid her hand up Roy’s arm, giving him a side-look. “He thinks that I should show up here during the day when I know he’s here and force my way into the house.”

“Exactly.”

“But we all know that that’s not a good idea. I hope and pray that someday forgiveness will reign supreme, but until then, I can’t come here. I can’t possibly deal with it. It’s going to be hard to mend a ripped apart bond like that. It might be impossible.”

“I don’t know who I should be agreeing with.” Felicity looked out at the night sky. A few stars tried to twinkle through the dark clouds. It symbolized how she felt right now. Troubled thoughts rushed through, trying to cover her with doubt, but the parts that made her happy— the six Queen children— found a way to break through the dark clouds. “I understand both sides. Mostly Thea. My father left me and my mom when I was seven. I haven’t seen him since. If he came to my door today, I don’t know if I could ever forgive him.

“I understand Roy too. You certainly have my thinking more than Thea. Don’t take offense to that, please. I wasn’t making a pass at you or whatever.” Felicity! “I can yell at Oliver because I don’t really care about him. But he’s Thea’s sister. It’s different that way.”

“See, Roy?”

“I was about to say, ‘See, Thea’?” Roy ripped off a smile for his wife.

“Stop it, unless you want to sleep on the couch tonight. I’m sorry about your father, Felicity. Our parents died when I was six. I don’t remember them much, but I do remember the pain of not having them there.” Thea reached across the table and squeezed Felicity’s hand. “You and I should maybe form a support group.”

“That sounds like a pretty good idea. How about I promise to keep working on Oliver? I can yell at him and maybe he’ll realize what he’s missing.”

Thea’s lip quivered. She looked away, and then smiled. “It sounds funny, because that sentence sounds so very cruel, but that means more than you’ll ever know. I miss Ollie. A lot. And I might just need some help from someone else for me to see him again. You might just be that person. I’m so thankful I met you. Thank you, Felicity.”

She returned the smile, thankful for those words… more than Thea would ever know. Her best friend Barry Allen just tried to call Oliver Queen for some unknown reason. Somehow she was suspicious
of that. Barry Allen. The guy who literally did nothing wrong his entire life, besides the time he got struck by lightning. And that technically wasn’t his fault.

He helped her through some of the most difficult times in her life, as she did him. No matter what, he stood by her side. Why was she doubting him now? Over some unknown number?

And to prove to herself that there was no reason to worry, she would do what she did best: hack into Oliver’s cell-phone and confirm that Barry called from his home in Central City. That’s all she needed to know. He wasn’t running an underground mafia. Or possibly worse, a drug dealership.

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“Hello, Mr. Queen. It’s good to see you here. It’s been a while.” Jerry, his executive assistant, waved as Oliver walked in. “Do you need to be brought up to date on what has happened?”

“A quick run through would be great. I won’t be here long. I did see stocks are up. Good job.”

“Thank you, sir. Here’s the monthly summary, along with some other stuff. I think you’ll be happy about the increases, though there was an interesting accountant issue two weeks ago. I would like you to look at that.”

“Oh, huh.” He scanned the top page, impressed again by the numbers. Why did he even come here to check in? They had it handled. He gave Jerry a thumbs-up. “Nice. Don’t worry about the accountant thingy. I got it.”

“No disrespect, sir, but your computer skills aren’t stellar.”

“Gotta have some confidence in me, Jerry. I can open a computer and figure out some stuff by myself. Thanks for the offer though. Is my computer still in there?”

“Uh huh. Let me know when you get stuck.”

Oliver winked at his way-too-helpful employee and walked into his office. Any normal CEO would spend more time at his company, but he’d been the CEO for Queen Consolidated since he turned twenty, meaning he no longer needed to be here. Everyone knew what he liked, and Jerry took his place in meetings that weren’t marked ‘extremely important’. This place held memories. Good ones and bad ones.

He remembered his parents bringing him here for his eighth birthday. It was his first time being there for the whole day. Dad brought him two bottles of Sprite and ten books about animals. For some reason, he could still picture them. He closed his eyes. His parents sat across from him, snickering amongst themselves about who-knows-what, their fingers intertwined. Every now and then they would look up at him and ask him how he was doing.

“Good, Mommy!”

“This is awesome, but Daddy, can I have another Sprite? Please?”

His dad could never resist. His mom could, but not Dad. That’s how he got his first puppy. A cute golden retriever he named ‘Cuddly’. His naming choices hadn’t been good even back then. But he loved the dog, until he died the day of his fifteenth birthday.

That’s when bad memories came in. He sat a level below his office now when a police officer stumbled in, faltering when Oliver looked up with a smile on his face.
“Can I help you?”

“I’m so sorry, Son. But it’s your parents. They passed away…this afternoon.”

The scream Oliver let out brought hundreds of employees rushing to the office. Some of them already knew. They saw it on the news. After a fatherly employee helped him out of the room, Oliver never stepped foot in it again. When he became the CEO, he ordered the room converted to a storage area.

That’s enough. What was with him? Several times in the past day he put himself in a position to go back in the past. It wasn’t good. Most of it wasn’t, and the bad always overshadowed the good. It’s how life worked. Good days happened; he’d even had a few of them since his wife died, but after a good one, a bad one always followed. Weeks went by with nothing good.

He shifted his focus back to the worksheet Jerry gave him. So they had a book keeping issue. He’d expected more questions from the financial team. When a million dollars disappeared, most people would panic and call him. Clearly they trusted him enough to not ask questions. Guilt wracked him for a second, but he shrugged it off. At twenty years old, even at twenty-nine, earning his employees’ trust for what he did now hadn’t crossed his mind—the idea would have caused him to laugh. But that was his life now. He needed to do this.

To fix the money ‘problem’, he shifted several accounting columns so that it didn’t look like a million dollars left any accounts. The money he took accounts from would never be missed; he had been the CEO for fifteen years now. The early mistakes he made that took years to figure out came in handy every now and then.

The computer froze. Of course it did. Jerry probably dumped a virus on it so that he had to ask him for help. Thankfully he’d had this happen before. Waiting it out worked. Oliver slid his hand into his jacket pocket and scrounged around for his phone. His fingers pulled out a pile of lint. He let out a line of obscenities. The night he needed his phone, he didn’t have it. He couldn’t call on a business line. He of all people knew how dangerous it could be.

His children needed to be safe.

Good thing he could do this by himself.

After his computer restarted twice, Oliver finished with the documents and saved everything to Jerry’s drive. That way the assistant who should probably own the name ‘CEO’ would see it and make sure everything went to the proper people.

He glanced at the clock as he shut the computer. Eleven o’ clock exactly. Just what he wanted. When a bed awaited him at home, staying out too late annoyed him, and being done early meant he’d be asleep by three.

If all went well.

Stupid phone. He stuffed the monthly reports in his bag and walked out.

“All done for tonight, sir?” Jerry switched on his screensaver. Not quick enough for Oliver to miss the game being played. He didn’t know Jerry played computer games. A Christmas present would be in order.

“Yep. Everything looks good. I changed a couple things, but it looks like we’re well on our way to our goal this year. Go home, man. You’ve done enough work.”
“Are you sure, sir? I usually stay—”

“You’ve got fifteen minutes to finish up, and then you gotta go home to your wife and kids.”

“What puts you in such a good mood tonight, sir? Hold on, don’t answer that yet.” Jerry grabbed the phone as it began ringing. “Executive assistant of Queen Consolidated speaking. What can I do for you at this late hour? Oh, okay. Hold on one moment, sir.” He lowered the phone and cupped his hand over the mouthpiece. “It’s a stock holder from Central City calling about Applied Science’s condition after the storm. He’s worried about something that he won’t specific about at the moment. Would you like to speak to him?”

He would be late already. Tonight did not need an annoying, grumpy, tired share holder. Oliver grasped the door handle and opened the glass door, looking back at his assistant as he stepped out towards the elevators. “Why do you think voice messaging systems were invented?”

Felicity shut the door and dead-bolted it, letting out a sigh of relief. Oliver wasn’t home yet, and Thea and Roy would be gone in a matter of minutes. One more visit passed by without him finding out. Now came investigation time. Oliver probably wouldn’t be home in a while, meaning she could put her skills to use. No cops would be involved this time. This time, restraint would be shown. She wouldn’t dig into photos or text messages. Just figure out where Barry called from. She just wanted confirmation that he didn’t call from an underground drug ring or a nightclub.

She opened her computer and plugged the auxiliary cord into the phone. With a few clicks of the keys, the security camera feed popped up on the side of her screen. Oliver wouldn’t be walking in on her spying on his phone.

It took five seconds for her to bring Oliver’s phone records up onto her computer. “Interesting, interesting. You and I need to talk about your talking-on-the-phone habits. Wow.” Focus, Felicity.

She drew up Barry’s call and entered several codes, sending her computer on a search for the location.

An error code popped up on her computer, stating the search failed. That never happened to her. This should be easy. Why wouldn’t it work now? Felicity ran the search again. Her computer screen went black.

“What the frack?” She hit the ‘on’ button. It wouldn’t turn on. It sure wasn’t dead.

Felicity swore and slammed her hand on the keys. What on earth was going on? What could Oliver be doing that he had a virus that would destruct a computer? No one needed something like that. Why would a billionaire need something like that? Sure, to protect his money, but that’s why passwords were created. Nothing added up. Oliver disappeared for weeks at a time. Could anyone tell her where he went? “My gosh, Felicity.” It was too late. If she stayed up any later, she’d convince herself that her boss was actually a psychopath who had plans to kill everyone in the house.

However. How could anyone explain all the facts that had been racked up? Barry somehow knowing Oliver Queen. His 'unknown number' phone call. The interesting information he shared. How no one knew where Oliver went—he could only guess they didn’t—and the fact that his phone just blew up her computer.

The one Tommy Merlyn bought her.

Good thing he had money, because she’d need another one.
Because she needed to put this together. Or take it apart. It depended on what she found. She didn’t like mysteries. They needed to be solved, and she would solve this one. It didn’t matter what the cost, because the Queen family deserved to know. She deserved to know.

Oliver Queen had a secret.

And she intended to uncover it.

******

Oliver surveyed the streets, using his view from above to watch for his guy. Why was he? A nice night, at least. He’d been up here with frozen fingers before. The benefits of taking down a guy during the summer and not the brutal Starling City winter.

As the motion sensor beeped in his earpiece, he clicked on his voice modulator and crept to the edge of the roof. The sensor went off when the person was twelve yards away, giving Oliver exactly five seconds prepare.

He slid an arrow into his drawstring and pulled the string back. When he let it go, the arrow flew towards the building to the north. It locked on the brick, the four tentacles securing their place.

His sensor went off again, warning him of the need for immediate reaction. Oliver jumped towards the north building, his feet hitting the brick and then bouncing off. He unhooked the cable and dropped to the ground in a low squat. Just as his man walked through the alleyway.

Oliver tightened his bowstring and aimed the arrow at the man’s heart. “Martin Somers. You have failed this city.”

Chapter End Notes

So sorry this was late! I had a family reunion and it was difficult to get out of there and finish the chapter. Also apologies on the shortness. I will try to make it up and write a longer one next time. :P I had a few problems with this one (I think it took a few tries to start this thing) but I hope that this gives everyone a little bit of a glimpse of how this story is going to pan out! (But I promise you, you know nothing.) :P
Felicity stumbled down the stairs, bleary-eyed and still half-asleep. The one day that the family decided to have a breakfast together happened to be the morning after she stayed up until two. At least. Her twenty-eight-year-old body couldn’t take the intense partying anymore.

‘Intense partying’ meaning intense thinking while sitting on her bed.

She pushed open the French doors, letting out a sigh when only two kids sat at the table. “Where’s everyone else? Raisa said that breakfast started five minutes ago.”

“The girls are getting their hair permed, probably. I don’t know where Daddy is.” Clayton sucked on an orange and then tossed the fruit into a bowl filled with squeezed oranges. “But I like this peace and quiet, so we’re good.”

“I’m here.” Oliver entered, his look making her feel a little better about her own slicked back greasy hair and random clothes. Did the guy shower in the past week? Even his three-day beard looked dirty. He sported a shiner on his cheek, something that would never draw more than curiosity, but now it did. How did he get that?

The kids either didn’t notice or didn’t care. They said good morning and continued eating fruit. Was this a normal occurrence? Felicity pushed her stringy hair back from her face as Oliver’s gaze fell on her. Maybe commenting on his wound wouldn’t be a good idea. Not that she was considering it. Yeah, right. The idea of saying ‘oh, how’d you get your butt whooped last night’ brought an odd sense of satisfaction to her. This type of satisfaction would not a good thing.

“Sorry we’re late!” Ellie burst in, followed by Harper, Piper, and Annie. “Good morning guys. How was your night off, Felicity?”

“Enlightening.”

“And why would that be?” A smirk formed on Oliver's lips. “I didn’t know you did yoga.”

She would not let him have the light of day on this one. “It was hot yoga, actually. I did it in my bathroom. Got everything nice and steamy and Namaste-ed away. Quite relaxing. Even if it was a hundred degrees in there. And like I said, enlightening.”

“Maybe I should incorporate that into my workout routine.”

If he wanted to be snippy, fine. She would show him snippy. And sassy. And whatever else he needed. “I really can’t see a big man like you doing a downward dog.”

Ellie giggled. “Yeah, I don’t know about it. She might be right.”

“I could do yoga. Don’t tell me I couldn’t.” Oliver’s huffiness shifted to Ellie, but without a glare in his eyes this time. He almost smiled when she shot back, “You can’t even touch your toes without having to visit a chiropractor that afternoon.”

“How do you remember that?”
“Because it’s the only time you went down on the ground.”

Raisa and the cook served breakfast. The last dish just went on the table when the doorbell rang.

Oliver yelled, “Dig, you gonna get it?”

“Already on it.”

The doors opened and a hushed conversation ensued. Diggle entered the dining room, an exasperated look on his face. “It’s for you, Felicity. Oliver, you might want to go too.”

She stood and smoothed out her shirt that ridden up. “If I’m going to be arrested, I should change clothes.”

“You’ll be fine.” Diggle shook his head at Oliver. Whatever stood outside was not good for her. It couldn’t be. Not when her friend gave Oliver a look like that. It said what-an-idiot. Or you-screwed-up-big.

“Listen, sir, I don’t think I ordered anything.” She waved at the Fed-Ex man standing at the doors. “You should probably just head home, because I don’t have much money to pay for it. Even if I am the nanny for Oliver Queen.”

“I was told that you would not be paying for it.”

“Paying for what? Of course I’m not paying for whatever it is, because I didn’t order it!”

“Come outside, ma’am. I think you had some hand in this.” The guy beckoned her onto the driveway. Fifteen boxes sat next to the truck. Big boxes. Like ones someone stored…no, no, no. Oliver couldn’t have. She told him no. Didn’t he listen? It’d been more than two weeks. That would be—

A glance behind her gave her all she needed to know. Oliver crossed his arms and shuffled his feet. He lifted his head, met her eyes for a moment, and then ducked down again. She tossed her hair back and stomped up to him.

“I think I remember saying that I didn’t want new clothes. Very loudly.”

“And I ordered them anyway.”

“And I’m not gonna wear them.”

“Yes, you are.”

“You think you can control me? I’m not a robot, you moron. You’re not gonna force me to do that. I’m not wearing the clothes!”

“And as I said before, you work for me now. Oliver Queen, if you haven’t forgotten. You can’t walk around wearing…that.”

“Yes, I can!”

“No, you won’t.” Oliver pulled his shoulders back and glared down at her. “You’ll wear them.”

“Do you think you can intimidate me? Because I’m sorry to break it to you, but you don’t. Your height, jerkiness, and abs do not intimidate me, Mr. Queen. And why waste thousands of dollars on outfits when you don’t even know my size?”
“Y-You…” his breathing hitched as he looked out past her. “You’re the same size as Annie.”

“And how do you know *that*?”

“I’m a man, Felicity. I’m not completely oblivious to….attractive—”

“Oh my God! Don’t even think of finishing that sentence!” She checked him out, yes, but this was different. Much different. He thought she…no. Just *no*. She pushed past him and stormed towards the house. Mansion. Stupid place. Burning it down would be good revenge. Then she wouldn’t have to live here anymore with this gruesome creature.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.” Oliver caught up to her and grabbed her arm.

Felicity lurched backwards to free her body from him. “You’re just lucky that you have six darling children who must have inherited all their sweetness from their mother! Because they sure didn’t get it from you!”

She stomped up the steps, slammed her bedroom door and collapsed onto the bed. A deep breath needed to be taken. Possibly twenty of them. He bought her a new wardrobe. If this was a boyfriend or husband, she’d be thrilled. But this was neither, nor was it a friend. Maybe a slight friend.

Who checked her out enough to know that she would be the same size as Annie.

Revenge would be hers. If Oliver wanted to be a jerk, she would make sure he knew that she didn’t approve of it. She almost laughed when the picture of Oliver’s face floated through her brain.

The kids would love a puppy.

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“Are we really gonna get a puppy again?” Piper walked with Felicity, their hands interlaced together. The other kids followed behind. “Like a real, live puppy?”

“You bet we are! I have the credit card.” Diggle, fed up with Oliver, gave her Oliver’s back-up card. How that man hadn’t been fired yet she did not know. But thank God for him. Apparently being mad at Oliver wasn’t just for her. And he agreed. Oliver needed a wake up call.

In the form of a squirrely, adorable puppy.

“I remember our other dog. Her name was Roxy. She loved all of us. She even made Daddy like her. When she slept in our room, she’d always sleep in my bed. She’d lay on top of me and put her paws on my head and go to bed. I miss her.”

“You can’t replace a dog, but we can get another to make you miss Roxy less.” Felicity lead the way to the back of the gigantic pet store. She called ahead to make sure they had several options. A gangly man sporting a nametag and wearing creased pants spotted them and walked over.

“I’m assuming you’re the lady who called. You said something about six kids coming so…”

“That’s us.”

“Perfect. I understand you are wanting to buy today?”

“Buying today no matter what.”

“O-Okay. Follow me. Because you are high profile guests, we brought all the puppies into the back
so you could look at all of them.”

“All of them? This isn’t the president’s family.”

“It’s the Queens. We are expected to give our best to you.”

Oh-kay. So their fall from society hadn’t completely happened. Or maybe it was just because Oliver owned the biggest and richest companies in Starling, and one of the biggest in the states. He could buy out a company in minutes. “Thank—”

“Puppies!” Piper squealed and rushed forward, falling to her knees at one of the crates. “It’s so cute! Look at it, Will! It looks just like Roxy! Oh my gosh. It’s so fluffy I’m gonna die!” Her squeals continued as the bean-pole employee unlocked the cage. The puppy rushed out and launched itself onto Piper’s lap.

The other five kids, regardless of age, got around Piper and the puppy, shrieks coming from all of them as their new little friend bounded from each one, licking their chins and trying to crawl up. Felicity took it all in. Did anyone ever get this excited about anything? Maybe proposals or a baby.

Not over a puppy.

“Can we buy her? Please, Felicity? Look at how cute she is!” Piper held up the puppy, the little legs dangling haphazardly. “We have to keep her. She can sleep in my bed like Roxy did. Please, Felicity?”

The ones who’d been broken so many times did. No six kids, at their ages, would act like this unless a little bit of happiness meant the world to them. Maybe this puppy would bring healing to them and start bringing them hope that life would get better. It wasn’t all about being spiteful to Oliver. Most of it is.

“If all the vaccines and such check out, we’ll buy her.”

“Yay!” The little girl bounced up and down, the puppy scrambling for something to hold onto as she slipped. “Oh, sorry, Fluffy. Ooh! Fluffy! That’s what her name should be.”

“But it’s so—” Ellie slapped a hand over William’s mouth.

“It’s perfect.” She put her hands on Piper’s shoulders and smiled. “If you like that name, then that’s what it should be.”

“Are you sure?”

“I’m sure. It’s a cute name.”

“Thank you! Hello, Fluffy. Look at how cute you are. Yeah? Do you like that name? My little Fluffy?”

The employee whispered to Felicity, “I’ll go check on medical records and bring them back. But if I remember correctly, this dog is all good to go.”

“Even if she wasn’t, she’d be coming with us. Oh.” She took a big step sideways to steady herself as her vision swirled. The moment passed, but it gave her an unwanted but necessary sign. She would have a headache soon. “I’m okay. Does everyone like the puppy?”

Why did she even ask that?
“I have the medical reports. There will be waivers to sign up front but after the papers are signed, you can take…Fluffy home.”

Piper led the pack to the front of the store, William behind her with the dog cage, Ellie lugging the way-too-big dog food bag. Felicity carried Annie, who whispered in her ear about her excitement for the puppy.

“Do you think it will cry like babies do?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never had a puppy. Or a baby.”

“You like babies?”

“I think so.”

“They’re cute.”

Felicity signed ten forms and swiped the credit card. Not bad getting to use a billionaire’s credit card. How much money did this card hold? Maybe she should go and buy ten thousand dollars’ worth of clothing of her choice. That would be the ultimate finish for her revenge tour.

“You can take your puppy now.” The cashier smiled as Piper screamed and reached for ‘Fluffy’.

“I love you so much.” Piper squeezed the new member of the Queen family. Tears snuck down her cheeks. She smiled. “My little Fluffy.”

It took everything in her not to cry along with her. The night of the big storm, the sun peeked up over the horizon. Each day, each moment, it pushed itself closer and closer to the top of the sky. They were hardly there yet, but they kept going up. Today they took a hot air balloon up several thousand feet, the sun pushing them up towards the end game.

“We have a leash, cage, food, dog tags…and dog. I think we have everything. Let’s go home, huh?” Felicity rubbed her forehead, the headache pain increasing. Dig stayed at home, meaning she had to make it back before she passed out.

“Get back here you spoiled rotten animal!”

Felicity nearly tripped over a cat as it flew past her, an employee not too far behind. “Sorry!”

Harper dropped to the ground and held out her arms. “Come here, sweetie! C’mere, you adorable little thing!”

A Siamese cat. Kitten. It ran into Harper’s arms, who squealed as she stood. “It’s so cute! Felicity, look at her! She’s so adorable.”

The other kids crowded around, oohing over the cute little thing. Felicity peeked over Clayton’s shoulder, having to squint to see straight. She knew where this was going. And she liked it. This would bring more revenge. And more happiness. That’s all that mattered.

“Can I get her?” Harper turned to the employee, the guy still gasping for breath. “Is she for sale?”

“She is. Please take her. This one has a mind of her own.”

“Just like Harper,” William muttered. “Buy her. She’s surprisingly cute.”

“Felicity?”
“It’s fine with me. But you guys gotta go get a litter box and whatever else.”

“Yes! Thank you!” Harper ran off with the cat in her arms, the employee struggling to keep up with her and the kids. Felicity went back to the counter and leaned against it. Might as well wait here, because here came a million papers to fill out.

“Could you, uh, hand me some of the paperwork so that I can get this over with?”

Fifteen minutes later the Queen family plus a nanny and two animals walked out of the pet store. Felicity couldn’t see straight anymore, but she could make it home. There’d been worse. And the sweet taste of victory on her lips.

They’d come here for a puppy, and left with ‘Fluffy’ and ‘Piggy’.

They arrived home just in time. Felicity didn’t bother to check if anyone could watch the children. Someone laid around here to make sure no one died. She told Ellie to watch the little ones and Fluffy, and dragged herself up the stairs. It took everything in her to push open her door, stumble around the boxes of clothes, and collapsed on the bed.

*Please keep them safe.*

Felicity opened her eyes and rolled over to her side to check the time. “Frack!” The clock read eight fifty-nine. She slept for six hours. How was that possible? No nap ever lasted that long. This counted as a good night’s sleep. With stress. Did the kids still breathe or had they all died?

She slid out of bed, her foot hitting one of the boxes. With a hard kick, it scattered. Stupid thing. Stupid all of these things. At least her headache disappeared. If she slept another six hours, maybe the boxes of clothes would go too.

“Annie? Willie?” She called out the kids’ names as she descended the steps. “Dig?”

“Oh, good evening, Felicity.” Raisa waved from her spot on the couch as she folded clothes. “Mr. Diggle wasn’t feeling well so he went to bed. The children went for a drive a while ago.”

“A drive? Is that safe?”

“They’ll do it every now and then. They wanted to get Fluffy and Piggy accustomed to the car. We let them do that every now and then. Though…” she sighed. “My bet is that they went to the office.”

“You mean…Oliver’s office?” Disaster. This would be an absolute disaster if that’s where they went.

“Yes. I heard Piper say something about ‘making Daddy like the puppy’. I decided to let them go.”

“Frack.” Oliver would not react well. Possibly something along the lines of forcing her to bring the dog and cat back. “Double frack. When did they leave?”

“Around seven.”

“Don’t wait up for me, unless they come home. Then definitely text me. Because I don’t want to sit at that office with Oliver alone. Creepy.” She went to the garage and surveyed the car options. Earlier today she’d had two options: which color Suburban did she want? Tonight she had one
person to drive. Meaning she had some really good options.

She chose the mustang. If Barry saw her in this, he would die laughing. Her Mini Cooper was a far cry from this hot-rod. No matter; she was the nanny of Oliver Queen’s children now. One of the necessities was that she looked the part, right?

The drive to Queen Consolidated took way too long. She thought about calling, but that would give Oliver time to prepare the screaming. He likely already had it prepared, so she needed time to prepare her spitfire return. Revenge. Retaliation. There were a few reasons she bought them a dog. And a Siamese cat. If a headache hadn’t set in, a few more dollars would’ve been spent on new high heels. Bright yellow ones with sparkles.

Didn’t these building usually have valet attendants? She pulled her hot rod into a parking spot and ran up the steps. Didn’t people work after nine thirty? Apparently not. No one stopped her from entering the elevator and hitting floor forty-eight. Two floors from the top would be around where Oliver worked, right? Most of her time would be spent trying to figure out where, if her first guess wasn’t right.

It was.

How did she know that?

Because when the elevator pinged and the doors open, Oliver Queen stood, his face scrunched in a way that could only be described as enraged. Six kids surrounded him, every single one of them with red eyes. Piper cradled Fluffy, sobbing into her fur. Harper held Piggy, tears streaming down her face.

Oh, no.

Not for her. She could handle herself. Not for the kids. They would be okay, because she had their backs. Definitely not for the animals, because they would be in their little beds tonight with the kids sleeping above them.

But for Oliver.

Who was going to get the biggest butt-whooping of his life.

In three. Two. One.

Oliver pushed past her into the elevator. “They’re going back.”

“No, they’re not. If you want to take them back, you’ll have to do that and tell everybody what a loser you are.”

“Given the fact that you were the one who decided to buy them, I think it’s you who’s the loser.”

“Daddy!” Ellie yelled and then glared. “Fluffy and Piggy aren’t going back.”

“Yes, they are! That pet store will be open when we get there, and I will be dragging those animals in there no matter how hard you cry.”

“No! No! You can’t take Fluffy away from me!” Piper screamed, the puppy being squeezed tighter in her arms every second. “She’s mine!”

“I told you that we’re not having animals in the house. Ever.”
“They’re not going back, Dad. You can’t make us bring them back.” William seethed. “Don’t do that.”

“That’s enough, William.”

“No, no it’s not. You’ve denied us everything so that you could go in your hole of grief and that included Roxy! So let us be normal and have something that other people have for once!”

“And I’ll second that.” Ellie separated the two growling men by stepping in between them. This wasn’t much better. “Ever since Mama died, you haven’t let us do anything that could actually cheer us up. You sent us to boarding school, for heaven’s sakes! Did you think that you could distract us for long enough that we would forget that we didn’t have a mom anymore?”

Oh, dear God. Oliver was going to cry.

Instead, he slammed his hand on the ‘first floor’ button and then whirled back around to Ellie and William. “I think I remember saying that no amount of whining and tears was going to make those animals not go back. End of discussion.”

“You’re going to have to move hell before you get those animals back there.” Felicity bit out, her pulse skyrocketing to insane levels. This wasn’t going to end pretty. At least for Oliver. Maybe for her. She would be on the streets after this. “If you think you’re going to bring them back, then you better take every single one of those boxes out of my room and personally burn them in that stupid fireplace you have. Because you are a selfish, rotten—”

The lights went out. Kids screamed and the puppy yelped.

Then the car freefell. Felicity collapsed to the ground, pulling Annie with her. She wrapped her arms around the screaming girl and prayed. They were going to die. Her fear didn’t allow her to scream.

The car bounced twice, and slammed against one wall, and then the other. Felicity covered Annie’s head, trying to brace for the inevitable slam. How quick did death happen from heights like this? Was it lots of bleeding or a slam and then nothing? Could she protect any of the kids in here?

No one moved. The elevator had stopped. Felicity didn’t want to breathe, in fear that any movement would send them tumbling to their deaths.

“Is…is everyone alright?” Oliver gasped out. When no response came, the words came panicked. “Is everyone okay?”

“Piper, Clayton, and I are fine.” William said, but his words quavered.

Felicity found her voice enough to mumble, “Annie and I are okay.”

“I’m…fine.” Ellie let out a cry, and then a scream. “Harper? Daddy, she’s not moving!”

Even in the dark, Oliver scrambled to his daughters, his hand moving to Harper’s neck. Felicity pushed Annie towards one of the boys and found her phone. The flashlight illuminated the group, showing the panic in each person’s face. They crowded around, but Oliver pushed them all away as he knelt next to Harper’s unconscious form, his eyes wide, face ashen.

“Hold that.” Felicity gave the phone to a dazed William and scooted to Oliver. “She’s breathing, right?”

“It’s her head.” Oliver shook himself. He wasn’t here. His eyes glazed with tears as his hands moved
along Harper’s neck and head, feeling for displacements.

“Oliver.” Gone was the anger. Oh, it still existed, but it now lay under piles of fear and the gratitude to be alive. Felicity set her hand on his arm, ignoring the tingling when her fingers closed around muscle. That didn’t matter now. “She’s okay. She’s alive. If nothing’s broken, then let’s evaluate what happened. Because something happened.”

Piggy meowed and pranced to Harper, her little paws going over the girl’s back. Felicity grabbed Oliver’s hand as he reached to shoo the animal off. “Leave her.” The cat’s tongue licked Harper’s neck, and then her face. Slowly, the blood left her cheeks.

“Daddy, is she gonna be okay?”

“She’s knocked out, but she’ll be okay.” Oliver’s expression finished the sentence off for him. *I think.* “Everyone calm down. She’s okay.”

“What…happened?” Ellie asked the question. “It was like a scene from a horror movie.”

“I don’t know. I really don’t know. I hit the emergency stop. That’s why we’re sitting here.”

And not at the bottom of the elevator pit, dead. Oliver’s quick thinking saved them. No one else could have found the brake in the dark, while freefalling. Someone knew how to perform under high pressure situations. “Not to address the most obvious question, but…how are we gonna get out of here?”

“I have no cell reception in here, so we just wait.”

How awful. And awkward. Three minutes ago half the family screamed at each other and the other half cried. Were they supposed to just…pretend that didn’t happen? Felicity took a seat on the ground again. Oliver slid down the wall next to her and gathered Harper into his lap. Why did he have to sit there? Weren’t there a dozen other spots for him to take?

Looking around the area she realized no, there weren’t. Every single person had a spot, but they only had one little area.

So much tension in one little car.

Annie scrambled onto her lap and threw her arms around her neck. “That….was so scary! I thought we were gonna die!”

Felicity squeezed the little girl, comforting the both of them. “That makes two of us.”

Fluffy stayed in Piper’s arms, but the puppy yipped, and then sneezed. Felicity and the kids laughed. Oliver continued running his hand over Harper’s hair, his expression unchanging. What a heartless person. Maybe hopeless better described him. How was she supposed to help a man who didn’t even want to be helped?

Annie stayed with her head buried in Felicity’s shoulder. “Please don’t ever leave.”

“I don’t plan on it. I promise I won’t be going anywhere.”

*****

*I don’t plan on it.* How did a woman who’d been put through attitude hell say that? Oliver couldn’t believe it. Felicity Smoak just promised his youngest daughter that she would never leave. In front of
him. As much as he wanted to believe that it came from the spitey-side of her, he knew that she wouldn’t make a promise she couldn’t keep.

His arm curled Harper closer to his body. It hurt to hold her. Five years ago he held Annie’s body in his arms. She’d been dead for a few hours, but it didn’t matter. He still screamed into her face, begging her to wake up.

She didn’t.

Tonight, his daughter in his arms felt too much the same. Unlike Annie, her heart beat in rhythm, but he couldn’t stand seeing her eyes closed. Please, Harper. Wake up. He couldn’t sit here long. Forty-five minutes before Felicity showed up, he told all the employees to go home early on this Friday night. No one needed to hear whatever went on with the Queen family.

As of five minutes before they got on the elevator, only four people remained in the building. Of all the nights to send every single one of the Queen Consolidated employees home, he picked this one. Just another string of bad luck.

The stupid dog yipped, and then sneezed again. He kept his face surly. The puppy would not be given the light of day from him. Fluffy. Almost as bad as ‘Cuddly’. Naming techniques got passed down.

“Felicity, can we play the game we played?”

“Which one?”

Annie whispered her answer, making Felicity laugh. “Of course we can. Alright guys, let’s do our favorite things!”

“Popsicles on a hot summer night.”

“That sounds like something Scarlett O’Hara would say.” William laughed as he elbowed Ellie.

“How do you know who Scarlet is?”

“I finished reading the book last night.”

William read Gone With the Wind?

“Okay…Willie.” Ellie put her arm around him. “So is that your favorite thing for the round?”

“Her hair.”

Oliver didn’t know what to react to first. Ellie calling William ‘Willie’ or William saying his favorite thing was Scarlett’s hair. The last time he checked, his son hated even the thought of girls. The idea of him…liking girls terrified him.

The cat meowed way too close to him. He pushed it away with his foot, but the stupid thing came back, using his or her paws—he really couldn’t care less—to swat at his boots. The thing could be crushed in seconds if he sat here alone. Maybe not. Blood wasn’t smeared to Harper’s cheeks anymore, thanks to the cat.

“Daddy.” Piper tapped his shoulder. “The kitty’s name is Piggy if you weren’t listening earlier.”

He hadn’t. He’d been too busy yelling gibberish. Did anyone even hear him? They didn’t usually listen, meaning they hadn’t listened then when he told them that the animals would be going back.
The kids and Felicity went around, saying their favorite things. When it reached William’s turn again, his son spun his head towards Oliver. “One of my favorite things is when Dad used to enjoy being around us and having animals around.”

Oliver gulped. He shoved the guilt down where it needed to stay; so much that sometimes he didn’t think he cared anymore. Why dabble in something that could be so heartbreaking? It didn’t seem worth it. He couldn’t listen to the bitterness from his kids, because if he did, everything would unravel.

“F-Felicity? Felicity!” Harper’s hand reached out, slapping against his cheek. “I-I’m so dizzy!”

“Hey, hey, I’m here.” Oliver ignored the ache in his stomach as Harper reached past him to Felicity. “You fell and hit your head.”

“Where’s Felicity?”


“It’s…my head. My head hurts!” Tears streamed down her cheeks. “Daddy….h-help.”

“Oliver.” Felicity met his eyes. “What’s going on?”

An extra bad concussion, was his guess. But he didn’t know. This wasn’t something he’d experienced. He couldn’t just sit here. The rest of the kids curled up against one wall, terror on their faces. Piper squeezed the puppy to death, while the kitten meowed at his feet.

“I’m going to try my phone. Take her.” She’d be going to the one she wanted, anyways. Oliver transferred Harper to Felicity’s arms and yanked out his phone. It hadn’t worked the other several tries, but he needed to try.

When he clicked it on, it died. Oliver swore and slammed it against the ground. As Harper let out a scream, the light from Felicity’s phone went black. The cat scrambled onto his lap, meowing.

“Daddy, what’s going on?”

“Oliver? Did my phone die?”

“Felicity, what’s happening?”

“It’s okay. We’re all okay. It’s just going to be dark for a while.” He reached for Harper’s hand. “It’s going to be okay.”

“My head hurts. R-Really bad.” She sobbed into Felicity’s shirt, her grip tightening on Oliver’s hand. “I-It’s….it feels like someone’s crashing something on top of me.”

Oliver lifted his eyes towards the ceiling of the elevator. He knew a way. It was dangerous, and he promised himself that he would never use his special skills in normal life. But Harper continued crying. He could do this. For his daughter.

“Ellie. William. C’mere.” Oliver waited until his two oldest sat next to him. “I’m going to get help. Keep her calm, and if something gets bad, hold her head.”

“Where are you going?”

“There’s a way to get out of here and get help.”
“Daddy, you can’t.” Ellie grabbed his arm, squeezing hard. “That’s dangerous. If you fall, you die.”

“I’ll be okay. I…I know what I’m doing.”

“How? It’s not like you’ve ever done this before.”

“Ellie…” he grasped for control. “We have no idea what’s happened to Harper, and it could be serious. No help is coming unless we go get it. Don’t worry about me.” He stood up, and scanned the ceiling for the escape route. His thinking stilled when Felicity put her hand on his shoulder.

“I’m coming with.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Don’t argue with me. I’ve made up my mind; I’m coming.”

“Felicity!” He whispered her name, but the forcefulness came in a shout. “It’s not safe up there.”

“And I want to be with you…unsafe.” She winced. “Why does my brain find the worst way to say things? What happens if you slip or something? I can help you. Let’s just pretend for five minutes that we don’t disagree about everything and help Harper.”

He studied her. The blonde hair, the slim but built form reminded him of Annie so much. But different somehow. Annie just glared; Felicity lectured, and got her way. She had a resolve about her. Oliver knew his wife well enough to know how he could break her down and get her to either listen or agree with. He didn’t know if Felicity would ever stand down. Even if she was wrong.

“I don’t really have a choice, do I?”

“Not really.”

He broke a chunk of the ceiling down and jumped up. His fingers latched onto the sides, and with a dolphin kick of sorts, he lifted himself through the hole and onto the top of the elevator car. “William, boost Felicity up. Grab my hand.” Her fingers intertwined with his as he pulled her up with him.

“Thank you. Take note of how the clothes you got me would’ve caused this to never happen.”

“How do you know there aren’t a lot of pants in the boxes?”

“Because you’re clearly not hot for pants. That came out very wrong.”

He tried to hold back a snicker, but couldn’t. Barry told him about her way of speaking every now and then. He just never imagined he’d be standing on top of an elevator, with this woman who happened to nanny his kids, kind of discussing clothing choices. And what he found attractive.

Harper’s cries interrupted his…interesting train of thought. Get it together, Oliver. This needed to happen as quickly as possible. “We’ll need to go up one level or so to open the elevator doors.”

“Why not down?”

“Because those doors jam all the time. We’re better off going up and opening those than having to go up two floors after the ones down there won’t open.” He advanced to the edge of the elevator. Oooh, boy. Even for him that looked like a long way to the bottom. “Don’t look down.”

“Too late.” Felicity kept her body behind his as she peeked down. “I should mention that I’m afraid of heights. Something that I just learned…now.”
“Felicity…” he tilted his head towards her. “Why are you doing this? You don’t need to, you know.”

“Because…you don’t need to do everything alone.”

Something fell from his heart. A clod of mud, maybe. A bolder. The concrete wall he’d built around himself cracked. Nothing fell. Nothing would ever fall. But a jagged fracture now ran down the sides. Maybe a little bit crumbled on top. Felicity made his heart feel…he didn’t know what. It sure wasn’t love. He would never feel that again, even if he had the chance. But what this woman did now was make him feel happiness. Even if down below his daughter sobbed and the other five hated him. Especially though they stood on top of an elevator, looking to climb up the shaft, failure meaning certain severe injury or death. It didn’t matter.

Because Oliver Queen smiled.

He shook himself out of his trance and stepped out on one of the beams. “Hold onto the one above and you’ll be fine.”

“This is just like that gymnastic class my mother forced me to do when I was ten. Except there was much less chance of death. I guess more back then because our heads aren’t fully developed until later, so if I fell then—”

“I don’t think now is the best time for a science lesson.”

“Oh! Sorry.”

They reached the end of the first beam. Oliver surveyed their options. Rock climbing or one very dangerous pull-up. Nice that both their phones were dead. They might get reception here to call.

“Daddy, hurry up!” Ellie yelled. “You gotta get help!”

Okay. He could do this. They could do this. From now on he would be carrying about a bow and arrows. This would be so much easier with them. He glanced back at Felicity. “I’m going to pull myself up, okay? If I start to fall—”

“Grab you. Got it.”

His words would have been ‘don’t grab me or I’ll take you with me’, but that worked. “After I get up, I’ll grab you.”

He did a pull up, looping his leg over the rung. Using the grip from his lower body, he grabbed the side of one of the posts that ran from the top floor to the bottom, and hoisted himself up to the beam. All other times this would bring a thrill, but now it caused his arms and legs to tighten in fear. Too much hung on this working. When he went out at night with his bow or flew to some unknown location to perform a task, nerves didn’t happen.

Tonight they did.

“Alright, hold on tight while I pull you up.”

“Sure you can hold me?”

“Just trust me.”

Even with heeled boots, she couldn’t reach the beam above her. Oliver kept one hand on the vertical beam and gripped Felicity’s hands with the other. When she had enough height, she let go with one
hand and grabbed the beam. For someone who claimed not to spend much time in the gym, she got herself—with a little bit of help—next to him with ease. Nice. “Be careful on this last stretch.”

“Wasn’t planning on not being careful.” She took his offered hand and stood up. “Thank you.”

They walked the plank together, with Felicity ahead of him. Oliver scooted past her at the end. Time to open the doors. “Hold onto me tight.”

Felicity braced herself against the wall and put her hands on his shoulders, keeping him close to the soon-to-be opening. “I imagined you saying that under different circumstances.”

He whipped his head around to stare at her in shock. Those words nearly caused him to fall in their own right.

She gulped. “Very platonic circumstances.”

The last time someone made a pass at him that obvious it had been when Annie made it clear she wanted more than six kids. And he’d thought that comment was outrageous. Oliver squared his legs against the walls and pried the doors open. He stepped into the dark area and pulled Felicity in with him.

“Oh, thank God! We’re safe. Do you have any idea where we are? Is there a phone around here? And if there is, do we call the elevator patrol or something?”

“Fire department, probably.” He felt around for a light switch, finally finding one. The lights gave them the directions to the nearest phone. Oliver got to it first, while Felicity went back to the open doors and yelled, “We’re safe!”

He could almost hear cheers.

“911, what is your emergency?”

“This is Oliver Queen. I’m at Queen Consolidated, and the elevator I was riding with my kids and their…nanny, lost control. I got the emergency brake to work, but one of my kids was severely injured. I need you to send whatever is necessary here immediately.”

“They are being dispatched now, Mr. Queen. I am so terribly sorry. Are you in the elevator now or did you get out?”

“The kids are still in there.”

“And how did you get out?”

“Felicity and I climbed out of the elevator shaft to get a phone.”

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“How’s she doing?” Felicity pulled the blanket closer to her body when Oliver walked out of the emergency room. What a wreck. Dust from the shaft they climbed through settled in his hair and beard, and covered his clothes. His shoulders slumped forward.

He crossed his arms. “They said it isn’t life threatening. I don’t think. I-I wasn’t really paying attention.” Oliver took a seat next to her, his body collapsing in on itself. From here, he didn’t look like a billionaire, or a snob. Or anyone hiding a secret. Instead, he looked like a man who’d lost so much that he couldn’t possibly bear the thought of losing anyone else. “I haven’t been in here for a
“The last time was when Annie died. They, uh, said that she’d made it to the hospital. I think they said that because they knew I’d never make it if they said otherwise. When I got here, they said she died on impact.”

“I’m sorry, Oliver.”

“Don’t be. I’m fine.” He bristled and pulled himself back together again. The idea that he could do that that fast terrified her. It took her a good day to recover from an honesty talk. That had to be the most he’d shared with anyone for a while. “Uh, where are the kids?”

“Raisa has them upstairs in one of the birthing rooms. It’s the only one that’s okay with animals in there.”

“Mr. Queen?” A nurse stepped into the hallway. “Your daughter is awake.”

Oliver jerked up and stumbled towards the room where Harper lay. Before he entered, he turned around to look at Felicity. His lips curled into a smile that could be described as small and weak. But it was a smile. “Tell the kids they can keep them.”

Felicity pushed herself up and walked to the stairwell before she clapped her hands and let out a quiet squeal. Without a fight—for the most part—Oliver relented. The kids would be relieved, and maybe this would help William to see that his father still did good.

She opened the heavy door but let it fall closed again when a newspaper glared at her from across the room. Why hadn’t she noticed this before? It certainly wasn’t a headline she saw often. Ever. Again? When had this happened before? Maybe she was reading this wrong. She went closer, pushing her glasses up her nose to ensure perfect readability. The words caused her heart rate to pick up. This wasn’t something she needed to see. The idea of living in a city with that running around? It was terrifying. And suspicious.

Whatever. This could be dealt with later.

Felicity left the newspaper stand, the title and picture glaring in her brain.

_The ‘Hood’ Strikes Again._

**Chapter End Notes**

Well...I did promise to make up for the short chapter. I didn't expect it to be this long. I actually wanted a little bit more of them in the elevator but by the time I went back to write, this chapter was pushing 18 pages. :P

Also....remember this is fiction. I don't know how elevators work and the only elevator shaft I've ever seen is in Arrow. I think. I do know that several elevators' brakes have broken and the car has fallen. So I just made some crazy thing up. lol

Hope you guys enjoy it as much as I enjoyed writing it! :)
Chapter 8

Oliver took a seat next to the bed, the nerves from earlier calmed as he scanned Harper’s body for injuries. An IV was attached to her arm to help the headache, and only a large welt remained on her head. The smeared blood from the kitten’s tongue was gone. His daughter didn’t look as helpless now as opposed to when the fireman carried her out of the elevator. “You gave us quite a scare.”

“I…hit my head. The elevator stopped working or something.”

“It did. Harper,” he rocked back in his seat. “You can keep the cat.”

“Really?”

“Why would I be lying about that?”

Harper giggled. “I don’t wanna get my hopes up.”

“Well, the puppy and kitten are staying. As much as it pains me to say it.”

“You’ll like them.”

“We’ll see about that. Listen, I need to go out for a while. I told the doctors to call me if anything changes, but you look good. Felicity’s here, and she’ll bring you home when they say you’re good to go.”

“Why aren’t you staying here?”

He ignored the pleading look. “I have something I need to take care of.”

“And it’s more important than me?”

“No, it’s not. It’s just that…” what could he say? He didn’t have an answer that she could hear. Or believe. “You have a lot of people who love you here. I’m not necessary right now, and that means I need to do something. I’ll see you in the morning.”

Oliver slipped out of the room, but not quick enough to avoid the sound of Harper crying. He clenched his fists. Staying with his daughter should be his top priority. But it wasn’t. Instead, he needed to be somewhere else. Anywhere but here. And this time he hadn’t forgotten his phone.


“Yeah. Felicity’s fine; Harper has a concussion, but she’ll be okay. Where are you?”

“You really want to do this after everything that happened? You should be with your family, man.”

“It’s better for me to be out there. As I said, where are you?”

“Hold on.”

As Oliver stepped out into the humid summer evening, Barry whooshed to his side, nearly sliding...
into a light pole as he tried to slow down. He still had some work to do.

Barry straightened his clothes out, grinning. “Here.”

*****

After being threatened jail time if they didn’t do what was demanded, the doctors released Harper to Felicity’s care. Dig who miraculously recovered from his illness in time to swing the van into the emergency entrance, drove them home, and carried Harper up to her bedroom, Piggy being carried in William’s arms. Carefully.

“There we go. How’s that?” Felicity finished tucking the girl in, smiling as Harper gave her a dreamy smile.

“Feels nice. Not very often I get pampered like this.”

“Well, you’re going to be spoiled by all of us for a while. Technically it should be the other way around, since you scared the crap out of us, but your adorable face makes me forgive you.”

Harper giggled. “Maybe next time I’ll grab onto someone more sturdy than Will.”

“Sturdier.”

“It’s like three in the morning. Not time for an English lesson.”

“It’s always time for lessons. But right now it’s time for you to rest. So good night.” Felicity leaned down and kissed Harper’s forehead. “Sleep for a long, long time please.”

“Okay. Uh, Felicity?”

At the door, she turned around. “Yeah?”

“I love you.”

The words rooted her in place. When was the last time someone told her that? Felicity blinked back tears and smiled. “I-I love you too.” She shut the door and leaned against, allowing her heart a few moments to cry. Those three little words could mean so much to someone who’d spent most of her life trying to belong. That’s what she was. A person who didn’t know where she fit in. Up until that fateful day when the manager fired her, she didn’t think she belonged in a family. Who would want someone as damaged as her? She didn’t trust; couldn’t love for fear of drowning. Even if she did find “the one”, she didn’t know how to keep it going. Or be a wife. Her cooking skills nearly burned the house down a few times. Who would want that?

Kids did. Seemed like it anyways. They didn’t care about her emotional damage; maybe they didn’t notice. Tonight Harper gave her a little hope that she could be loved, because if the tough, tom-boy girl could say ‘I love you’, that meant that other people could love her too.

She descended down the stairs and into the kitchen. A cup of coffee awaited her. Her lips curled in a smile. “Thanks, Dig.”

He shut the freezer and set a container of mint chip ice cream on the counter. “I figured you’d need it. Though I’m a little surprised that you’re not sleeping.”

“If I fell asleep now, I’d have nightmares the whole time. Too much happened tonight.”

“It’s not every day that a person gets stuck in an elevator and then has to climb out of it to rescue
“If I’m not thinking constantly, I start imagining all the awful things that could’ve happened tonight. Not that it wasn’t awful already. It could’ve been just more awful. We could’ve died, Dig. If not for Oliver. Who really performs well under high-pressure situations. Who knows how to climb an elevator shaft?”

“Oliver has certainly acquired some weird skills over the years, but if he said that he knew how to do that, he was probably trying to make himself feel better.”

“His constant working out has finally paid off.” Felicity grabbed a spoon and stuck it into the ice cream. Ahh, this stuff was amazing. Someone should make this the national food for the United States. And crown the creator of mint chip king of the world. “Did you see the newspaper?”

“I saw multiple newspapers today. Including the front page for tomorrow’s.”

“The one with the green guy. The vigilante.”

“That one. Yes, I saw it.”

Was he being calm about this? “I’ve been in Starling for only a year or so, and I don’t look at newspapers or the news because it depresses me. Has this…guy been around for long?”

“He’s been around for years.”

“What?”

“I’m not sure when it started. Eight years ago, possibly.”

“Does he kill people?”

“Sometimes. Seems like he’s gotten more violent over the years. The police used to be fine with him, but now every time he shows up, there’s orders to shoot to kill.”

“Why would someone want to do that? Put himself in harm’s way by two parties. He’s gotta have some sort of death wish.”

“He has a partner now, according to some photos people have gotten.”

“A sidekick. How sappy can this get?”

“It’s a guy who wears red. All red.”

“Leather? Don’t tell me it’s leather.”

Diggle nodded. “He’s fast.”

“Like Usain Bolt fast?”

“Faster. They’re calling him a…metahuman.”

Felicity snorted. “Yeah, right. How’s that possible? It’s not possible, is it? That’s like if Captain America was actually real. It’d be great if he was, but he’s not.”

“I’ve seen a video of it. It seems like it couldn’t possibly be real, but there’s multiple sightings in—”
The backdoor creaked open and Oliver stepped in. His gaze shifted to Dig, then Felicity. “You can keep talking. I’m not the great stiller of words.”

That drew a giggle. Felicity tried to cover it up with a cough, but Oliver caught it, and made an attempt to smile. “There’s coffee if you want it.”

“I have enough things to worry about tonight that don’t need a caffeine high to help them.” Oliver began his walk through the kitchen, clapping Dig on the back. “Thanks for pulling yourself together to come get them. Also…” he backed away towards the kitchen door, a smirk on his face, and a glimmer of light in his eyes. “You’re gonna get credit card privileges revoked at some point.”

“Just doing my job, Mr. Queen.”

“Oh, it’s ‘Mr. Queen’ now?” Oliver raised one eyebrow. Boy, if he could just do that every now and then and Felicity would die happy. “Felicity and I came to a little agreement just before the chance of our deaths, so you can stop being mad at me now.”

“Did you apologize?”

“No,” Felicity answered. Oliver’s mouth opened and his hand went up in sync, but Diggle spoke first.

“Really, man?”

“I was going to.”

“Maybe you should do it now. Before I revoke your motorcycle privileges like I used to.”

“Dig used to ground you?” Oh, this was getting even better.

“Nooo…” Diggle glared; Oliver shrugged. “Yes.”

Felicity laughed. “So Dig was basically your nanny. In your twenties.”

“Yes,” Diggle said. “You can’t deny it, man.”

“It’s debatable. Speaking of me being in my twenties, I’m not anymore, and that means I need to go to bed.” He dipped his head at Felicity. “I’m sorry about the clothes. I mean that. You can uh, take them back if you’d like. Goodnight.”

When he shut the door, Felicity grabbed her spoon again. “Should I say I’m surprised? Lucky? Fortunate? Does he usually fire people after he apologizes?”

Diggle chuckled. “That’s the most genuine I’ve seen him for a long time. Goodnight, Felicity. Don’t eat too much ice cream. That’s mine.”

“Night, John.” She ate half of the precious food before she put it back into the freezer. Time to attempt to sleep. Movies were always an option if sleep failed. Her body ached, and the headache that had disappeared had come back at almost full force over four hours ago. Her physical self begged for sleep, but the physiological part said to stay far from the bed. What happened in the past twenty-four hours that would let her sleep in peace?

After brushing her teeth and taking off her sweat-soaked, elevator-shaft-dust covered jeans and shirt, she collapsed into bed and closed her eyes. What a night. Day. Whatever. All of it started over clothes. Which she would look at in the morning. With an ounce of objectiveness.
She thought back to what Dig said before the whole crap about metahumans. **Yeah, right.** He said something about seeing the front page of tomorrow’s newspaper. Their elevator debacle made the news. Of course it did. It involved Oliver Queen for heaven’s sakes.

And it involved Felicity Smoak.

The Felicity whose mother had no idea her daughter even had a job as a nanny, and most definitely not as the Queen’s nanny.

If the accident made National News….

**Frack.**

She awoke to pitter-patter on the floor next to her bed. When her eyes opened, a puppy looked up at her, tail wagging. “What are you doing up by yourself? C’mere, Fluffy.” The dog was all too happy to let herself be picked up and put on the bed. “Did you sneak in here because you did something naughty? Or do you just want to cuddle?”

“You got a dog? How much money did you pay your father for that one?” Tommy’s incredulous voice reached her bedroom. Oh, right. It was Saturday. “Felicity bought it using your dad’s credit card? That explains it. Wow, I’m glad I wasn’t there to hear that conversation. This is one time seeing is not necessary to believe. I can imagine it just fine.”

Fluffy licked her nose, bringing a giggle out of Felicity. She grabbed the puppy and slid out of bed. “Looks like we have some business to take care of.”

“Are you seriously talking to the dog?” William yelled from outside her door. “Piper’s in her bed crying because she thinks Fluffy ran away.”

“I’m coming.” She slid her robe on and opened the door. “Should I bring her over to the room?”

“It’d be better than me having to dry tears.”

“Okay. And Willie.” She grabbed his arm as he turned away. “We need to talk.”

“I know, but there’s nothing that you can say that’ll help. Trust me on this one. Just stay out of it.”

And that was supposed to faze her? “After I deal with all those boxes, shower, and go calm down Piper, we’ll discuss things. For now, go make sure Tommy doesn’t give whoever is down there a pony or something.” Felicity carried the puppy down the hall to Piper’s room. The little girl shared with Harper and Annie, and sometimes even Ellie slept in there with them. “Hey, sweetie? Someone wants to say hello.”

“She ran away! She wasn’t supposed to leave, but she did!”

What a little drama queen. Pun intended. Felicity pushed open the door and set Fluffy on the ground. “She just wanted to come say hi to me, with all intentions on coming back in here, but I think she got lost.”

Piper gathered Fluffy in her arms and pulled her into bed with her. “Don’t scare Mama like that again! That wasn’t very nice.”

Fluffy yipped her apology. Felicity found a clean skirt and cardigan, again ignoring the boxes, and
descended down the steps. Tommy waved at her. “Hi.”

“Hey, Felicity. I heard about your daring…adventure. How are you still alive?”

“Which one are you talking about?”

“Both. Are you okay? Oliver didn’t attempt to throw you out?”

“I think he didn’t because throwing me out would’ve meant climbing on top of the elevator and committing murder by throwing me to my death.”

“Hey. I wasn’t that mad.” Oliver went past her to hug Tommy. “Good to see you, buddy.”

“It’s been a while. What’ve you been up to?”

“Picking up artifacts in weird places. Kidding. You still with Laurel?”

“Everyday. I can’t believe it took me this long to figure myself out. My dad still doesn’t know, but that’s for the best. He might be my employer, but we all know he’s not really my dad.”

Yeah, they had that handled. Plus, she didn’t really want to talk about dads not being there. Felicity went back upstairs to Harper’s room. After a peek in to make sure she wouldn’t be waking Harper up, she pushed open the door and walked to the bed. “How’re you feeling this morning?”

“Everything’s kinda blurry. But Piggy is keeping me company. Right, honey?” Harper’s hand went out and caught the kitten, who meowed, but eventually relented being pulled in close. “I was kind of out of it for a while, so I kinda forgot to say this, but thank you, Felicity. For getting us our animals. It means so much, especially since you had to endure Daddy’s temper tantrum.”

“Aww, it was worth it. Your daddy has forgiven me.”

“Really.”

“He’ll learn to deal with them.”

Harper snuggled up against Felicity’s leg and let out a contended sigh. “And thanks for being there for me last night.”

Felicity rubbed the little girl who definitely inherited her father’s height, meaning she wasn’t really little, but—You need a nap. And a shower, if she were being honest with herself. “No place I’d rather be. Except right now, I’m going to go back to bed. I didn’t get half as much sleep as I should’ve after that event.”

“You could sleep with me.” Harper scooted over a few feet in the queen bed. “Just lay down and fall asleep and then I’ll go to bed too. Piggy can cuddle in between us. Come on. And when we wake up, we can watch a movie. Everyone else can take of themselves for a day.”

“You think so, huh?”

“There’s a reason Raisa’s here. And Dig. But he can’t cook. They’ll live.” Harper smiled dreamily again, closing her eyes. The drugs were making her a little bit loopy. “Go to bed, Felicity. Then we can watch Fifty Shades of Grey.”

“What?”

Felicity laughed and slid underneath the covers. Harper cuddled up close to her, her arm flinging around Felicity’s stomach. Felicity closed her eyes, thankful that she didn’t have to relive the elevator falling this time. It would be a long time before she got in an elevator again. “Sleep tight, Harper.”

“Goo’night.”

That evening, after a three hour nap with Harper, dinner, and cleaning up dog poop on the couch, Felicity grabbed a container of orange juice and climbed the steps to her bedroom. A couple Tablespoons of liquor in the juice would be satisfactory but she needed her head for this one. Time to go through the clothes.

Armed with a knife, she opened the first box and pulled out an orange dress with a cut-out top. Interesting. And cute. Next came a high-wasted skirt with a black top. Annoyingly cute. Now a blue, three-quarter sleeve blue peplum top with matching skirt. What was with this guy? Could he pick a bad outfit?

Okay, that coat wasn’t cute. Or practical. Wouldn’t rain come through the little ringlets?

But he picked ten good outfits to one bad jacket. She made a point of locking the door before she pulled off her clothes and tried on the orange dress. Oooh, boy. Was it possible to be this in love with a piece of clothing? She’d have to get another one of these, just in a different color.

Oh, Oliver. He knew how to make a woman look good. Not that she hadn’t looked good before—weird decals on sweaters looked sexy on her, thank you very much, but this brought out a completely different kind of Felicity Smoak. One side of her was the nerdy girl who just wanted to get away from her life before, and this side….wow to this side. All hail the queen. The dress hugged her hips and with the cut-out at top, showed just enough cleavage to let her strut her stuff.

Felicity went through all seventeen of the boxes, putting the outfits in either the ‘want’ or ‘burn’ pile. Most of them would stay with her. She would need a bigger closet. An entire box was dedicated to shoes. How did Oliver know her foot size? Could that be found on the internet?

Spiked heels. Raisa had to help with those. Or did Annie wear much of them same fashion?

Curiosity got the better of her. She opened the computer she borrowed from the stash of computers the Queens owned, and typed in ‘Oliver and Annie Queen’. Her cursor clicked on the ‘pictures’ part of google. An assortment of photos popped up. Ones from galas, a few from hospital beds, holding a baby, and plenty of ones of them out to eat or kissing on the docks, courtesy of the paparazzi.

No, Annie didn’t wear anything like this. At parties, she seemed to prefer long sleeved gowns, with her hair done up in intricate styles. A few glances through the pictures, it appeared as if she mirrored many of Kate Middleton’s clothing choices. And she didn’t wear heels. Who would, when you could stand barefoot and still be only a few inches off your husband’s height? If she ever got married, she would have to wear high heels twenty-four seven.

Probably why God gave her the attitude that could take down Goliath if need be.

She shut her computer and let out a long sigh. Oliver bought her clothes that he knew wouldn’t remind him of his late wife. That was okay with her. She didn’t want to be thought of as Annie. Just as Felicity Smoak. The coolest nanny/hacker on the face of the Earth. Oliver would be thanked and maybe apologized to. Not for flying off the handle at him and going on a revenge path, because he certainly deserved that, but for doubting him. And slamming the door in his face that first night. That
wasn’t nice.

Felicity grabbed ahold of the nightstand and pulled herself up. Her fingers knocked the open bottle of orange juice, splattering it all over the white carpet. She swore. Way to ruin a nice moment. By turning the carpet orange. Crap. Time to go on the hunt for cleaning supplies.

“Way to go, Felicity.” She muttered as she changed back into her pajamas and headed down the hall. If she remembered correctly, a closet on the west wing of the second story contained cleaning stuff. Stain remover had to be in there, right? And that was if she could find her way to that side of the house. The only time that resulted in her being over here was because of the broken window.

She started at the main staircase and turned left from there. Then left again. Aha! The infamous closet that would save her a lecture from at least one cleaning person in the morning. And it contained a chemical with the name ‘for those accidents’. That would do the trick.

Felicity shut the supply closet door, thankful that she’d found the necessary products to clean up the mess. She started down the hall, but a noise from the bedroom on this side of the house caused her body to go rigid. The sound came as a broken wail, a cry for help.

Oliver.

She crept along the wall until her hand reached the door leading to the room. It was cracked open, for once. When did he ever leave the door open? This was stupid. People had nightmares all the time; including her. Why was she even considering going in there to…do what? Cuddle him and say it would be alright? She of all people knew it wouldn’t be. *Time to go, Felicity.*

“Please…you can’t do it! *Don’t!*”

Oliver screamed. Felicity pushed the door open and stepped into the bedroom. She shouldn’t be doing this. Or maybe she should. That was the problem. She didn’t know. Nevertheless, no one should wake up from a nightmare and be all alone. What had she told Oliver in the elevator shaft? ‘You don’t have to do everything alone’? Something like that. Truth was, he didn’t. As much as he ticked her off, she cared about him. Not like that. Definitely not like that. She cared as….someone who’d been through a lot of hell herself. That’s what it could be described as.

The sliver of moon illuminated Oliver, spread out across the bed, chest heaving. Sweat soaked his chest and shorts, his left hand squeezed a pillow with vice-grip, enough that the veins popped out in his arm. Everything flexed, rigid. What was she supposed to do? Sit on the bed and wait for him to wake up? *Wake* him up?

“Oliver?”

He let out a shattered cry. “Don’t. Please. Don’t.”

How could so little words break a person’s heart? He was begging. Trying to keep something from happening. Over and over again. Is this what kept him up every night? Why he looked like he hadn’t slept in a month every morning at breakfast? Maybe where the bruises came from? What if the reason he couldn’t get over Annie’s death was because his demons wouldn’t allow it?

Maybe while fighting her own demons she could heal his as well. Felicity sat down on the bed, restraining her hands from touching him. If he woke up, then she’d provide comfort. Not during. That sounded too close.

“*Noooo!*”
Oliver screamed and jerked up, his body falling forward to dry-heave off the bed.

“Oliver?”

His muscles strained as he pushed himself up to a sitting position. A light went on in his eyes for a split second. For a moment he flashed a sign of hope. “A-A-Annie?”

Oh, dear God, no. Correcting someone on who she was never felt this hard. How could he think that she was his dead wife? Had he been dreaming about her and somehow thought…God, help me. She couldn’t do this one alone. It hurt to quietly say, “No. I-It’s…Felicity.”

Oliver collapsed back against his pillow, his eyes closing, squeezing shut, but unable to hide a few tears that trickled down his cheeks. “I-I…thought…” he cleared his throat. “You look like Annie.”

No wonder he had a hard time with her. She looked like his deceased wife. Could any words be enough? “I’m so sorry, Oliver.”

He rolled to his side, gathering the blanket close to him. His body trembled from the draft that roared through the room. From the pain of the dream. A minute passed without a word, and then another. He wasn’t going to say anything, and that meant she needed to go before she made this anymore awkward. Felicity planted her hands on the bed in preparation of pushing herself up and scurrying out of the room.

“It’s okay,” he said, his voice cracking on the last word. “You can, uh, stay. I didn’t mean to call you Annie. You just…you look like her, especially in the dark. She had blonde hair, just like you.”

“I dye it, actually.”

A stutter of a smile appeared on his lips. “You could have fooled me.”

“I’ve fooled everybody. It’s a not-so-good trait of mine.”

This time he did smile, but then it fell away. “Why’d you come in here?”

“I spilled orange juice on your pretty white carpet and there’s a closet with stain remover up here. You happened to be making a lot of noise, so I came in here to check on you.”

“No one’s done that for a while.”

“Is that a good or bad thing? That I came in here. Which I’m sorry that I did. It’s just that I know how it is to have nightmares, and they’re really—”

“Felicity.” He tapped her arm. “Thank you. Truly.”

That brought her panicked heart-rate down a notch but not the your-touch-is-nice beat of her heart. It went up. “Are you gonna kick me out now?”

“I won’t be falling asleep for a long time.” Those words brought her back to reality. Every smile from Oliver just covered up the real problem. He not only spent his days in pain, but he spent the nights fighting away horrifying images. It didn’t take a MIT-grad brain to figure out what made him scream and dry-heave.

“Do you ever, uh, watch movies to forget about everything? Sorry, that was stupid.”

“I do sometimes. Usually this is the time that I do CEO stuff. It’s about the only time I do it. My EA always wonders why everything gets turned in at two in the morning.”
“Have you ever told him why?”

“There isn’t a need to. He has a brain. He just asks because he hopes he can get an answer from me.”

“But Oliver Queen doesn’t exactly open up to people.”

“How’d you know?”

“You’re not exactly the best at covering things up.” When he chuckled, she froze. Everything in her clammed up. This couldn’t be happening right now. Not ever. For a split second, she allowed herself to feel. To like him. To like Oliver Queen. That couldn’t happen. She couldn’t ever love a man, because she would wreck that. Her lack of trust in humans would.

“Felicity? Are you okay?”

Now the one who just awoke from a nightmare was asking her if she was okay. Great. She gulped back the panic and managed a smile. “I’m okay. I, uh, was actually planning on telling you this in the morning, but I guess it’s early morning so it’ll work. I went through the clothes. Thank you. I like ninety percent of them.”

“You’re welcome.”

“And I’m also sorry for a lot of things. I shouldn’t have yelled at you.” And she just apologized for something she told herself she wouldn’t apologize for. “But I’m not gonna say I’m sorry for buying the animals. You deserved it.”

“Probably so.”

Yep, it was time to leave. She needed to get out of here. “I’m gonna go. Is that okay? You’re old enough to deal with yourself?”

“I’ll be okay.”

“Good.” She stood up and pushed the sheets and covers back onto the bed. “You might want those at some point. Being warm helps. Pretend I didn’t say that. And also pretend that this didn’t happen. Because I’m assuming that most of the nannies haven’t come in here and sat on your bed and waited for you to wake up and then I sat here—”

“Felicity.” Oliver stopped her. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Goodnight.” She shut the door, and rushed down the hall. Dear God. What happened to her in there? She collapsed into bed and drew the covers up to her chin. Oliver let his guard down, and that did something to her heart. Or her head. Maybe that orange juice contained a brainwashing chemical and his little smile activated it. “Shut up, Felicity.” Oliver wasn’t her type anyway. Remember Cooper? That didn’t end well. Neither would this.

Now she would just have to tell herself that every time Oliver smiled at her.

******

Oliver rolled over to his stomach and maneuvered the blankets over his head. Closing his eyes wouldn’t be a good idea. The images in his head did just fine without them closed. He never realized he was that loud at night. Since Annie died, no one said anything about nightmares. They knew he had them; Dig woke him up from time to time, but after Oliver let out a tirade at him for doing so, his friend never ventured into the room at night.
But Felicity did. It took guts to do that.

His eyes fluttered shut for a moment but he jerked himself awake. His body needed sleep but his heart couldn’t take another nightmare. Not tonight. It would have to handle another one tomorrow night, and the night after.

She liked the clothes. He smiled. That hadn’t been easy to tell him. Especially after she took his credit card and bought two animals with it, bent on revenge. It wasn’t that he blamed her. It was a stupid, typical Oliver Queen thing to do, buying her clothes after he said she needed to fit the part. She did need to; he could’ve been a little nicer about it.

He let his guard down tonight. When he opened his eyes and saw who he thought was his wife, eyebrows creased in worry as her hand reached towards him, something in him hoped for a second. Maybe the nightmare he’d experienced had been just a continued part of his life, and Annie still sat down next to him at night, waiting to talk about the dream.

But it was Felicity. Who looked every bit heartbroken when she corrected him. He hadn’t meant to cry, but when she said, it brought a whoosh of emotions that he hadn’t felt in a while. The calming voice of a woman. And the tender touch. He lost a lot five years ago—more than anyone would ever know—but love was what he missed the most. He missed Annie’s smile, their fights, and everything that went along with that, but he missed the looks she’d give him from across the room at parties, the backrub that she’d finally give in to after he whined for an hour about being sore. Her love healed him of all the wounds he’d received.

And that’s what he went to bed each night missing.

For one moment—a ten minute conversation that ended with one of them begging the other to forget the whole thing—he felt that love again.

Chapter End Notes

It was fun writing the last part. ;)
So...I decided to do this like a season. After chapter 9, which will be next Saturday, I'm going to take a two weeks break. I'll let you know next week when exactly to expect chapter 10. That will give me some time to write ahead, as school starts soon! I promise I will let everyone know if there will be a break after chapters, but do expect some every now and then because I'll get back to being super busy. :P
Hope you enjoyed it!
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Trigger warning at the end of this chapter. I don't want to spoil anything, but if you feel the need, please message me and I will gladly give you anything you need to know! :))

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*PLEASE MAKE SURE TO READ THE CHAPTER SUMMARY!*

“So what caused the elevator accident?” Thea questioned, the rustling of sheets confirming to Felicity that her friend still lay in bed. The benefits of working later and not having to be up before children. Who woke up way too early.

“Dig said that it was faulty brakes. No idea how or why, though. There’s going to be an investigation as to how it happened.” Felicity kept her gaze on the staircase that Oliver would come down from at any time. When that happened, the phone conversation would be cut off. No need to make things any more awkward. “All I can say is that I will be climbing fifty floors of stairs for a year before I go in another elevator.”

“I wouldn’t. But everyone’s okay, right?”

“All shook up, but yeah. Harper’s head is feeling better, last time I checked. I think I’m still shaking from that elevator shaft climb.”

“I can’t believe you did that. I can’t believe Ollie let you do that.”

“I didn’t give him much of a choice. Speaking of…” She spotted Oliver walking down the hallway and towards the stairs. “Thundercloud has decided to wake up. I gotta go.”

Thea giggled. “That’s a good name for him. Talk to you later.”

“Who was that?”

Felicity stopped the call and raised her head to look at ‘Thundercloud’. “A friend who was concerned about my near death experience. Uh, did your EA receive lots of works last night?”

“I actually fell asleep. So now I’ll have to go the office and do work today. If I don’t get any calls demanding I be in Europe by the evening.”

Perfect opportunity for the investigating she’d forgotten to do. Near death experiences could do that to a person. “What do you do over there?”

“Lots of meetings. Tommy’s dad is over there occasionally. Also the guy at Palmer Tech. Ray. He’s a nice guy. Awful to sit in meetings with because he talks the whole time.”

“Where are the meetings held? In the normal spots or weird spots? And by normal I mean Italy, France, and England.”
“It depends. Mostly in the ‘normal spots’ because that’s where most of our business goes. Have a nice Sunday.” He backed out of the room and disappeared into the hallway that led to the garage. Hopefully he didn’t want to drive hot wheels because that still sat at the office.

“Wow, Felicity.” Diggle smiled at her from the other living room entrance. “I haven’t gotten that much information from him in five years.”

“Didn’t he go overseas before then too?”

“Not much. He usually sent a representative for those duties. I’m pretty close to him, but he never tells me where he goes. Just one of the things that happened to him. He’s closed up.”

She needed to start a list of all the suspicious things that involved Oliver Queen. Maybe her friend would give her answers. After all, Barry Allen sucked at lying.

It took all morning and most of the afternoon to get ahold of him. Finally, after she spied Oliver pulling into the garage on his Ducati, Barry answered his phone. “A little busy at the moment, Felicity.”

“How fast are you driving? And since when do you drive with the windows down?”

“Lots of wind today. Anyways, I really can’t talk.”

“I just need to ask you a few questions. Are you at a crime scene? Because if you are, I’ll call back later. But I miss you, Barry. There’s a lot of stuff to talk about. Please?”

“Okay, hold on.” There was a whoosh, and then still. “I’m good now. How can I help you?”

“I want to know about Oliver Queen.”

Barry groaned. “Felicity, are you still suspicious of something? Cuz you don’t need to be. Seriously. This is ridiculous.”

“I have every reason to have suspicion. Oliver’s hiding something. And I think you are too.” She gave him a rundown of the things she’d uncovered, including the unknown number call from Barry and her computer being destroyed.

“Well, he’s a billionaire. Maybe his phone is programmed to keep people out of there. And that time that I called, I lost my phone so I had to call from the CSI line. The phone must have registered as a weird number. As I said, nothing to worry about.”

She had a feeling that Barry didn’t care and was getting annoyed with her questions, but she’d ask one more anyways. “Don’t you think that there’s something fishy going on? That something things aren’t lining up properly?” Two questions.

“Yeah, but look at you, Felicity. Changed your hair over your boyfriend’s death. Changed everything, really. Got fired for a little bit of an illegal hack job you performed. I’m sure if someone opened up your emails or looked at your search history, they’d be suspicious of you too. None of us are little saints and none of us, if examined closely, look like we’re Abraham Lincoln. I’m sure he had his secrets too. Oliver Queen has his secrets, yes. I know him well enough to know that, but that doesn’t mean he’s liable to be investigated or interrogated. The man lost his wife, a lot of other stuff that day. Who wouldn’t hold some things inside?”

Felicity gulped back the sting of the lecture. Something hit Barry’s chord. Was it her questions? His denial? Covering up for Oliver? Whatever it was, it didn’t help any of her skepticism. No need to tell
Barry that. “You know what? You’re right. I’m going to drop it. Clayton’s waving me down, so I gotta go. Bye, Barry.” When he said goodbye, she set her phone down and waved Clayton over. “What’s wrong, buddy?” Why did she automatically assume something bad happened?

“William kicked me out of the room.”

“What do you mean by that? It’s yours too, if I’m not mistaken.”

“He threw my book at me and called me a nerd and then left. I didn’t do anything to annoy him. I don’t think. Maybe walking in annoyed him. Felicity, am I a nerd?”

“Oh, Clayton.” She put her hands on his face and leaned in close. “Yes, you are. But you know what? It’s perfectly okay to be a nerd. I’m a nerd, and I’m really cool. At least I think so. It’s okay to be anything you want, as long as you’re never a jerk.” She tapped his nose, making him smile. “You and I can start a nerd group.”

“I like that idea.”

“Perfect. We’ll hold it every other day in the kitchen and nerd out. In the meantime, I’m going to talk to your brother.”

“Can you tell him I’m a cool nerd?”

She laughed, but sobered as she climbed the stairs. This would be the perfect opportunity to talk to William about issues. Clearly he had them. She had them. But she could deal with hers and keep them under the rug. Not William Queen, who had a hard time discerning what he could and couldn’t say. Her mind rushed back to a few of the things she yelled at Oliver. Okay, yeah. Sometimes her brain thought of the worst thing to express her anger. And if her father stood before her, she didn’t know what would come out of her mouth. Anger. Disgust. Questions.

Maybe a moment of weakness when her guard came down and she said she was happy to see him.

Felicity knocked on the bedroom door, pushing it open when William called that she could enter. “Hi Willie. I see you’re spending your Sunday moping and doing school. Or is it the other way around?”

“I’m not moping.”

“And studies have shown that cows are capable of producing chocolate milk.”

He chuckled. “I’ve never heard that one before.”

“Well, there’s only been one Felicity Smoak.” She took a seat on the foot of the bed and gave him a little push that earned her a smile from him. His gaze shifted downwards again, and he fiddled with his notebook edging.

“Felicity…this might sound weird, but do you have a mom?”

“Well I wasn’t created by Zeus that’s for sure. Yes, I have a mom. She and I just, uh, don’t really talk much. Well, she wants to talk. I don’t want to talk. It’s just one of those things that happen over time that you can’t see coming. That one people could’ve seen coming from a mile away.” She took a deep breath to steady herself. “My dad left me and my mom when I was seven. My mother, well, she’s my mother. But that’s all she was to me. Nothing more than that.”

“I guess I should say that I’m sorry. I kinda know how it feels. After Mom died, Daddy left too. Figuratively and literally. I was ten, so it was a little different than Piper and Annie. They don’t
remember much. Piper remembers Mama a little bit, and Roxy. Us older kids remember how it was before, and that’s the worst.”

“It doesn’t mean you should hate your dad as much as you do.”

“I don’t ha—yeah, I do. Sometimes I imagine that if I were bigger, I could take him on and beat him up until he apologizes for all the hell he caused. Cuz he did cause it. Maybe not Mom’s death, but everything after that. I guess…” he gave a belligerent shrug. “He thinks that’s his fault too, and since he’s always so right all the time, maybe it is.”

She’d seen glimpses of this side of William, but never the full character. Bitterness, anger, and the knowledge that he could do nothing to change anything wrecked his heart and his head. It clouded his judgment of his father. Felicity was inclined to believe the same thing, but she’d seen Oliver without the mask on, and he looked a lot different than what William saw with his glasses of hate on.

This was new too. Not shocking, but new. Oliver believed that he caused Annie’s death in some way. “Why would he think that?”

“I don’t know. He’s never told us that, but the night when we never saw Aunt Thea again, they started yelling in the office. It’s not like we can’t hear things. At least I could, because I was up in the attic and there was a vent. He said that it was his fault that they died, and that Aunt Thea should shut up. He used different words, of course.”

“Did multiple people die in the crash?”

“Another person. The funny thing is that Daddy wouldn’t have exactly cared if someone else died. It was an old guy who probably lived a pretty good life and had to be happy he died cuz his wife passed away a couple weeks before that. It never made sense. But he believes it was his fault.”

“I think most husbands would after their wife dies,” Felicity mumbled. That’s all that she could come up with as her brain spun. What really happened that day? Something did. Something suspicious, maybe. Maybe it was nothing. But the dark-web part of her that still lived deep inside set off warnings in her soul.

Whatever. Deal with it later. She came in here to talk to William, not to freak herself out. “I’m not excusing anything that Oliver’s done. There’s no excuse for abandoning your family. But what I want you to do is to observe objectively his actions. Okay? Don’t think about him as his son—”

“Most of the time I wish I wasn’t.”

“But as a bystander. Think about what he went through, and think about what he’s doing now. He let you guys keep the animals. That’s saying something, at least in my opinion. And at the end of the day, he’s your dad. Coming from someone who never knew my father well, be thankful you have one.”

“Sometimes I wish I didn’t. In fact, it would’ve been better if Daddy died in that car accident and not Mom. She wouldn’t have gone in the hole of despair and never even attempted to climb out of it.”

William stood up. “I’m sorry, but I need to go.”

He stormed out of the room, leaving Felicity to stare at the painting on the wall. What. Just. Happened? William hadn’t just said that. No way. He wished his father died instead of his mom. Now who was the jerk?

She pushed herself up and walked into the hall, banging into Oliver who exited a different room. “Ooh! Sorry!” Her hands landed on his chest. Very firm chest. She yanked her body away from him.
“I seem to have a hard time not making awkward situations. You’re very nice to run into though. I mean, no, no. Not like that. Oliver, stop smiling!”

“I’m not smiling.”

“You, you are. You’re making fun of my speaking blunder.”

“No, I’m not.”

“You’re an awful liar.”

“No one’s ever told me that before.”

“Really? Well, I can see right through you, Mr. Queen.”

He cocked his head, a smile on his face. Not a flirty one. Definitely not that. “You seem to be in a weird of habit of switching from ‘Oliver’ and ‘Mr. Queen’.”

“Does it bother you?”

“Not too much. Though I’m curious.”

“About that?”

“No, about that look on your face. Looks like someone kicked your cat.”

“I’m fine. The nanny is a little worn out, that’s all.”

Oliver’s eyes swept over her. “You should go take a nap.”

“And a shower. I know. No need to state the obvious.”

“Uh, listen. I just got a call from one of our businesses abroad, and I need to go there tonight. Apparently it’s urgent. So, uh,” he pulled his leather jacket to his chest, squeezing it tight. “Watch out for the kids, please. You can keep the credit card you haven’t given back to me, just keep the new animals to a minimum.”

“I was intending to give it back to you.”

“Keep it. I trust you.”

But I don’t trust you. Okay, she did. Mostly. She trusted some parts of him. His heart. That was intact. Hopefully. He definitely had a brain. But the skills? That’s what she couldn’t trust. Neither could she trust his phone. Or his computer. Or where he travelled.

Or Annie’s death.

“Have a nice time in Europe, Oliver. We’ll try not to buy too many little mice.”

“No mice!” Oliver yelled as he walked down the hall.

Oh, yes, mice. Too bad she couldn’t stand them. If she could, they’d have a whole family of them. Felicity shook her head and went to her bedroom. The shower felt great, but the nap felt even greater. After a quick peek at the kids to make sure they were alright, she went up to Oliver’s office. Before she got herself in more trouble online, maybe it would be best to just check to see if he was an idiot and had precious files laying around.
What a perfectly clean office. Did this man do anything in here? Hers would be trashed.

This wasn’t a good idea. Someone would walk in and she would have to answer questions. Felicity went back to her bedroom and set up her computer at the desk. First things first. Doing what she should have done before she got here.

Look up the accident.

On Google. It wasn’t yet necessary to dig around on the dark web.

Information popped up right away, detailing the graphic scene of the wreck, eyewitnesses, and the victims. Annie Queen and Marcus Semyon died, and two women were hit by flying debris. Simple enough. But no accident report was ever released. Nothing told her if the brakes failed, if someone ran a red light, or if it was just a freak accident.

What kind of celebrity accident wasn’t investigated?

Or maybe it had been. Just never released. Felicity’s hands flew across the keyboard, entering SCPD’s files, drawing up accident reports, and running a search through them. A folder from the accident popped up, but it contained nothing.

Nothing.

Did Oliver murder his wife and cover it up?

“Felicity!” She slammed her hands on the desk. “No. Don’t go there.” There had to be an explanation. She could figure this out. The answer would not be that Oliver killed his wife. This was not his fault, like he told Thea. Those words loomed over her head as she dug deeper into the SCPD files. If someone investigated the accident, the report wasn’t on the web.

She rubbed her eyes and blinked hard. Apparently she chose the wrong career. Detective work would have been a better option. Or maybe it wouldn’t, as she wasn’t doing a good job right now. Though it could be blamed on the fact that no one wanted her to find anything.

What else could she use? No way would it be wise to walk into police headquarters and ask for information.

The hospital. Wouldn’t there be a medical report? Bravo, Felicity. Good thinking. In one minute she opened the hospital’s records. The scan took five minutes, thanks to the slow internet. Even Oliver Queen’s mansion wasn’t immune to that. When the reports from that day popped up, she clicked on Annie’s and pumped her fist in the air. There was a report! It wouldn’t tell her what happened in the accident, but it would tell her how Annie died.

And…of course. Several key elements of the report were missing. But it contained a linked note. Felicity clicked on it.

Everything came crashing down on top of her. Every move. Every word. Every look. Everything that Oliver had done since the accident made sense now. Too much sense. Felicity jerked herself up from the chair, slamming the computer shut. She couldn’t handle staring at those few sentences. Not when they caused so much pain for her. How could Oliver have lived with that? No wonder every bit of him fell apart. How could it not? Nothing could ever stop a man from falling into the pit of despair when he lost two people that day. Yes, two. That word hurt to even think. Two people from the Queen family died.

Annie had been pregnant.
“So. What’s the plan? Because I should make it clear that I don’t really want to be here right now.”

“We know. You’ve made that clear to us many times, Oliver. But it doesn’t change the fact that you need to be here. If you want your family to live, that is. Do you want your family to die? Like your wife?”

“Shut up. You’ve tried that technique plenty of times. It’s not going to change the fact that I don’t want to be here.”

“Maybe another message would help you. Maybe—”

“My family is off limits in this conversation. We had a deal. You don’t talk about them, I do what you want me to do. Like taking care of whoever ticks you off, so let’s talk about that.”

“Even the little blonde?”

“Her too.”

“I don’t think she fits under the criteria of who I can or cannot threaten. She’s not…family, as you would put it.”

“She is now. Now before I kill everyone in this room, who do you want me to kill?”

Chapter End Notes

Okay. So this storyline is something that I’ve been debating as I planned things out, and even while writing this chapter. Why I ultimately decided to do it? Last year, at this time, my mom miscarried a baby. Almost to this day exactly. Five years ago before that, we lost another sibling. Both losses sent me into a very dark place, especially last year. I only made it out with the help of Jesus. My sisters and I decided that writing this storyline would help us (me especially) heal from the loss and move on. So today, I dedicate this story to my two little siblings who I didn't get the chance to hold, and to all the people who have lost children, siblings, and grandchildren. It is a painful experience, and something that I promise I will do my best to show in this story. I know it isn’t EXACTLY like the one I went through, but Oliver lost a child, and the Queen kids will eventually learn they lost a sibling. I feel like that is close enough. Just know that if anyone ever needs to talk about anything, please message me! I am available to talk. You can always talk to me on my Tumblr, lovejesusarrowavengers. Now. On to slightly happier topics. Chapter 10 will be posted September 17th! I want to write as much as I can in the next two weeks so I don't have to write for a while. :P Please be patient...IF I get antsy or get a crazy amount done, maybe I'll post on the 10th. MAYBE. :)
A surprise guest brings up old wounds and adds them to the fire that is simmering in Felicity's heart.

The next two weeks past in a blur. A painful one. Felicity helped the kids with classes, grateful when October hit and the humidity went down. Each time she looked at one of the Queen children, she had to shake away the idea that a five-year-old would be just starting to spell words like ‘cat’ and ‘dog’. Maybe he or she would want a pet too.

And if that child were alive, that meant she wouldn’t be here, because that meant Annie never died. Each day hurt. She gave up looking for new evidence. It caused too much pain for her. It forced her to remember too many things about her own childhood. Things that she didn’t want to remember.

Oliver came home the night of day fourteen. When they saw him in the driveway, the kids asked if they could watch a movie and never reappeared. Felicity was halfway up the stairs to her bedroom when Oliver pushed open the door, and dropped his suitcases on the ground. He spotted her, but didn’t smile.

“You look tired.”

“You’re one to talk,” she said, taking the edge off her voice with a small smile. “How was your trip?”

“Enlightening.”

The callback to breakfast a few weeks ago did bring a genuine smile to her face. “I’m glad. I’m going up to bed, so, uh…see you in the morning?”

“Maybe. I need to sleep.”

Felicity got to her bedroom before the tears she’d been holding back seeped out. How was she supposed to do this? She wouldn’t tell Oliver that she knew. No, she couldn’t let him relive that. It wasn’t fair to either of them. But each day he did. What went through his head at night when he lay there alone? Did he think about Annie and the baby? Could he fight away those thoughts and think about work? Some stupid thing he read on the internet?

Did John know? That’s what hurt her the most. Had Oliver kept this all to himself for five years? It
hurt to imagine. Carrying a secret so heartbreaking as that. No one should have to do that. Go through something alone. She did. She’d gone through a lot of things alone, and she knew that it sucked. It hurt. She wouldn’t be the person she was today if things went differently and someone held her hand.

Finally, sleep claimed her. Nightmares unleashed, filled with cries of a baby. Blood. So much blood.

She woke up when Fluffy scraped against her door. Muttering a few swear words about why the puppy couldn’t just stay in the other rooms, she opened the door and let her friend in. She glared down at the dog, who looked pleased with herself. “Yeah, you woke me up. How do you feel about that? It should be guilt, young lady.” Whatever. Time for a shower.

But her shower made a wheezing noise and refused to allow more than a trickle of water out. She put on her robe and padded to the guest bathroom, letting out a sigh of relief when the shower turned on. And got hot quick. The hot water washed away the nightmares she had, letting her sit back against the wall and relax. For once not thinking about Oliver, but instead about herself. Or more like her mother. Strange she hadn’t at least received a phone call in the past two weeks. Maybe Donna Smoak gave up.

But no. Smoak women didn’t give up easily. She was probably planning something. Something drastic. And embarrassing. And something that Felicity did not want to imagine right now. Too stressful trying to keep up with her mother.

She stepped out of the shower and dried off. A quick peek out the window brought her spirits down a notch. Her favorite orange dress hung on the line. Oops, one more thing she forgot to tell Oliver. The dryer broke yesterday.

She wanted that dress. The towel covered up enough that if she saw someone, it wouldn’t cause too much embarrassment. Plus, it was six-thirty. Not many people would be awake now. Felicity double-checked the towel around her chest, and stepped out of the bathroom. Fluffy tumbled down the stairs next to her, and trotted behind her through the kitchen and out to the side of the house where the clothes hung. “Hello, darling. Oh, mama’s missed you. Sexy little thing.” She unpinned the dress from the line and took a step towards the house, stopping when a noise reached her ears.

Whistling. Who whistled? Dig? No. Oliver. He looked like someone who would whistle. Oh, God. What should she do? Try to put the dress over her head? No, the towel would drop and make things…up there very showy. That couldn’t happen. Not right now. Not at six in the morning!

Oliver rounded the corner wearing swim trunks. And no shirt. Of course. With a six-pack like that, why wear a shirt? He stopped short, his eyebrows raising and mouth opening. The whistling died. “Wow. I mean, what are you wearing?”

“A towel. Clearly. Don’t ask anything else. I would be wearing this dress, but the dryer broke yesterday and I really like it and please don’t tell me that you heard me calling it a sexy little—”

“Felicity.” Oliver chuckled, moving closer to her. “It’s okay. I was just a little surprised, that’s all. This is not what I was expecting.”

“What exactly did you imagine?”

Oliver shuffled, glancing around before looking at her again. “More clothes.”

A scream rocketed through the area. Normally, Felicity would imagine all the bad things that
happened. Something bad definitely happened. Or would happen, if her memory of screams didn’t betray her. But this wasn’t an I-broke-my-head-open-help scream. Oooh, no. This certainly wasn’t that.

They both whirled towards the sound. Felicity groaned; Oliver possibly choked in shock. A blonde woman stared at them, her arms outstretched, deepening the effects of the outfit she wore. It far exceeded any outfit that anyone had ever seen.

“Baby!” Donna Smoak ran towards them in heels that defied gravity itself. “Oh my baby, I can’t believe it!”

“Mom?” Felicity mustered out as Donna threw her arms around her.

“Mom?” Oliver mouthed.

She shook her head and waited for Donna to let go. Her mother was going to yank the towel off with her aggressive hug. “Mom, what are you doing here?”

“I came to see you. You didn’t tell me you were a nanny.” Donna pulled away, a smile floating on her lips. Her eyes went from Felicity to Oliver and she made a gesture. One that didn’t need much of a brain to guess what she meant. Then she laughed. “But clearly you’re more than that.”

Oh, dear God in Heaven, help her. Her mother thought…Felicity jerked her eyes over Oliver. He came from the pool. She came from the shower. But what did they both have in common? Wet. They were both wet. Donna thought—don’t even think about it, Felicity Smoak. “Oooh, no. Mom, don’t think like that. This is not here. Not happening. Ever! He’s not—”

“We’re not—”

“He’s my boss!”

Donna set her hands on her hips. “Really. Because you both look like you came from the pool. Or worse.” She grabbed Felicity’s hands, a smile spreading across her face. “Better, because maybe I’ll finally get those grandbabies!”

“Mooooom!”

Oliver’s face went white, and then beet red in way too fast amount of time. “Mrs.—”

“Miss—”

More surprise. “Miss Smoak, please don’t take this,” he gestured to…something, “as a sign that anything is happening. She was coming down to get a dress because our dryer broke and I was in the pool. Nothing more. And I’m Oliver—”

“Queen. Yes, I know. It’s nice to meet you.” Donna shook his hand, the smile still on her face. Whatever anger that brought her here had momentarily dissolved at the idea of her daughter producing grandbabies with a billionaire. “It’s great to know that you’re taking care of my daughter.”

“I think I’m taking care of him, thank you very much. Oh. Did I say that out loud?” The one eyebrow raise happened. At her. A subtle, sexy warning that she should probably watch what she was saying. “I mean, Mom, I’m taking care of his kids. Oliver just pays me.”

“Really?” Oliver turned to her, the puppy eyes activated. The little piece of— Did he suddenly decide to torture her with this predicament? “We were stuck in the elevator together.”
“With the kids. And very platonaically. See, Mom? Nothing to worry about. Or be excited about. Now you should explain why you’re here.”

“I told you, baby.” Donna put her hands on Felicity’s cheeks, a small amount of the deeper issue showing up in her eyes. Donna Smoak was angry. Rightfully so, if Felicity were being honest. Maybe it was a good thing that they’d been caught doing nothing. “You wouldn’t call. Or text. You left me one voicemail vaguely saying that you were safe. That’s all I had, honey. So I had to come. I told the taxi driver that I was your mother, and he brought me up here. So now I’m here. And it’s so good to see you. It looks like being a nanny has treated you well.”

*If she only knew.* Felicity mustered up a smile and pushed her mother’s hands off her. “Listen, I’m going to get dressed. Oliver can bring you into the living room and entertain you while I do that.”

“Um—” Oliver stopped himself, scrunching up his nose, probably deciding not to complain about his fate. He grabbed her arm and tugged her close to him. A little too close for her beating heart. “Are you adopted?”

“Let’s discuss my embarrassing background some other time.” She stormed into the house and continued stomping until she reached the bedroom. How? Why? There were several questions she had involving ‘why’, but the biggest one she voiced aloud. “Why today?” Not yesterday, when it would’ve been her and Dig, the kids gone most of the day on a shopping trip with Raisa. Not a week before. But today. When she and Oliver had a chance encounter outside looking like they’d been doing things in the pool!

She slid down the door, an audible groan escaping her lips. There was no need to imagine what her mother and Oliver were discussing right now. More like what her mother was discussing with Oliver. Telling him all of her favorite foods. What she was allergic to. Which would have its benefits.

A knock sounded. “Felicity, honey, can I come in?”

“How’d you find my room?”

“Oliver told me.”

“You don’t need to come in here.”

“Felicity Smoak, open the door this instant.”

Letting out several quiet curse words, Felicity opened the door and allowed her mother to come in. She slammed the door and spun around. “Now that we’re alone, maybe you should tell me why you are here. I certainly didn’t invite you.”

“No. No, you didn’t. You didn’t do anything. I found out where you were working when that elevator accident when national. Imagine my surprise when they mentioned you as the Queen children’s nanny. Maybe a simple call would’ve sufficed. Anything to know where you were.”

Felicity stomped into the bathroom and worked on getting her dress on. “I think we both know why I didn’t do that.”

“Why? I don’t know why it’s so hard to call your—”

“Mom, the only job you’d be happy that I have if it were working as a waitress at some bar in Vegas and wearing a porn dress like you!” She yelled the words, not bothering if anyone else in the house heard it. Maybe it’d be better if they did. “It’s why I haven’t bothered to contact you for so long. I will never be like you. And while some people are fine with being different than their parents, you
aren’t. You’ve never cared and the only reason you’re here now is because you’re feeling guilty about not showing up for five years! Now go downstairs and entertain Oliver so that I can make myself presentable. *Now.*”

“You know what, Felicity?” Donna stopped at the door. “Maybe before you call me out for something, you should examine yourself. I think you’ll find some interesting things.”

She couldn’t feel this. No, this was something that she could push back into the dark recesses of her heart where she’d put every other comment her mother had made. That’s where they belonged. If she stopped to think about any of them, she’d never start her life again. Felicity reached for her hair dryer but decided against it. The embarrassing damage had been done. Her hair didn’t need a blow dry.

Her life needed a complete makeover.

Starting with never finding out about the lost Queen baby. That’s what tanked this ship. Who could function, when every look at Oliver made her think about the baby? She tousled her hair and then stared at herself in the mirror. “Okay, Felicity. You can do this. Have confidence!”

On the way downstairs, the conversation drifted to her ears.

“So you have six children?”

“Yes.”

“Are they all yours?”

“Yes.”

“And Felicity takes care of all of them.”

“Yes.”

“Don’t you help? Seems like an awful lot of kids to deal with. You are their father.”

Ooooh, no. Oliver didn’t need another Smoak lecture. Felicity slid into the room—literally, thanks to the newly waxed floors, and stopped next to her mother. She moved away an inch or so. Time to channel the inner actress she had in her somewhere. “You know what? I bet you haven’t had your coffee yet. Or doughnuts. I’ll have Dig order us some.”

“I already had my coffee for the morning, and I don’t eat doughnuts. Who’s Dig?”

“Right here.” Diggle stepped in, deadpanned.

Donna leaned closer to her, seeming to forget what she’d told her daughter a few minutes ago. “This is Dig?”

“Yes, Mother. This is John Diggle.” Felicity hadn’t.

Diggle mouthed, “Mom?” at Felicity, but extended his hand, a smile on his face. “It’s nice to meet you…—”

“Donna. Donna Smoak.”

“I’m John. I’m the bodyguard and driver for the Queen family. Your daughter has done a lot of good here.”
Felicity ducked to hide her pink cheek.

"Why, of course. She’s an amazing woman. You’re lucky to have her here."

What a hypocrite. Minutes ago criticizing her and now bragging about her. Felicity resisted the urge to roll her eyes.

"Why does Felicity always get to have people over and we never get to?" Harper stood at the entrance, Piggy perched on her shoulder. Oh, yeah, that became a thing as well. She marched over to Donna and extended her hand. "I’m Harper. I’m thirteen. You look a lot like Felicity."

"Oh, hi. I’m Felicity’s mom."

"Oh! No wonder.” Harper’s nose scrunched. “Daddy, why are you wearing swim trunks?"

"I, uh, was in the pool."

"Since when do you get in the pool? You hate the water."

"I was hot."

Harper squinted, then shrugged. “Okay. But that means that you have to get in the water with us sometime and throw everybody.”

“Maybe.”

Like he would. Even Harper knew he wouldn’t, because she rolled her eyes and headed to the kitchen.

Annie ran into the room, thumb in her mouth, other hand gripping a pink, frayed blanket. Her thumb popped out so she could gesture for a hug. “I had a bad dream. And then Fluffy licked my head and tried to kiss me.”

Felicity lifted Annie up and gave her a peck on the cheek. “Is that a better kiss?”

“Uh, huh.”

“Oh, who is this little nugget?”

“Mom, she’s five. Not a nugget.”

“I’m Annie.”

“And I’m Donna. Her mom.”

“You have a mom?”

“Of course I do.”

“Oh. I thought she died. Like my mom.”

Oliver made a noise. It sounded like a moan. Maybe a stifled cry. Felicity gulped back the hopeless feeling in her heart and tightened her grip on Annie. She would have to answer this one. Oliver wasn’t capable of doing that, as he slipped out of the room, his hand scrubbing his face.

“Well, honey, she, uh, didn’t. She’s safe.”
Annie left it at that, sliding down and running off to her bedroom again. Felicity sagged. Diggle left in the direction of Oliver, but Donna moved in closer, tears in her eyes. “I didn’t know what you have to deal with. Are you okay? This has to take a lot out of you. I can only imagine the pain…”

“I’m fine. I love the kids.”

“And everything else?”

“Mom, I said I’m fine! I need to go get everybody up and ready for the day. You should go in the kitchen and introduce yourself to Raisa. She’s the housekeeper and she cooks breakfast. I’ll see you later.”

“Felicity!”

“I’m sorry, Mom. But I’ve gotta go.” She had to. Right? There were things she needed to do. Her mother could wait. It wasn’t like she could shove away her responsibilities for the woman who caused a lot of her pain.

******

Diggle pushed open the screen door and headed down the pathway to the gazebo. Oliver disappeared down here often, especially in the beginning. Sometimes he came after him, sometimes he didn’t. Today was one of those days that talking would be necessary. At least for him. Oliver shrugged a lot of comments off, but Diggle couldn’t always do that.

They both needed this talk.

Oliver sat at the far wall, keeled over, his hands on his face. Unmoving.

“Oliver?”

“Yeah?” He jerked up, straightening his shoulders, the strong smokescreen unable to hide the veil of tears. He slumped forward and sank back down to the bench. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“I know you don’t. But that doesn’t mean you’re not going to.”

“You’re not my babysitter anymore.”

“No, I’m not. I’m your friend. A friend who has grown consistently more worried about you.”

Diggle stayed at the entrance, giving Oliver his space. For now. He knew how the guy worked. Too well. Soon, the façade would break and Oliver would let up, allowing Diggle in. Even if it was just a shallow comment or for just a moment. It would be something.

Oliver slid his hands out in front of him, and made a fist. The fidgeting started. Finally, he took a shaky breath. “She thinks all moms die.”

“Oliver—”

“Don’t ‘Oliver’ me. She’s grown up without a mother, John. I don’t know how other people do it. A lot of people don’t have a parent. Or parents. But Annie thinks…Annie doesn’t know how it feels to get tucked in at night, or to get good morning kisses, or…”

Little Annie did know. Now she did. He’d seen how Felicity mothered her. Mothered them all, in fact. This ‘nanny’ hadn’t just adopted the title. She’d taken the title of mother. More so than he’d seen since Annie died five years ago. No one could provide that comfort, that love like that. “They
have you, man. They do still have their dad. Who says you can’t tuck them in at night?”

“I can’t do that.”

“When are you going to tell me why you can’t?”

“It doesn’t matter. It just has to be that way.”

“No, it doesn’t, Oliver. Those kids miss you.”

“They don’t. Have you seen them? They don’t care. I’m better off not in their lives. Let them grow up with you, and Raisa. Felicity. She’s done more for them in a month than I’ve done in five years.”

“That’s because she’s putting all of her heart and soul into it.”

“I don’t need a lecture.”

“I’m stating a point.”

Oliver pushed himself up, his hand brushing across his cheeks, attitude from a minute ago gone. “I said I don’t need a lecture.” He brushed past Diggle, turning towards the garage. Thirty seconds later, the red and black Ducati whizzed by, turning at the gate and heading towards the deeper woods. Diggle sighed. He remembered the days when he followed along in his car. Annie paid him from her personal account to make sure Oliver didn’t go do something stupid. Oliver knew who was behind him, and did everything he could to lose him. Diggle kept up ninety percent of the time, and it always ended with a handshake and laughter.

It would be different if he followed him now. Oliver didn’t let anyone in anymore; he might not ever. It hurt to imagine him living alone, after seeing him so happy. Maybe someone could change that. Someday.

“Dig?”

He turned and spied Felicity on the veranda on the second story. “Hey, Felicity. Need something?”

“Your buffness. Muscles! Muscles. That’s what I intended to say.”

He chuckled and started back to the house. “Be there in a second.”

Maybe a certain blonde woman could change that.

******

When the grandfather chimed twelve, the kids left for lunch that Raisa prepared. God bless that woman. Felicity set the Civil War history book down and sighed. Food sounded good, but that meant facing her mother. She wasn’t prepared for that. Preferably she wouldn’t go down there at all.

“Knock, knock.” Diggle whacked on the wall. “Can I come in or are you in a mood that I shouldn’t?”

She took off her glasses, gesturing for him to come in, and then rubbing her eyes. “Sorry.”

“I might know the whole story, but I can tell there’s some issues there. I thought you might like some of this too.” He set a tray on the table, complete with lasagna, crackers, and a glass of milk. “Eat up. I know how strained relationships can make a person hungry.”
“You have family problems? Or are you talking about you and Oliver? I saw how he stormed out after you went after him.”

“John Diggle is unfortunately not immune to relationship problems. And before you ask, I’m not talking about a girl. My brother. He died several years ago, but not before we had plenty of drama. I ate all the time.”

“First of all, I’m so sorry for your loss. And second, you’re just trying to make me feel better.”

“You’re right, Felicity. I mean no harm when I say this, but you look stressed. You’ve looked stressed for a couple weeks.”

“I’ve had a lot of things on my mind. My mother showing up isn’t helping.”

“Anything you wanna talk about before the kids come back up?”

“Not anything that we’d have time to talk about. And even if we did, I don’t want to talk about it.” She couldn’t tell him about everything anyways. Maybe he knew. Maybe he didn’t. That wasn’t a risk she could take, spilling details about Oliver. If Diggle found out, it would cause an even bigger rift than they already had. Might as well drop a bomb between them. That would signify that relationship. “I’m sorry, John. I just can’t. This isn’t your problem, and it shouldn’t be. Thank you for the food.”

“If you ever need to talk, I’m here, okay?”

_Do not cry_. “Th-Thanks.”

When he left, thankfully shutting the door behind him, she dropped her head in her hands and let out a tiny cry. It was all she would allow herself to do right now. The kids would come back and she needed her head. God forbid any of them ask why her eyes were puffy and red. That would be the final straw for her.

She could do this. Get through today or whoever long her mother would be here. She’d survived where no nanny ever had. Meaning she could do this.

So five minutes later, when Piper and Annie burst into the room with their if-I-do-this-then-I-don’t-have-to-do-this bargains, there was no trace of tears. In her heart yes, but none of the children would ever know what plagued her.

Felicity clutched the railing as she descended the staircase, her heartrate picking up. Her mother was sitting downstairs. Somewhere. Oh, dear God. Her _mother_. Hopefully Raisa had supplied her with things to do. After her talk with Diggle and her subsequent crying episode, she hadn’t left the second floor. Now, at ten, after finally getting the little girls to settle down and go to bed, she decided to approach the deadly topic of family. She pushed open the kitchen door and spotted Donna sitting at the table. “Hi, Mom.”

“Hello, Felicity.”

“What’s wrong?”

“What’s wrong? Maybe the fact that I sat down here all day, waiting for you to come down and at least _check_ on me? But what do you do? Hide upstairs all day?”
“I have a job, Mom. I was working. The kids need help.”

“And your mother doesn’t matter?”

“Not as much as those kids do, if we’re being honest.”

“Well, if we’re being honest, maybe I should say something too. You can’t hate me, Felicity. At least I was there when your father left. When he left us. You can’t blame me for everything.”

“What happened to you after Dad left? Because you didn’t care anymore. You didn’t spend half as much time with me when I needed it. When I needed you. You were there, yes. But you weren’t there. You were out of it.”

“I was working to get a roof over your head, Felicity. To keep one. To make sure you could go to the most prestigious high school there was, and make it to college.” Donna stepped up closer to Felicity, her finger wagging. “I made sure you stayed alive.”

Felicity stepped backwards to avoid the confrontation. This wasn’t what she could deal with right now. Not with the kids, Oliver, the baby. She didn’t have room for any of this. But here she was, face to face with her mother, having a serious conversation. Not what needed to happen right now. Anything could be better than this.

“You know what? It was stupid to come. I’ve wanted to come for a while now, but I just don’t have the money. But then I got this email saying that I won this ticket—”

“Wait, what?” Felicity grabbed her mom’s arm. “You got a ticket to here randomly?”

“Yes. I won it. Is that abnormal?”

It was. The very thought sent shivers down her spine and rooted her to the ground. She couldn’t move. No one just received a ticket to Starling City. To anywhere. Hackers did that. But who would send Donna Smoak a ticket like that? Only— “Mom, you’ve—we’ve gotta get out of here. Up! Go upstairs!” That’s where Dig slept.

“Felicity, what’s going on?”

“Just move!” She swung open the door and stopped. Oh, God. A hand slammed against her face to stop her scream. When hands enclosed around her shoulders, forcing her back, she swung her leg up, whacking the table, sending a vase toppling to the floor. Good. Someone would see the struggle. The kids? Would they see it? Bile rose in her throat as someone threw her to the ground.

A black bag went over her head, squeezing her air into tiny little pockets. She gasped for a clean breath, but nothing came. Black spots swirled in her vision, knocking her off course.

“Mom? Mom!” Someone help me! What could she do?

What if she never saw her kids again?

******

Oliver pulled the bike into the garage, locked the door, and headed inside. At eleven, no one would be up, and he could find food and go to sleep in peace. No lectures. And no faces he didn’t want to see right now.

He used his key to unlock the kitchen door and stepped in. Everything froze in place. Nothing was right. A tipped over chair. A broken vase. And no Felicity. Would she be up in her room right now?
Did the dog do this? He tossed the keys on the table and ran towards his bodyguard’s room. “Dig?”

He burst into the room, flipping on the light, suddenly realizing what he was doing. Reacting. He was reacting to something. To a suspicious situation that involved a woman he cared about. When had he last done that? The thought disappeared when Diggle shot up, his hand reaching for the gun on his end table.

“What’s wrong? Oliver, man, what are you doing?”

“Something…something happened. The kitchen…do you have the security feeds?”

“I haven’t looked at them for years, but yes.” He slid out of bed and ambled to the desk with computers. With a few clicks, they powered on, the security feeds flickering to life soon after.

“Can you go back a little bit?”

“Let’s see….this is half an—oh my God.”

Oliver jerked backwards and stumbled towards the door, knowing what he had to do the moment the masked men yanked Felicity to the ground.

“Oliver, don’t leave. She’s not dead. This is going to be okay!”

“I-I’m fine. Call the cops. I’m going to see where they went.” He ran up the stairs and to his bedroom, scrambling around on his desk for the key. Where was it? His hand enclosed around metal, allowing him to kneel at the foot of the bed and pull out a box. One that stayed with him, here, at all times. In honor of Annie.

And tonight, he’d use this bow again.

To go after the first woman who had made him care about life since the very woman who gave him the idea.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

The reveal of the Smoak’s kidnapper threatens to unravel Felicity, while at the Queen mansion, things turn disastrous without their nanny.

Chapter Notes

Tech babbling is not my forte (maybe the next AU will be a football story because I am an expert at that) so please don't get too mad if something is basically impossible to do or whatever. :P
Hope you enjoy it!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The hood ripped off, scraping against her cheeks, allowing light to seep in. Felicity sucked in clean, free air, knowing that her breathing pattern could cause her to hyperventilate. “Mom? Where’s my mom?”

“Right here, Felicity.” Her mom sat a few feet from her, face scratched from the rugged fabric, eyes flailing, begging for answers. Just like her. “What’s going on? Where are we?”

“I don’t know. Are you okay? Are you alright?”

“I-I’m okay.”

“Hello, Felicity.” The disguised voice vibrated at them. “It’s good to see you again.”

“Get away from us, you creep! You’re going to regret this. Big time.”

“Oh, no. Are you mad?”

“Am I mad? You kidnapped us!”

“I didn’t kidnap you. They kidnapped you.” The man, though still in the shadows, pointed at the men holding the hoods. “But that doesn’t matter now. You’re going to help me.”

“I’d be more likely to help you if you weren’t going full Darth Vader with that voice and hiding in the shadows like a coward!”

“If you saw me, you’d—”

“This is not the Phantom of the Opera! Who are you?”

“I thought they said that you never forget your first true love.” Cooper stepped out of the shadows. Alive and well. And carrying a gun. Felicity choked back a scream. From terror. From horror. From disbelief. The man she once loved aimed a gun at her forehead. “I’ve learned a few things over the
years. One is that every now and then, banks need cash. And when they do, they send armored trucks to the banks. There’s a navigation system, and if those trucks stray off course, they’re shut down. You’re going to hack into that system and reroute the trucks. To where I can kill every single one of those men and take the cash.”

Felicity yanked at the zip-ties that kept her to her chair, the panic keeping her words stuck in her throat. What could she say anyways? She wasn’t a trained assassin. Even if she got out of these handcuffs, it would take a miracle for her to make it three steps without being shot down.

Cooper. Alive. Those two words should make her feel happy, not terrified. How many times had she dreamed of this, her love coming back to her? Not really dead. The suicide attempt had caused him to disappear off the grid, and someday, he would come back to her.

He did.

“Y-You…died. I went to your funeral. I was heartbroken.” Stop crying, stop crying. If she wanted to get through this, she needed a head. A non-crying one, that is. “And I’m not going to do it.”

“I assumed you’d say that. You always did seem to have a weak spot for criminal activity, babe.”

“Don’t call me ‘babe’.”

Cooper chuckled. “Finding out that your ex-boyfriend is a criminal can do some things to you, huh? Anyways, it’s a good thing I brought some insurance.” He cocked the gun and planted it on Donna’s forehead.

Felicity screamed, “Fine! Fine, all do it! Don’t touch her!”

“Good girl comes through again.” The gun came away as Cooper spread his arms to his comrades. “Told ya.” He whirled at Felicity again, and pulled out a knife. “Don’t worry…dear. I’m not going to hurt you with this.” The knife cut through the bands that held her to the chair. He grabbed her arm and marched her to a batch of computers. “Do it. Reroute the trucks. Now or your precious mother dies.”

You can do this. She couldn’t lose anyone else. Including her mom. Who she told moments before the kidnapping that she didn’t care for. As she typed, she said, “I’m sorry, Mom. I didn’t mean to say what I said. Y-You were there for me when—”

“Let’s skip the dramatic speeches and hack, okay?” Cooper slapped Felicity across the cheek. A shriek of pain slipped out unwillingly.

“Hey!” Donna yelled from behind them. “Don’t you dare touch my daughter. You should know, as you probably do, given the fact that you zip-tied her to that chair, that without that gun, you wouldn’t last ten seconds against her. And I suspect there’s a reason why you had to kidnap her to do your dirty work. Because you’re not smart enough to do it yourself. I might not understand all this tech-get-up, but I know that she could run circles around you on the web. So leave your hands off her.”

A wall of darkness crumbled from around her heart. It broke off and fell, disappearing and turning into dust when it hit the ground. Felicity knew it did, because several tears spilled down her cheeks. Not tears of terror, or fear. But tears of love. Happy tears. That’s what they were. They were ones of forgiveness. Her mother did love her; deep down she knew that. But it had been covered by so much hatred and bitterness that that love could never surface. Tonight, or day, whatever time it was, that wall of hatred fell. And it felt good. Even if they were still kidnapped.

Not for long, if she had anything to say about it.
“There. It’s done.” Felicity lifted her fingers off the keys. “They’ll be at your door in five minutes, with guns, so be ready.”

“I knew you could do it, babe.” His fingers traced her cheek, waltzing along across her face like he used to do. Back then it made her smile. Now she had to fight the bile that rose in her throat. “I’ll be back, and I’ll finish this job. For now, sit tight.”

******

He had no idea where to look. How could he? He’d been at this for eight years, and the last time he went out of his way to save someone…well, that had been a long time ago. Oliver swore, slamming his hands on the desk before standing up. He needed help. Which meant calling the one person he did not want to talk to right now.

Barry Allen.

“Yo, whassup?”

At the moment, thunder crashed. Of course it was storming out. Symbolizing how he felt right now. Why did he always talk like that? The kid needed an arrow in his back. Two of them, preferably. Oliver rolled his eyes, but then channeled all his frustration into his voice to quickly knock Barry out of his teenage mode. “When I say this next sentence, I want you to stay in Central City. Got it?”

“Sure.”

Yeah, right. “Felicity’s been kidnapped.”

“And you expect me to stay here?”

“Yes.”

Barry swore. “You can’t just control me, Oliver!”

Oh, yes I can. “I’m not a computer tech-wizard. I need you and Cisco to get on the computers and find out where Felicity is. Then I will go and get her out of there.”

“Why not me?”

“Your mask is pathetic.”

“And yours isn’t?”

“Barry, who is she more likely to recognize? The guy she’s known for a month or the friend she’s known for ten years?”

“But I have super-speed and you have a…bow and arrows.”

“We’ve been over this. You’re young and stupid, and I have tactical awareness. End of discussion. Now get Cisco working on finding her and her mom, and send me information. Now I have to go and talk to Dig who is freaking out that I’m freaking out.”

“How shocking.”

Did he ever shut up? Oliver ended the call and slammed the phone down. He scanned the bedroom to make sure nothing incriminating lay around, and then left the bedroom.
“Daddy!” Piper ran at him, tears streaming down her cheeks. “Someone took Felicity! She’s gone!” She tried to wrap her arms around him, but he kept her away, managing to give her a slight hug. That’s all he could muster at the moment.

“We’re gonna get her back. Don’t worry.”

“Fluffy’s worried too!”

“I’m sure he is.”

“It’s a girl, Daddy.”

Oliver took a deep breath. “Okay. Where’s Dig?”

“Down here,” Diggle called from the lower level. “The police are here, Oliver.”

He descended the stairs with Piper and the dog behind him. Oh, no. A familiar form bent over the crime scene, now roped off with yellow tape. No, no, no. This couldn’t be happening. They hadn’t seen each other since—

“Hello, Mr. Queen.” Quentin Lance straightened and strode towards him. “I’d say it’s good to see you again, but the circumstances are far from good. Why don’t you explain what happened? From your perspective.”

“I, uh, came in from the kitchen door, at like, um, eleven. Maybe a little later. Everything looked exactly the way it does now. The vase broken, the chair knocked down. I went and got Dig, and he called you guys.”

“And where were you when Mr. Diggle called us?”

“In my room.”

“Hmm.” Quentin glanced back at the kitchen, and then back at them. “There’s not much to go off of. Whoever did this was good. Without a little struggle from Miss Smoak, correct? and her mother, there would be no evidence. Now we wait for a ransom note.”

“What if it never comes?”

“You’re a billionaire, Mr. Queen. You own the biggest company on this side of the country. You’re going to be targeted by some very bad people. It comes with the territory.”

The pointed words ached in his stomach. Oliver gulped, and turned away, just as a loud ‘bang’ shook the house. The lights flickered twice, then went out. Piper screamed and threw herself at him. He caught her this time, spinning towards Diggle to ask for help. His bodyguard already disappeared, his form moving to the closet with flashlights. How he wished that he’d repaired the generator after it broke a few years ago. “It’s okay! Everyone stay where you are. Don’t move. The lights are out, that’s all.”

“I want Felicity!” Piper dropped her head against his shoulder, shakes starting in her body. “Felicity should be here!”

“I know. But she’s not right now, so you need to stay calm, okay?” He resisted the urge to kick the puppy as it yipped around his ankles. Stupid thing. “We’re gonna get her back, you just need to be calm.”
“I’m t-trying. It’s too dark.”

Low light flooded the room as Diggle flipped on a battery-powered floodlight. “Is anyone still upstairs?”

“Harper, Willie, and I are!” Ellie yelled. Why was everyone calling him Willie? “But we can get downstairs if Daddy says it’s okay.”

“Come on down.” Oliver called, setting Piper down. His little girl sank to the ground and cuddled Fluffy in her arms. “Where’s everyone else?”

“We’re here.” Clayton held Annie’s hand as they made their way into the foyer. “Annie’s scared, Daddy.”

Oliver stood rooted in his spot, unable to come up with something to say. What was he supposed to do? Years ago he could do this, comfort a child and keep them calm. But he couldn’t anymore. He couldn’t say that it all would be okay. It would be another lie. What if the lights didn’t turn back on? What if Felicity died tonight?

Quentin grunted but squatted down and motioned for Annie to come closer. “You don’t like the dark, young lady?” His voice went from gruff to father-like. Annie’s posture loosened, and she scooted even closer to him.

Annie shook her head and then mumbled, “I want Felicity.”

“Well, I’m a police officer, and I’m gonna get your Felicity back, okay? For now, you can’t be afraid of the dark. Does Felicity ever tell you what you can do if you’re scared?”

“We tell each other our favorite things.”

“And what’s your favorite thing?”

“Right now my favorite thing is you, because you’re nice.”

Quentin chuckled. “I don’t like the dark either. You just have to brave through it. We’ll get the power back on, and we’ll get Felicity back.”

“Sir?” Piper tapped him on the shoulder. “Get Felicity back first. We can live without the lights, but we can’t live without Felicity.”

“Sounds good. I’ll do my best.”

Oliver clenched his teeth at the scene. They didn’t need to deal with this right now. The obsession with Felicity. She wouldn’t be around forever; didn’t they understand that? Someday she would leave, just like all the other nannies. And it would destroy them. Maybe then he could finally show them that that’s what happened in life.

His phone buzzed. A quick glance told him it was Barry. “Excuse me, I need to take this. I called a few old buddies who’ve dabbled in kidnapping the rich.” When he felt a door handle and slid inside the room with the piano, he slid open the call. “This is Oliver.”

“Oh, hi, man. Please don’t get all growly with me.”

Cisco. The long haired kid with the personality of a drunk Barry. If he could get drunk. “What’d you find?”
“Absolutely nothing.”

“You’ve gotta do better than that.”

“See? I told you that’s what he’d say!” Cisco yelled those words to undoubtedly Barry, and then continued with Oliver. “We searched everything. Facial recognition, and everything that you probably don’t know how to use. I can’t hack into the FBI server, but they wouldn’t have much either. Without something to go off of, there’s nothing to find. The kidnappers probably didn’t drag her out into the open so people like me could pick her face up on cameras. Or…cameras could pick up her face and then I coul—”

“Cisco!” Calm, Oliver, calm. “Can you go through money trails…maybe the kidnappers got money wired to them before they came here.” The idea of people in his house made his stomach tighten. He couldn’t take that. Not again. “Or—”

“Oliver, what are you doing in there, man?” Diggle knocked on the door. “Your family needs you.”

“They have you. I’m dealing with this right now.”

“You need to stop hiding. Get out here and deal with your crying children.”

Oliver hit the ‘off’ button on his conversation with Cisco and jerked open the door. “You know what? Right now I don’t care. Someone in my house is missing. Kidnapped. Kidnapped, Dig! Does that just a little remotely like someone else? I’m going to leave the kids to wallow in their grief right now so that I can focus on getting Felicity back.”

Surprise littered Diggle’s face as he stepped backwards. He didn’t say anything except move away down the hall. Oliver swore and jerked his phone back to his ear. This time Barry answered. “Please tell me that you have something for me to go hit.”

“Nothing.”

“How do you have nothing?”

“We don’t all have Felicity Smoak powers, Oliver. Maybe you should figure that out.”

“And what does Felicity have and not you?”

“She’s a hacker. Don’t you know that? She’s good with computers. That’s probably why they took her. And I mean she’s not a hacker. Not usually. She’s…just got lots of skills.”

Felicity was…good with computers? How did he not know that? Because you’re never around. He took a deep breath. Freaking out about Felicity’s abilities was not necessary right now. “Well, obviously we don’t have Felicity. So find her!”

He pushed open the door and ran right into Dig. Frack. And how he was adopting Felicity’s form of expressing anger. “Uh, hi.”

“Who were you talking to?”

“No one. Well, someone. Because—”

“Oliver, I’ve known you for a long time. But nothing can explain that conversation I just heard. I’ll ask you again. Who were you talking to?”

He could only tell him the truth. Part of it, anyway. “I was talking to an old buddy. He’s a member of
the CIA. But he’s got nothing.”

“Hmm. Well, maybe you should stop hiding in the closet, and come help the Starling City police find her, not some CIA. We’re going to get her back. You need to believe that. Now come on.”

Why did Diggle even have to have this conversation with him? It was stupid. *Stupid.* He didn’t need to be freaking about this. Felicity wasn’t his wife. Or girlfriend. Or anything. Truthfully, he barely knew her. So why was he panicking like this?

“Nice of you to join us again, Mr. Queen.” Quentin gave him *the* look. The one his dad used to give him when he got in trouble. Which was a lot. “We were getting worried about you.”

“Yeah, sorry. I was just, uh, making a phone call. Did you find anything else?”

The older man paused before saying, “No.”

******

They needed a way out of here. If not, they’d die. Simple as that. Felicity stared at the computers in front of her. Cooper left them all alone in here. Stupid of him. That was always his mistake in life. Too much confidence in himself. And underestimating of her. The sound of her mom crying behind her made her glance back and muster up a tear-stained smile. “Don’t worry. I’m going to get us out of here.”

“How do you plan to do that? You’re handcuffed to the chair.”

“God did not gift me with height, nor an abundance of muscle. Instead I got brains. And strong fingers.”

“I’m not really following.”

Felicity leaned in closer to the computers, trying to hone in her skills into one area. She could do this. If she could stare down Oliver Queen, and handle his kids, she could hack herself onto a database that the police could see. “I’m going to send out a signal to some people.”

“People…as in the police?”

“Trying.” The computer froze as she tried to send out a signal to the police department. She swore, and switched to the computer beside it. That one also froze.

“Felicity, what’s going on?”

“It’s locking me out. I don’t have many options anymore.” It wouldn’t allow her to pull out a map. If it was locking her out when she tried to make contact to the police, where else could she send her signal? There wasn’t enough time to attempt to override the firewalls Cooper put on the police stations. She needed to pick somewhere that would see the signal and get it to the police. A random address wouldn’t work, because most people wouldn’t know what to do with it. Some people wouldn’t even have a computer or a phone to see it.

Barry. Barry would know, and he’d be looking for her.

With a few clicks, she sent the signal to Star Labs. Her strength gave out, and she collapsed back against the chair, watching the little yellow lights pulse from wherever they were to Star Labs. *Please work.* She couldn’t go like this. Her mom couldn’t die because of something that her daughter was good at. No, it wouldn’t work that way.
Someone would find that signal, and come for her.

Before her ex-boyfriend pulled the trigger.

Oliver sat in the living room, bouncing in his seat. The kids crowded on one couch, all holding hands and shaking. He tried to ignore them, but every few seconds Annie would start crying louder, and grab Ellie’s shirt. Go hug her. He couldn’t. Nothing in him could muster up the strength to go to his children and comfort them. Why couldn’t he? He wanted to; he needed to. He just…couldn’t.

His phone buzzed in his pocket. Ignoring Diggle’s look, he pulled it out and answered. “What?”

“We’ve found Felicity. Or, she found us.”

He jerked to his feet, already moving towards the entrance. “How far away is it?”

“If I—”

“If I—”

“Going from your house, you’ll be there in fifteen minutes.”

Oliver spun in a circle to make sure no one would overhear this part. “I’ll be ready in two minutes. Take me there, but dispose of the guards. I’ll take care of Felicity and the perp.”

“It’s a plan.”

He ran up the stairs and to the bedroom, where he jerked off his t-shirt and jeans. Over the years, the suit-going-on had been perfected, and it came on in a minute. He loaded his hip holsters with flachettes and swung the quiver over his back. He pushed open the window and fired an arrow at a nearby tree. His feet hit the ground, and then were whooshed up when Barry came by. This would take two seconds, but it still made him sick.

The Flash set him down next to a warehouse, for once not smiling or cracking a joke. “Let’s do this. I’ll dispose of the guards.”

“Remember, just like I taught you. Controlled and cool-headed.”

“Are you going to be cool-headed in there?”

“Irrelevant to the conversation. Go.” He stepped out of the shadows and fired an arrow at the man with the grenade launcher. Barry whizzed through the first three guards, giving Oliver an opening into the warehouse. It didn’t take long to figure out where Felicity was.

Her scream made his blood run cold.

“Don’t touch my mother!”

The man laughed. “I warned you about what would happen if you didn’t obey me.”

“I did! I sent the trucks right where you wanted them. They’re outside now. Maybe you should go make sure the money’s in there! Get your hands off my mother!”

The man kept Donna’s hair pulled back tight, stretching her neck. His cocky smile continued to grow. “But babe. Why are my men disarmed out there? Did you…fiddle with the computers?”
Oliver slid out of the shadows, an arrow aimed at the guy’s heart. “That’s a good question. But however she did it, she got ahold of me.”

Cocky gave a disbelieving laugh. “I never should’ve doubted you, babe. You can pay for that with this.” His hand fist and he slammed it against Donna’s cheek, causing her to fall forward in unconsciousness. It was better that way. Oliver took a step forward, trying to block out Felicity’s cry.

“I’ve heard of you. The Starling City vigilante. I wondered how long it would take for you to try to foil my plans. Apparently you’re an expert at that.” Cocky spread his arms out wide. “So I brought some…insurance. They’re motion sensored and they’ve just finished scanning you, so they now will follow you until your body is riddled with bullets.”

Great. Yay. Four pillars of machine guns lined the area. Oliver whirled and fired at the first gun, exploding it, but it set off the other three bullet slingers. Why did it always have to be guns? Not knives or something. He slid underneath the second pillar and fired an arrow at the gun across from it. The two remaining guns spun towards him. He climbed up the pillar and used the brief hiding spot to fire an explosive arrow at the third gun.

One more to go.

Cocky un-cuffed Felicity, dragging her up from her chair by her hair, the gun stuffed against her neck. Oliver needed to be there now or the guy would kill his only nanny option. He fired an arrow at the ceiling and flew up, using the brief hesitation of the tracking mechanism in the gun to hurl a flachette at the last gun.

It stopped in a flurry of sparks.

He dropped to the ground and repositioned the arrow at Cocky. “Let her go.”

“I’m sorry, babe. I really did love you. But I have to do this.” Cocky cocked the gun.

Felicity reached for the gun, her elbow jerking back into Cocky’s stomach. She stepped back onto his toes, and swung the pistol into his face, slamming him backwards into the table. He tumbled to the ground.

“Mom!” She threw the gun to the ground, letting out a little squeal when it fired—it had been cocked—and rushed to her unconsciousness mother. “Mom! Can you hear me!”

“She’s okay,” he mustered out. He didn’t know she could…do that. She just pistol-whipped a guy who had a gun to her head. It took strength and guts to do. And skill. Was he even needed in this situation? His kids’ nanny took care of it herself. Her crying brought him back to the situation. Despite the prowess she showed a moment ago, she was terrified. Talk, Oliver. Get her calm. “Just knocked out.” He pressed on his com so Barry could hear him. “The ambulances are on their way.”

“Oh, right!”

Idiot. Disarms everyone and doesn’t think for one second that ambulances might be necessary.

“Th-Thank you.” She sobbed out as she cut the zip-ties off Donna’s wrists. “You saved our lives.”

“You did just fine on your own. What did he want with you?”

“He’s my ex-boyfriend. Obviously dirt bag.”

Ex-boyfriend? Dirt bag is right. He cleared his throat.
“A-and to answer your question, he wanted me to send money here. I guess he remembered my skills in college, and he knew I could do something for him that he couldn’t do.”

“I’m needed to get out of here. Too much risk of her realizing who he was. Or him moving closer to her to make sure she didn’t sustain injuries from her jerky ex-boyfriend.

Why was he caring anyways?

He shot an arrow up to the rafters, clicking a function on his bow that would pull him up. He landed out of sight and scanned the area for ways out. A door on the second floor would work. The com clicked on with a beep. “Go get my clothes from the house.”

“Am I suddenly your servant boy?”

“Who happens to very fast. Now go. Leave them in the shack to the left.”

“There’s not a—oh, there is. How did you notice that?”

In truth, he had eyes on it right now. But Barry didn’t need to know that. “I saw it on the way in. Maybe you should pay more attention every now and then.”

“You’re impossible. I’ll go get your clothes.”

He stood and walked to the door, opened it, and stepped out into the cold, night air. From a mile or so away, police and ambulance sirens roared. Time to go. He swung down to the ground and jogged over to the little building. Barry stood there, holding his clothes. And a towel.

“Thought you might like to wash off the grease paint before you walk out.”

With the mask pulled down, Oliver chuckled as he reached for the rag. “You have some hope.”

“Nice of you to be encouraging once and a while. Now hurry up so I can take you somewhere so you can drive here and make it look less obvious that you just saved Felicity’s life.”

Oliver wiggled out of his suit, replacing the leather with his jeans and t-shirt. Nice of Barry to bring a jacket. He scrubbed the paint off his face, dropping the rag with his green suit when Barry gave him the thumbs up. The sirens whirled closer. He shoved his gear under an old cabinet and stepped out into the frigid air. “Alright, Barry. Make it quick.”

In a few seconds, Barry nearly slammed them both into a Queen Consolidated parking garage wall. “Sorry! Okay, you take the car and go. Don’t get picked up.”

“Very funny.” He slid in and fired up the engine, pausing for a moment to consider what he was doing. Going back to the scene to…what…check on Felicity? No. Yes. She would be fine on her own, but she looked terrified. Maybe she needed someone to…hug.

He should turn around. Wait for the kids to get there. They would calm her down.

But he was the closest. If he were any ordinary person, wouldn’t he want someone familiar to at least be there? He owed it to her. She endured a few minutes of his nightmares because she cared enough. He cared for her enough to go and make sure she was alright.

He pulled up at the scene and stepped out of the car. Four police cars lined the area, along with two
ambulances. Barry went all out. And of course managed to call Captain Lance. The man spotted him and harrumphed. Oliver walked towards him, cringing inside as Quentin all but growled at him.

“Ditch your family for a drink?”

“I’m not a drunk.”

“Then what are you, Mr. Queen? A man who can’t handle his pain well enough to even reach a little bit of love towards his children?”

“Considering you haven’t seen me in five years, back off,” Oliver growled. He would’ve said more, but someone yelled his name.

Felicity.

He spun around as she ran into him. His arms hesitated, unmoving for a moment, unsure of what to do, but as she crumbled against him, he wrapped his arms around her back, pulling her in close. She broke down, her sobs shaking her small frame. Her arms came around his neck as she cried. His body went into robot mode at her touch, but the words still eased out of his mouth like he’d done this a million times, when in truth he hadn’t. Not for a very, very long time. “Hey, shhhhh. It’s okay. It’s okay.”

She didn’t say a word, just stayed in his arms, her crying slowly subsiding. He looked around. Everyone was watching. Even the ambulance crew had their eyes towards them as they packed their gear up. He warded off the inner panic and let Felicity calm down before he released his arms.

“I-I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to do that.” She rubbed her eyes, succeeding in dragging the smeared mascara over her face even more. A couple feet separated them now. “But my mom is knocked out and the only other people to hug are these old people who don’t understand what I just went through. I mean, I’m sure some of them do. It’s not like you’ve ever been kidnapped but I just…” she took a deep breath, her face collapsing into an exhausted mess. “I know you. I don’t like hugging people I don’t know.”

“It’s okay, Felicity. I understand.” He kept his hands to himself this time, but moved closer to her. “Are you okay? He didn’t hurt you, did he?”

“I’m okay. A little rattled, but okay.” She rubbed her arms, her gaze shifting to the others around them. “How did you know it was a guy?”

“I didn’t know. I assumed it was.”

“Well, you assumed correctly.” Quentin marched up to them, his impossible-to-erase frown still plastered on. “Miss Smoak, I need to discuss some details with you. We have the guys who did this, but it’d be best to know everything that happened.”

Oliver pulled his jacket off and handed it to Felicity. “I’m going to check on your mom and emergency stuff. Put that on and talk to Mr. Lance, okay?”

Felicity pulled the leather jacket on without a complaint. It was way too big for her, but it’d keep her warm. “Thanks.”

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“He was my ex-boyfriend. Please don’t make me explain that sentence.” Felicity tugged Oliver’s jacket tighter around her. She didn’t know what came about her when she ran into his arms. He just
looked like…a good person to cry on. He knew terror and pain; she could see it on his face every
day, and maybe for a moment, he would forget his habit of pushing people away and comfort her.

And he did. More than that, actually, given the fact that she now wore his jacket.

“Ex-boyfriend.” The man with ‘Lance’ on his nametag let out a disbelieving laugh. “That sounds
rough. No wonder you pistol-whipped him instead of having the vigilante put an arrow in ‘im.
Curious that he showed up for you. He hasn’t done much saving for a while.”

“I’ve only been here for a while, so I haven’t had time to properly meet this green leathered guy. But
he was nice. Called the ambulances and stuff for me. Or maybe that was his buddy. I don’t know.”

“Did you see the other guy?”

“His partner? The one that is apparently fast? No. He must’ve taken care of the guards. He did a fine
job of it, too, given the fact that they’re all…unconscious. They’re not dead, are they?”

“No. The other kid doesn’t seem to kill people. It’s just the green one.”

“Well, he saved my life. So he probably isn’t all bad.”

“Hmmm.”

She finished the rest of the story just as a van pulled into the lot. Only one person drove that thing.
“Excuse me, but I have to go. Just over there. Don’t worry, I’m not running away.”

“Felicity!” Annie screamed as the little girl ran at her, arms outstretched, tears streaming down her
cheeks. “You’re alive! You’ve alive!” She jumped into Felicity’s arms, her own arms circling around
her neck and squeezing so hard Felicity almost choked. “I love you so much, Felicity. Don’t ever
weave agai’!” Her words got messed up through her sobbing.

The other kids crowded around her, all trying to hug her at once, some of them crying—William was
refusing to shed tears—but all of them expressing how much they missed her. Felicity tried not to
cry, but her emotions got the best of her. In those few hours of terror, she didn’t know if she’d see
them again.

That terror translated into the tightest hugging she’d ever given.

Including that one that she gave Oliver.

She glanced back at him. He said he wanted to check on the ambulance stuff. Now he walked
towards them, looking cold. The jacket wouldn’t be going back though. It was nice and warm.
“How’s my mom?”

“That’s why I was coming to get you. They’re going to leave now. She’s stable, but they want to
check her out.”

“Okay. I’d better go with. I’ll see you all in the morning. Try not to worry about me. I’m fine. Just a
little bedraggled.” Her favorite orange dress was ruined. She’d ripped the hem twice in her struggle
earlier, and a few blood stains landed on it during the evening. Her hair had fallen from its ponytail a
long time ago, and whenever she moved, it swished around her face.

Ellie grabbed her arm and smiled. “We love you.”

“Fluffy loves you too!” Piper held up her puppy. Felicity leaned down and gave her a kiss.
“Now she can sleep good. I-I love you too.” She waved and stepped backwards to the ambulance. Oliver caught up with her.

“I’ll ride with you.”

“You don’t have to. You told me that you don’t like hospitals and—”

“And you can honestly say that you want to be there alone?”

“If we’re being honest, then no.”

“I can handle myself. C’mon, they’re gonna leave without us.” He hopped onto the hatch first and held out his hand for her. She grasped it, trying to ignore the tingling. “Thank you.”

“Is he family?” One of the doctors pointed at Oliver.

How was she supposed to answer that?

Oliver put his hand on Felicity’s shoulder and gave the doctor a smile. “She takes care of my family.”

“Fine. Close the doors. We’re ready to go.”

They rode in silence the whole way. Felicity fiddled with the frayed ends of Oliver’s jacket, and tried not to shed tears when she looked at the ruins of her dress. She loved this thing. Why did the kidnapping have to be today? Not that she wouldn’t be wearing it tomorrow. Oliver stayed still, minus the couple times he glanced around the ambulance. Thinking about how Annie’s ride to the hospital must have been? She’d been pronounced dead on the scene, but they brought her here anyways in order to keep Oliver calm.

The doctors unloaded Donna and pushed her into a room, one of them stopping to say that they needed to run some tests, so sit tight. Felicity sank to a chair, while Oliver disappeared down a hall. A minute later he reappeared with coffee. “I’m assuming you’d like some. I, uh, didn’t know if you were a cream and sugar person, so it’s just black.”

“I’d take ten shots of expresso right now. Thank you.” She eyed him as he dropped to the chair next to her. Nice of him to bring her coffee. Nice of him to be here at all. He didn’t like it here. His head swiveled, looking at the different doors leading to trauma rooms. Each person who walked through the doors got a thorough examination by him. Poor guy needed a distraction. Something to talk about. What better than to discuss her embarrassing life? “I’m assuming you overheard what I told the Lance cop, so are you going to ask about my ex-boyfriend?”

“Me? No. Well,” he shrugged one shoulder and gave her a goofy smile. “It’s an interesting story. I’ve heard some crazy stories, but exes kidnapping the other is one I have not heard.”

They had nothing else to do, so why not? “We dated in college, and we did a little bit of a stupid thing that led him to getting arrested. By the FBI. Not just cops. That was fun. Not too long afterwards, I got a call and they said he killed himself. Up until two hours ago or whenever it was, I thought he was dead.”

“I can’t say I know the feeling.”

“Not many people do.”

Oliver laughed. He rocked forward and then back, a smile on his face. It stayed as his eyes shifted
towards her. “Some of us have a little guess as to how it would go. I never had any girlfriends. Besides Annie. My parents always told me that I should’ve dated before I married her. But now I’m happy that I didn’t. Wouldn’t want any psycho ex-lovers to come back and kidnap me. Though it wouldn’t be for my computer skills.”

“Lovers. Sounds creepy no matter how you say it.”

He smiled.

“Miss Smoak?” A nurse stepped out of the room. “Your mother is awake and would like to see you.”

“Oh!” She jerked up, and let out a little shriek when her ankle gave way. Oliver grabbed her as she buckled.

“You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just…my leg got a little cramped. I’m fine. Thanks for the assist.” Probably should’ve taken the heels off. She got to the room without failure and knocked on the wall. “Hey, Mom.”

Donna shifted and smiled. “Hi, sweetie.”

“How’re you feeling?”

“A little dizzy. What happened? Did the vigilante save us?”

“Kind of. He distracted Cooper long enough for me to whack him hard in the face. So we’re all good.” She took a seat on the bed and grabbed her mom’s hand. “I meant what I said when we were kidnapped. I’m sorry. For everything I’ve said.”

“I’m sorry too. I should have been there for you, honey. I wish we were closer, because you’re my only daughter. I miss you, Felicity. Miss our little talks when you were little, and your obsession with telling me about the boys you liked. I swear you had a new crush every single day. Now I don’t even know you. Besides that you and Oliver—”

“Don’t even say it, Mom.”

“Okay, I won’t. But baby, you really need to get a boyfriend.”

Felicity laughed through her teary eyes. And slight embarrassment. Hopefully Oliver wasn’t listening. “Don’t ruin the moment. Please.”

“Okay. Sorry. But I want to get to know you. For real. Let’s not stray too far away, okay?”

Felicity squeezed Donna’s hand. “Okay.”

******

“So what else are you hiding from me?”

“It’s not my secret to tell.”

“That the nanny of my children has these…abilities?”

“Don’t make it sound like she has powers like me.”
“Barry!” Oliver slammed his bow on the table and whirled towards his friend. Partner. Not very good friend. “Felicity was kidnapped by her psycho ex-boyfriend because she could hack into some trucks that had money in them. He didn’t just take her because he was obsessed with her. Felicity has skills.”

“Yes, she does. And she’s skilled. I’ve seen a lot of it. But why are we discussing this? You haven’t really showed any interest in her.” Barry winked.

“I’m not interested in her. I’m interested in her skills.”

“I’m still curious as to why we’re having this discussion.”

“We can use her.”

“She’s not interested in being a vigilante. Just because she pistol-whipped her ex-boyfriend does not mean that she wants to wear a skin-tight leather suit.”

“No, not like that. We can use her to help us. Help me. Part of the reason we’ve had to wait so long to do anything is because we don’t have any help getting evidence. Or where people are. Or anything. No offense, but Cisco is not that good. We need someone who can really help.”

“And how do you plan to do that? Reveal yourself?”

“No. I’ll go to her as the Arrow. And ask her for help.”

Chapter End Notes

Be ready for the next couple chapters...I think y'all will love them!
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Felicity accidentally brings up a touchy topic that turns into a little bit more than a disaster.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“And then.”

Felicity shared a look with Oliver and smiled as Harper continued on with her rant about a boy at the grocery store. Never again would that girl be going on any excursions because it always led to a discussion at the breakfast table that usually ended with William spurting something awful and children picking sides.

Oliver lowered his fork and aimed a look of exasperation at his daughter. “Do we really have to hear about this?”

“Yes! You should sue his father, because he raised a stupid son. Better yet, I’ll use my trust fund to sue him. I can do that, right?”

“And why, exactly, do you want to make your trust fund disappear?”

“Because he called me cute! Hot! He told me that he liked my butt. And as I was saying, then he winked at me and said that I should call him, because we would be cute in a Christmas photo together.”

William waved his food around on his fork, a smirk on his face. “Shouldn’t you take that as a compliment?”

Ooh, here it goes. At least this time Oliver would be here to see it happen and take note of the way his children had begun to act without guidance.

“Boys are stupid and petty. I don’t want to date one for a very, very long time.”

“Maybe if you stop wearing tight skirts the boys will stop flirting.”

Harper’s mouth opened and then closed. She grasped her cup and hurled the contents of it at him. The orange juice splattered on William’s shirt and on the wall behind him. He howled and grabbed his plate, but Oliver reached across the table and grabbed William’s wrist. “Hey! That’s enough! There is no need for you to throw food or to get angry like that. Ever.”

“While you get angry yourself.” William jerked himself away from Oliver. He stood up from the table and moved towards the exit. “She does wear too tight of clothing. Maybe after one of your extraordinary journeys, you should check up on your kids. Before one of them gets married to some jerk like the one Harper was talking about!”

When he left the room, Felicity glanced around and winced. It was quiet enough in here that she
could almost hear the orange juice dripping down the walls. Should she say something? Make a weird joke about tight skirts? This should be familiar territory now, awkward moments after children flipping out at their dad.

No wonder Oliver never ate with them. Disaster ensued each time.

“Sorry, Daddy.” Harper broke the silence. “But Willie’s a jerk.”

“Why is everyone calling him Willie?”

*Don’t say that I started it. Please.*

“Aunt Thea used to call him that.”

Oliver jerked back, his face going ashen. “That’s been...a while.”

“I know. But Felicity likes the nickname.”

Felicity winced, especially when Oliver whirled towards her, eyes squinting.

“I told you not to call him that.”

“A-And...I thought it was cute.” What else could she say?

“Fel-ic-ity.”

“It’s a cute nickname, Oliver. Nothing wrong with calling him that. Is there?”

“N-No. There’s not.”

“Daddy, we all miss Aunt Thea. We should have her over so she can meet Felicity.”

If someone said anything else about the one-who-shall-not-be-named, Oliver might faint. He grasped the edge of the table so hard that his knuckles went white. Felicity had never doubted Thea’s story, but his reaction deepened it further. This was a soft spot. Sore spot. Did Oliver expect to keep what happened between him and Thea a secret from his kids?

*Right next to all his other secrets.*

Oliver cleared his throat and pulled back from the table. “She’s been busy.”

“Too busy to see us?”

“No, uh, yes. She doesn’t really want to see us.”

Ellie jerked back, her face paling. “What?”

Oh, Oliver. She wanted to cluck her tongue. Or blurt out the truth. Had they never had this conversation? Apparently not. Maybe he’d been able to avoid it for that long. Without her there, he could control the conversations more. It almost made her feel guilty, bringing so much upheaval into Oliver Queen’s world. A quick glance at him wiped that guilt away. No, this was good. Her being here was changing their lives, including his. One small step at a time. It would hurt, because it was change. The look on Oliver’s face let her into his thoughts. It hurt to think of Thea.

Ellie glanced at Felicity, her brows narrowing. Oh, no. Not another one.
“I’m going to the office today. Be good for Felicity.” Oliver sent a final glare her way before he left the room. She groaned. Why was she always left for the mop-up part? She glanced at Diggle who stood in the doorway. He shook his head. To what? Not spurring out the truth? Not going and giving Oliver a lecture?

Probably the latter.

But she was going to avoid that for at least two weeks. No yelling, no grumbling at him. She could do that.

Hopefully he left on another excursion for a month.

She helped Raisa clear the breakfast table and clean up the orange juice—William was nowhere to be found to do it himself. When Raisa shooed her off, she went up to the ‘schoolroom’. Ellie sat at the window with her computer, crying.

“Hey, Ellie.” Felicity grabbed a box of tissues and walked towards her. “Wanna talk about it? We’ll be talking about it either way, but if you say yes, it might make things better.”

“You know what happened with Daddy and his sister, don’t you?”

“Ellie—”

“I saw his face this morning. Aunt Thea hasn’t been mentioned for years. I don’t know why. I should’ve guessed that something happened and she didn’t just leave. I’m sure you know, so go ahead and tell me. I can handle it. A lot better than William can.”

“How’d you know that William knows?”

“Because his anger towards our dad has increased significantly over the past months.”

Couldn’t Oliver deal with this? Happy thoughts, Felicity. “I don’t really know how to explain.”

“Just tell me the truth. I’ve handled everything else that’s happened in my life so far. I can handle this.”

Not all of it. Oliver hid the baby secret for a reason. Who wouldn’t wonder if that would be the last straw for his children? They’d already lost so much, and then to find out they lost a sibling? It could cripple them forever. She took a deep breath. “There’s a few layers to the story.”

“It’s okay, Felicity.”

“According to Thea, when your dad got back from his disappearance, she took him to the woodshed, and basically told him to straighten up and take care of you kids. He kicked her out, and told her never to come back again. Apparently she tried, but he wouldn’t allow her in the house.”

Ellie stifled a sob and turned away. Her hand went over her mouth as she cried. Felicity reached out but stopped herself. Ellie needed to mourn or to get angry. That was all a part of the process. A part that Felicity forgot to do. It still remained one of the reasons she could never face her father.

“Have you talked to her?”

“I found out pretty early that she sneaks over and talks to Dig and Raisa when Oliver’s gone. She’s been watching over you, just from a distance.”

“And Daddy doesn’t know about it?”
“No.”

“She always did have a way of getting her way. It makes me feel better that she’s been here.” Ellie swiped at her tears. “I’m not angry. Well, yes, I am. But I know how Daddy works. I know him better than anyone but Mama. He can’t take anything. I truly am surprised he’s handled you for so long, because you’re the first one who’s challenged him. I can tell Dig is catching onto that to, because when you got kidnapped, Daddy disappeared for quite some time, and I think Dig got mad enough that he would’ve dragged him to the woodshed if he could’ve.”

Had Oliver disappeared because he was worried about her?

“I just can’t believe that he just…” She dropped her head back against the wall. “I can’t even process this right now. I’m guessing that you want this to stay quiet.”

“For now. Your dad still needs work.”

“Daddy needs a lot of work. I don’t think you know how much. We all do.” She let out a broken laugh. “There’s something broken inside of me. In him. In all of us. Dig and Raisa…Uncle Tommy, they’ve all tried to help us. But all they do is pull a sheet over the deadness we all have. No one can fix what’s wrong with us.”

“I can’t accept that.”

“Felicity, it’s basically impossible.”

“No, it’s not. Ellie, I’ve gone through some stuff myself. Nothing like you, but I know what pain feels like. And if I had accepted my pain, I’d probably be a cocktail waitress in Vegas like my mother, going to bed each night with that empty, heartbreaking feeling in my chest. I never would’ve moved a thousand miles away to work in Starling City, I never would’ve gotten fired for trying to uncover truth, and,” she reached across her lap to take Ellie’s hand. A smile curved her lips. “I never would’ve met you. You can’t just accept things. You have to rise up. Conquer. No one goes through life without pain.”

“And a rainbow only comes after a lot of rain.” Ellie nodded, smiling though tears fell down her cheeks. “And somehow all those scattered branches and downed leaves don’t seem so scary anymore when you look up and see those colorful streaks in the sky.” She squeezed Felicity’s hand, a dawning of a new day happening somewhere in her heart. “And after you’ve repaired the damage, looking at that new beautiful house seems that much more rewarding.”

“And even though you can still see the remnants of the disaster, the house stands majestic over it all.”

“Yeah,” Ellie whispered. Then a quiet laugh escaped. A breath of fresh air, almost. “Did you come here with the intention of just babysitting us?”

“No. Well, I took the job because I was going to be broke in a few days. Then I realized, in only a short time with you, that I could help. Maybe help save a few people.”

“You accomplished that.”

“I did?”

“You saved me.”

******
That night, Felicity replaced her clothes with her bathrobe. Time for a really, really long bath. Today exhausted her heart, along with her body. That had been tired for a while. Two nights ago she suffered a kidnapping and she still carried the bruises. Lotions and creams truly were a scam. If only they worked on emotions too. The nightmares had begun, causing her not to sleep well since before the deal with Cooper. Who now sat in a jail cell. Someday he’d be prosecuted. But Felicity couldn’t think about that now. Only about saving herself from the same destructive path that Oliver began five years ago.

She squirted toothpaste on her toothbrush and began brushing. The lights went out.

*Frack.* What was with this house? They were constantly losing electricity. And of course her room didn’t have a flashlight. She checked last night, made a mental note to get one in here, and forgot. “Hey, Dig, if you happen to be around—ooh!”

Someone stood on the veranda. Someone big and…leather clad? “Oh, God.” She dropped her toothbrush and reached for the plastic sword that Clayton left in her room from this afternoon, brandishing it out in front of her stomach.

“I’m not here to hurt you.” The man with the vibrating voice held out his arm in a ‘I come in peace’ stance. “You’re safe with me.”

“You showed up at my kidnapping.” She glanced down at the sword. This thing couldn’t kill a cat. Let alone a normal sized human being. And definitely not a human that big. Gee, did he work out twenty-four seven? Even in the light just from the moon, she could see the outlines of his chest and shoulders. Wow. Would he be mad if she took a picture and framed it?

“I want to ask for your help.”

“First, I’m not interested in dating you, and second, I don’t like wearing leather.”

“I’m in need of someone with skills like yours.”

“My plastic sword skills?”

“Your computer skills. I looked you up. Hacking comes easy to you.”

Oh, that. Where was her brain right now? “It does, actually. It’s why I got fired from my previous job. I was trying to uncover some truth. But I’m sure you already knew that. Anyways, if I theoretically took the job, what would I be doing?”

“Investigating.”

“Investigating what?”

“A corporation that has caused much harm. I have been trying to take it down for years, but without someone like you, I haven’t had any success.”

“And why should I trust that you’re not going to lead me somewhere and shoot me with one of your arrows?”

“You can trust me.”

“And I’m supposed to trust your ‘you can trust me’ speech?”

“Yes.” He assumed the stance of a guy who definitely thought he’d convinced her. “I’ll be back.
You can tell me your answer then.”

He disappeared over the railing. Felicity rushed to it and looked down, but he was gone. How could someone disappear that fast? The lights flickered back on. She picked up her toothbrush and made her way to the bathroom again. Her brain couldn’t process what just went on. The vigilante stood in her bedroom fifteen seconds earlier.

The vigilante.

Who wasn’t this big bad wolf. Big, yes, but he didn’t hurt her. He almost seemed nice. He could lose the vibrating voice modulator. Too Darth Vader-ish. But he didn’t seem like a killer. Maybe she could work with that.

******

“You what?”

“We talked about it, so don’t freak out like that.”

“I thought you were kidding! For the sake of all that is good and holy, why would you ask Felicity for help? Oliver, that’s stupid!”

Oliver rolled his eyes. “Barry, I don’t know what your problem is.”

“This puts her in danger, if you haven’t noticed.”

“We can protect her.”

“Like how you protected Annie?”

Oliver stiffened.

“Sorry. Sorry! I shouldn’t have said that.”

“I agree.”

“Listen. You can’t just…ask her to do this. And not just for safety reasons. I know Felicity. She’s innocent, but she’s not naïve. Many a man has tried to take advantage of that blonde hair she has, and they’ve been shut down.”

“She’s dyes it, actually.” When Barry whirled around, a quizzical look on his face, Oliver winced. Probably not a good thing to disclose.

“How do you know that?”

“She, uh, told me.”

“And when did tell you that?”

“Does it matter?” And why did he feel like he was back in fifth grade, being interrogated by his mother about a crush?

“Yes, it does, because she’s my best friend. And I have a right to know things.”

“Says the person who still hasn’t told his ‘best friend’ about his abilities.”
You’re impossible. Call me when she says no and you have to go look for someone else. Maybe next time find someone trained in self-defense.” Barry whizzed away, scattering papers everywhere. Oliver swore and spent a minute picking everything up. The Speedster had a point. One he’d already considered and made sure it wouldn’t be a problem.

Codenames did come in handy every now and then.

He glanced at his watch. One in the morning. No one would bite on anything he had running on the computers, meaning he could go home and sleep.

He locked up the lair and slid onto his motorcycle. Felicity’s reaction to him stayed in his head as he rode home. She grabbed a freaking plastic sword and waved it in front of her. It took a lot to not laugh and give away his cover. A couple interesting tidbits were said too. Apparently she got fired from her earlier job because she’d been hacking. Someone bypassed that when going through her background check.

That they didn’t exactly run. Barry told him he had someone fit for the nanny job, Oliver told Raisa that this girl would be calling, and that was it. It didn’t bother him now; Felicity proved herself worthy of the check he gave her every Friday. Which should be doubled. Tripled, if he were being honest. She’d done more for his family in the past few months than anyone had done in five years.

Oliver deposited the bike in the garage and entered the house from the kitchen. He headed to the side stairs that brought him directly to his bedroom, but stopped in the hallway when a light from the living room shined. And a fire crackled. Raisa, most likely, but after the scare a few days ago, it’d be best he checked.

His oldest daughter curled up on the couch, a cup of something steamy on the table and a book on her lap. She had on a pair of Annie’s glasses. His wife only wore them for reading, when she would take a seat on the couch, just as Ellie did now, and read for hours.

He hadn’t seen those glasses for years.

“Ellie? What are you doing up?”

“Oh, hi.” She straightened out on the couch and smiled at him, a yawn rippling through her. She laughed at that. “I couldn’t sleep so I decided to build a fire and read.”

“Since when do you know how to build a fire?” He taught her years ago, but she’d been seven. At the most.

“I’m seventeen now, so that means I know how to use my head. Annnnd the internet.”

He chuckled and made his way to sit next to her. The heat felt good on his gloved fingers. October nights had a way of doing that. “That wasn’t around when I was growing up. I had to make the fire all by myself.”

“Did you do that a lot?”

“Not enough. We used to roast marshmallows.”

“Did Aunt Thea like them?”

“One time I started the fire and went to get something, and when I came back, she had the entire bag gone.”
“That’s impossible.”

He smiled at the memory. It hadn’t been a good one back then, but it seemed funnier now. “She stuffed at least half of them in her mouth and the other half she threw in the fire. Apparently she learned about explosives that day in school and thought that the marshmallows would explode. Turns out, it was only me who did. And I got into big trouble.”

Ellie giggled. “It serves you right. Who wouldn’t want to see if marshmallows would explode?”

“I was more interested in setting off firecrackers with Tommy.”

“You never did get around to telling us why we call him ‘Uncle Tommy’.”

“When he came to visit us in the hospital after you were born, and I gave him you to hold, his first words were, ‘Hello, little baby. I’m your Uncle Tommy’. Your mom surprisingly liked it, because there weren’t any uncles in the family.”

“Just an aunt. And technically now an uncle. Did you know that Aunt Thea married Roy?”

He took a deep breath and focused on the fire. They were too close to a conversation he never wanted to have. “No.”

“Well, they did. I found some pictures online. Would you like to see them?”

Oliver looked over at Ellie and smiled. “Maybe later, pumpkin.”

She froze. And then tears welled in her eyes. Her hand went to swipe them away, but it was too late. Oliver realized what he’d said. Pumpkin. It was what he called Ellie for the first twelve years of her life. He hadn’t even muttered that term since. And now he did. What was wrong with him? Talking about his sister. Getting close to his daughter. Calling her pumpkin.

He needed to get out of here.

“Don’t…” Ellie reached out but stopped herself as he stood. “Go.”

He reached the exit when she whispered, “Daddy?”

“Yeah?” He turned, expecting an insult thrown at him.

Ellie stood, drawing herself up to her full height. She looked like a grown woman. Like someone who knew more about the world than was necessary. She looked like Annie. When her mouth opened, a wave of love washed over him. He felt it. “Just so you know, when you’re ready to come back, I’ll be waiting. I love you.”

Oliver spun around and took off to the stairs. No use hiding the panic and fear now. As long as Ellie didn’t see the tears. She couldn’t. If she did, she’d have come after him and tried to barge into the room and comfort him. That couldn’t happen. Somehow, tonight had caught him in a moment of weakness.

What terrified him was that it felt good.

He sank to the bed, his hand falling to the right side of the bed. If he were being honest, nothing was right even before Annie’s death. Some of it had been—he still remembered the shock and the drop of his stomach when she told him that they would have another little one soon. Jerry came running because Oliver had let go of his computer and missed the chair when he sat down. That had been a
sight, the almighty Oliver Queen on the ground with Annie on top of him, both crying. His EA would never forget that.

Neither would he forget how the moment when he had to come tell his boss that Annie was being transported to the hospital.

In that moment, Oliver knew. It had come. Just like they said it would. Just like he shrugged it off, saying that threats came all the time. Those people killed Annie and their baby for something that he refused to do. It made sense. He knew that. But they punished his family for what he did.

It was one of the reasons why he would never forgive himself.

******

A hand reached down towards her in the darkness, blood dripping down onto her. It was Cooper! His smile widened as his hands closed around her neck. Felicity gargled, swinging her arm, trying to knock him away. A cry lodged in her throat when she saw her father standing behind him, coaxing him on. Telling him to squeeze harder.

Felicity screamed and jerked up, grabbing her throat. Cooper wasn’t here. Her father wasn’t here. Everything was okay. That knowledge didn’t stop her from rushing into the bathroom and throwing up into the toilet. She collapsed against the shower door, gasping for air. The dream that had once just consisted of her father staring down at her, unmoving, unsmiling, but it had morphed into one with her ex-boyfriend and blood.

Third day in a row that it happened.

She forced herself to get up and look at the clock. Four forty-five. So much for her wish to sleep in for the first time in three days. Maybe Barry would be up. The vigilante would show up again, and she needed an answer by then.

She grabbed a blanket and her phone and went out onto the deck. Curled up in the lawn chair with the lamp on, she hit Barry’s number.

“What are you doing up at four?”

“I’d ask you the same question, but you’re probably at a crime scene right now, but I just had an awful nightmare and I need to talk. All nightmares are awful, but this one was especially bad. Not as bad as Oliver’s but—oh.” That sounded bad.

“Are you two getting chummy or something?”

“No!” She took a deep breath. Wow, that was needed. “One time I was upstairs when he had a nightmare and I calmed him down after that. Platonically. Very platonically. Can we stop talking about this?”

“Sure, Felicity, sure. What else do you want to talk about?”

Barry did not need to know about the vigilante’s visit; however, she needed his input on what to do. “Uh, so have you ever had a time in your life when you’re faced with a decision that there is truly no clear answer?”

“Like whether you should date Oliver Queen?”

“Be quiet. I’m being serious here. What if someone asked you to do something that—”
“If this is something about you being asked to hack for someone, remember what happened the last time. Don’t say yes.”

“I didn’t say it was hacking.”

“It’s either that or Oliver asked you to marry him.”

Just for that, she would say yes. If the vigilante showed up now, she would scream from the rooftops yes. Little annoying brat. Lately he had been. No longer trying to help her, and almost seeming a little spiteful. Fine. “I’ve made up my mind.”

“Felicity—”

“You’re not the boss of me, Barry. I make my own decisions. And I’ve made up my mind. Don’t try to change it.”

He sighed. “I’m not going to. Just…just think about it. Don’t make any irrational decisions.”

“I’m not. I promise.”

She made small talk with him for a few more minutes, and then hung up. What she told Barry was the truth; there was no right or wrong here. But there was regret. What if she could help save someone? A family? A city? For the past two months she used her talents, yes, but she hadn’t used all of them. The skill that her fingers moved when at a computer hadn’t been given to her to just…dig around in Oliver Queen’s personal life. With her help, this vigilante could take down someone who’d caused too damage in the world.

Now she just had to wait until tonight to tell him that.

The day passed uneventfully. Harper and William made up, Oliver snuck out the back door for the office after not showing up for breakfast, Annie and Piper both cried during school, and Donna called, asking how everything was going, with a little hint towards the love-dovey part Felicity did not want to talk about.

At ten, she slipped into her room and collapsed onto the bed. She spent a minute by herself before she dialed Thea’s number. A lot needed to be discussed.

“Yoo hoo! This is Thea!”

Felicity laughed. “Your high voice isn’t at all attractive. Where’s Thea?” She clicked ‘speakerphone’ and stood up, making her way to the bathroom. She could talk while taking her make-up off and such.

“Right here. Go away, Roy. You have chores to do. Hi Felicity. How are you doing?”

“A few more nightmares. I think you might want to know what happened yesterday.”

“Roy’s next to me, refusing to fold the laundry he promised he’d do, so go ahead.”

Felicity told her about breakfast, and what Oliver said, and then her conversation with Ellie. “I’m sorry.”

“Oh, Ollie.” Thea sniffed. “I didn’t realize how far he’s gone. Well, I did know, but it’s just a hard reminder. It, uh, makes me happy to know that Ellie knows now, and she doesn’t seem to be that
“I think she and Oliver talked last night.”

Roy whistled. “Oooh, boy.”

“Why do you think so?”

“Because I heard her go downstairs at about ten or so. Then at one thirty, she came up, and I could hear crying. I almost went in there, but I decided that it’d be best if she were alone. Today Oliver didn’t come down to breakfast, and hasn’t been seen all day. Granted, it could be some weird coincidence, because Oliver has a tendency of disappearing like that, but I’m choosing to believe that something was said.”

“It might not be good. Or it could be good. Ellie was always like her mother. Very forgiving. Maybe she said something along those lines, and Ollie got scared.”

“Hold on a sec.” She turned on the water to wet her cloth and then said, “Her and William might want to see you at some point.”

“I know. And I want to see them. I want to see all of them. But I can’t. You know why. If Ollie knew about any of this…he’d drag me off to a dungeon of some sort. But let’s talk about a funnier topic. Have you heard from your mom at all?”

“Yes. She and I have talked a few times since she left. I think we both have realized that we need to try to repair our relationship. A lot got ruined.”

The lights went out. Felicity picked up her phone and ventured towards the door, knowing what’d she find. “Hey, Thea, I’m gonna have to call you back. The electricity went out.”

“We can talk tomorrow. It’s time Roy and I went to bed.”

“Allright. Talk to you later.” She put her phone on the dresser and ventured towards the hooded man at the doors. “Sorry I kept you waiting. I just wanted to finish up my conversation that you probably shouldn’t have heard. Please don’t use them as leverage. Obviously there’s better leverage to use—I will stop talking right now.”

He cleared his throat. “Do you have an answer?”

“Yes.”

The vigilante turned slightly to glance at her. “Yes to what?”

“Yes, I will help you.”

His shoulders relaxed. “Thank you.”

“Do I start now?”

“No. I will contact you.”

“You can’t just keep turning off the lights and coming into my bedroom. That’s weird.”

“I will send you information.”

“On my computer? You do know I will be able to figure out where you emailed that from, right?”
“I know my way around a computer.”

He disappeared. The lights went back on. Felicity let out a disbelieving laugh.

She was now partners with one of the most hated men in Starling City.

The vigilante.

********

Oliver tossed his gear under the bed, not bothering to fold it up. The bow went on the dresser, along with his quiver. He flipped the mask off and dumped that on the ground. No need to take the grease paint off. No one was coming in here anyways. He should have gone to the lair. There he could fire as many arrows he wanted into targets and say whatever he wanted.

Felicity Smoak was talking to Thea Queen. His sister. And Ellie knew about what he did. William knew about it. Somehow his son knew.

All because of Felicity.

He swore and kicked at the dresser. He should’ve guessed. Of course Felicity would figure out how to get in touch with Thea. Or his sister did it herself. The little conspiring brat got it from their mother. Now what was he supposed to do? He couldn’t stop it because only the vigilante heard those words. Not Oliver.

He stormed into the bathroom and slammed the door. Something cracked, but it didn’t matter now. He slid down the wall to the ground, dropping his head between his knees. Ellie knew. She found out yesterday, according to what he heard. And last night she said ‘I love you’. What kind of person would do that? She forgave him enough to say that.

Oliver tried to push away the pain rising in his heart. Not pain. It didn’t hurt like this. It was something else this time. Maybe the feeling of knowing someone forgave him for one of the many things he did. It didn’t change the fact that he would rather go through days of torture than to see his sister again.

He was an idiot. Thinking he could let Felicity Smoak take care of his children and not bring absolute destruction to the rest of his life. She was too smart for him to think otherwise. The moment she sensed a problem between him and whoever, she’d bite on that and make him miserable. Dig probably told her about what happened, and Felicity reached out. That’s who she was; she challenged him. That couldn’t happen.

Oliver swore and pushed himself up. This needed to be dealt with somewhere else. In the lair. Or the weight room. He’d probably drive his bike into a truck in a fit of rage if he went to the lair.

No one disturbed him tonight when he crept down the stairs to the work-out room. If they had, he would’ve ignored them. Or threw a punch. If Felicity had walked out, he didn’t know what he’d do. Fire her on the spot? No children would be there to hang on him and beg him to keep her there. Oliver locked the door and grabbed his earbuds.

The punching bag earned its money for the next hour. Finally, his body gave out, and he collapsed down onto the mat. He clenched his teeth and warded off another bout of anger that would send him to Thea’s house demanding an answer. That she would end up lying about and then trying to turn his family against him more than she already had.

I love you.
Ellie hadn’t.

William had.

And Felicity…

She just signed on as the Hood’s helper.

And now he couldn’t stand the idea of being in the same room as her.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked it!! This was by far my favorite chapter to write so far. I may or may not have cried a few times. :P

Next week there’s a full chapter of Olicity as they embark on a journey that some will remember from 2x01. :)
Felicity opened the glass doors and cleared her throat. “Hi Jerry. It’s Jerry, right?”

The short, smiley man looked up from his computer. “You’re Felicity. It’s nice to meet you. Oh, and yes! I’m Jerry. Is something wrong? Please tell me nothing’s wrong.”

“No, not really. Kind of. It depends on your definition of that. Anyways, may I speak to, uh, Mr. Queen?”

“He’s not necessarily busy right now. A little grumpy, I will say. But you look like someone who could handle his overall bleak outlook on life.”

*Don’t you know it.* She moved to the doors leading to the boss’s room. “Thank you.”

“Felicity, what are you doing here?”

“I need some help. Well, not help. You weren’t answering your phone, so I told Dig I’d come here and let him deal with everything at home.”

“My phone died, and I didn’t have a charger.” Oliver closed his computer and leaned forward. Felicity averted her eyes to the attractiveness of his sleeves rolled up to his elbows. There was no reason to look at that, right? “What’s going on?”

“Two of the housekeepers quit, saying they couldn’t handle working there anymore, and now they’re threatening to sue. It’s a little bit of a raucous there, so understandably I—we need some help.”

“I’m busy at the moment.”

“That can wait, I think. It’s an emergency at home. You are the head of the household. Please, Oliver?”

“Currently busy.” He opened his computer again.

What was wrong with him? This was testing her patience to not say anything bad about Oliver. Felicity glanced about the office. Did he ever do anything in here? It was so spit-spot. *Take your mind off him.* He sniffed. Her eyes shifted to look at him. He was staring intently at the computer. He even looked annoying just staring at whatever. Probably his screensaver. *Ignore him.* He’d come around eventually.

And she’d stand here until that happened.

Oliver started typing. Felicity pursed her lips and stared out the window. Fingers hitting keys could never be more annoying. *Deep breaths.* There was no need for her to say something to him. Eventually he’d notice her and put his stupid computer down. Maybe she could cast a spell on him and make him stop being annoying. It basically meant knocking him out for a few hours.

She glanced at him just when he looked up. *Frack.* She ducked her head and crossed her arms. This could wait a little bit longer. As long as it meant that Oliver would be coming home with her. Oh,
that sounded awful. He would be coming back to the mansion with her to deal with the issue.

“Are you going to just stand there like that for the rest of the day? Because I can sit here and ignore you for twelve hours.”

Don’t say anything. Be nice. Remember your rule. “Well, I’ll just stand here for twelve hours then. These heels are quite comfortable, and I peed just before I got here.” Felicity!

“Good thing I brought extra food.” Oliver waved a sack in front of her. “I think Raisa packed it. Hmm! Fried chicken. With…oh! Look at these beauties. Cheese pizza. I’m sure you like it, right? Too bad I’m eating it all.”

Be nice. Be kind. She could do that. No need to say anything.

“This is definitely the best pizza I’ve tasted in a while. Possibly the best one yet.”

Oliver, shut up.

“And—”

Gunshots stopped Oliver’s smarting. Felicity screamed and ducked. Oliver yelled something and jumped towards her. “Get down!” He jerked her to the floor as the desk above them was riddled with bullets. His body covered hers, but she could still feel the backlash of the explosion a foot from them as the desk crumbled. How were they not being hit?

“Hold onto me tight!” He jerked her up and ran at the windows.

“Oliver, what are—” She screamed as he reached for a chord and crashed through the window. Oh, God. They were going to die. They were going to fall to their deaths and die. All because Oliver Queen thought he could jump out of a window. And what? Go through— “Oliver!”

They crashed through another window, falling on top of a desk, sliding to the floor. Felicity smashed her face on the ground, for once thankful it wasn’t tile. Her hand sliced on glass, and her glasses definitely fell down her nose.

“Felicity?” Oliver reached for her, his hand brushing her hair back from her face. “Are you okay?”

“Considering I just went through a window, great.” Talking about her arm, not so much. Blood streamed down her elbow from several cuts on her biceps, and on her wrist. She should’ve worn a leather jacket.

More gunshots. How were they supposed to get out of this? “Oliver, what’s going on? Besides the fact that someone’s attacking. Someone’s obviously—”

“I know. Let’s go.” He stood up, wobbly on his feet before he reached down and helped her up. “We need to get out of here. Whatever you do, stay behind me. Got it?”

“I will because I’m not exactly a martial artist or something, but I should stay behind you because you’re trained in something sinister or because you think that because you’re the man, you have to protect me?”

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Felicity’s words bit into him. Yes, he was trained. He could take down whatever cowards tried to shoot up his company. But could he? No. Because no one could know who he really was. Even in a
life-or-death situation like this one. Oliver kept Felicity’s hand in his own and led her down the hallway, staying close to the walls. She’d stayed surprisingly calm during their little escapade. It wasn’t the smartest move, taking her out of the fire like that, but he couldn’t find any other way besides fumbling for the pistol embedded into his desk. That sort of movement could get them both killed.

Something clinked on the floor. Felicity slammed into him, pushing him forwards.

“It’s a bomb! *Move!*”

Oliver glanced back, his breath hitching.

Hand grenade.

He wrapped his hand around Felicity’s waist and propelled her forward. Depending on the blast radius, it could decimate them both no matter how far they were. When the blast rocketed, he pushed her to the ground and dropped on top of her, bracing his hands on either side of her, though it would do little to help them if the grenade exploded further than several feet. Felicity screamed as smoke enclosed around them.

They were safe.

Oliver pushed himself up and looked down at Felicity. Soot covered her face, and a splotch of red formed on her cheek. His fault, as he shoved her down with force in his panic. She reached for his arm, her breathing labored. “W-We…need to get outa here.”

“I agree. Take the heels off.”

No argument came. She unbuckled them and tossed them in a corner. “Don’t want any bad guys to know we’re here.”

“Smart thinking.” He pulled her around the corner as bullets flew into the wall where they’d been standing. One shooter. It would take him five seconds to dismantle the guy and keep them safe. He’d be keeping Felicity safe. That was a good reason to go after the shooter. It’d only take—

“Let’s move.” Felicity tugged on his arm. “Is there a closet we could hide in? Any secret rooms on this floor?”

He moved them along at a brisk walk, scanning the walls for a floor number. His heart sank. Why did they have to be on this one? There was a place to go in. Where they’d be safe, and not even bullets could penetrate it.

He just hadn’t been in the vicinity of it for over fifteen years.

“*Oliver!*” Felicity stopped them and grabbed his arms. Her eyes raged with intensity. And fear. “We. Are. Going. To. Die. If you don’t pull yourself out of that funk you’re in and get us somewhere we’re going to be safe!”

*Ignore it.* He had to ignore it. Ignore the aching in his stomach as he and Felicity ran to the converted supply room. Just like he imagined killing the guy to save Felicity, he had to remember that he was doing this too to keep her safe.

Bullets exploded a hallway away from them. Someone screamed. Oliver pushed open the door and ran towards the closet. Safe, almost. Felicity followed behind him. He pressed in the code, praying that someone hadn’t changed it.
The latch unclicked.

It hadn’t.

“Get in there.” He pushed Felicity into the room and shut the door. The door clicked shut just before he remembered that his father designed it so that no one could open it from the inside. It didn’t matter right now. They were both safe for the time being. “Felicity…”

She cowered on the ground, crying. Her body shook with sobs while blood dripped down her face and from her arm. Any anger he had towards her momentarily washed away. This attack was meant for him. And just like usual, it didn’t affect him. It managed to hurt so many others, including a woman he cared about. A little. Felicity handled herself with poise and even managed to pull him out of his ‘funk’, but now, all the terror rushed at her. He knew how it felt.

He was feeling it now. Not for the same reasons as she. Several feet from here, out in the area that now functioned as a storage closet, he had sat, over fifteen years ago, when someone came in and told him that his parents were dead. Oliver hadn’t planned on being back in here. That terror threatened to suffocate him and bring him to his knees, but he forced himself to move to Felicity’s side and sink to the floor next to her.

“Hey. Shhh, shhh.” He reached for her shoulder, but her body shifted slightly, making his hand connect with her face. She didn’t shy away, and neither did he. Her cries quieted slightly, and her hand went to rest on his knee.

“I-I’m s-sorry, Oliver. I-I just…”

“It’s okay. No need to explain yourself. We were shot at. And we survived a grenade. You can cry. I won’t judge.” Though if she did stop, he would be grateful. Tears made him uncomfortable. In the dim light from under the door, he eyed the blood, wincing. When they went through the window, he shouldn’t have let her go. He cared about them being alive, but he should have cared more about her getting up without injuries. “How does that feel?”

“Lousy.”

“Is it okay if I smile?”

Her lips pouted. “No.”

He smiled anyway. “If you’re okay with it, let’s move closer to the door. I might be able to see if you have glass in your arm. Or at least stop the bleeding.”

She hesitated.

“It’s okay, Felicity. No one’s gonna hurt us. I promise.” Cuz if someone did come in here, he’d snap their neck. Necks, if necessary. No one would make Felicity cry again.

He would just have to remember that himself the next time she went off on him.

She picked herself up and scooted to the door. He took a seat on one of the file boxes and motioned for her to sit down next to him. Why hadn’t Diggle been with them? He knew more about first aid than the common person. Oliver just knew how to tend to bullet wounds. Not often that he needed to do anything in the dark with nothing to work with. “Do you feel any glass in your arm?”

“There’s something on my elbow. And before you panic, I’m not gonna die of blood loss. This isn’t any worse than when I’m on my period. Oh, God! You did not just hear that.”
Oliver coughed back a laugh, thankful for the darkness now. Neither of them could see each other’s red faces. He cleared his throat and reached for her arm to feel for the glass. If it were big, he could pull it out. “I was married, remember? Some of that stuff doesn’t faze me.” *As much.*

“Sometimes I wish I could melt into a little hole or speed away like that guy from Central City.”

He refused to let his inspection slow as his heart rate picked up. “You don’t seem like the kind of person who would like that stuff.”

“Me? Pfft. Up until a few weeks ago, I didn’t even know that anything like that existed. But then the green leather guy who has a surprisingly nice body showed up and saved me. *I* saved myself, but he helped. So now I’m paying a little more attention to it.”

Thank goodness for the dark. Praise the heavens, actually. Oliver knew his face lit up like one of those red bulbs on the Christmas tree. She thought…? *Don’t think about it.* He couldn’t stop himself. It almost warranted a laugh. In the dim light, Felicity had taken notice of his…body. That made him slightly proud and very terrified. She didn’t know, did she? She seemed like someone who would blurt it out if she knew.

“Does it feel bad?”

“The glass is too small for me to get out in the dark.”

“With no tweezers. Got it. Anyways, it’s already stopped bleeding. Are you hurt at all?”

“I’m a little banged up, but like you. I’m not going to die of blood loss.”

“Please don’t mention the other thing I said. I’m going to regret saying that for the rest of my life. When do you think we can leave this dark and dreary room? I really do hate the dark and I also don’t like being in here with you. No offense.”

“Uh, Felicity?”

“I know that tone. I don’t know your tone, but I’ve heard that tone. It’s like when my mom would come home and say I couldn’t go to the fair because we didn’t have enough money. Or Barry would say he had to leave dinner because there was a crime committed. We’re locked in, aren’t we?”

“Yeah.”

“Frack. Double frack!” She collapsed back against the wall lined with files. “So we have to sit here with no knowledge of what’s going on outside for who knows how long.”

“I’m sorry, Felicity. I forgot that this door had a flaw in it. It’s been a long time.”

“You’re the boss, and this is a file room. I think. Why haven’t you been in here for a while?”

Leave it to Felicity to ask the question. “It’s a long story.”

“We have a lot of time right now, so you shouldn’t run into any obstacles in telling me.”

Oliver moved to the back of the little room and sat down on the ground. “My parents died when I was sixteen. By then I worked here a lot, and it was in that room out there that one of the workers came in and told me that they’d died. I’ve never stepped foot in here since.”

“I’m so sorry that you lost your parents, and I’m sorry that I caused you to have to come in here.”
“There’s two of us, and it’s not your fault.”

“Without me you could’ve protected yourself easier. I shouldn’t have come here. Just dealt with the situation. Dig’s gonna be worried.”

Did she know? He shrugged the thought away and shook his head, even though she couldn’t see it because she still sat near the door. “I still would’ve gone out the window, but I probably wouldn’t have been as careful. And probably got myself killed. So thank you.”

“For being an incredibly annoying part of the male population, you’re not so bad.”

Something crashed behind the door. Felicity froze, her hand going over her mouth to stifle a cry. Oliver pushed himself up, his fists clenching in preparation to fly at whoever opened the door. But there was nothing. Someone died or went about. Oliver clattered over the boxes to Felicity’s side. “Hey.” Her hand closed around his. “Why don’t you come sit in the back with me? No one’s gonna come in here, and back there you won’t hear as much.”

Felicity followed him to the back and sank to the ground. “They’re killing people out there. They’re going to kill every single person. While we’re safe in here. Stuck in here, but still safe.”

“I’d help if I could.”

“Oh, no, it’s not a dis at you. I know you. Well I don’t know know you but I think you’re a pretty stand-up guy. Besides…reasons. Anyways, you are decent. But I wouldn’t want you going into the line of fire.”

Oliver squinted. He shouldn’t ask it. No, it was stupid. “Reasons?”

“No reasons.”

“Felicity, we have plenty of time for you to explain yourself.”

“You have a giant smirk on your face right now, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Fine.” She stretched out her legs, her bare feet pushing against his legs. “Ignoring your…jerkiness issue, there’s a few question marks. For one, my friend Barry called you from an unknown number.”

The night that he left his phone at home. Of course Felicity answered it. Why wouldn’t she? “Are you expecting an explanation?”

“You’re asking me that to stall so you can come up with an answer.”

“No.”

“Well, if it works for you, go with it.”

Aha. He had it. “I’m not sure where Barry was calling from, but my phone is programmed to screen all calls that aren’t in my contacts. If they aren’t in there, it shows up as unknown.”

“That’s a good explanation.”

“And?”

“Why do you always assume that I have more to say?”
"I would expect nothing less."

"How did your wife put up with you? You’re very annoying, and you can’t just woo a woman with your attractiveness. She didn’t seem like she was a part of that side of the female population. Besides, you couldn’t have had a six-pack to woo her with when you were sixteen. Or eighteen, because that’s when you convinced her to marry you."

"How’d you know that?"

"Dig told me."

Of course Diggle told her. The man didn’t have many friends, and when he found someone to talk to, he talked. Surprising, because John Diggle didn’t look like a talker. Oliver sighed. Felicity might as well know the whole story. "We both turned eighteen a few days before the wedding. Everyone was pretty skeptical, but they went along with it. At the little reception we had, the head of security told me that he gave us six months."

"What an awful thing to say at someone’s wedding."

"He was a good bodyguard so I didn’t fire him. Gossip magazines loved us the first few years. Any little thing was reported and printed. On our fifth anniversary, we figured out that the security guy was the inside source for all the rumors. Whenever we’d get in a fight, he’d call it in for a substantial amount of money."

"Did you punch him?"

"Yes."

Felicity laughed. "I didn’t think you’d say yes."

"Annie gave me permission. He went flat on the ground." Oddly enough, a sense of pride washed over him. "He went to jail for a while. And that’s when I found Dig. He was just out of the army and was looking for a more laid back job."

"And what’s more laid back then being the bodyguard for the richest family on this side of the country."

"Back then it was a less difficult."

A silence overtook them then. Oliver listened for gunshots, but nothing came. It was eerily quiet. No telling how long it would be until someone found them. First it would be tending to the wounded, then figuring out the shooters. Then they would figure who was and wasn’t among the crowds of employees. Finding them would be a different story. How many closets and secret nooks existed? That meant he and Felicity would spend quite a bit of time together. It wasn’t terrifying at all. The last time he spent this much time with a woman happened to be a business partner that he fired after the second day.

The name Isabel Rochev immediately should’ve flashed red flags.

"Y’know, they miss you."

He squeezed his eyes shut, hoping that if he did, he could escape that quiet, gentle voice. And the words. Hot off the emotions from his talk with Ellie, he couldn’t handle this. Not that he ever could, but he certainly couldn’t now.
“I know that I’m risking a lot saying this. And not just because you pay me money. Mostly because we have to sit here for who knows how long. But Oliver, those kids need you. So much. And they miss you. And that’s all I’m going to say. For now.”

Oliver shook his head, that old helpless feeling he tried to avoid pushing against him, making his body weak. Making everything weak; even his heart. “I can’t care, Felicity. I can’t love them. If I do, something awful is going to happen. You might think it’s ridiculous, but it’s true. I lost too much that day to ever care again. There’s nothing in me that can love again. That day I lost my wife.” He choked back an unwanted and unexpected cry. “I lost more than anyone will ever know. My wife, a—” He stopped himself. No. That couldn’t be said.

“And Oliver…I know about the baby.”

Those few quiet words ripped down the last bit of his heart. Oliver planted his elbows on his knees and buried his face in his hands. How? He didn’t think anyone could figure that out. No, no one knew. He hadn’t told anyone. Not Diggle. Not Tommy. Definitely not the kids. They couldn’t know that they lost a sibling too. But Felicity knew. Somehow, she did. The rekindled ache for the baby he never got to hold tore at his soul. The knowledge that someone finally knew about he and Annie’s baby shut down the scanner in his brain that always told him to steer away from emotion. It didn’t work.

“I—I’m sure you’re wondering how I figured it out. My computer skills got the better of me and I found the medical report. I’m so sorry, Oliver.”

Stop. You gotta stop. He had to stop. He was unravelling right here, trapped in a safe with some girl who seemed to keep unknowingly torturing him. No, he was torturing himself. None of this was her fault. It wasn’t her fault for talking to Thea or snooping around in his life and figuring this secret out. He brought this upon himself. Oliver sucked in a deep breath, but it backfired, coming out as a sob. No, no. He could cry; Felicity couldn’t hear that and she couldn’t see it either. But he couldn’t let go of all the strings.

He clamped his teeth around the skin on his wrist to force himself to stay quiet, but allowed the tears to run. It had been a long time since he cried. Why did it have to be tonight? Rarely did anything set him off; he dealt with his grief with anger. That wasn’t too hard to admit. It would be harder to deal with that anger. He probably never would.

“Oliver.” Felicity moved from her spot and came to sit by him. She didn’t touch him, but he could feel her. Somehow. “I’m sorry. I-I shouldn’t have told you. I guess I had a moment of thinking that it would be nice to know someone else knew. I’m sure you didn’t tell anyone. A-And I might not know how it is to have something like this happen, I do know tragedy, and I guess…” she didn’t finish her sentence, but rested her hand on his hunched shoulder. Her fingertips fell on his back, absentmindedly squeezing.

Run, Oliver. Run!

He slowly uncurled himself, falling back against the wall. Felicity’s hand stayed where it had been placed. They didn’t say anything; it wasn’t necessary. Oliver silently grieved. He didn’t know what Felicity did, but he could imagine it involved beating herself up. But if he spoke, that last string of his being would be sliced, and everything would crumble. Slowly he regained control of himself, reigning in the heartache. At least he tried. He’d never be okay again, but he’d could fake it. That’s what he had to make himself do right now.

Her hand slipped away. With a soft ‘thunk’, her head hit his shoulder.
“Felicity?” He whispered the words. She didn’t respond. Why would she? Felicity Smoak had fallen asleep. It almost made him laugh. Here they were, stuck in a closet. One of them had snot all over his face—his dress shirt would need to be washed when they got out of here, and the other was fast asleep. Tommy would have a field day with this.

He dropped his head back against the wall and closed his eyes, forcing himself to imagine Tommy’s comments. Maybe even Captain Lance’s. It took his mind off the earlier pain and slowly pulled him off to la-la land. Not before he heard Felicity mumbling in her sleep and start to show signs of a nightmare.

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What was happening? Someone with the face of her father but the body of Cooper leaned down over her, the knife poised to strike. She tried to roll away, but it wasn’t quick enough. The knife slammed down, catching her in the chest. She screamed and wrestled with the hand that pushed the dagger deeper into her heart.

Off in the distance someone called her name, telling her to breathe. She fought against the voice, flinging her hand out to push away her father. Cooper. Whoever it was. If she wanted to survive this, she needed to fight. Get out of here. Ignore the voice. Ignore the voice, Felicity. The terror gripped her, immobilizing her.

“Felicity!” The voice came closer now. Oliver. That’s who stood above her. It was Oliver, trying to kill her!

“Get away from me!” She tried to swing her hand out to push him away, but he kept her secure on the bed. Ground.

“It’s me. It’s me, Felicity. It’s Oliver. Everything’s okay. I’m not going to hurt you. It’s okay.” He repeated the last sentence over and over again as she opened her eyes and focused. Darkness reigned supreme, but he knelt next to her, his eyes on her face. She could see that. He wasn’t a part of the bad dream. In fact, he was trying to help her.

“You’re okay, Felicity. It was a bad dream.”

She scrubbed her face to hide her tears. No use. The panic, pain, and terror from the dream needed to come out somehow. “I-I’m sorry.”

“Hey, it’s okay. I cried quite a bit a while ago. I’m not gonna judge. No one’s gonna hurt you.”

No one’s gonna hurt you. The darkness enclosed her again, suffocating her. She needed something to hold; to know that someone was there. Felicity reached back and clutched some part of Oliver. Probably his wrist because that was the only thing small enough on his arm that she could get her hand around. Her breath came in gasps. Nothing could stop this. What was it? A panic attack? It hadn’t happened for a long time. When a nightmare occurred, she could always get up and flip on a light and do something. Not here.

“Breathe, Felicity. You have to breathe.”

“I-I c-can’t. I need…light.”

“Okay.” Something rustled, and then he grunted. He left her for a moment. He seemed to be moving something. That’s it, Felicity. Focus on something else. She could do this. But as she closed her eyes, the nightmare began in full rigor again. She grasped for control, but the strings had long since been sliced.
“Felicity. It’s alright. You’re not alone. Okay? Breathe.” Oliver grabbed her hand and squeezed. “Just listen to me. Don’t listen to what your dreams are telling you. They’re not telling you the truth. I promise everything’s okay. You’re safe. I’m here.”

She sucked in a deep breath, pushing away the demons and focusing on Oliver’s soothing voice. It wasn’t impossible. When she opened her eyes, the knife and the faces disappeared. The effects stayed, but she could see Oliver’s face. “I-I need light. I need light, Oliver.”

His arms enclosed around her then. They pulled her close to his chest. The warmth radiated through her, lowering her heartbeat to a steady rhythm. It wasn’t something she was accustomed to. But it helped her breathe again. With the help of Oliver. The man who didn’t want to love again. The one who stayed away from everything that might make him feel. Because of her, he was doing something she knew he hadn’t done in a long time. “I-I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. Just breathe, Felicity. It’s all gonna be okay.”

She relaxed against him, only realizing how long it had been when he scooted them to the ground. That’s what he’d been doing. Moving the boxes so they could both rest. Maybe even sleep. Felicity let herself float away, closing her eyes and imaging happy things. This time her father smiled at her from across the table. Her mother set a casserole that most definitely had been bought next to her and dished out the contents. Yep, definitely from the store. Nothing Donna Smoak cooked looked or tasted this good.

The Queen children ran into the kitchen, howling about dinner. Fluffy clambered up onto Felicity’s lap and Piper sat down next to her. The rest of the kids found seats just as Oliver came in. He clapped Felicity’s father on the back and winked at Felicity as he sat down. His grin widened as Annie hopped up to sit on him, expressing her concern for his ‘muddy pants’.

What on earth was going on?

The dark sky that shone into the kitchen began to brighten. The kids continued to laugh about a joke they had between themselves, but Felicity looked out at the light. That was odd. Wasn’t it supposed to be dark?

Someone cleared their throat. No one did in the kitchen. No one sat in the kitchen anymore, except for Felicity. She looked around, looking for the noise. It came again.

Felicity’s eyes flickered open. Oh. Dear. God. There was no way to describe the feeling of staring up at Diggle, Tommy, and not too far behind them, Captain Lance from the kidnapping. She glanced at Oliver, still fast asleep, his arms around her. Her leg—very bare leg, thanks to the fact that her pencil skirt had ridden up a bit—had settled over his legs at some point. Dear God, help us all. This didn’t look good. She nudged her sleeping partner in the ribs. “Oliver.”

“Hmmm?” He jerked up, letting go of her and shaking his head. It didn’t help with the overall bleariness in his eyes. “Hi Dig. Tommy. Captain Lance?”

“Well, it’s good to see you two are still alive. You,” The grumpy Captain gestured to the other men standing above them, “can deal with this. I’m outa here.”

“We were really starting to worry that you’d been kidnapped. Had a search team scouring the city and everything.” Tommy’s eyes swept over the room. “We didn’t even think to look in here.”

“Yeah, well, it was either here or death.” Oliver grumbled, pushing himself up. He helped Felicity up and then straightened himself out. Blood had dripped onto his light blue dress shirt, and tie, though
that now hung low on his neck. An off-white color stained his sleeve. Felicity knew where that came
from. She didn’t want to look down at herself. The skirt and shirt were where they needed to be;
that’s all that mattered. “Please don’t think that we…did anything.”

“Oh, no! It was a very platonic closet hideout. That I just made worse with my comment.”

Diggle chuckled and clapped Oliver on the shoulder. “We’re just happy you’re alive. We might have
to do a little damage control, but it should be fine. There’s nothing to worry about.”

Felicity rubbed her eyes as she adjusted to the brightness. It was morning. They’d been in there all
night? Great. Let the tabloids and her mother run wild. At least they had an excuse for why it
happened. Speaking of. She cleared her throat. “What…happened? Last night?”

Diggle sighed. “Gunmen. That’s all that the police have figured out so far.”

“Apparently they were trying to get to the CEO of the company.” Captain Lance turned back
around, an almost smirk on his face. “Shocking, isn’t it? People come after the rich kid. Again.”

Oliver rubbed his face, unable to hide the distinct shuffling of his feet. “Mr. Lance, can you maybe
hold off on the interrogation for a few minutes? If you could, that’d be great. Let us deal with
everything else first. Like getting Felicity medical attention. She still has glass in her arm. We also
had a grenade of some sort thrown at us.”

“Don’t forget that we went through the window.”

Tommy shook his head but looped his arm around Felicity’s back. “Let’s get you cleaned up. The
medical team is at ground level.” He put some separation between them and the other three. “I don’t
know if the kids can take another night like this. I think I should get a little bit of your paycheck for
all of the stuff I did last night. I watched Cinderella for the first time, and sang Under the Sea for
thirty minutes. Not to mention the Muppet show I acted out.”

“Well, it wasn’t only me missing.”

“Trust me when I say they were more worried about you than Oliver.”

“There’s no way that’s true.”

Tommy glanced back and then lowered his voice. “Who’s shown they cared more about them? You
or their father?”

“Tommy, you can’t possibly believe that.”

“It’s true, Felicity. Oliver might care about them. I’m sure he does to some degree. But he’s gone.
The Oliver that you think is somewhere in there has been dead for years.”

“I don’t believe that.” And she never would.

They made it down to the ground level where Tommy escorted her to the med bay. An older nurse
helped Felicity sit down and found a scissors. “No, not another one.”

“Excuse me?” She turned around, her brow furrowed.

“Oh. This is just the second time in the past week that I’ve ruined an outfit. I might work for the
richest guy in Starling City, but it doesn’t mean I like buying clothes left and right. But I don’t enjoy
the idea of having glass in my arm, so go ahead and cut the dress off. Not the whole dress! Just the
arm. I’ve already embarrassed myself enough.”

“Don’t worry, ma’am. We won’t do too much here. If there’s too much glass, we’ll take you to the hospital.”

Felicity spotted Oliver coming into the area. Another nurse went to talk to him. He gestured to his cheek, and then to his shoulder. Soon, she moved him to a different area. And definitely asked him to take his shirt off. Don’t look. It was a successful self-talk for a few seconds, until her eyes wandered. He had the shirt off now. This isn’t the first time. Stop! But it was a such a perfect distraction from the nurse’s fingers pressing into her tender forearm. The way his chest expanded at each breath, and then flexed, showing off those absolutely gorgeous abs.

“Ma’am? Are you hearing me?”

“What? What’d you say? I was just thinking about nearly dying.”

The nurse smiled. “I might be old and happily married, but I’m not blind.”

“Whaaa—” her eyes shifted to Oliver, now chatting with the nurse, and then back to the elderly lady who stood over her, a twinkle in her eyes. “Oh, thank God. I’m not the only one. Obviously I’m not the only one. I’m sure his wife thought he was gorgeous.” That sounded horrible. “You do know that she died, right? This isn’t an affair. Not that I even like him—three, two, one. I’m going to stop talking right now.”

“You have a lot of spunk. And as I was saying, I would like to take you to the hospital to remove these glass pieces.”

“That would be okay. Before that happens, I would like to say hello to my…family.”

“That’s just fine. Go ahead. You can take this sweatshirt if you’d like.”

She assumed they were here, that is. Felicity stood and walked to Oliver. He looked at her and smiled. “Do you have to go the hospital to get the glass out?”

“Yeah. I want to see the kids first. Are they here?”

“I assumed they would be at the house.”

“Tommy said he deserves money for babysitting.”

“He’s been saying that since Ellie was born.” He stood, scooting away from the nurse. “Thank you, ma’am. I can deal with the rest myself.”

“You’re certainly not a doctor, Mr. Queen.”

Oliver slid on his t-shirt and winked. “This just takes common sense.”

None of which he had. Felicity shrugged the thought away and hurried to catch up with him as he strode towards the exit. “I don’t really want to ask this but…how many people died? Jerry didn’t, did he?”

“Four people were killed. It’s a miracle considering that there were ten shooters. Dig said that most people were alerted of the shooting and hid. Whoever attacked this place forgot to game plan for the secret closets everywhere. John!” Oliver waved over their bodyguard. “Where are the kids?”

“They’re down in the kids’ room. There’s a movie playing. I can imagine the bodyguard we have
posted down there is having a hard time keeping them down there.”

“Let’s go.” Felicity glanced at Oliver, who made a subtle shake of his head. Ooh, yes. Now they were definitely going down there. Seemed like she still had her job today, even after she admitted to him that she’d been snooping. What came over her then she would never know. How could she explain why she decided to tell him that she knew? His reaction broke her heart even more than it’d already been broken. He started crying. As much as he tried to hide it, she knew he was silently suffering over in the corner.

So she went to sit by him. And maybe massage his shoulders. What a ridiculous, crazy thing to do. Maybe he didn’t remember it. That would be best for everyone. Better yet, maybe she would wake up and realize the whole thing had been a bad dream.

No.

Why would she want to forget that?

Ellie met them at the door, and went to hug Oliver first. He seemed surprised, but after a split second of a hesitation, wrapped his arms around Ellie and pulled her close. She held on for a few seconds longer, and then switched to Felicity. “I thought I lost both of you.” She pulled away, her hand hesitating at the now kind of bandaged arm. “Are you okay?”

“We’re both fine. Just a little sore and needing to go to the hospital soon to get glass out.”

“Felicity!” Clayton pushed Ellie away, and wrapped his arms around Felicity’s waist. His glasses smooshed into her stomach. “I thought you died! And then I wouldn’t have my nerd partner.”

“Don’t worry. I’m safe.” Go hug your father, Clayton. She wished she could tell him that. But the little push she gave him was enough. He gave him a hug. The little boy’s head only reached Oliver’s thighs. It begged to wonder if maybe the trauma stunted his growth. It wasn’t like anyone in the family was small.

The rest of the kids converged on them. Only Piper hugged Oliver first.

Half an hour later, Felicity sat in a hospital room, trying not to cry as a nurse removed the glass in her elbow. If she focused on something else, maybe this would pass quicker.

“Don’t worry, ma’am. Just breathe. Breathe, and it’ll be over soon.”

“Breathe, Felicity. It’s okay. I’m here.”

Oh, dear God. Felicity squeezed her eyes shut. The nightmare last night. She’d had a nightmare, and Oliver had said that to her. It came back now. He put his arms around her to calm her down, and that’s why they were laying on the ground. Yikes. Wow.

She smiled. Oliver comforted her last night.

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“I’ll be there by two. We had a little bit of an…incident at the office. Know anything about that?” Oliver tipped his head up to stare at the ceiling as the messenger rambled on about how he was never involved in anything, just contacting people. Of course. Why would the Bratva shoot up a building like that? Fortunately, the trusty SCPD would be on this one, investigating who killed and injured all those people. He rolled his eyes. “Tell your demanding boss that I will hop on a plane soon.”
He gathered his gear and a few clothing options that he always brought along, and then headed downstairs. Felicity sat on one of the chairs by the double doors, putting on shoes. Flats, for once. For all the walking, running, and being kidnapped that she’d dealt with, that woman was never seen without heels on. If Oliver had even the options to wear those blasted five-inches of awfulness, he’d chose being shorter than everyone no matter what. “Hey.”

Her head jerked up, a smile brightening her face. “Where are you going?”

“Business trip. I tried to get out of it, but apparently it was an emergency. For real this time.” He eyed her shoes, and her sweatshirt and jeans. Tousled hair. “Whatcha planning on doing? Running away?”

“Oh, no. I wouldn’t last long out there.”

“Your prowess recently has proved otherwise.”

With her tennis shoes tied, she straightened. Without the heels, her head barely reached his shoulder. Kind of adorable, if he were being honest. “What exactly are you referring to?”

He tilted his head to the door. “Walk out to the car with me? And you didn’t answer my question.”

“I need to clear my head. Take a nice, long walk that will hopefully leave me very tired. Not that I’m not already tired, but I just need some just…air.”

“I have some sleeping pills upstairs if you want some.” Though her problem wasn’t falling asleep. He knew from last night’s experience that it was what came after that haunted Felicity. Something about her father, mother, and that creepy, cocky ex-boyfriend.

“You know what happened last night.” She kept stride with him as they walked towards the garage. “I need a big stuffed animal to sleep with. A tiger, preferably. Sorry. I also need to thank you.”

“For what?”

“For calming me down last night. I didn’t remember much of it until at the hospital. But you calmed me down. So thank you for that.”

“Yeah, well…” he shifted his body, thankful that the light couldn’t illuminate his red face. “I know how it feels to have a nightmare. And I know how it feels to have someone there. Plus, I’m not very good at getting a heartbeat going again, and you were close to that happening. Having a panic attack, I mean.”

“Well, thank you anyways.”

He needed to thank her too. The normal Oliver would blow by the situation and what happened the night before, but this needed to be discussed. It would hurt, but it’d be better to do it now. “There’s, uh, something else I want to say before I go.”

“Is this where you fire me?”

He laughed, and shuffled his feet. The light from the garage now gave him a clear shot at Felicity and her tousled hair. “Thank you for telling me about you knowing about the baby. I’m not mad about the snooping, and I’d hardly fire you for that. It uh, really helps to know that someone else knows. It’s been hard to keep that to myself.”

“Well,” with a small smile, she clasped his hand. “Hopefully this’ll help you learn that you don’t
always have to do stuff alone.” Her eyes drifted to their hands. That was the end of that. “Anyways, you’d better get on your way. Are you sure you can’t stay? The kids are in a wreck. They…need you.”

He unlocked the garage door and grabbed the sports car’s keys from the many that hung on the wall. With a smirk to cover up any pain that Felicity could assume he had, he backed towards the car. “We both know that they’d rather have you instead. Have a good couple weeks.” He got out of there before Felicity could argue with him. Of course she would. Somehow she’d convinced herself that he could change. Or go back to the man he once was.

It wasn’t possible.

Though something happened last night. He shouldn’t consider it a change. It wasn’t. But it was something. Maybe a little more than that. He couldn’t remember the last time he hadn’t had a nightmare. If he didn’t wake up in the middle of the night gasping for air, it was a worse one at four that sometimes left him paralyzed in fear and pain.

But last night he didn’t have any nightmare. He calmed Felicity down after one of her own.

But he didn’t have a nightmare.

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Felicity headed out towards the manicured lawns, a smirk on her face. It helped to focus on something other than her million problems that should be addressed at some point. Not tonight. Tonight it would be thinking about Oliver. He didn’t think he could change; be a better man.

He thought.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked it!!! As always, kudos, comments and such are always appreciated. I’m getting into the heat of the story now, and it takes encouragement from you guys to keep going. So thank you ahead of time!!!! :) The ending is a little cheesy, but I needed to a little bit of a lead-on, and that was what came to mind. :P I wasn't so sure about Felicity telling Oliver about the baby, but as I was writing that scene, I glanced back at my document of notes - which is literally a bunch of quotes that I want in the story - and realized I could put that scene in there. I think it turned out as it should. Tender, a few tears (I love those), and an Olicity moment. Well, basically the whole chapter was Olicity. I realized last night as I was doing a final run-through that the beginning-of-the-chapter Oliver acted very much like Oliver in the premiere. Oops. :(
Someone knocked on her door. A very tentative knock, meaning one of the little kids came to call. Felicity flipped on the lamp and called, “Come in.”

Annie peeked into the room, holding her teddy pair. “I had a bad dream.”

“Oh, no.” She sat up and patted the unused portion of the bed beside her. “Come up here. What was your dream about?”

Her little friend ran over and jumped up, cuddling up against Felicity. Her little arm looped around Felicity’s stomach. “You and Daddy died. And then this new mommy came and she was really mean. She made us give away Fluffy and Piggy. And it was very sad. Now I’m scared!”

“Mommy?”

“Yeah.” Annie looked up at her, a smile on her face. “Since my real mommy died, and you’ve stayed longer than anyone else, I think you should be my mommy.”

“Oh, Annie.” Felicity gathered her in her arms and squeezed. If she had the ability to travel in time and change one thing, she would give the Queen children their mother back. And Oliver his wife. She would never have met this family, but at least it meant they would be happy. “A mommy is different than me.”

“No, she’s not. Harper said a mommy is…uh, loving. And she buys you special things. And she gives hugs. And you do all that. So you’re my mommy. Please say you are, Felicity.” Annie looked up at her, those blue eyes pleading with her to say yes. “I want to have a mommy too.”

Oh, God. Felicity squeezed her eyes shut. No crying. That wasn’t allowed right now. She kissed Annie’s forehead and smiled. “Yeah. I can be your…mommy.”

“Good.” Annie closed her eyes and dropped backwards against Felicity. The teddy bear lay, discarded and forgotten. Soon, her little friend was sleeping. Felicity shimmied down so that they lay flat. “Goodnight miss Annie. Sleep tight.” And hopefully no nightmares would wake them up.

The next week passed quickly with lots of school. Annie slept with Felicity every night, and on the fourth night, Piper joined them. Fluffy too. The night they hit one week without Oliver, Felicity knocked on Ellie’s door. “Can I come in?”

“Sure.”

Felicity stared at the pile of fancy dresses laying on the bed. “What on earth are you doing? I didn’t know you had these.”

“We used to have lots of parties. Dances. Lots of dancing.” Ellie stood above the piles, hands on her hips. “I decided to pull them out and pick the ones I want to keep, and give the rest away. They’ve been sitting in my closets for years and it’s time they are dealt with.”
“Awww, it’s so pretty.” Felicity lifted a blue, flowy gown from the top. Much too big for a twelve-year-old. She lowered it down, squinting at Ellie, the truth dawning on her. “These are some of your mom’s, too, aren’t they?”

Ellie sniffed, then nodded. “Yeah. I took them out of their room when she died because I wanted to keep them. B-But…it’s time. It’s been five years, and I need to deal with this. Wanna help me?”

“I don’t have the best taste in fancy clothes.”

“No need for fashion tastes. Just your support. Like this one.” She held up a purple dress that was definitely more expensive than anything Felicity had ever worn. “Keep or go?”

“Where are they going?”

“I don’t know for sure. I thought they’d be fun to give to a home for abused girls. They probably don’t get to dress up very often, and with the amount I have, they could—you know what?” Ellie whirled around and grabbed the three plastic bins that sat on the desk. “They’re all going.”

“What?”

“If I want to live my life, really live my life, I need to start over. We all need to start over. And that means that all these dresses are going to girls who never would’ve dreamed of being able to wear something like this. Help me pack these up, please?” Ellie started stacking the folded dresses into the bins, a look of peace on her face. That’s what helped Felicity out of her funk of shock. She reached for one of the dresses. Ellie’s decision to do this whooshed up her pride. It was a step in the right direction. At least that’s what she thought. Ellie would know that these dresses would be precious used while she let go of something that might have held her back.

Ellie stacked the second bin on top of the first and finished filling the third. “So I think we should go trick or treating. No one has ever taken us because I’m pretty sure Daddy’s always made sure we were busy that night, but I want to go. And we have a couple weeks before that happens so we can make some plans for costumes so no one knows who we are. Is that okay? And I only ask that because you seem to be able to overpower my ridiculously stubborn father. If you say we can go, we can go, no matter what he says.”

“I don’t know if that’s a good philosophy, but yes. I would love to go trick or treating.”

“Yay. There. All done.” Ellie surveyed her work, and then sat down on the bed, tears filling her eyes. “I’m doing the right thing, right? It’s a good idea to move on and do this. Right?”

“I’m not an expert at any of this, Ellie.” Felicity took a seat next to her. “But. There’s something that I’ve always believed. And that’s that we all experience sadness. One way or another. Some people rise above it, and some people sink lower. There’s not necessarily a manual on how to deal with pain. Maybe yoga.” When Ellie giggled, she smiled. “Anyways, the best way is to move on. I moved on from all that crap with…everything.” Had she? Her nightmares were a violent proof that maybe she hadn’t. “It doesn’t make you forget. But it helps you pick up that camper and move to a different camp site. And that little speech does not mean that we’re going camping. Ever.”

“I’m glad you got fired from your job.”

“Me too.” Felicity glanced at the boxes, and tapped the bed. “Do you have a place in mind to send the dresses?”

“I do. Do you have a computer so I could show you?”

“Coffee. Mama let me drink coffee when I was nine. Daddy had a fit, but I was addicted.”

Ten minutes later, Felicity handed Ellie a cup of coffee with whipped cream on top, took a seat next to her with her own cup, and opened her computer. When the site popped up, she smiled. “I can see why you liked this place. It looks sweet.”

“There’s a little story behind that. Uncle Tommy’s mom was killed when he was little. She ran this place before her death, and it’s still very dear to him. His dad doesn’t care as much, but he still supplies them with the resources. Unfortunately, he’s not a dresses guy.”

“I didn’t know that Tommy lost his mom.”

“Yeah, well, as you said, we all have our sad stories. He’s done a good job recovering.”

“He’ll be happy to hear about the dresses.”

“Felicity?” William ran into the room, looking disoriented. He scanned the situation, letting out a sigh. “I’m sorry to interrupt the girlie discussion, but Clayton’s having a nightmare, and I can’t wake him up. Can you come upstairs, please?”

“Coming.” She followed him up to the bedroom and took a seat on the bed where Clayton tossed and turned, crying. Most words were mumbled, but occasionally she could make out a few words. ‘Daddy’ and ‘gone all the time’ were some of them. Felicity ground her teeth to keep her annoyance at Oliver at bay. It could be dealt with another time. When Oliver got home. “Clayton. Honey, can you wake up? It’s Felicity.”

Clayton screamed and sat up, gasping for air. Terror gripped his face, his eyes wide and flitting around, searching for…something. Finally, they found Felicity. He reached out to her as his face crumpled. “C-Can…you hold me?”


“I-I n-never have nightmares.”

“We all have them sometimes. Don’t worry about it.”

Clayton kept his face buried against her shoulder. “I miss Daddy.”

“I know you do, honey.” And Oliver would wish that Felicity had never appeared when he came home and she took him to the woodshed. He should be here. Here, right now, dealing with this. His son, the tenderhearted one, had just had a nightmare and needed comfort. But where was he? Halfway across the world being a jerk to people to get more money. No doubt thinking that he could never care again. Or he was too scared to do it. Coward. That’s what he was, ultimately. Hiding from his emotions because he didn’t want to deal with them.

Later that night, as Clayton fell asleep in her bed next to Annie and Piper, Felicity kissed his forehead and whispered, “Don’t worry, sweetie. Your daddy is going to be back soon. For real this time.”

******
Oliver lay flat on the roof, keeping the rifle trained on the exit. It would happen soon and then he could go home. He kept his mask lowered over his face, but when his com clicked on and the lookout said, “You’ve got a few minutes before this guy comes out. He’s currently hanging out with some girl who’s fairly attractive. I’ll let you know when to go to attention,”, he pushed the mask up. No one would see him up here.

He clicked the safety on and set the gun to the side. His “side-kick”—the only one he ever allowed to be out with him in the field—had good eyes and would give him the proper time for him to get the gun and put a bullet as close to the man’s heart as he could without killing him; someone else would finish him off. Unless he could get Barry’s help in time.

His leg cramped as he stretched out in a more comfortable position. He certainly wasn’t getting any younger. Maybe when he blew out his knee in the field in a few years they’d let him go and consider the blackmail contract finished. They’d expect him to hang up the other hood too, but it would mean that he’d be done with this part of his life. Lying. Killing. No one would ever know about it.

Unless Felicity figured it out.

Felicity.

He smiled. What a woman. If only he knew her five years ago. The kids would have recovered and moved on with their lives with her help. That first nanny he hired…goodness she was awful. Felicity, though…another smile happened. Not on purpose. He just couldn’t help it. Her ill-timed comments about his body made his heart do something weird. Not love. Just…a little happiness. That’s what she did to him. Brought light into his life that he desperately needed. Even if she did yell at him all the time.

He needed to buy her a new dress. Raisa made a comment about now that the orange dress had been ruined, she needed to do more wash. Felicity loved that one. Thanks to Cocky and his evil minions, that dress no longer existed. Plus, it did look nice on her. Oliver. Anyways, when he got home, he’d order the orange one again. Maybe get a few more colors, if he could get one of the little ones to tell him her favorite colors. It could function as another apology for being a jerk.

And he could see her in that dress. With those sparkly heels she wore all the time. Those were nice. They did accentuate her—

“Oliver! On your right!”

“Wh-What?” He jerked up, but someone slammed something into his back, pushing him to the ground again. Good God. Someone had him. It’d been a long time since this happened. Of course it had be tonight. He raised his hands, ignoring the pounding in his heart. A bullet could go through his head any moment, and it’d be over. His family would find out. And then be killed for his incompetence.

“Stand up with your hands raised.”

He stood up and turned around. The butt of the rifle smashed down onto his forehead. His feet slipped, his hands reaching out to catch himself. The cliff. Oh, God, he was gonna fall off the cliff and break his neck. It would be a better death than he imagined. The burly man stood above him, a pistol now aimed at his chest. At least he thought it was a gun. His vision swirled; black spots appeared in his sight now. Oliver made a final attempt to keep himself from falling, but his grip slipped. He tumbled downward, smashing his ribs against limestone. His head snapped back, whacking the rock.
The next morning, Felicity found Diggle in the garage, cleaning the cars. “Hey, Dig. Can I talk to you for a second? And when I say ‘talk’ I mean rant. Yell, maybe.”

“Go ahead. Just yell at the car and not me. It deserves a lecture.”

“It’s about Oliver. I’ve come to my wits end.”

“He’s not even here.”

“I can get angry with people even when they’re nonexistent.”

“And let me guess. That’s the problem.”

“Very much so. They need their father. Don’t you see, Dig? If anyone does, it should be you. Oliver pays zero attention to them. He told me in our little night in the closet that he can’t care or love. Because he’s scared of getting hurt again. And it’s ridiculous!”

Diggle sighed. “There’s something that can’t be helped. Not truly.”

“And why do you think so?”

“Because I know from experience. I tried to do something about it. I nearly got fired, and banned from the premises. I got lucky, because Thea got kicked out. A couple nannies tried telling Oliver about how he needed to pay attention to his kids, and they were both fired.” Diggle walked towards her, his tone not lecturing. Just sad. “Oliver is not a nice man, Felicity. We all try to see past the anger and the darkness that is in his heart, but he’s ruthless. If something isn’t right, he changes it. With his money. With his name. Someone gets in his way, he takes care of it. He’s had too many heartbreaks in his life for him to be any different.”

Felicity glanced at the walls, lined with driving equipment. Lots of motorcycle helmets. A few pictures scattered the walls, including one of Oliver and his father. A little boy at the time, he sat on top of the older man’s shoulders. Oliver now looked like a mirror image of that man. Was that part of what haunted him at night? Robert had to have been not much older than Oliver now when he died. “You…you don’t think he can change?”

“You haven’t known him as long as I have.”

“John, people can change.”

“And how do you know that?”

“Because….” She could prove him wrong on this one. She squared her shoulders. “I changed. You might scoff now, but you didn’t know me a few years ago. I was angry. Dark. My hair was black, actually. I wanted nothing more than to punish everyone who ever did me wrong. But I changed. And I’m here now to say that it is possible. It might take more work for others, but it can be done.”

“And you need me to help you.”

“No. Yes. I can’t do this by myself. But I need you to back me up if necessary. It’ll definitely be necessary at some point, knowing me. I want to do this for the kids. They need their daddy back.”

“They need a mom too.”
“Maybe you should make him an online dating—” Oh. Oh. “John, I do not like Oliver.”

“You made it an entire night without killing each other.”

“Not killing each other and being compatible for marriage is a very different thing.”

“Okay.” He clapped her on the shoulder as he walked past. “I won’t mention it again.”

“Thank you.” He left her standing alone in the garage with the awful smell. *Smells.* Felicity wrinkled her nose at a number of things and headed back to the house. Diggle said they needed a mom. According to Annie, she already had one. But for real? Absolutely not. She was the loving type, but marriage? That scared her more than anything.

******

His back hurt. Not just hurt. Agonizing pain. Enough to make him groan. But he couldn’t. Without knowing where and who he was with, he couldn’t make a noise. Nor move, even if the headache made him want to bash his head with a hammer.

“Oh, good. You’re awake,”


“Yeah, you got lucky. I was already on my way when I saw you fall. Got you back to the med bay in record time. You’ve had a nice sleep.”

“How long?” And why couldn’t he remember how he got hurt?

“Two days or so. Everyone was starting to get worried.”

Yeah, right. Why would they worried? He scoffed, then groaned as the pain increased. “Don’t tell me I broke my back.”

“No. Just some pain. If you haven’t noticed. They took you off the meds so you’d wake up. Seems to have worked. To spare you the agony of talking and asking, it was a bodyguard who got you. Not shocking that he’d be scouring the area. What’s most shocking is how he snuck up on you. You’re usually the one who’d push him off the cliff, not the other way around.”

He got pushed off a cliff? While distracted? It sounded nothing like him. “Uh, yeah.”

“You got hit pretty hard in the head. The doctor said you might have a hard time remembering some things. But what I just told you sums up what happened. Something got you distracted, and the bodyguard snuck up on you, slammed the rifle into your head, and knocked you off the cliff. I can’t say everyone’s too happy about you getting dreamy. You’ll have to answer that one, brain damage or not.”

Oliver shut his eyes and moaned. What on earth could’ve gotten him distracted enough that he nearly got killed? “I can lay here for a while, right?”

“No, you can’t.” Anatoly walked into the room, his pistol twirling in his hand. “Get up.”

“Can we do this with me laying here?”

“Not if you and your family wants to live.” The gun pointed at his forehead. “Get. Up.”
He gritted his teeth and put his palms outside his body and pushed. Pain ripped through his body, igniting an agonized cry. Get up, Oliver. He had to ignore the lightning ripping down his back and keep himself and his family alive. If only he could fight away this problem like he did every other issue.

“Alright. I’m up.” His voice sounded like an old man’s. “What do you want?”

The blow came fast and hard. A healthy Oliver would’ve blocked the punch and taken the attacker to the ground, but he could barely move his body enough to keep from landing smack on his back on the tile. He groaned as Anatoly stepped over him, the gun aimed at his head again. “Get up.”

No need to waste energy by begging him to stop. Oliver forced himself up, and spread his feet wide. It hurt, but it would keep him upright. Unless the gun went off. If it did, he could only hope it would be over quick. For him and the rest of the Queens.

“Now that we’ve established who’s in charge,” the Russian man who had orchestrated Annie’s death moved closer to him. “Why don’t you explain to me why you were thrown off a cliff before you took care of your assignment?”

What a kind and caring man. “I don’t know.”

This time, Oliver kept himself upright when Anatoly reared back and landed a punch on his jaw.

“You’ll have to do better. We’ve already established what happens when you lie. So tell me. Before you get a bullet in your chest.”

“I was…” what was he thinking about? He couldn’t remember. There was a plausible choice. One that would hurt to say and could cause some problems. But he had to come up with something. Oliver swallowed his fear and mustered out, “It… it was the kids. I was, uh, thinking about them.”

“And your children affected your decision making? When was the last time that happened?”

Never, if he were being honest. But for the past few weeks he’d spent time with Ellie, nearly died and wondered if he would see his children again, and endured plenty of Felicity’s pestering about his relationship with them. There was no other option. Oliver gulped. “A lot of things have happened recently. My mind wandered.”

“Hmm. Well maybe that needs to be taken care of.”

“You stay away from my family, Anatoly. If anyone in my family so as gets a papercut, I will burn your entire world to ashes.” Oliver found a resolve in his busted body to threaten the man who could blow up the entire world.

“If you want me to stay away from your family, including the little blonde girl, then I would learn to keep your family out of your business. Or you will learn pain. Maybe not pain like this. But the pain of watching your family suffer. And then die. And never receive a proper burial. Because they will rot at your feet.” Anatoly smiled, the disgusting twirl of his lips that he’d done since he’d slammed Oliver to his knees when he tried to attack him after finding out who killed Annie. “You will see them all leave this earth. I will see to it. Get him out of here.”

Oliver jerked away from the security guard’s arms and limped towards the exit. He grabbed his gear from a shelf and opened his phone. It had been almost two weeks since he left. But he couldn’t go home yet. Glancing in a window, he could see the bruises on his cheek. Considering the beating he took, his face wasn’t too bad. A little make-up could cover it up, and he could go home and ask Barry for a fix-up.
The guards didn’t follow him into the shower area, so he stripped his clothes off and stepped into the steamy area. The heat eased the tension in his back and his head. He relaxed against the wall, breathing deeply. The terror gripped him again. Now he knew how Felicity felt that night in the closet. The panic weakened him, and he slid to the floor. Anatoly had never threatened his family like that. That man would kill his children in front of him, including everyone else he cared about. Because he’d dared to think about them during a mission.

They would die because of him. Just like Annie and their baby did. Because of him, they were dead. And if he kept thinking about them, Ellie, William, Harper, Piper, Clayton, and Annie would all die because of his insistence on keeping himself close to his family. Who cared what Felicity or Diggle said. He was keeping them alive by pushing them away. It wasn’t a life—he knew that—but it was a sacrifice he could make so others could live their own story.

Even if it meant never feeling love again.

*****

“Clayton?” Felicity knocked on the door, smiling when it swung open, thanks to his invention. “You still haven’t made me one of those. It’s almost a crime. I want one.”

“I charge money.”

“You’re making it sound like I don’t have any cash to spend.”

“I don’t want to make you broke or something.”

She laughed as she sat down. “Please make me one. But I didn’t come in here for that. I wanted to talk about last night. You had quite the nightmare, and I thought we should talk about that. It’ll help.” Even if she never talked about her own. “Clayton, honey, what was it about?”

“Daddy left us. It was more complicated than that but…” he shrugged his little shoulders. “Mommy died again in my dream. There was a lot of blood. I think that’s why I started crying. There was a funeral that was weird, and then Daddy said goodbye and he left. I had that part in your bed.” His eyes shone with tears as he scooted over to Felicity and leaned against her. “I’m too little to remember a lot of things. But I really miss Daddy. Will says that he doesn’t care anymore. Do you think that’s true?”

“I think your dad cares. Don’t let William tell you otherwise.”

“Why do you think so?”

“Because I know your dad a little bit. And I think he’s a good person. He really loves you. And maybe if you showed him that you loved him, he’d show that a little bit more.”

“How do I do that?”

“Maybe….” She picked up his gadget and twirled it her hands. “Maybe you should show him this.”

His eyes lit up. “You think he would like it? Daddy doesn’t know that I like inventing.”

Was this right? Felicity shook away the thought and plodded on. “Maybe by showing him this you will be saying that you want him to be here more. It’s worth a shot.”

He nodded, a smile on his face. “I like it.” He grabbed the invention from her hands and slid off the bed. “I’m gonna get it ready for when he comes home. Thank you, Felicity!”
“That was stupid.” William came out of the bathroom, his permanent scowl on his face. “You just led him into a trap that will lead to heartbreak.”

Felicity stood up. “Now you don’t know that, do you?”

“I do. Because I know Oliver. He’s a jerk. He only cares about himself. Don’t think otherwise. It’s won’t end well. For you or for my little brother.”

When he stormed past her, Felicity reached out and grabbed his arm, spinning him back towards her. She stepped up to him, thankful for her high heels. “Are you saying that because you know you’re right? Or because you don’t want to believe that your dad might actually be a good person down inside and you might be wrong? Because, William, some of your siblings don’t believe that. And I refuse to let you poison them with your words and your actions. To them, Oliver’s is still ‘Daddy’. Not some damaged guy who lost his wife. And—” Felicity! “And a lot more than that.”

“I don’t need a sermon, thank you very much.” He jerked his arm away and stormed off. Felicity clenched her fists, forcing herself to breathe. Everything seemed to be falling apart. Didn’t it feel that way? They all needed something that maybe she couldn’t give them. Maybe she was too damaged herself to repair this.

Glass shattered. She took off down the hallway even before a small voice howled, “Felicity!”

Two days later, Ellie yelled from the third floor, “Daddy’s home!” Felicity straightened out her dress as she stood and headed to the hallway with Annie and Piper, both more gleeful about the idea that they could take a break from school than Oliver actually being home. They’d been on a shopping trip earlier and didn’t get any school done, so she made them sit down for a couple hours after dinner. Oh, the joy. She peeked out one of the windows and watched Oliver hand the driver his bags and trudged to the doors. When did he ever have someone else carry his stuff?

“Hi Daddy!” Annie ran at him first to give him a hug, but he sidestepped her, patting her hair, no attempt at a smile.

“Not right now. I’m in a hurry.”

“But I want a hug.”

“Go hug Felicity.” He turned to the taxi driver who looked just as exasperated as Felicity felt. “Put the bags there.”

Felicity picked Annie up. The little one’s lips quivered. So did Felicity’s heart. Not from sadness. Absolute and utter anger. “Don’t worry. It’s okay.”

“Daddy, how was your trip?” Ellie came down the stairs, a smile on her face. Either she hadn’t seen the scene a few seconds prior or chose to ignore it. “You look a little tired.”

“It was fine. There’s a reason why we have money. As I was saying, I’m in a hurry.”

Her brow furrowed. “Oh.”

“Daddy, you’re back!” Clayton rushed down the stairs from the other direction, stopping right before Oliver, hands behind his back. Felicity made a step to him, prepared to call him off, but Annie chose that moment to break into tears. Oh, God. This was really going to happen. Just like William said. She shouldn’t have thought this would work. It wouldn’t. Of course it wouldn’t.
“Clayton, not—”

“It’ll only take a second.” He brought one hand up to push up his glasses. “It’s something I made. I thought you’d like it.” The other hand brought up the invention. “See? I made it! It opens doors. I can show you right now or later—”

“Clayton!” Oliver stopped him. And glared. He had the audacity to glare at his own son. “I don’t need to see it. It’s not necessary, because it’s a toy. I need to get to the office. I’m sure Felicity would like to see it.” With a sigh, he exited the room and headed up the stairs towards his office.

That. Was. It. That was it. There was no other explanation of what happened next. The fuse reached the bomb, and it went off. Nothing could stop it now. Every emotion that had been kept up inside that bomb blew up. Felicity transferred Annie to Ellie, who just stared straight ahead, unblinking. “Tell Raisa to put everyone to bed. Now, please.” When Ellie nodded, she climbed the steps and stormed to the office. What was she going to say? She didn’t know. But something needed to be said. A lot. And it didn’t just need to said. It needed to be yelled. So far she hadn’t been able to get anything across to Oliver.

Tonight she would.

_God help me._ She threw open the door and stormed in. “What was that?”

Oliver spun towards her in his chair. “I don’t need to see some stupid—”

“Stupid? You’re going to call that _stupid_? You know what, Oliver?” She slammed her hand down onto the desk. “I have sat by for three months and watched as you have threatened to take animals back, refused to let your children go trick or treating, lied about why they haven’t seen their aunt for five years, and ignored them. Been a complete and utter jerk. To your own children! To the ones you helped make and raise! And you know what? I have tried to do something about it. I have truly tried. But I’m done trying. I’m going to say what I have to say and then that’s it. I can’t handle it anymore. I can’t handle the heartbreak, the anger, the pain. I have had too much heartbreak in my own life to do this.”

“Why haven’t you left already? I gave you plenty of options.”

“Because of the kids. Do you even know their names, Oliver? Do you know anything about them?” She approached his chair, noting how he shifted away from her. She moved along with him. “Do you know them at all? How Ellie wishes for someone to nurture her like other girls her age were? How she gave away all her gowns to the place that Tommy’s mother founded? How about William? He wishes you died, Oliver. He wishes you were _dead_. Because you don’t pay attention to him. He’s fifteen! He needs someone in his life who’s not a driver or a house maid!”

“Don’t. Talk to me about my children.”

“Why not? Because it hurts?” Peace rushed over her. She could do this. By telling him all that she’d thought over the past few months. She knew Oliver well enough to know what would hurt him the most and make him think. And realize what he was doing. “It hurts doesn’t it, Oliver. I know it does. I can see it on your face. Harper misses you too. She longs to have someone to play with her. To teach her things that a woman couldn’t teach her. Piper and Annie now sleep in my bed because they have nightmares. Annie calls me ‘mommy’ now because apparently I act like one.”

Oliver’s eyes widened.

“Three nights ago Clayton had a nightmare. His mom died again. With lots of blood. And after the
funeral, you said goodbye to him and left. He woke up screaming, and said that he misses his
daddy.”

His shoulders collapsed back against the chair. He just stared at her, his eyes turning red.

“He went to sleep in my bed. Now I have three kids, plus one dog in my bed, plus one nanny who
has nightmares of her own! So Oliver. What do you even know about your kids?”

“Stop. Just stop.”

“No. There’s something about me that you don’t know. When I was seven, my father kissed me on
the forehead for the last time, and said that I would always be his greatest accomplishment. And I
never saw him again. My mother…my mother gave up after that. She worked in Vegas. Long nights,
tending drunk customers. We never had enough money. I never saw her. I never got a goodnight kiss
or a good morning hug.

“I lost both my parents that night. I did have my mom around. But I grew up without a dad in my
life. And it shows.”

“That’s enough, Felicity.” He pushed himself up, grimacing as he stood.

“I am not finished, Oliver.”

“Yes, you are. Get out.”

“No. No! I won’t.” She hit his chest with her finger. “I understand that sometimes, people grow up
without a mom. Or a dad. Or both. But those kids out there? They’re lucky to have one parent. And
it’s a dad. You know what they’re supposed to do? A father is supposed to nurture his children. He’s
supposed to guide them. He needs to teach them right and wrong, and how to be a woman who
carries herself with grace and a man who treats women right. That’s what you need to be doing. And
you’re doing none of it!”

“I said that’s enough!” Oliver pointed at the door, his other hand grabbing her arm and pushing her

All the steam left her. Felicity sagged forward and moved to the door. But just before she opened it,
something prodded her to say something else. Quietly. Gently. The last little bit that would bring
everything together. “Oliver, I know you told me that you can’t love. That you’re scared to. I know
you already lost your wife and a child. But shouldn’t that give you more of a reason to love them?
Life…is precious. And you should want so much more out of life than what you have right now.
You’re not living a life. You’re just…living.”

Oliver stared at the ground, a quiet moan escaping his lips.

“Your children love you. If they didn’t, they wouldn’t miss you so much. They wouldn’t run to give
you hugs when you get back. They certainly wouldn’t want to show you an invention that they
made. They love you so much, and they miss you. Just…just remember that.”

She shut the door and leaned against it, the tears rushing down her cheeks. From the other wing, she
could hear crying. She couldn’t do that right now. Nothing could bring her feet to move across the
halls to comfort the child.

She needed time alone. Away from everything. It would hurt everyone, but ultimately, it would give
her a peace that she so desperately needed. Felicity moved to her bedroom and packed several
dresses and the odds and ends. She found two pieces of paper and took them to the kitchen to find a
pen. With that, she scrawled out the first note, trying not to let too much anger seep in.

Oliver,

I’m sure you’ll understand why I have to leave. If not, well, just think back to our earlier conversation. The kids are yours, and that means that they’re your responsibility. They’ll need you. Don’t run away, because I will find you and I will make your life miserable. No credit cards would really suck for a guy like you. Just remember what I said. Live.

She signed her name and slid it into an envelope titled ‘Oliver’. Hopefully no one else would open it. Except Diggle. Then he’d know how angry she was. The next note was written with a smile on her face. She left that on top of the envelope, sealing it with a kiss.

Dear Whoever is reading this,

I’m sorry, but I have to leave for a little while. I promise I’ll be back. I do keep my promises, and I promise I will be back. But I need some time to myself. You know where to find me. If you forgot, just ask Barry Allen. I’m sure you girls would be happy to give him a call. Anyways, I love you all. Be good for your Daddy.

Love, Felicity.

Felicity picked a little car to drive—Oliver could spare a car for a while—but stopped just before the gates, glancing back at the house. It was better to do this. Give them all some time. Especially Oliver. She couldn’t be around him right now. He was a jerk, and she was definitely mad at him. But she needed to do something for herself for once. They could all heal together, but she needed a head start. Maybe go visit her mother. Barry would like a call. Do something other than be a nanny. Just for a little while. Two weeks. Tops.

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Do you even know your own children? Oliver didn’t. He didn’t. Not since his wife died. Not since he thought that the very being of his soul had been ripped out and buried along with Annie and their baby no one would ever know about. He gave up. Felicity was right. He became the man who terrorized Felicity’s dreams at night. The one his father had been. The one Tommy complained about since they were young. Years ago, Oliver made a promise when he held his first daughter. Never would he leave her, and never would he become like a rich father whose act of love was giving money.

And that’s who’d he become.

He didn’t know his kids. He didn’t know that they had nightmares. That they slept in Felicity’s bed. That Harper didn’t always like doing things that girls were supposed to do. That Annie called Felicity ‘mommy’.

That’s what did it.

Letting go of the pride that he still hung onto so tightly, Oliver sank to the floor. And cried.

Chapter End Notes

Well. It happened. I cried a little bit but apparently that's good when you're writing. :P
This is kind of the end of the first ‘chapter’. Next week you'll see a very different Oliver, and I think everyone will like it, especially if they've read up to this, because we all know how much he’s struggled with the kids.

About Anatoly/Bratva. I was HOPING that the big bad guy in Russia would be revealed in the show early so I could put him in here. But that didn't work out. So Anatoly it is, even though he's not *too* bad in the show. The struggle of fanfic writing. Anyways, hope you enjoy the chapter! Let me know what you think! :)
He didn’t know how long he sat there. It took a long time for the sobs to subside, and even longer for him to push himself up and drop to the chair. He’d ruined his life. And not accidentally. He’d done it with full knowledge of what was happening. Of course he’d try to convince himself that he pushed his children away to protect them. The truth? He wanted to keep himself safe. And how had that turned out?

Oliver let out a bitter laugh.

Felicity was right.

He was selfish.

*Life is precious.* Felicity’s words rang in his head. He didn’t know about all the pain her father caused her. The nightmares she experienced made sense now. The man haunted her. Just like he haunted Clayton’s dreams at night. The thought of his son brought a new wave of guilt into his soul.

It ripped against his heart, threatening to destroy him. Thankfully Oliver had already destroyed himself.

He told Clayton that he didn’t want to see his invention. His brain couldn’t stop replaying the boy’s face as he yelled at him. Oliver squeezed his eyes shut. What had he done? Why did he let himself fall so far off the cliff? Literally and figuratively. There was no forgiveness for it. No use trying to convince William to love him again. His son was right. If Annie lived and he died, they would’ve carried on. Become a better family. She wouldn’t have let them sink to the deepest ocean floor and drown. Not Annie. Of the two of them, she could take a beating and get up quicker than he could. Ironic because only one of them went out at night with a Halloween costume to beat up street thugs.

He had to try to make this right. One way or another.

Oliver pushed himself up and opened the door, glancing around for a certain blonde nanny. Somehow he wished that she’d stuck around, waiting for him to come out. Which was a stupid assumption. He’d been a jerk. His little hope to not make her cry again had fallen down the drain.

He turned left and headed to the kids’ bedrooms, stopping at the first closed door. Which room did they sleep in? Felicity owned one of them, but he couldn’t remember which one. He couldn’t even remember which room his children slept in. He glanced at the doors, leaning against the first one. A loud crash confirmed which one he needed to go into. He raised his hand to knock, but lowered his arm. What was he doing? Did he think he could go in there and apologize and make anything right? They wouldn’t forgive him. Even Clayton. This was stupid. He needed to get out—

*Life…is precious.* Her face drifted through his mind. Those tear-filled eyes as they somehow channeled a sort of forgiveness to whisper those words. The hair—Oliver knocked on the door and closed his eyes, waiting for a spear or a bullet to come flying through. No matter they didn’t know who stood at the door.

“Come on in. You better have brought ice cream.”

He could do this. Oliver turned the knob and opened the door. The boys sat on the ground with a bowl of popcorn between them. William dropped his popcorn on the ground, his mouth sagging
open. Clayton finished stuffing his popcorn into his mouth before he scooted up to the bed, fiddling with his hands.

“Daddy.” He looked up for a second and then dropped his gaze again.

“Hi.” Oliver shut the door and leaned against it. He took a deep breath and stood up. “Clayton, can I, uh…” he licked his lips and mustered up a smile. “I’d like to see your invention now.”

He shook his head. “No, Daddy. It’s okay. You don’t need to see it. It’s just something I made a while ago and it doesn’t matter now. Don’t feel bad; it doesn’t matter too much.”

“No, no. It matters to me.” He picked his way through the pile of mess and sat down on the bed, ignoring William’s look of fire. Clayton scooted further away, his finger twitches increasing.

“Please, Clayton. I-I want to see it. Please.”

He looked up at him then, his eyes filling with tears. They looked so much like Annie’s, including the glasses. Clayton shook his head. “Daddy, it’s fine.”

“Son…” Oliver stared up at the ceiling. What was he supposed to do? A long time ago he knew how to deal with this. He could deal with anything. Pre-teen girl panics about boys, little ones screaming for hours, boys hurling mashed potatoes over the banister at parties. All of that he could deal with, but now? He didn’t know what to do except whisper, “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Clayton.”

“You said it’s stupid.”

“I know I did. And I was wrong. I don’t know what to say. But I’m sorry. Can you…can you please show me your invention?”

“Okay. It’s a little hard to explain and I’m not all done with it.” He reached underneath the bed and pulled out an intricately put together object that Oliver could only marvel at.

“D-Does it have a name?”

“I’ve never decided on one. It doesn’t need a name. Just watch what it does. William, can you open the door just a crack?” When he did, Clayton fired the invention at the door. Oliver watched in awe as his son gave him a run-through of a device he could only dream of making. “That’s how it works. Like I said, it’s not all done yet. I haven’t worked on it for a while.”

Oliver laughed, shaking his head in disbelief. “Clayton, I-I…can I see it? Or, hold it?” He took the device from him, running his hand over the design. He’d used simple things to make this thing. Even with the brain he had that had managed to run a multi-billion-dollar company for fifteen years, he couldn’t even figure out how Clayton could have made it. “Where’d you learn how to do this?”

“YouTube. And my head. I used to do this stuff with Mama. I have a whole box full of stuff. Remember that?”

“I do.” He’d just tried to forget it. “I didn’t know you liked this kind of stuff.”

“Felicity and I have nerd time in the kitchen, and we work on stuff like this. Or sometimes we just, uh, ‘geek out’, as she says.”

William scoffed and left the room, the door slamming behind him. Oliver closed his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath. He needed to talk to him, but right now, he needed to focus on Clayton. He set the device down. “I can’t say I can join the nerd group. I’m not a nerd.”
“Felicity said we can’t talk about sports, so you can’t join. Sorry, Daddy.” His laugh was contagious. “Maybe you should start your own group for fanatics like you. At least you used to like sports.” He trailed off and began fiddling with his invention again. Oliver didn’t know what to say. Was he supposed to apologize again? Leave? Tell him how cool the invention is? He needed help. From Felicity.

He needed to apologize to her. On his knees. With flowers. Dear God. He’d been a jerk. Worse than one. He’d channeled his inner Bratva with her, telling her to shut up, and ultimately kicking her out. Because it hurt. He wanted to bury himself in the lair and never resurface. But he needed to do this. Not for him; for his kids. Because Felicity was right about another thing:

They needed their father too.

“Hey, Daddy?”

“Yeah?”

“I forgive you.” Before he could react, Clayton had his arms around his neck. Hugging him. The small, innocent body against his tired, damaged one released some of the agony in his soul. It would never leave him; the guilt, the murder, the secrets. But at least he could give himself a little bit of peace. For a moment.

“We all have bad days, and Felicity says that you’re a good person, and I believe her. She’s usually right. Always right, actually. So I forgive you.”

“Thank you, Clayton.” Oliver pulled away and slid off the bed. Enough with the emotions for five seconds. “I’m assuming you need to go to sleep.”

“I should. Can you send Felicity in here? She gets the nightmares away for me.”

“And, uh, how does she do that?”

“She uses her sword to scare them all away.”

The nerf sword that she brandished at him when he appeared in her room. A sly smile crept across his face at the image he’d created in his mind. Felicity Smoak, that tousled ponytail from a day of taking care of the Queen children, swinging the plastic sword around to ‘scare’ away the dreams. She truly came from heaven, didn’t she? “I will send her up here when I find her. Try to sleep until she does.” He winked at his son and slipped out, knocking into William as he shut the door. Had he been listening? “Sorry.”

“So now you’re trying to apologize. Nice, Dad. Nice.”

“I did apologize. Do you have a problem with that?”

“We both know you just did it because Felicity took you to the woodshed. Rightfully so.”

“She was right. So I decided to apologize. And William,” his body felt robotic as his son jerked away from him, glaring. “I owe you an apology.”

“Yeah, well, to what are you referring to? You abandoning us after Mom died? Or kicking Aunt Thea out? Or are you talking about tonight? When you told Clayton that his invention was stupid and you had no time? Because you should get a chair and bring some coffee because it’s gonna take you a while.”
“William—”

“Don’t touch me.” He jerked away from Oliver’s reach. “You haven’t been my dad for five years, and you have no right to attempt to be him now. I don’t know what Felicity told you, but stay away from me.” He left Oliver standing alone in the hallway. His body reacted, by moving towards the stairwell, but his heart didn’t. It just stood still, refusing to respond. Someday it would just stop beating all together. Maybe not literally. But the part that cared and loved would stop because of the heartbreak. And it would never start up again.

He walked into the kitchen, holding back a groan when only Diggle sat at the counter, sipping coffee. Of course he would’ve heard what happened; might’ve even seen it. His friend glanced at him and set down his cup, his expression darkening. Oliver needed to say something before this turned disastrous and Diggle said everything that he’d been holding back for years. “John, I—”

“Save it, Oliver.”

“No, it’s…I’m sorry.” He shrugged, unable to hide the defeat. “For everything.”

“I can think of several other people who deserve that apology before me.”

“I, uh, talked to William and Clayton.”

“How’d that go?”

“Guess.” He walked to the counter and leaned against. That took some pressure off his back. “I made a mess. Of everything. And I don’t know what to do anymore. For as much as I’ve tried to act like it, I’m completely lost. William hates me, and I’m sure most of the other kids do too. You hate me, and Felicity…she has to.”

“You’re talking to me like I’m an expert in this area. I don’t know any more than you do.”

“But you’re my friend.” He raised his head, but couldn’t muster a smile. Instead, a little whine—moan—came out. “At least you used to be. Before…before everything happened.” When Diggle didn’t respond right away, Oliver cleared his throat. “Where’s Felicity?”

“She left.”

“What do you mean she left?”

“I found these notes on the counter when I came down here. One’s addressed to whoever, but the other is to you.”

The first note to the kids gave him all he needed to know. As he read the scribbled paragraphs addressed to him, he had the urge to cry. She needed time away; he understood that. But leaving him alone? With no knowledge of what to do? What the kids liked? How to…school them? “Dear God.” The note fluttered to the ground as Oliver sank to the dining room table chair and dropped his head into his hands. Two weeks. Without the woman who could control his children. Without…Felicity.

“Oliver, I’ve gotten to know this girl, and I have a feeling she’s giving you a chance to change. She’s mad, but she’s a rational thinker. Get to know your children, man.”

“I don’t think I know how.”

“Yes, you do. I remember how you were six years ago. Your kids loved you. They still do, but back then they loved being around you. Just become the man that Annie would be proud of. He sighed.
“Oliver, you are not alone in this house, and that means you won’t have to do this by yourself. But that does mean that you are responsible for getting back on the right track with your life and with the kids. That’s not my responsibility. Goodnight.” He clapped Oliver on the shoulder and left the room.

Oliver gripped the edge of the chair to pull himself up, but his back gave out, sending rockets of pain through his body. Meaning he would stay here for the time being until the pulses stopped. He slumped toward, laying his head on the table. Eventually the pain would decrease. Right now it didn’t matter. The exhaustion took over, and so did the numbness. Tomorrow he could figure everything out. Or maybe one thing. It would be progress, no matter what. Right now just closing his eyes and letting his imagination take the reins would be okay. If only—

“Daddy?”

Someone tapped his shoulder.

“Hey, Daddy, are you dead? Fluffy’s worried.” To signal that, a dog yipped close to his ear. Oliver jerked up, nearly smashing Annie in the face as he did so. She jumped back, a quizzical look on her face. Fluffy barked twice, and then wiggled out of her arms. “Uh, why are sleeping in the kitchen? What happened to your bed?”

“I guess I fell asleep.” He squinted at the clock. Five. He shifted his gaze to Annie, who wore her princess nightgown he vaguely remembered buying her last year for her birthday. “What are you doing up so early?”

“I’m used to Felicity sleeping with me, and she makes me stay in bed until seven. But she didn’t come into bed last night and I thought something bad happened to her again. Is she okay?” Her lower lip stuck out in a pout. “I want Felicity.”

“She’s okay. She’s just not here right now.”

“Where is she?”

“She decided to, uh,” this needed to be explained at the table with the rest of the kids. “Can you wait until breakfast? I’ll tell everyone where she is then. Okay?”

“But she’s okay.”

“Yes.”

“I can wait until breakfast. I gotta go take Fluffy outside. She already peed in the shower, but I think she has to take a number two.” Her voice lowered to a whisper. “She doesn’t like it when people announce her business.”

Oliver chuckled. Here came an opportunity to take a step in the right direction. “Want me to come with?”

“You can if you want, but I do this a lot. It’s technically Piper’s dog but I take Fluffy out and she does my chores.” She tugged on Fluffy’s leash. “I got this in the bag.”

Felicity’s way of speaking rubbed off on at least one child. Oliver pushed himself out of the chair, breathing easy that his back didn’t fire up again. With two quick strides, he caught up to his littlest. “I’ll come with. I don’t have anything to do.”
“You don’t? Cuz yesterday you said you were in a hurry.”

“I cleared up my schedule.”

“Good.” She let Fluffy off her leash and gave her a push with her foot. “Go poop, honey.”

He laughed. Annie was right. The puppy ran off into the bushes with her tail between her legs.

“Does the cat get along with her?”

“Piggy? They don’t like each other.”

“Why not?”

“Because they’re, uh…adversaries.”

“How do you know what that means?”

“Felicity taught me.” She shrugged. “She better be back today for school. She was gonna read to me.”

He refused to let that bit of knowledge deepen his fear of what was to come during these two weeks. That could come in a few hours after breakfast. “We’ll figure it out.”

It was eight-thirty before the whole crew came downstairs. Raisa didn’t seem shocked, as she didn’t start preparing breakfast until eight. Oliver chugged down three cups of coffee before the beloved house maid jerked the cup away from him.

“Mr. Oliver. You are going to get yourself drunk on caffeine. I don’t know where you read that it’s a good thing for nerves, but I can tell you that it’s not. It might even make them worse. And yes, John told me.”

That explained it. Oliver took the cup of water she offered him, nodding his thanks. “It’d help to have Felicity here.”

“And thanks to you, we don’t. So man up and deal with the problems you created. You can also cook yourself your own breakfast if you want food.” She finished the harsh words by dumping the pot of coffee down the drain. Oliver worked the shocked expression off his face. Raisa never gave him lectures. She glared at him, but she never did…that. “Go!”

“Okay, okay.” Oliver slid off the chair and pushed open the swinging door that led to the formal dining room. For some reason they always ate in here. Another thing that changed. A long time ago, breakfast would be held around the counter in the kitchen, but now, it happened here. They all looked up when he entered. Annie and Clayton smiled. Fluffy, now on a leash next to Piper, yipped. At least he found favor with a few of them.

“Where’s Felicity?” Harper clipped the words, but her eyes showed worry. “We haven’t seen her since last night when…where is she?”

“That’s what I was going to talk to you about.”

“Don’t tell me you fired her.” William glared at him. “Because if you did—”

“I would never fire her. Not after all she’s done. She, uh, decided to take some time off.” The groans were loud and many at that sentence. Oliver put his hands on one of the chairs and leaned against it. “She left a note, actually.” He reached into his pocket and pulled it out, and read it to them. He left
out the part where she told them to be good for him. That would just create more controversy.

“‘Love, Felicity’.”

“What are we supposed to do now? We’re all gonna die without her for two weeks,” Harper bemoaned, stirring her food around on her plate, her expression downcast. “She gets us up on time, and makes sure we’re all wearing clothes and not our pajamas, and she helps us with school cuz—”

“Cuz Diggle isn’t very good at math.” Piper added.

Yeah, well, neither was he. Oliver wanted to zone out and not listen to everything that Felicity did for them. How could she possibly think he could do this? Maybe if he put his vigilante suit on he’d feel more confident.

“And she can make macaroni really good!” Annie yelled from her spot at the table. Then her expression sobered, and her eyes teared. “What did we do wrong?”

This was getting out of hand. Oliver put all his weight on the chair and stared at the ground, trying to gather some words of wisdom from the carpet. “Okay, listen, kids.” He scooted the chair away from the table and took a seat, careful not to drop down hard. No one needed to see him start crying over an injury. Though crying would probably happen at some point today. During math, most likely. “I know I haven’t the best father. I’ve let my grief take over and that means I’ve ignored you all for five years. I’m sorry for that. More…” No, no. No getting emotional until he had to explain algebraic functions to a thirteen-year-old. “More than you’ll ever know.” He snuck a glance at Ellie, who gave him an encouraging nod. Not a smile, but it was all he needed. “Felicity left because she needed a break. Not from you, but from me. We, uh, wasn’t very nice to her last night.” In his defense, she wasn’t either. “But while she’s gone, I can help. There hasn’t been a day since every one of you was born that I haven’t cherished having you as my children. I just hope that I can show you how much I cherish you, and not just by giving you money.

“I know most of you hate me. Understandably so. And I’m not asking anyone to forgive me right now. Just…just give me a chance, okay?”

Ellie gave him a small smile. “I’m willing to take that chance.”

Clayton gave Oliver a thumbs-up, while Piper and Annie responded with, “Fluffy says yes so we say yes.”

“Me too.” Harper nodded, her lips curling slightly. “That does mean you have to help me with math. I’m awful at math.”

Oliver glanced up at the ceiling, imaging his wife looking down from her spot in Heaven, finally proud of him. Thank you, Felicity. He smiled at Harper. “Unfortunately you take after your father. Straight Ds in high school.”

Alarm rose in her expression. “Are you gonna be able to help me?”

“I did learn all the ways to figure out a problem.”

“I don’t support cheating.”

“Oh, it’s hardly cheating. Just…yeah, it’s cheating.”

“How on earth do you run a multi-billion-dollar company?”

“With a calculator.”
Harper’s eyebrows raised, and then she laughed. Ellie did too. Oliver smiled. His heart felt light again, forgetting about the threats on his family—especially the recent one—and just living.

The kids had most of their food eaten, meaning they would be ready to move onto…what? “What comes after breakfast?”

“We eat cand—”

Ellie put her hand on Piper’s shoulder, sending her a warning glance. “William and I have our own stuff, and Harper and Clayton can do most of their stuff except for math and English but Piper and Annie need help.”

Okay. He could do this. “Alright. Where do you two do school?”

“Up in our schoolroom.”

They had a schoolroom? “Uh, okay.”

Annie dropped her fork and jumped up. “I’m ready! C’mon, Daddy. Let’s go. There’s so much to do today, including reading. I love reading. And Felicity said we get to work on cursive!”

Cursive? Oliver pushed himself up, hiding the discomfort. When did a six-year-old learn cursive? Felicity better have a book upstairs or something for him to use to teach his daughter. He only used cursive when signing his name. It could be called a dead language. Worthless. “What else do we have to do today?”

“We do need to uh, order our costumes.”

“For what?”

Ellie crossed her arms. Oh, no, he knew that move. He owned that one. “Felicity said we could go trick or treating. Y’know, as in, Halloween. That’s less than two weeks away and we need to either buy or order costumes so that they’re here by the thirty-first.”

“Hmm. I see.”

“You can’t say no, because Felicity said yes.” His oldest daughter raised her chin.

“Who said I was going to say no?”

“You did. Your face did, anyways.”

The urge to prove Ellie wrong got the better of him. “Decide amongst yourselves whether you want outfits ordered or bought at a store today. Come on, you two.” He cast a smirk over his shoulder as the three, plus Fluffy, ascended the stairs to the schoolroom. They thought he would say no. He should’ve; trick or treating was something he hated; but they would be going out of spite. “What do you normally start with?”

“Felicity reads to us.”

Oh. Oliver followed them into the room, raising his eyebrows at the sight. They—Felicity most likely—had transformed an old guestroom into a room with desks and a whiteboard. Complete with a world map that spanned half of a wall. “You weren’t kidding when you said it’s a schoolroom.” He ran his hand along the many books on the shelves. “Who did this?”

“Felicity and Diggle. Barry brought a whole bunch of science books and we found the rest at garage
sales.”

He stopped moving. His eyes searched Piper’s face for teasing. “You, uh…went to garage sales?”

“I bought this outfit at an old lady’s house a couple weeks ago. For five bucks. Can you believe that? Felicity said it was a bargain, so we got it.”

They. Bought. Clothes. At a garage sale. Oliver gulped down the rage that threatened to boil over. The person who needed a yelling wasn’t here. Fortunately for her. And unfortunately for him. The girls were staring at him, curious. He cleared his throat and moved to the couch. People read to kids on the couch, right? “Okay. What book are you reading right now?”


His heart stopped beating. It was the book—books—that his mom read to him every night for years. Of all the books for them to be reading right now, it had to be this one. Of course it was. Felicity probably talked to Thea and found out what book would cause him the most agony.

“Daddy? Are you okay? You look a little white.”

“I-I’m okay, Piper. Is…Is there any other books to read?”

“Don’t you like Laura and Mary?” Annie put her chin on his shoulder and looked up at him with those irresistible puppy eyes. “What about Ma and Pa?”

“I-I like them.” He used to love them.

“Then how come you asked if we had something else to read?”

“Because.”

“Felicity says that’s not an answer.”

When did Annie get so smarty? Oliver sighed. If he wanted to do this, he had to go about at one hundred percent. No lies. At least ones that wouldn’t hurt everyone. “My mom used to read them to me. It was happy back then, but sometimes it brings back bad memories when I think about the good times I had with her.”

“Because she died.” Annie scooted even closer to him. “And that makes you sad.”

He looked down at his daughter, his arm curling around her. An old habit had come back to life. “Yeah.”

“Well,” on the other side, Piper smiled. “Maybe if you read it to us, you’ll make happy memories and they’ll knock out the bad ones.”

“You’re right.” They were; he needed to move on from one thing in his past. He tapped Annie on the arm. “Go grab the book.”

She whizzed to the shelves, yanked the book out, and leapt back to the couch, landing next to Oliver. With a dramatic flair she handed him the book. “Now read. And Jack better be in there. Right away.”

He would make Diggle read the part in the fourth book when Jack died. Oliver flipped to the first chapter and cleared his throat. Annie snuggled up against him as he began. “’A long time ago, when all grandfathers and grandmothers of today were little boys and little girls…’”
Annie got to hear about Jack. And more Jack. They read about building the cabin, and Mr. Edwards. Oliver just smiled when Annie climbed onto his lap and cuddled against him. Piper stretched out on the couch, putting her feet on her sister’s legs, and pulled Fluffy onto his stomach. Oliver propped his feet on the coffee table. And continued to read.

“Girls? Mr. Oliver?”

He looked up at Raisa, standing above them with a concerned look on her face. “What’s wrong?” His voice rasped.

“I was getting worried about you. Everyone else has eaten and you’re still up here. Reading, I see. Have you done anything else?”

“Uh, no. We have not.” Come to think of it, what time was it? Did she mention eating? He glanced up at the clock, but all the reading had done his eyes some harm. They weren’t used to doing this. “What time is it?”

“Two.”

“Two?” He looked down at the book and winced. They were three quarters of the way through it already. “Oops.”

She smiled. “I’m happy to know that you’re enjoying yourselves. If you’d like lunch, it’s downstairs.”

“Do I need to make my own food?”

“Not anymore.”

So that’s how it worked. When she left the room, he tapped Annie on the head. “Hey, are you two hungry?”

“We can eat after we finish the book.”

“What about the rest of school?”

“Daddy?” A distressed sound came from the hallway. Harper ran into the room, holding a gigantic pile of books. She dropped them on the table with a ‘thud’. “I need help. I know you’re reading, but Diggle’s busy, and the housemaids quit a couple weeks ago because I dropped a snake down one of their shirts and a baby mouse down the other person’s dress. It was a cute one, and the lady smooshed it with her heel.”

Did Harper often do that? No wonder no other nannies stayed. It also explained a lot about his daughter. Oliver looked at the two little ones who gave him the ultimate puppy eyes. “I did read to you for six hours, so don’t look at me like that.”

“Is that why you sound like an old guy?”

“Not helping your situation, Harper.” He turned back to the girls. “How about we read before bed? Um, we can do the other stuff when we’re done with math.”

“Hey, Daddy?” Clayton came in the room, carrying a computer. “Can you explain this to me real quick? It won’t take long. It’s just a science thing about the heart. I can’t really figure out where the
blood comes in and goes out.”

“Isn’t there a manual for that?”

“It’s a test. I’m not supposed to use anything for it.”

“Buuuuut using me is not cheating.”

“Correct.”

Why did he have a feeling that he was being played? Oliver glanced at Harper, who shrugged, but her titter gave her away. He needed to remind himself to breathe. “If it’s a test, then do it on your own, and if you get it wrong, then we can look at it later.” That’s how it worked, right? How did Felicity do this by herself every day? “Sound good?”

“Uh, huh.” When he left, Harper giggled. “You’re harder to pull on than we thought.”

“I’m your dad. I know a few things.”

The little girls scurried out of the room with the dog and a few books between them. Harper stared at the table, her fingers clicking on the chair. “It doesn’t always seem like that. I don’t hate you like William does. I’d never do that. But I remember how it was a long time ago.” She raised her head, and in that moment, Oliver could only see his little sister. Not just the hair. But the eyes, and the movements. Thea—not his daughter—stared up at him, saying that she didn’t hate him. “You weren’t the only one who changed. We all did, and some of us not for the better. But I miss you. You, uh…” she licked her lips and rubbed her eyes. She didn’t do this very often, did she? Open up to someone like this. Oliver pushed his hand forward, giving the option to take it. She stayed frozen in her spot. “I remember when you’d take Piper and me to the park and have Diggle lock it down so no one could hurt us.

“And then you’d push us for hours. I loved that. And the trips to the amusement park. That was so much fun. We’d come home and Mom would have dinner on the table and…” a tear dripped down her cheek. “And we were all happy.”

“I miss her too.”

“That’s the thing, Daddy.” Harper leaned forward, the intensity in her eyes beginning to glow. “The more that time goes by, I don’t miss her. As much. The only thing that makes me sad is when I see that we’re all still sad. We deserve to be happy. Mama would’ve wanted that. If you died tomorrow, you would want us to be happy, right?”

The painful truth in her words was starting to hit him. Oliver nodded.

“That’s what Mama wants. Instead of being sad, we need to be thankful that we’re all here. And be happy. Now.” She clapped her hands. “Time for math. Ma—Felicity usually reads the lesson and then we go through the problems together.”

He didn’t know what to process first. The words of wisdom that came from this thirteen-year-old’s mouth, the fact that she could change topics so quickly, or that she started out with ‘Mama’ when talking about Felicity. Oliver blinked back the tears that threatened to be shed and leaned in closer to view the math book. Pre-Algebra. He got through algebra 1 and 2 in high school, and another time in college. Reading a few lessons of this should be easy.
“How did today go?” Diggle chuckled as Oliver drained the whole cup of coffee in record time. No matter that it scalded his tongue and throat. He needed it. Oliver set the mug down and let out a load groan. That would give his friend all he needed to know. But he’d still complain about it. Rant, more like.

“How have you ever tried to figure out pre-algebra? It’s awful. Why do schools require kids to learn that stuff? It’s harder than algebra. I’m not kidding, John. Stop laughing.” Oliver glared at him. “This isn’t funny. You know it’s bad when Harper starts crying. If that cat hadn’t taken that moment to throw up on the carpet, I would’ve started crying too. Why couldn’t I have been gifted with the skill of doing numbers? Or…” he dropped his head back to let out another groan. “Letters. It’s all letters. How are you supposed to do math when it’s all letters?”

“I think that’s the point, Oliver.”

“It’s stupid.”

“Besides math, how’d it go?”

“Well, we read an entire Laura Ingalls book so…” he shrugged. “I don’t know. I have no idea how life normally functions around here. Speaking of, I need to get to the office. I have two weeks of work to catch up on, and Jerry is going to kill me at some point. Or maybe hire a new CEO. Either way, I need to go.”

“I don’t think you should.”

“Why not? If I get replaced, you’re gonna be out of a job.”

“I have a savings account like a normal person.”

Oliver laughed.

“I’m talking about the kids. We got lucky with no nightmares last night, but something might happen tonight. You should be here if it does.”

“I don’t…” the helpless look came back. “I don’t know how to deal with that.”

“You and Felicity have a good nightmare formula going.” He tried to hide his smile, but failed. Oliver caught on, squinting at him.

“Where did you hear that?”

“Just gossip. Goodnight, Oliver.” Diggle clapped him on the shoulder and headed out of the kitchen. “You’ll hear them if they wake up.”

“Hey. Wait…Fine.” Oliver rolled his eyes. Let Diggle get his rest. Because he would be asking him about the ‘gossip’ comment. How else did he know about the nightmare thing? Unless he had an audio recorder in every room. It wouldn’t shock him.

He did need to stay here. The office work could be dealt with tomorrow. Math. On the weekend then. They also needed to go shopping for costumes, as he’d been told at the dinner table. And do Piper and Annie’s other school. They would be pushing for the next book tomorrow, and he’d have to stand firm and say no. Learning cursive came first. Along with the million other things that needed to be taught. Oh, and he and Harper needed to figure that math problem out. Without tears.

What he now needed to do was stop thinking about everything he needed to do before he started
crying. Oliver headed up to his bedroom. What awaited him brought a smile to his face. For some reason, two nights ago it wouldn’t’ve. But tonight it did. “Hey Annie.”

“Hi.” She stayed put on his bed. “I’m used to sleeping with Felicity, and since she’s not here, I thought I’d sleep with you. I promise I’m quiet and I don’t snore.”

“That’s fine. I’ll be there in a minute.” So apparently he would be at least attempting to fall asleep. That could either go well or very wrong. Oliver brushed his teeth and switched into sweatpants and t-shirt—the bandages and bruises were not to be seen by anyone—before he went back into the bedroom. Annie lay underneath the comforter, the blankets pulled up to her chin. She smiled and patted the spot next to her. He froze. Annie lay on the right side of the bed, leaving him the left side. His wife’s side. No one ever touched that part of the bed, except for his hand.

“What’s wrong?”

Why were all of his children so perceptive? It’d do them some good to not notice every little thing that made him uncomfortable. Oliver took a deep breath and slid into bed, fighting away the demons that rushed at him as soon as his relaxed against the mattress. “I’m fine.” Stop it. It was a bed. It didn’t matter. Except for him, because he held onto things for too long. Things hurt now because he couldn’t let go.

“Hey, Annie?”

She propped herself up on one elbow. “Yeah?”

“You should know that sometimes I have nightmares.”

“That’s okay. Sometimes I have nightmares too. We all have scary dreams sometimes. Maybe if I sleep with you, you won’t have them. Felicity said she doesn’t have nightmares when I cuddle her so…” Before he could resist, she slung her feet over his legs and scooted herself right next to him. She let out a sigh and closed her eyes. “Goodnight. I love you.”

“Sleep tight.” He shifted his body in an attempt to unstick himself from Annie, but she moved right along with him. He wasn’t used to sleeping with anyone, especially a little body who kept getting closer to him. In five minutes, she rolled to her stomach and slapped her arm around his chest. He was stuck now. Any little movement brought Annie with him. He didn’t hear the door creak open, but felt the bed shift. Piper climbed in next to Annie.


“Piper—”

“I hope you don’t mind. Fluffy doesn’t like sleeping alone. Don’t worry. She’s good.”

Ah, yes. He had nothing to fear. What a day. But somehow it’d been a fun day, despite the terror that he still felt. Felicity would get a million-dollar check when she got back. Other nannies deserved an apology, and not just from the children on their behavior. They didn’t deserve any extra money though, because none of them had the nerve to pull the kids out of school and teach them themselves. It took a special kind of stupid to do that.

A stupid that he really enjoyed.
“You are not wearing that.”

“Why not? It’s cute.”

“My seventeen-year-old daughter will not be seen wearing anything like that until she’s…thirty. Forty, preferably.”

Ellie rolled her eyes and planted her hands on her whatever that leather suit costume thingy was. It hurt him to just look at it. He should shove her right back into the changing room and demand that she change into something less skin-tight. “I’m almost an adult. I can make my own decisions on what I wear to Halloween.”

“Well, I’m your father. I have the last say in these type of things. Therefore,” Oliver pointed to the changing room. “You’re not wearing it.”

“Have you even seen the outfits that she normally wears?” William sat slumped on one of the chairs, having picked out his costume five minutes after they entered the store. “This isn’t even half as inappropriate as what she normally wears.”

“I do not!”

“What about those leather pants you wear when he’s not home? With the holes?”

“Whaaaat?”

“Calm down, Dad.” Ellie glared at William and then smiled at Oliver. Too sweetly. “They’re not leather. They’re shiny, and they only have holes in the knees. And I don’t wear them very often. So stop looking like I just said that I parade around town without any clothes on. Maybe by closing your mouth. We’re trying to be inconspicuous. I’m wearing this. End of discussion.”

Well, at least they cleared up who was in charge. Oliver let out a groan. He should’ve drank more coffee. And brought more painkillers. It’d been only forty-five minutes since they got to the store, but his back needed a break. Or drugs. He glanced at William, who continued his grumping in the corner with his phone. Who could he possibly be texting? “Hey, buddy, can I ask you a question?”

“You’re gonna ask it anyways so might as well say yes.”

“Do you have a lot of friends?”

William lowered the phone down, his brows furrowing. “Do I look like someone who has a lot of friends?”

“I was just wondering. How am I supposed to know anything if I don’t ask?”

“I’d prefer it if you didn’t. Now if you excuse me, I need to get back to my phone. And actually, I do have one friend. Her name is Rachel. Felicity knows about her. If you want any information, talk to her.” His head snapped up. “Oh right! You trashed that relationship with her. So you’re not getting anything about Rachel and you’re especially not getting anything about me.” He stormed past him, casting an ugly look back as he exited the changing area. “I’ll be looking around.”

Oliver fell back against the chair, stifling a groan when pain ripped down his back. What a life he’d created for himself. Not just physically. Emotionally too. He deserved this; William’s hate. He just wished it didn’t hurt so much.

They made it home for dinner, miraculously. After breaking up a would-be fist fight between Harper
and William about who-knows-what, and finishing a spelling lesson with Clayton that he insisted that he couldn’t do by himself, Oliver tucked the little girls into his bed. Fluffy included. “You two gonna be okay in here for a little bit?”

“What do you have to do, Daddy?” Annie batted her eyelashes at him. Oh, no. “Can’t you read to us a little bit?”

“We’re already halfway through the next book. So no. You can talk for a little bit but when I come in here I expect you to be asleep. Is that understood?”


Say it, Oliver. Everything clammed up. The idea of saying those three little words caused every bad memory to come rushing back. That last night with his mom, when he kissed her on the cheek and said, “I love you.” The last morning with Annie when he pulled her against him and whispered those precious words. The last time he hugged his sister and thanked her for everything she’d done and told her how much he loved her. The last time he cradled William in his arms and—

“Daddy, are you crying?”

“What?” He shook his head, realizing now what he’d been doing. “No, I’m not.”

“You’re crying.” Piper popped out of her blankets and walked across the bed to him. Her hand touched his cheek. “What’s wrong?”

“I-I’m okay. I was just thinking.”

“About Mama?”

“Uh, no.”

Annie sat up, curiosity peeking through her expression. “About Felicity?”

“What? No.” He squinted at the six-year-old who needed a little talking-to about her knowledge. Or lack there-of. Because he certainly wasn’t thinking about Felicity. At least this time. Oliver. What was wrong with him? He needed to stop taking the pain meds. They were screwing with his head. He tapped Piper’s head and smiled. “Sometimes I think about stuff, and I’m okay. So crawl back into bed and sleep tight.” He left the room before anything else could be said. Time to go to the lair and figure everything out. Without his children running around and making him…feel.

Ellie peeked out of her bedroom. “Are they at least laying in bed?” When he nodded, she pushed open the door. “Come in. I don’t feel like sleeping yet, and Harper’s watching a movie so I don’t have anybody to talk to.”

Never mind. He’d do that later. Good thing Barry liked staying up late. Oliver sidled into the room, and scanned the large area for a chair. He settled for the bed, though that too was covered in clothes. Was it possible to own this much clothing? “I’m sorry about today. I overreacted about the outfit. Even though it is inappropriate.”

“Mama used—”

“You do not get to play that card, young lady. She was much older than you.”

“Not that much older when she married you.”
And look how that turned out. Oliver chuckled. “That’s different. We were in love, so we got married. And we dealt with tabloid drama up until she died. I’m pretty they had the entire city believing we were the most unfaithful couple in history with how many times they said we cheated on each other.”

Ellie glanced up from her computer. “This is going to sound…awful. But I’ve always wondered. Nothing ever…happened, right? I remember the tabloids and they were awful but I always thought you and Mama—”

“No.” He didn’t mean it to sound that harsh and firm, but Ellie stopped rambling and pushed her computer to the side. “We sure fought. A lot, sometimes. But nothing like that ever happened.” And even after her death, it hadn’t. It wasn’t for Ellie to know—at least right now—but he had no desire to ever touch a woman again. Maybe someday, a long time from now, he would want that, but—

Life is precious. Felicity’s smile flashed in his head. Those piercing eyes. The way she carried herself with no fear of a powerful billionaire like him. Oliver! He grabbed himself out of the imagination station and brought himself back to the present and gave Ellie a comforting smile. “You don’t have to worry about that anymore.”

“Good. I guess, deep down, I always had this thought in my mind. It’s stupid, and ridiculous but…” she stared down at the desk and fiddled with her fingernails. “What if one of you had an affair and that was why she died? I know. It didn’t happen. But every now and then I think of that, and I can’t help but bring it to life. But,” she looked up at him and smiled. “It’s nice to hear from you that nothing ever happened.”

Oliver nodded, and then shifted his attention to the boxes on the floor. “What are those?”

“Dresses. I’m giving them to Rebecca’s clinic.”

“Oh. Felicity told me about that. You’re giving them all away.”

“Felicity told you?”

“Along with a multitude of other things that came out.”

She grinned as Oliver stood and walked to the boxes of dresses. “She’s got a gift.”

He popped open the first box, his smiling fading when he spotted the blue, flowy dress that he bought for Annie years ago. “You’re…giving that away?”

“She never liked the dress anyways. You know that.”

“It’s her dress.”

“Yes, and she didn’t like it. I need to move on, and that means giving her dresses away. I kept a few, but most of them are going. And you can’t stop me, because I’m making my life better, even though you’re still hung up in the trees about something that happened five years ago.”

“She was your mother, Ellie. And my wife. Do you expect me to just…forget about her?”

“No. I’m just tired of living in the past. I’m going to live my life. Here. Now. We’re not the first people to have lost a mother or a spouse. If they can make it and make their lives better, we can too. And that means giving Mama’s dresses away. Especially the ones she never liked in the first place.”

Oliver gave the dress one final look before he closed the bin and sank down to the bed again. “When
did you all get so smart? Harper told me the same thing. I’m pretty sure Annie and Piper told me a version of the same story. Everyone seems to have made this giant leap of faith and I got left behind. And I don’t mean to sound whiny.”

“You do sound a little whiny. But maybe your problem is that you haven’t listened to Felicity enough.”

“I listened to everything she said a few nights ago.”

“There’s deeper meaning in a lot of things she says. It’s probably not the first thing she yelled at you. I know it isn’t.” Ellie smiled at him, that little look of love that she still somehow carried with her. “Maybe it is time to move on. A little bit. You don’t have to take all of Mama’s clothes out and burn them or something, but just take a little step. I don’t think you’ll regret it.”

He let out a huff of laughter. Yeah, his daughter had grown up. “Any ideas?”

“Yeah. One.” She leaned forward, a sly smile on her face. “We throw the Annual Queen family gala.”

Chapter End Notes

Well. This took a lot of thought. It was hard and almost awkward writing a few of these scenes, especially in the beginning. I had a lengthy discussion with my sisters about how easily the kids would warm up to him. We realized that the kids would, because they never really stopped loving Oliver. (Except William. And he’s a whole different story.) This will be a journey for them, and this is just the first step. I’m mostly happy how I was able to mention the Little House books. Those were my FAVORITE when I was little. :P
Hope everyone liked it! Next up....getting Felicity to forgive Oliver!
“For the last time, Mother. I’m taking a break from everything.” Felicity shifted the phone to her other ear as she maneuvered the spatula underneath the omelet. *Please work.* It had taken two tries before this to even get the egg this far. Of course her mom chose that moment to call and inquire about her life. “I’ll be going back sometime soon, but last week proved just too much for me to handle.”

“You have had a lot of awful things happen to you lately, honey. Are you sure you don’t want me to come up and visit?”

“I’ll be okay. Barry’s been up here with Iris. I’ve done some shopping. I’m not exactly poor anymore. And I’ve been doing some reading.” On the internet. That kind of involved illegal hacking. But Donna didn’t need to know that. “Anyways, Mom. I’m making myself some food. You know the pain of Smoak cooking and how often it fails, so if I could say I love you and hang up, that’d be awesome and it’d spare me another five eggs.”

“Oh! Of course. I love you, honey. I hope everything goes well for you. Bye!”

Felicity dropped the phone and flipped the omelet. “Yes!” It worked. Success. The rest of her day would go well, because if Felicity Smoak could make an omelet, she could do anything. She put her cheese, carrots, peppers, and onions into the middle and then dumped it onto her plate. Her bare feet padded on the floors over to the couch. She’d missed a few things after moving in with the Queens. One, no heels. And two, she could eat on the couch. It only took her a few steps to get to her living room while it took three minutes to maneuver her way through the Queen house to get to the couch.

She pushed open the window and breathed in the windy air. What a nice day out. Maybe she should go shopping again and try to find another orange dress. Oliver would know where to find it, but oh no. That would not be happening. Ever. Unfortunate, because at the end of the week, she planned to go back to the mansion. And somehow avoid him for the rest of her life. Maybe she could convince him to get married. Yeah, that would work.

Not. Oliver didn’t like being around women. Or anyone, for that matter. He liked seclusion. End of story.

Someone rang the doorbell. Felicity sighed and set her plate down. She took her phone with her and peeked through the peep-hole. And smiled. It’d been almost two weeks, but they couldn’t stay away forever. She opened the door, and opened her arms for hugs. “It’s good to see you again. I was worried you were mad me.”

“No, we understood.” Ellie motioned to the house. “Can we come in?”

“Oh! Yeah, of course. It’s not as beautifully decorated or expensive as the Queen Mansion, but it works. And I only almost burnt down the whole apartment twice in the past twelve days so you know, it’s a record. Anyways. What are you two here for? Nothing bad happened, right?”

“No. Don’t worry about us.” Harper produced an envelope. “Go ahead and open it, cuz we have more stuff to show you after this.”

“It’s not a bomb, is it?”
“Just open it!”

Whatever it was, it had Harper excited. Felicity tore open the envelope and pulled out a card that looked too regal for her to be holding. In fancy lettering, it scrawled out You are cordially invited to the Queen Family Annual Gala on November 5th, 2016. She lowered the paper and stared at the girls. “You’re…holding a ball? I thought you guys didn’t do that anymore.”

“We do now!” Harper bounced around. “And you’ve gotta come, Felicity. It’s gonna be so much fun. We even brought you a dress!”

“A dress?” Oh, right. She left most of her stuff at the house.

“I’ll go get it.”

Ellie laughed as Harper disappeared down the steps to the car. Felicity could spy Diggle waiting in the driver’s seat. “She’s really excited about this. Everyone is, actually. We got new dresses yesterday. They’re really pretty, and—”

“And Daddy made us sit in that creepy men’s clothes store for two hours while the boys got their suits. They took longer than we did.” Harper held a dress bag and handed it to Felicity. “You’re gonna love it.”

“Um…‘Daddy’?”

Ellie smiled and nodded. “You’ll be surprised.”

Felicity unzipped the bag and pulled out a pink, floor-length dress. She let out a little moan. “It’s really pretty.”

“See? You’ve gotta come, Felicity. So you can wear it.”

She eyed the two of them, smiles on their faces. Something was definitely up. Did Diggle put them up to this? “I will come. But that does not mean I’m talking to your father. He and I…yeah, we’re done. Not that we were anything to begin with, but we’re definitely done. Like squashed on the ground.”

Ellie glanced at Harper. Oh, no. They were up to something. That scared her more than anything. The oldest and the most resilient Queen daughters? Yeah, not two women she’d want to mess with. Meaning that whatever they had planned, she was screwed. Ellie smiled at her. “We just need to know one thing. Do you know how to dance? Because there’s gonna be a lot of dancing, and we’re doing a few lessons in the next couple days, and if you want, you can join us. If not, then we’ll see you there. Come at seven. We’ll get ourselves ready.”

“Are you sure?”

“We’re not incapable.”

“Plus, Daddy knows how to do hair!” Harper yelled as Ellie ushered her out the door.

Ellie glanced back and winked. “We’ll see you in a couple days.”

They shut the door and ran down the steps to the car. Giggles galore. Dear God. Felicity sank to the couch, still clutching the dress. Maybe something that she screamed at Oliver two weeks ago set in. They were holding a party. The kids said that hadn’t been done since before Annie died. And apparently Oliver could do hair. That was new. With those fingers of his, it made sense. But why
would he be doing hair? Maybe he did decide to take her advice.

No matter.

She was still mad at him.

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“She said yes!” Harper ran into the room, hands in the air. Oliver breathed a sigh of relief. He shouldn’t have worried that she wouldn’t; the kids going to her apartment guaranteed a good answer, but he still did. He could get her in the house, do a nice apology and right the ship. A least a little bit.

“Good.”

“That’s all you’re going to say?” Ellie sailed in, a smirk on her face. “She said she’s still mad at you. Which isn’t too shocking.”

“But we all know that your father is proficient in apologies and could never fail.”

Oliver glared at Diggle, who shrugged. “Just something I’ve noticed over the years.”

“Okay, well. Now I’m mostly worried about getting the house ready for this thing. Someone’s gotta take care of the lawns and the driveway. That might need to repaved, if we’re being honest. At least everyone found dresses. I didn’t think that would happen.” Oliver stopped talking when he noticed the stares from everyone. “What?”

Ellie walked by him, smiling. “It’s just nice to see you doing this again. Happy, if you’re wondering. And planning a party. That’s going to be absolutely amazing and I can’t wait to dance with all those guys I invited.”

“Good thing I uninvited them all.”

“Good thing I told them you would try to do that and to ignore you.”

“Wait, what?” He grabbed her arm and spun her back towards him. “You actually…invited males?”

“Stop sounding like that’s a bad thing. I’m almost eighteen, meaning I can smile and dance with a few guys. You did say we could invite our friends. So I did.”

This was not something he needed to comment on. Oliver gave her a look as to say ‘this will be discussed’ and headed upstairs to check on the rest of the family. He followed the sound of their voices and found them in the attic. At least they’d been in the attic. Fluffy ran up to him, wagging her tail. He bent down to pet her, thankful for the ease of doing so. His back still hurt occasionally, but the painkillers were no longer needed. “Yeah, I don’t think you did all this on your own, did you? If so you’d be a very naughty—”

“Boo!”

He shrieked and spun around. Piper doubled over in giggles, which had to be difficult given the fact that she wore a dress five sizes too big for her. It looked a lot like one of his mom’s dresses. “Honey, what are you wearing? And where did you find that?”

“I have no idea what I’m wearing besides that it’s itchy and it must be old because it’s a little yellow. But I found it in that trunk over there. Come see.” She grabbed his hand and dragged him to the back of the attic where he hadn’t ventured in years. Probably since he was Piper’s age. “Oh, and people
“Are you okay?”

“Hmmmm?” He looked up to see Harper standing next to him. The girls made noise behind them. “Yeah, yeah, I’m fine.”

“I swear you’re the only person who just stares off into the distance like that. Then you get this weird look on your face and I don’t know if I should snap my fingers in front of your eyes or what. And you’ve been doing it more often.”

“Promise I’m fine. Wanna go work on math?”

“No.”

“Me neither. But you have to be able to impress Felicity when she comes back. And so far, we’ve done three lessons. In almost two weeks.”

“We’ve been busy.”
“I feel like Felicity won’t take that as an answer.” The only math tutor that they had available quit last week after Piggy threw up all over her lap and Harper fell out of her chair in a fit of giggles. Not that the math tutor would’ve helped Harper any longer than that anyways; Oliver had to give the woman a five-hundred-dollar check on the spot for an hour of math, but still. That meant he had to help his daughter with concepts that he either didn’t use or didn’t know. “Let’s just work on a lesson for half an hour, and then we can be done. I promise.”

Twenty minutes later, Harper hurled the math book across the room. Oliver rubbed his eyes and muttered a swear word. He’d handled most of the week by himself, but this? Yeah, he needed help. Maybe Malcolm Merlyn could help with this. And he wouldn’t find the need to demand Oliver take another thousand out of his bank account. Gee, this family would be broke by the time little Annie graduated high school. He glanced at Harper, who slammed her head down. “Hey.”

“Don’t talk to me. I suck. I’m a failure at life.”

“No, you’re not. I’m awful at math.” He couldn’t say that he wasn’t a failure, though. But he didn’t fail his life because of his poor mathematic skills. He failed it because he was a coward. Oliver tapped his daughter on the back, holding back a chuckle when she shrugged away from him. “We’re all talented at different stuff. It’s okay if it’s not math.”

“But William’s good at math.”

“He is?” And if he was, why exactly wasn’t he helping his sister? He had to have heard the moaning and groaning at the breakfast, lunch, and dinner table each night. Or the loud yelling that came from the schoolroom when they got a problem wrong. When Harper nodded, he sighed. Of course he wouldn’t help. “We will try to figure this out. Now go get the book.”

“No.”

“Harper, go get the book. Don’t be a pain.” She refused to move, instead keeping her head against the table. He let out a loud huff. “Harper Queen, you are acting like your mother when she messed up the book keeping for the millionth time. Now sit up, get the book, and bring it here. And sit up. We’re not gonna get anything done if you sit slumped like that.”

“Why are you so demanding?” She slid off her chair and retrieved the book. Slamming it down on the table, she cast an evil look at him and sat up. Straight. Too straight. She squinted at him, and then with a voice that could only be described as pure evil, she drawled, “Sit up straighter…Father. You’ve gotta pull your shoulders back like this.” She pressed her hand against the middle of his back, and pushed. Hard. He bit back a shout, managing to suppress the pain to a grimace.

Her hands jerked away. “Are you okay?”

“Fine.” He gave himself a shake and leaned in towards the math book. If he could channel his inner Felicity, they could get this figured out. “Remember what we talked about…the last time we did this. This formula can’t be used with the problem we were doing. But if we put these numbers into this one, we might get the right answer. If we do the math correctly.”

“That’s a big if.”

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Ellie looked up from her computer when someone knocked on her door. “Come on in.”

“Sorry if I woke you up. I assumed you’d be awake but anyways.” Harper shut the door and hopped onto the bed. “I have something I wanted to talk to you about. It’s kind of stupid. Like…it’s probably
nothing. It’s really stupid, actually.”

“Why don’t you tell me what’s wrong before your voice goes out from rambling.”

“Sorry.” She took a deep breath. “Something’s up with Daddy.”

“He was a little quiet at dinner tonight but I don’t think—”

“It’s different than that. I think he’s hurt. Don’t look at me like that. Today he did something really weird when we doing math. I was sassing off—don’t ask—and I told him to sit up straighter, and then I pressed my hand against his back and pushed. Not really hard, but hard enough. And it look liked he was trying not to yell.”

“So he hurt his back?”

“I don’t know. But it was weird. It kinda looked like he got teary eyed. And I also noticed that there was a painkiller bottle in the garbage. Do you think it’s stupid?”

“Not really.” It honestly didn’t sound stupid. It sounded suspicious, if she were being honest with herself. When had her father found time to get injured? That’s what made her sit up and swing her legs over the bed. “How about I go ask him? I’m sure he’s still up. Maybe he fell down the stairs or something.”

“Please confirm that I’m not insane.”

“You’re not insane, Harper. Don’t worry about it. You can sleep in here if you want. I know it gets lonely with Piper and Annie with Daddy.”

“I survive, but I’m gonna lay in here until you get back. At least.”

Ellie wrapped herself in a blanket and slipped out. She’d likely find Oliver in the office, since the little girls plus the dog already went to bed. Unless they decided to read until two in the morning again like they did a couple nights ago. No one would’ve known about it if they didn’t wake up at noon. She listened at the bedroom, but when no shrieks of laughter came, she headed to the next door. The office was attached to the bedroom, and it used to function as a living room for her parents.

“Daddy?” When he didn’t answer, she pushed open the door. And stopped in her tracks. “Daddy? What on…”

Oliver spun around, yanking out his earbuds. His eyes widened as he took a step backwards.

“Ellie…what are you doing in here?”

“It’s doesn’t matter. Your back. What happened to your back?”

“It’s fine.”

“No. No, it’s not! Daddy, what happened to you?” She’d only seen it for a split second. One second, and Harper’s suspicions were proven true. And many more were brought to light. A back wasn’t supposed to look like that. Even with the bandages that plastered across the middle, she could still see the bruises. Black, blue. Purple. It was disgusting, and unlike anything she’d seen. Since she saw her mom laying in the morgue.

He reached for a shirt. “It’s a bit of a story.”
“I’ll listen.”

“I got into a car accident in Italy. Kind of. I was walking across the street and some guy hit me.”

“Oh my God. Did you file a police report? Please tell me they caught that jerk.”

“They tried, but they didn’t catch him. It’s okay. I lived.”

“You did go to the hospital, right?”

“In Italy, yes. Nothing’s broken, just bruised. I swear it’s fine, Ellie. Don’t worry about me.”

“I kind of have to when your back is basically black and blue.”

“I promise I’m okay. It’s been feeling better, and I will definitely live.” He moved closer to her, a smile on his face. “You really don’t have to worry about me so much.”

“You’re my dad. And you don’t have anybody to take care of you. It’s what I’m supposed to do. So as long as we’re both around, I’m going to worry about you.” She looked up at him, with a smile on her face. For now, she wouldn’t worry about the car accident. After a while, maybe she’d ask Felicity to look into it and see if she could catch the jerk who tried to kill her dad. It didn’t matter right now. “I love you.”

“I’ll see you in the morning. And next time, knock.”

It didn’t surprise her when he didn’t say it back. He didn’t seem to be able to say it yet. That was fine with her. It would come eventually, and for now, he was saying it with his actions. “Night.” Ellie headed out, but took the time to touch the family picture sitting on the dresser. Love you, Mama.

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Oliver sank to the chair, his heart racing. During the confrontation, he stayed calm, and came up with an answer that kept Ellie away from the truth. She believed him, shockingly. He almost expected her to question him more. But she didn’t, and finished off with an ‘I love you’. Every part of him wanted to say it, but he couldn’t. His heart said yes, but his brain said no.

It was stupid to walk around without a shirt on, anyways. Felicity could’ve decided to come home and stormed into the office and he wouldn’t have gotten off that easy. Yeah, right. He shook the thought away and reached for Thea’s dress that lay on the ground. He knew where she lived. Of course he did. And he had a box that could fit the dress perfectly.

He folded it and placed it in the box. His fingers rested on a pen, a piece of paper close at hand. It would take five seconds. Just…something. Let her know that he still breathed. Which was stupid. Of course she knew that.

No. It wasn’t necessary.

As he reached for the tape, he stopped himself and grabbed the pen. In fifteen seconds, he shoved the crudely written note into the box, forced it shut, and taped it up. That was the last time he’d think about it. This was hardly an invitation for reconciliation. He owed it to Thea to give her this. “Okay, Oliver, that’s enough.” He owed it to her to send this, but he didn’t need to think about it for the rest of the night.

Now it was time to dedicate all of his time and energy into finalizing the party.
“It’s good to see you, Tommy.” Oliver gave his old friend a hug, and then turned to Laurel, Tommy’s now-fiancée. “I should’ve offered you money for agreeing to marrying him. Maybe it would’ve happened sooner. Congratulations. To both of you.”

“Thanks, man.” Tommy winked at him as he put his hand on Laurel’s back and pushed her towards the refreshments. “Have fun greeting all these guests.” He slipped Piper and Annie candy. “Your father is likely going to not pay you for doing this, so here’s Uncle Tommy paying you instead. By the way, Oliver, my dad is coming eventually.”

Oliver nodded and turned back to the guests. He told Diggle to send out invites to all the old party friends and such, but he’d forgotten how many there were. Each person came through, expressing their thanks, and then promptly squealed when they laid eyes on the children, all saying how much they’ve grown. Ellie smiled and shook hands with everyone, but William forced a smile half the time. The other kids did their most adorable looks, though Oliver occasionally leaned backwards to check out why Harper had her hands clasped behind her back. No snakes and no mice. So far.

“Hey, Oliver. Kids.” Barry Allen, accompanied by his girlfriend Iris, slapped his arm, that childish, slightly annoying smile on his face. “Thanks for inviting us.”

“I thought that Felicity would be happy to see you. How was your trip?”

“Let’s say that we got here…in a flash.” Barry took Iris’ hand and began moving past them. “I’ll talk to you later.”

The next fifteen minutes were spent welcoming guests, and as the last couple came through the line, Diggle grabbed Oliver’s arm. “The dancing is about to start, so I thought you’d like to address the crowd. Oh, and Felicity just texted and said she’d be here in a few minutes. Apparently there was an issue with her hair.”

Oliver grinned. “Yeah, I’m coming. Guys,” he pointed at the kids and aimed a warning look at them. “I don’t know how many of you remember these things, but we’re on our best behavior, okay? You don’t have to talk to anyone you don’t know, but be, uh…”

“Nice?” Ellie waved him off. “We got this.”

“Perfect.” He felt much better about everything. Not. Oliver grabbed a wine glass and hopped up onto the stage with the musicians. The crowd quieted, but his heart didn’t. The last time they held one of these parties, Annie did the honors. She usually did, because for as much CEO speaking he did, he didn’t like talking when he wasn’t earning money. You can do this. It was time to take a step in the right direction. And welcome his guests. “Hi, everyone. Thank you for coming. It’s been a while, but it’s nice to know that some people still remember my name.”

Felicity stepped into the ballroom. Oliver struggled to keep from staring at her. How could a woman look that beautiful? The first time he saw her, standing a few feet from him in the weight room, his eyes saw cuteness. The adorable, quirky blonde nanny who his children would probably love. But now?

Felicity Smoak was a beautiful woman. Still cute and quirky—glasses did not transform a woman into something else, despite what the young adult books said—but beautiful. Focus, Oliver. He needed to get this done. Plus, she was still mad at him. She said it herself. He pulled his eyes from her to the crowd again. ‘I’m sorry that it’s been so long. For five years I’ve buried myself in grief, but I don’t want to do that anymore. A long time ago, the ‘person of the night’ would go to my wife.”
But tonight, that honor goes to my children. This was their idea, and if any of them drops a mouse down your shirt, just remember that John Diggle is still employed here.” He raised his glass, feeling the excitement radiating through him. This would be fun. “Enjoy!”

As the band struck up a song, and the crowd parted to form the dance floor, Oliver hopped off the stage, and handed his drink to Diggle. “How was that?”

“Considering that you haven’t done one of those for five years, not bad, sir.”

“I’m going to take that as a ‘great’. I’ll see you in a few minutes.”

“Oliver.” Diggle cleared his throat. “Let her see you first.”

“I wasn’t going to go talk to her.”

“I can see it in your eyes, man.”

“Daddy!” Annie ran up to him, her curls bouncing around. So much for all those bobby pins he thought that would keep her hair in place. She grabbed his hand and gave it a tug. “Can we dance please? This is the song that the dance lady taught us, and I know how to do this one.”

“I don’t think I know this one.”

“It’s okay. I don’t think they’ll judge.” She practically dragged him onto the dance floor, a smile on her face. It was contagious. He’d never seen her so excited for tonight. Granted, he hadn’t been around much in her life. But that didn’t matter now. “Do you like it so far?”

She grabbed his other hand and started swaying. “It’s cool. Not as cool as Laura and Almanzo dancing, though.”

He chuckled. “Why is that?”

“Because she’s taller than me.”

“How about we do this?” He scooped her up and settled her on his hip. His back stung, but the pain faded away as he spun her around and soaked in her giggles. As they moved along to the music, he whispered, “Someday you’ll find your Almanzo. And you’ll be just tall enough for him.”

“Is that why I’m too short for you?”

“I’m just your daddy, honey. That guy will be more special to you than anyone.”

“Like how you loved Mommy?”

Oliver glanced across the room, his gaze catching Felicity’s. She ducked away, and moved towards the rest of the kids who clustered together, laughing about something. Hopefully nothing about the mashed potato bombs they rigged up on the bannisters. He spun Annie one more time just as the song ended. “Just like that.”

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She was mad at him. Yes, she was. He yelled at her, kicked her out of the room, and threatened to fire her. That was it. Yes. That was it. Why she didn’t want to see him. Why it took a phone call from her mother to convince her to come tonight. Why she didn’t want to look at him. Why she definitely didn’t want to talk to him.
But why did he look so gorgeous? And why did he look…changed? Her heart nearly melted into mush when he scooped Annie up and whizzed her around the dance floor. Two weeks ago, Oliver wouldn’t have done that. He sure wouldn’t be throwing a party. Or….

“So what’d you do for two weeks? We really missed you.” Clayton, dressed in a tux that had to be more expensive than her apartment rent every month that Oliver took care of, smiled at her.

“Reading. Shopping. Barry came to visit me. I also cooked.”

“What’d you burn?” Harper hopped into the conversation. She looked stunning, with a braid that looped around her head. And she wore a dress. Felicity half expected her to be wearing shorts and a t-shirt. The mascara had already smeared above her eyes, but that didn’t matter. The light that flickered to bright then to dim depending on the circumstances of the day had become a sunshine, radiating happiness.

Felicity glared, then smiled. “I went through two dozen eggs while trying to make omelets. They just didn’t look good. Or they were slippery and they fell on the ground. Or—”

“Stop making excuses for your poor cooking.”

“You look very nice, William.” She gave him a hug, thankful for the squeeze he gave her. At least he’d taken a small step in the right direction. “I have to ask, and please don’t take offense to this, but how on earth did you all get ready? I was really worried even though I told myself I shouldn’t, but now I’m realizing I worried about nothing. I actually should’ve hired your hair-dresser because I would’ve been here earlier.”

“Daddy did it.”

She squinted at Harper, who wore a smug expression. “I thought you were kidding when you said Oliver knows how to do hair.”

“Nope. It took a few tries with my hair, and Ellie had to do the hairspray because he sprayed Annie’s eyes on the first try, but he did it all.”

“Oliver did…” she scanned the crowd for the person she was becoming less and less mad at each second. Still didn’t want to talk to him, though. Unfortunately, he and a bouncing-around Annie walked towards them at an increasingly faster pace. Annie squealed and ran towards her. “I missed you so much!”

“I missed you too, sweetheart.” Felicity lifted her up for a hug, feeling annoyed that it was harder to do that than how Oliver made it look. “How was your two weeks?”

“Jack died.”

“Oh, no!” And when did they read the books? She didn’t think any reading would be done during her time away. “I told you that you shouldn’t fall in love with him. Dogs don’t live as long as humans do.”

“And then we read about Caroline and her mom and her grandma.”

“You read those too?” She set Annie down, glancing at the sophisticated Ellie who wore a dress with a neckline that had to have caused Oliver to have a heart attack. She needed to have a talk with someone and find out exactly what happened. This whole dropping-hints-about-what-happened was driving her nuts. Had someone read the entire series to the kids? That meant a lot of reading.
She glanced the other way. *Frack.* Him.

He smiled, and nodded. “Hi, Felicity.”

*You're still mad at him, remember?* She gulped and nodded back. No smiles would tell him to stay away, right? “Hi.”

“How was your break?”

Could he not take a hint? “Fine. My bank account took a hit. But I had fun.”

“But you’re back for good, right?” Piper grabbed her arm and hung on her, puppy eyes making her heart melt.

“I’ll just need someone to come with me to my apartment to help with moving my stuff back. And I’ll be back.”

“Good. We missed you. But Daddy stole one of your jobs.”

“And what job is that?”

“Reading. He does the voices much better than you do.”

She needed to remember why she hated Oliver Queen. He could do hair. He could read Little House in the Prairie with voices. Where had this version come from? Had her words…gotten into him? She spotted Ellie, Harper, Clayton, and Piper in a corner, whispering. Time to excuse herself. By not saying anything. “Whatcha all up to?”

“We’re gonna go out on the veranda and be by ourselves for a little bit. That way Daddy can talk to people without worrying about us. Tell the other kids to come.” Ellie whizzed away towards the outside area where none of the guests were. Felicity motioned for Annie to come, not surprised when she found William on one of the seats. “You can mingle with people.”

“I don’t really want to. Don’t remember this much. It was a lot more fun to dance with people when I was eight.”

“You can dance with me.”

“You’re the nanny.”

“And?”

“I think Clayton should get the first dance. He deserves it more than me.”

She didn’t need that sentence explained. With a smile, she moved towards Clayton, who ambled around, staring at the finely-trimmed greenery. “Hey, buddy. Care for a dance?”

“I thought the guy is supposed to ask the girl.” He performed a dramatic bow before extending his hand. Gloved, hand. Did guys wear gloves to dances anymore or had he just found those in the attic? “Miss Smoak, would you dance with me?”

She giggled and took his hand. “I would be delighted to, Mr. Queen.”

The music could still be heard well from out on the veranda. As it started again, Clayton took Felicity across the clear floor. The height difference caused a few issues during spins, but they managed. William bowed to Ellie and waltzed her around, them both looking far more accomplished than
Felicity could ever be. Ten-year-old Clayton had more skill than she did. So did Annie and Piper, whizzing each other around in the corner by the ballroom.

“Oookay.” Felicity groaned as her shoulder popped when they tried to do a double turn. “We gotta work on that.”

From behind them, someone chuckled. A very recognizable, sexy, annoying laugh. They stopped dancing to see Oliver leaning against the stone wall, a smile on his face. He stood up and moved towards them. Felicity took two steps backwards. No, no, no. She didn’t want him around right now. She’d been enjoying this time with Clayton, and he had to ruin it.

And that’s exactly what she told him.

He just smiled and extended his hand. “Time for a dance?”

“Not feeling like dancing with you, Oliver.”

“Yeah, well, I know. But people are staring so you have to say yes now.”

He was right; people were beginning to look out into the veranda. To see if the almighty Oliver Queen could get the estranged nanny to dance with him. Most of her wanted to prove him wrong, but the other part was curious to see what would happen if she accepted. With a forced smile, she took his offered hand and followed him into the ballroom. The next song began, forcing her to put her hand on his shoulder. His hand settled on her lower back.

They moved to the music in silence for a few moments, before Oliver spoke. “I’m sorry.”

“Excuse me?”

“I’m sorry…Felicity.” He tightened his grip on her as they moved along with the other couples. “I was mean to you, and I said things I never should’ve said. I know you’re mad at me, and rightfully so.” With that, he artfully twirled her, but quickly pulled her right back to him. He looked down at her, his blue eyes giving her an opening into his heart. “And you were right. Everything that you said…you were right about. I didn’t know my kids, and I let them sink in those deep waters with me. I was an idiot. So Felicity, I’m sorry.”

“Y’know, the Oliver Queen I knew two weeks ago wouldn’t tell me this.”

“I know.”

“So why are you apologizing and telling me that I’m right?”

He flashed a smile that nearly sent her to her knees. “Because life is precious.”

A few tears threatened to spill over. Felicity bit her lip and nodded. It was time. Time to say those words that, judging by the puppy eyes he was giving her, Oliver wanted desperately to hear. “I forgive you. That also means that I’m not mad at you anymore. So I’m going to apologize for stepping on your toes. I’m not exactly a good dancer.”

“Just follow me.”

She smiled and let him take her across the ballroom floor, letting out a laugh when he did a dramatic spin that nearly sent them both to the floor. In a slow part of the song, she cleared her throat and glanced up at him. “I didn’t know you were such a Laura Ingalls fan. What would Tommy say?”
“My mom read them to me when I was little. I had a big crush on Laura back then.”

“She doesn’t really seem like your type.”

“I loved Nellie too.”

“Now there’s your type.” Her laughter trailed off. “In all serious…you really read to the girls?”

“We went through twenty books in two weeks. I could barely talk on our Halloween trip.”

“You brought them to…” she moaned. In happiness. Yes, it was possible. “I never thought that anything I said would register with you. I was hoping, but I never thought it’d actually happen. You changed, Oliver. And for the better.”

“It wasn’t quick enough.”

She followed his gaze past the dancing people to William, who leaned against the wall at the back, watching them. “He’ll come around.”

“I didn’t…I never thought it was this bad. He hates me with everything in him, and nothing that I say will change that. Apparently the best I can do for him is to stay away. His words, not mine.” Oliver sighed. “I don’t know what to do.”

She flashed a wry smile. “Those are words that you don’t say very often.”

“I said them a lot recently. Felicity, I never realized how much work you put into my kids. There were times when all I wanted to do is hide in my bedroom and cry. Mostly because of math. I kept trying to help one kid with English and the other with science meanwhile Annie and Piper refused to do anything but read about Jack and Laura.” His laugh sounded almost bitter. “I think God designed women a little differently. At least it became really obvious that I can’t do a lot of things that you can do. So thank you.”

“You are just full of compliments and apologies tonight, aren’t you?”

“Having you gone…it just made me realize how much I need you here. You’re irreplaceable, Felicity.” His hand tightened around her waist as he smiled. “I found that out.”

She was turning red, wasn’t she? No one ever complimented her like that. Not even when she saved a thousand workers from unemployment with her computer skills. No one ever thanked her. Certainly no one ever said she was…irreplaceable? She’d only dreamed of hearing that word coupled with her name.

A small amount of the hurt that had been piled into her soul for twenty years disintegrated. Her heart let out a little moan and collapsed at Oliver’s feet. Hopefully the rest of her could stay upright as they continued to dance. She moved backwards when her heel dug into Oliver’s toes. “Sorry!”

“I’ll chalk that up as payback.”

“I certainly can’t throw a punch. Or fire a bow like Robin Hood. Though I feel like the best power to have would be whatever the red streak has. The ability to do anything fast? Life would be great.”

This time it was Oliver who stepped on her toes. She shot him a look, surprised to see a pale looking face staring at the band several feet away from them. What was with the scarlet speedster? He didn’t like to talk about it. She’d mentioned it during their night in the storage closet, and he nearly squeezed her arm off. Tonight he stepped on her toes. Which hurt. A lot. But that question could
come later. Right now she would just enjoy his hand on her waist, guiding her around the dance floor. Clearly he’d done this a few times. Even with her lack of skill, they moved at a steady pace.

“You ready for the dip?”

“What dip?”

Oliver smiled as the music began to slow. “This song always ends with the obligatory dip.”

The cellos began some major vibrato. Felicity held on tight to Oliver’s hand as he dipped her back, using his arm as a brace. She giggled. This felt good. Oliver smiled as he pulled her back up just as the song ended. Applause broke out through the ballroom. Felicity glanced around, her heart fluttering in a way it hadn’t for a long time. People had stopped to watch them. A lot of people.

“Were we that good?”

“Must’ve been.”

Ellie yelled from the corner, “You gotta do a bow!”

They did that at dances? “Do I curtsy?” Oliver chuckled and looped their hands together again. “Do whatever you want.”

After the crowd applauded one more time, Felicity let go of Oliver’s hand and moved to the bathroom. She needed to freshen up. Run some water over her face. Which she couldn’t do because it took her two hours to do her makeup. When she opened the door, it nearly smashed a woman standing at the first sink, washing her hands. “Oh! Sorry!”

“It’s fine.” The woman waved a hand. “Don’t worry about me. A door slamming against my heel is not the worst thing that has happened to me.”

“I might want to hear that story sometime.”

“Well, it’s classified.”

“You’re in the military?”

“To some extent.” She extended her hand. “I’m Lyla Michaels.”

“Nice to meet you, Lyla. I’m Felicity Smoak.”

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Oliver resisted rolling his eyes for the hundredth time as he tried to get away from the discussion with this old lady he vaguely remembered spreading rumors about he and some random woman at a dance ten years ago. Why had Dig invited her? He wanted to get away, and apparently she wasn’t picking up on any of hints.

“So, Oliver, are you back in the dating business now? It seems like it’s time you get married again. Five years is plenty of time to wait. Why, the 1800s men and women didn’t even have that long of a mourning period.”

_Do not react. Do not react._

“Mr. Queen?” Felicity came up to him, and laid a tentative hand on his arm. “The little kids need you for a minute. They have a question about the food. You know how Piper has that allergy and she doesn’t know what she can eat.”
Oliver mustered up a smile. “Excuse me, Mrs. Hunt.”

“It’s actually Miss Carter now. I’m long past that scoundrel.”

“Hmmm.” He put his arm on Felicity’s shoulder and guided her around the corner. “Thank you.”

“Yeah, well, you looked like you were going to strangle her and no one wants a death at a party. And before you ask, Piper does not have a food allergy, but they do want you in the family room for a photograph of some sort. The kids don’t want you in there, but the photographer does.”

“Oh, thank God, Mr. Queen, you’re here.” The man with the camera looked frazzled. “I’ve been trying to keep them in here for five minutes and it’s proven exhausting.”

“Do we have to?” Harper whined, but Oliver grabbed her hand and pulled her towards the picture spot. But he turned on his heel and moved to a different area. They wouldn’t be taking a picture there again. This would be the first family photo in five years, and they would not be getting a photo in the same spot ever again. They were starting over this year.

“Come on, kids. You all need to be in the photo.” Oliver held onto Harper’s arm to keep her from running away as the rest of the kids crowded around. Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted Felicity moving to the corner. What he did next he could never explain, but he did it anyways. “Felicity. Come join us.”


“No, Felicity, c’mon!” Harper beckoned for her to come over. “You can’t not be in the photo. You’re practically family anyways.”

Were those tears in her eyes? Oliver let go of his daughter and moved towards Felicity. She shook her head and scooted further away. “Hey, Felicity.” He took her arm, not surprised when she pulled away. “It’s okay. I want you in the photo with us. Harper’s right. You’re practically family anyways. So don’t go hide in a corner.”

“People will see.”

“And the woman who basically whacked one of the richest men in the world with a frying pan is now afraid to do this?”

She glared at him. “This is different.”

“No, it’s not. You’ve saved all of us, Felicity. We became a family again because of you. Which means that you are going to be in the photo. End of discussion.”

Tears filled her eyes. This time he was positive. “I’ve never really had a family. Definitely not one that I take pictures with. I don’t think I’ve ever had a picture with my mom and dad. I know it’s different, but—”

“Felicity.” His hand cupped around her shoulder. “You don’t have to do everything alone.” A little smile escaped her sadness as she realized he said her quote back at her. “Just because you’re not actually family doesn’t mean that you can’t be a part of our family. For as long or as short as you want it to be. So c’mon. We need a picture for our mantel.”

“Ah, finally. We have it all figured out.” The photographer positioned the camera as Oliver and Felicity took the back. William stood next to Felicity while Ellie stood next to Oliver. Harper stood in
front of him, her arms around Piper’s neck. But they both were smiling so he wasn’t going to intervene. Annie and Clayton slung their arms around each other and grinned.

“What an adorable family. Everyone smile in three, two…one. Perfect. Thank you.”

The three younger kids ran out of the room right away and towards the area with food. Harper gave Felicity a hug and then left with Ellie and William, leaving Oliver alone with Felicity. And the camera man who scampered out after packing away his camera. Oliver took that moment to stop the woman who’d quickly become more than just a nanny before she left too. “Hey.”

“I’m sorry for overreacting a second ago. Sometimes my parent issues get the better of me and then—”

“You don’t need to apologize for that. Ever. I know how it is to lose someone. You carry that pain with you forever. Just know that…” what was he doing? He needed to get out of this situation right now. Before he said something he would regret. Oliver smiled at her before making a move towards the exit. “You’re always welcome here.”

He mingled with the guests for the next hour, taking time to dance with his daughters, and even wasted two minutes of his life dancing with Miss Carter. At eleven, Felicity came to find him. “Oliver, the kids and I are going upstairs. Annie’s sleeping on the couch, and I’m pretty sure everyone else is on their way out.”

“I’ll come up with you.”

“You can stay down here. They’re all gonna sleep in the same room, so it won’t take too long.”

He responded by excusing himself from the boring conversation about the mayor and headed down the hall. “I’ll get Annie.” He walked into the small living room down the hall that could keep noise out. His daughter lay on the ground, spread-eagle, bobby pins scattered around her. His laugh had to be smothered, because he didn’t want to wake her up.

He scooped her up and headed up the side stairs to avoid guests. The rest of the kids already piled in Ellie and Harper’s room, looking a little worse for the wear. Several hours of dancing and eating took a lot out of a person, as they all just learned. “One of you clear some room for Annie, please.” After Ellie pulled back the blankets, he laid his littlest down and pulled the covers up to her chin. He planted a kiss on her forehead. “Night, sweetheart.”

He didn’t miss the noise that came from Ellie. It was time. Time to take one more step in the direction that he needed to go in. It didn’t mean he’d always stay in that direction, but right now, he needed to say something that had been lacking in their lives for a long time. Oliver straightened and focused on the kids. “Thank you for everything you did to get the party ready, and for tonight. I haven’t had that much fun in a long time.” He walked to the door, and took note of Felicity waiting in the hallway. “Goodnight, everyone. I-I…” no more fears. No more fighting. Oliver took a deep breath and channeled all his strength into three words. “I love you. All of you.” He smiled. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

“I love you too!” Annie sat up in bed with a dreamy smile on her face. “I love you, Daddy.”

“I love you too.” Ellie and Harper said at the same time. Piper echoed it, and so did Clayton. William smiled. Oliver let Felicity come into the room and finish putting them to bed. He walked down the hall to his bedroom to change shirts. The epic dance number he and Ellie put on during the Macarena had caused serious damage to his clothes. It would be best that he didn’t smell like a pack animal for the rest of the night.
Humming one of the dance songs, he pushed opened his door. And froze. Warning signals exploded in his brain. Someone was in here. Or had been in here. Oliver opened the safe in the wall and swiped the gun from its holster. Only at last resort would be it be fired, but if the robber saw him with it—

It wasn’t a robber. Of course it wasn’t. The only people who could get into this house without anyone knowing it were the people he worked for. That thought caused bile to rise in his throat. Why had he ever gotten involved in this? He should’ve given up a long time ago. Let his family die. It would’ve spared them this. Someday the world he secretly built would come tumbling down from its perch and leave him with nothing.

He moved around the room, scanning the area where something would be hidden. The sight on the wall by the dresser caused him to drop to the windowsill in terror. It shouldn’t have scared him. He’d seen something like this many times before.

But that was the thing. He hadn’t seen this before.

Stuck on the wall with a knife that dripped with blood, was the photo that the family took only a few hours before. The blood trailed down each person, morphing them into something from a horror film. How stupid of him to think that he could have a normal life. Anatoly and his men had granted him two weeks of peace. A miracle, really. He hadn’t gone out as the vigilante for that amount of time. Barry took care of everything. And how had that turned out?

He lived a completely different life than his family. While they still lived innocent, naïve lives, he was in Russia, firing kill-shots at assassins. While they heaped on the love every time they could, he struggled to even say ‘I love you’. It wasn’t Annie’s death that changed him. That was the start. But in reality, it was the willingness to give his soul to the devil. If a counselor knew everything that he’d done, they’d be able to pinpoint his demise to that very moment that he told Anatoly that he would work and kill for him, in exchange for the safety of his family.

The ability to breath had diminished over the past few minutes. Oliver ripped the knife off the wall and crumpled the picture up. He needed to do something. Get this out of his head.

“Raisa, do you know where my orange dress is?” Felicity went by his door, supposedly talking to their house maid. “Not the orange one I ruined. The other orange dress.”

He needed to buy her a new dress. Raisa had made the comment…anyways, when he got home, he’d order the orange one. She could wear it with those sparkly heels she wore all the time. Those were nice. They did accentuate her—

Oh, God.

He wasn’t thinking about the kids when the bodyguard pushed him off the cliff.

He’d been thinking about Felicity.

*****

“Roy Harper! If you bought another red hoodie, I will never let you kiss me again!” Thea yanked open the door to find the mailman staring at her with a quizzical look on his dear old face. “I’m sorry, Bob. My husband just needs a little talking to about buying things on the internet.”

“I don’t think this one came from Amazon, unlike the other packages I’ve delivered.”

“Well, we all know it came from Abercrombie then. Thank you, dear.” She shut the door and
glanced down at the return address. Her fingers went cold, the package fell to the ground. What? That wasn’t possible. “Oh, God.”

“Thea? Honey, what’s wrong?” Roy ran into the room and straight to her. “Hey, sweetie, what happened?”

“Look at the box.”

With a quick glance at the package, he let out a whistle. “That’s your brother’s handwriting.”

She nodded, forcing any thought of hope down until it was all but gone. But it rose up again in a matter of seconds. He hadn’t contacted her for five years. Why now? “It doesn’t make sense, Roy.”

“Let’s go into the kitchen and open it, okay? Then we can figure it all out.”

“Can you open it for me?”

“Sure, dear.” Even in a moment like this, he reassured her. Kept her together. Just like always. Roy slit the box open with a knife and popped it open. Thea almost expected mustard gas to seep out or a bomb to go off. Instead a piece of paper fluttered out. Roy glanced at it, and then pushed it her way. “Deep breaths.”

Thea picked it up, taking in a stuttering breath as she did so. Her eyes welled when she looked at the one sentence. *I thought you might like this ~ Ollie.* “Oh, God.” She stared at her husband, feeling the tears trickle down her cheeks. “He…what’s in there?” A sob ripped through her as Roy pulled out the dress. It was *the* dress. His eyebrows rose as he recognized the color and the cut.

“You were wearing this dress when I met you.”

“And somehow he found it.”

“And sent it to you.” Roy dropped the dress and enveloped her in his arms. His hand cupped against her hair, drawing her closer to his chest. Thea let go then, all of the hurt, anger, and now, glimmer of hope washing down her face in the form of tears. He sent her the dress. The one she often thought about, wondering what had happened to it. And Ollie…each day it got easier to accept that her brother wouldn’t be coming back into her life. Nor would she be allowed back into his. But tonight she could sleep with the knowledge that something had changed in his heart.

Because he sent her that dress.

*******

He’d been thinking about Felicity in that orange dress. That’s how he got distracted and pushed off the cliff. Thanks to his desires, he’d nearly been killed. And he blamed the kids for it. How stupid of him. For five years he hadn’t cared about women. The thought of his wife took care of those desires enough. Or maybe it was the thought of losing a lover again. Just like he was scared to be around his kids.

Felicity changed that. He’d been thinking about how sweet and how cute she was. And he nearly paid the price.

“Oliver!” The door swung open and Tommy strutted in. His whistling stopped. “Why the long face, man? You look like you just got told that…are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I just came up here to change shirts and to catch my breath.”
“She’s quite the beauty, right?”

“Laurel? She’s lovely. You’re lucky to have her.”

“Well, her too. She’s the woman I never thought I could possibly deserve. But I’m not talking about her. I’m talking about Felicity.”

Oliver closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “What about her?”

Tommy laughed. “What is wrong with you? Are you that out of the loop?”

“Out of the loop of what?”

“Maybe it was just me and the rest of the crowd, but you…” again, he laughed. Never did he think he’d see the day that Barry Allen’s laugh wasn’t the most annoying in the world. “You’re in love with her.”

“Tommy, she’s the nanny.”

“Nannies don’t normally get pulled into the family photo.”

“That’s…” he let out a frustrated huff. “It’s different. Felicity doesn’t have a family, and I wanted her in there because—”

“Because you’re in love with her and she’s in love with you.”

“Tommy!” Oliver stood up and took a step towards his friend, who took a step backwards, his brow furrowing. *Calm, Oliver. He had to be calm. “I’m not in love with Felicity. We’re friends, yes. We share a common bond, because we both love the kids. There is *nothing* between us. I don’t know if you’ve been paying attention, but she’s not the marrying type. And neither am I anymore.”

“Okay, okay.” Tommy backed towards the door, hands in the air. “The guests are starting to clear out. Me and Laurel are gonna head home. Thanks for the party, man. It was lots of fun.”

The door shut and Tommy’s footsteps echoed down the hallway. Oliver sagged forward and moved to the window. Guests streamed down the walkways towards their parked cars. A successful party for the Queens. If only life worked like that.

*You’re in love with her.*

No, no he wasn’t. He couldn’t be. Why would Tommy think like that? He wasn’t in love with her.

Oliver closed his eyes and shook his head, fighting off the four months of memories. The moment he saw her. When she came flying out of the house on rollerblades and took him into the pool. Accidentally of course. When he stumbled upon her calling the eggs ‘chickies’. When she insisted on risking her life so that he wasn’t alone in that elevator shaft.

The fluttering and lightning in his stomach when she calmed him from the nightmare.

Her hand squeezing his shoulder as he cried.

His spontaneous move to lay on the floor with his arms wrapped around her, trying to calm her from the nightmare.

The feeling of happiness when she said she forgave him for everything he’d done and said to her.
Insisting on her being in the family photo.

*Oh, God.* He sucked in a deep breath to calm his racing heart. It wasn’t working. No. No.

He loved Felicity Smoak.

Despite his insistence that he didn’t or couldn’t love again, he’d done it. Done the one thing that he could never, ever do. He could maybe love his children and continue his other life. But love a woman? He could never do it. He couldn’t *afford* to do it. Annie died not just because of the Bratva. She wasn’t here because he was too blindly in love to see the warning signs around him. How could anyone ever take someone away from him? Not when he went out every night with a bow and took down crime.

No woman deserved a man like that, especially Felicity.

He opened his eyes, his line of sight going to the crumpled-up picture, and the knife on the floor. Five months ago, they’d been living peacefully. The kids went to school, and each night came home alive. The Bratva didn’t question his focus, and that meant that no one would be in danger. Now, thanks to his involvement with Felicity, they were all in danger.

Because of him. Always because of him.

He needed to get out of here. Not for a ‘business trip’. He needed to *leave*. Go somewhere no one would find for as long as he didn’t want to be found. They’d be okay without him. If he’d learned anything in the past few months, it was that they could live with him gone. It would be better without him here. He could figure himself out, and come home. No more love. No more Felicity.

That was it. Oliver grabbed his duffel bags from the closet and shoved jeans, cargo pants, and jackets into them. He pulled his wooden box from underneath the bed and stuffed a gun and a sheath of knives for backup. That was all he needed. He flushed the picture down the toilet and added the knife to his bag, not even bothering to wonder who’s blood now smeared his weapons.

With a glance at the clock, confirming that everyone would be gone, he grabbed the box and bag, but stopped. His family didn’t deserve for him to disappear. Which *was* exactly what he’d be doing. The least he could do was leave a note to let them know that he needed to go away for a while. At least Felicity wouldn’t send out the cops after him. Mainly Captain Lance. That would be the exploding point on that relationship.

He scribbled a quick note, addressing it to Felicity. She would likely find it first. With the envelope in hand, he took the back stairs to the kitchen and set it against the vase of flowers. Roses, ironically. *I’m sorry, Felicity.* Any other man could do this the right way. But he couldn’t. When he went out as the vigilante, he told the robbers, rapists, and scumbags that they failed this city. Tonight, he was the one who failed. He’d failed his kids. His best friend. His house maid.

But most of all, he failed the woman who believed that he changed. For the better. Maybe he did. He knew he did. But then the dark waters of his past crept closer to his head, threatening to suffocate him. It was okay if he died, whether it be literal or not. He couldn’t let the rest of his family drown with him.

Oliver walked through the living room to the foyer. With the door open and the November air hitting his back, he took one last look at the house. He would come back. But not for a long time. Taking one last deep breath before shutting the door and heading to the garage, he whispered, “I love you all.” *And I’m so, so sorry.*
“Oliver?” Felicity descended the staircase, taking her earrings off as she did so. She still wore her dress, even at one o’clock in the morning. Before she crashed in her fancy clothes and slept for twelve hours, she wanted to talk to him. Just one more time. Tonight had been…wonderful. Even if she didn’t fully know what had happened. “Oliver, are you down here?”

She stepped over peanut shells, wrinkling her nose when her toes ground against them. Hopefully this didn’t spurn an allergic reaction.

Her heart slowly fell to the ground as she entered the kitchen. Oliver wasn’t sitting at the counter, drinking coffee, and neither was Dig. Instead, a white envelope leaned against the vase of roses that had been in the ballroom. Did she want to know what that said? No, she shouldn’t. But she needed to know.

Stop shaking. She peeled open the envelope and opened the piece of paper. “No.” No, no, no.

Dear Felicity,

No, I was not kidnapped. I’ll be back in time. Don’t worry about me; tell the kids I love them.

Oliver

Her glasses came off and were set, with the paper, on the counter. Felicity sank to the chair and dropped her head into her hands. Why? Why now? After tonight…when she watched him say ‘I love you’ to all of the kids for the first time? What about the things he said to her during their dance? What about…

She swore. No. This wasn’t right. He had to be playing a joke on her. Oliver wouldn’t leave.

Felicity picked up the piece of paper again. Tears spilled down her cheeks, dropping down onto the note. He wasn’t playing a joke. This wasn’t a nightmare. This was real.

Oliver left.

Chapter End Notes

From the get-go, I planned on Oliver leaving. It wasn't just because of the original Sound of Music, but also because Oliver isn't fully healed yet. He's scared, and he's being swallowed up by a secret life. I feel like this is the end of the first third of this story. The next part will delve very, very deep into Oliver's life and his secrets. Along with a few other things like...Olicity. (!!!!!!!!!)

I should also mention that NanoWrimo starts on Tuesday. I decided to just continue this story, and hopefully finish it. (Which if we're being honest, there's not way 50k is going to finish this thing.) I've won the past four years, so I'm hoping to continue that tradition. Which means that some things might not be fully edited. I usually read the chapter to my siblings and then go from there, but if I don't have time....I apologize for anything weird. One more thing. I was going through my comments and I'm so, so, SO sorry that I have neglected to respond to some of them. I feel really bad, because I appreciate every single one of them and they usually make me smile. I do my best to reply, but sometimes it's hard for me to find time and to thoughtfully respond. So my apologies!
Hope you all enjoyed this chapter and don't get *too* mad at me for sending Oliver off.
ONE MONTH LATER

“We are not renaming Fluffy ‘Jack’, for the last time. Annie, please don’t make that face at me. Jack was a bulldog, remember? Fluffy is a golden retriever.” Felicity sighed when Annie’s lips quivered. This was the fifth time it’d happened. And no amount of lecturing would keep it from being asked.

“Well, it reminds me of Daddy.”

Of course. Why wouldn’t it? Everything reminded everyone of the man who decided to be a coward again and disappear from their lives. Felicity pulled Annie into a hug. Maybe the little girl didn’t need one, but she needed it. “Your daddy didn’t die, honey. He’ll be back, and you won’t need to remember him by changing Fluffy’s name. Just remember him normally.”

“But what if he died? Like William said he did?”

“What did William say?”

“That Daddy fell off a cliff and died.”

William. Oh, he was lucky she didn’t have a taser right now. He needed a stern lecture. And a few months in prison to make him thankful for a few things for once. Three. Two. One. “Annie, that did not happen. He’ll be back. You don’t need to worry about him. For now, I think I sent you upstairs to work on your handwriting.”

“Okay. I’ll go up. I just got tired of doing it.”

“Well, finish it up and then we can read a book.” When Annie ran upstairs again, Felicity grabbed the basket of laundry she’d been transporting to the laundry room. After Oliver left, the family set into a routine. In the morning Felicity helped the little ones and anyone who needed it with school. After that, she would help Raisa around the house and the kids would read or finish school. It kept everyone busy and distracted. Especially Felicity. She enjoyed her time with Raisa, but today everything seemed…maddening.

She banged her hand against the door as she moved into the laundry room. Several swear words came out. With an extra loud one, she dropped the basket on the ground and kicked it. That hurt too. Here came the tirade that she’d been saving up since she read the note. Stupid everything. Stupid of her to believe that he’d changed. Stupid of her to allow herself to be swept up by him. Stupid Oliver.

“I don’t think saying stupid repeatedly is going to help anything.”

“Oh! Dig. I didn’t see you there.”

“You were getting fairly loud in here, so I thought I’d come check on you.”

“I’m okay.”

“Hmm.” Did he ever take that as an answer? “Why don’t we have coffee.”

“I think I’d rather not.”
He gave her an exasperated head tilt. Felicity sighed and tromped down to the kitchen where coffee already brewed. “Nice, Dig. You had this all planned out, didn’t you?”

“We need to talk.”

“I don’t want to talk.”

“I know you don’t. But it’s something that I think we should. It’s about why Oliver left.”

“He left because he realized that he can’t handle his life. It doesn’t need explaining.”

“When Oliver and Annie got married, they weren’t planning on having kids for a while, but life happened. Raisa told me a few days ago that when Annie told Oliver, he disappeared for four days. He came home and apologized profusely and all was well. Then Ellie was born. Oliver was there for the birth, but after he held his daughter for the first time, he left for six hours.”

Felicity pushed her mug away, trying to also shove aside the feeling in her stomach. Deep down, she knew what Diggle meant to get across her to her. And she didn’t know if she liked it or not.

“There were several other instances, but this one I remember clearly. When Annie told him that they would be expecting their sixth child, he took his bike and left. Captain Lance had to send out a squad to find him because Annie was a wreck, worried that this baby sent him over the edge.”

“So Oliver runs away when he gets scared.” Felicity nodded, accepting that part. “But it doesn’t make a lot of sense. Why would Oliver be scared of loving his kids? Not after the two weeks he had with them. I never imagined that he would feel that way.”

Diggle smiled. “He didn’t leave because of that.”

“What on earth are you saying—oh.” She shook her head. “John, that’s not possible.”

“Is it?”

“I-I…”

“It took me a while to figure it out. It didn’t make much sense until a few days ago. Oliver fell in love with you. And that’s what terrified him. When he realized it, he ran. Just like he always has.”

She squeezed her eyes shut. No, that wasn’t possible. Nothing in her life was ever that…easy. She couldn’t win a man over like that. Not a man like that. He’d loved a woman for twenty years, counting his puberty years. A woman who was far less damaged and far better than Felicity Smoak. Oliver Queen couldn’t fall in love with a woman like her. “John, are you on drugs? Because what you’re implying is…preposterous. Oliver is not in love with me. That’s ridiculous.”

“Felicity, you do realize that you are a woman who a man would fall in love with, right?”

“Oh dear God, don’t tell me that you love me too.”

“No. But as your friend I want you to take a look at yourself. Objectively.” He gave her a warm smile. One that nearly melted her heart right there. “You think that no one could possibly love you. But I think if you could look at you without seeing all the brokenness, you’d see why Oliver has fallen in love with you.”

She was gonna cry. “John…”

“You’re irreplaceable, Felicity. Here, with us. And eventually you’ll be irreplaceable to someone
else. Whether it be Oliver or—"

“I’m sorry, but I need to go.” She covered her mouth and dashed out of the kitchen, stifling her cries. "Oh, God.” Ellie stood in the hallway, tears on her cheeks. “I’m so, so sorry, Ellie. This isn’t true, it’s—"

“No, no.” Ellie shook her head. “That’s just it. It’s true. And that makes me so happy.”

Felicity couldn’t hold back the sob that erupted from deep in her heart. Ellie…wanted it to be true? It seemed crazy. Why would she want her dad to love someone again? Wasn’t once heartbreaking enough? She couldn’t stand here and deal with this. “I’m sorry, Ellie. I have to go.” Despite the protests behind her, she grabbed a coat and hurried out the door. No bother that she wore heels. Maybe the pain of wearing them would distract her from the pain in her heart.

Two weeks after her father left, she lay in bed, staring at a picture of them during a field trip. Only a few days before he disappeared. The picture had fluttered to the ground as she cried. One question remained that night: what was so wrong with her that he left? What caused him to pack his bags and leave her? Had she said something wrong? Did her report card say something lower than what he wanted her to have? Wasn’t she good enough for him?

Those questions stayed with her. During her relationship with Cooper, she questioned his loyalty and his love. Look how that turned out. Two months ago he tried to kill her. She questioned her mom’s love. Gee, she even questioned Barry. Her best friend!

She couldn’t trust.

She couldn’t love.

She was too broken for that.

Felicity continued her walk through the greens and woods until she reached the little stream with the bench on its bank. She sank down and kicked off her heels. That felt good. If only she could kick off the heels that kept her heart looking way taller than it actually was. Funny how she spent hours with a family who’d been shattered to pieces, but here she was…sitting here…her soul splattered to a billion little pieces of glass. Maybe she hadn’t suffered through losing a spouse or a mother. But that was almost easier, wasn’t it? The Queen family knew that Annie didn’t want to die.

Her father chose to leave. Whether he was dead or not didn’t matter now. He still chose to leave.

She closed her eyes and leaned back, letting the wind blow her hair around. A few droplets of rain hit her cheeks. Maybe she could sit here for the rest of her life. No noise, no expectations.

But no children.

And no Oliver.

Heaven help her. She needed to stop thinking about him. Maybe tonight would be a good night to go out and party like a college kid again and—“The last time that happened you were sick for three days, Felicity. You can’t do that.” Especially with her job. That would be embarrassing, and with Oliver not here, she couldn’t afford to be sick. Stop thinking about him, Felicity!

When she started shivering from the wind and rain, she grabbed her high heels and started traipsing through the now muddy grounds towards the house. Maybe she could’ve made a dramatic exit to her bedroom instead of fleeing like Cinderella to the creek. If only the fairy godmother showed up. Given her some dancing shoes.
Though the dancing shoes still up in her bedroom would suffice perfectly.

When she entered the house, Piper gawked at her. “Why are you all wet? Did you fall in the pool?”

“Just a lot of rain. I’m going to go shower, okay? Does Annie still have Fluffy?”

“No, she’s in the living room. I just came in here to get some water and a snack for us. And before you go,” Piper ran at her and wrapped her arms around her waist. “Since I already know that you’re going to ask me what this is for, I’ll tell you. I just want to thank you so much for getting my puppy. I love her.”

Thank your father for that, dear. Felicity let out a happy moan and tightened her grip on Piper. The hug felt good. It gave her a reassurance that everything would be okay. The kids loved her; that’s all that mattered. And all that she needed to live. “We all love Fluffy, so I’m very glad we got her. Now you might need to get new clothes on too.”

“Don’t worry about me. Fluffy and I are having fun in there reading books.”

“Sounds good.” She winked at her little friend and headed up to her bathroom. Unfortunately a mirror resided there, forcing her to look at herself. Time to stop wearing mascara, as it now smeared under her eyelids and on her gold eyeshadow. It helped accentuate the dark circles underneath her eyes. Who knows how long this would go on, her sleeplessness. The nightmares had gotten better; she no longer woke up gasping for air or screaming, but it didn’t mean that she slept peacefully. Thoughts of her father and Cooper often wafted through her brain as Annie cuddled up next to her, muttering about Laura and Mary.

She shed her rain-soaked clothes and stepped into the shower. The people on Pinterest were right. Hot water and the steam that came along with it could do a lot to a person. Like make everything feel okay for a few seconds. Which it wasn’t.

Several minutes later, she stepped out of the shower and whipped her hair into a towel. She glanced at the clock, smiling when it read four. No one would be showing up tonight, meaning it wasn’t necessary to blow dry her hair. Tomorrow night a few of them were expected at a party, but for now, she would be laying on the couch with a few of the kids tonight, reading.

She checked in on the kids in the schoolroom, and then headed downstairs to the living room with her computer, taking the time to stop at the mantle. The picture of them at the party hung there, proud and beautiful. Despite her inner turmoil, she smiled. That had truly been a magical night. From her dance with Oliver, to him insisting she be in the picture. It brought light to her heart, and forced her to see herself—for a moment—as others saw her. As irreplaceable. That night was the first time someone called her that. Even after all the jobs she’d done for researchers and reporters, digging up dirt on someone who deserved prison or worse, no one told her that without her, they wouldn’t be where they were today.

Oliver did. And today Dig said the same thing.

Maybe you should listen to them, Felicity. She flopped to the couch and opened her computer. Like Oliver asked, she didn’t spend time looking for him. Periodically she did check death records in case he did, in fact, fall off a cliff. So far nothing. Which was good. Oliver didn’t look like someone who would die easily.

Her mother had sent her an email. Felicity laughed as she read it. The normal spelling errors, and weird punctuation, along with several run-on sentences. Donna wanted to come visit. Just like the other three times, she’d have to say no. It wasn’t a good idea; she had too much to do here. Plus, the
last visit had involved kidnapping.

She passed the next two hours with emails, and reassuring Jerry at QC that Oliver would be back as soon as possible, but until then, to continue being the fake CEO, just like he’d been doing for the past several years. At six, Raisa called them all to the dinner table. Piggy hopped onto Harper’s lap, and Fluffy laid down at Piper’s feet. Maybe that’s why Oliver left. Too many animals. The two hamsters would be a nice surprise when he came back. Along with Clayton’s kind-of pet mouse.

“So Felicity.” Harper leaned forward, a grin on her face. “Who gets to go to the dance tomorrow night? Do we draw straws or gamble for the spot?”

“I haven’t decided yet. But it might involve being good and not terrorizing that math tutor who complained to me today about behavior from a certain thirteen-year-old.”

“And I’ll continue to make her life miserable until you decide to help me again.”

“But she has to help me.” Piper gave Harper a proud smile. “She’s mine.”

“I should get your help every other hour. You can help everyone else and then you help me.”

“This is not helping your case for tomorrow.” Felicity laughed when Harper made a pouting face. “I was thinking that Ellie and I would go. The rest of you can have a movie and popcorn night while we suffer through talking to people. Of course, Dig will go as our bodyguard.”

“We should hold another party here.” Annie batted her eyelashes at Felicity. “It’d be fun.”

“Yeah, well, look at how the last party ended,” William muttered as he dumped ketchup on his potatoes. “The next one Felicity’ll leave.”

“What? No! She won’t leave!”

“Annie…Willie.” Felicity shot a look at the boy who spent most of his days and nights being bitter. “I’m not leaving. I won’t be leaving for a very long time, and I certainly wouldn’t go anywhere until your dad gets back. And he will come back. No one should think that he won’t, because you all should know him better than that. Now before a fight breaks out…” she shared a look with Diggle and Ellie. They both knew of this, but the other kids didn’t. “Let’s discuss the Christmas party that we’re throwing.”

Screams erupted. Harper grabbed Piggy and gave her a big hug. Piper jumped onto her chair to celebrate, but Annie one-upped her by hopping on the table and letting out a gorilla-like scream. Felicity stayed out of the chaos, but laughed as the kids continued to celebrate. A few weeks ago, she found out that the family used to throw a big party on Christmas Eve. Even if Oliver didn’t show up, they would throw it.

“Goodnight, John.” Felicity waved as her friend took his phone and headed out of the kitchen.

“Think about what I said, okay?”

“Yeah, I will.” She had been for the past several hours. “Don’t worry about me.”

With Annie and Piper sleeping with Ellie tonight, she would have some time to herself. Again. Maybe it would’ve been a better idea to insist the girls sleep with her so they kept her distracted with their outlandish stories they enjoyed telling. Last night it had been about an alien dog who came to
earth and fell in love with a normal dog and they flew off to a different earth and had a whole bunch of puppies.

Car lights shined through the window. Felicity jumped up and ran to the door. Oliver! It was Oliver! He was home. Thank you, God. She unlocked the door and ran out into the snow, ignoring the tingling of her bare feet. “Oliver! Oliver?”

“It’s the other Queen. Sorry, Felicity.”

Oh, God. Felicity opened her mouth to say something, but nothing came out. Stupid of her. Seeing car lights and assuming Oliver was home. Who would think that? No way he would be home yet. But here she was, standing in the cold, barefoot with a dress on, yelling Oliver’s name as if she knew.

“I should’ve called, but I was visiting a friend who just had a baby, and I thought I’d stop in. Felicity, are you okay?” Thea came into view, her eyebrows furrowed. “You look really pale. And you’re standing here with practically nothing on.”

“I-I’m fine.”

“Let’s go inside.”

Get your act together, Felicity! She forced herself to function, and moved ahead of Thea to open the door. “Sorry…I just…”

“Thought I was Ollie?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re not the only one who has done that. After I got that dress, I kept imagining Ollie coming to my door and apologizing and giving me a hug. Guess that’s what happens when you miss someone so much that you start imagining things.” She laughed. “What is with you tonight? You just went white again.”

“I-I’m okay.”

“Your definition of ‘okay’ is a little different than mine.” Thea leaned forward, her eyes squinted. “Felicity, what is going on?”

“Dig told me something today.”

Thea smiled. “That Ollie fell in love with you?”

“How’d you know that?”

“I was the one who talked to John about it. He must’ve forgot to include that. I started to put it together a bit ago. I’ve never seen you interact together, but I do know my brother. And I do know you.” She reached across the counter to squeeze Felicity’s hand. “I think Ollie fell in love with you, Felicity.”

“I don’t think that’s possible.”

“Why not?”

“Have you seen me? Oliver wouldn’t fall in love with me. He loved Annie, and she was a heck of a lot more amazing than me.”
“Felicity.” Thea stood up and walked to the window. “Annie was amazing, but she wasn’t perfect. My husband is an amazing man, but trust me when I say that he has his faults. None of us are perfect. And you…why would think that Oliver wouldn’t fall in love with you?”

“B-B-Because…” she couldn’t voice it. No. Saying it would just make it more real. She didn’t think she could be loved. Maybe like Cooper loved her, but not…not loved by someone who wanted to get married. To pledge their love. No, she wasn’t that type of girl. Maybe without her insecurities she was, but not with them.

“Don’t let your head tell you something you’re not. That’s Oliver’s problem. He lets his head tell him that stuff that isn’t real. It tells him that he fails as a dad, and that he was responsible for Annie’s death. It also tells him that he can’t possibly love. It told him that he couldn’t listen to me or forgive me. Don’t be like Ollie. Be the light, Felicity. My brother needs a lighthouse to bring him back to shore, and then he needs a sun to shine for him. You don’t have to do it for the rest of your life. Just let him soak in that, and then he can be your light for when you need it.”

She shouldn’t be crying. This wasn’t a usual occurrence for her; crying twice in the same day. But she couldn’t help it. Thea’s words touched deep in her soul. In the part that stood defiant, refusing to budge from its dark ways. No, it wouldn’t love. Well, it would, but it would hide itself before anything went too far. God forbid it look at a member of the male population and feel any sort of desire.

“Don’t ever tell yourself that my brother or any other man wouldn’t love you. Because that would be a big lie.”

An hour later, Felicity stood at the mantle, staring at the picture of the Queen family plus the nanny. She and Oliver stood next to each other, their hands on kids’ shoulders. She could smell Oliver still. Whatever cologne he put on that night still made her sigh in happiness. He’d made her feel so…loved that evening.

Loved was the word, wasn’t it?

She sank to the couch, not taking her eyes off the photo. John and Thea…even Ellie. They were right. That night in the ballroom…the night in the closet…the morning he made her an omelet. Even when he bought her an entire new wardrobe of clothes. He’d made her feel loved. He never acted like she was broken. In fact, he seemed to view her as someone who had it all together. Someone who could help his children. Maybe he saw her as someone who could help him.

Oliver…Felicity closed her eyes. And smiled.

He loved her.

Despite everything, he’d fallen in love with her.

Oliver Queen had fallen in love. With her.

She wanted to repeat that for the next year. Over and over again.


See, Dad? I deserve to be loved. I can be loved. She didn’t need him. She just needed Ellie, Willie, Harper, Piper, Clayton, and Annie. Fluffy and Piggy too. That’s what the little girls would say.
Felicity smiled. “Fluffy and Piggy too.” With their love, it would be enough. But she had other people too, who viewed her as irreplaceable.

A laugh rippled through her as the truth whacked her in the head.

Five months ago, she’d been working at a news company, researching stupid topics for men who viewed her as nothing. In fact, one of them fired her as she “accidentally” dug too far into a topic. She lived in a little apartment and ate take-out for ninety percent of her meals. She wore cardigans and wool skirts from second-hand stores. On Friday nights she would meet up with Barry, Iris, Caitlin and Cisco and go have fun for a few hours.

Five months later, she lay on a couch, on a Friday night, six children asleep above her. A cup of coffee sat on the ottoman. She wore a dress from Nordstrom, and the heels that lay a few feet away from her cost more than the dress. A few hours ago she ate a meal cooked by a trained chef.

And she’d fallen in love with a grumpy, middle-aged man who had six kids and still managed to have a six-pack.

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The next four weeks passed with Christmas carols, decorations, broken decorations, Christmas presents, a thousand and one Christmas cards to lick closed and send off to the rich people in Starling City and the other people who the Queen family befriended years ago, and cookie baking. Felicity only set three batches of cookies on fire, so that was a plus. On Christmas morning, she awoke to Clayton standing above her, a towel over his arm.

“Good morning, Felicity. And merry Christmas! Today, we’d like to treat you to breakfast in bed.” He handed her a laminated sheet of paper. “You can order off the menu.”

“What…how…isn’t Raisa gone for the day?”

He drew his shoulders back “She’s taught us how to cook.”

She held back a laugh and scanned the menu. “I think I’ll have the chocolate chip pancakes. And can you put whipped cream on them?”

“That can be arranged. Thank you, Felicity. Your order will be ready in a few minutes.”

When he left, she reached for her phone and sent a text out to her mother, saying merry Christmas and that she would call her later. The next message went to Barry, and a little ring emoji in hopes to push him towards the love of his life. He sent her back a Christmas tree emoji along with an angry face. And a gun. She laughed and dropped her phone to the bed. Jingle Bells blared throughout the house on the sound system. It had to be making everyone deaf downstairs.

Ten minutes later, Clayton and Harper pushed a cart in. Harper spread a napkin over Felicity’s lap and Clayton set the plate of pancakes on it. Felicity squealed, and it hardly was for show. Butter rolled around on the pancakes, melting into them. Syrup streamed like a river down the whole plate. “Guys, this is literally amazing. And by far the best start to a Christmas I have ever had. Thank you.”

Clayton grinned. “We wanted to say thank you in one of the only ways we could, so we made your breakfast.”

“And Felicity…” Harper leaned forward. “We were wondering if we could join you up here.”

“Why would I want to eat alone?”
“We knew you’d say yes. Come on in!”

The four other children entered the bedroom, Ellie and William carrying two plates. They handed one each to Harper and Clayton. Annie ran up to Felicity and kissed her on the cheek. “Merry Christmas, Felicity. And please hurry up, because we have presents downstairs and I need to open them as soon as possible.”

“Merry Christmas, Annie. I’d kiss you but my lips are very sticky right now. And I will try my very best to shovel these pancakes down so we can open presents. I’m sure they’re going to be awesome.” In fact, she picked out most of the gifts, with Diggle pushing the shopping cart throughout a dozen stores in the mall, the same exasperated look on his face each time Felicity ordered them to stop at a section. Next year they would be doing online shopping, he said after the sixth store.

They finished breakfast and deposited them on the cart. Felicity wrapped herself in a robe and ran down the steps with the kids. Diggle sat on the couch with his new…what would you call her? Friend? Either way, her name was Lyla and she was nice. And kind of scary. Apparently she didn’t have anywhere to go today, meaning he invited her here. It seemed like a very easy way to cover up the fact that John Diggle had a crush.

“Merry Christmas, Felicity.” Diggle gave her a hug. “I hope you enjoyed your breakfast.”

“Very much, thank you. Good to see you, Lyla.” She turned to see the kids staring at the presents. Even William and Ellie looked ready to tear everything open. “Your names are on everything, so before you break into everything, check whose name is on there. So go ahead. Start opening.”

“Willie, can you lift me up so I can see if my name’s on that big one?” Annie squealed when her brother hoisted her up so she could read the name, even though he already could. “It’s mine! Felicity, what’s in there?”

“Maybe you should open it.”

“Willie, can you help me?”

Felicity smiled as Annie and William ripped the box open to reveal a sled. “It’ll be perfect for today, because it’ll be nice and fast on the hill with that layer of ice we got last night.”

“I got a pink parasol!” Piper raised it in the air, nearly whacking Harper in the process. “You remembered.”

“You love pink, so I thought you’d like something like that.”

The day wore on, with sledding races, a Christmas dinner that Raisa prepared the night before and left with instructions of what to do, and for ‘heaven’s sakes, don’t let Felicity come in the kitchen’, and board games. Felicity called Donna and wished her a merry Christmas. Later that night, Thea and Roy visited with Felicity, Diggle and Lyla, and the two oldest Queen kids.

The next week passed with a few days of grouchiness about Christmas being over and then excitement for New Years. That party flew by without too much drama. They settled into their normal routine again: school, a few discussions about when Oliver be back, William complaining and making derogatory remarks, and then bedtime stories. Sometimes doubts swept into her head, late at night, but Felicity fought them away. Those demons had to stay far away from her; that was the rule she made with herself.

Halfway through January, as they reached two months and two weeks since Oliver left, Felicity set
down the English book down and eyed Piper and Annie. They both stared at her, unblinking, and very dead looking. “Are you two even listening to what I’m reading right now?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, Piper, what did I just read?”

“It was something about…uh…grammar?”

“Yes. Definitely. I’m glad you were paying attention.” Relief washed over her. Felicity rolled her eyes. “Piper, this entire book is grammar. We’ve been reading about grammar since August.”

“Oh.”

Felicity sighed. Time for a change. There was a benefit of not having everyone in a boarding school, right? “Harper and Ellie said they needed new winter coats at breakfast, right?”

“Definitely.”

Of course they would say that. Felicity stood up and tapped the table. “Alright. Get your hair combed and coats on, cuz we’re all going shopping.”

“Can I bring Fluffy with?”

“As long as you put a collar on her. She’ll need to be on a leash. And maybe put that little doggy coat on too. Poor thing might freeze. I’m going to grab the rest of the kids and Dig. I’m not driving with snow on the ground. That would be the definition of dangerous.”

Fifteen minutes later, Diggle drove them out of the driveway and towards the city. Halfway to the mall, Ellie pointed out a quaint shop that sold winter coats. Diggle dropped them off and headed to the mechanical store. Felicity groaned when they entered the store. How many kinds of coats did this kind of place need?

It took half an hour for the girls to pick out coats. Felicity used Oliver’s credit card, laughing to herself when the total rang up into the thousand area. If he was around a computer, at least he’d know they were enjoying themselves. When she called Diggle to pick them up, he said that he’d be another fifteen minutes. “Alright, kids. Let’s go down to that ice cream spot and we’ll get something there. Dig’s gonna be a few minutes.”

“Ice cream!” Piper, who had stoutly insisted on Fluffy coming into the store with them, dragged her out into the cold. Felicity followed behind at a slower pace with Ellie and Harper, who carried the bags. “We are never, ever going to a coat store again. That lady nearly fainted from the amount of people who walked in, not counting the dog, and I nearly fainted at the sight of that many wool coats. And I do realize I sound very…not rich.”

Ellie laughed. “That’s honestly a small one compared to the ones we used to go into. These are the first fancy coats we’ve bought for a long time.”

“Fluffy!” Piper screamed. Felicity jerked her attention away from the girls to see the puppy running out into the street. And Piper starting after her.

“Piper, no!” Felicity pushed the frozen-in-place Clayton out of the way and stepped out onto the street. Her heeled boots skidded on the ice. Oh, God. Oh, dear God. “Piper, don’t do it!”

It was too late.
A minivan barreled down the road as Piper reached down to scoop Fluffy up. Felicity screamed and tried to move but she slipped and fell.

Fluffy howled.

A sickening sound echoed throughout the street.

Someone behind her screamed Piper’s name over and over again.

Felicity crawled on her hands and knees to the little girl who lay sprawled out on the ground, blood soaking the once-white snow around her. The puppy lay off to the side, unmoving. “Piper? Piper, honey, open your eyes. Open your eyes, Piper!” The sobs turned to screams as the rest of the children gathered around, calling their sister’s name. Out of the corner of her eye, Felicity could see an old lady with a phone to her ear. 911. John.

Oliver.

Oh, God.

Piper’s father was halfway around the world with no knowledge that his daughter lay on the street, nearly dead.

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“Oliver, I know we’ve tried to contact you before for Christmas and New Years, but Oliver…you gotta call us back. Please. You have to call me. Something…something’s happened.” Felicity dropped her phone to the table and leaned forward. It’d been an hour of hell. She hadn’t taken off her coat. Piper’s blood smeared it, and even her neck from when she held Piper’s head in place, begging her to keep breathing.

She glanced around the waiting room. Ellie cuddled Annie in her arms, her face buried in the little one’s hair. William stared out the window, the tears long since gone. Clayton sat in a chair in the corner, tears silently trickling down his cheeks. Harper still had her arms wrapped around Diggle, who kept her cradled against his chest. What else were they supposed to do? They didn’t even know if Piper was still alive. They didn’t even know about Fluffy. The stupid, stupid dog.

Oliver needed to be here.

Felicity swore and stood up. “John, I’m going to find Oliver.”

He eased away from Harper who sank to a chair. “How can you possibly do that?”

“I have skills. Skills that…I can find Oliver. All of you stay here. I need to find a computer.” She marched down the hall to the front desk. “Listen, woman. I have no idea who you are, and you likely only know me as the not-actually-Queen-mother who came in here an hour ago with a near-dead child. But you need to give me access to a computer. I need to find the girl’s father and the only way I can do that is if I have a computer. Please.”

The lady stared at her for a moment—long enough that Felicity considered yelling again—but then she nodded. “We have a room that you can use. Everything is monitored, though. So keep that in mind.”

“I could care less right now. Thank you.” When the woman closed the doors, Felicity went to work. Facial recognition software was “borrowed” from the FBI; police reports from the United States and Europe began scanning. Everything that could be used to find Oliver, she would use. Even if it
meant her getting in trouble.

The door opened. Felicity switched to the lock screen and whirled around, relaxing when Ellie stood there. “Please don’t tell me—”

“They haven’t said anything. I came to help.”

“What can you do to help?”

“It’s really nothing, but maybe it’ll help.” She collapsed on the chair next to Felicity’s. “When Daddy came home the last time, he’d gotten hurt. We didn’t realize it until a week and a half later when Harper was goofing around with him. I inquired about it, and apparently he got hit by a car in Italy. And filed a police report. You said that you have skills, so can you look that up? See where it happened?”

“So…” Felicity whirled back to her computer. “We can pinpoint where he’s been in the past and see if we can get an expected location. Sounds good.”

“This isn’t your fault, y’know.”

“I let her get the dog, Ellie. I got her the dog because I was angry at your father. I should never have done that. If I hadn’t, Piper wouldn’t be on her deathbed.”

“Do not blame yourself for this. It wasn’t anyone’s fault. The dog got out of her collar and Piper went after her. She loves Fluffy, but if it were a stray cat, she would’ve done the same thing. That’s just how she works.” Ellie put her hand on Felicity’s arm. “That’s how we all work.”

Felicity nodded, and bit her lip. She needed her head right now. And no questions to how she was searching for this police report. The search came up blank. “You said Italy, right?”

“Yes. He didn’t say where though.”

She typed in several key phrases and ran the search throughout the Italian police department. A hundred came up, but nothing matching a description of the male or a name. Ellie stood up and leaned against Felicity’s chair to see. She sighed.

“There’s nothing.”

“We can run searches throughout Europe and see if we can get—”

“No.”

“What do you mean ‘no’? We need to search, Ellie, and nothing that I’m running is finding anything. We can’t even authorize life support or…anything without Oliver here. I need to find him.”

“You’re not gonna find a car accident. If it’s not in Italy, then he lied. Simple as that. It doesn’t matter right now. We just need to figure out where he could possibly be.”

An idea popped into her head. A stupid one but at this rate, anything and everything was on the table. Felicity stood up and pushed Ellie into her chair. “I need to go to Queen Consolidated. If anything pops up on here that looks remotely interesting, call me or get Dig. Don’t touch anything, because this is…not a good business to get into.” She left a quiet Ellie in the room and ran back to the waiting room. “John?”

He set Annie in William’s lap and came around the corner with her. “Did you find anything?”
No. Of course not. But I have a really stupid idea. I’m going to run to Queen Consolidated and talk to Jerry. Hopefully he’s there. I’m running facial recognition in every corner of the world that I can think of, and Ellie’s watching it. Please…” she took a deep breath that did nothing to help her emotions. “Please call me if anything changes.”

“I will.” Diggle wrapped her in a hug. “It’ll be okay, Felicity. One way or another.”

She let out a sob and smooched her face against his chest. Nothing was said; nothing needed to be said. What would become of this family if Piper lost this battle? There would be nothing that anyone could ever do to help them recover. What if she didn’t find Oliver in time? What if he came home two weeks from now, with no knowledge that his daughter had died? What if he couldn’t attend the funeral?

“We have to have faith, Felicity. That’s all we have right now.”

Felicity held on for one more moment and then let go. She looked up at her friend and managed a smile. “Yeah.” It was the only thing they had. “We do have faith.”

“Felicity! Oh my God, I’m so sorry to hear what happened.” Jerry stood up when Felicity walked into the office. “What can I do to help?”

“We need to find Oliver.”

“He’s still not back?”

“No, and he’s basically left no way to contact him. I have been running facial recognition software throughout the world—please don’t ask—but it’s coming back negative. So I’m hoping that you can help. And please don’t question my sanity, because I’ve long since put that far away in my head. About the second I saw my little girl get hit by a car and had to hold her body in my arms. So—”

“Felicity, I’m not going to question anything.” He put his hands on her arms to quiet her. “I will help in any way I can. Just tell me what needs to be done, though I’m not entirely sure what I can do. I’m just the EA.”

“How long have you been here?”

“About as long as Oliver has been here.”

“Then you have a lot of power, right?”

“I guess so.”

“Then I need you to access records of what the Queens own. Every house, yacht, plane…everything. I need offshore accounts; any and every bank account that Oliver has used or just has laying around. And I need bank records from all those accounts.”

Jerry stared at her for a long moment with his mouth open, but then snapped to attention. “It may take a while, but if you help me, we can get find everything. Are you willing to—”

“Oliver needs to be back here.”

“Alright.” He moved towards the door. “Likely all records are sealed, but I have a feeling you know more about computers than anyone in the building, so you can go into Oliver’s office and use his
computers. I am going to search in the records room. Some things might be old enough that they’re in there.”

“What’s Oliver’s password?”

Jerry glanced at her and shrugged. “That’s probably like making an omelet for you. Easy.”

As she ran to Oliver’s new desk and took a seat, she muttered, “You’d be surprised.”

It took half an hour to get past all the firewalls Oliver had set up. Which was saying something. She pushed away all suspicion for the time being, but when the files started coming up, she grabbed a hard drive and downloaded as many as she could pertaining to financial records that had to be protected by a million firewalls. How did he even know how to do this?

“Felicity?” Jerry ran into the room. “I found something interesting.”

“I’ll take anything at the moment.” She pushed her purse over the drive but continued to run the files over. “What’d you find?”

“Apparently twelve years ago, the Queens…well, Oliver to be exact, purchased an island.”

“How does he have that much money?”

“It’s a long story. But it’s somewhere in the North China Sea. Seems like something that should be considered. And I did some looking up myself.” He set his tablet on the desk and pointed to a blurry picture. “That’s a plane that he’s owned for the past six years. He bought it with cash, and the only reason I found it is because I checked records from a date that’s pretty dented into my mind.”

“And what’s that?”

“The day Annie died.”

Felicity glanced at her phone. Ellie texted, ‘nothing’ in response to the question about the software running. “That’s where he is. That’s why we can’t get ahold of him and it’s certainly why we can’t find anything on facial recognition. He’s on an island.” She stood up and swiped the drive with her purse, sliding the little device in her pocket. “Can I have the island deed or whatever or however you purchase an island? I need to get back to the hospital.”

“Here you go.”

“Thank you.” She stopped at the door and turned back to him. “Thank you, Jerry.”

“I would do anything for the Queen family.”

“I’ll remember that.”

“John!” Felicity hurried down the hospital corridor, clutching the folders. Diggle looked up from his phone. Several more people had joined the waiting room, along with…she had squint to make sure she was seeing right. Thea and Roy. Raisa. And Lyla. She stood up along with Diggle and moved with him to Felicity.

“What’s going on?”

“I think I figured out where Oliver is. With Jerry’s help. It makes a lot more sense now. Considering
that I did all I could with all my computers. Which is typical. I guess I have to turn in my card for best person finder in the US because Jerry did—"

“Felicity, you’re making zero sense.” Diggle guided her to a chair. “Tell us where he is.”

“Twelve years ago, according to this file,” Felicity flipped it open and handed it to Lyla, who passed it to Dig. “Oliver purchased an island. Called Lian Yu. In the North China Sea. I looked it up on my way here. The name means ‘purgatory’, ironically. Now we just need to find out where it is.”

“I can do that.” Lyla shared a look with Diggle. “And we can use one of the planes.”

“One of?”

Diggle nodded at Felicity. “She’s military.”

“A form of military, Johnny.”

Johnny? Felicity raised her eyebrows. Okay. This had all gotten very interesting. “I can go find—"

“These kids need you, Felicity. Lyla and I will go. She’s a pilot.”

A pilot too? What else could this woman do? “Okay, but what do I do if…”

“It’s not gonna happen.”

“Johnny, let’s go. The sooner we get…there, the quicker we’ll be off the ground. Stand strong, Felicity.” Lyla squeezed her hand and then headed down the hallway to the exit. Diggle gave Felicity a hug and then followed his probably-girlfriend out the door, leaving her standing in the middle of the hospital corridor, doctors and nurses going around her.

“Felicity?” William came down the hall and beckoned for her to follow him. “Someone wants to talk to us.”

A doctor stood in the room when they entered. Felicity leaned against the wall, afraid that her remaining strength would fail her when the man spoke. “Uh…you have news?”

“Yes, I do. I must first ask if we have a legal guardian here?”

“I’m her aunt.” Thea spoke, her voice weak. She clung to Roy’s hand. “I’m the closest you’ll get to a legal guardian right now. Piper’s father is coming, though.”

“Good.” The man sighed. “Miss Queen made it through the surgery, which is remarkable. You have a very strong and resilient sister.” He gave the group of Queens a smile. “The rest of the news I have to share can be either shared here or with just the adults. It’s up to you.”

Felicity glanced at Thea, who shook her head. This wasn’t her area of expertise. None of this was. If only she could hide in a hole and never come up. If only she could’ve gotten to Piper in time and took the hit. Her adult body could’ve handled it better. But little Piper? She didn’t stand a chance against a vehicle that was driven by a mostly blind woman who had her license taken away from her two years ago.

Ellie cleared her throat. “Uh, sir, we’d like you to tell us all. We’d much rather know then not.”

“Okay.” The doctor took a seat opposite them and set his clipboard on his lap. “Miss Queen sustained a brain injury during the accident. We are still unsure the extent of the injury, but…” he glanced at Thea, and then at Felicity. “But you should prepare yourselves for the worst. As for the
other injuries…” he consulted his clipboard. “We reset her broken leg, and her broken arm. I’m so very sorry. We’ve done all we could for the time being, but we will be taking her into surgery to attempt to drain the fluid in her brain.”

Felicity closed her eyes as he got up and walked down the hall. She couldn’t take this. This was her fault. On so many levels. Oliver trusted her to keep his children safe. Now one of them had a brain injury. Which meant a coma. And possible forgetfulness. What if Piper forgot Oliver? What if she forgot Fluffy? “Oh, God.” A sob ripped through her. She pushed herself up and turned towards the exit. “I’m so sorry.”

“Felicity!”

“Leave me alone!” She spun around, the anger spilling over into her voice. “Just…just leave me alone. Please.”

Ellie didn’t step back. Instead, she moved forward. Felicity shook her head and continued to walk backwards towards the exit. Being in the cold would help. It would feel like a punishment for her wrongdoing. Although wasn’t this punishment enough? Seeing the only family who truly loved her…fall apart? “Just stay away from me.”

“No.” Ellie grabbed her arm and guided her to a secluded area by the doors. “You never let me go when I was being ridiculous, so I’m not gonna let you do that to yourself either.”

“This is my fault.”

“No, it’s not. It’s no one’s fault. This…what’s happening…it’s a result of a decision. Piper made a decision. For her, it was either stand there and let her puppy die or go and rescue her. In her mind, there was only one decision that was right.” Ellie stared straight ahead, her eyes welling with tears. She glanced over at Felicity and smiled. “Others would’ve let that stupid dog get run over by a semi-truck. But not Piper. That’s not who she is. She’s someone who will do whatever—whatever—it takes to keep the people around her smiling. And that includes her puppy. That’s not your fault. Over the years, as heartbreak reigned supreme in our house, that love for people and animals has developed. Good luck telling her that she can’t go and save Fluffy, because she would make the decision to be disobedient and go save her. None of this is your fault.”

“Sometimes I think you would’ve been better off if I hadn’t come.”

“You keep telling yourself that. But it’ll never, ever be true.”

Felicity allowed her tears to run as she reached over and hugged Ellie. This girl had gone through a tragedy no one deserved to go through, and managed to continue loving people and encouraging them. It was just like Thea said that night. Be the light for a while, and then when you need it, let the other person be the light. “Thank you, Ellie.”

Oliver stumbled out of the special ops van, for the tenth time biting his tongue when the question of where Diggle had found this woman and her van came into his mind. That didn’t matter now. Right now, all that mattered was getting to his daughter. Who was somewhere in this hospital, twenty feet away from him. Just like—Oh, God.

“Oliver, what’s wrong? It’s freezing out here, man. Let’s move.”

“Is Piper dead?”
“What? No, she’s not.”

Oliver whirled on his friend, his hands reaching out to grab Dig’s jacket. “That’s what they told me five years ago! And she was dead long before I got there.” His grip tightened on the coat, enough that Lyla stepped closer. “If I go in there and my daughter is gone, I will kill you. Because I can’t take—”

“Oliver, I promise. The last time I talked to Felicity, Piper was going in for more surgery. She’s alive.” Diggle pried Oliver’s fingers away and took three steps back, his hand raised in a defenseless manner. “Piper is still alive. And if you will follow me, then we can get you to her. Okay?”

He was losing his mind. Oliver staggered towards the emergency entrance. His friend wouldn’t lie to him. Of course he wouldn’t. He’d put himself and his girlfriend into more danger than they possibly could’ve imagined to come find him. But standing there, staring at the hospital sign had brought back so many memories. The panic. The pain.

The hope.

Until he walked in those doors and told the receptionist his name, he’d hoped and prayed that Annie would be okay. He’d kept imagining eight months from then, when they’d introduce another Queen to Starling City. Maybe it would be a queen. Another girl. It’s what usually happened, anyways. But that hope had been smashed when the doctor told him. Annie had died on impact. In his head, he finished for him.

And the baby.

Today, he didn’t have any hope walking in. Hope wasn’t real. It was something people made their brains think to keep themselves standing. It might keep them alive, but it wasn’t real.

“Mr. Queen, it is good to see you.” The woman at the front desk smiled. “Mr. Diggle, you can take him down the hall and to the right.”

“Thank you, Emma.” Diggle grabbed Oliver’s arm and steered him towards the hallway. “She’s still alive. Have some faith.”

“That ran out a long, long time ago, John. Now let go of me.” He strode ahead, glancing at the white walls. The yellow floor. Couldn’t they not make it look like puke? All the stupid brochures in the little containers. He turned right at the first intersection. To the left was where they led him when he asked to see Annie. What if he had to go see Piper there too?

He glanced at the walls again, and then at the ceiling. And then at the woman who stood up from her seat near the door. Felicity. A glimmer of hope encircled his heart as he looked at her. Greasy, blonde hair, long since escaped from her ponytail, framed her cheeks. Mascara smeared under her eyes. That didn’t help him.

It was the light in her eyes. Despite the exhaustion, the trauma, the pain…she had hope. If Felicity Smoak—the person who tried to jump out in front of the car and save Piper, and the one who held her until the ambulances got there—could have hope, couldn’t he? Maybe just a little?

He reached her, and pulled her close to him. Maybe he shouldn’t have. The Oliver of a week ago wouldn’t have touched her. The Oliver of four hours ago wouldn’t have touched her. Now, though, he needed to. He needed that hope to take root in him, because in a few minutes, he would have to face his daughter, laying in a hospital bed, nearly dead. He would have to face his other children, all demanding an answer as to why he left.

He couldn’t think about that right now.
Because right now, with his arms wrapped around Felicity, he had her hope.

Chapter End Notes

I know I put a lot in this chapter, (and a lot of pages too) but I hope that's fine with everyone. Please don't yell at me if the doctor stuff is wrong. I've only been to the hospital a couple times, and I was very little so most of this I got off shows and quick research.

In the first part of the chapter, Felicity is a lot like me. I hope you can all feel me in the part where Felicity realizes that she is loved, and that she has fallen in love with 'grumpy guy with a six-pack'. I should note that I haven't lost parents or anything like that, but I've often wondered if people would want to love me. I'm weird, overreactive, over-caring...the list goes on. But as I wrote this, I realized that I could be loved.

To everyone reading this - not to sound sappy - know that you can be loved too. If there's anything I want people to get from this story, it's that. :)

Hope you all enjoyed this! Now back to writing for me!
He felt like he’d been the one hit by the car. Piper was in surgery; the doctors wouldn’t let him see her. Which he understood. What he didn’t understand was why he couldn’t function. Whatever happened to the constant feeling of…being in control? The Hood could certainly do it. Oliver Queen couldn’t. As he took a seat in the waiting room, every part of his body groaned. Maybe it was the training on the island. He shouldn’t have put his aging body through that.

Felicity came around the corner carrying two Styrofoam cups. “Coffee?”

“No, thank you.”

“No? C’mon, Oliver. I burned my hand getting this for you, and you look like you need this. You look…disgusting. And you stink. I wasn’t going to say anything when you hugged me, but my gosh, you smell like a wild animal. You look like one too. When was the last time you shaved?”

His beard wasn’t that long. He trimmed it every few days. Oliver almost shot something back about her outfit and hair, but then his heart fluttered. No. No, no. This would not be happening again. He came back to see his daughter. To see his family. Not to fall deeper in love with Felicity. That was something he realized on the island. He couldn’t get Felicity out of his head. But he could keep her from getting further in there. “Uh, I just don’t want coffee right now.”

“Fine, Mr. I-can-run-on-the-fumes-my-beard-produces, I’ll drink them both.”

Oliver blinked several times in attempt to stall his tongue from saying something about what she just called him. And then reminded himself what he promised himself that he’d do. Stay away from her. At all costs. For his family’s sake.

Though that worked out real well, hadn’t it? If he’d been there, Piper wouldn’t have gone onto the road, and even if she did, he would’ve gotten to her before the old woman hit her. In fact, they wouldn’t have been on that street in the first place. Because he would’ve been there. This happened because he feared what would happen to him if he fell in love. And the only one who was punished for it? His daughter.

“Oliver.” Diggle snapped his fingers near his face. Oliver glanced up to see his friend with two coffee cups.

“No.”

“Yes.” He clinked the cups together and took a few steps down the hallway. “You and I are going to talk.”

“I need to stay here. In case—”

“They told us the surgery would last several hours. Felicity said it’s been three. She’s going to be okay. Which is why we need to talk, and we can’t do that here.” Diggle smiled when Oliver rolled his eyes and stood up. “There’s a nice little parent area that is currently unoccupied. Then, there’s going to be a shower open at some point and also a razor. Felicity doesn’t seem to like men who look like Santa Claus.”
“I do not look like him.”

They entered the little room with a dozen toys Oliver hadn’t seen for years. Diggle shut the door and then took a seat. Oliver sank down to the chair opposite him. “Okay. What do you want to talk to me about? Because apparently it’s pretty urgent.”

“What don’t you just guess.”

“You wanna know why I left.”

“Isn’t that the question of the week. Month, actually. Two and a half months.”

“I’m sorry, John.” Oliver shrugged. “There’s nothing else I can say.”

“As I said before, I’m not the one who deserves the apologies.”

“I will apologize to the kids.”

“They too.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m talking about why you left.”

“You do not have the right to talk to me about that.”

“Really? Because I remember several times when Annie asked me to pull your head out of your butt. And that’s what I’m doing now.” Diggle put his elbows on his knees and aimed his gaze at Oliver. He knew, didn’t he? He’d put it together. Of course he did.

Oliver let out a long sigh that seemed to sum up how he felt right now. Defeated. Finished. “You know already, John. So just…save me the lecture about how much I’ve screwed up my life and just go.”

“I’m not going to lecture you about how much you screwed up your life. I actually want to give you advice on how to save it.”

“Good luck with that,” he muttered. Diggle, for as hard as he tried, would never be able to help him with this. He’d effectively stomped out the fire that was his life, and no amount of matches could save that. They’d all just burn out before they even hit the dead fire. The charred ashes. They were gone. Dead.

“Oliver, I know you’re scared. Of course you would be. But that’s not a reason to run away and give up hope on loving a woman again.”

“I can’t, Diggle.” Oliver snapped his head up to glare at him. “The last woman I loved? She died. And look where that left me.” Because you killed her, you idiot. He bit back the emotion that threatened to show itself. “Felicity… I can’t love her.”

“Even if you already do?”

“I can’t.”

“Why not, Oliver?”

“Because…” he squeezed his eyes shut. Oh, how he wished he could tell someone. Tell someone
The thing that no one ever mentioned about keeping a secret was the pain of not being able to tell someone. That’s what ate a person up inside. It wasn’t the guilt. That sure helped with the destruction. But ultimately, the agony of keeping it inside was what hurt the most. He could never tell anyone about how Annie died. About how he’d been suckered into being a part of the Bratva. About how he put his life on the line to keep his family safe. It all had to be buried inside of him. What if someday he couldn’t handle that anymore? What would happen then?

“Why can’t you love her?”

“It’s complicated.”

“What could be less complicated than falling in love with a woman like her?” Diggle scoffed. “You’re not going out on a date with a reporter. Or a billionaire stuck-up woman like they all are. You’re going out with Felicity Smoak. One of the most beautiful, kind, compassionate women out there who not only understands you but loves your kids. And don’t you tell me that she’s not your type. I’ve seen the way you look at her, man. And I’ve seen the way she looks at you.”

What? Oliver shook his head, but Diggle nodded. Of course he would. He had this entire thing planned out, didn’t he? The idea that Felicity might’ve...fallen for him crossed his mind a few times, but he always shoved it away. Three quarters of the time he’d been a jerk, and the other quarter...well, he was trying to make up for being a jerk. Not exactly the best way to make a woman fall in love with him.

“It doesn’t change anything.”

Diggle sighed, and shifted in his seat. Likely scanning his brain for speech notes that he prepared on the plane. “Oliver, I know you’re hiding something. A lot of things. Then again, we all have our secrets. I don’t need to know yours, and you don’t need to know mine. But I am your friend, and I do have the right to notice things. You are hurting, man. More than you care to admit. I watched one of my best friends turn into something dark and twisted when he lost his wife. I understood it, and let him stay that way for a while. But I’m tired of sitting by and watching this darkness destroy everything in him and around him.

“And then Felicity came along. And put light into the house. It was the first time I’ve heard the sound of music throughout the place for years. I’ve seen firsthand what she could do. Each of those kids…they’ve blossomed into the versions of themselves that the darkness pushed away.”

Oliver pulled in a stuttering breath and glanced around the nursery.

“You don’t have to live in the darkness any longer. Let go of the pain and fear that you’ve built up inside and let Felicity in.”

“I…I don’t know how.” Oliver channeled all his strength and his honesty. Couldn’t he tell the truth for just one second? Let his old friend know a little bit of truth? He gulped back the emotion that lodged in his throat. “John…I don’t know what to do. I love Felicity. Yes.” It felt good to admit something. “But where do I go from here? I’m a thirty-six-year-old widower with six kids. There’s nothing normal or easy about this. And Felicity…why on earth would she want me?”

“That’s for you to find out. I just know that twenty plus years ago you got up enough courage to make your sixteen-year-old self ask Annie out. You also asked her to marry you, and you went through with that marriage.” Diggle leaned forward again, a smile on his face. “Stop hiding in your hole of pain. Get out of there and do something that requires bravery. You don’t have to do it all at once. But you do have to do it. You owe it to yourself, and you owe to it your kids.” He stood up and clapped Oliver on the shoulder. “No pressure.”
“Thanks, Dig.” Oliver stayed put when Diggle left the room. He rubbed his hands over his face. Stared at the ground. Looked around at the toys. Dear God, he was in love, wasn’t he? There was no denying it now. Diggle was right. He needed to do something brave. Step out of his hole. Even if it cost him in the end. The words Felicity had quietly spoken to him several weeks ago came back. Life is precious. Maybe he wouldn’t be around much longer. But then again, maybe none of them would. That was a part of life. Sometimes it just didn’t work the way people hoped.

He owed it himself to do something brave.

Oliver pushed himself up, groaning when his knee and ankle cracked at the same time. What would become of him in ten…fifteen years when he hung up the hood and everything that came with it? Would he even have a body left? Likely not. He grabbed a small package from the receptionist that included a razor. And shampoo. It wouldn’t hurt to clean up. Felicity was right. He did stink. The shower felt good, even if he felt a little bad about exercising his rich-man rights to get one.

Ten minutes later, he walked down the corridor with chocolate chip muffins he swiped from downstairs and coffee. Likely Felicity would want more. Just before he rounded the corner, he heard her voice. Loud and very clear.

“Listen, she’s in surgery right now and your brother is back. Fortunately for us, but unfortunately for you. If he sees you here, we’re all dead. I promise I will call you if something changes, but for now…just stay at home with Roy. I’m sorry.”

Oliver closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Gone was the anger that had long since captured his heart. This…everything made it different. Just because he sent her that dress did not mean he wanted to see her or reconcile. But he did care about her. When Felicity ended the call, he came around the corner. The blonde-haired nanny dropped her phone into her pocket and put on an innocent smile. Yeah, right. I know all about you.

As the hood. When he reached her, he set the coffee and muffins down. “You can call Thea back and tell her that if she wants to see Piper after she’s done with surgery, she can. Just make sure I’m not there.”

Felicity stared at him, her mouth wide open. After a few seconds, she found her voice. “H-How do you know I was talking about your sister?”

“Because you mentioned ‘your brother’ and I’m not an idiot, contrary to popular belief.”

“I’ll call her back. Just…” she pulled her phone out again and waved it around. “Why the sudden change of heart? And before you say something snarky because apparently you’re in that mood, you should know that I know that you have a very big heart. It’s just covered in muscle.” Her eyes widened. “And lots of…”

“Pain?”

“Yeah.”

“Well…” he took a seat next to her. “I’ve been thinking about that recently. It’s complicated, as all things are that involve me or…anyone. But it’s come to my attention that there’s really one answer. For now at least.”

“Are you going to make me ask?”

“You can if you want to.”

Felicity scooted to the end of her chair, a teasing light in her eyes. “Okay. So what made you change your mind?”
“You.”

Her mouth opened, and then closed, her eyes widening. For once, she didn’t have anything to say. Which was okay. Because Oliver did know. At least he thought he did.

“Felicity…” *Life is precious.* “That night when I left…I was scared. Terrified, really. At that time, running away seemed like a good idea, but clearly it wasn’t. My daughter wouldn’t be in surgery, and we’d certainly have had this conversation a lot earlier.” She still hadn’t said anything, which forced him to keep going. “The one where I tell you that I realized I’ve fallen in love you.”

A smile cracked. As her smiled widened, Felicity closed her eyes.

Oliver took that moment—when her eyes closed—to stare at her. He really hadn’t done that before. Maybe a little, but not like this. Her dimples. Her cheeks that were definitely blushing right now. Her lips. Everything about her made him smile. It sounded cheesy, but Oliver Queen hadn’t gotten to be cheesy for a very long time. He deserved a moment to think like that.

“You know…” the words brought him back to reality. Felicity caught his gaze. “I was really mad at you, and you rightfully deserved it. But then I figured out why you left. And then I was still mad. But…then I realized that I’d fallen in love with you too.” Her hand moved closer to his, and finally, spurned by her, their fingers intertwined. “I can’t say it how people normally say it because you have six little angels, but…you changed my life.”

“You changed *mine.* All of ours.” His eyes drifted from their hands to her lips. They were more beautiful than they’d been a second ago. It’d been almost six years since he kissed a woman. Hopefully it would be like riding a bike. But as he leaned in, his daughter laying in a hospital bed flashed through his mind. No, this wasn’t right. Not yet.

He cleared his throat and glanced over at Felicity who still had a smile on her face. “This is stupid but…uh…” ahh, yes. He’d missed the stumbling over words that used to be his life twenty-five years ago.

“When Piper is safe. I understand, and I agree. Meaning I don’t think it’s stupid.” She looked down at their hands and giggled, glancing up at him again. “When I was little, I always imagined being down on the beach in Hawaii with the waves lapping at my feet as a guy told me he loved me. Or in a gazebo with rain pouring down all around us. Like in the Sound of Music.”

“This isn’t Hawaii. And we’re definitely not in a gazebo.”

“Nope. But that’s honestly okay. Several years ago, I wouldn’t be too happy about it, but now…I’d be okay with getting married here. Not that I want to marry you right now. That’s a whole different discussion for a later time. I’m not really interested in anything like that yet. Not saying that I won’t be—”

“Felicity.”

“Sorry.”

He chuckled and pulled his hand away, placing it against her cheek. She let out a little sigh and leaned against it. “You never have to apologize for babbling. The only problem is that when you start talking like that, sometimes I have a hard time deciphering what you’re saying. And I think I heard you say that you don’t want to marry me?”

Felicity squinted at him. “Are you flirting with me, Mr. Queen?”
“I’ll let you decide whether I am or not.”

“You just flirted with me.”

“You sound surprised.”

“I just…you don’t look like a guy who flirts. You’re all big and growly. You don’t seem like a guy who gets all mushy.”

“Well, Miss Smoak, I can—”

“Daddy?” Annie’s voice interrupted his flirting attempt. Oliver pulled his hand away and tucked it in his jacket pocket before turning towards his daughter. “Were you kissing Felicity?”

“No.”

“Dang it!”

Huh?

“I missed you!” She ran at him, full speed, and jumped into his arms. “We all really missed you, Daddy. You smell nice.” She pulled away from him and patted his cheek. “Did you want to smell nice for Felicity so you could kiss her?”

“Annie, where are you getting these ideas?”

“Harper and Ellie were talking about them. But don’t say anything cuz that’ll get them in trouble. I’m just really glad you’re back!” She hugged him again and then…winked? at Felicity. His daughter was either growing up or becoming exactly like her namesake. He didn’t know which one he dreaded more. Oliver kissed Annie’s cheek and then settled her in his lap. “Are the other kids awake?”

“They’ll be coming down soon. Felicity, have you heard about Fluffy?”

“Raisa called a while ago and said that Fluffy is awake. She’ll be—”

“Yay!”

“As I was saying, she’s gonna be hurt for a bit. But she’s alive.”

“And Piper’s still okay too, right?”

“Yes.”

A door opened and a doctor stepped out. Felicity stiffened. Oliver tightened his grip on his daughter. Please be good news. Please.

“Hello, Mr. Queen. It’s good to see you here. Hi Annie; Felicity. I have good news for you. We have completed Piper’s surgery, and we were able to clear the fluid out. She is officially out of the danger zone. We do need to warn you that when Piper chooses to wake up, she might not have all her memory. It’s something we monitoring, but we can’t know for sure the amount of brain damage she has sustained until she wakes.”

Most people wouldn’t consider that much good news. Oliver did. He released his death-grip on Annie and nodded at the doctor. “Thank you, sir. May we see her soon?”
“In the next hour or so. Someone will alert you when you can go in.”

“Oh, thank God.” Felicity dropped her head back against the wall. “I should call…people.”

“You can mention her name.”

As she stood up, she shot him a smile. “You really have changed, haven’t you?”

“A little bit.” Oliver watched as Felicity walked away, dialing a number. His sister’s actually. He still remembered her number. How easily he could call it. He just wasn’t ready for that moment yet. He needed several more years before he ever wanted to see her face.

The elevator doors opened and Harper stepped out, a blanket encircling her shoulders. “Daddy, you’re back.” Unlike Annie, she didn’t launch herself at him. “So you were on that island. Since when have we owned an island?”

“I bought it a long time ago, and I’ve never been there.” Lie number five thousand and ten. “I decided to check it out.”

“Maybe next time you should go somewhere with a cell tower.” She crossed her arms. “What would you have done if Piper died? And we couldn’t find you? What would you have done then, Dad?”

“I don’t know, Harper.” It was the truth. He didn’t know what he would’ve done. Probably found a gun. Or never come home. It was his way of dealing with things. Running away. At least now he knew what his problem was. Oliver stayed rooted in his place, unable to move towards Harper. That would be her decision, though it would likely wouldn’t happen for a long time. “I’m sorry I left.”

“Yeah, me too. I had a lot of math that I could’ve used your help on.”

“I—I—”

“Do us all a favor and don’t make excuses. There might be a few people who will forgive you right away, but it’s gonna take a while for me.” She turned towards Felicity, who walked towards them. “How’s Piper?”

“The doctor just told us that they finished the surgery, and everything’s looking good. We’ll be able to see her in a while. Did you get some sleep?”

Harper shrugged. “I guess so. Everyone else is getting up. I’m gonna go find some breakfast. Alone.” The look she sent Oliver could’ve melted steel. Oliver took a deep breath and turned away. He deserved this, even if it hurt. Especially if it hurt. He glanced back. Harper stormed down the hallway, her blanket flying behind her. Felicity’s heels clipped on the floor as she moved towards him.

“Don’t feel bad for me. It’s my fault.”

“Oh, I don’t feel bad for you.” She whacked his arm with a folder as she walked past. “But I am willing to help you. Not a bunch, because you created this problem and you need to fix it, but as the person who has a kiss owed to her, I’m going to help you.”

“Thank you. And what’s that folder?”

“Dig gave me this back. It’s the Lian Yu file. I assume that I should put it back where I found it.”

“Where did you find it?”
“Jerry found this. I was busy trying to find something to go off of on your computer.”

Oliver sucked in a breath. His vision swirled; the panic threatened to push him over the edge. Felicity…dug into his computer? He knew how well she could do anything. If she got through the firewalls—which would take her half an hour while it’d take anyone else days—she would find everything. He found his voice just as Felicity opened her mouth. “Thank you for finding me. It’s nice to have someone who can find a person like me.”

“It technically was Jerry.”

“But most people wouldn’t think of that.” If he buttered her up—and rightfully so—would Felicity forget about whatever she saw? Or maybe she hadn’t. Wouldn’t he be arrested by now if she did? Oliver flashed her a smile. “So thank you.”

“You’re home.”

Could they do this at a later time? Oliver turned towards the voice. William stood several feet away, his arms crossed. Ooh, boy. “Hi, Son.”

“Don’t call me that.”


“You disappeared. For almost three months. I don’t know what you were thinking, or if you had too much to drink that night, but…honestly I couldn’t care less. All I care about is that you left. You missed a lot of stuff.”

“I know.”

“The Christmas party. Christmas morning. Which I realize is normal for you, because you’ve missed the past few Christmases. Oh, and New Years. And you also weren’t here for when Piper got run over by a car. So good job. You’re really succeeding in the ‘dad of the year’ category.”

“I guess saying I’m sorry won’t help.”

“At least we’re on the same page about that.”

He’d taken two tiny steps forward and a hundred big steps backward. As William stormed off down towards the breakfast hall, Oliver sank to a chair. Some people, after a conversation like that with a child, would go hide in a closet and cry. He could use one of those moments, but it wasn’t necessary. Acceptance had set in a long time ago. William hated him. And he kept giving him reasons for the hatred. And it wouldn’t be fixed. Maybe ever.

“Your sister is coming in half an hour. I’m going to go call my mom.” Felicity gave him a sad smile. “Coffee helps.”

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“You did what?”

“I told Oliver that I fell in love with him.” Felicity braced for the reaction.

Donna screamed. Unfortunately the sucky phone signal did nothing to quiet the noise. Good golly. And her mother wondered why her daughter never told her anything. Maybe over the threat of being deafened? Felicity closed her eyes to prepare for the onslaught of questions. Would she even be able
to answer them all?

“Did you kiss him?”

“Not yet.”

“You didn’t kiss that sexy man? Felicity, what is wrong with you?”

“Mom, you have got to be kidding me. Life is not all about kissing.”

“No, but it’s an amazing part of being in love with someone.”

“You haven’t been in love for years.”

“I know. But I can tell you that having a man who can kiss is just magical. Your father was amazing at it. He knew how to—”

“Moooom! I do not need to hear about you and dad’s kiss life. Or worse. I just wanted to talk to you for a few minutes. To tell you this and just...” Felicity brushed her hand over her face. “I just needed to hear your voice. It’s been a really rough couple days, and I really miss my mom. Even if she does scream in my ear and acts like she just kissed a guy and not her daughter.”

“Awww, I’m sorry, sweetheart. I didn’t mean it to sound that way. I’m just happy that I’m going to be getting six grandchildren and not just one. If you decide to adopt, that is.”

“Just because I admitted I have feelings for a guy does not mean I’m going to marry him and adopt his kids.”

“Of course not, honey. Anyways, do you want me to fly out there and give you a hug? You sound like you need one.”

Felicity glanced out the window where Annie and Harper played chess. They both waved at her. She smiled. “I think I’m okay, Mom. Believe it or not, I’ve created a bit of a life here, and these people will help me get through it. But I do appreciate having you around. And I promise that we will figure out a time that you can come here. But I promise you that it’s not the time right now.”

“It’s okay. I understand. I need to go to work. Love ya, hon, and when you and Oliver decide to get married, please let me know.”

Mothers. “Goodbye, Mom. I love you too.” Felicity slid her phone into her pocket, her fingers touching the USB that she’d transferred to her clean coat that Diggle gave her a few hours ago. She’d seen Oliver’s reaction when she told him she dug around on his computers. It was a brief, quickly-forced-away moment of terror. She’d been stupid to push away her suspicions. Oliver Queen was hiding something. Maybe not a nuclear bomb under all those firewalls, but he had a secret to tell. Or didn’t want to tell.

She pulled her tablet out of the bag and plugged the USB into the port. The files popped up right away. At least they hadn’t all wiped out, and they hadn’t destroyed her computer like Oliver’s phone did. Yet. She clicked on the file titled ‘unknown’. Bank records popped up. A good hundred of them.

Why hide all of these bank statements under a firewall that most people could never get through? She had bank statements and records, but she didn’t keep them locked up like this. Actually, she still had several laying around in her bedroom. Maybe the Hood would find them when he decided to come around and ask for her help, and pay them for her. Felicity! Focus. She tapped on one of the
statements, working the shock off her face when the balance totaled over fifty million. She wrote down the bank number and then checked the next folder.

It was a different bank. In Russia. And, as of four months ago, it contained one hundred million.

Felicity squinted at the Russian name. Norilsk. Sounded terrifying. Why on earth would Oliver have a bank account there? Two minutes later, she discovered he had one in Italy. And in Hong Kong. All with a lot of millions in them.

So maybe that’s where he went on his business trips.

With several clicks, and a few more federal offenses on her list of accomplishments, she drew up flight records. Four months ago, Oliver left for two weeks. She entered the date and his name and hit ‘search’. Nothing popped up.

Of course. He owned a private jet. Good thing she could find those records too. Jerry had given her the plane’s information. Several words that she tried her best not to say slipped out when nothing came up. Did Oliver fly his own plane or something? Dear old Barry would be getting a call about this. Something was up.

Who else went to these business meetings? Oliver had mentioned a couple of names. Both from big companies. Palmer and Merlyn something. Maybe they all travelled together. And maybe they didn’t hide their travel details from her. “You sound so bad.” What on earth was she doing? Researching the man she almost kissed? The one she just told her mom that she loved. It didn’t make sense why she sat here with her tablet, digging into information that didn’t apply to her?

Maybe she should go find the Hood and ask to become his sidekick. Clearly she enjoyed it. Finding information about people that didn’t matter to her.

But that was the thing, right? Oliver did matter to her. If she wanted to consider a life with him—or just with his kids—she needed to know him. Every little thing about him that he seemed to enjoy hiding. Or had to hide. He’s not a psychotic murderer, Felicity. Calm down. She had the right to know. Even if it meant committing a few crimes to do so.

That was the decision. Dig around, see what she could find. If she found something interesting, she’d ask Oliver about it. If she found anything kind of interesting, she’d ask Barry. After a few deep breaths, she continued her search. Ray Palmer, who wasn’t too bad looking, and Malcolm Merlyn. Tommy’s dad. He looked creepy. Just like a typical businessman. Three months ago, they both went to a business convention in France, according to flight records and a quick check at the attendance list. But who wasn’t there?

The guy she wanted to kiss.

Three more searches warranted the same results. Ray and/or Malcolm went to each one, but Oliver went to none of them. And the places these conventions were held? Never in Russia, Hong Kong, or Italy.

She took off her glasses and rubbed her eyes. What had she discovered? That Oliver had a private jet, owned an island, had a bunch of bank accounts in weird foreign places, and never went to business meetings like he said he did? If she dug deeper into these files, would she find something too dark for her imagination? Or would she find a quick, fluffy explanation to this?

“One way to find out, Felicity,” she muttered. Ask Oliver. Give him a chance to explain himself. If he didn’t give her answers, then it would suck for him. Because she would find them out herself.
One way or another.

As she ejected the USB from her tablet—yes, she was a part of the two percent of the population who did that—Ellie opened the door. She glanced around the room. “Are you busy? Because I can come back sometime else. This isn’t too important.”

“By the look on your face, it is. What I’m doing right now can be saved for a later time. So sit. But first you have to pour me a cup of coffee.”

“You and your coffee. You’re probably more addicted to this than drug addicts are to crack.” Ellie poured Felicity a cup of the black magic from the station by the door and took the time to grab a sugar pack and a cream. “There you go. Now drink up before the shakes start. Or maybe a shower will help.”

“Very funny. What’s on your mind?”

“Daddy’s back.”

“Fully aware of that.”

“And I don’t know what to do.” Ellie sighed. “I know why he left. But what I don’t understand is why he hid on that island for almost three months. The other kids decided as a group that the best way to make sure he doesn’t leave again is to make him miserable. And I think they’ve done a stand-up job of that so far.”

“And do you agree with that?”

“I may be angry, but I’m not a Russian. I just…Felicity, why on earth does someone decide that it’s better off to go to an island in the North China Sea and be in solitude? What could he possibly be scared of that makes him want to do that?”

Funny how she was asking the same question right now. “No matter what, forgiveness takes time. We just need to make sure no one blames your dad for what happened to Piper.”

“William does.”

“Willie is gonna have to deal with this hatred and distrust and anger by himself, because I don’t know how to help him. But we can help the other kids. Okay?”

“Does that mean I have to be really nice to him? Because it’s…it’s just gonna take some time.”

“It doesn’t mean you have to be an angel. But don’t be a jerk. Oliver’s already convinced himself that this was his fault. And we both know it wasn’t.” Felicity squeezed Ellie’s hand and smiled. “Listen, I’m going to go use that shower. I still have blood on me and it needs to come off. Plus, I have a lot to think about.”

As she walked down the hall towards the stairs—elevators were still not okay—Oliver came out of Piper’s hospital room. She knew how hard he tried to blink back the tears in his eyes, but this time it didn’t work. Pushing away the doubts and suspicions—because right now, they didn’t matter—she wrapped her arms around his neck. Oliver’s arms encircled her and pulled her close.

“It’s gonna be okay, Oliver.”

“She looks…dead.”
“She’s gonna wake up. You have to trust me on this one.”

“If I’d been there—”

“No.” Felicity jerked back and whacked his chest. “No, you are not thinking like that. You cannot think like that. If you do, then your head’s won. And your head can’t win. You have to believe, Oliver. Have a little faith. And you can’t always blame yourself for everything. Because not everything is your fault. Okay?”

The shocked look came off his face as he nodded. “O-Okay.”

“Good. Can I trust you to not feel guilty for a few minutes while I go take care of myself?”

He flashed a smile and nodded. “Yeah.”

How could a man that adorable be hiding secrets? Felicity climbed the stairs to the room they were renting and headed to the shower. Or a bath. That would feel nice. But then she’d see the blood gathering in the water. Not a good idea.

She would ask him about USB. The nonexistent flight records. The fact that he didn’t appear to go to any of the meetings he said he went to. However, those questions would come after Piper woke up. There was no rush, and there certainly wasn’t a need to put more stress on him. Because there would be stress, even if he had an immediate answer. She could wait a little bit. She owed that to Oliver.

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After four hours of playing games with Annie and being cheered up by Tommy, he’d had enough of happiness. How could he smile…laugh…play Monopoly when one his daughters might not have a brain left? Oliver walked into the room, his heart crumbling when he laid eyes on Piper. Each time he saw her, it hurt more. Brought back more memories. Each time, she looked more like his wife. Dead. He glanced at the heart rate monitor. Get a grip, Oliver. She wasn’t gone. Just sleeping. But that’s how Annie looked.

He took a seat next to the bed and took Piper’s limp hand. The past three times he came in here, he just stared at her, trying to convince himself that it would all be okay. Maybe this time it would help to talk. “Hey, sweetie.” The nickname brought a smile to his lips. “I’m sorry I haven’t called you that enough. I-I used to do it all the time. But after a while I kinda forgot how to say it. I could call you sweetie for the rest of your life and it still wouldn’t make up for how many times I didn’t.

“I guess I got so caught up in how much my life sucked that I forgot about you and your siblings. When I—we—lost your mom, I changed. I get mad too easily, and I don’t say enough to any of you. I’ve avoided all of you. Losing her isn’t the only reason I changed.” He scooted closer so that he could put his elbows on the bed. “I got messed up with some awful people, and now I’m over my head. That’s part of the reason why I left. I got scared, and I thought that if I left, everyone would be safer. But I realized…” his gaze went from Piper’s face, the tubes in her nose, to the heart rate monitor. To those stupid flowers that Tommy and Laurel sent. “I almost lost you anyways. And I don’t think that I could even take another breath if I lost you. Any of you.”

“So I promise you, sweetie, that I will never, ever leave again. If I’m here, I can protect you. I can be your dad. Because…” he sucked in a breath that sounded more like a sob. “There’s nothing that makes me happier than being your daddy.” His fingers weaved through her messy hair. A long time ago, every night that they could do it, he would sit on the bed and Annie would sit on the floor below him. Each of the girls would come sit on his lap and dangle their legs over their mom while Oliver braided their hair. When that was finished, he’d braid Annie’s. Piper wouldn’t remember it; she usually ended up with her hair in a ponytail on the top of her head, her frizzy hair pointing
straight up. Three months ago, he got to do their hair again.

Even if it did take several tries and lots of hairspray.

“You gotta wake up, Piper. I can’t stand seeing you like this. It makes me think of things that I don’t ever want to think about again. And I really want to see your smile. And know, from you, that you’re okay. So please. Please wake up.” He closed his eyes and dropped his head to the bed and let the emotions take over. On the plane ride home, it’d been shock, and then panic. The past twenty-four hours had been trying to find the strength to stand. To live. Trying to keep the rest of his family from falling into the pit of despair. But now, he could let himself grieve. For Piper. For his family. For his life. Everything, really.

He didn’t know how long he sat there, holding Piper’s hand, face smashed against the comforter, but at some point, he felt a distinct press on his hand. As he sat up and glanced at the heart-rate monitor, Piper squeezed his hand. He could’ve screamed for joy, but nothing came out. Everything stopped working for a split second.

“D-Daddy?”

That he could react to. Oliver leaned in closer as Piper worked to open her eyes. “Yeah. Yeah. It’s Daddy.”

“How…was, uh…” Oliver strained to hear her voice. The breathing tubes made it difficult for her to speak. “The rest…of the party?”

Party? He squinted, then looked up at the ceiling, searching his brain for a reason why she’d ask about a party. Did she mean the holiday parties they threw? “The Christmas one?”

“No, Daddy.” She laughed. “It’s not Christmas. We…” her eyes flickered open. She gave him her best exasperated look. “We…just went to Halloween stuff.”

Oh, God. Oliver jerked back, trying to work his lips to say something. But nothing would come. No. No, this wasn’t possible. How could she have forgotten almost three months of her life? And why did she go right back to that night? Why not three days after? Why not a month after? Why not two days ago?

“You look…like…”

Like he was about to throw up. If Piper’s brain went back to that night, that meant she didn’t know why she was in the hospital. Or that they didn’t know if Fluffy would walk normally again. And she didn’t know that he left. Oliver rubbed his hands over his face to hide the tears that trickled down his cheeks. What was he supposed to think of this? Four of his kids refused to talk to him. Even Clayton. His littlest was too naïve to hate him. And Piper…she didn’t. Because she didn’t know.

“Listen, sweetie, I’m going to get the doctors, okay? They’re gonna help you.”

“I was gonna…ask.” Her eyes flitted around, looking more concerned as she recognized some of the instruments. “Did I…fall over the balcony?”

I wish. Oliver tapped her hand and mustered up a smile. “I promise I’ll explain everything, but just stay put for a few seconds while I go find someone. Then we can talk about what happened. But don’t worry; you didn’t fall over the balcony.”

“Phew.”
He pushed himself up and stumbled to the exit. Felicity sat in the corner, reading to Annie. She spotted him and set the book down. Annie slid off and ran off down the hall to the stairs. “Oliver, what’s wrong?”

“Piper woke up.”

“What? Oh, hallelujah.”

“Felicity, she doesn’t—”

“Oh, God.”

“She asked me how the party ended. The one after Halloween.”

Tears filled Felicity’s eyes, but she put her hand on his arm and pushed him back towards the room. “I’ll get the doctors. You go in there with her. Don’t say anything that will confuse her. If I’ve learned anything, it’s that you don’t want to do that. Just…just go.”

As she ran down the hall, Oliver went back into the room. Piper smiled at him as best as she could. The pain of what happened crushed against his heart, making it hard to breathe. Yeah, she didn’t hate him. Maybe he could treasure that. But how could he when, because of him, she had forgotten three months of her life? The Christmas party. Christmas day. New Years. And all those little moments in between. She forgot them all because he left.

So what if she didn’t hate him? He’d rather be hated than to have her lose her memories.

A nurse entered the room, followed by the doctor. Both went to work as Felicity stepped into the room. Oliver grabbed her hand and squeezed. At least he had her.

“Daddy?”

“Yeah, Piper?”

“What’s…going on?”

“Just hold on, sweetie. Let them do their stuff, and then we can talk.”

“O-Oookkaayy.” Her eyes fluttered shut. Oliver jerked forward, yanking Felicity with him. “What are you doing?”

The doctor didn’t glance up at him as he took notes. “We put her under.”

“But she was awake! And lucid! I was gonna talk to her and—”

“Oliver.” This time he did look at him. That just-listen-to-me look that he’d seen so many times in people. “We have the readings we need, and we have your information. We’ll let her sleep as we….” Oliver stopped listening. The more he stared at the man speaking, the more he looked like a Bratva agent. Like the one he talked to before going to the island. The one with the—

“Your daughter will wake up again soon, but we need to evaluate the situation, and help you all understand what is—”

“Shut up.”

“Mr. Queen, I’m the doctor. You are not. Please understand that I’m doing what is best for your daughter.”
“Yeah, because you always make the best decisions, right?”

Felicity’s hand pressed down on his arm. “Oliver…”

He shrugged her off and moved towards the man. “I don’t trust you, so back off my daughter.”

“Mr. Queen!” He raised his hands in the air and took three steps backwards. “Please listen to me. I know you’re hurting. I understand that. Your daughter lost three months of her memory. That is terrifying. But understand that I am trying to help you.”

“Shut up!” Although the warning bells started ringing in his head, Oliver put his hands on the man’s chest and shoved. He went flying back, slamming against a cart. The nurse screamed. Felicity yelled his name. But it didn’t matter now. This doctor…he wasn’t a doctor. Not really. He was trying to kill Piper.

Oliver stormed towards the man, who pulled himself off the floor. Just in time for Oliver to grab his coat and hurl him again. The assassin kicked in, taking over his body motions and his head. Oliver, stop. You have to stop. But there was no stopping this. Not anymore. Uncontrollable rage ripped through him. Every moment that

“Oliver, I’m trying to help you and Piper! I am not trying to hurt her!”

“I know you. I know what you’re trying to do. You’re trying to kill her!”

Just before he reached the doctor again, Felicity slammed into him. The force of the hit knocked him unsteady. She grabbed his hands and squeezed. Hard. “Oliver! Oliver, listen to me! Look at me, Oliver.”

“He’s trying to kill Piper.”

“Maybe. Maybe not.” When the doctor yelled something about truth and calling the authorities, Felicity snapped back at him. “Shut up or I will let him pummel you! Oliver, you have to control yourself. Acting like a…lion is not going to help this situation. I can confirm to you that Piper is still breathing. We can figure everything else out later. But she’s still alive.”

She’s still alive. Oliver took a stumbling breath and then let it out. He glanced around the room. The doctor lay on the floor, blood spurting out of a sliced forehead. The nurse held a stun gun. Felicity stared up at him, anger flaring in her eyes. Her hands had moved to his chest, pushing against him. What had he done? Went off on the…doctor? “Felicity…”

“Okay, just breathe. Okay? I have no idea…put the stun gun down, woman. He’s not going to kill anyone.” Felicity pulled her hands off his chest. “Doctor Gonzalez, on behalf of the Queen family, I’d like to thank you for not going to the police about this. Unless, of course, you want me to tell everyone about that secret child you have with a woman who, if I recall, actually works here.”

“What…how—”

“If you could get what you need from the room along with the information and readings, and leave, that would be great because then I can deal with this on my own.”

When the door shut, Oliver sank to a chair as Felicity crossed her arms and glared down at him. “Please don’t ask me what happened.”

“Oh, I already know what happened. It’s not that hard to figure out. You snapped. Decided to take all your anger and all your pain out on a poor old doctor. Who was definitely not trying to kill Piper.
I don’t know where in the world you pulled that one out of, but it was probably that frazzled brain of yours that struggles to work in moments like this.” Felicity let out a bitter laugh. “You know who you sounded and looked like for a few seconds? You looked like the Hood.”

Oliver let out a little moan.

“You looked like you wanted to snap that guy’s neck. And you were growling. *Growling, Oliver!*” She squatted down to his level and grabbed his hands. “You know what that tells me? It tells me that you’re angry. Beyond angry. You are drowning in it. I know how to deal with hurt and pain, but I don’t know how to deal with this. I can forgive you, and trust me when I say that that guy kind of deserved it because he was getting on my nerves, but how can I love a man who’s angry enough that he wants to snap a guy’s neck?”

“*Oliver, honey…how am I supposed to kiss you at night when I know that you’re so angry inside?*”

“*Maybe that’s your way out. Divorce me because I’m angry all the time.*”

Her hand curled around his back, pulling him closer. “No. That makes me think that you might have brain damage too. I’m not leaving you. I’m never leaving you. I’m just saying we might have to find a way for you to get that anger out.”

The image of the hood came to mind. Annie created the Hood. The vigilante who prowled the streets at night. For years, that was his sanctuary. The place he went to blow off steam. And it worked. With Annie keeping him grounded, the anger dissipated, and he knew he was helping people. Really helping them. Unlike the work he did at Queen Consolidated.

But then she died. And everything went out the window. He still went out at night—even got a partner who of course had to be Felicity’s best friend—but it wasn’t the same. His patience didn’t last as long. The arrows got a little closer to the bad guys’ hearts. The punches rougher and more uncontrolled.

And now this happened.

He went off on a doctor.

“Call me when she wakes up again, okay?” Despite Felicity’s protests, he stood up, kissed Piper’s forehead and left the room. Captain Lance wasn’t there to arrest him. Whatever threat Felicity threw at the doctor must’ve been true. He grabbed his jacket and headed outside. The jog to the old Steel factory building calmed him down a couple notches. It didn’t help much, though. He was angry. Angry at everything. If Barry happened to be sprawled out on the spare bed in the lair, sipping his pumpkin latte, the boy would die.

Luckily for the Flash, Barry was not in the lair. After making sure his phone would ring if Felicity called, Oliver stripped his jacket and shirt off, and grabbed a pole. One of the benefits of having Barry here was having a person to beat the crap out of. Today it’d just have to be himself. He positioned the bar on the lowest level of the ladder and swung up, catching the next rung.

Three months ago he bargained with the Bratva; time to himself if he promised to train. He had been. But like this? No. So fine. If they wanted him to train, he’d train. Mindlessly. With the anger. It would all be out before Felicity called to tell him that Piper woke up. And then he could go back and be the father. Maybe a lover. Something other than just an assassin and vigilante.

******

“He threw the guy across the room, John. Don’t you think that’s a little concerning?” Felicity took
her glasses off and rubbed her eyes. “Typical of me. I finally have a guy interested in me, and he turns out to have major anger management issues.”

“Life doesn’t send us an email for Christmas telling us everything that will happen to us, Felicity.”

“One sentence in my mailbox wouldn’t be so bad.”

“I think there is a reason why Oliver works out as hard as he does.”

“That six-pack doesn’t make itself. Oh, dear God don’t ever repeat that to anyone.”

Diggle chuckled, but then he sobered. “I think you need to know what you’re getting into. This will not be a relationship like most people experience. Oliver is not always in his right head. As we’ve discussed, you can help him with that. But you do have to have patience.”

“Miss Smoak?” The doctor approached them, looking a little worse for the wear. Felicity almost smiled at him. The cut above his eyebrows looked like it hurt. At least she had a guy who could stand up for her. “Yes, doctor?”

“Piper is waking up.”

“Thank you.” She stood up and looked at Diggle. “Do you want to come in with me? I could use your help with this.”

“You go in and I’ll call Oliver.”

She nodded and headed into the room. Piper opened her eyes. She no longer wore a breathing tube, just a lot of monitors on her chest and wrists. “Hey, honey. It’s Felicity.”

“You and Daddy are cute together.”

“Really.” She took a seat on the bed, aware that her little girl was on numerous drugs right now. Who knows what would come out of her mouth. “And why do you think that?”

“Because you dance like Belle and the Beast. And you look at each other like Almanzo and Laura look at each other.” She let out a little sigh. “Are you gonna tell me why I’m in here? And why I can’t move my leg?”

“Would you like me to tell you or do you want your dad to tell you?”

“Can you just tell me?” Piper’s eyes filled with tears. “I’m tired of not knowing anything. I really do wanna know.”

“I understand.” Felicity took Piper’s hand. “This is going to be hard to understand for you, okay? Try not to worry too much, because it will all be okay.” God, help me. “Two days or so ago, you were hit by a car.”

“But we were making the house pretty two days ago.”

“N-No. It’s not like that. Piper, two days ago, we were out shopping. Fluffy—”

“Fluffy?” Piper’s hand reached further up Felicity’s arm. “What happened to my puppy? What about Fluffy?”

“She’s okay. She’s okay.” In that moment, Ellie’s words made sense. And a heavy rock lifted off her heart. This disaster wasn’t her fault. Neither was it Oliver’s. Piper loved Fluffy. She loved all
animals, and she would do anything to keep them safe. Even if it would hurt her. Just like how she would take a bullet for any of these kids.

“Felicity, why can’t I remember that?”

“Because Fluffy ran out into the road. And you were hit by a car.”

“So I forgot stuff?” Her lip quivered. “I forgot Christmas?” Her eyes rolled up to the ceiling before they found Felicity again. “I forgot three months? Three months, Felicity?”

“You can’t worry about it, Piper. It will come back.” They could hope and pray that it would. “Right now, you need to focus on getting better.” Piper grabbed her hand again, her eyes welling with tears. “I’m sorry, honey. I’m so sorry.”

A scuffling sound came from the corridor, and Oliver appeared at the entry, looking…you are not allowed to think he is hot in this situation, Felicity Smoak. Did he go to work out? Because…wow. It doesn’t matter right now. It didn’t. Piper trembled in the bed, her eyes flitting from Oliver and then to Felicity. She let go of her hand and extended her arm to her father. “Daddy.” A tiny cry slipped out. “C-Can…can you come here?”

Felicity moved out of the way for Oliver, who cast her a helpless look as Piper started crying. She didn’t know how to do this. How would she? She wasn’t a mother, only a nanny. And right now, Piper needed her father.

As her sobs got louder, Oliver tossed back the blankets and slid into bed with her. The tubes and attachments inhibited her from moving, so he scooted closer to her and slid his arms around her shaking body. Felicity watched as the man with a million secrets who, a few hours ago, threw a doctor across the room, cuddle his daughter, bringing her down from her panic. Telling her that he loved her. That it would be all okay.

She could marry a man like that. Maybe not right away. This would take time. There were a lot of things that needed to be addressed. Like the secrets. More like the weird things that he seemed to be hiding. But she could do it. Unknowingly, he helped her see the beauty in herself. Her ability to be loved. That kind of man was worth fighting for.

When Piper asked for her, Felicity smiled and took a seat on the other side of the bed. “Yes, honey?”

“I want to see Fluffy.”

“We can arrange that.”

“Can I see everybody soon? They’re alive, right?”

“Yes, they are.” Felicity side-eyed Oliver and caught him looking at her. He flashed her an innocent look. “Is there anything else you want? I think we can do almost anything, except take you down a water slide.”

“I want you to be my mom.”

“Ahhh…” How on earth could she answer that one? She could answer in truth, because what had she been thinking about not too long before? But if she answered truthfully, that would create a landslide of reactions and emotions that could not be dealt with yet.

“It’s open for discussion.” Oliver winked—winked—at her. If it were possible to melt into a pile of goo at a tiny thing that ninety percent of the world’s population could do, she would. Felicity moved...
her gaze to the floor, hoping to hide her blush. And then smile. That would be the most obvious part.

“Piper?” A broken cry came from the doorway. Ellie ran over to them and skidded to a stop just before she slammed into the bed. Piper smiled and waved her fingers.

“Hi, Ellie. It’s good to know that you haven’t married yet.”

“No, no, I haven’t. There’s not many guys who want to date me right now.” Ellie clasped Piper’s hand and laughed. “You really scared us.”

“I didn’t mean to.”

“I know. But it was still scary. And we didn’t—we didn’t really know if you were gonna make it.”

“But I’m okay. So stop crying.”

As the rest of the kids crowded into the room, followed by a new doctor who still managed to give Oliver the stink-eye as he ran tests, Felicity left the area. Too crowded, and the family needed their time. In a couple days, physical therapy would start. They would have to start working on helping Piper regain her memory. Oh, and Fluffy with her broken legs. That might create the biggest drama of all.

She walked down the hall, intending on leaving the hospital. Everything smelled in here. Even her clothes smelled now. When her heels stepped into the frigid air, she took a deep breath. Never did cold air smell and feel so good.

As she dug around in her pocket to find keys to one of the cars in the lot, her fingers grazing against the USB, she turned around at the ‘hey’. She smiled. “Shouldn’t you be in there with the kids? Make sure they’re not starting a pillow fight or something?”

“They’re busy catching up.” Oliver took her elbow and guided her away from the sliding doors. “Piper’s gonna be fine.”

“You should know that if I forgot three months of my life, I would be in a lot worse state.”

“She has her siblings. And us. She’s always been a strong girl.”

Felicity stared up at him, looking into those blue eyes. They told her so much. The worry. The sadness. The small bit of relief. “We’re all gonna be okay.”

Oliver nodded, his gaze very obviously at her lips. “If that’s the case, can I kiss you now?”

“In a second. First,” she reached into her pocket and pulled out the USB. “I just want an explanation about this. And a few other things.” His eyes narrowed, and then something came over his face. That gave her all the confirmation she needed. Whatever she stumbled upon, it wasn’t a quick explanation. This wouldn’t be a quick fix, and then a kiss she so desperately wanted to have. But how could she kiss a man she didn’t trust? She loved him. But it was possible to love someone but not trust them. Felicity closed her eyes. “I get it, Oliver. It’s not something that—”

“No, wait.” Oliver grabbed her arm and tugged her closer. “It’s a long story. Whatever you have on that thing—”

“Bank records. Statements. A list of names that I haven’t yet looked at.” His eyes widened. He took a step back, that look on his face. God, that look. She’d seen it before. In her mother’s eyes…in her expression. Whenever Felicity demanded to know where Daddy went. Why did he leave? Where did
he go? Could she see him? It was the terror of answering questions and someone discovering the truth.

“Oliver, how can I kiss someone when I know they’re keeping secrets from me? Gee, how can I love someone when they’re keeping something from me?” Felicity sucked in a deep breath in an attempt at steadying her voice, but she couldn’t hide the pain. And she couldn’t hide from Oliver’s face. “I could care less about how many firewalls and protections that you have set up on your computer. I don’t care that you have bank accounts in Russia, Italy, and Hong Kong. What I do care about is that nothing lines up. Why aren’t you going with Ray and Malcolm to business meetings? Why on earth do you have an island? And why do you look like you’re about to faint right now?”

Oliver crossed his arms and turned away from her. Silence reigned for several beats, but then he spoke. Quietly. As if saying anything would cause death. “It isn’t something that needs to be talked about.” He turned back to her, his blue eyes glossy. “And I realize that there’s nothing that I can that will keep you from digging. But I can’t just let you do that.”

“Because you’re scared of what I’ll find?”

“Because I’m scared of what will happen if you find something. Stay away from it, Felicity. And if you’re going to be stubborn and insist on doing something, think about the kids. Don’t do it for their sakes.”

“Fine. But Oliver…” Felicity shook her head. “I can’t do this. I might have fallen in love with you, but I don’t trust you. If you decide you want to tell me the truth, then maybe we can work this out. But I can’t do it right now.”

The tears in his eyes were replaced with solid granite. He shut himself off to the world. To her. “Better to not have a relationship than to lose everything else.”

Chapter End Notes

I promise - PROMISE - that I was planning on them kissing in this chapter. I actually wrote the scene. But as the chapter continued, I knew I couldn't. Would any of us pursue a relationship when we didn't trust him? I know I wouldn't. There's a lot of things that need to be revealed in the next few chapters, and a few things need to happen before Felicity and Oliver can take the jump. They made moves tonight, but they haven't taken 'the leap'.

Again, doctor knowledge: ZERO. LOL (I was going to write a scene in which Felicity talks to a doctor/nurse about telling Piper about the brain injury, but I didn't fit it in. Just like we sometimes have to do with Arrow, we have to assume a few off-screen moments happened. :)

Important note: please don't expect a chapter next Friday. I need to burn through a good 15K this week for NanoWrimo and that means *not* having to worry about getting a chapter completed and semi-polished. If I get something done and it works, then one will be posted. Just wanted to let y'all know that! Hope you enjoyed the chapter, even I did probably destroy your hearts. :)
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

It's back!!!!!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 19

Oliver glanced at his phone when it rang for the umpteenth time. Unknown caller. He knew who it was. The Bratva didn’t sit around for three months and wait for him to figure his life out. Which wasn’t happening anytime soon, clearly. It didn’t help that he’d been home for a week and still hadn’t made contact with them. With a sigh, he tossed the phone back to the chair and scrubbed his face.

“Daddy, are you okay?”

“Hmm?” He scooted closer to Piper’s bed. She patted his head.

“Did you and Felicity break up?”

“You can’t break up with someone you never dated.”

“But you should. Date her, I mean.”

Curiosity won out. “Why do you think I should date Felicity?”

“Because you love her. And since your eyebrows are crinkling up, I’ll say why.” Piper smiled. “You keep trying to sneak peeks at her when she’s not looking and it’s absolutely adorable. And she does it too sometimes. And then your eyes will turn all dreamy and then you smile. Just a little bit and you look like a lovesick teenager.”

The scariest thing was that she spoke the truth, but Oliver didn’t want her to know that. “Sweetheart, how do you know what a lovesick teenager is?”

“That’s what Ellie is.”

“Excuse me?”

“She really likes guys on the TV. Harper does too.”

“Hmm.” His phone started buzzing again. Piper glanced at it. “Who is that who keeps calling?”

“It’s no one.”

“Clearly it’s no one. Maybe you should answer it.”

“I want to be with you right now.”

“Is that because no one else will talk to you?”
Oliver gulped. It had become obvious, hadn’t it? Most of the kids didn’t talk to him. Annie had started to figure out there was a reason, and even she had stopped sitting on his lap. And Felicity? She put on a brave face and kept up a façade that only she could, even giving him a hug the previous night after William went off on him. It had become a normal occurrence. Any hope of reconciling with his son had gone down the drain when he left.

“It’s a long story that you told me you don’t want to know.”

“Obviously, something happened. But you’re right. I don’t want to know. Now put me in my chair or carry me to the weight room so we can work on that hellish thing that the doctors said I have to do.”

“It’s called physical therapy.”

“I know, and I hate it. But I’m going to do it, because I want to walk again.”

He wanted to ‘walk’ also, but physical therapy wouldn’t help him learn to walk in a straight line again. In fact, nothing would heal his wounds. The literal and figurative ones. “Before we do that, I need to send a text. So don’t run off when I’m not looking.” She giggled. Oliver opened his texting app and drew up the unknown number that he’d used for five years when calling wasn’t an option. If you haven’t been paying attention to the news, my daughter was injured. Meaning I’m expecting to not be bothered until we get through physical therapy. If it’s an emergency and you somehow can’t survive without my help, you know where to find me. The message sent off. Oliver clicked ‘delete’ and set his phone down. “Alright, young lady, let’s go.”

“I think I changed my mind and I’d rather stay here.”

“Oooh, no. Not gonna do that to me.” He slid his hands underneath her and lifted her up, careful not to jar her broken arm and leg. “You and I are gonna go do this because in a little bit I need to go to Queen Consolidated and give Jerry ice cream for making him do all my stuff for so long.”

“Five years is a long time. You might need a lot of ice cream.”

Oliver winced as he realized that he just told Piper why the kids hated him. “Yeah, it is.”

******

“Felicity, I am telling you. For the last time, actually. I do not know anything about Oliver being suspicious. Is ten times enough for you or are you still gonna doubt me?”

“He practically told me to stay from his life unless I wanted to die. And he also pulled the kids card. ‘Do it for their sakes’. What am I supposed to think about that?”

“Clearly nothing because this was a week ago if my math is correct.”

“I’ve been trying to get past it. But I can’t. Barry, I’m dying to know what the heck has happened that I can’t search!” Felicity winced when her friend sighed. “Sorry. This is why I didn’t call a week ago. I’m mad, and I need answers.”

“Maybe you should tie Oliver to a chair and torture him. Or just tell him you’re not gonna wear your short skirts ever again.”

“Hilarious, and if you make one more joke about my skirts that aren’t that short, I will send the Hood over to Central City to slice your head off.”
“Not so sure he slices people’s heads off. But okay, I won’t. Maybe you should just ask him.”

“That’s not worked before. He’s clearly hiding something and telling anyone is not an option. And just when I finally came close to a kiss!”

Barry laughed, then sobered. “Wait, seriously? You…really were gonna kiss him? My gosh, that’s an imagine I can’t get out of my head. Wow, no wonder you’re asking questions. It’s probably difficult to fall in love with someone without trust and—”

“Yes, counselor, I get it. It’s why I told him that I wasn’t kissing him until I trusted him.” She rolled her eyes when Barry whistled. “Shut up. Listen, I discovered something early on. Actually, I didn’t discover it. It was just laid before me. There was never an accident report. It doesn’t look like anyone ever did anything. Which is odd, because that was Oliver Queen’s wife. Seems like there would be a big investigation into how she died.”

“Maybe it was a normal car accident, and so there was no investigation.”

“People don’t just not investigate something like that, Barry. You of all people should know that.”

“That doesn’t mean she got shot and drove into a post and the exhaust blew up.”

He didn’t believe her. She wasn’t sure she believed herself. For the past week, she’d lived a lie. Tried to show the kids, through her actions, to love their father. That they could forgive him. When in truth, she couldn’t even do that. How much longer could she fake it? Under the fear of whatever could happen to them, she hadn’t dug into anything. Each day, the fear faded, and the curiosity increased.

Not curiosity. The suspicion.

“Talk to you later, Barry.” She set her phone on the bed and ran her hand through her hair. It was nice to be home; almost a week in the hospital did that to a person. The only reason they got to bring Piper home this early was because of the amount of money Oliver could put into her therapy. Apparently it was a little bit more convincing when someone could have equipment for physical therapy brought in the same day the doctors asked for it.

She left her bedroom and headed down to the big living room. The kids all slept in the same room right now—on the first floor—so that they could keep an eye on Piper and cheer her up whenever need be. Whatever the consequences were of the accident, it had brought the Queen siblings closer together. Piper never had to be alone. The problem was that it left her alone at night.

Someone unlocked the front door and stepped in. Felicity jumped up and reached for the nearest weapon. A vase. And of course that’s what she held in her hand when Oliver walked into the room. He chuckled. “Did I scare you that bad?”

“I-I, uh, thought it would be best to grab something. I was a pitcher in high school, if you didn’t know. I’m good at aiming.”

“No, you were not. I’ve done my research on you. Now put that down.”

“What do you mean you’ve done research on me?” And why can’t I do mine on you? Felicity set the vase back on the table. “And don’t tell me you found the Myspace account I had ten years ago.”

“I didn’t know you had a Myspace account.” Oliver crossed his arms and leaned against the wall. “You don’t seem like one of those people.”
“Trust me when I say that seventeen-year-old me was much different than twenty-seven-year-old me.”

“I think that would be true for all of us. Ten years ago I was a completely different person.”

“Care to explain how?”

He shifted. “No.”

“Apparently it’s for the good of me and the kids that I don’t go digging around, but that doesn’t mean that I can’t ask. Tell me something, or I will go searching, and trust me when I say that I will be very thorough.”

“I told you to stop asking questions to protect my family. And you.” He aimed his gaze at her. That sweet, loving look that she’d fallen for. But not tonight.

“If you cared about me, you’d let me look. Because you aren’t getting any kisses until I know everything.”

Oliver sighed and took a seat on the couch opposite her. “I, uh… a long time ago, got messed up with some bad people. Kind of comes with the job when you have a multi-billion dollar company. There was blackmail involved; they threatened Annie and the kids. Obviously, I wasn’t gonna let anyone hurt them, so I gave in. That’s what all those files you discovered are from. I’ve created accounts in weird places, like the coldest place in Russia and such. They were very clear that if anyone found out, my family would die.” He took a deep breath. “And before you say something about going to the feds or whatnot, I sent an email to the director of the FBI, and three days later, Annie died.”

“Oh my God.” Felicity covered her mouth. “I—I’m so sorry, Oliver. I had no idea.”

“When people say that it wasn’t my fault…” Oliver sniffed. “They’re wrong, because it was. I was cocky and thought that I could get rid of these people, and my wife and baby died because of it.

“So when I told you not to dig around, that’s why.” He lifted his eyes to look at her. “I care about you a lot, and I love my kids. I can’t lose anyone else because someone figured out that someone dug around.”

“But I can help you, Oliver. I’m skilled at this kind of stuff. I can get through things that most people can’t get through. Undetected.”

“No.” He shook his head. “We can’t risk it, and I don’t want you to worry about it. I have it covered.”

She believed him. Against her better judgement, probably. But it made sense. And the thin veil of tears that made his blue eyes shine convinced her. She leaned forward and intertwined their fingers. “Okay. I’ll stop. But I’m gonna figure out how to get you out of this. You can’t stop me from doing that. Deal?”

Oliver smiled. “Deal.”

******

Dear God, he was starving. He should’ve eaten more for dinner. William sat up and tossed the covers back. “Hey Clayton, do you still have those crackers under the bed? Clayton?” Of course. This had to be the one night that his brother actually slept hard and didn’t wake up when the floorboards creaked. He grabbed his flashlight on the nightstand and opened the door. At two in the
morning, all the lights were off upstairs. A faint light glowed from the living room. Food could come after he checked out who was up right now. Probably his father. Planning on when he could leave again.

He took the side stairs to the first floor and crept along the hallway until he reached the living room. *Don’t look yet. Just listen.* That was what got people killed in spy movies. Looking. He could figure out what was going on by just the talking.

“I told you last time that if you ever visited my house again, I would kill you.”

He didn’t expect *that* from his dad. Cold, menacing. In fact, creepy. He spoke in a way that sent shivers down William’s spine.

“I believe that deal was made with the stipulation that you would cooperate, Mr. Queen.” A man with an even creepier voice and accent spoke. “And you haven’t. When was the last time you checked in? Three months ago? You told us you went off to that island of yours to train. Anatoly was fine with that, until you came home and started ignoring our phone calls. Forcing us to come to your house.”

William scooted himself closer to the entrance and peeked in. Three men stood, facing his father, armed with weapons. Guns at their hips. Rifles on the table. An old box lay at one of the men’s feet. It didn’t have a lock on it. What had he walked into? What was going on?

“I didn’t respond because my daughter got hit by a car. Understandably I needed awhile to myself before you sent me over to Russia for another assignment? Which brings up the million dollar question. Why. Are. You. Here?”

“Because you need to go on an assignment. But don’t worry, Oliver. It’s close.”

“Oh, I just can’t wait until you ask me to kill the mayor.”

Kill? William’s knees gave out. He grabbed onto the end table for support. If he fell to the ground, he’d make noise. And then he’d be the one dead. Not whoever his father…he put his hand over his mouth to stifle a cry. What was going on? Why were these people in their house? Why did his dad let them be here? He was the all-powerful Oliver Queen. Couldn’t he make them go away?

“Not him. Malcolm Merlyn.”

Oliver scoffed. “You think I would kill one of my best friend’s father?”

“Yes. You will, or your family will bear the consequences.”

“I’m not killing Malcolm. I’m not even going to shoot an arrow in his leg as the other guy. He’s a friend. Which means I’m not touching him.”

“You’re going to do it, Oliver. And it will be done. By the end of the week.”

*Don’t say yes, Dad. Please don’t say yes.*

There was a pause and then—“Send me the plans by Tuesday and I will take care of it. Now get out of my house.”

Russians. Weren’t they Russian?

“Good choice. Anatoly is losing patience with you.” Their voices faded as they moved to the door. William took a deep breath and slipped into the room. They left the box. Meaning it would give him the answers to what was going on. When the Russian scary guys spoke in the foyer, he ran to the box and opened it.

*****

Felicity jerked up as a scream interrupted her dream. It wasn’t her. She hadn’t had a nightmare in three days, and none of the kids slept with her tonight. What was that? She wrapped herself in her pink robe and left her bedroom. Downstairs, a door slammed. Felicity tightened the robe and ran down the stairs. She slammed into Oliver at the bottom. “Sorry!” He didn’t move. She touched his shoulder. “Oliver?” When he continued to be a wax creature, Felicity went around him. Bile rose in her throat as her eyes adjusted to the scene.

William knelt on the ground, a wooden, worn box in front of him. That wasn’t what brought Felicity’s heart to her knees. It was the bow. A high-powered bow. William held it in his hands, his mouth gaping. Felicity whirled back around. To Oliver. His face and posture told her everything she needed to know. He stared at his son, his eyes filled with tears. He didn’t move. Didn’t breathe. Just stared.

“You’re…him.” As William spoke, Ellie ran down the stairs, a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. “What the heck is going on? Daddy?”

“You’re the Hood.” William slammed the bow to the ground. The noise ricocheted off the walls. He pushed himself up and moved towards Oliver. “And you…you told those Russian guys that you would kill Malcolm Merlyn for them.”

“What?” Harper joined them. She grabbed Oliver’s arm. “Daddy, what’s going on? Why is there a bow—”

“And arrows?” Ellie knelt at the box and withdrew a quiver. “Daddy?”

What could she say? Nothing. She couldn’t tell the kids that they were freaking out nothing. Couldn’t tell them that it wasn’t true. She couldn’t tell herself that. All she could do was stare. Just like Oliver. He still hadn’t moved. Could he hear them? In his terror, had he shut them out?

“Daddy, what’s going on?” Ellie’s voice rose in panic. “Why do you have a bow and quiver?”

“I know.” William grabbed the bow from the ground and twirled it a few times before pointing it at Oliver. “It’s because you’re a murderer. You kill people. You’ve been doing it for years. And hiding it.”

“I was…” Oliver’s voice cracked. “I was trying to protect you.”

“So you’re saying this is…” Harper choked, and then recovered her voice. “This is true? Willie’s right?”

“He’s—”

“Don’t try to lie. I’m right. I heard him talking to those people. I saw them. They had guns. You let men with guns—Russian men—come into our house.”

“What’s going on?” Piper wheeled herself into the room, her eyes flitting around the room. Oliver’s
face crumbled. With a shaking hand, he reached for the couch arm and collapsed down on the sofa. William picked up the bow as Ellie pressed the quiver to her chest. Harper just stared. Piper kept looking around the room. Felicity crossed her arms and stared at the man whose life just fell apart before his very eyes.

“Oliver?” She cleared her throat, trying to get the sticky feeling out. It wasn’t working. “Oliver, wh-what’s going on?”

“It’s…complicated.”

Everything started piling up now. The not-actual-business trips. The bank accounts in weird places. Russia especially. The fact that he paid Captain Lance two million dollars to cover up Annie’s death. Oh, God. William was right. Whatever he discovered, he was right. Oliver was the Hood. And something else. “You can’t just say that it’s complicated. Because whatever he found out, William’s right.”

Ellie dropped the quiver. “How do you know for sure?”

“It’s a long story.”

“Well, clearly no one’s getting any sleep tonight, so you might as well start talking. Since our father is not going to start talking and telling us.” Ellie glared at him. “So maybe you could tell us something.”

“I’ve discovered things on my own.”

Oliver let out a little moan.

“But that’s something that we can talk about after your father tells us. Everything.”

“I can’t.”

Ellie swore. Loudly and several times. “You can’t? What is your problem? We find out that you’re this mass murderer in some capacity and what do you say? You can’t tell us?”

“If I tell you—”

“People will kill us,” Felicity muttered. Everyone snapped to attention to her. William, still holding the bow, stared at her, his mouth open. “Excuse me? What about people killing us?”

They deserved to know. Oliver brought this upon himself, didn’t he? He deserved this. Felicity crossed her arms, glancing at the entrance as Clayton and Annie entered the room. Oliver dropped his head to his hands. The littlest Queen started crying and ran to Felicity. “What’s going on?” She burrowed her head in Felicity’s robe. “Why is there a robin hood bow in here?”

“That’s a good question, Annie.”

“No, William.” Felicity shook her head. “This is not something that she needs to hear about right now. Sweetheart,” she turned Annie towards her and reached up to wipe the tears that trickled down her face. “I want you to go back to bed.”

“But what’s going on?”

“You don’t need to know. Not right now. I think you would prefer to go to bed. It’s late.”

“I don’t want to sleep by myself.”
“Right now none of us can lay with you, but you can sleep with all your stuffed animals. I’ll take you up, okay?” She sent Ellie a look. A plea to keep everyone alive for ten minutes while she put Annie back to sleep. “I will be right back. Don’t die. Please.”

“Oh, don’t worry. Hopefully Dad decides not to fire kill shots. If he even knows how to do that.”

“Let’s go, sweetie.” Felicity climbed the stairs, hoping to lull Annie to sleep before they reached the bedroom. Yes, Oliver deserved this. Whatever he’d done. But his daughter didn’t. None of these kids deserved this. Finding out their dad wasn’t who they thought he was. Not that many of them held him in high regard. Why would they? He threw away any hope of love a long time ago with his actions. But this? The term ‘nail in the coffin’ came to mind.

“What’s happening downstairs?” Annie gathered her teddy bears around her. “Everyone’s mad. And Daddy looks like he’s crying.”

“Just know that whatever happens, it’s going to be okay.”

“Did someone die?”

A lot of people actually. Felicity mustered up a smile. “No one died. As I said, everything’s gonna be okay.” Somehow. Someday. “Sleep tight.” Annie mumbled something about sleeping as she closed her eyes. Thank goodness. At least she’d have one thing out of the way.

But trying to deal with everyone downstairs? She couldn’t do that. This was not what she signed up for.

*******

William heard him talking to the Bratva. Agreeing to kill Malcolm Merlyn. And then he opened the box. And pulled out the bow. He’d known from the moment that the scream rocketed through the house that his life was over. One way or another. Everything that he’d tried to hide…it had come out. In a way that only his nightmares had come up with.

Oliver stayed rooted in his place, afraid that if he lowered his hands, a tidal wave of death would be unleashed.

That’s what would happen. They would all die because of this. And if they somehow escaped that? His children would hate him for the rest of their lives. William was right. He killed people. Yes, he had to do it for the safety of kids, but he still chose to fire bullets and arrows at people’s chests. What could he ever say that would make his kids forgive him? There was nothing. Because he had no excuse.

“The hood’s been around for years. I’ve heard stories about the hood since I was little.” Ellie let out a bitter laugh. “Did you lie to Mom too about this?”

“No. She knew.”

“And how do we know that isn’t a lie?”

“You have to trust me.”

“Trust you? Ha! How are we supposed to do that?”

“It’s not like you’ve given us any reason to believe you.” Harper’s voice came from several feet away from him. Oliver lifted his head to see his daughter. Tears streaked down her cheeks. “And
now we find out that you’re an assassin? I’ve seen the papers. The Hood is not a nice guy.”

Felicity came back down, now dressed in normal clothes. She took a seat on the couch opposite him and crossed her arms. “Alright, listen. I’m just as angry as all of you. But I was given the task—”

“What is with this family and having discussions at three—oh.” Diggle stopped as his eyes rested on the box. “What’s this?”

“Daddy’s the vigilante.” William handed Diggle the bow. “And he works for Russian people. He told them that he’d kill Malcolm Merlyn for them.”

“What the…” Diggle cast a look in Oliver’s direction. “Is this true, man?” He looked at Felicity, who nodded. “What…” he dropped to the couch. “You’re the Hood? How is that possible?”

“Oliver was just about to tell us. Wasn’t he?” Felicity gave him an ugly look. Oliver dropped his gaze to the ground. And he lost her too. For a while, he believed that he could save the little bit of humanity he had left and love Felicity with it. But he couldn’t. He was a murderer. An assassin. A vigilante. There was nothing left for him. He deserved this; whatever came next. How ironic. Getting kicked out of the house. Just like he kicked his sister out. He squeezed his eyes shut. What would she think? She’d been right. Way back then, when she yelled at him. Dear God, she’d been right.

“We’re waiting.”

“There’s…there’s nothing to say.”

“Pfft. I think there’s something here to say, Oliver. Defend yourself. Tell us we’re wrong. Say something.” Felicity’s words held a little hope. Here she was, pleading that maybe he could explain himself. If only he could.

Oliver raised his head and caught Felicity’s eyes. “There’s nothing to say. Because William’s right. You’re all right. I’m a…murderer. I’m the Hood.” He moved his gaze to Ellie who stared at him, tears rushing down her cheeks. “Your mother gave me the idea. I was angry about a lot of things. But when she died…I lost all that hope that she once put into me. So I started being the judge, jury, and executioner. And yes.” He looked at William. His son crossed his arms and stared straight ahead, unblinking, and unmoving. “I work for the Russian mafia.”

Ellie screamed. She collapsed forward, her eyes begging him to deny it. “No, Daddy. You’re not. You can’t be. That’s not…she let out a sob. “That’s not the dad I knew and loved. You can’t be the Hood. Or in the Bratva. That’s what it’s called, right? You can’t be. Say you’re not. Please, just say you’re not.”

“Elizabeth…” Oliver shook his head, feeling the tears in his own eyes spill over. “Honey, that would just be another lie.”

“No!” This time, Ellie screamed and reached for a vase on the end table. Felicity yelled a warning to not do it, but it was too late. She hurled it at him. Oliver could have blocked it—he’d blocked much smaller and deadlier—but he deserved to get hit. He deserved much worse. As the glass smashed into his cheek, he bit back a yell of his own. Pain and blood exploded. But it didn’t hurt as much as watching his daughter push Diggle away and run down the hall. Piper started crying. William grabbed the bow and quiver and left with her. Harper and Clayton stood there for one last moment, and then ran off.

Oliver touched his face, wincing when the glass punctured deeper. Felicity, her mouth covered, cried as she moved towards him. He held out a bloody hand, stopping her. “I-It’s okay. I…I can take care
of it myself.”

“Because you’re the vigilante, I know. But you have me right now. Dig, go find Ellie. Or someone. I don’t know. Just do something. You—” she pointed at him, “Come into the kitchen.”

He pushed himself up, trying to hide the pain in his features. If he had a gun right now, and Anatoly stood before him, he wouldn’t be killing the Russian mafia leader. No one deserved a bullet more than him. When Felicity pointed to a chair, he collapsed down, and watched her move around the kitchen. She pulled out a first-aid kit and wet several wash cloths. Even now, she stayed calm.

“This is gonna hurt a little bit. Tip your head.” She dropped the supplies on the table and squeezed one of the wet rags above his cheek. Oliver winced as the water trickled down it, but it washed away the blood, leaving shards of glass.

“Felicity, I can deal with it.”

“I know you can. But I’m going to do it. So shut up.” She grabbed the tweezers and plucked the first few easy glass pieces out. “You asked me to help you take down some bad guys. Who were they?”

“It’s complicated.”

“I can make this a lot more painful, Oliver.”

It wouldn’t hurt half as bad as some of the things he endured, but right now, anything would cause him to break down into tears and never stop crying. That couldn’t happen for a very long time. “The Bratva.”

“So you, as the Hood, are trying to take down the other organization you work for. At least we’re not the only people you lie to.”

“Felicity—”

“No. Save it.” She dropped another piece of glass onto the table. “This all shocking, yes, but there’s been crazier things revealed. But you know what I can’t understand? I gave you the opportunity to tell me. To tell me something. And you didn’t take it. You lied. You covered it up. Did you seriously think that you could hide this the rest of your life? That you would die and then we would dig this up? Because what would your children have done then? You’d be dead and there’d be no way to redeem yourself.”

“There’s no way to do that, either way.”

“I don’t believe that.”

“My daughter threw a vase at me, Felicity. They all now know I kill people. There’s no redemption for that.”

“Moses was a murderer. And look what he did.” Felicity set the tweezers down. “I’m mad at you, Oliver. I’m so mad that I could cry. And Lord knows that I have done that already, and I’ll do it as soon as I go upstairs and wash all this blood off my hands. But you are not done yet. You have a life to live, and there’s always hope. No matter what. You can believe differently, and your kids can too. But there’s always hope. People change, and that’s not just their complexion. They can have a change of heart. They can see something differently. You’re still hiding things. You’re hiding why. Why are you a part of the Bratva? How? So maybe you should start with that.”

“It doesn’t matter. I’m a killer either way.”
She moved away from him. “The glass is out of your face, so bandage it up yourself, because that you’re definitely better yet. And Oliver?” She stopped at the kitchen door. “There’s a difference between there always being hope and losing hope. There’s hope for people, but there’s a lot less when that person gives up on himself.”

When the kitchen door shut, he opened the first-aid kit and pulled out the bandages, but as he cut the strips for his face, his hand began shaking. Oliver dropped the scissors and grabbed ahold of the edge of the table. Stop. He had to stop. Stop freaking out. Stop...everything.

They’d found out.

He struggled to take a breath as the realization came to a head. His kids found out. About everything.

And they hated him.

He raised his bloody, shaking hands to his eyeline. They’d killed so many people. Not innocent ones, but he’d killed them all the same. He was a murderer. For so long he hid the fact, but now, it had been revealed in the worst way possible. And now they knew. How he spent his nights. How often he lied to them. How many people he’d fired arrows into.

With a sob, he dropped his head to his bloody hands. What would Annie think of him now? She started the hood because she knew that he could be a hero. And he was. For a long time. But now? She would ashamed of who he was. Would she even want to be with him? He’d destroyed himself.

That wasn’t why he cried.

He could handle the loss of his soul. But when he lost himself, he’d destroyed his family too.

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Felicity slid on her red coat and opened the door, the January air rushing at her. She reached inside and grabbed another jacket, just in case Ellie didn’t bring one. Why it was necessary to take a walk at four in the morning, regardless of the circumstances? Diggle said he saw her disappear down the walk and ignored his calls. Wisely he told Felicity, and after cleaning Oliver’s blood off her hands, she headed out.

What would she say when she found her? ‘I’m sorry you found out your dad works for the mafia and is a vigilante; get over it’? Or ‘I wouldn’t be mad at you if you threw another vase at him’? That sounded like a better way to start it off. The problem with all of this was that she didn’t know what to do. There were no answers to this. The proper thing to do would be turn Oliver over to the police. Quentin Lance would be more than happy to take care of that for her. But she couldn’t do that. See him arrested? No. At least not yet. If the police discovered him, then fine. They’d deal with that. However, that wouldn’t be happening.

Knowing that Ellie would go traipsing through the woods and into someone else’s property to avoid her, Felicity continued her search without a flashlight. She’d been out here enough to know where people would hide. After ten minutes, she heard crying. Felicity made her way to the bench and took a seat. She settled in, thankful for the shelter from the wind. There was no reason to speak. When Ellie wanted to talk, she would talk.

What would her mother say when she found out about this? She loved Oliver; told her daughter that several times each conversation. Didn’t seem like she would enjoy knowing her little girl’s crush could be sent to federal prison for the rest of his life. Sound like anyone else she’d loved?

“Why is this happening?” Ellie scooted closer to Felicity and took the extra coat. “I mean, what did
we deserve to have this happen to us? We lost our mother. And then we lost our father to whatever this is.”

“I don’t know, Ellie. Or Elizabeth. I didn’t realize that was your real name.”

“Apparently Daddy liked Ellie and Mama liked Elizabeth. They compromised.” She fingered the coat, a little smile on her face. “They couldn’t agree on many names. I remember when Annie was born, and they got into a big fight in the hospital about naming her after Mama. Daddy wanted to, and she didn’t. Even though she told me a few days before that if it were a boy, she wanted to name him Oliver.”

“Your parents were quite the couple.”

“And that’s what destroyed everything, huh? Daddy loved her so much that when she died, there was nothing else to live for. Even us. So he signed on to become a killer. Trust me when I say that he wasn’t one of those people before that. I can’t believe he was the vigilante, but if Mama helped him…” she sniffed. “I’m sorry I threw the vase at him.”

“No, you’re not.”

“I was just so angry. I still am angry. How am I supposed to face someone like that? He lied to us. For five years. And he didn’t just lie about that. He’s said that he’s gone on business trips when he actually went to kill people. He’s…” Ellie swore and slammed her hands on the bench. “I can’t talk about this.”

“It will help, I promise.”

“I can’t. This is stupid. It’s all stupid.” She stood up and spun around, her temper flaring up. “Maybe someday. But right now? I can’t forgive him. I can’t even think about forgiving him.”

“I’m not asking you to, Ellie.”

“I know. But I can’t think about it. I can’t forgive him. For anything. And don’t ask me to.” As she moved back towards the house, Ellie stopped. “Please don’t worry about me. I’m not going to do anything rash. But don’t come after me.”

At nine that morning, after three hours of a nightmare-filled sleep, Felicity stepped out of her bedroom. She didn’t attempt to put a smile on her face. The chaos could be heard downstairs. Did she even want to go down there? Maybe if she stayed in bed she would be able to avoid the hell that would be going on.

She let out a sigh and descended the stairs. Harper sat on the floor by the living room, fingering an arrow. She glanced up as Felicity entered. “Good morning. Well, it’s not necessarily a good morning. I would much rather be anywhere else but here.”

“Where’s your father?”

“He’s not here.”

“What do you mean he’s not here?”

“Well, unless he has a secret lair underneath the house, he isn’t around.” Harper rolled her eyes and stood up. “William hasn’t been around here either.”
Great. Now she had to go find the two Queen men. “Please tell me that no one else disappeared.”

“The others are here. I think. But don’t expect any forgiveness and sweetness around here. There’s nothing.”

You are not the only one. “It’s okay. Where’s Ellie?”

“Here.” Ellie came into the room, wearing a towel on her hair. “I can’t say that we have much to report. Daddy’s gone.”

“Oh, I’m sure. Try to deal with things for a bit while I deal with things.” She swiped open her phone and hit Oliver’s number. In two rings, he picked up. “What do you want?”

“Uh, maybe for you to be here?”

“I guess they didn’t look everywhere. I’ll be there in a few seconds.”

Felicity set her phone down on the table. “He’s coming. Meaning we need to find William now.”

“What, so the whole family can be together for a nice screaming match?” Harper scoffed. “I would definitely adore that. It’d be almost as fun as finding out your dad is a serial killer. Maybe he’ll have another secret to tell us when he gets in.”

The door opened and Oliver stepped in. Felicity sucked in a deep breath when he turned his head to look at her. Blood had dried on his cheeks, and coupled with the cuts, he looked like someone who put on a hood every night. A man who killed. He glanced around the room, taking in account for everyone, all glaring at him. “I was in the gazebo.”

“Planning your descent into hell?”

Oliver stared at Harper, his brow furrowing.

She folded her arms and walked towards him. “Y’know, I’m only thirteen. Almost fourteen, if you haven’t forgotten. And like every other child, I’ve looked up to my parents. I don’t remember my mom very much, so I can say I’ve looked up to you more. Even when you disappear and do whatever crap you do. Well, now I realized that I looked up to someone who’s fake. You lied to us. Repeatedly. What else are you gonna tell us? That you killed Mom?”

He sucked in a deep breath and shifted.

Harper caught it. She let out a disbelieving laugh. “Of course. You killed Mom.”

“I did not kill your mother.” Oliver regained an ounce of confidence. He moved towards his daughter, even as she moved backwards. “And in case you didn’t hear me, I did not kill her.”

“Then explain the body language.”

“I—”

Someone knocked on the door. Felicity sighed and opened it. Oh, how she would come to regret that decision. Captain Lance stood outside, holding a piece of paper. His hand rested on a gun. Oh, God. She kept the door open just a crack. “Wh-What are you doing here?”

“We’re here because we have an arrest warrant.”

“No, you do not.” Felicity looked back. Oliver stared at her, the stoic, calm demeanor gone. He
stared at the door, his eyes wide. He was scared. Terrified. Despite the anger towards him, she wished she could keep that fear from being realized. Her eyes shifted back to Lance. “I think you have the wrong place.”

“Felicity.” He swore. “We’re here to arrest Oliver Queen, and I can see him standing behind you. So unless you want to be dragged off to federal prison too because you interfered with an arrest, I’d open the door and let us in.”

*I’m so sorry, Oliver.* She nodded and pulled open the doors. SWAT men converged first, their guns pointed at Oliver, who raised his hands. As Harper and Ellie backed up, both shaking, he growled, “I’m not gonna hurt anybody. Put the guns down. *Please.*”

“Put the guns down, men.” Quentin joined them in the foyer as Piper and Clayton plus Diggle and Raisa ran in, all yelling various versions of ‘what is going on’. With a smirk, the police captain waved the piece of paper around. “Oliver Queen, you are under arrest for suspicion of being the vigilante and being a member of the Russian Mafia. And *murder.*” He chuckled. “I’d enjoy this moment in your big ol’ rich mansion, because this is the last time you’re seeing the light of day as a free man for a very, very long time.”

All her strength dissipated. Felicity fell back against the wood paneling. The handcuffs clipped around Oliver’s wrists, symbolizing the end. The end of a romance that barely even started. The end of a father. The end of the Queens. Their lives would never be the same, would they?

“Daddy?” Annie ripped into the room, but Diggle scooped her up and whispered something to her. She ignored him and wiggled around so she could see Oliver. “Why are you in those handcuffs? What’s going on?”

Oliver’s shoulders sagged forward as far as they could with his hands behind his back. “It’s okay, sweetheart. Don’t worry about me. Just…” his chin trembled. “Go and play, okay?”

“Let’s go, Queen.” Lance grabbed Oliver’s arm and pushed him towards the exit.

“*Daddy!* What are you doing to my daddy?” Annie screamed and pummeled Diggle’s arms. “Let me go! Diggle, let me go! I want my daddy!”

The SWAT team exited the house, but just before Quentin walked Oliver out, he looked up at the balcony where William stood, arms crossed. “We really appreciate it, Son. The audio gave us everything we needed.”

A little cry came from Oliver. Ellie ran down the hall, her sobs echoing back to them. Harper let out a dark laugh. Clayton just stared. Piper’s crying increased. And Annie screamed. Felicity sank down the wall to the floor. *Oh, God.* What was she supposed to do? Hold everyone up? Even when her own anger and pain threatened to rip her up from the inside out? She couldn’t. Even John Diggle couldn’t, as he sank to a chair, still holding Annie who continued to scream.

With one last look around the room, Quentin shut the door. Several seconds later, doors slammed shut and the cars drove off. Felicity took off her glasses and dropped her head to her knees. Little hands came around her neck and a wet cheek pressed against her. She sat up and helped Annie on her lap. Felicity wrapped her arms around her and held on tight. There was no need to say it would be all okay, because that would be a lie. They would not be okay. Lance was right; Oliver would never see the light of day again as a free man.

“What…” Annie lifted her head from hiccupped. “What are we gonna do now?”
“I have no idea.” Felicity rocked her back and forth as she surveyed the room. William still stood on the stairs, his arms crossed, chin up. That kid felt no guilt, did he? How would he feel when he realized that he just sentenced his father to hell? Probably just fine. But everyone else? They all hated Oliver.

And now, with him en route to the prison, what could he ever do about that?

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed it!!! There will be a new chapter next Friday; I promise! :)
“I promise I’m not carrying weapons underneath this coat.” Felicity kept her hands outstretched and resisted the urge to roll her eyes as an officer ran his hands over her frame, searching for bumps. And not one of those bumps. Oooh, no. No baby bumps for a long time. Maybe not ever. “Do I look like someone who would be carting illegal things into a conversation? And please don’t do a strip search based on that comment.”

The officer looked up at her, eyebrows raising higher each millisecond. “Ma’am, we don’t require visitors to do a strip search. We just need to take extra precautions because you’re visiting—”

“I’m very aware of who I’m about to visit.”

“You can go right in through those doors. Here’s your visitor tag.” She put it on her coat and walked to the steel, guarded doors. Just before them, she stopped. Did she want to do this? It had been five days since the arrest. It wasn’t like the kids would be visiting him any time soon. Neither would Diggle. Leaving her, of course. If she could throw a good right hook, she’d punch him, yes. But whatever Oliver did, he didn’t deserve to sit in jail all by himself. Plus, she needed answers. If she were honest with herself, that was the real reason she came. She needed to know. Why did he lie to her? To his children?

A guard opened the door. “Go right in, ma’am.”

Oliver already sat at one of the tables. He didn’t see her step in since he faced away from her. All the other prisoners in the room didn’t wear handcuffs, but he did. Calm, Felicity. Calm. Acting out against the officers about why he wore restrains would be unnecessary. She knew why, of course, though it seemed like Oliver could probably get out of those. Before moving towards him, she paused and watched. He just sat there, staring down at the table, his shoulders hunched. He’d given up already, hadn’t he? Guilt touched her heart. She should have come the first day. Let him know someone was there for him, even if everyone had left. No matter if anger waged in her heart when she thought of him. He needed someone here.

“Oliver.”

He sat up straighter and turned around. Smiled. A little bit. “Hi.”

She took a seat opposite him and forced herself to look at his face, not the cuffs. It wasn’t any better looking up. After only a few days in here, he wore the look of an inmate. The blank stare. His hair stuck up on all ends—attractive, yes—but grease darkened the tips. In all the pictures and in all the months she’d known him, his scruff…was always scruff. But he hadn’t shaved since the arrest. Focus. “I don’t really know what to say.”

“That’s a little unusual.” Oliver cocked his head and flashed her another small smile. “For you, at least.”

“I’ve been at a loss of words before. One time, when this dirt bag tried to ask me out on a date when I was twelve and I didn’t know what to say. And one time when I was twenty and some guy thought it would be fun to ask me out to a dance with fireworks. So it is possible. It’s just not very often.” She took another deep breath. “Sorry. It’s…I’m sorry, Oliver. I don’t know what to say. I’ve gone
through several things that I could say, but none of them really work. This is not a situation that I’m good at. Which is odd.” Dear God, she was rambling. “Because I’ve actually visited people in jail before.”

“Felicity.” The handcuffs clanked as Oliver reached across the table to grab her hand. Despite the disgustingness in here and the frigid air, his hand was warm. Felicity looked down at their hands. If her mother could see her now. Holding hands with a guy who had handcuffs around his wrists. And despite that, she was okay with it. There would never be any kind of relationship—not in here at least, but she could still love him, right? Despite all the lies, she still did.

“Thank you for coming. It’s been a little lonely in here.” Oliver scanned the room. “And they don’t like a lot of noise. Which is what I like best.”

“I could record the kids screaming and you could play it at night.”

“We both know they wouldn’t do that.”

“Yeah, well…” she sighed, and then looked up at him. “I’m sorry, Oliver. I wish I could say that they’re gonna get over this easily, but they’re not. There’s no forgiveness in their vocabulary right now, and Lord knows how long it’ll be. There’s nothing that I can say that will change that.”

“It’s okay.” Everything but his words told her that it wasn’t. “I wouldn’t want to see me either. I don’t even know why you’re here.”

“I don’t know either. Mostly because I’m still mad at you. I certainly have never been locked up in one of these places, but I know how it is to be without anyone. And I don’t want you to be alone in here.”

Oliver took a deep breath and looked up at the ceiling, tears filling his eyes.

“And I realize that you lied to me. A lot. And I don’t know how I’m ever gonna deal with that. But that day that I came to your house for the first time, I told myself that I was going to save your family. I sure didn’t expect it to be this difficult or crazy, but I signed up for everything, and that includes you too.”

“I-I don’t deserve that.”

“I know. But I don’t deserve the love that you and the kids have given me either. So now I’m gonna return the favor.”

“Felicity…” Oliver’s grip tightened on her hands. “I want you to know what happened.”

“What do you mean?”

“About the Hood. About Russia. Everything. It’s rather simple, really. I should’ve told you earlier.” He took a deep breath. “What I told you was mostly correct. Six years ago, someone came to me with photos. Proof that I was the vigilante. They told me they wanted me to come work for them. With the Russian accent it was pretty easy to figure out what they wanted me to do. And I said no. Told them to go to hell. The next day someone hacked into my computer and took a couple million dollars. Then they asked me again.” He let out a bitter laugh. “If only I said yes right away.

“Four days later, Annie died.”

An ache started in her stomach. “She was murdered by them.”
“Because I said no.” He sniffed and glanced away. “They took her ring. The day after she died, when I was sitting in our bedroom, someone came through the window. He had the ring, and a letter. It described, in detail, what would happen if I refused the request to come to Russia. I had to leave after the funeral.”

“That’s where you went when Thea thought you were off drunk somewhere.”

“And that’s why I went off on her when I got back. I couldn’t handle the thought of her around when she thought I was drinking while I was off being trained to become a part of the Bratva. It was wrong of me to do it, but in my grief and rage…I sent her away. Turns out she was the third person in a long line of people that I lost. It’s stupid but,” Oliver blinked back tears. “Sometimes I wonder what would’ve happened if I hadn’t kicked her out. Maybe I’d still be here, but the kids might not hate me as much.”

“The kids still love you, Oliver.”

“No, they don’t. They have no reason to. Besides those two weeks with them, I have given them no reason to love me. And they haven’t even heard the whole story. Imagine if they found out I basically killed their mother. And a sibling. I’ve never even told them that. There’s no hope of anything. I’m gonna spend the rest of my life in here, and maybe—”

“You can’t think like that.”

Oliver attempted to spread his hands, but the cuffs kept him from doing so. He glanced down at the metal, his eyes watering. Felicity closed her eyes to allow him a moment to collect himself. After several moments, he spoke, but this time, the strong voice was gone. “What other choice do I have? Become an optimistic person and sit in my cell every day and wait for someone to tell me my kids are here to see me? It’s a much better idea to just accept it.”

“You can’t just accept things, Oliver.” She leaned in closer to him. “If I had accepted my life, I would be a cocktail waitress in Vegas like my mother. And I never would’ve moved a thousand miles away to work in Central City and I never would’ve moved to Starling City to nanny six rambunctious children and simultaneously deal with their annoying, way too attractive dad.” He smiled at that. “And I never would’ve realized that I fell in love him. Accepting things as they are gets us nowhere. Sure, it looks pretty bleak. But my life looked pretty bleak several months ago too. It was way past bleak. It looked hopeless. I was never gonna find a guy, never gonna find a family. Never gonna do anything but research topics for people more important than me. But then I decided that I wanted to do something different. I didn’t want to accept my life. And you can’t either. You made mistakes. But that does not define us. They make us who we are, and you are wonderful man. You know what you said tells me? That you love your kids. So much that you decided to become an assassin for the Russian Mafia. You sacrificed yourself for them. You basically let yourself die so that they could live. That’s love.”

“Time’s up, you two.” An officer tapped Felicity on the shoulder. “It’s time for you to go, Miss.”

“Okay.” They stood up in sync. She looked down at his handcuffed hands and pursed her lips. “I guess this could be a weird hug, but whatever. You won’t shoot me if I hug him, right?”

The guy raised his eyebrows, and then shook his head. “No, Miss, I won’t.”

“Good.” Felicity wrapped her arms around his neck, smiling as he relaxed against her. Now she was glad she came. So glad. “I know it’s not the time for dramatic-ness, but I don’t care.” She wiped her lips across his cheek.
His lips brushed her ear. “Don’t tell anyone about what I told you. I don’t care if you don’t know why; you just can’t. They can’t know about how they killed Annie.”

The officer cleared his throat. “It’s time to go.”

She couldn’t fight Oliver’s logic right now. Even though it would help the kids to know, it would hurt them too. More than anyone could ever imagine. “Okay, okay. Sorry, sir. I promise next time we’ll do this before you show up.” She squeezed his bicep, swooning a little bit at the size of it. “I’ll come visit sometime soon. My mom’s coming into town, so you know what that means.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Lots of screaming?”

“You’d be surprised.” She winked and then smiled at the guard. “Sorry I kept you waiting. Bye.” She deposited her ‘visitor tag’ in a basket and walked out into the cold. A horn honked. She smiled. Diggle pulled up and rolled down the window.

“You need a ride, ma’am?”

“What happened to the car I drove here?”

“We took care of it. Hop in.”

Felicity slid in and shut the door. “Okay, you wanna explain you were decided to come pick me up? Did you think I couldn’t handle myself at a prison? Because let me tell you…I throw a killer right hook.”

“That is not the reason. I have no doubt that you can take care of yourself. There is a vigilante in there.”

“John, your disgust is showing.” She rolled her eyes. “I don’t think Lyla will find it very attractive. Which is saying something, because she is somewhat of an assassin too.”

“It’s very different, Felicity, and you know it. And we all know that that is not what makes me angry.”

“He lied to you. For five years. I know.”

“And he lied to his children.”

*For a good reason.* Felicity glanced at Diggle, who kept his eyes on the road, jaw flexed. “I think he was trying to protect them.”

“Trying to protect them or himself? Because when push came to shove, his own son turned him in.”

“Yeah, and how’s William gonna feel about that when he comes to his senses in a few months and realizes that he damned his father to a life in prison?”

“You think Oliver doesn’t think he deserves that?”

“Oh, I know he does. But John…” Felicity clenched her fists. She prided herself in being in control. She liked having the upper hand on things. These past few weeks had wiped away all of that. She no longer knew what to say or do. What *would* happen if William came around? Would she be able to deal with that situation? What if one of the kids decided to forgive Oliver? How would they—including her—deal with the trial that would be happening in the coming months?

“John, I don’t know what to do. I feel like I’ve been a walking zombie these past several days. I’m
terrified. Scared of what’s gonna happen with Oliver. With the kids. They don’t have a dad anymore. Am I supposed to spend another ten years with them? Do I adopt them? How am I supposed to continue on with my life when the guy I actually considered marrying for a few days suddenly gets arrested because he’s the hood? Who has actually done a lot of good in the city.” She reached into her purse and pulled out several papers. “I did a lot of research on him the past few days."

“I don’t need to hear about him.”

“No, you should.” She held up the top paper closer to her face. “Three years ago the hood allegedly went inside a burning building and saved a pregnant woman. Eight years ago, probably when he was first starting out, he saved a man who drove off a bridge. Eyewitnesses said that…Oliver went in and didn’t emerge for five minutes. The guy survived. I looked him up, and he has eight kids; his wife had died a few years earlier. So basically Oliver saved an entire family.

“Another one says that they saw the Hood crawl into a car that had been overturned and pulled out three little kids before the vehicle blew up. The mom and dad died, but he saved those kids.” She dropped the papers to her lap. “Stuff like that. There’s a hundred more stories like that.”

“And how many more people did he kill?”

“John!”

He sighed. “I’m sorry, Felicity. I just can’t move past it.”

“I’m not asking you to move past it. You don’t have to forgive him. But don’t let your hate get in front of the facts. Oliver saved a lot of lives. I’m sure he saved lives in the Bratva too. He’s not a cold heartless man. He can be, but deep down, he’s not. And you have to think about that too. Just give him a chance. Read the stories I found. Do a little research yourself. I’ll let you borrow my computer if you want, and you can hack into the police files and read those too. But know that if you’re not as good as I am, you will get caught and then our bodyguard will be in prison.”

As they pulled into the Queen’s driveway, Diggle cast her a look and smiled. “I will do that, but I’ll pass on the offer to hack into files. I don’t look good in a prison uniform.”

“Yeah, the least they could do is let Oliver walk around without a shirt on. Sorry! Forget I said that. I definitely did not say that.”

“I’ve gotten pretty used to those comments, Felicity. But I would appreciate it if you would refrain from saying anything.”

“I will do my best.”

Diggle dropped her off at the front door and then went to park the car. Felicity unlocked the doors and pushed them open. “I’m home!”

“Hi Felicity,” Piper called from the living room. “How was your shopping trip? Did you get anything?”

“Just a little love.” She kissed Piper’s forehead. “How’re you feeling?”

“I’m fine. My legs hurt a little bit, and my head does too. But I’m okay. Are you sure you didn’t get us something at the store? Like a new movie?”

“I didn’t feel like using my credit card so I decided that we could read some books tonight.”
“You went to visit Dad, didn’t you.” Felicity turned around when William spoke. Frack. No use hiding now. “Yes, I did. I went to visit your father.”

He scoffed. “I can’t believe you. Daddy lies to you, but you still decided to go visit him in that hell hole? I’m sure he enjoys it in there. Nice place for him to rot.”

“William Queen!” Felicity took a deep breath to keep swear words from exploding from her mouth. “Listen, buddy, I don’t care that you hate your dad. Well, I do, but I just don’t want to deal with that right now. But something that I cannot deal with is this attitude. Hate your father, fine. But do not hope that he rots in prison. He’s your dad, and nothing is gonna change that. You’re driving a wedge between everyone here, and I can’t have that. Make nasty comments in private where your siblings can’t hear. Is that understood?”

That took the fight out of him. His shoulders sagged forward as he nodded. “Yes. I understand, and I’m sorry.” He looked past Felicity to Piper. “Sorry, sis.”

“It’s cool. As long as you help me the stuff I have to do today. It’s leg lifts. Kind of.”

“I can do that.” He went over and grabbed the wheelchair’s handles. “Let’s go do some stuff, shall we?”

As they left the room, Ellie slid into William’s position by Felicity. “Well, that changed fast. Too bad I don’t agree with much of it. You went to see Dad? After, what? Six days?”

“Well, it’s not like anyone else was gonna visit him. Prison is a lonely place, if you don’t know.”

“And he doesn’t deserve to sit in there by himself for a while?”

“Is that the nice way of saying you want him to rot in prison?”

“He’s a murderer, Felicity. A vigilante. And a member of the Bratva, one of the most notoriously murderous organizations in the world. And you know what’s worse? He lied to us. So many times, and without an inch of guilt. What else is he hiding? A secret kid?” She groaned. “He probably lied about never cheating on Mama. Oh, God. He probably cheated.”

“Ellie, I don’t think that’s true.”

“Well, what do you know? Did he tell you all the secrets when you were there? Because if he did, I’m really curious to hear them.”

Could she go bury herself in a hole for a year or maybe just not appear again? When would her mother be coming? Maybe she could take over the nannying. Ellie wanted to know the truth. Truth that Oliver didn’t want to give her. Would he ever tell them? About any of it? What about their brother or sister who they wouldn’t get know on this side of heaven? Oliver did speak the truth about that. He hadn’t told them before/ Why tell them now? They’d just hate him more because he didn’t tell them right away.

Both ways of approaching things: continuing the lying or giving truth the light of day, would cause irreparable damage. Oliver had backed himself in a corner and he couldn’t get out of it. Not without some crazy miracle. And she didn’t know if she even believed in miracles anymore.

Ellie rubbed her eyes and took a deep breath. “Maybe it would be best if we just don’t discuss him in the house. He’s not gonna be around for a very, very long time. If ever. I wanna keep moving on with my life, and that means moving on. From all of this.”
“No one can truly move on until forgiveness happens.”

“He doesn’t deserve forgiveness.”

When she left the room, Felicity dropped to the couch and stared at the ground, where several nights ago, the box lay with the bow and arrows. Where did he get that thing anyways? It looked like it came from ancient China. That night would forever be etched in her brain. William’s scream, and the subsequent downfall of Oliver Queen. Fitting that the child who hated him the most discovered the secrets. Why couldn’t it have been Ellie or Harper?

Then again, they both made it clear they wouldn’t be forgiving their dad anytime soon.

Someone knocked on the door. Felicity glanced out the window and smiled. The other Smoak had arrived. “I’ll get it, Dig!”

“Already got it.” When the squeal happened, Felicity rolled her eyes and moved to the hall. “Hey, Mom.”

“Baby!” Donna dropped her purse and enveloped her in her arms. “Oh, my sweet honey. How are you holding up?”

“I’m okay.” As the hug tightened, Felicity wrestled herself away. “Mom, I swear. I’m okay. Just really looking forward to having you here.”

“Well, at least one good thing has come out of this disaster.”

“What’s that?”

“You want me here.”

Felicity sighed. “I always like being around you, but right now I really need you.”

“Hi!” Annie waved from the balcony. “Felicity said you were coming. Did you bring treats?”

“I did.”

*Oh, no.* If she’d tried to make them, they would all die.

“Thank God.” Felicity picked up the two suitcases the cab driver placed at the door. “I’m glad you’ve finally accepted that you can’t cook. Annie, honey, did you finish cleaning your room?” She and her mom needed a few minutes to talk, and then the Queen children could join them. When Annie shook her head, Felicity pointed towards the room. “Go finish that and then you can come down, okay?” She turned to her mom. “Let’s go up to my bedroom where it’ll be quiet. Dig, can you check in on Piper and Willie?”

Donna grabbed her suitcases and followed Felicity up into the room. After she set them down, she reached out and squeezed Felicity’s hands. “Honey, please be honest with me. As your mother I need to know. How have you been?”

Felicity took a deep breath to ward off the emotions, but as her mom rubbed her arm, and looked at her with such worry and love, she let go. “Oh, Mom.” She buried her head in her mom’s fluffy coat. “What did I get myself into? I fell in love with a guy who’s most likely in prison for the rest of his life. And his kids hate him. They hate him! And I can do nothing about it. It’s awful!”
“Let’s sit on the bed, shall we? You’re used to hugging Oliver, and I am not that big and strong.” Donna pulled her down next to her. “There. Much better. Now, I’ve yet to hear the whole story, as you’ve been too busy being heartbroken and taking care of these precious children. So why don’t you start at the beginning and tell me the whole story. Do you think you can manage that? But hold on.” She stood up and walked to the bathroom. “Let me get you tissues first.”

“Thank you. I sound like me fifteen years ago when Hal broke up with me.”

“He was a jerk. It was a good thing he broke up with you.”

“Trust me when I say this is not one of those ‘good break-ups’. Not that it is a breakup.” Felicity blew her nose. Now she just sounded stuffy and cry-y. Great. “But it was close to one. You’d think after all these years—”

“Felicity, honey. Start from the beginning.”

“Sorry. And I’m sorry if I start yelling.”

Several minutes later, she finished with the events of today; the prison visit, what Oliver told her about being forced to join the Bratva, and the subsequent reactions to her visiting him. Felicity took off her glasses and wiped her eyes. “That’s it. Go ahead and tell me that I’m insane. Mom,” she glanced at her mother who had tears in her own eyes. “Am I doing this right? Because I feel like a lost sheep who’s leading a whole bunch of little sheep around.”

“Baby…” Donna put her hand on Felicity’s cheek. “First of all, I am so, so proud of you. You’ve done more for this family than anyone could have ever asked. I know it’s confusing because this is a situation that no has ever dealt with before. But you should know that I am here for you. And we’ll get through this. With everyone.”

“So you’re not mad at Oliver?”

“Oh, I’m mad. But as a parent, I know exactly where he’s coming from. He was trying to protect his children. Though murder isn’t what I was thinking of, he needed to do what he could to protect the ones he loves. Even if that means killing. That’s my stance on it. Clearly the kids think differently.”

“They don’t know about Oliver being blackmailed. He told me this morning and asked me not to tell them.”

“Why not?”

“Of course he mentioned it at the end just before the officer dragged him away so he didn’t get to explain exactly why, but he doesn’t want the kids to know about Annie being killed. Understandably.” Felicity slung her arm over Donna’s shoulders. “Thank you, Mom. I feel better already. Which is really saying something, because the last few days I’ve had to deal with the FBI ransacking the house, interviews, and lots of ticked off, crying children. I hope you cleared up your schedule. And by that, I hope you cleared it way up. Because I would like you to stay here with me. For as long as you possibly can.”

Donna put her hand over her heart. “Are you serious? You really want me to stay?”

“Yes. Please. I need you. Plus, the kids don’t really have a grandma.” She winked as she stood up and opened the door, just as Annie walked past, carrying a garbage can. “Young lady, what is that?”

“It’s garbage.”
“And what’s in the garbage can?”

“A hamster.”

“Annie! Give me back my hamster!” Clayton came tearing down the hallway with a plastic sword. “Give it to me!”

“Your hamster deserves to be punished. With death.”

The violence that had been unleashed into this family had begun to take root in the littlest. Felicity took the trashcan from Annie and pulled ‘Hammy’ out. As he squealed and clawed at her, she held him out at arm’s length. “Aren’t you acting a little mean considering I just saved your life?”

“Please don’t talk to Hammy. He doesn’t need to be poisoned by anymore women.” Clayton grabbed his little rodent away from her.

“And what makes you think that I would poison him?”

“Because you’re a girl.”

Annie put her hands on her hips and stepped in front of Felicity. “If anyone is going to poison him, it’s you, because you’re a guy and you’re creepy. I think that we should throw Hammy away.”

“Which will not be necessary because if we discuss throwing Hammy away one more time, no one is getting any ice cream. Clayton, please put your hamster back in its cage and Annie, take the rest of the garbage out, unless you’re hiding anything else in there.”

“Nope.” She flashed an innocent smile before walking down the hall to the stairs. Felicity sighed. This had become the norm. Ridiculous fighting. Constantly. If they weren’t ranting about their father, they were trying to throw hamsters away or trying to make someone cry. As Harper said, “If our dad can do it, why can’t we?” That could be considered the theme around here. She turned to see her mom watching her. “What?”

“It’s just such a beautiful thing to see my daughter so grown up. You’ll know the feeling in a few years.”

“I don’t know about that.” She accepted the hug, mostly to hide her teary smile. “Maybe.” If Oliver broke himself out of prison.

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“So you’re the vigilante, huh?” The cop shut the cell door and leaned against the wall. Oliver took a seat on the cot and spread his hands. “That’s what they’re saying.”

“Why the green?”

“Well, black was already taken.”

“The speedster over in Central City or the guy over in the city no one wants to go to anymore?”

“You can assume whatever you want, but that fast guy wasn’t there before.” That would explain Barry’s absence. Oliver asked him the night that everyone found out to not interfere; Felicity didn’t need anyone else betraying her, but he assumed he’d visit him. Come up with a plan on how to protect both cities and keep everyone safe. Another speedster in town would keep him from coming.
“I’ll come by later to let you outside for a while.”

Oliver laid back on the cot and stared up at the ceiling. Iron Heights liked grey. Down to the food. Maybe after he got his multiple life sentences they’d let him decorate. Or maybe they’d put him in death row. He’d had preliminary hearings and though that never came up, he knew it would. Starling City’s vigilante on death row. Ironic, given the fact that he’d played judge, jury, and executioner for ten years.

“Mr. Queen?”

He sat up. “Hmm?”

The guard smiled. “I’m here to bring you outside.”

“But the other guy said—”

“There’s been a change of plans. Please put your hands here.”

It had only been a few days, but he knew the drill. Oliver stilled his face as the handcuffs clanked around his wrists. It wasn’t like they rendered him helpless; he could still kill people with metal keeping his hands together. These cuffs...they made him feel helpless. Like he couldn’t protect his family if the Bratva came after them. Like he couldn’t ever save the relationships with his children. He could save himself, but he couldn’t save anyone else. No matter how hard he tried.

Oliver walked ahead of the guard, but instead of taking the normal route, the guard steered him right instead of left. As he slowed down and then came to a halt, a knife pricked into his back.

“One wrong move and you’re dead.”

He kept his breathing steady as the increased as the guard pushed the knife further. “If you really think I’m the hood, you should know that a little knife won’t scare me.”

“Oh, I know you’re the hood. You killed my brother. And that’s not the only person you killed. I think I speak for all of us when I say they were the lucky ones. The others in here...they were the unlucky ones.”

Even without turning his head, Oliver felt the presence of others. How many he didn’t know, but they had weapons.

He took in a deep breath. If this was where it all ended, it would be okay. He told Felicity the truth, and after it was all over, she could help the kids understand. He’d done everything he could. Oliver glanced backwards, just as the first guy swung. He ducked and smashed his hands in the face of the guard who wasn’t actually a guard. Someone slammed a knife into his back, dragging into down. Oliver lurched backwards, but slashed his foot out, catching the man. The knife fell. As a gun fired, and a siren blared, he grabbed the knife, blood dripping down the handle, and smashed the end of it against someone’s face, just as another man barged into him, screaming. The fake guard. He took Oliver to the ground, pinning him. His fist smashed against Oliver’s face. Again and again.

Someone finally pulled the man off as another police officer pushed Oliver to his stomach. He moaned and let his head fall to the cement. His back stung, and his face didn’t feel any better. He survived, though. Somehow. Could that be called a miracle? Fate?

“Alright, let’s get you cleaned up.” A guard helped him to his feet. Oliver glanced around the hallway. Three men in prison uniforms lay on the ground being tended to by emergency personnel. The ‘guard’ must have been dragged away. “I’m sorry, Mr. Queen. We don’t know what
happened.”

“Neither do I.” He lifted his cuffed hands to his face to wipe away the blood that dripped into his eyes. He glanced around as they walked down the hall again towards what he could guess would be the medical unit. All hopes of proving that he wasn’t the vigilante went down the drain during that fight. How could he say he wasn’t the hood when he took down four attackers while handcuffed? No one would believe him.

“Well, if it isn’t Mr. Queen. The man always in trouble.” Quentin Lance walked into the medical room with that disbelieving, disheveled look on his face that he always wore. “I heard you got into a little tussle.”

“Yeah.” Oliver shrugged on the t-shirt that the nurse offered him, wincing when the injury to his back shifted. He crossed his arms, thankful for the absence of cuffs. “Turns out one of the guards—whether he was legit or not—had a beef with me about a number of things. Everyone else just came along for the fun.”

Lance turned to the nurse. “Will you give us a moment? Alone?”

“That’s fine, sir. You know how to call for help if you need it.”

“I won’t need it.” He took a seat on the chair next to the bed and leaned forward. “There’s no recordings in here, and neither have we gotten a chance to talk. So why don’t you cut the crap and be honest with me. We both know you’re the Hood.”

“I don’t think my lawyer would be happy with you—”

“Oliver, I’ve known you since you were eight and you kissed both of my daughters on the same day and I had to come talk to your mom because Laurel punched you. I know when you’re lying. Just like I’ve known for years that you were hiding something.”

“I did pay you off. You probably should’ve known that.”

“I was naïve in thinking that you just didn’t want it public.”

Oliver reached up to rub his face but stopped as his fingers brushed against the bandage that covered most of his cheek. “I don’t know what you want me to say. Yes, I’m the vigilante. Yes, I’m a member of the Bratva. But you already knew that, right? You have it on tape.”

“The tape your son gave me.”

He bit his lip and stared down at his hands. “Yeah.”

“It makes me wonder.” Lance straightened up and pulled his shoulders back. “What’s a man gotta do to make his son hate him so much that he turns him in to the police?”

“Because I lied. Well,” Oliver huffed, “That wasn’t the reason he did that. I’ve been a terrible father. When Annie died, I thought it’d be better if I shut myself off from the kids. From my sister. I decided to provide for them, and that meant keeping them fed, clothed, and under a roof. But I failed to realize that that wasn’t what mattered. That’s why William hates me. Why they all hate me.”

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Felicity took a seat in Oliver’s chair as the kids came into the dining room. Clayton pushed Piper in and managed not to bang her into the table this time. The remade Fluffy was set on her favorite person’s lap. Donna took Felicity’s old place as Raisa and the remaining house maids served dinner.

“So Felicity, I was wondering—”

“Ellie, she’s gonna say no, so don’t even ask.”

“What makes you think I’m gonna say no?”

Before Ellie opened her mouth, William added, “She wants to have a guy over for dinner sometime. He’s apparently very attractive, but his name is Jim. Isn’t that name kind of telling? He’s a creep.”

“First, he is not a creep, and second, he goes by Jimmy. And if you think your place in this house as the most annoying male is being threatened, trust me when I say it’s not.”

“Oh, it’s impossible. I am in no way fearful of my position being taken away.”

Now that the arguing had finished, Felicity aimed a pointed look at Ellie. “What’s with this ‘Jimmy’?”

“A guy I met.”

“She has an online dating profile!” Clayton cat-called from his seat. Felicity had to wrap her brain around that one.

“I do not!”

“Ladies and gentlemen.” Felicity pushed herself up. “Raisa made us a really delicious meal tonight and so far all I’ve heard and seen is bickering. We will deal with Jimmy and whatever scandalous things that are hiding in the closet after dinner.”

“You mean like everything that Daddy’s done?”

“Harper, that’s goes in the ‘after dinner’ file.”

“Well, it’s hard not to notice. People give us weird looks now, since we don’t have a mom who might’ve died because of our dad who is now sitting in Iron Heights. Where you went today.”

“You went to Iron Heights?” Clayton pushed his glasses up his nose. “Why did you go there?”

“Well, it certainly wasn’t to visit my fourth cousin.” Okay, no one found that funny except for her? And maybe the puppy. “I went to Iron Heights to visit Oliver. Your father.”

Harper rolled her eyes. “I don’t think we need to be reminded of who he is.”

“Or isn’t.” William stirred his food around, his eyes never leaving his plate.

“Whatever he did, he’s still your dad. Like it or not.”

“Well, it’s a heck of a lot more ‘not’ right now.” Harper let out a bitter laugh. “Why would you even stand by him right now? At all? He’s gonna go to prison for the rest of his life. Because he killed people. Slit their throats. I bet those people had fathers too. Or maybe they were fathers. Or moms. And they aren’t coming back, are they? So neither am I. He can go to bed every night knowing that I’m not going to visit him. Ever.”
“Me neither.” Annie crossed her arms and ‘harumphed’. “Never, ever, ever.”

“Guys…” She’d lost them. Just like Oliver. They wouldn’t believe anything else. If anything, her saying anything would make it worse. They all hated Oliver; end of story. It hurt her, yes, but it hurt her more thinking about him. Every night he would go to sleep, never with anyone beside him. What about those nightmares he still dealt with? Would anyone be around to calm him down when he woke up or would he have to suffer alone? He’d never be able to cuddle any of the kids again.

The saddest thing about it? Being behind bars wasn’t the reason he would never hold one of his children again for a very long time—if ever. It was because they hated him. Rightfully so. For a time. There was a season for hatred; for un-forgiveness. But then it was time. Time to move on from that anger. Time to forgive and move on.

A memory flashed in her brain.

“You’ll always be my greatest accomplishment.”

That’s what she’d done. Hated her father. For twenty years.

Felicity glanced around the table, all the growly faces and angry stirring-of-the-forks. That’s what they’d become if they didn’t forgive. They’d become her. Stumbling through life, weighed down by the past. Unforgiving and angry. Broken.

She couldn’t let that happen to them. No, she needed to make them forgive their father so that they didn’t turn twenty-seven and not know what happened to those little kids who used to sit on their dad’s lap and beg for more Laura and Mary and Jack stories, or ask for help with a math lesson. Instead, they’d have nightmares about old boyfriends and be haunted by their father and mother. They wouldn’t be able to love, because that ability had been stolen from them so many years ago.

She had to keep that from happening. She couldn’t let them become her.

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“‘Dashing through the snow, on a one horse open sleigh’,” Felicity sang along to her Christmas playlist as she scrubbed soap through her hair. No matter that it was far past the pretty snow stage. “‘Jingle bells, jingle bells’—hey!” The song went off, and then her ring tone started. Any other week she wouldn’t think about answering it, but after everything, getting out of the shower happened to be necessary. She slipped into her robe, wrapped a towel around her hair and answered the call. “Hi, this is Felicity.”

“Hello, Felicity. This is Captain Lance.”

Her heart rate spiked. Felicity opened the door, preparing to yell for help. “Wh-What do you need? Because I was enjoying my shower while singing Jingle Bells. Which you didn’t need to know. What’s going on?”

“Oliver was attacked in prison tonight.”

She dropped to the side of the tub. “I-Is…oh my God. Is he okay?”

“He’s banged up, but he’s alive. A long gash on his back and several gashes on his face.”

“By all the people who think that Oliver condemned them to hell. Maybe you should’ve kept him safe instead of sending him into a prison all alone where all sorts of people could hurt him!”
“Felicity, what is going on in there?” Someone yelled from the bedroom. “Are you okay?”

“Go away, William!”

“Maybe you should tell him that his father nearly died. Maybe that would help him.”

“I don’t know about that. When can I see him?”

“Not until tomorrow. If you’re lucky. Rich people seem to have more of a pull with the law than we’d all like to admit.”

“I’m hardly rich, Captain Lance.”

“You’re now associated with a rich and broken family, Felicity. Might as well get used to it. You have a nice night. Now hopefully you can get back to your shower with Jingle Bells. Bye.” He hung up. Felicity set her phone to the floor and dropped herself into the tub. She covered her face with her hands. Could anything go worse? Don’t think it Felicity. The whole house would blow up in a few seconds. She slumped further into the tub, trying to ignore how the water soaked through her robe. The longer she stayed in here, the longer she could ignore her problems.

“Felicity?” Ellie knocked on something. “What on earth are you doing?”

She kept her eyes closed. “Just resting. Have you ever noticed how comfortable it is to lay in the bathtub and think about your feelings? It seriously is really awesome. I’m really enjoying it. You should try it out sometime. Not right now, because this is my tub. Please go to bed.”

“It’s not like you’re making it anymore obvious that you’re having a problem.”

“I don’t have a problem.” She opened her eyes and watched as the seventeen-year-old rolled her eyes. Yeah, this wasn’t working. Why would it? Nothing else had worked for a good several weeks. Months, even.

“You’re laying in a bathtub in a pink robe and a towel wrapped around your hair.” Ellie walked to the edge of the tub and crossed her arms. “Clearly there’s no issue.”

“It’s nothing that you want to hear about.”

“It’s about Dad, isn’t it?”

“Captain Lance called me a few seconds ago and told me that he was attacked in prison today.” Ellie’s eyes bugged out as she collapsed back against the counter. “Is he alright?”

“Apparently he has a cut on his back and his face is busted up, but he’s okay.”

“Why…how…” She stared at Felicity, tears filling her eyes. “Isn’t he in protective custody?”

“No one’s safe in prison, Ellie. No matter how rich they are.”

“But he’s a billionaire. We’re all rich. Can’t he be safe in there?”

“The Hood might’ve killed people but he put a heck of a lot more people in prison. Meaning most people in there would like to kill him.”

“But he’s the hood and a mafia guy. Can’t he, like, fight?”

“Well enough that he’s still alive. But I can imagine it’s a little hard to fend off a lot of ticked off
people.” Felicity pushed herself up and stepped out of the tub, fully aware of the look on Ellie’s face. She felt something right now, didn’t she? When she voiced that thought, the seventeen-year-old laughed.

“No. Absolutely not. I don’t care about him. Not anymore. Nothing is going to change that. Probably not a good idea to pull the sympathy card. Ever again.”

“Elizabeth!”

“Don’t call me ‘Elizabeth’. In fact, when I turn eighteen, the chances of me staying a Queen is highly unlikely. Maybe Tommy and Laurel can adopt me.”

“Every family has their secrets. Trust me.”

“Do you have skeletons in the closet?”

“Just ask my mother.”

“Doesn’t mean that you have a father in prison for murder.”

You have no idea. “I don’t know where he is. I haven’t seen him in twenty years, which, if you don’t know, is longer than you’ve been alive. But it still hurts me knowing that I don’t know where he is; if he’s still alive. Why he hasn’t contacted me after all these years. All I want to know is see or hear from him. Maybe you should think about that for a second before you rule out hating your dad for the rest of your life.”

“Just leave me alone.” Ellie left the bathroom and slammed the bedroom door shut behind her. Felicity resisted the urge to fall back into the tub, instead moving to the bed and collapsing onto the bed. She pulled the cover over her head and let out a sob. “God, I don’t know what to do. Show me what to do. Please. I’m so lost.” Everything was falling apart. The kids hated their dad. They hated her. They’d soon hate Donna too, because she wanted them to forgive Oliver.

“Just…help.” She closed her eyes and imagined the Queen family the night of the party. After Halloween. How Oliver’s arm looped around her as the photographer counted down to the photo. How he smiled. How his other hand settled on Harper’s shoulder. And before. Oh…how beautiful that night had been. Oliver’s arm slipped around her waist and intertwined their fingers as he whooshed her around the dance floor. The look in his eyes as he apologized. Everything.

Why couldn’t life had stayed that way? Them all happy. She and Oliver could’ve fallen in love with each other like a normal couple. Gotten married. Maybe had a couple kids. That would be funny; eight kids. Instead, fate had it a different way, and here she lay. No need to go through everything that had happened since. If only.

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“Oliver.”

He jerked up, reaching and hitting nothing as his hand clanked on the end table. The Flash stood outside his cell, arms crossed. Oliver stood up and walked to the bars. He glanced around; the prisoners in the cells around him all lay in their beds. Drugged, given the fact that Barry held a syringe. “Thought you’d show up earlier.”

“I was going to, but I’ve got a problem. It’s nasty. But it’s nothing you need to worry about. You’ve
got enough.”

“I’m fine.”

“Fine as in ‘I’m still breathing’ or fine as in ‘I’m stuck in prison and my face is busted up and my kids hate me’?”

“I really don’t want to talk about it. Why aren’t the alarms going off, considering you’re standing here?”

“Cisco took care of it. Are you okay, man? Felicity told me about what happened today. You look like crap.”

“This isn’t the worst thing that’s ever happened to me.”

“I’m not exactly asking about that. Felicity also told me about everything else. It must be rough, you know, being in here, knowing your kids ha—”

“You think I don’t know that, Barry?” Oliver spoke through clenched teeth. “That’s what hurts the most. I can sit in here for the rest of my life and I’ll be okay, but I think I’d rather be tortured to death over the course of a few years than be in here knowing that they all hate me.” He drew in a shaky breath. “But we can’t talk about that right now. Has there been any action on my accounts?”

“Nothing. I’ve kept tabs on the house as much as I can with Zoom running around Central City and there’s been no one around. I’ve checked all the ways they contact you, and there’s been nothing. That’s either good or bad.”

“If they haven’t made a move yet, I don’t know if they will.”

“Oliver…” Barry glanced around the area before catching his gaze again. “What if they come for you? We’re so focused on keeping everyone else safe that we fail to realize that they’re going to come for you? You’re the one who left the box out and it’s all history.”

“If they come for me, it’ll be okay.”

Barry squinted. “Are you suicidal?”

“No one’s gonna miss me.”

“They will. And they’d have to live the rest of their lives without their mom and their dad. My dad’s in prison. But it’s a heck of a lot better than him being dead. Without my dad, even if he is behind bars, I would not be where I am today. Kids need their dad, especially if they don’t have a mom. So don’t think for one second that you have nothing to lose.”

A door clicked. Barry disappeared in a fiery red blur. Oliver sank to the cot and grabbed the book that lay on the ground. Harry Potter, because of course a thirty-six-year-old man wanted to read about some wizard. He actually did read the first couple books to Clayton and Piper but he didn’t want to read the third one right now. It made him think about the kids curled up on top of him with cookies, begging him to read more, even after his voice reverted to its teenage years.

“Mr. Queen, are you all good in there?” A female officer—one of the only people who’d been nice to him—stopped at his cell door. “Do you need any painkillers for your back or your face?”

“Nope, I’m good.” He didn’t like drugs; they made him loopy, and in here, he couldn’t afford to be high on anything. “Thank you, though.”
She smiled and left. Oliver dropped the book to the ground and closed his eyes. He smiled as his mind drifted back to that night of the gala. Felicity’s hand squeezed his shoulder; her fingers intertwined with his. She smiled up at him, allowing him to whiz her around the dance floor. That night, he realized he fell in love with her.

If only he hadn’t run away. Stayed in Starling City. Fell in love with Felicity. Kissed her. Maybe married her with the all his kids watching.

If only.

Chapter End Notes

I wrote this during NaNoWrimo (I won, if any of you were wondering:P), and I honestly didn’t remember half of this. I think it turned out decent. I didn't realize the parallels between Oliver and his children and Felicity and her dad until I was writing this. We'll explore that a little bit in the next few chapters. And then the trial! It's gonna be epic. LOL I don't know why I'm saying that, because I have zero experience in the court room so it should be interesting. Anyways, I hope you enjoyed it!!!
There's a lot of angst, but I promise the ending is happy!

Chapter 21

“Hey, Felicity.” Oliver waved at her as she stepped into the room. She laughed at the pitiful attempt. With handcuffs on, it looked more like a wave for help then a welcoming gesture. His eyes wandered and the smile grew. “You look nice.”

“Thank you but this is not one of my good looks. And I’ve worn this dress three days in a row.” She wrapped her arms around his neck and smiled as she buried her face in his t-shirt. Even in prison, he still smelt good. And the muscly muscles helped with her happiness. “You’ve been doing pullups.”

“Keeps me busy.” He let go of her and took a seat. “Before we talk about anything, I need you to do something for me.” He reached down to the bench that he sat on and sent her an exasperated look. “They actually let me bring this in here because apparently it’s a problem if I don’t.” He placed a folder on the table. “Don’t look at it yet. Let me explain first.”

“These aren’t adoption papers, are they? Sorry. Not a good thing to say.”

“Jerry came to see me this morning. He, uh, told me about the current state of the company. We’re gonna lost all of it. Apparently me being an alleged criminal is not sitting well with investors, and we’re gonna lose everything in a few weeks.”

The company that had had ‘Queen’ on top of the building for decades. “Oh, Oliver, I’m so sorry.”

“The only way we can save it is if I appoint a new CEO.”

Felicity snapped her fingers. “Jerry.”

“You.”

She let out a laugh loud enough that the guards turned around. She waved them off before leaning in closer. “Honey, are you feeling alright?” Frack. A ‘honey’ just slipped out of her mouth. Oliver ‘s eyes turned dreamy. Even better. Now he wouldn’t be listening to her. “I’m not becoming a CEO. Dear God, Oliver. There are a hundred people ahead of me who could run that company better.”

“Maybe so, but I want you.”

“No.”

“Felicity…” he grabbed her hands, intensity glossing over the dreamy look in his eyes. “My kids don’t deserve to lose all their money that’s keeping them safe and alive. If I don’t appoint a CEO in the next day or two, living in the mansion is done. I don’t know what would happen to them. Or the company. Jerry will help you. I can help you. But I want you to do it. Please.”
“How am I supposed to do that and take care of the kids? Because Oliver…” she sighed. “I don’t know if I can deal with both of those things. It’s almost impossible.”

“You wouldn’t have to be there a lot. Just a couple times a week, and you can bring some of the kids along. They need to start learning things there.”

“You’ve thought about this a lot, haven’t you?”

“Well,” Oliver shrugged. “It’s not like there’s anything better to do.”

Because only Felicity had visited him in the past month. It wasn’t surprising. Why would any of the kids visit their father when they hated him? Dig refused to come, and Tommy hadn’t moved on from anything; he used planning for his upcoming wedding as an excuse. That left only her, and she couldn’t come that often. She knew, from Captain Lance, that Oliver worked out in the lawn for hours, and when it came time for him to be locked up, he just laid on his bed, staring up at the ceiling. He wouldn’t move. Often the food was left uneaten. He still managed to put on a façade every time she came, but she knew. Oliver Queen had given up.

She couldn’t let him lose his company. A sliver of faith in the back of her head said that maybe he would get out of this hellish place, and then he could reclaim his place. Which meant that, for now, she could run it. Disastrously, but as long as it stayed away from the negatives, they’d be fine. *Shows what you know.* “Okay.”

“Okay to what?”

“I’ll be the CEO. For a little while. And you have to promise me that you’ll help, because I know nothing about doing that, other than the fact that I can do math and I graduated from MIT.”

“You’ll do amazing. I already talked to Jerry and he’ll help you. I trust him, and he’s nice.” Oliver smiled. “Thank you, Felicity.”

“Thank me after I go a couple weeks without tanking everything. Are you sure you shouldn’t put all the money in a different account?”

“I do have money in places that people can’t touch, but that’s for emergencies. And one might come if we lose the company and I have no money to pay for good lawyers. Which is stupid because I shouldn’t even need one.”

“Explain that last sentence.”

He shrugged. “There’s no way I’m winning that trial, Felicity. I might as well give up now and not put you and everyone else through that.”

“Don’t you have any faith in anything?”

“I don’t know if you’ve been paying attention, but if my own family can’t forgive me, no one else is gonna have any sympathy. My own son turned me in.”

“Not something any of us don’t know. And I’m an expert at the whole family thing, and I can truthfully say with confidence that family and friends will be more hurt than strangers.”

“Say that to the people I’ve killed.”

“Under duress.”
“And will that help with convincing a jury? Because I don’t think so.”

“Oliver!” She grabbed his hands and yanked. Way too hard, if she were being honest. He stared at the table, his jaw clenching. “You cannot think like that.”

“Why not?”

“Because that’s what’s making you depressed. Have you even seen yourself? You look like one of those guys who would love to jump off a cliff if one was around. You’re falling apart, and it’s been a month and a half. I don’t want to get a call from here that tells me you hung yourself from the ceiling.”

“I would never do that.”

“Well, you’re sounding like it!”

“Felicity, I’m not thinking about doing anything like that.”

“Ma’am,” an officer joined their conversation. “Do you need help?”

“Could you whack him across the face really hard, please? Or is that considered wrong?”

The guy furrowed his eyebrows. “I would assume that’s considered illegal.”

“Frack. Well, maybe let him freeze outside for a while and he’ll figure his life out. Right, Oliver?” She glared at him. “I don’t care what you think, but I rely on you. I trust you. You’re the only male I’ve looked at since Cooper didn’t actually die and my father left that I want to love. I need you. So that means you can’t fall off the wagon and give up. Because I haven’t given up on you, so you can’t do that to yourself. You hear me? You can’t give up. The kids will come around. The trial will turn out okay. We won’t go broke. We will find a way around all of this. But that starts with not giving up!”

Oliver’s lips trembled but he nodded. Felicity pulled him up and wrapped her arms around him. It was still awkward; he couldn’t move his hands—but today, he needed her warmth and her love. Some days it would be the other way around. Today, it was her turn to comfort him. “It’ll be okay, Oliver. I promise.”

She signed the papers and agreed to take them to Queen Consolidated. Felicity slid into the driver’s seat of the sports car and dropped the folder onto the seat next to her. What had she just done? Signed a document that said that she’d become the new CEO of QC? How dumb. She didn’t know a thing about running a company. Running a household, yes, but this? With a billion dollars at stake?

“Take some of your own medicine, Felicity.” She started the ignition and pulled out onto the busy road. “By not talking to yourself.” Her phone rang as she headed towards QC. “Hello?”

“Hi, this is Thea.”

“Hey! I didn’t look at the ID. We haven’t heard from you for a while.”

“I know, and I’m sorry. Roy and I…we’ve had a little bit of a tough time as of late, and we needed some time to be by ourselves, if that makes sense. And Ollie. Felicity, I’m so sorry about him. All of it. Is everyone okay?”

“It’s a long story. Do you wanna meet me at Queen Consolidated? There’s coffee.”
“Uh, is that a good idea? I haven’t been there for five years.”

“I’m actually the new CEO so I can do whatever I want.”

“You’re the new—”

“Long story. Just meet me there in a little bit, okay?” Felicity said goodbye and refocused on the road. What had happened with the Harpers? Why hadn’t she heard anything? It would be tempting to demand an answer as soon as she saw her, but if Thea was anything like her brother, it would take a while.

Ten minutes later she pulled into the executive parking lot and headed up to the top floor where Oliver’s office was located. Her office. She laughed. Several months ago the boss of a newspaper company axed her off the pay list. Today, she was the CEO of Queen Consolidated. If only that scumbag could see her now. Though, technically, she should send him a thank-you note, because it could be considered thanks to him that she stood here now, at the top level of the building, staring through the glass doors into her office.

Jerry waved at her and opened the door. “Felicity! Thank God. Oliver wasn’t sure you’d do it, but it seems like he was persuasive enough. Looks like we all get to stay rich.”

“Just because I’m here doesn’t mean we’re gonna be rich. I don’t really know what I’m doing and I don’t know why Oliver wouldn’t want you doing this.”

“It’s your company now.”

She knew that look. “Oh, Jerry. I’m so sorry. I know you’ve worked here for years and I’m sure you wanted that position.”

“Felicity, it’s okay. Oliver is the guy in charge, and I agreed that you should be the CEO. You’re connected to the family now, and that means that you’re a part of the business. That’s perfectly fine with me. Plus, Oliver gave me a raise, so my own family will be happy. Let’s get you started, shall we?”

“Am I coming in at a bad time?”

Felicity turned at the voice and smiled. “Hey, Thea. Come in. We’re not really doing anything.”

“Hi Jerry.” Thea did a little wave. “It’s nice to see that you’re still here.”

The EA just stared at her, mouth wide open.

“I know it’s been a bit.”

“It’s been a lot longer than that.” Jerry recovered and wrapped Thea in a hug. “It’s really good to see you again, though I have to say you’ve grown up a bit. And there’s a ring. Congratulations. Don’t tell me it’s the red hoodie kid.”

“It’s Roy.” She laughed when he groaned. “He grew up too so don’t worry.” Her eyes lost their light as she glanced around the room. “So Felicity, you’re the new CEO. We can visit a different time if you’d like. I can imagine how—”

Something happened to Thea in the past two months, and she needed to talk about it. They both did. Felicity put her hand on her friend’s arm. “That can wait. What matters now is you, and I want to hear about it.” She guided her out of the office and called back to Jerry, “I’ll come get you when
we’re done. Thank you!”

“He’s gonna think that all women go off to chat about their feelings instead of try to save a company.”

“It’s perfectly okay. Money can wait. I think you should tell me about what happened.” Felicity shut the door of the conference room and plopped down on a chair. “You look like you need a drink.”

“I’ve had a few of those in the past few weeks.” Thea sank down to the couch and ran her hand through her hair. She stared straight ahead and delivered the words with a level of pain and acceptance. “Roy and I…we lost a baby.”

The words cut deep into Felicity’s heart. The Harpers lost a baby. Just like the Queens, right? Her memory flashed back to the night when Oliver quietly mourned the loss of he and Annie’s baby. Something that happened five years ago. How did it feel to go through losing a baby…as it happened? And here Thea and Roy went through it. Alone. “Oh my God. Thea, I’m so, so sorry. Why didn’t you tell us?”

She wiped away the tears that had fallen down her cheeks and sniffed. “We found out that we were expecting one of the nights that Piper was in the hospital. We thought about coming, and giving Oliver a shock and telling everyone, but…it just didn’t seem right. We wanted to make sure it was real, which was stupid, but we waited anyways. A week later I started bleeding, and that night, we heard on the news that Ollie had been arrested. It didn’t seem right to tell anyone because you were going through so much already. I talked to Raisa one day and she told me how stressful and awful it was over there. I wanted to come…but I couldn’t. Looking at those kids would make me think of the baby.” She covered her mouth as a sob escaped. Felicity left her chair and took a seat next to Thea. “I just couldn’t think about that, because it made me think of my little baby I’d never get to hold.”

Was there anything to say? ‘I’m sorry’ wouldn’t help. Nothing really could. Felicity wrapped her arms around Thea’s small frame and held on tight while they both cried. As her friend mourned the loss of her child, Felicity cried along with her, but it brought up the question yet again: what would have happened if she hadn’t taken this job? Would life had gone on like normal for the Queens? Oliver would leave for business trips every other week. The kids would go boarding school or whatever that place called itself.

There wouldn’t be an accident that left Piper immobilized and forced to go through agonizing pain to rehabilitate her legs.

There would be no arrest. No imminent trial that would likely send Oliver to prison for the rest of his life. No ‘I hate my dad’ rants at dinner.

Maybe Thea wouldn’t have lost the baby.

Becoming the nanny for the Queens helped her, but had it helped them? Or had it just damned them all to a hell greater than anyone could’ve imagined?

Even though her self-pity train waged its war inside her, Felicity switched gears to comfort her friend. By telling her to go see the one person who knew what she was going through. “Maybe you should go visit your brother.”

“I thought about that. I’ve actually thought about that almost every day. I just…” she shrugged. “I can’t do it yet. I already decided that I’ll be going to the trial, but before that, I don’t know. I always thought it would take a lot to make anything happen between us but…”
“If you’re waiting until all that pride in Oliver is gone, trust me when I say it’s gone.” She didn’t have to mention the humiliation she knew he felt every time she visited and he had to wear handcuffs. Any of the pride he had had been ripped away from him the morning of the arrest. “He’s different now.”

“I know. But I can’t. I need some time to deal with the baby, and to deal with everything that sent him to prison in the first place. If that makes any sense at all.”

Thea was the more adult-like version of the kids stating her feelings. Felicity smiled. “It makes more sense than most things.”

“Thank you for listening. And for being a comforter. It’s been a little hard at home. We’re making it through, but it’s a little difficult. Speaking of,” Thea glanced at her phone. “I need to get home to make supper. And you have a company to run.”

“That’s not at all terrifying.”

“You’re home!” As Felicity walked into the kitchen, Annie ran at her, arms flailing out in excitement. “We were really worried about you. William thought you died.”

Despite her exhaustion, Felicity smiled and hugged the littlest. “No, honey, I didn’t die. It’s a long story, but I’m alive. Sorry I didn’t call you.” She looked up as Diggle entered the room. “Hopefully you’re not mad at me.”

“Called the prison and they told me what was going on. Congratulations.”

Annie looked from Felicity to Diggle and then back again. “Congratulations? For what?”

“She just became the CEO of Queen Consolidated.”

“But I thought Daddy was that person.”

The soon to be six-year-old still hadn’t grasped what had happened to her dad. Though she did manage to catch on to the hatred that had been spewing left and right since January. At some point Annie would figure it out, but for the time being, the adults had decided to not tell her where Oliver had gone to. Felicity tightened the waist-hug. “Daddy asked me to do it, and I said yes.”

“That’s cool. Can I come with to the office sometime?”

“Maybe. Aren’t you supposed to be in bed? It’s ten.”

“I just wanted to say hi and now I’m gonna head up to bed. Goodnight. I love you.”

“I love you too, sweetie.” When Annie left, Felicity let go of her nanny-self and stumbled to a chair. When she took off her glasses, Diggle whistled. “What?”

“I just have learned how to determine whether something bad happened or not.”

“And that clue is me taking my glasses off?”

“Plus the forehead rubbing.” He chuckled as he took a seat next to her. “What happened?”

“A lot of things.” She looked at her friend, trying to fend off the tears, but it wasn’t working. Diggle’s little smile faded as her chin quivered. He scooted closer and lowered his voice when he
spoke. “Felicity, why don’t you start at the beginning.”

“Oliver was the same. For once he isn’t the reason I’m gonna cry on your shoulder. He might be the ultimate reason but it doesn’t matter right now. Thea called me on my way to QC. There’s a reason she hasn’t contacted us. She and Roy, uh, they miscarried a baby.”

“Oh my God.” Diggle turned around and put his hands on his head. Felicity scrubbed the tears off her face and plugged along with the story.

“They thought about telling us about it, but just after they found out that she was miscarrying, Oliver was arrested. Thea said she couldn’t come here because the kids reminded her of the baby.”

“How is…” his voice cracked. “How is she doing?”

“I don’t really know, John. I told her to go visit Oliver and tell him about the baby because—” Felicity! She just had to go say that, didn’t she? Diggle furrowed his eyebrows. His head tilted. Oooh, no. He was gonna ask. Of course he would ask. Why wouldn’t he? She’d just dropped one of the other secrets Oliver kept. “Don’t look at me like that, Dig. Do you some more coffee? I’ll get you more coffee.”

“Felicity, sit down please.”

Oh, that was his kind of scary voice. She plopped back down. “Yes?”

“Why should Thea visit her brother and tell him about the baby?”

“It’s none of your business. Maybe you should call Lyla and go out on a date. You clearly need a kiss and it’s not coming from me.” Felicity!

“No, I think we’ll sit here until you tell me what’s going on. Or what happened. Likely a long time ago. You know about it. Why don’t I?”

“John…” all the fight left her. Felicity sagged forward. “I really don’t want to talk about this right now.”

“It’s about Oliver, correct?”

“Yes.”

“It’s okay to tell me, Felicity. Whatever happened—”

“Oliver and Annie were expecting a baby.” She blurted it out in a ramble of words that would be quiet enough that only Diggle would hear. Looking at him crushed the remaining parts of her soul’s storage for the day. Oliver’s bodyguard stood up and walked to the window. He set his hands on his hips and took a deep breath. Felicity cried silently. She knew the pain. Maybe it didn’t happen to her or to John, but a loss like this was connected. It exploded through people’s souls; even into strangers’ hearts.

“Oliver never said anything.” He stayed rooted in his spot. “All these years and he’s been hiding that pain.”

“Yeah.”

“Why didn’t he tell me? Come to think of it, how did you find out?”

“I was digging around a few months ago and I stumbled upon that in a report from her death.”
“And does Oliver know that you know?”

“I told him the night that we were stranded in the closet together. I told him that he should tell people, but I think he was scared to.”

“Because Oliver Queen likes his secrets. Though I can see why he kept this from everyone.” Diggle turned around and made his way back to his chair. “And why he kept the others. They would cripple the family. The kids have been through so much already.”

“I don’t think Oliver was intending for anyone to ever find out.”

Diggle sighed. “Did he think he could hide it all for the rest of his life?”

“Maybe he thought he wouldn’t be around for much longer.” When her friend sent her an exasperated look, she shrugged. “He was a vigilante and an assassin, basically. It's hard to live when you’re just one of those things, but two? Death is something that could happen at any moment.”

“Imagine if something happened to him these past several years. He just disappears and we never hear anything? Or did he have a contingency plan in place in how to inform us?”

“Not anything that Oliver and I have discussed when we talk.”

The look in his eyes softened. “How’s he doing?”

She refused to let that question spark hope for forgiveness. “He puts on a façade for me when I come. For a little bit at least, but then it quickly falls away. Captain Lance has told me that he’s resigned himself from everyone and everything there except the work out equipment. And with the trial approaching…he’s scared, John. He’ll never admit it, but the idea of being alone in there until he dies…it’s terrifying.”

“And so is the idea of being without his family.” Diggle took a deep breath. “Okay. Will you be fine by yourself for tonight? I’d like to take some time to myself.”

Thank you. “I think we should be okay. Take as long as you need.”

“Call me if you need anything. I’ll see you later.” Diggle grabbed his coat and phone and left. Felicity slid her glasses back on and went to the fridge for something non-alcoholic but sparkly. Instead, she grabbed a lemonade that her mom bought and headed to Oliver’s office. She spent a lot of time in there. It still smelled like him. Tonight, it would serve a different purpose. The feds had gone through everything but they put it back, which came at a shock. If she wanted to be a decent CEO, she would have to learn from the best. Not the best—Oliver didn’t excel at being the leader of QC, but he managed not to get fired for twenty or so years. Mostly because there wasn’t anyone who was going to fire the man with the last name Queen. Anyways.

She took a seat at the desk and opened the lowest drawer of the file cabinet next to her. Lots of folders. “Gee, Felicity, did you think this would be easy? Oliver is not a neat freak. And people ransacked this place. And you need to stop talking to yourself.”

“Felicity?”

“What?” She whirled around, a folder in her hand, outstretched in defense. Harper stood there. Felicity dropped the folder and went to the girl as her eyes took in the sight. Harper took a step backwards and shook her head. Despite the red eyes and the tear tracks that told her that a hug was needed, Felicity stepped back.
“I-I just want to talk. Not a hug right now. Please.”

“Okay.” Felicity smiled and gestured to the couch. “Wanna sit?”

“I’ll stand.” She crossed her arms, and then uncrossed them. With a sigh, she walked to the closed door that led to Oliver’s bedroom, and opened it. When she disappeared, Felicity followed behind. Harper opened one of the dressers and fingered around for something. All of the sudden, she crumpled to the ground.

“Harper!” Felicity got to her, and wrapped her arms around her as her little girl started sobbing. “Hey, hey, shhhh. What’s wrong? Honey, what’s going on?”

“I-I…was supposed to have another brother or sister.” The tears increased as the words were choked out. Felicity let out a moan. Someone heard. Oh, God, someone knew. And that person was Harper. Why did it have to be her?

Help me. Help me.

“I’m so sorry, sweetie. I’m so sorry.”

“Why?” Harper’s fingernails dug into Felicity’s shoulders as she clung to her as if she let go, the whole universe would crumble. “Why?”

“I don’t know, sweetie. I really don’t know.” As the sobs increased and shook them both, Felicity tightened her hold and stared up at the ceiling, the weight of…everything crashing down on top of her. What could she do? Tell Harper it would be alright? That would be a lie, because it might not. Say that there wasn’t a baby? She’d been pressed into a corner and all sides were steel with no exit. Every way she turned there were explosives, threatening to blow up in her face. And one had just went off.

Regardless of the terror and pain that pressed around her, Felicity held Harper, rocking her back and forth, telling her how much she loved her. Finally, after her legs and butt went numb, Harper sat up and rubbed her face. Without a sound, she hopped up onto the bed and reached for the picture that sat on the nightstand.

“Daddy kept that all bottled up for five years.” Her finger traced the photo before she put it back down again. “He certainly never told anyone about our little baby, This would happen. Broken sobbing on the floor, Annie’s necklaces lying next to them after they’d been knocked off their shelf by a distraught thirteen-year-old who’d already endured so much tragedy in her life. What could she say to someone like this? ‘Don’t worry, it’ll all get better’? ‘It sucks; keep your head high’? There wasn’t a manual on how to do this. All she had was her heart, and she wasn’t sure that worked right anymore.

Oliver understood why he couldn’t tell anyone about the baby. This would happen. Broken sobbing on the floor, Annie’s necklaces lying next to them after they’d been knocked off their shelf by a distraught thirteen-year-old who’d already endured so much tragedy in her life. What could she say to someone like this? ‘Don’t worry, it’ll all get better’? ‘It sucks; keep your head high’? There wasn’t a manual on how to do this. All she had was her heart, and she wasn’t sure that worked right anymore.

“Secrets are hard to keep.”

“Yeah.” She fell back onto the back and closed her eyes. Neither of them said anything for a time, until Harper spoke. “Felicity?”

“Yeah?”

“Can you take me to visit Daddy? Do you think he’d like that?”
Do not cry, do not cry. Felicity smiled and nodded. “I think he’d love that.”

Harper rolled off the bed and enveloped Felicity in a hug. She’d grown. Either that or the heels were no longer making her look taller than everyone but Oliver. She smiled and buried her head in the scraggily blonde hair off the girl who almost stood taller than her now. He’d be so happy. It didn’t matter why his daughter came; it would bring light to the dark cell he’d sat in for two months.

“I don’t know if I’m ever gonna be okay again, Felicity.” Harper hiccupped. “It doesn’t seem possible. Basically all my life has been death and sadness. How am I supposed to be okay?”

“I’ve wondered the same thing. It’s hard to imagine. But it will be. Eventually.” Felicity kissed Harper’s cheek. “I promise.”

Oliver’s fingers slipped from the bars as he attempted his one hundred and twenty-seventh pull-up of the workout session. He collapsed onto the ground and glanced at his hands. The guards didn’t allow the prisoners to use gloves in weight room. Therefore, his hands had long since calloused to the rigorous work-out regime he’d developed over the past two months, but the scars still existed from when they weren’t so used to it.

The clock on the wall said two fifteen meaning he still had fifteen more minutes before they came to get him and lock him back in that stupid cell. Oliver pushed himself up and hopped to the bar again. One guard told him that the metal bar with tape around it would collapse soon from all the working out Oliver did on it. It’d serve them right. Because he was considered a ‘security threat’, the amount of time he had outside or anywhere other than his cell was limited. The only time he had to himself without several guards armed with guns watching was here. In the work-out room.

He started the pull-ups again, counting out loud the number. When the pain started setting in, the pain from the outside went away, and in its place became anger. At the Bratva. At himself. Anything that would keep his mind off the fact that his kids still hated him and that the trial would be coming up soon and then it would be official: he’d never see the light of day as a freeman again. Captain Lance was right the day of the arrest.

“Mr. Queen?”

“What? I still have—oh.” He didn’t. Oliver dropped from the bar and slipped on his t-shirt.

“Turn around and place your hands on the wall.”

Couldn’t they skip the formalities and just get it over with? Oliver obeyed, closing his eyes when the guard clipped the cold cuffs around his wrists. How easily he could turn around kill the man. That would be the simple part. As trained and skilled as he was, he couldn’t get out of a prison like this. Not by himself.

The Bratva didn’t care. Which wasn’t shocking. They murdered his wife. Did they look like people who would try to get him out of prison? At least they hadn’t made a move on his family. That’s what kept him awake at night the most. The idea that someone could be at the mansion right now, with a knife, preparing to kill all that he held most precious.

He’d sacrifice himself in an instant if it meant that his family would stay safe. If only he could do that. Right now. Just get it over with and die knowing that they’d be okay. Maybe when he died they’d forgive him. Move on. See what he’d done to keep them safe. To save them. Maybe then it would be okay. That’s all that he ever wanted. For it to be okay. And it would, because the kids had
Felicity. Diggle. Raisa. His sister. All those people who loved them in ways he never could. Or… couldn’t anymore.

As they walked back to his cell, Oliver kept his head on a swivel. It had earned him several whacks on the back with the baton, because prisoners were supposed to keep their eyes forward. He couldn’t. In an attack, the first person they’d be going for would be the guard. No one else would die because of him.

“Talk to you later, kid.” The guard deposited him in his cell and left. Oliver collapsed onto the cot and stared up at the ceiling. They’d moved him to a bigger area a couple weeks ago. Bigger, as in he could workouts in here without slamming an elbow into the wall. It hadn’t helped with the feeling of being suffocated. Nothing could help with that.

They’d put him in the ‘most-likely-to-attempt-escape’ ward, which left him with psycho men who pounded on the walls until guards came to yell at them, and still it would continue. It almost made him laugh. They thought he belonged with them. Delusional. Sick. So damaged that he didn’t know what he was doing.

“Mr. Queen?”

“What now?”

The man’s eyebrows raised. “You have a visitor.”

Felicity. Likely with an entire box of papers that had a thousand problems on them. Oliver smiled and stood up. Knowing that he’d have the chance to visit with his—his—blonde-haired genius, pushed away all the negative thoughts for a few moments. And also reminded him of everything she told him to not do. Which was, of course, what he’d been doing since she left the other day.

“Gotta say, you seem to have quite a number of blonde-haired girls in your family. Are they all blonde?”

Why on earth would be asking a question about kids who hadn’t been seen in the limelight in a while? “Most of them, yes, though one of my daughters has beach blonde hair.”

“Aah, that explains it.”

As they came to the visitor room, Oliver drew up. “Explains what?”

The guard unclipped the handcuffs and tossed them onto a cart. “Just go in and see.”

“What the—” the intended word got messed up with a soft cry as he stepped into the room. Harper sat at the farthest table, fiddling with her hair. Her beach blonde hair. She noticed him and smiled. And waved.

She came. Someone didn’t hate him. Or…at least decided to forgive him. Maybe. It didn’t matter now. He wanted to gather her in his arms and hold onto her for as long as the guards allowed him, but his daughter stayed rooted in her spot as he made his way over. Oliver settled down opposite her and forced his mouth to move. “Hi-Hi.”

“Hi, Daddy.” The familiar name brought tears to his eyes. Harper continued, a smile still on her face, though her chin wobbled. “I probably should’ve told you I was coming. But it was kinda last minute so I decided that I’d just come and oh dear God I’m starting to sound like Felicity.” She let out a little laugh. “Sorry.”
“Harper…” he didn’t know what to do. Or say. Except apologize. A million times. “I’m so—” He stopped when she raised her hand.

“Please don’t. I understand. Not what you did or what’s going on, but I understand. You’re sorry, and that’s fine. But I didn’t come here to get an apology. I actually came here because I brought something for you.”

He glanced down as her hand reached in a bag.

“I guess it’s not actually for you. I need help with something. A lot of things, actually, but apparently, I can only bring one thing at a time. So.” She dropped a book on the table and added several pieces of paper and a pen on top. With a sheepish grin on her face, she leaned in closer, covering the book and papers. “I kinda need help with math.”

“You brought the…” Oliver’s voice cut off as emotion strangulated him. He stared at his daughter for a moment, her eyes watery. Even though she was always the one to pick up a knife and hurl it into the target on the first try, she was also the one who got to an injured bird first. Harper loved. Despite all the hurt—and despite what he’d done—she loved. She sat up straighter and tapped her hand on the math book. The math that they’d worked…everything shut down. All he could see and feel was Harper’s fingers intertwining with his own. She squeezed his hand. Smiled.

“It’s okay, Daddy. You can cry if you want.”

Oliver closed his eyes and smiled. The tears trickled down his cheeks, but he didn’t care. One of his children forgave him. Came here with a stupid math book because she wanted help. From him. She could’ve gotten it from anyone else—and everyone else was a heck of a lot more qualified—but she came to get help from him.

“I’m sorry I didn’t come sooner. I really am. Hating you became a nice pastime, but I don’t wanna do that anymore. You’re my dad. And even if I don’t fully understand anything that put you here, I still need you in my life. I still need you to help me with these stupid, ultra-frustrating math problems. I still need your insight of boys. I still need you to show me how to deal with problems.” Harper’s voice cracked as she squeezed his hands harder. “I still need you to be my dad. Because these past two months…I’ve missed that. More than you’ll ever know. So if we can just forgive and move on, we can work on this math problem that I’ve been stuck on for the past five years.”

Oliver chuckled and moved to sit by her. She flipped open the book and handed him the pen, that expectant look on her face. “Oh, no, young lady. I’m not doing it for you.”

“You should.” Her lips formed a pout. “You’re a lot better at doing problems than I am.”

“But I’m not the one who’s gonna need at least a little bit of math in the coming years.”

“Yeah.” Her eyes flitted around, to the guards, to the other inmates talking to their families, and then to him.

He sighed. “Harper, I’m okay. Don’t worry about me.”

“Does it…does it ever get lonely in here? Be honest with me.”

“It does. A lot. Sometimes it’s almost more than I can—” the last words were muffled into Harper’s coat as she threw her arms around his neck. Hesitantly, he curled her closer to him and held on tight.

A long time ago, just after he turned fourteen, he took his father’s motorcycle for a joy ride around the Queen’s property, subsequently wrecking it, and breaking his arm in the process. His parents
were on a business trip, so he hid the bike in the woods and walked around with a broken arm for two weeks until Raisa noticed how odd it was that he didn’t go outside to play. She called his parents and they showed up at the hospital just after the doctor told a tearful Oliver that they’d have to rebreak the arm.

He’d even more tearfully apologized—profusely—to his parents for wrecking the bike. His mom started crying and gave him a hug that lasted for several minutes. She never said anything, just rocked him back and forth as he cried.

That’s what it felt like now. He’d broken something. A lot of things, actually, and he hid it for as long as he could. When it came out, it was worse than it would’ve been if he told the truth right away. It wasn’t like people forgave him right away. He’d done far worse than wreck a motorcycle.

It was the hug.

The feeling of his daughter’s arms around him. That’s what brought back those memories, his mom holding him, without words telling him that she forgave him and loved him. That’s what Harper said now, with her love.

Whatever happened in the coming months, his daughter had unknowingly freed him.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed it! I know someone said that they longed for the days of doing math, so here you go! :)


“Be with you in a moment, sir! I just need to finish this phone call,” Felicity yelled to the man who’d tapped his hand on the glass way too many times for both their good. “Please just hold on.” She put the phone to her ear again. “Okay, Piper, can you tell me one more time how and why there’s paint all over the bedroom, because I have someone who’s demanding my attention and I might need to punch him soon. Either that or talk to him.”

Three minutes later, she set the phone down and ran to the glass doors. “I am so, so sorry, sir, that I kept you waiting. I had an important phone call to take care of and—”

“I’m used to it. Ever since Robert died, the CEO of this company has been either late, rude, or both.”

“Well, I hope that I can change that today, sir.”

“You’re batting zero right now, Miss Smoak.” The man set his briefcase on the desk and pulled out several documents. “Earlier this year I spoke to the, uh, other guy, and he said that he’d take care of this for me. Apparently, it was in his forte.”

“I can look into that.” Felicity took the papers and scanned the top one. Something about transferring stocks to AmerTek. Something she could do. She glanced up at the grumpy guy as he started tapping his foot again. “His name is Oliver, by the way.”

“Fully aware of that, but he’s about to become a tried and convicted felon so I think it’s best we don’t talk about him.”

“Well, actually…” she plopped down to her chair and channeled her sweetest smile. “I was just there talking to him. Clearly it depends on the viewpoint and I’m obviously a little biased because he and I are kind of a thing, but Oliver is a good man. Better than you.”

“I don’t think that is the proper thing for the CEO to say to a rival company’s CEO.”

“Really? Because you’re really not the CEO of AmerTek.” Felicity spun her computer towards the guy. Paul Westernly, actually. His poor mother. “You’re just the little guy who does things his boss wants him to do, so I think you should apologize for trash talking the man who made this company one of the richest in the world before I have you escorted off the premises.”

“Felicity—”

Her head snapped up. “It’s Miss Smoak, Mr. Westernly. Now you can tell your boss that I will send these back to him in the next couple days. Now I really need to deal with my other job, which is being a nanny. So thank you, sir.”

He left, just as Jerry walked in, laughing. “Wow, Miss Smoak, that was amazing. That guy’s been a jerk since he became the assistant several years ago. High five?”

She gave him one before focusing on her computer. “Jerry, I need to go home for the day. I know I’ve only been here for three hours but the kids need me there. It’s a long, complicated story but—”

“Felicity, I understand. We signed on together knowing that some days you won’t be able to be here
all the time. That’s fine. Go on home and I’ll finish this. Why don’t you take the papers home and
sign them though.”

“’Kay. I’ll hopefully see you tomorrow.” As long as no one got the flu like last week. That had
sidelined most of the family until two days ago when Felicity got herself out of the house and
decided to come to work. And now Clayton spilled blue paint on the white carpet. Maybe renaming
them rascals number one, two and so on would be better.

As she exited the building, her phone rang. Letting out a number of expletives that could only be said
when in private, she answered it. “Hello, this is Felicity.”

“Hi, this is Carly.”

“Oh, hi.” She really needed to start checking the caller ID. “Please don’t tell me I have to come to the
prison because right now is not a good time for that.”

“No, that’s fine. This does not require a visit. This is about a plea deal that I’ve been working on
with the DA for Oliver.”

“And have you told him about that?” She grimaced as her heels landed in slush. “I know I’m the
more thoughtful, think-things-through person, but…and I realize that I just made it sound like we’re
married or something. Which we aren’t. And I am so sorry for rambling. I’ve had a bit of a stressful
day.”

Carly laughed. Poor woman had gotten used to this, after two months of corresponding with the
family. “It’s okay; I understand. The other side is bringing it to the meeting on Saturday and I want
you to know about it.”

Felicity slid into her car and cranked the heat way up. It didn’t matter that the calendar said April
twenty-first; it was still freezing. “Go ahead.”

“The feds have been trying to catch the leaders of the Bratva for decades, with little to no luck.
Oliver is the first person who has any legitimate knowledge of how they work, where they work or
who they are. With his help, they could maybe take him down.”

“And what’s the deal?”

“Life in a low-security prison.”

Felicity let out a laugh. “No. No way. He has a shot at winning in a trial. He doesn’t need to take a
plea that would automatically send him to prison. And what’s the difference? It’s still prison. He’d
still be locked up. So no thank you.”

“I think before you dismiss the deal you should consider the other options. They’re not good. If he
takes the deal, there’s a lesser chance of going to trial, and your family won’t have to be put through
that. I know Oliver does not want to tell anyone anything about the mafia, but he needs to consider
it.”

“I really don’t need to be reminded about the fact that he needs to consider it. As we’ve considered
the other lame deals that we’ve been given so far.” Which was a grand total of one. There weren’t
many deals to be made for an assassin. “I will see you at the meeting on Saturday. Goodbye.” She
tossed the phone onto the seat beside her and whacked the steering wheel. Couldn’t it be simple? Or
just…maybe no trial and they could settle out of court with all the people Oliver more than likely
killed? If only.
She pulled into the garage and headed to the house. Harper sat in the entrance way with a bunch of papers. “Hey, sweetie. How’re you doing? And what are you reading?”

“I’ve been worse. And I’m reading police reports.”

“How did you get those?”

“I have my avenues.” When Felicity squinted at her, Harper winked. “I asked Barry for help and he got these for me. Apparently someone by the name of Cisco does stuff with computers.” She waved the papers around. “It doesn’t seem fair that Daddy would go to for prison for all the bad stuff he did. What about all the people he saved? There’s like a thousand of these things about how he kept people safe. Not killed them.”

“That’s what Carly is hoping people will see when the trial happens when people he did save testify.” At least it would show the public that the vigilante did good in the city. The way the media painted it made it look like all he did was murder. Slice people’s throats without a reason. But he didn’t. She knew he didn’t.

“Do you think I can testify for him? Would that help?”

“Aw, Harper.” Felicity wrapped her in a hug. “I don’t know, honey. I guess anything will help, but there’s not a lot of hope right now.”

“Maybe that means we need to create our own hope.”

“I think that extends far past by capabilities at the moment.”

Harper looked up at Felicity with a smile on her face. “I know how to do it. It’s simple. We play the ‘glad game’. Just like Pollyanna. If she can do it, then I think we can figure it out too.”

“I think it’s gonna be a little harder to convince everyone else to do that. Especially your father.”

“It’s why you should kiss him.”

Felicity loosened the hug so she could send a glare down at Harper. “A kiss does not equal hope, young lady. Neither should you be setting me up with your dad.”

“I’m not setting you up with him. You love him, and you should show him that by kissing him.”

“And let me guess. You want to be there when it happens.”

“No, I do not. That’s adult gross stuff. But you should kiss him. Because that’ll show him that he should fight and not give up. Because I think he wants to marry you and you know, do stuff.”

“Harper Queen!”

She sent her an innocent smile and headed inside, calling behind her, “Talk to you in a little bit!”

Forget about the paint soaking into the carpet upstairs. Felicity took a seat in the unoccupied chair and scrubbed her eyes with her fingertips. Apparently Oliver wanted to marry her. And she wanted to marry him. In normal life, there would be only two things they needed: a ring and a proposal. And a ‘yes’. However, this was anything but a normal life. They could never have a relationship. Kissing him would bring that desire to the front of the line and that couldn’t happen. She could love him, but she couldn’t marry him.

“Felicity, sweetheart, what are you doing outside? You’ll freeze to death.” Donna peeked out, a
sweater thrown around her shoulders. “Come inside, darling. What’s with the long face? Did something happen at the office? Because I can send Johnny there and he can punch whoever did this.”

“Johnny’? Really, Mother?”

“He said I could call him that. Seriously, Felicity, what’s with the long face?”

“Hmm. I don’t know…maybe the fact that being a CEO is stressful, the fact that there’s blue paint on the white carpet in the boys’ bedroom, Oliver’s in prison, there’s a deal on the table that could make his life less sucky but still sucky, and the fact that ninety percent of the kids still won’t go and see him? Oh, and don’t forget the icing on the cake. Harper thinks I should kiss him.” The little rant done, Felicity took a deep breath and spun away from her mom. “S-Sorry.”

“No, it’s okay. Sometimes we need to get things off our chests. I know how much you’re dealing with right now. Would you like to talk about any of it?”

“Not really. I just need your support. And love. Just like you’ve been giving me the past few months.” Felicity kissed Donna’s cheek. “Thank you. Truly.”

“Well,” tears filled her eyes. “You’re my daughter, and I want you to be happy. However that happiness comes about.”

“Felicity!” Clayton yelled from the stairs above them. “Do you wanna come up and look at the mess? Diggle thinks it’s, uh, unsalvageable.”

“Well, if he says that, then it probably is. How’d it happen anyways?”

“An invention went wrong.” William finished for him as she made her way up. Spots of his hair were blue. “Annie’s insisting the floor was thirsty and that’s why it soaked up the paint.”

“Not gonna comment on that. Wow.” She whistled when they reached the bedroom. “Maybe you should redecorate your room so that it looks like the eighties. Because blue carpet was big back then.”

“I think that means we’d have to buy more paint to stain the rest of the floor.” Diggle groaned as he tossed a blue rag into a bucket and stood up. “It’s been quite the day. How was the time at the office?”

“Oh, fine. I only almost kicked one guy out, so that’s a new record. Don’t worry; my mom already volunteered you to go punch him.”

“The amount of disrespect is ridiculous there.” Donna let out a huff. “Men these days.”

“It’s more the fact that I took over for Oliver. Apparently I’m not to be trusted because of that.”

“It’s not shocking,” William muttered as he walked past. Felicity glanced down the hallway but didn’t say anything to him. She’d done that too many times.

Diggle set his hands on his hips and shook his head. “I don’t know how Oliver’s supposed to win a trial when his own kids won’t forgive him.”

“It’s the ones closest to us who hurt the most, right? At least that’s what I’m hoping is the case. Because, yeah, he’s practically screwed if it’s proved the kids hate him. Which is obvious, because the prison records show that only Harper’s gone to visit him.”
“At least there’s that.”

“We all know that she went to visit him because of something totally different.” Felicity dropped back against the wall. “The good news is that she’s forgiven him and visits him quite frequently, but the fact of the matter is that besides insisting on living there with him, she’s not gonna be able to make up for the other five.”

Diggle walked past her and flashed her one of his reassuring smiles that he somehow still had stocked up. She would have to thank Lyla. “We’ll get it figured out. There’s still a little bit before the trial.”

“Yeah.” Felicity mustered up her own smile. “We’ll get it figured out.” Somehow.

The man’s hand closed around her neck. He squeezed, cutting off her air. A knife was raised, pointing right at her heart. Felicity screamed and bucked, flailing her arms out to fight off death. “Stay away from me! Get away from me!” The man with her father’s face kept her pinned down, suffocating her as the knife came closer to her chest.

“No!” Felicity sat up and screamed. Donna kneeled on the bed, her hands on her shoulders. For a split second, she saw the knife. Her father. The blood. She screamed again, but then everything faded. Only her mom stared at her, tears streaming down her face. As the strength left her, Felicity collapsed back onto her pillow. “I’m so sorry, Mom.”

“No, I’m sorry.” Donna’s hand squeezed Felicity’s. “I’m so, so sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry about. It’s just a dream. I have them every now and then.”

“No, no, honey. It was about your father.”

Felicity closed her eyes and shook her head. “No, it wasn’t.”

“You said ‘Dad’. Several times. You screamed it, actually. You had a nightmare about your father. Honey…how often does this happen?”

“I haven’t had one in a while, but they happen every month or so. Sometimes more. But it’s okay. Oliver has nightmares a lot more often.” She opened her eyes to see tears streaming down her mom’s cheeks. Despite the terror that still gripped her, she pushed away the pain and sat up. Her arms came around Donna’s shoulders. “Mom, it’s okay. I’ve had a few things happen to me that causes some bad dreams sometimes. I promise it’s okay.”

“You’re scared of your father.”

“That’s what my dreams end up being about but in all honesty, I don’t like him. He left me. Left us. It’s hard to love someone like that.”

“Oh, sweetheart.” Donna let out a sob and tightened her grip on Felicity. “I wish…oh, I wish…”

“Mom?” She pulled away and squinted at her mom. Glasses would be helpful in this situation, but she left them in the bathroom. “What aren’t you telling me? Or more like what haven’t you told me for all these years? And before you say something, you should know that I’ve gotten pretty good at detecting lies, so please tell me the truth.”

“It’s about your father.”
“What about him?” A wave of fear washed over her. “Is he dead?”

“No, he’s not dead. I guess I can say that I wouldn’t know. He’s hasn’t contacted me in years.”

“So why do you still have that guilty look on your face?”

“Because…”

“You’re scaring me now. What. Happened?”

“Oh, God, Felicity. You’ll never forgive me.”

Felicity shook her head. “I think you’re forgetting everything I’ve had to forgive the past four months. I grew up a lot, so it might be the perfect time to tell me. Like right now.”

“Your father didn’t leave you.”

“I think you made it clear enough that he did.”

“No, he didn’t, hon. He…” she covered her mouth and shook her head. “I-I asked him to leave.”

“Y-Y-You…you asked him to leave?” Felicity stared at her mom, the fear and panic grabbing onto her again. “Mom, what do you mean you asked him to leave? You told me that he left. On his own. I’ve thought that since I was seven-years-old. You can’t just say that you told him to leave, because that’s ridiculous.” Dear God, she was rambling. “That’s ridiculous!”

“No, it’s not. Felicity, he was involved in some very bad things. People were coming for him. Very bad people who could hurt you. I couldn’t let that happen. We couldn’t let that happen. And so I told him to leave. To pack his bags, say goodbye to you, and to leave. Forever.”

You will always be my greatest accomplishment. It made more sense now. He left because of his “accomplishments”. But he wanted her to know that she was his greatest. Because he loved her.

Felicity pushed away Donna’s hand and slid off the bed. She went to the double doors and opened them, allowing the frigid spring air to rush at her. That’s what it felt like in her soul right now.

“For twenty years I’ve thought that he left us. I wondered why he left me. Why I was so wrong that he had to leave. It kept me from loving anyone, because I didn’t understand why they could love me back. Because Dad left.” She turned around to face her mother again. “When in reality…he left because you sent him away?”

“Honey, you have to understand my reasoning. He was mixed up with some very, very bad people. People who could’ve killed you and me! I had to. And I’m sorry. I never realized or thought for one second that you were broken because of him.”

“Of course I was broken!” Felicity yelled, not caring if people heard or not. “My father left me. Don’t you understand? Didn’t you know back then how much his leaving would wreck me? All I wanted was a father. It’s why I’ve worked so hard here to make sure these kids have one, because they don’t have a mom. They need their dad. And I needed mine! I still need mine.”

“Felicity—”

“Just don’t. Not right now.” She grabbed a blanket and left the room, despite her mom’s calls. The tears rushed down her cheeks as she went across the hall to Oliver’s bedroom. No one slept there anymore; no one ever went in there. It smelled like him a little bit. When she collapsed down onto the bed, it was almost as if he pulled her against him and held her. Just like when she had the
nightmare in the closet. Those reassuring arms around her. Keeping her safe.

Like her father might be doing right now if he hadn’t been sent away.

She buried her face in the pillow and sobbed. If only. Couldn’t that be the title of her autobiography? If only he hadn’t left. If only she hadn’t dated Cooper. If only she didn’t decide to go a thousand miles away from her childhood and look for a job. If only she didn’t get fired from that newspaper company.

If only.

Would it ever stop? Could she ever settle down and have peace? Every time it felt like her life had stopped spinning around in circles at a rate faster than the teacups at Disney World, it sped up again and threw her out of her seat. Didn’t she have enough on her plate right now? Couldn’t this have waited for a few more months; until after they knew whether or not Oliver would rot in prison?

Her sobbing increased.

Why couldn’t Oliver be here right now? All she wanted was a hug. Or a quiet voice saying it would be okay.

Maybe it wouldn’t happen because it wasn’t going to be okay.

Maybe it never would.

She woke up with Clayton watching her. He cocked his head and squinted at her. Felicity rubbed her eyes. “What’s wrong?”

“You’ve been crying.”

“No I haven’t.”

“You look like you just heard your dog died.”

“It’s a little bit more than that, Clayton.”

He bounced back and fell back on the pillow with her. “I’m here to talk to.”

Felicity smiled and gave him a gentle push away from her. “It’s okay. It’s none of your worries.”

“Is this about Daddy?”

“No right now it isn’t.”

“It’s okay to tell the truth. If it’s about Daddy, that’s okay. The outlook is kinda depressing.”

That could count as the first time Clayton had said anything not mean about his dad for a long time. His smile and the glasses that were titled the wrong way made her want to cuddle him close to her. She closed her eyes. No crying. “It’s actually about my own dad.”

“You don’t ever talk about him.”

“That’s because I haven’t seen him in twenty years.”
“That’s a really long time. What’d he do?”

“He…left. But last night I learned that he didn’t exactly leave. He was asked to leave.”

“Was he a bad man or something?”

“He had a particular skill set that could be used for bad things. And bad people wanted him. So my mom asked him to leave. To protect me.”

“Sounds kinda valiant.”

Felicity scooted a few inches back so she could see his face. Serious. He wasn’t joking. “And why do you say that?”

“Not to make you mad or anything, but that means she had to make a really tough decision and send him away. I bet it hurt a lot, but she did it anyways, because she really loved you and she wanted you to be safe. And I bet it hurt a lot for your dad too but he loved you. So he went away to keep you safe. So that’s why I think it’s valiant.”

Tears filled Felicity’s eyes. Not for her, or for her situation. But for Clayton. And Oliver. The little boy had just described his father. Everything that his dad had done for him; the reasons. He’d just described them all. Unknowingly, of course. But if little Clayton could understand that, couldn’t he understand what his dad did? Maybe this could be a blessing in design; the kind of blessing that came through tears. It could give her a way to reach the kids.

“Why are you staring at me like that?”

“No reason.” She sat up and gave him a kiss on the forehead. “Thank you, buddy. That helped a lot.”

“So are you not gonna be mad at our kind-of Grandma anymore?”

“That’s up to me to decide. But you helped put it into perspective, and you gave me an idea.”

“What kind of idea?”

“For you to find out. Now please go and make sure hell hasn’t broken loose downstairs because I’m guessing that it’s really late. I’m going to shower and then I need to go to the office to drop things off.”

He nodded and ran out of the room. Felicity went to her bedroom, surprised to find no one in there ready for answers as to why she slept in Oliver’s bed. The best response would be that it smelled nice, but that wouldn’t fly with many of the kids. Considering that they all thought even his name would mean death by poison.

But that would all change.

Even if she couldn’t change what had happened to her, she could change what would happen to the kids and Oliver. By saving those relationships, it would save her too. That was the deal that she made with herself during her shower. If she could get even three of them to understand, that would heal her. She would forgive her father. Forgive her mother. Move on from all of that.

By healing the Queens, she’d heal herself.

Dealing with her mom, for the time being, would be awkward. She understood that it took time to
forgive. She hadn’t interfered, for the most part, with the kids’ anger and un-forgiveness. Until now. In a month and a half, Oliver would stand trial for a number of things, and he needed his family’s support. All of it. Not just Harper’s.

The kids had gone long enough without knowing the full story and tonight, once she dealt with everything that needed to be dealt with, they would find out. Everything that Oliver had told her. Even if he didn’t want them to know. Clearly they weren’t going to forgive him if they didn’t understand. And now, with her own story, they’d understand fully the sacrifice parents sometimes had to make for their children.

Half an hour later, Jerry greeted her when she stepped into their shared office. “Good morning, Felicity. Or, close to afternoon. How’re you doing? Forgive me for possibly overstepping, but you look a little tired.”

“I am. I had a rough night.” She set the folder on his desk and released a sigh. “I found out something about my family that I should’ve known twenty years ago. It’s been a little difficult.”

“Wow. Anything that I could help with?”

“No. I’ve got it figured out, actually. It’s just that…” she took a seat at Jerry’s desk. “Have you ever had to be a role model and that means that you have to act differently then you would if you didn’t have to be a role model? I know that it doesn’t make any sense but—"

“I think as adults, and kind-of parents, we were given those children as a blessing. And we shouldn’t waste it on being bad people or harboring grudges or whatever. We need to forgive. That’s what’s wrong with this world right now. We, as parents, are holding grudges for the rest of our life and being angry about everything, and in turn that’s telling our kids that they can do the exact same thing.” He raised his eyebrows. “Is that what you needed to hear?”

“Yeah. That works.” She got to her feet and pushed the folder towards him. “I’ll come by tomorrow. For now, that’s the signed papers. Send them to AmerTek and maybe give that Mr. Westernly a popcorn cake or something. And thank you for the advice. Sounds weird, but it actually reaffirmed a lot of things that I was telling myself.”

“You’ll go far in life with that attitude, Felicity.”

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“Felicity, can we talk?”

She turned around to see her mom at the door, tear tracks on her cheeks. Annie and Piper looked up at her, quizzical looks on their faces. Not something they needed to know about yet. “Hey, you two are done. Why don’t you go out and play with Fluffy? I bet she’d love to go play in the leftover snow. We can finish the book later.”

“Sure.” But Piper sent her an I-know-you look as she stood up. Slowly, but after months of rehab, she could walk again without help. It was a miracle in itself, but by the time she took her first steps with crutches, Felicity had already started searching for a bigger one. “Ellie can finish the book so you can talk to Grandma. Clearly you need it.”

Denying the issue would only lead to bigger problems. “Thanks, Piper.” When they left, Felicity crossed her arms. “What would you like to talk about?”

“You know what I want to talk about. You’re hurting and I don’t want you to—”
“To what? Be mad at you? Mom, you hid a secret for twenty years. How am I supposed to process that let alone forgive you? I can’t…” she let out a shaky breath. “I don’t really know anything anymore. For so long, I hated him. For a good reason. This morning Clayton basically described what Oliver did for his family by saying that what you and Dad did was valiant. You sent him away and he agreed to go because you loved me. I can understand that, because you did it to keep me safe, but Mom…you kept it hidden for twenty years. Don’t you think you could’ve told me during dinner sometime when I was sad about him leaving?”

Donna sank to the couch. “I was scared that you would be mad at me. I lost my husband. I couldn’t lose you too.”

“Why do you think you would lose me?”

“Because, Felicity….” Her mom looked up at her, tears in her eyes and a smile on her face. “The daughter I knew six months ago would never have asked that question. You were a completely different person. Whatever has happened here…it’s changed you. You are basically a mom to these six kids, you visit Oliver as much as you can, and you’re the CEO of Queen Consolidated. You’ve changed. I don’t care what you say. The girl from last July would never, ever have even let me talk to you let alone talk this long.”

Felicity sucked in a deep breath and turned her attention to staring out the window. Was her mom right? Did being here change her that much? She knew it had scraped away all the fake pieces of herself—especially recently. But really? Truly? “Mom….” She turned around. “Do you really think I changed that much?”

“Yes, I do. You’ve grown into not just a beautiful woman—not that you weren’t before—but you’ve developed a new look on life that is so…it’s so beautiful, Felicity. You somehow know all that hurts in this world, but you still manage to love everything. Most people would never have been able to forgive Oliver, but you did, and you’re helping the kids to do the same. You’ve comforted Thea and honey, I’m just so proud of you. And I know you don’t like me right now, and that’s okay because I did a terrible thing. But…I’m still so proud—”

“Just stop. Please.” Felicity put her arms around her mom and buried her head in her shoulder. “I just need a hug. It’s gonna take some time, but right now you’re the best option.” She held on for a little bit before letting go and adjusting her dress. “And thank you. Kind of. Because this has given me a nice idea for the put-my-foot-down talk I’m having with the kids tonight about Oliver. For now I need to run to the office and give Jerry some papers. So I’ll see you later.”

“I want everyone to meet me in the living room in a few minutes, please,” Felicity called at the stairwell. After receiving confirmation from three kids, she took a seat on the couch. The very couch she sat on almost four months ago when Oliver lied to her, and then several hours later when she found out about everything.

Five minutes later, the whole group gathered in the living room. Even William came down without a second yell up to his bedroom. Felicity took a deep breath and whispered a prayer. “Please let this go well.”

“Why are we all down here?” Harper bounced around in her spot. “We aren’t in trouble, are we?”

“No, you’re not. I want to talk to you about something. I promise you you’re not in trouble. All I’m asking is that you listen. Sounds good?”
When they nodded, she began. “All of you know about how my dad left when I was little, right? Well, a couple days ago, I found out that he didn’t leave me. My mom asked him to leave.”

William whistled. “Why on earth would she do that?”

“My dad…he has a very particular skillset. Much like mine. I can hack into anything, but he’s even better than me. Not kidding. He’s used his skills to help the world and cause problems. Either way, when someone’s that good at something, people want him. Very, very bad people.”

“People with guns?” Annie’s eyes grew wide when Felicity nodded. “That’s not good.”

“No, it’s not. And my dad was married and he had me. I was seven. So my mom asked him to leave. To protect me. And he left.”

“And…you just found out about that…last night?” Ellie looked around the room. “Donna’s still here.”

“Yes, she is.”

“Why?” William let out a disbelieving laugh. “She lied for twenty years.”

“She did. And it’s gonna take a little while to get over that. But I understand. I know who was coming after me and my mom and my dad knew too. That’s why he left. To keep me safe.” Felicity put her hands between her knees and squeezed hard. It kept the kids from knowing that they were shaking. “There’s something your dad asked me not to tell you, but I think it’s high time you knew.”

William stood up.

“No, you’re staying here.”

“I don’t need to hear a pathetic little story about—”

“William Queen, sit your butt down right now before I drag you to where Daddy is and have him give you a whipping because you sure deserve it.”

His mouth fell open as he stared at his older sister. Ellie drew her shoulders back and glared at him. William reached for the couch arm and sank down, his eyes still wide. Felicity hid a smile. That was the first time Ellie had said anything that remotely sounded…good. Not that the sentence she razed at her brother was good, but… anyways.

“I want all of you to listen with open minds and not go off on your hate-filled rants right away. Is that understood?” They nodded. “Good. You know the full story about the vigilante. Your mom started it, and Oliver went along with it. But you don’t know the full story about the Bratva. Really not one bit.

“Several years ago some people came to your dad with photos. Proof that he was the vigilante. They wanted him to come work for them. They were from Russia and he knew that. That’s why he said no, and apparently told them to go to hell. The next day someone hacked into QC’s bank accounts and stole two million dollars. He still said no.”

Ellie’s eyes widened as the truth began to become clear. “They…they killed Mama. Oh, God.” She covered her mouth her hand. “Oh, my God.”

“They killed your mom, yes. And apparently they took her ring.”
“I wanted it that day. And D-Daddy said no.” Tears began falling down her cheeks.

“A few days later they returned the ring and told him that he had to come work for them or you would all suffer the same fate but to worse extremes.” Her eyes fell on Piper, who looked down and rubbed her legs. She knew what a worse fate meant. She’d almost experienced one. “So your father said yes. He’s worked with them ever since, to protect you.

“That’s why my dad and your dad are very much alike. They didn’t have a choice. For twenty years I’ve hated my father. Because I thought he left me, when in truth he didn’t. He didn’t have a choice. Not just because my mom asked him to leave. I’m sure he already knew he had to. He understood that leaving would keep me safe. So he did. You…you’re alive today because Oliver was willing to sacrifice himself to keep you all safe. I don’t know if any of you know anything about the mafia, but it’s an awful place. You have to survive, and to survive, you have to know how. There’s torture, and there’s a lot of pain. He would never tell you that, but I know. And now you know.”

Felicity took a deep breath. “That’s it.” She looked around the room. The reactions were mixtures of shock and pain. “And there’s one more thing I want to say. I hated my father for twenty years, and he has haunted me for that long in nightmares. I have issues that will take a long time to be resolved because I didn’t forgive him. He might’ve left, but the real reason I have issues is because I didn’t forgive. Don’t be like me. You don’t want to grow up and realize that all these issues started when you decided to harbor guilt and never go to see your dad.” Her eyes rested on Piper who stared at her legs, absently rubbing them. “Coming from someone who hasn’t had a hug from her father since I was seven, don’t ever wait that long.”

“If…” Piper glanced around the room. “If someone killed our mom, are they gonna kill us too?”

“Are we all gonna die in a car accident?” Annie’s eyes bugged out. “Like Mommy did?”

“Everyone’s safe here.” For the time being. “Everyone is going to be safe here.”

“Yeah, because if the Bratva was going to kill us, then they probably would’ve done it already, huh?” William stood up and left the room. Felicity pushed herself up. “I’m going to go upstairs. If any of you want to talk—”

“How could he ever forgive any of us?”

“Excuse me?”

Clayton looked around at everyone, tears in his blue eyes. “How could Daddy ever forgive us? One of us turned him in and the rest of us didn’t do anything to stop it. And only one of us has gone to see him in the past four months. Seems like he’d have a hard time forgiving us.”

“Well, honey.” Felicity stood and moved to the exit. She smiled at him. “I think you’d be surprised. He misses all of you. It’s pretty lonely in the prison. If any of you want to talk, I’ll be up in Oliver’s office. My office.” She’d made it look a little bit more like her own. Painted it pink. She still hadn’t told Oliver that.

She had just shut the door when it flew open again, showing Annie. “Hey, sweetie. What’s—” she stopped when the little girl let out a sob and went running into her arms. “Hey, hey. Honey, what’s wrong?”

“I want Daddy. I miss Daddy!” Her arms tightened around Felicity’s waist.

Felicity smiled and took a seat and hoisted Annie onto her lap. “It’s okay, sweetie. It’ll be okay. I promise.”
“He was…” she hiccupped. “He’d cuddle me until I fell asleep. And he’d read me books. And kissed me goodnight. And I want him to do that again. I miss Daddy.” She looked up at her with puffy eyes. “I really, really miss him. Do you think I could go see him? Would he like that?”

The little baby of the family grew up, hadn’t she? Felicity nodded. “I think he’d love that.”

“Can I go right now? With Harper?”

“It’s nine o’clock at night, Annie. I think he might be sleeping.” Working out, more likely. “I think you can wait a little bit. Because on Saturday, whoever wants to come can surprise him.”

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Ellie parked in the empty lot and slid out. She slipped a thing of pepper spray in her purse and locked the car. A text had already popped up from Diggle. Where’d you take the car? Guardians. Almost worse than actual parents. She sighed, but replied, I just need a little time to myself. I’ll be back in an hour.

She made her way through the rows of graves until she reached the Queens plot. On the left, Robert and Moira, her grandparents, were buried. On the other side her great grandparents. Both stones stood a few feet off the ground, regal and proud. The middle was different. A small stone, only a foot wide and several inches long, lay there. Annie Cassia Queen. Loving mother and wife.

“A light that was dimmed too soon.” She took a seat on the wet ground, thankful for the blanket she brought along. “Hey Mama. I’m sorry it’s been such a long time since I came. We have had…quite the year. And I’m not even talking about anything before January. Felicity Smoak became our nanny, and I’m pretty sure she’s falling in love with Daddy. And I know he’s fallen in love with her. It was kind of adorable, watching him flirt with her. It made me wonder how you ever dealt with him, because he’s not exactly subtle. Must’ve been rough bringing him over to the house.

“And now Daddy’s in prison. For something you started. It’s hard to imagine you encouraging him to become a vigilante, but apparently there’s a lot I didn’t know about you two. I wouldn’t be surprised to find out that you fought alongside him. Anyways, I’ve spent four months hating him. Understandably so. I’m sure you would’ve been mad at him.

“But Mom…I don’t think I can do that anymore. He punished himself to keep us safe. It’s hard to hate someone like that. And he’s my dad. Despite the lies and killing, I love him, and I miss him.”

She closed her eyes and watched as her mom’s form morphed in front of her. So beautiful and so wise. She loved life. Loved the kids. Loved her husband. Ellie remembered a few fights. Her mom was the only one who could make her dad look legitimately scared. Until Felicity came along.

But that wasn’t what she needed to think about right now.

Before she came here, she’d looked up the timeline of the Hood. According to SCPD, the first body dropped in 2004. Meaning her mother would’ve been alive for that. She didn’t divorce him. She certainly didn’t remember if they fought, but her mom stayed and loved him. And kept supporting him. She saw the darkness, and kept fighting for the light.

Felicity’s life story came to mind. Her father didn’t have a choice. And he left. Just like her own dad did.

“Mom, is it completely ridiculous to say that I forgive him? Because part of me feels like it is, and the other part says that I should have done it a long time ago. And I know that once I make that decision, the others will follow.” And Harper would stop getting the cold shoulder. A tidal wave of guilt hit
her as she thought of her little sister. The maturity she showed surpassed all of them. Just today she’d been calling people who the Hood saved. Ellie hadn’t even gone to see her dad, and it was about a month before the trial would start.

Ellie pushed herself up and blew her mom a kiss. “I love you, Mama. I hope…I hope you’re proud of me right now.”

She stopped at a coffee shop and picked up mochas for her and Felicity. They needed to have a talk when she arrived home. Or maybe this could be called an apology cup of coffee. In that case, their more-than-nanny Nanny deserved an entire Starbucks. She’d put up with insults, fighting, and the cold shoulder for months.

When she pulled into the garage, Diggle sat on the stool in the work area, watching her. She stepped out of the car and sent him an exasperated look. “Dig, I’m seventeen. Almost eighteen. You don’t need to wait for me.”

“I know, but I’m also a bodyguard. And you’re very, very lucky that I didn’t send Lyla’s team after you. Whatever the Bratva is, they’re still around. And I’m supposed to take care of you.”

A chill ran down her spin at the mention of the Bratva. “You think they’re watching us?” Had they been watching her at the cemetery?

“I don’t know, and I don’t think I want to know. Oliver asked me to keep my eye out for anything weird. And you leaving in the middle of the night is one of those things.”

“Then why didn’t you send Lyla’s team after me?”

“Because I knew where you went.” He came towards her, a gentle look on his face. “Your mom always had the best advice.”

“I can always feel her there, and I could feel her there tonight. But now, I have to go embrace what I have now, and go talk to Felicity.” She stopped when he smiled. “What?”

“Nothing. Go enjoy your coffee before it gets cold.”

“O-Okay.” She let out a laugh as she stepped out of the garage and headed to the house. A whooshing noise made her stop in her tracks. “Who’s there?” No one answered, but off in the distance, an orange light blurred, and then disappeared. *What in the world?* It looked like…”The Flash.” Her dad had sent the speedster to watch over them.

She giggled. Everything would be okay, wouldn’t it? A sense of peace washed over. All she could was smile. It would all work out. Somehow. Now she just had to convince everyone else of that.

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“Thank you.” Oliver flashed the officer a smile before he stepped into the conference room. It took him a moment before he could comprehend what was happening. It didn’t seem real until a familiar voice screamed, “Daddy!” She ran at him, and jumped into his arms. Oliver pressed his hand to the back of Annie’s head to keep her close as she continued to yell into his ear. He didn’t care. The arms squeezing him to death drowned out all noise.

“Daddy…” Ellie looked up at him with a smile on her face, despite the tears. Oliver shifted Annie to the side and wrapped one arm around his oldest daughter, just as Piper ran up to him. She swished her skirt and raised her leg, something she couldn’t do four months ago. “Hey, Dad.”
“Y-you can walk.” His voice broke. Piper giggled and wrapped her arms around his waist. Clayton didn’t need an introduction; he pushed his way through the crowd of children to give him a hug. Harper came too. Oliver closed his eyes and cherished the moment with almost all his children around him.

When he opened his eyes, he caught Felicity’s gaze and mouthed, “Thank you.” She smiled and nodded.

“I’m sorry we didn’t come sooner,” Ellie whispered. “You should know that we all forgive you.”

“And we all love you.” Piper tipped her head back and grinned at him.

Annie kicked Piper in the head. “But I love you the most! And that is…undisputable.”

Everyone laughed. Oliver kissed Annie’s forehead. “We won’t argue with that.”

“Alright, Mr. Queen.” Carly cleared her throat. “I’m sorry, but we need to get along with this part of the meeting before the other lawyer gets here.”

“Miss Carly, the ruiner of fun,” Piper muttered. He shouldn’t have agreed with her, but he did anyways. “Uh huh.”

“Alright, it’s good to see most of the family here. Where’s the boy…William?”

Felicity sighed. “Not here, clearly. So let’s start doing this stuff.”

Annie climbed onto his lap and cuddled up against him. She popped up to his ear and whispered, “Daddy, do I have to understand what’s going on?”

“No, honey, you don’t have to worry about understanding things.” It would be better if she didn’t. In all honesty, it would be better if no one understood anything. What if they decided that they didn’t want to be in his life just as quickly as they decided they wanted to be here? He wouldn’t blame them. In fact, why would Felicity let them come? He didn’t want them—

“Felicity told us everything, Dad.” Ellie sent him a reassuring look. “Don’t worry about us finding out about stuff. We know everything.”

Not everything. Oliver took a deep breath to steady himself. “Okay. What’s on the plate?”

Carly opened her folders. “Expect a plea deal today. As we discussed, the feds have put a deal on the table and we’ll deal with that when it comes. I know what it is, and I highly suggest considering it.”

“But no one is making any decisions until we talk about it.” Felicity glared at Carly, and then at him. Did she know what it was? Likely, if she kept sending him ugly looks. Oliver sent her a reassuring one.

“Well, hello, Mr. Queen.” The defense attorney stepped into the room. He surveyed the scene and his eyebrows raised. “I see you brought the entire family. For the most part. Looks like you’re missing one. Is it the one who turned you in in the first place?”

“Mr. Donner, that’s hardly the most appropriate thing to lead off with,” Carly bit out.

“I’m just curious.” He took a seat on the opposite end of the table. “Let’s get this started, shall we?” He opened his folders and slid a piece of paper to Carly. “This is the deal that the feds have come up with. Life in a low security prison in exchange for information about the Bratva—”
Oliver stopped listening. In the back of his head, he’d thought that there would be a deal that involved a few years in prison. Or maybe a year of torture. He could handle that. Two years, actually. He’d learned how to deal with the pain for a while. He was thirty-six. If he lived a normal life, he would be in here for fifty years. Fifty years of having to shower with guards watching, and to sleep in an uncomfortable bed. Without the woman he’d fallen in love with next to him. Would the nightmares ever go away? What if they never did?

“Oliver, honey, take a deep breath, okay?” Felicity’s hand rested on his shoulder. “Breathe. It’s gonna be okay.”

“I-I’m…” he took her advice. “I’m fine. Thank you.”

Adam continued. “The thing is, Mr. Queen, even if you accept the deal, you’ll still go to trial with charges against you involving the Hood.”

“So you’re saying that even if he takes that deal, if he’s found guilty, he’ll still go a maximum-security prison.” Felicity scoffed. “Isn’t that what you’d call a screw-over?”

“It’s worth a shot. If you win in one case, you might lose in another. It gives you a chance.”

“It literally changes nothing.” Felicity yanked the piece of paper away from Carly and glared at it. A few seconds later she slammed it to the table. “This is stupid. Tell the feds to come up with a better one because this is basically a waste of time.”

Adam Donner chuckled and leaned forward, the smirk on his face intensifying. “You are more than likely facing prison, Mr. Queen. I don’t know what Miss Smoak thinks, but it’s about near hopeless. I don’t care what your attorney says. So I would put in some serious thought about this deal before you say no.”

Annie started crying, soon followed by Piper. Oliver squeezed his littlest tighter and put his other arm around his second youngest. “Hey, hey. It’s gonna be okay.”

“B-But—”

Adam looked around at the crying kids. “Why on earth would you bring the kids here?”

“We wanted to come.” Ellie raised her chin. “And we’ll be staying. And coming to the trial. So you’re gonna have to get used to us.”

At some point this guy would drop the case, by the look on his face after Ellie gave him a lecture. Though he couldn’t call it a lecture. Not as an adult, he couldn’t. But as a father, he could send her a little smile. Off the books that he would never admit to, especially when Felicity gave him the look. The one all women gave men when they did something they shouldn’t have. Oliver winked at her.

She rolled her eyes.

“Allright, that is what we needed to talk about. You have a few days to think and talk about it.” Donner pushed the papers back into his folder. “I would suggest thinking strongly about it, though.”

Oliver cleared his throat. “I’d be willing to do a deal if it meant not having a trial.”

“What?” Felicity grabbed his hand. “No.”

“It’d be better than putting everyone through a trial. One that even I don’t want to have to go through, let alone them.” He nodded down at Annie whose cries had quieted finally. “It’s worth a
shot.”

“Oliver—”

Oh, not a fight he wanted to have right now. Oliver leveled a look at her. “We’ll discuss it later. But for now, Mr. Donner, why don’t you see if you can come up with something that would keep a trial from happening. I would consider a deal, but…” the panic came back, along with the knowledge that he could never tell the government about the Bratva. “Just come up with something.”

When Adam left, Carly stood also. “I’ll leave you all to do…whatever you’re going to do. I’m honestly not even surprised at anything anymore. I’ll contact you in the next few days. We have things to discuss involving testimonies.”

“Oh thank God she’s gone. Now we can all yell at you.” Ellie crossed her arms. “I can’t believe you’d think about taking a plea deal.”

“What part about a trial and what I’m going to be tried on do you all not understand?” Oliver tossed his hands in the air. “It’s called murder. On several accounts, and that’s not even talking about the Bratva. I have a one percent chance of winning over a jury on any of those points.”

“But there’s still a one percent chance.”

“Ellie—”

“No, listen. I know it sounds ridiculous given the fact that this is the first time I’ve visited you in four months, but Dad…” she looked around the room. Tears filled her eyes. “I can’t stand the idea of you being in here for the rest of both of our lives. It’s not fair, and you can’t just take a plea deal.”

“I’m not happy about it either, but it might be the best option.” If Carly could negotiate a deal that involved him not telling people about what he knew.

“No, it is not. The Flash can’t watch over us for the rest of time. So you have to at least give yourself a shot at winning and getting out of here.”


Oliver hid a groan. Great. Another secret that could potentially get dumped.

“I saw him watching the house the other night. He sped away just as I was walking out and I caught him going back to where he came from.” Ellie smiled. “Does he have a nice backside, Dad?”

“So the Flash has been watching our house. That’s actually kinda cool.” Harper giggled. “I’m with Ellie. Does he have a nice body? Because he’s too fast to tell.”

If Barry could hear this conversation right now…Oliver shook his head. “Absolutely not. None of you would like him. He’s annoying and cocky. And he’s got some help from where he lives and they’re just as annoying.”

“But I bet you’re really grumpy to work with too.” Piper grinned and scooted forward. “Do you have a secret lair?”

“I can’t tell you that unless Felicity can disable all of the—”

“Did that five minutes ago.” This time Felicity winked at him. He smiled. “You’re free to talk. I also
bumped the schedule back so we have some extra time.”

He knew he found the right one to fall in love with. Oliver shifted Annie to ease the weight off his thighs. “Yes, I have a secret lair. But I can’t tell you where it is.”

“Daaaaaaad.”

“The Flash still works there sometimes and if I told you, I can imagine one of you going down there and finding out who he is. But I can tell you that the lair is cool.”

“Is he someone we know?”

Do not look at Felicity. Do not look at her. “I don’t think so.”

“Because if it’s Barry or Tommy, they have nice butts.” Harper laughed when they all stared at her. “What? I notice things.”

“Too many things, if you ask me.” Oliver glanced down at Annie who cuddled up against him. “Since most of the family is here right now, I want to say that I’m sorry. I know it doesn’t really matter now, but I still am. I was responsible for your mom’s death, and a lot of death afterwards. I never should’ve lied to you, and for that, I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Ellie squeezed his hand. “I...we, understand now why you did it. And we all agreed it was pretty brave. Anyways,” she glanced around at the kids, and then winked. “Not many kids can say that their dad is a vigilante.”

“And speaks Russian.” Clayton furrowed his brow. “You do speak Russian, right?”

“Да. Я говорю по-русски.”

Clayton clapped his hands. Piper squealed. Oliver smiled. Never did he think that people would be awed by the language he’d learned over the years. But today they were. By the looks on their faces, they were thrilled. His son scooted closer, his eyes wide. “So what does that mean?”

“‘Yes. I speak Russian’."

“Can you teach me some sometime? Because I think it’s really cool. Can you speak any other languages?”

“Just little stuff. Hello, and where’s the bathroom.”

“So can you teach me that? Cuz I wanna know how to say stuff in different languages. It doesn’t matter what. Just so I can sound cool.”

“Me too!” Piper waved her hand. “I wanna learn too.”

“Can I learn too?” Annie titled her head up and flashed her sweetest smile and did the puppy eyes at him. “I bet I could learn the quickest of all you because I have the youngest brain. Felicity said that young brains learn quicker.”

Piper reached out and tickled her. “I think she said that when you asked her if she could play the flute yet.”

“I gave her lessons.”

Oliver looked over Annie’s head to Felicity. She shrugged.
“Before she gets a job teaching children we’ll have to make sure she knows that lessons are not playing the instrument several times and then banging the person on the head with it when they can’t name the notes.”

Annie’s lips formed into a pout. “You suck at music.”

“Believe it or not, you’re not the first person to say that to me.”

“Hey, Daddy, can I ask you a question?” Ellie cast him a look. “It’s about Mama.”

“Yeah.”

“How involved was she in you being the Hood?”

“Well, she never went out with me, if that’s what you’re asking.” He smiled as memories hit him. “She did everything for me, basically. Stitched me up if, or more like when I got hurt, and took care of all the technical stuff that I still don’t know how to do.”

“Like what?”

“She was good at working the computers. That’s why I have the, uh, Flash to help me. He’s good at that stuff, and he can run fast.”

“And he’s probably young enough for me to date.”

“Ellie, since when are you interested in dating?” He’d hoped that she was joking the first few times, but this happened to be the third or fourth time he’d heard of dating. And boys. Men, actually. Barry Allen would never hear about this. Ever. “Life is much better without significant others. For a while at least.”

Harper rolled her eyes. “That’s rich coming from someone who got married at eighteen.”

“Wait.” Annie popped up again, nearly slamming her head into Oliver’s chin. “Ellie’s seventeen. So you got married a year…you were eighteen?”

“It’s why he has amazing abs…” Felicity covered her mouth. “I’m so sorry. Please ignore that I said that.”

Oliver ducked his head to hide a smirk, and maybe his red face. Oh, Felicity. If they weren’t surrounded by little children, he’d say something that would borderline flirting. The issue was that if he said anything with all these lovesick pre-teens and teenagers, they’d notice and would find it the most hilarious thing in the world.

“Abs?” His littlest tried to peek down his shirt. She glanced back at Felicity. “You like his abs?”

“Oooohokay.” Jason, one of the guards Oliver had befriended, stepped into the room. He winked at Felicity. “I have to say that it’s nice to meet the rest of the family. I’m Jason. I’m a friend of your dad’s. Unfortunately for all of you but fortunately for Felicity, time’s up. I got as much time as you possibly could’ve gotten. Sorry.”

“Bye, Daddy.” Annie gave him a hug. “I love you.”

“Love you too.” He caught Harper as she wrapped her arms around him. “Thanks for coming, sweetie. Next time bring the math, okay? We’ll get that done.”

Oliver stood up and hugged his oldest. “Thank you for coming. You have no idea how wonderful it
was to see you.”

“I’m sorry it took me so long to come. And I’ll visit again. Soon.” She kissed him on the cheek. “I love you.”

He held on to her for a few more seconds before Jason tapped him on the shoulder. “Alright, I gotta go. I love you all.” He backed out of the room. When the gates clicked shut, Oliver turned around and put his hands on the wall. As the cuffs clipped around his wrists, Oliver glanced back at the guard. “Thanks for not doing this in front of them.”

“Well, it’s not like I’m worried about you throwing a punch and breaking out of here. Maybe some people think that way, but those kids already saw you get arrested. They don’t need to see anything else.”

“Yeah, well, they’re about to be put through a lot of hell during that trial.”

“They’re strong kids. I think you’ll be surprised how they’ll handle it.”

Oliver chuckled and shook his head. “I don’t think you understand what they’re going to hear about their dad. It took them four months to forgive me. What if they start hating me again after what they hear there?”

“I think you’re underestimating your kids. I’ve seen a lot of children make it through a trial without a problem. And if you don’t want them to see stuff, then tell them to stay at home.”

An image of his family, plus Felicity, flashed in his head. “I don’t think they’d take that as an answer.”

“Well, then let them be there. Have a little faith.”

Jason deposited him in his cell. Oliver walked to the small window that couldn’t really be called a window and looked up at the darkening sky. He smiled. They all came to see him, for reasons still unknown. Last time Harper came, she said that they were all cursing his name. Now it was down to one.

This prison cell didn’t feel so small anymore.

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Felicity stepped into the house, carrying a sleeping Annie. “Let’s lay her on the couch since we haven’t eaten yet. I don’t want her to wake up and have no idea where she is. Grab a blanket, will you?” She walked into the living room and spotted the one Queen who stayed home sitting on the couch. “Hey, buddy. How was the movie?”

“Fine.”

Oh, the ‘read between the lines’ word. “Could you scoot over so I can—thank you.” She laid Annie down and took the blanket Ellie brought. “What’s with the long face? You look like you had no fun.”

“I had fun. Did you?”

Ellie scoffed. “Yes, we did. It was good to see Daddy again. It was nice to be together as a family. Minus one.”
“Ellie.” Felicity sent her a warning look. The bitterness had started to show and while his father might be forgiving, his siblings might not be. Ellie’s aggressiveness would come to play at some point in a showdown between her and William. Felicity did not want to see something like that. “William decided to stay here. That’s fine.”

“The same way it’s fine that Daddy’s sitting in prison because of you?”

Okay, this was happening now. “Ellie, that’s enough.”

“No, it’s not.” William stood up and stared at his sister. “Dad’s in prison because of what he did. There might be some people in there who don’t deserve to be in there, but he’s there because he was an idiot and killed people. And lied. And did a lot of nasty stuff.”

“To protect us.”

William laughed. “That’s literally the best lie that he could come up with, huh? He was doing this to protect us? Because that’s a bunch of bull crap. He killed people. He was a part of the Russian mafia! Don’t you think the ‘I did it to protect you’ story line is a little bit much?”

“Do you not know Daddy at all? He loves all of us, and he’d—”

“I knew the Dad from five years ago. Back then he was loving and kind and caring. We never had to worry about him breaking our trust. Now? He’s a killer. And a liar. And that’s not even talking about how he treated us the past five years. Don’t you remember the constant ignoring? The fact that he cared more about killing people than us?”

As she went to intervene, Felicity stopped herself. Despite the anger that radiated off him twenty-four seven, William hadn’t blown up. This way, she would know all the problems. Not that she didn’t before, but this would confirm everything. At some point she could help him with them. Maybe.

“Willie, your hate is clouding your judgement.”

“No, it’s clouding yours. All you can see is a perfect guy—”

“Perfect?” Ellie rolled her eyes. “Really? I do not see a perfect man. Or father. He’s been far from good in many categories. But he’s still our dad, and he deserves a second chance. Yes, he’s made mistakes but everyone has. Even if you think that he’s lying about being forced to do things, you still owe it to yourself to forgive him. And someday you will regret telling Lance. Trust me.”

Chapter End Notes

Five down, one to go! We'll see that last sentence come back to haunt a few people in a few chapters. I actually just finished writing chapter 25 and the ending made my sisters scream so...*winky face*. Anyways, hope you enjoyed the chapter! I had a lot of fun writing take-no-names-Felicity-Smoak at QC, and it was also tons of fun to write a scene with Ellie's POV. Oh, and let's not forget Felicity's dad! *screams* I decided to use the actual canon for this story in those terms. I really liked the idea that Felicity had to make herself forgive Donna to show the kids. It will continue to be a story line, and if there's a sequel...we might just meet Noah!

Extra note: completely forgot that it's Christmas next week! But don't worry; there will
be a new chapter! And I think there will be a little bit of a Christmas present for Olicity fans. :)
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

All the Olicity!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Oliver reached to lift the phone off its hook, muttering under his breath when his handcuffs restricted the movement. After this long, he should be used to it, but the pieces of metal still got in his way. He scooted forward and picked up the phone before it stopped ringing. “Hello?”

“Oh, thank God. I was worried I wouldn’t reach you. They said that I could call between one and one thirty but my phone wasn’t working and it’s just a big ginormous—”

“Cisco, if you don’t slow down I’m hanging up.”

“Sorry. Okay, I’m calm. Not really, but I’m going to act calm. It’s Barry.”

“What?” He glanced at the guard outside the door. “These calls are monitored.”

“I have that taken care of.”

Of course. Barry had found the right side-kicks. “What happened? Is…is he okay?”

“He’s alive, but other than that, I have no idea. Actually, we think we know. It’s…” Cisco took a deep breath. “It’s bad, Oliver. Really bad.”

“What. Happened?”

“It was Zoom. We tried to lure him into a trap but he was more powerful than anything we’ve ever seen. He, uh, broke Barry’s back. Caitlin’s still running tests, but it looks like both of his legs are broken too.”

Oliver dropped his head back and closed his eyes. No. Not Barry. The kid did no wrong. He didn’t deserve anything like this. Super healing or not, the agony that would come with broken legs and back? “I’m so sorry, Cisco.”

“According to Caitlin he won’t be able to feel it anyways. He’s paralyzed.”

“Oh, God.” That wasn’t possible. Barry was the fastest man alive. There couldn’t be someone who had more power than he did. Paralysis wasn’t possible. “There’s no way that’s possible. It’s Barry.”

“That’s what we all thought until his back cracked. Or maybe it was his spine. I don’t know. I didn’t exactly sign up for this. All I know is that you no longer have someone to watch over the house. I got hit by something, but I don’t have speed and I don’t have any powers. Yet. But that’s what Dr. Wells said. Anyways, I’m sorry, Oliver.”

“No, no. I can figure that out. Cisco, I’m so sorry. How’s Iris?”
“Freaking out. Crying. Not that I haven’t been. But Iris is Barry’s girl. I don’t know what we’re gonna do.”

“I wish I could help.”

“Well, you’d just make it worse by yelling, so it’s probably a good thing you’re stuck. Which I realize is not a good thing to say, so I’m sorry. And Caitlin is yelling at me, so I gotta go. Let me know if there’s something that Star Labs can provide. Oh, and I told Felicity it was a car accident. Bye.”

Oliver set the phone down and stared at the grey wall. His sidekick might never walk again. The first reaction would be pain for Barry. He might be the most annoying kid in the world, but he didn’t deserve any type of injury. The second reaction was panic. Oliver relied on Barry’s speed to get to the Queen mansion if something happened. This ‘Zoom’ guy didn’t seem like someone who would be helpful.

He took a deep breath to ward off the anxiety that threatened to take over. If the Bratva wanted to attack, they would’ve done so already.

“Mr. Queen, you have a visitor.”

Oh, no. The one time that he did not want to see anyone. It was actually surprising; it took two days for someone to come and whack him on the head after he told Donner that he would take a deal if the man could get it figured out. They’d all yelled at him at the meeting; after a couple days, the yelling would end up being a twenty-page report about why he shouldn’t do it.

When he entered the room, he gave Felicity a little wave. She set down a folder and smiled back at him. CEO stuff. He could do that. “How are you?”

“A little tired. And stressed. Barry…” She rubbed her eyes. “Don’t wanna talk about that right now. The big thing is this.” She flipped the folder around and pushed it towards him. “I’ve discovered a little irregularity with this dude’s file and it’s wigging me out.”

“What exactly do you mean? This is one of my top security guards. He’s been working there for years.”

“I know. There was a problem with the accounts so I had to manual pay the security yesterday and I decided to check them all out. Not their bodies.” When Oliver let out an exasperated sigh, she whacked his arm. “I’m not like that. So stop looking at me like that. Anyways, James—which isn’t his real name by the way—didn’t go to Stanford, and he actually didn’t even go to this security academy that he said he went to.”

“But Jerry…no, not him. It was a guy who left the company a while ago. Carl. He did all the background checks. That makes zero sense.”

“Well, don’t look at me. I came to ask you about this. And also talk about something else.”

“I knew you wouldn’t be able to stay away from that topic for long.”

The transformation from business woman to fiery not-really-girlfriend was extraordinary. She grabbed his hands and yanked him. Hard. “Are you mad?”

“I think that’s up for debate.”

“This. Isn’t. Funny.” She glared at him. Oliver tried to hide a smile. “What? What could possibly be
funny?"

“You’re cute when you’re angry.”

“I am not, and stop looking at me like that. This is serious. It does not mean that you can smile your way through this lecture that I planned. I practically wrote it out. You actually deserve a slap across the face but that’s not allowed in here. I can yell at you though. Dang it, Oliver! Stop!”

He leaned forward, intensifying the look in his eyes. He knew how to do this, especially since there weren’t any kids around today. “What’s the problem?”

“You keep looking at me and it makes me want to—”

“To what?”

“Stop interrupting me.” Felicity put her elbows on the table and dropped down. Oliver eyed her lips. A long time ago he noticed that she liked wearing pink lipstick, and today was no exception. For years, he liked red. That’s what Annie wore, but that was in the past. If he wanted to have any kind of life—even if it would be behind bars—he needed to move on. Follow his daughter’s example and chose to do something different.

Like kiss a woman. For the first time in almost six years.

“If you look at me like that, then I have to—”

“Felicity.” He placed his hands on her cheeks and pressed his lips to hers. Why hadn’t he done this earlier? The fear and pain that had made their home in his heart panicked and ran. They couldn’t live in there when love drowned out everything else. It took ahold of the broken parts of his soul and pasted them together. In the distance, a faint flower of hope rose from the ashes. Faith too. As this kiss deepened, the good parts—no, the great parts—of his life bloomed. Oliver grinned. The smile widened enough that he had to pull away. Felicity looked at him, her eyes sparkling.

“You are an amazing kisser, Mr. Queen.”

“As are you.” He smiled as he traced her dimples with his finger. “Felicity Smoak.”

“Am I allowed to tell the kids? They’ll be very happy.”

“I think they’ll be disappointed that nothing else happened.”

“You should know that I’ll say yes.”

His hand wandered to her hair. “And what makes you think that I was talking about that?”

Her fingers curled around the hand that now resided in her tangled ponytail. Warmth shot through him at her touch. She giggled. “I can see it in your eyes. And I just want you to know that whatever happens next month or next year, I’m going to be by your side. And it sounds sappy and ridiculous, but I’ll be here. And not just because you’re a good kisser or the fact that you have amazing abs.”

Her face flushed. “But because you’re kind. And gentle. You’re the first man who I can look at and not see my father and Cooper. And that is why I’m going to stay. I’ve had a lot of men come after me but none like this.”

“Even if I have to spend my life in here?”

“Especially so. Plus,” she looked around, a little smile playing on her lips. “If we’re married, you
have enough money to rent a little married-couple apartment. I looked it up.”

Oliver chuckled and looked down at the table. Oh, yeah. He knew how this worked. He’d been married for almost fifteen years. The knowledge didn’t just go away, even though this was the first he’d had kissed a woman since the day that Annie died. He met Felicity’s eyes and smiled. “After the trial. Let’s talk about it. We could talk about it now but then you couldn’t yell at me for considering things you don’t want me to consider.”

“But you just said after the trial. So you kinda…have to say no to any deal that comes up on the table.”

“There’s gonna be stuff that they show that’s not gonna be pretty.”

“That’s okay. Well, it will be. It’s okay. Y’know,” she took his hands. A little smile played on her face. “You seem to think that we’re all weak and get scared easily. I know I’m not. If I did get freaked out at any little thing, I would’ve never even come into the mansion. And the kids…they’ll be okay. They understand better than most, now.”

“You told them about everything.”

“Basically. I couldn’t let them hate you for something that you were forced to do.”

“Felicity…” he shifted his gaze to the gated bars and licked his lips. “That’s the thing. I could’ve gotten out of there if I wanted to. Maybe. I know how to fight, and I had the fastest man alive. I could’ve done something, but I couldn’t. I stayed there…stayed a killer. Maybe,” he shrugged. “Maybe that’s who I am.”

“Don’t think that I can’t throw a wicked right hook and punch the stupid right out of you.” She took a moment before she spoke. “We can all be different people then we are. I don’t know if you remember this, but this is not my original hair color. And the girl I was in college...oh, boy. Just be glad you never met her. Thing is, that wasn’t me. I was angry at the world and I wanted nothing but to make it burn. I’m not an angry little you-know-what, even though I was one back then. I realize that it’s different, but it’s really not.”

Oliver laughed. “It’s a little different, Felicity.”

“Well, some of it’s the same. You’re not a killer. Yes, you killed but there’s a difference between being a psychotic murderer and killing. And oh my God I can’t believe I’m talking like this. This is my life now and jeez it’s weird. Not weird. Just different.”

“You can admit that it’s weird.”

“Okay.” She grinned. “It’s weird.”

“Mr. Queen, time’s up.” The guard walked to the table, dangling handcuffs. He smiled at Felicity. “It’s good to see you here. Mr. Queen is always a little less grumpy after you show up and talk to him.”

“Well…” Felicity winked as she stood up. “That’s my job.”

“You’re doing a mighty fine job then. C’mon, pal.”

“I’ll come visit in a few days. Bye, Oliver.”

The guard let go of his arm for a moment to allow him to curl her into a hug. She stood on her tiptoes
and whispered, “I’m gonna dream of that kiss like a girl in fourth grade. Which is not a good thing, because I’m an adult, if you haven’t noticed. Actually, I know that you have because you—”

“This is not something I need to hear.” The guard pulled them apart and slapped the cuffs on. “Miss Smoak, please. We officers are here to see no one tries to kill anyone or break out. None of us need to hear or see anything.”

Oliver didn’t stop smiling even after the cell doors closed. For so long, he thought that he’d go at it alone. Not much of a relationship with his kids, no girl. Funny how it took an arrest and a likely life in prison to change his thinking. He had the opportunity to have a relationship with his kids. And he had the chance to woo a beautiful woman.

And maybe get married again.

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Felicity didn’t stop smiling as she walked to her car and drove home. He kissed her. Put his hands on her cheeks and his lips on her lips. When he touched her, lightning ran down her spine and back up into her heart where it exploded. She hadn’t felt like that before. Granted, the only other guy she kissed—the middle school kisses with dirt bag #1 and 2 did not count—happened to be Cooper, the fall guy. The one she went to because she needed somewhere to hide.

She wasn’t hiding from anything anymore. The truth came out about her parents. She’d punched Cooper. Hiding wasn’t necessary, meaning she could love with all her heart, not just her fear. And marriage? That didn’t seem so scary anymore either. If she truly loved a man, couldn’t she wear a sparkly band on her finger? A few months ago she would’ve said ‘that won’t be happening. Ever!’, but now…she told Oliver that she would say yes.

“Hey, Felicity.” Ellie waved at her when she came into the kitchen. “How was it?”

“Great. Yeah. Really good.” Frack. Felicity wrinkled her nose when Ellie slid off the bar stool and came towards her, a quizzical look on her face.

“What happened?”

Time for some damage control. “Why do you think something happened? Because nothing did. It was just a nice visit. We did a lot of talking. Yeah, lots of talking.” Heat rushed to her face. Double crap. She was just making it even worse. “Just the normal things.”

“You are absolutely pathetic, Felicity. What did you do? Break him out or something?”

“Definitely not that.”

She covered her mouth after a scream erupted. Ellie bounced around on her toes. “You kissed him? Oh my gosh! You kissed Daddy!”

There was nothing else to do but admit it and pray that no one else heard the scream. “Technically he kissed me.”

“What about kissing?” Harper entered, wearing a bathrobe and a towel on her hair. Ellie grabbed her hands and resumed bouncing around. “Daddy kissed Felicity!”

“Whaaaaaaaat?” Harper squealed. “Seriously?” When Felicity nodded, she tipped her head back and screamed, “Daddy kissed Felicity!”
“No, no, no. You don’t need to announce it to the whole world, Harper. It’s just a kiss.”

“No, it’s not just a kiss. It’s the kiss. The first kiss. It’s like the symbol of love.”

Annie came in, her eyes wide. “Does that mean you and Daddy are gonna get married?”

This…was a disaster. Diggle stopped in the hallway, his eyebrows raising as he took in the scene. Piper ran down the stairs, followed by Clayton. Even William came from somewhere. They were all here. And all of them wanted an answer to Annie’s question, apparently. Felicity took a deep breath. “Okay, whatever I say, I don’t want any screaming. If people scream, then I’m leaving.” Not that that threat would scare them much. “Your dad and I kissed, and ah—I see you.” She pointed at Piper who stifled a squeal. “It doesn’t mean much. You can ask your father for more information, but we already decided that we’re not telling anyone anything.”

Harper stuck her lower lip out. “Does that mean you weren’t gonna tell us about the kiss?”

“No. I wasn’t. Mostly because I was a little worried that this would be the reaction. I’m not a huge fan of screaming over kisses.”

“But we all knew that Daddy loves you and that you love him so we were expecting a kiss soon.” Ellie spoke with a tone of matter a fact-ness. “So congratulations.”

“We actually had a bet going.”

Ellie slapped a hand over Clayton’s mouth and flashed Felicity a shaky smile. “No, we didn’t.”

“Yes, you did! You had a bet going on how long it would be before Daddy kisses Ma—Felicity!” Annie grinned. Oh, she was proud of that one. Did she not notice the accidental ‘mama’ in there? Felicity shook the thought away and focused on the fact that the Queen children…had a bet going on how long it would take for their dad to kiss the nanny. Nice. “Probably not a good idea to tell your father about that one.” And dear God, please don’t let there be a bet on how long it will take for a wedding to happen. “Now that we’ve had our good freak-out moment, I need to tell you something. It doesn’t exactly pertain to you, but my friend Barry was in a car accident and is in a coma.” Again. Wasn’t one coma enough?

“Oh my gosh, Felicity. I’m so sorry.” Ellie put her hand on Felicity’s arm. “You should go see him.”

“That’s what I was going to say. But I don’t want to leave you here alone. We’re so close to the trial and—”

“Barry needs you.” Diggle smiled at her. “We can handle ourselves for a few days.”

“Yeah. We’ll be just fine. Maybe we can have Aunt Thea and Uncle Roy over.”

Felicity shared a look with Harper, who ducked her head. “Maybe you can do that. But it’s up to you to call and ask them. Since it sounds like everyone can live without me for a few days, which is great by the way, I’m gonna go pack. I’d like to go as soon as possible. And if I hear anything about a kiss…I’ll stay away a little longer.”

“But we all know that you’ll come to visit Oliver so you’ll have to—ow!” Clayton turned and kicked Harper in the shin. “That’s what you get for pinching me.”

“Okay, that’s enough.” Diggle put his hands on Clayton’s shoulders and steered him out the door. “I have a job for you. And you too.” He beckoned for William to follow them. “The van needs a serious cleaning.”
Felicity laughed when the boys groaned. Leave it to Diggle to make sure they stayed in line. They’d be just fine with her gone. An hour later, after saying goodbye and issuing several threats about what would happen if she got a bad report, she pulled out the driveway and headed towards the interstate. A an hour drive going five over the speed limit would take her to the hospital.

Meaning it gave her plenty of time to think.

About kissing Oliver Queen.

“Hey, Felicity!” Cisco waved at her when she entered the room. He stood and gave her a hug. “It’s good to see you.”

“Good to see you, though I wish it was under different circumstances.” She let go of him and moved to the bed. Barry’s head lolled to the side, giving the impression that he was dead. Only the beeping above him told her that he wasn’t. Tears filled her eyes. “Hey, Barry.” She touched his leg. That would never walk again. “I’m so sorry.” She looked at Iris who sat on the other side. “I’m really sorry.”

“Thank you, Felicity.”

“Have the doctors said anything about his condition?”

“Nothing really.” Cisco joined her at the side of the bed. “Still comatose.”

“Seems like it wasn’t too long ago that we were here the last time.”

She spent an hour in the room, talking to Iris and blabbering to Barry about a number of things. After a time, she stood up and headed out to the vending machines. Cisco followed her.

“So how’s everything going with Oliver?”

“I got him to drop the idea of taking a deal. Which, trust me, is a miracle in itself. So it’s official that we’re going to trial no matter what. And everyone but William has gone to see him, which is great.”

“That’s good. I can imagine that it was difficult for him without them there. He has you, though.”

“How do you know that?”

Cisco shrugged. “I called him to tell him about Barry’s injury so that he knew ahead of time in case you were freaking out. He mentioned you.”

Ahh. Felicity smiled and took the chips from the machine. “We have lots to talk about after the trial. There’s a seventy-five percent chance he’s gonna be pronounced guilty, and the other percent…”

“So you’re saying there’s a chance.”

She dropped to a chair as she nodded. “Either way, I’ve fallen in love with him, and that’s gonna lead to some interesting conversations. Especially if it doesn’t go our way.”

“He’s a good man.”

“And how would you know that?” Felicity flashed him a baffled look.

“Eh, I know him a little bit. He’s really overreactive. Slightly annoying. Very difficult to get along
with at times. But he’s kind. And that matters the most.”

“I think you just described the man I met last year. I thought I could snap his neck if given the chance. He was terrible. But then I started to see the real Oliver. The one he refused to show anyone because trust me when I say the real Oliver Queen is very sappy. He’s flirty and romantic and—sorry.”

“No, it’s okay. I deal with Barry and Iris smooching all day. I can deal with you going off to fairy-tale land for a few minutes.” He flashed her a crooked grin. “Any other things you need to drool about? Because I’m here for you.”

“Thank you, Cisco. But I’m good. I am curious as to how you know Oliver is overreactive and such.”

“On the phone. A couple times in person. He knows Barry, and since he and I are friends, I’ve met him a couple times. All I gotta say that when he’s mad, he’s mad.”

Felicity giggled. “I’ve had some experience with that. He’s also learned that when I’m mad, I’m really mad. And I can and will yell at him.”

“Perfect relationship. Founded on friendship and fear of ticking the other person off.” He flashed the ‘okay’ sign.

“And what do you know about love?”

“Had some experience with that. Not really, but I know love when I see it.”

Felicity laughed. “Okay, Cisco. Just don’t put ‘professional relationship counselor’ on your Facebook bio. But thank you for talking.”

With a grin that could only be described as ‘Cisco Ramon’, he slid his hand into her chip bag and then shoved the subsequent number of chips into his mouth. “You’re very welcome, Miss Smoak.”

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“Mr. Queen.”

Oliver jerked up but stopped his hand from reaching for the invisible weapon that he still thought lay on the nightstand. It wasn’t a guard standing there. Instead, someone in a uniform stood at the cell door with a gun. He raised his hands and slowly stood up. “What do you want?”

“I’m not here to hurt you or anyone. This is just precautionary. You’ve done some amazing things.” The man put the gun back in its concealed holster. “We didn’t want to risk anything.”

“We?”

“I’m the director of the FBI. Walt Camron. Which is classified.”

“Oh, I know all about classified.” Oliver stopped at the bars. “I asked you a question. What do you want?”

“Just to talk.” He unlocked the cell door and gestured for Oliver to exit. “Don’t worry about any of this. As the FBI director, I have the ability to do a lot of things.”

“Clearly.” As they rounded a corner, Oliver clenched his fists, preparing for an onslaught of guns or knives. None came. In fact, there was no one. He took a deep breath. You’re fine, Oliver. The FBI
wanted to speak to him about obvious things.

Walt opened a door and went in. Oliver followed. The man chuckled. “At ease, soldier. No one’s gonna hurt you. I was worried that you’d be hurting me. I just want to ask you a few questions. Take a seat.”

Oliver sank to a chair and scanned the room. Two windows. Two doors. Whoever planned this knew how to make him feel comfortable. Which in turn made him feel more uncomfortable. Walt sat down opposite him and pulled a file from the drawer. He handed it to him. “Does this look like anything to you?”

“Bratva. It’s my file.”

“Quite a resume you have there.”

“Sir,” Oliver looked up at him. “If you want me to take my ‘skills’ over to the FBI and help you, then you’re wrong. I’m done doing this. I’d much rather spend time in here then do whatever you want.”

“How do you know I would ask you that?”

“Because I can read people.”

“I’m the director of the FBI. It’s hard to read me.” He folded his hands and leaned forward. “Actually, I want information. We’ve been trying to catch the Bratva for years, and you’re the first one who might have information.”

“Except I don’t.” Oliver flipped the folder closed. “I might be an assassin for them, but I’m just one of them. There are hundreds. Thousands. There are men and women who are higher than me, because they’ve been there for thirty years. Don’t you think I would’ve tried to take them down?” He’d taken a few steps, but the director didn’t need to know that. “I’m friends with the Flash. He can take down a hundred guys in twenty seconds or less. But I don’t even know where the head base of operations is. They’re not just Russians. They operate all over the world.”

Walt leaned back in his chair, the curiosity in his eyes dimming. He just got some sucky news to say the least. “You were in their world for five years. Don’t you know anything?”

“Oh, I know a lot. I know who many of the people are, and I can give you the base of operations that I reported to. I can give you cell phone numbers and email addresses. Ways they communicate. But I can’t give you who the leaders are or where they operate. And even if I could…” Oliver sighed. “They’d come for my family.”

“We can protect them.”

“No, you can’t. They already killed my wife. The Bratva is different than the League of Assassins.” When Walt’s brows furrowed, Oliver rolled his eyes. “You’ve heard of them. Don’t act like you don’t. But they’re different. You kill their leader, they follow the one who assumes leadership. If I wanted to go after them, I’d kill Ra’s a Gul, and it would be over. But the Bratva is a brotherhood. It literally means brotherhood.”

“aright that.”

“No, you don’t. You might know that but you don’t understand it. You kill a man who has been there for five days, they’ll come after that person. You torture someone who’s been there a year? They’ll come for you and they’ll do the same that you did to that person. Kill a leader? Everyone you
love will die. I know that’s hard to understand but—"

“Oh, I understand quite well.”

Oliver clenched his fists. The stained-glass doors darkened with bodies. And guns. “So this is how you want to play things? I thought you were worried about me killing you.”

“Well, yes, I was worried about that at first. But then I remembered that it’s hard to take on twenty men with guns.”

When the doors unclicked and were pushed open, Oliver dropped to the ground for a split to avoid the Taser fired at him. He hurled the metal chair at a group of the men and swung his fist out and smashed one of them to the ground. But there was no hope of getting out of this one. Too close of a proximity without a weapon. A gun prodded him to raise his hands. Oliver took a deep breath and fired a disgusted glare at Walt. “You don’t need to do anything stupid.”

“I’m not doing anything stupid. I’m doing something for the United States of America. Now sit down.”

Oliver shook off the gun aimed at his back and dropped to the chair. “What do you want to know?”

“Everything. Everything you know. That or your entire world burns.”

He let out a laugh to cover up the terror. “Good luck with that.”

“Well, as you said Mr. Queen, you already lost your wife. It’d be a shame if anything would happen to, uh, what’s her name? Felicity.”

Oliver jerked up and yanked the director up into a standing position before anyone could react. “Do not even think about touching a hair on her head, or anyone in my family for that matter, or you will feel pain like you’ve never felt before.”

One of the men slammed him back to his seat. Oliver crossed his arms and leaned back. He had to regain control of himself. Tell the FBI everything he knew and pray that they never made a move on the Bratva. They knew what they were doing. Backed him into a corner. Either he told them what he knew and his family would be in danger or he didn’t and his family would be in danger. It’ll be okay. He pictured Felicity. Yes, it would all be okay. “Fine. But you have to promise that you’ll tell me before you make any move.”

“That’s fair. Now why don’t you begin.”

Two hours later, the prison doors closed, leaving Oliver alone. He reached for the picture that sat on the nightstand and raised it up to the light. Happier times, yes. But they were days where he lied to live. Now he didn’t have to do that. Part of him even wondered if these were what people called ‘happier times’. If the FBI made a move on the Bratva, there wouldn’t be anymore happier times. There would be only death and funerals.

You can’t accept things like that.

No. He couldn’t. Not if he wanted to listen to what Felicity said. Because she was always right. But what would happen if he accepted it? That, at some point, something terrible would happen, and just like Annie’s death, even though the Bratva’s fingerprints were on it, he could do nothing about it. Something like that could happen. And it would.

Oliver set the picture down and sank to the bed. If he accepted it, the darkness would chain him to
the wall and never let him go. He couldn't do it. In fact, he had to do the opposite and have faith. Maybe something terrible would happen. Life wasn't sunshine and rainbows; he learned that as a teenager when his parents died. But at least until it happened he could live his life and love his family.

And Felicity.

*******

The next three weeks passed at a speed that could only be described as ‘uneven’. On the days that his family came to visit him, they would pass quickly. On the days they didn’t, Oliver worked out and then read books. Harry Potter actually turned out interesting, and so did the other series the kids brought for him to read. The only bad ones were Twilight. Those were on a whole different level of suck. After that, Ellie and Harper weren’t allowed to bring books for him.

Regardless of how long it took, tomorrow the trial would start, and he, Felicity and Carly were sitting at one of the tables, going through the last minutes changes to the schedule for the next few days.

“Does this make sense?”

Oliver looked up at Carly for a heartbeat before focusing on the paper again. “Uh huh. But, uh, this can’t be revealed.” He tapped the medical reports that involved Annie’s death. “The kids don’t know about that.”

“I know, and you told me that. But if something goes wrong, it will need to be revealed. I will let you know if it needs to be, so you can prepare the kids. Does everything else make sense as to what is going to be said and done?”

“Yeah.” He raised his eyebrows at Felicity, who nodded. If it made sense to her, it made sense to him. “Everything looks good. Thank you, Carly.”

“You’re very welcome. Try to relax tonight.” She winked at Felicity. “Take some time with your girl.”

“Oh, we’re not—”

“Yeah, that’s not—”

She rolled her eyes. “You’re holding hands underneath the table.”

And, of course, because they were both not good at this, Felicity jerked her hand away from Oliver’s and slammed it on the table. “No. No, we were definitely not just holding hands. Why would you even think that we were?” When Oliver quirked one eyebrow at her, she leveled a look at Carly. “We totally were, but we’re not…dating or anything. We have kissed. A few times. But that’s not anything that you need to know.”

Carly smiled as she stood. “I have grown very fond of your family these past five months, and starting tomorrow, I will do my very best to get you home. So I’ll see you in the morning. You still have ten minutes before the guard comes in.”

“Thank you,” Felicity called. When the lawyer left, she inched closer to Oliver. “How are you doing?”
“Good.”

“Good as in ‘I haven’t been attacked in over two months’ or good as in ‘I’m in a mentally stable state for the first time in a long time’?”

His mind flashed back to the FBI moment almost a month ago. He hadn’t told Felicity about it. Or anyone. That was between him and the government, and when it came time for them to make a move, he’d tell the family and take precautionary measures to keep them safe. Oliver shook the memory away and focused on Felicity. “Good as in I’m in a relatively mentally stable state. ‘Relatively’ being the special word.”

“It’s better than it was.”

“It helps to know the kids are on my side. Most of them anyways.”

“William will come around.”

Oliver made a face. “At least someone thinks so.”

“You can’t give up hope for him. At some point he’s gonna realize what an awesome guy his dad is.”

“You’re just said that last sentence to make me feel better.”

“No, I did not. I said it because it’s true.”

“How’s Barry?”

She gave him an I-know-what-you-just-did look. “He’s doing better. Awake, and Cisco called me yesterday to tell that he had feeling in his toes. Which is a miracle. Once the trial is finished I’ll try to run over there and see him. Thankfully Iris has done most of the duties. And Cisco. Those two are like brothers.”

And she still hadn’t figured out the real reason Barry couldn’t feel his legs. Oliver nodded to Felicity’s words, his mind wandering to tomorrow. It had taken forever for it to come. He wanted it over. If Barry had his speed again, maybe he could take him forward in time. Not that it would solve anything. If anything, it would cause more problems. Tomorrow he needed to enter the court room with a little bit of his children’s faith that everything would turn out okay.

“Hey, Felicity?”

“Hmmm?”

He looked down at their hands and smiled. “I want you to know that I’m going to be fine. I know what I’m going up against, and even though I don’t know if I’m gonna win the trial, I know one thing. Two things, actually.”

Her eyebrows rose and she made a face that made him laugh. “What’s that? Or, what are those two things?”

“The first is that, no matter what happens, I have you. And I have the kids. Eventually I will have all of them. And yes, I’m admitting you’re right on that topic. As you usually are.”

She giggled and dropped her gaze for a second, before she looked up at him, a curiousness in her eyes. “And the second thing?”
Oliver put his hands on her cheeks and leaned close enough that their noses almost touched. “I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

I was going to end this with a sad, sappy moment that would preview the trial, but then I remembered that it's Christmas, so my gift to you is a happy ending, gift wrapped with an 'I love you'. So you're all very welcome, and it's also an apology for what I'm going to do to all of your hearts in the next couple weeks. :P

So, without further ado, MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!!!! Joyeux Noël! Feliz Navidad!!! I pray that you all have a wonderful weekend filled with lots of love. I'll be back next week with Chapter 24! In the meantime, eat lots of food. :)}
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

There's not many times when I'm going to use my age (or anything) as an excuse, but this time I'm going to do just that. As someone who has not reached 18 and has had a limited exposure to legal problems (thank God), I am not proficient in the art of criminal trials. Even with research. So please forgive the legal problems, especially if someone (God forbid) works as a lawyer. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I don’t know if I can do this, Felicity.” Ellie set the curling iron down and fluffed her hair up. She looked at Felicity who continued to apply makeup, even if it would all disappear and wash down her cheeks at some point. Most likely. She set her mascara wand down and turned towards Ellie.

“I know what you mean. The idea of walking into that court room today makes me want to throw up. But,” she enveloped Ellie into a hug. “If Oliver can generate enough courage to walk in front of all those people while handcuffed, I think we can hide in the back. It’ll be okay. I promise.”

“Do you promise?”

Felicity moved away from Ellie to see Piper standing there in her purple dress, her eyes puffy.

“Aww, honey. I honestly can’t promise. I wish I could. But. Though I can’t promise that everything will turn out okay, I can promise that we’ll get through it. Together.” Her hands caressed Piper’s cheeks. “Okay?”

She sniffled, but nodded. “Okay.”

“Good. We better get going. They said there’s spots reserved for all of us but the earlier we get there, the less we have to worry about media. Good news is that Dig is gonna take care of that for us. So let’s go!” She raised her voice on the last sentence to make sure everyone heard. Harper and Clayton already sat in the living room; William had announced an hour earlier that he would be waiting in the car. The other three followed her out to the humid weather.

Seven months ago, Captain Lance pushed Oliver into a cop car. Today was the start of one of the most talked about trials in the United States. And the Queens would be there. All of them. No one spoke as Diggle pulled out of the driveway and headed towards town. Even Annie stayed silent; only played with her princess dolls. Felicity stared out the window and rethought her last conversation with Oliver. The ‘I love you’. And the kiss. She smiled. Hopefully that gave him hope and faith for the coming days.

Diggle cleared his throat. “Everyone got everything they need? All the coloring books along? Because I’m not drawing anything for anyone to color in.”

Annie giggled. “Don’t worry. We all know how bad your drawing is.”

He let out a whine that sounded more like a mom than a bodyguard. “You’ve deeply wounded me, young lady.”
“I have not, because you are still living. So stop being dramatic.”

“Yeah, Johnny,” Piper mocked the nickname that Lyla had given him. “Stop being so dramatic.”

“I don’t think I’m being dramatic.” Diggle winked at Felicity, who nodded her thanks. “I think you’re the ones who are being dramatic. Clearly you woke up too early.”

“I woke up at nine.” Annie whacked him on the shoulder with her book. “I bet you woke up too early.”

“Seven thirty, young lady.”

“Yeah, but—what’s that?”

Felicity turned and looked where Annie’s finger pointed. “That, honey, is the media.” Cameras lined the streets, with yelling men and women behind them. When they realized who rode in the black van, with the tinted windows, they took off after them. Diggle swore and hit the gas. Felicity reached back and grasped Annie’s hand. This was why Oliver didn’t want to go to trial. Because of this. The media would do anything to get information. Even if it meant traumatizing the kids.

“When I stop the van, there will be security to take you inside the court house. Keep your heads down, do not engage, even if they something nasty.” Diggle looked back at the kids. Mainly Harper and Ellie. “They will say bad things, but you cannot lose your cool.”

“We’ll be okay. Promise.”

“Okay.” The van slowed down and then came to a halt. “Everyone out.”

Felicity jerked open her door and got the sliding door open before Annie could get it. “Alright, sweetie, let’s go.” She lifted Annie into her arms and turned around. A man in a suit took her elbow and guided her towards the court room. Couldn’t they have gone through the back? Not that it would’ve helped any. The press would’ve found them there too.

“Keep walking, Miss Smoak. The kids are behind you with their own personal security.”

“Thank you, random suit guy. You’re rather attractive.”

“As I said, keep walking.”

How ridiculous. Did he not like a little ego boost?

“Felicity, what do you have to say about the rumors of you and Oliver Queen’s romance?”

Ignore, ignore.

“How do you respond to the rumors?”

Annie cuddled closer. “Felicity, what rumors?”

“It’s okay. Don’t worry about it. Just ignore them.”

“If Oliver is found guilty, will you stay as the Queen’s nanny, even if their father is a—”

“Don’t you dare!” Felicity whipped around and advanced to the reporter. “You have no right to say anything like that, you cocky, pig-headed—”
A hand clamped on her arm. Felicity stumbled towards William, who continued to keep his hand on her. The security man stood next to the reporter, looking scary. She looked up—yes up—at the oldest Queen son. “Thank you. Mostly for saving me from prison.”

“Only Dad can be in prison. We can’t lose you. Plus, if I could punch, I’d deck that guy. He was a jerk. And stop looking at me like that. I just want to get in there without any more problems.”

They climbed the steps together and walked through the open doors. William let go of her arm and moved ahead of her. Felicity turned around and counted heads. They were all here, including two extras. Now two more. She smiled. “Hey everyone.” Thea snuck through the crowd of people to give Felicity a hug. “We got here in the nick of time because we got the escorts. After I showed them my driver’s license proving that I am indeed the infamous Thea Queen.”

“Hey, Felicity. Good to see you again.” Tommy gave her a big hug. “I brought cookies for the kids.”

“And by the kids,” Laurel put her hand on her husband’s shoulder, “He means himself.”

“You know me too well.”

“Alright, Miss Smoak, we need everyone to go into the court room. Everyone else too.”

Felicity took a deep breath. Here we go. She took Annie’s hand as Piper grabbed her other hand. They could do this. She could do this. She owed it to herself and to the kids to do this. Maybe not always strong, but always there. She went first, followed by the rest of the family. The paparazzi and company moved with them until they reached the court room. A whole different crowd was in there to take care of photos, of course.

A man in a suit directed them to the front row. Felicity and the kids plus Diggle took the benches closest to where Oliver would be, while the Harpers plus the Merlyns and Raisa took the second row. Annie climbed on Diggle’s lap and pulled out her drawing book. The judge entered the room, followed by the jury. All they were missing was the criminal.

The man she loved.

********

“Mr. Queen, we’re ready out there.”

Oliver stood up before the guard took his arm. The handcuffs restricted his movement but he managed to adjust his suit. It felt weird wearing anything other than the regulated prison uniform. According to the lawyers, he looked less like a murderer and more like a human being in a suit. True, but there wasn’t any way to convince the jury that he wasn’t a killer, even if his lawyers had evidence and whatever lined up as far as the eye could see.

The guard paused before opening the door that led to the court room. “As a cop I shouldn’t say this, but as someone who has gotten to know you and your family, I truly wish you good luck on this trial.”

“Thank you.”

Oliver stepped into the court room. He’d been in here one time several years ago so the need to scan the room for exits wasn’t necessary. Instead, his eyes flew from the judge, to the jury, to the crowd of people. To his family. The kids at in the front with Felicity and Diggle.

To Thea. His little sister.
She smiled and waved at him. Oliver worked to keep the tears off his face. No use bothering with the fact that they were welling in his eyes. Even after all the nasty things he said and did to her, and his refusal to see her for five years, she decided to come to the trial. With Roy. The used-to-be cocky kid grinned at him.

“C’mon, Oliver.” The guard led him to the table where his lawyer sat. Oliver glanced behind him one more time as he took a seat. The cuffs came off one hand and was attached to a metal rod that would keep him seated until he would be called up as a witness. He forced himself not to look back again, knowing that if he did, the calm demeanor he’d worked so hard to show would go out the window.

Adam Donner stood up. “Six months ago, Oliver Queen confessed to being the vigilante who has terrorized Starling City’s streets for over ten years. Since he first put on the hood, he has committed countless murders, and put hundreds in the hospital. He also confessed to being a part of the Bratva. An organization that is known for murdering anyone and anything in their way.”

At least they never discovered the true power of the Bratva. Or the long list of skills that he had, including torture.

After Adam laid out the plan for the trial, Carly stood up. “Six months ago, my client told his family that for the past eight years, he had been the man who has saved countless lives on the streets of Starling City, which is more than most of us can say, and he also was able to tell them that for the past five years, he has been forced to work for the Bratva, better known as the Russian mafia. With the threat to his children, and now to others in his household, he became an assassin. He became that man because he needed to be one to keep his children safe.”

But he could have said no, and told his family. Moved on. Done his best to protect them. Instead, they were all here, having to suffer through a trial. Because he was stubborn enough to hide secrets for five years. Longer, if he counted the other reason they were here.

Oliver half-listened as Adam talked about the evidence, but then he announced that he would play the recording William gave to the police. He knew exactly what he said, but when he heard it, it became obvious why Carly told him that their best chance at winning was not proving that the recording was a fake. Not that he would have agreed to that, because that would leave William with an asterisk the rest of his life.

The jury had to know, right then and there, that there was no way Oliver wasn’t an assassin and the Hood. Every word in that tape was spoken as if they were the most painful thing that could ever happen. And in truth, they were. He could remember the pain on his kids’ faces—on Felicity’s face—as he crumbled their world to ashes.

Adam shut it off when Ellie screamed and the sound of glass shattering could be heard. “Clearly he devastated his family with these seconds. Enough that his own son turned him in.”

Carly took the floor. “But what Oliver left out in this explanation is why he became a part of the Bratva. He didn’t just volunteer himself. He was forced to.”

He stopped listening. Why listen to everything they’d already talked about a thousand times? Some people couldn’t tune out like that, but a long time ago he learned how to check out of his body and just think. Sometimes it would be the other way around, but today he needed to not hear the drama unfolding before him. At the end of this trial, it wouldn’t be him who decided the verdict. It would be the people sitting to the right of him, their eyes on Carly.

His brain floated to the people behind him. The kids sat in the front with Felicity and Diggle. The
After five years of not allowing her to come close to the kids, and after all those terrible things he’d said to her, she’d decided to come to his trial. If only he could halt the talking and go hug her and apologize for all the things he did. Even before he kicked her out. He’d never been the best brother; always obsessed with sports or hanging out with his friends. When Mom and Dad died, he took ahold of his grief and put it into the company, working his way up to CEO.

That was his problem, wasn’t it? When ‘better’ turned to ‘worse’, he turned away from what made his life better, and went straight to the parts of life that could cover him with their wings of secrets and keep him away from the pain. But instead, it sucked away the better part of his life, and it usually took the life that he loved away from him before he realized it.

“I’d like to call Oliver Queen to the witness stand.”

Oh. As he stood up, he glanced back at the crowd of people behind him. Felicity gave him a reassuring smile and Thea mouthed, “You got this.” Oliver swore over the Bible before stepping up to the witness stand. He took a deep breath.

“Let’s start with the Hood. When did you first put on the suit and become a vigilante?”

“The spring of 2003.”

“Why did you decide to become a vigilante?”

“After my parents died, I had a lot pent-up anger, and it just got worse over the years. My wife, Annie, suggested I take that anger and use it for something good. I’d already taken a lot of self-defense classes…we were rich, it wasn’t like we could walk down the street without problems.” At that, he looked at Thea, who nodded in agreement. She’d had just as much self-defense training as he had. “Over the next year, I worked my way up from knocking out purse snatchers to knocking out would-be rapists.”

“Did you go out every night?”

“No. I had a growing family and a company. Mostly my family. I went out whenever I could.”

“But Mr. Queen, if you cared so much about your family, then why did you go out? Didn’t you realize that you might be arrested? Or killed?”

“I did.” Might as well be honest. “At first.”

“And what do you mean by ‘at first’?”

Oliver steadied his breathing. “There were a few scary moments when I first started out.” And they had continued to this day, but no one needed to know that. “There were times when I thought about quitting. But I couldn’t. When I was out there, all the pain and anger that I had was gone. And…” he looked out past his attorney to his kids. “I saved people’s lives, which was more good than I had ever done before, even though I’d run a multi-billion dollar company for several years. When I’d go home at night, knowing that I was able to save someone from something, the thought of dying or ending up in prison didn’t seem very important.”

“Alright, good.” She nodded. “Let’s move to the Bratva. When did you first come in contact with them?”

“Not too long before Annie’s death. Six years ago, someone came to me with photos. They had
proof that I was the vigilante. They told me that they wanted me to come with them. It was obvious that they were Russian. And I said no and told them to go to hell. The next day someone hacked into my computer and took a couple million dollars. Then they asked me again. Four days later, Annie died in a car accident.”

Carly took a moment to let that settle in the courtroom before she asked the next question. “What happened after that?”

“I knew right away that they’d killed her, and that’s why I shut the investigation down. The Bratva was good enough that they could’ve hid a murder, but I couldn’t risk that being exposed to the public.”

“And why couldn’t you do that?”

“The day after she died, I was sitting in our bedroom, and someone came through the window. He had Annie’s ring and a letter. It described, in detail, what would happen if I didn’t join the Bratva. I was instructed to leave after the funeral.”

Thea covered her mouth.

“I stopped the investigation then. Explained to them that I knew what happened, and it didn’t matter.”

“Did you go to the Bratva to train?”

“Yes. For the first several months I had to learn the ropes. Their fighting style was a lot different than the one I learned.”

“Can you enlighten us on the type of training you did?”

They’d agreed upon this, but it didn’t make it any easier to explain with all the people he loved watching him. “Stealth, weapons, how to and not kill people. And uh how to withstand torture.” He averted his eyes from everyone who would have a reaction to that. “After that, I went out into the field.”

The answers came easy after that. He and Carly had worked on this. The questioning took an hour. When his lawyer announced she was done, Adam took the floor.

“First of all, Mr. Queen, I’m sorry for the death of your wife. I can only imagine how awful that must’ve been. But I do have some questions for you.” Adam put his hands on his hips. “When you were talking about being the Hood, something came to mind. It’s not a pretty notion, but it’s a thought. You said, and I’m quoting you, ‘all that pain and anger that I had was gone’. I understand anger. And pain. It sucks a lot. But here’s what got me thinking.” His hand swept out towards the family. “Did you ever think about them?”

Oliver swallowed. “I didn’t—”

“Because if you did, you would have hung up the hood right away and went back home to your family. Your lovely wife, who basically dug her own grave by telling you to go out there.”

Carly jumped up. “Mr. Donner, do you have a question or are you going to spend your time making little children cry?”

“I do. It’s very clear. Did you ever think—” this time, Adam fully turned to gesture at the Queen family, the little ones now crying, before he looked back at Oliver. “About them?”
He didn’t want to look at his kids—or anyone—but he needed to. He needed to let them know that he was sorry. “I didn’t. Maybe sometimes I did, but—”

“So you’re saying that you care more about yourself and your mental health than your own children’s?”

You’re fine. You’re going to be fine. “No, I’m not saying that.”

“Then what exactly are you saying?”

Oh, God. Oliver glanced at Carly, who had her head down, taking notes. He looked at Felicity, who squeezed her eyes shut. What could he do? He’d been backed into a corner, and there was nothing he could do but tell the truth. “You’re right.” Several people groaned. “I didn’t think about my kids. I was the Hood because I needed and wanted to.”

“So we are supposed to believe that you were a part of the Bratva for your children’s sakes.” He scoffed. “I feel like we need to evaluate the truthfulness of the ‘I had to be a killer for my children’s sakes’. Because if you, as the Hood, decided to ignore the fact that your children would eventually have to sit here and watch this, or go to your funeral, how are we supposed to believe you on any of this?”

Oliver opened his mouth, but nothing came out.

“Mr. Donner, ask a question.”

“I’m getting there.” Adam paced the room. “Mr. Queen, here’s my question. How are we supposed to believe you?”

What could he possibly say? This was what he’d been telling himself for months. Years. Everything came crashing down onto him, and he had no way of doing anything.

“Answer the question!”

Harper started crying.

Oliver looked up at the ceiling and took a deep breath. “I-I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?”

“No, I don’t. All I know is that though I didn’t think about my children as the Hood, they were the only reason I kept going in the Bratva. The only reason I possibly could’ve survived five years of that.”

“And how easy would it have been to ask for help? We understand that you know the Flash—a name you’ve refused to give up, which is fine for now given the fact that he doesn’t kill people. Why not ask him? Why not contact the FBI and get help from them?”

“I was scared.” There, he said it. “I thought about it, but as it became obvious what the Bratva could do, I couldn’t. They’re more powerful than anyone could ever imagine, and I couldn’t risk losing my family.”

“But this is coming from the same man who admitted to not caring about his family. The same one who didn’t care about his family’s safety or their happiness or their lives. If we’re being honest here, that all of this—your wife dying, your son hating you…this is all your fault. Do you realize that all of this started with you deciding to put on a hood?”
Diggle had to push Felicity back to her seat. Oliver tried to channel something resembling hope, but the look he sent her didn’t help with her anger. Or the pain in his chest. Adam knew the guilt he must have carried around for years. He knew how to tap into that and to bring it to light. On the witness stand, in front of his kids and a jury. Oliver took a deep breath to steady the emotions that were threatening to arise from the depths of his heart.

“Mr. Queen,” the judge glared at him. “That’s a question that needs to be answered.”

“Yes.” This time, Diggle put his hands around Felicity’s waist and kept her on the bench. Any other time, it would be funny. Oliver leveled his gaze at Adam. “Yes, I realize that, and it’s something that I’ve had to deal with for years.”

“Thank you, your honor. I have no more questions.”

Oliver let out a breath that he didn’t know he was holding. That was bad. He might not be trained in the art of lawyering and trials, but he knew a disaster when he saw it. And judging by the look on Carly’s and Felicity’s faces, it had gone just as well as he thought. Adam pointed out the obvious: Oliver Queen was his own worst enemy. Even in a courtroom.

The judge called for a break. Likely after enduring five minutes of sniffling from the Queen children. Oliver left the courtroom with the bailiff who deposited him in a room with bars on the windows. It shouldn’t have come as a surprise—he was being tried for murder—but sitting there, in a room that had bars on the windows, with the demeaning words from Adam still echoing in his head, brought all the bad things that had ever happened to him to his head.

His parents’ death.

Annie.

The baby.

His son turning him in.

The spiral deepened as the noise in the hallway stopped.

Adam was right. Everything that had happened had been because of him. All of it. The nightmares the kids suffered. The anger William harbored. Annie’s death. The fact that no one would ever know their brother or sister on this side of heaven. Everything. All because of him.

The door flew open. He jerked up, his hands raised in defense, but instead of an angry man with a gun or someone with handcuffs, Thea crashed into him, wrapping her arms around him. Crying.

He waited a moment to make sure he wasn’t imagining things before his arms came around her small frame.

Oliver closed his eyes. Cherished the feeling of his sister’s arms around him for the first time in six years.

And cried. It wasn’t just because he had his sister back after he pushed her away. She’d come back. But the tears were for the relationship he never got to have with his parents. For his wife. For the baby he never got to hold. For his son who hated him.

He rested his chin on her head and whispered, “I’m sorry, Speedy.”

“No, no, there’s nothing to be sorry about.”
“Yes, there is.” He pulled away from her and rubbed his eyes. “I sent you away. Kicked you out and never thought of you again. I didn’t even come to your wedding. There’s—”

“Because I yelled at you. I accused you of being a drunk and not caring when in reality you just came back from hell. You were saving the kids.”

Oliver looked up at the ceiling and shook his head. “How can you seriously stand here after being out there a few minutes ago and actually say that?”

“Because I know you.” She put her hands on his shoulders and looked up at him with a teary smile. “Yes, we haven’t seen each other for five years, but I grew up with you. You were never the kind of boy—or man—who listlessly did anything. Everything was done for a reason. With a reason. Besides the time you went out with Tommy and got yourself in the back of a cop car. That was done without a reason. Mostly because you were drunk.” She smiled when he chuckled. “The type of man that that jerk-wad painted in the courtroom is not Oliver Queen. It’s not you. That’s why I decided to come. I knew that you did everything for a reason, and that reason is obvious now. You needed to protect the kids.”

“I ended up having to protect the kids because I decided to put on a hood because I had the problem.” Oliver gestured to the barred windows. “And look where that got me.”

Thea scoffed. “Do you seriously think that this is your fault?”

“Yes.”

“Haven’t you been listening to Felicity at all?”

Oliver rolled his eyes. “Just because Felicity says something—”

“And when you stubbornly push back against what she says, it makes her even more right.” Thea looked up at him with that same look Mom used to give him when she was about to deliver a rousing speech. “You might’ve become the vigilante because of selfish reasons. Selfish reasons that are reasons to become a vigilante. I know how much anger you had, and I know Annie knew it too. But you know what? You continued being the hood. And not just because the anger went away. You told the jury that you continued going out because you saved people. There are people alive today because of you. There are women who don’t have to suffer from the effects of rape because of you. Children have their parents because of you!”

Oliver closed his eyes. Believe her, you idiot. He needed to accept that. To live, he had to. But each time he took one step to accepting that not everything was his fault, an image flashed in his head of Annie’s body laying there on the cot, blood stains on her body. Now Adam’s words echoed in his head. If we’re being honest here, that all of this—your wife dying, your son hating you…this is all your fault.

“Ollie, you can’t.”

And she and Felicity would never stop telling him that. Oliver smiled and pulled Thea back in an embrace. “You and my not-actual-girlfriend must be hanging out a lot.”

She let out a little sigh. “You don’t even want to know.”

“I really am sorry, Thea. For everything. We missed out on a lot of time.”

“We did, but we have to move on. Get to know each other again. Because,” she grinned. “Your not-actual-girlfriend is getting closer to becoming…I don’t know. A Queen?”
“Can I come in now?” Felicity peeked into the room. “I’ve been dying to enter this conversation but I wanted to give you two a little bit of time, since you haven’t seen each other in forever.”

“Ollie would like a hug. Maybe a kiss.”

“We only do that in private.” She said something to someone outside and then came inside. Her hug softened the pain. “You doing okay?”

“How’re the kids?”

“They’ll be fine. I got them all put back together and gave them tissues. We had a talk, and everything should be fine. They’ll make it through today. Tomorrow…” Felicity rested her head on Oliver’s chest. “I nearly lit a flame underneath Adam’s butt. And I wish I was kidding.”

Oliver chuckled and continued to run his hand over her back. “This is not the worst thing I’ve had to endure.” Better to let them think that then worry about him.

“What else did you have to deal with? Grumpy cats?”

Never good when she started to make weird jokes. “Hey, Felicity.” She lifted her head to look at him. “You know you don’t have to be funny with me, right?”

“I’m okay, Oliver. I’m worried about you. Everything that happened…not many people could ever handle that.”

“Felicity, I’m okay.”

“How much of that is you trying to reassure me?”

He tightened his hold on her. “A lot of it.”

Before she could say anything, Carly entered the room. “Alright, Oliver. We need to discuss the game plane from here on out.”

Oliver let go of Felicity and took a seat at the table. “That was pretty disastrous, correct?”

“Because there’s only adults in the room, yes. That was very disastrous. There’s no other way of stating that. We’re not going to be able to make any rebound of anything until tomorrow. I’ll be calling witnesses from the hood days then. But for now, we just need to make it through the day without any other setbacks.”

“That’s hopeful,” Felicity muttered. Oliver squeezed her arm in order to keep the other mutterings silent.

“They’ll call everyone back in a few minutes.” Carly gave them a reassuring smile. “Just because we lost one fight does not mean we’re gonna lost the battle. This’ll take time. One bad thing isn’t gonna to set the jury’s mind on a verdict.” She glanced at Felicity. “Are the kids okay?”

“Sugar cures even the saddest of souls.” When the lawyer squinted at her, Felicity backtracked. “I gave them all chocolate. Maybe I should give you all chocolate. You look like you need it.”

*******

Felicity rolled out of bed before her alarm and knocked on the kids’ doors to alert them that they had to get up. At the last door, Annie opened it before she could knock. She snuffled and wrapped her arms around her waist. Felicity brought her into the hallway. “Hey, sweetie, what’s wrong?”
“I don’t wanna go.”

“What do you mean—oh. Can I ask why?”

“I don’t like seeing Daddy in handcuffs.” She started crying into her shirt. “And people are being mean to him. It’s not nice!”

“I know it’s not nice, honey.” In fact, there were a few moments yesterday when she wanted to jump and scream expletives at people. Diggle had to hold her down at one point. She hated watching Oliver struggle to form words on the witness stand to defend himself. It didn’t help that Adam Donner took the momentum and ran away with it. Today would be different, because the first witnesses would be called up. But nothing was guaranteed, and like yesterday, it could get ugly.

“I just don’t want to go.” Annie continued to cry. “I hate those people in there. And the cameras. I hate the cameras.”

“Everything okay over there?” Raisa came around the corner, holding a basket of towels. “Hey, sweetie. You doing alright?”

“She doesn’t want to go today.”

“Aww, I understand.” The housemaid set her basket down and wrapped Annie in a hug. “That wasn’t so much fun yesterday, was it?”

Annie shook her head.

“I’ll stay home with her. You just call me if anything interesting happens, though I’m sure the day will be well documented on TV. We’ll make cookies and then eat them while watching—”

“Not Nemo. I don’t like when the mom and babies die.”

A huff came from down the hall. William stood there with his arms crossed. “Guess I can’t ask to stay too?”

“No, buddy, you need to come.”

“It’s just gonna be Dad getting ripped again.”

“No, it’s not. Today—”

“They’re bringing up witnesses who Dad allegedly saved, blah, blah, blah. I know. Can’t wait to see how it backfires. And before you yell at me, I’m just going to say that I’ve already had breakfast and I will meet everyone in the car.”

When he stomped down the stairs, Felicity rolled her eyes and turned back to Raisa and Annie. “I will text or call you if anything happens. Hopefully it’ll just be a day filled with lots of talking. I love you, sweetie. And thank you, Raisa.” She gave them both a hug, and Annie a kiss. “See you tonight.”

“Will Daddy be with you?”

It was asked with the hope and faith that only Annie had. Felicity took a moment before answering. “I don’t think so, sweetie. The trial will last a little longer.”

“Okay, but if Daddy gets to come home tonight, make sure we know so that we can surprise him.”
Felicity shared a look with Raisa before she smiled at Annie. “I will do that.” She hurried downstairs to the living room where Thea and Roy sat, smooching. “Oh, my eyes.”

“Sorry!” Thea pulled away from him, but stayed on his lap. “William already came in.”

“Oooh, he’s probably scarred for life.”

“Naw.” Roy gave Thea a kiss on the cheek and then pushed her off so he could stand up. “How’re the kids?”

“Annie’s staying here with Raisa. She didn’t like what happened yesterday, and I don’t blame her. The idea of watching Oliver get taken to the woodshed again is not something she enjoys. Or me. Don’t get me wrong, I’m going and I’m gonna support him and maybe scream swear words at people and maybe, just maybe, hack into their cellphones and put porcupine sounds as their ringtones, but yesterday was not fun.”

“First of all,” Thea stood up and adjusted her dress, “I will sit and watch you put porcupine sounds on Adam Donner’s phone. And that basically gives you my other point. I would be very thankful if I became deaf for a few days so I didn’t have to hear anything. And blind. But, since that’s not gonna happen, I think we should all plan on making it through today without getting arrested.”

“Sounds like a plan.” Felicity winked at her friend and walked to the stairs. “It’s time to go!”

Ellie came down first, wearing one of Felicity’s sundresses. She glanced down and giggled. “I realized that you and I are about the same size and I’ve always liked this color.”

“It looks cute on you.”

“Yeah, but it’d look cuter on me!” Harper yelled from the top of the stairs. She began her descent, one heavy, grumpy footstep at a time. “I got it from the closet first, but since Ellie didn’t need a belt to make it fit, she got to wear it but it should be me.”

“Oh, stop whining and be thankful that you don’t have to wear heels.”

“I don’t understand why we have to look nice to go to a trial. Why not show up in sweatpants and an ugly tank-top to express the displeasure at being there.” Harper flipped her hair up into a ponytail. “It’s ridiculous.”

“But we also want to show people that we are not frumps. Which is what you’d look like if you showed up wearing sweatpants. So instead of whining about things, skedaddle to the car because we need to go.”

“Skedaddle?” Harper raised her eyebrows. “Where on earth are you finding these words? Next it’s gonna be ‘dope.’”

Felicity channeled her inner gangster and winked at her. “That dress is so dope.”

Harper burst into a fit of giggles. When she finally caught her breath, she whapped Felicity’s arm. “That was so good! You would totally pass as a gangster.”

“I highly doubt that. Now get in the car.”

An hour later, they sat in the courtroom as the first witness, Melanie Carter, took the stand after swearing over the Bible. She flashed Oliver a smile, and then winked at the group sitting behind him.
“Miss Carter, I understand that three years ago the Hood saved you.” Carly paced the carpet. “Is that correct?”

“Yes, it is.”

“And what did he save you from?”

“I was having a very difficult pregnancy, and my doctor prescribed some pain meds that knock a person out, and it also made me very dizzy. When I finally awoke, the apartment building was on fire and my home was filled with smoke. I fell several times trying to get out of there, and the last time, I couldn’t get up. Then the Hood appeared.” She laughed. “It was so loud in there that I couldn’t hear a thing but I remember the shock in his eyes when he saw my ginormous belly.”

Felicity looked at Oliver, who ducked his head. He was smiling.

“And Miss Carter, how was he able to get you out of the apartment?”

“He helped me up and guided me to a window. I screamed that I was scared of heights and that if I jumped, the baby would die, but he yelled right back that I was gonna do it. And to trust him. He fired an arrow out the window just as a beam fell down and blocked our path. He took his jacket off and wrapped me in it and then led the way out of the apartment. At some point I fell, and he picked me up.”

Carly and Melanie had rehearsed this, but Felicity hadn’t heard about that part. He picked her up? Pregnant women weren’t light. Not that she’d ever been pregnant, but they just weren’t. It was a well-known fact.

“And for those wondering, yes, he picked up all one hundred and seventy-five pounds of me. Carried me all the way down the hallway as stuff fell around us. At the end of the hallway he blew something up with his arrows and the firefighters were able to rescue me.”

“Did you ever see him again?”

“No. As soon as the firefighters appeared, he was gone. But I got a necklace in the mail when my daughter was born two months later. It was shaped in a star, but I’m pretty sure it was made out of arrowheads.” A laugh exploded from Thea. Oliver looked back and glared at her, which caused Felicity to giggle. Melanie smiled. “I don’t know for sure, but I’ve always assumed it was him.”

Ten minutes later, the next witness took the stage. Alberto Krakness. The man glanced around the room and rubbed his thighs. Carly flashed him a reassuring smile. “Mr. Krakness, can you tell us how the Hood rescued you?”

“Eight years ago, I was driving around a corner, and talking to my daughter. My wife had died a few years ago and she ran the household. That was her job, and she needed my help.”

Adam jumped up. “Not relevant, your honor.”

The judge sighed. “Mr. Krakness, please tell us how the Hood rescued you.”

“Sorry. I went around the curve and the next thing I knew, I was under the water, unable to get out of my car.” Alberto took a deep breath and glanced at a woman and a boy, who gave him thumbs up. His kids, likely. “I thought I was going to die. I knew I was going to die, because the water was flooding in and the doors were jammed. It was about four minutes in, and the water was over my head. My head was starting to pound, and then I heard pounding on the windshield. The Hood, or, I guess, Oliver, broke the glass and pulled me out.”
“That man saved my life. Because of his bravery, I was able to go home to my eight kids who didn’t have a mom.”

After a few more questions from Carly, Adam stood up. “First of all, Mr. Krakness, I’m very thankful that you are alive today. Whoever saved you…it was a brave act. Which brings me to my question. Who rescued you that day? Or, let me check,” he flipped open a file. “It was nighttime. That man could have been a good Samaritan.”

“No, sir, it was him.”

“And how can you be sure?”

Alberto’s eyebrows rose. “Because not many good Samaritans have a quiver. And I don’t remember the good Samaritan in the Bible being completely clad in leather.”

This time, Oliver chuckled. Carly elbowed him in the ribs, which elicited a giggle from Harper who sat closet to her father. The giggle fit got worse when Oliver glanced back at her and winked. Felicity slapped her leg to shut her up, but it didn’t help. Mostly because now Piper started laughing.

Alberto had burned Adam. To the ground. And they all needed a moment to revel in the smoke. For once, it didn’t make her eyes water. It just made her smile, while the rest of the kids laughed. After several more heartbeats, she gave them all a glare, and quieted them down.

“Well, now that we have calmed down the giggly Queen family, let us continue on with the questions.” Adam’s word caused Felicity to grind her teeth. ‘Giggly Queen family’. Ha! Did this family look like they were all giggly and frilly? The only thing frilly and giggly about them were the girls’ dresses. They were sitting behind the man being accused of murder on several accounts. Did they look like a happy family? Maybe right now. For once.

Four more witnesses came up, and were cross examined. Felicity focused her eyes on Oliver’s back. He could sit without moving for longer than anyone else. At least her. She had to be moving at all times, but he could sit there, still as a dead man. The good part about this situation was that she could stare at his well-sculpted back and hair. She loved his hair. A lot.

At noon, the judge called for an hour break. The family, plus her and the Harpers and Diggle, met in a room with bars on the windows. They’d come to deal with the prison feel, because it meant that Oliver could be with them, even if the ankle bracelet would beep when he moved, and a security guard sat in the corner.

“So Dad.” Clayton set the sandwich down. “Is this better than the food you ate in prison?”

“I think you could say that.” Oliver spoke with food in his mouth. “This is better than ninety percent of the meals I’ve had in the past five months.”

“Maybe I should bring some of my food and then everything will taste beautiful.” Felicity winced when a cloud washed over Oliver’s face. “Sorry. That was...not a good thing to say. You’re gonna get out of here, and then Raisa can cook.”

“No, it’s okay. It might happen. There’s no reason to be ultra-positive.”

“Well, today has been better.”

“At least no one’s yelling,” William muttered. “Yet.”

Oliver glanced at his son but didn’t say anything. Felicity choose not to comment on the remark.
They’d long since decided that snapping back at William wasn’t going to help the situation. Instead, she flashed him a reassuring smile and continued on with her meal.


Piper dumped her food in the garbage. “How many more days of this?”

“I don’t know, sweetie.” Oliver sighed. “Hopefully not too many.” When he stood up, the thing around his ankle beeped. “I guess it’ll go as long as it takes.”

“Well, that was the most non-descript answer on the face of the Earth.”

Oliver shrugged. “What else can I say? I don’t know, and no one will until the jury decides that they have a verdict.”

Felicity sent Harper a look to keep a bitter remark about the justice system from coming out of her mouth. The healing moment that they had a few hours ago had dissipated, and they were all back to grumbling. And muttering. So much muttering. “Well, the good news is that we only have a few more hours in the court room. We can make it a little longer without throwing fits. And yes, I’m also talking about me.”

The door opened and the bailiff walked in. “Sorry, guys, but Oliver needs to come with me.”

“Alright, kids, let’s go.” Felicity ushered them out, but stayed behind to give Oliver a kiss on the cheek. “You got this.”

“At least one of us thinks that.”

“Oliver—”

“Miss Smoak, I’m sorry, but we don’t have time for one of your pep talks.” The bailiff cuffed Oliver’s hands behind him and tugged him away from Felicity. “They’re great, but not right now. We’ll see you in the courtroom.”

Ten minutes later, Adam began the afternoon with a list of the people the Hood allegedly killed. And apparently he had proof of at least a few of them. “This first video that we will show you is one from five years ago. This is a bystander’s video that we were able to acquire.” Adam hit a button to start the video, but it didn’t move. Behind him, Felicity muttered, “Great, now I’ll have to help the bad guy with his stupid TV.”

The screen crackled before going black. And then it came on again. With a man standing there, holding a gun. Cold rushed down his arms and to his fingers. Oliver tried to stand up, but the cuff around his wrist kept him sitting down. All he could do was stare at the screen as a man he worked with scanned the room as if he knew everything. And he did, didn’t he? He knew all about Oliver and his family.

“Oh, God.” William let out a cry. “Oh, God. Dad—”

“Hello, everyone. Hopefully you can all see me. Hello, Oliver. Felicity. Kids. Well, most of them anyways. A few of you might recognize me.”

Oliver gripped the table. Rage ripped through his body, threatening to cause an atomic eruption inside of him. The man’s words grated on his heart as it sunk into the depths of the ocean. He knew
what was coming. Just as sure as he knew that his youngest daughter wasn’t sitting with Felicity. As Adam worked to turn the TV off, the man on the screen chuckled. “You won’t be able to turn it off. I’m the Bratva.”

People gasped. Oliver closed his eyes to hide the terror from the man who could destroy his world in seconds. Behind him, someone reached around for something in a bag and then swore. Felicity. She wanted to track the video. But they couldn’t have devices in the courtroom. Why would they be allowed? It wasn’t like people had done this before. Oliver gritted his teeth.

Adam lowered the remote and cleared his throat. “What do you want?”

“We want Oliver Queen to suffer.”

He laughed. “He’s right here. Now, unless you have bombs planted in the room, I don’t think that’s going to work.”

The man chuckled. The camera started moving. “We don’t have bombs. We have something much more valuable.”

Oliver titled his head and let out a little cry. But it wasn’t because of the words. The Russian accent. The fact that someone had hacked into the court’s network and was broadcasting a video.

It was the scream.

A child’s scream.

Annie’s.

His precious little girl screamed over and over again.

“Y’know, Oliver,” the camera moved with the man as he walked along a corridor. “I always found it ironic that your littlest is named after your wife. Annie. Such a beautiful name. In Hebrew it means prayer. In Russian it means favor and grace. Which is also ironic. Because your wife and this little Annie have had anything but favor, haven’t they? One died because of you and the other has lived a miserable life because of you. Because of the mistakes you made. And now, this little girl will die because of the mistakes you made.”

“Daddy!” The camera landed on Annie, who sat in a chair, rope keeping her seated. Her eyes were red, along with the side of her face. Blood. Oh, God. They’d hurt her. They’d hurt his baby. The man’s fingers traced her tears, his smile growing. He glanced back at the camera. “Your daughter will be die because of the mistakes you made.”

“Daddy, help me!” Annie’s screams heightened and filled the room. “Daddy!”

The camera jerked away from her, but her screams were still heard. She cried for her father, and for Felicity. Begging them to come get her. To save her from the bad men. But then they stopped.

The camera dropped to the ground.

“Don’t expect to ever find her. She’ll be dead before you even get your bow back to come rescue her.”

And then the screen went black.
Before people completely freak out: this is what I was planning to do from the start. Everything that I've been writing has lead us to this moment. (And yes, I just referenced 3x20.) The next chapters are, to say the least, the climax and/or the turning point. We'll see a very different version of several characters. Chapters are already written and I can say that they appear to be good! :P
Everyone have a happy new year!!!
Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

Little warning: there's a bit of violence at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Bratva kidnapped Annie.

The little Annie Queen.

The one who told her today that she didn’t like *Finding Nemo* because the mama and the babies died.

The one who didn’t like the dark because that’s where monsters lived.

That’s who they kidnapped.

The most innocent of all the Queen children. The one who cried the most.

Felicity cuddled Piper in her arms as they both cried. The second youngest clung to her as if she was a lifeline. Ellie had run out of the room as soon as the TV went black. Harper held onto William. Roy had his arms wrapped around Clayton and Thea. And Oliver just sat there. She couldn’t see his face, but he hadn’t moved since he tried to stand up. His first instinct had been to get up and go to Annie. To save his daughter.

And now someone needed to save him. Get him back here. Because right now Annie didn’t need her daddy. She needed the vigilante. Arrow. Bratva assassin. She needed a killer. A man who would do anything to get her back. Alive.

She transferred Piper to Thea and moved to the gate that separated the criminal from the normal people. As her hand reached for the unlock button, a police officer stepped in her way. “Ma’am, I’m sorry, but you can’t go over there.”

“Don’t you think that rules don’t apply right now? Oliver’s daughter is kidnapped. I need to go to him.”

“You are not going to touch him until we say that you can.” The man took her arm. “You’re not even family.”

Maybe not, but today she was. Felicity jerked away from his grip and slammed her hands against his chest. “You get the *hell* out of my way, mister. That man is my family. And the girl who is missing is my family too. So back away.”

Surprise etched in his features, but he opened the gate for her and backed away. Felicity rushed to the desk and dropped to her knees next to him. “Oliver!” She grabbed his handcuffed hands. They were ice cold. “Oliver, you have to listen to me. We’re gonna get her back. She’s not dead. She’s gonna come—”

“They’re gonna kill Annie.” He stared straight ahead, unblinking. “They’re gonna kill her just like
they killed my wife.” He sounded robotic, as if each word came from somewhere programmed to deal with situations like this. Felicity shook her head. No. She needed him right now. They all needed him. Not some deathly, accepting version.

“You can’t think like that. We’re not going to let it happen.”

“They’re gonna kill her, Felicity.” His eyes found her face, and the robotic voice broke down to a whisper. “They’ll kill her.”

People were beginning to leave the courtroom. Officials herded the jury out, while Carly moved the out-of-it Queens and the family towards a side door. Adam Donner ran to them, almost slamming into the desk when he came to a halt. He unlocked Oliver’s cuffs and tucked them in his pocket. “I am so sorry, Mr. Queen. Miss Smoak. I…I can’t imagine what’s going through your mind’s right now. We’re going to get you into a private room so that you can be with your family. The feds have already been called. We will get your daughter back. I promise. Felicity, you can meet us in room five with the rest of the family.”

“Thank you.” She turned around and caught Harper, who erupted into a sobbing tantrum. Felicity curled the girl close to her body, shielding her from the cameras that still wanted pictures. They needed something for the front page of their tabloids tomorrow, didn’t they? More proof that the Queen’s fall from grace had been anything but graceful. More evidence of the loss. The horror of finding out that a child; a sister, was taken. By the very people who killed her mom.

They needed to get out of here before she took all her anger out on those cameramen. Felicity shielded Harper from the photographs as they walked to the door and out in the hallway. Room five was only a few footsteps from the courtroom. When they came in and shut the door, Harper went straight to her dad, who buried his face in her hair. The kids, minus William, who dropped to a chair and cried alone, crowded around him. Felicity went to stand next to Thea, who crossed her arms.

“Makes you wanna put on a leather suit of your own and go stab some knives in peoples’ chests.” The words were laced with venom, but when the kids moved away from Oliver, Thea stepped up and gave her brother a hug. “I’m so sorry, Ollie.”

Oliver nodded and then opened his eyes and met Felicity’s gaze. The man she knew and loved had returned, but there was no assassin or vigilante there. He was a tired man. Tired of the pain and death that he’d stumbled through for so long. She glanced at Adam who stood in the corner. “Could you, uh, give us ten minutes alone, please?”

“In any other situation, no. But this situation is far different than any I have ever dealt with, meaning you can have some time. Soon we’ll need your statements, as well as evidence. The police are on their way to your mansion already.” With that, he shut the door. Oliver collapsed into one of the chairs and reached for Piper, who cuddled onto his lap. As his arms enclosed around her, he closed his eyes for a second. When they opened, they found the rest of the kids. “We’re gonna get Annie back.”

“How?” Ellie crossed her arms. “They said no one would find her. She’s gone.”

“No, she’s not. You can’t think like that.”

William scoffed. “Where are you getting your optimism? Because Annie’s going to be dead—if she isn’t already—because of you. You got us into this mess and you didn’t even think about what would happen to anyone else. Except yourself.”

“That’s not true, William, and you know it,” Ellie shot back. “He did it to protect us.”
“And look where that got us all. A dead mother. Missing sister. Our dad in prison. And the only people raising us are a nanny who’s got as many issues as us and a bodyguard who never signed up for any of this!”

Oliver closed his eyes and hung his head. Felicity looked at Diggle, who shook his head. What could they say that would make any of this better?

“William!” Harper stood up, her defiance growing by the second. “Daddy became the hood because Mama told him to. He joined the Bratva because he didn’t want to lose us.”

The oldest Queen son spread his hands. “And where are we now?”

“I’m sorry.” The words came out in a whisper. With tears in his eyes, Oliver looked up at his son. “I’m sorry, William. I did what I thought was best, but it turns out that it was wrong. This is all happening because of me.”

“Oliver—”

“No, Felicity. He’s right. Everything that is happening right now is my fault, and I’m going to try to fix it.”

“There’s no fixing this, Dad.” William shook his head and moved to the door. “You can’t. Maybe you should just stay here and not wreak anything else while people try to find our sister.”

Oliver let out a long breath and nodded. “C-Can all of you go out, please? Dig and Felicity, stay in here. Speedy, you can if you want. B-But I need all of you to go out.” He set Piper on her feet. “Please.”

Ellie kissed his cheek and whispered, “I love you,” before she led the kids out of the room. Oliver settled back in the chair and gripped the arms. “They’re not gonna be able to find her.”

Felicity wrinkled her eyebrows. “Who?”

“The feds. The police. The CIA. The FBI. No one’s gonna find her.” He looked up at them with the eyes of a man who could snap a person’s neck and not feel any guilt. A man who had already lost so much and couldn’t bear to lose anything else. Especially a daughter. “But I can.”

She could see the light at the end of the tunnel on this one. “Hold on, Oliver.” She whipped out her phone and in thirty seconds, disabled the recordings systems. “Okay. Go ahead. We’re all clear in here.”

“I need you,” he aimed his gaze at her and then at Dig, “and John to get me out of here.”

Felicity scoffed. “Oliver, how on earth do you propose that? You’re a criminal. You can’t just… walk out of here.”

“No, but with all of your help, I can. There’s no one who knows the Bratva like I do. And there’s no one who knows how to work computers like you. You can find the location quicker than any of the FBI agents that will be working for hours to just find one clue. I’ll need you to—”

“There are literally two other people in the room, Ollie. Can Dig and I do anything or is it just you and Felicity gazing into each other’s eyes?”

He clearly chose to ignore the last part of that sentence. “I’m gonna need my suit.”
“Good luck, cuz they took the one at the house.”

“They never did find my lair.”

Thea groaned and turned away. “Of course. Okay, Roy and I will go get the suit. We’ll take Ellie. And any other things you need. Weapons? Like…guns? Arrows?”

“I’ll give you a list. Dig—”

“I’ll find a way out of here.”

“And I’ll find Annie.” Felicity worked up a smile. “Got it.”

“Thank you. All of you.” He stood up and looked around the room. “I’ll just stay here. Like William said—”

“He’s grieving and he’s angry. That’s not a good combination.”

“But he’s that way because of me. I brought this darkness into their lives and he’s angry at me because of that. There’s no changing that, Felicity. I’ve tried, but…” he sucked in shaky breath.

“There’s nothing that I can say or do that is going to make him feel any differently. He believes that I killed his mom, and that I’m responsible for this too. Maybe up on the witness stand I can defend myself and tell people that I killed in self defense…but this? I can’t, Felicity. There’s nothing to tell William or show William that he’s going to believe.”

“We honestly don’t have time for me to say something that will drastically change your mind. But I’m going to say this.” She put her hand on his arm and stepped up close to him. “We are not in this situation because of you. It’s because of the Bratva. They are at fault right now, and no matter what your ticked off son says, it’s them we need to channel our anger at. Not at you. Okay?” When he nodded, she pulled away and clapped her hands. “Okay. Let’s go. Thea, call me. No, actually don’t. Wait.” She grabbed his arm again as an idea hit her. “What about the Flash? He can do a lot of things, and he’s fast enough that he could scan the entire city before I even put a finger—”

“No.”

“What do you mean ‘no’? Even if you had a falling out, don’t you think he’d come out of hidey hole for this one?”

“I mean ‘no’ in the sense that he’s incapable of being a speedster at the moment. He couldn’t help even if he wanted to, and I’m sure he’d like to.”

Well, that was off the table. Felicity glanced at the clock. They had three minutes left before people would barge in here with questions. Questions that this…team would be answering on their own. Everything needed to be mapped out by then. “Oliver, write down everything you need. Including directions. We don’t really know where this.”

He took a seat and grabbed a pen and paper. Thea read over his shoulder, and after a few seconds, an expletive came out and she slapped his face. “Oliver Queen!”

“What?”

“That’s where your lair is?”

“Speedy, be quiet. You’re not helping in any secretive factors, so shut up. That’s where it is. End of story.”
“I ran a club there for three years and I didn’t know?”

He muttered a, “Sorry”, before continuing his writing. In thirty seconds, he handed the paper to Thea. “You’ll have to look around in there for a few things. Maybe look them up in the inventory. Don’t touch or look at anything you don’t need to look at. There’s no safeguards and I don’t need you stumbling on anything you don’t need to find.”

“Oh, that makes me feel really good.”

“Just go.” Oliver waved his hand. “It’d make me feel better knowing that something’s being done.”

“The good news is that things are being done.” The door opened and Captain Lance stepped in. Thea cast him a glare before leaving the room. “First of all, let me say that I am so sorry for what’s happening right now. I could never have imagined that this would happen. So I’m sorry that we didn’t think that it would. Anyways, we’re doing all that we can to find her.”

“It’s not gonna be enough.” Oliver stood up and walked to the cop, his eyes steely. “Nothing’s gonna be enough unless I help.”

“You can help by giving the search party information. You’re our best bet for that.”

“I’m talking about the skills that I have.”

He scoffed. “Absolutely not. That’s called letting a criminal roam free in the streets. No one’s gonna let that happen. You’ll give information, but that’s it.”

“Quentin—”

“Don’t say anything else. I’m already going to be putting extra security on all of you. No one’s going out of a guard’s sight. Maybe three of them.”

Good thing Thea left already. Felicity forced herself not to smirk but couldn’t help but share a look with Oliver. “Mr. Lance, I can assure you that I am not a threat. I am, however, in need of a major pee break, and I have a little bit of a problem with my, uh, monthly flow. Not to be graphic, but I forgot my purse in the car and I am in major need of something, to, uh, stop it.”

Diggle muttered an “Oh my God” while Oliver covered his mouth and turned away. Lance’s eyebrows stayed high as he stared at her, and then nodded. “Okay. Go do whatever you need to do. You’re lucky I have daughters.”

“Then I’m sure you know what I’m going through. Plus, I have pretty bad cramps right now which is not helping with any of this. Thank you, Mr. Lance.” She left the room and headed straight to the car where she left her tablet. And absolutely zero tampons. Thank goodness that happened last week. Just the person she wanted to see.

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“Miss Smoak, can I ask you a few questions?”

“Ah, no thank you, sir. We’re kind of in a family crisis at the moment and I don’t really have time to—”

“That’s actually what I wanted to talk to you about.”

She slung her purse over her shoulder and slammed the door. “No.”
“I think you have something to tell me.”

Time to start walking. *Now.* Felicity’s heels clicked on the pavement as she ran to the door. The man didn’t follow her, but he continued to yell questions.

“Are you now a part of the Queen family? Are you and Oliver secretly married? What about the kids? Will you stay on as their nanny if Oliver is sentenced? Or will you adopt them?” His questions faded away when Felicity slammed the door and leaned against it. These people were figuring it out, weren’t they? They knew how much she cared for the family. Could that be used against her or them in the future?

*You can’t think about that right now.* Annie Queen needed her magic fingers, not her spiraling head that liked to spiral a lot these days. Felicity snuck down the hall and entered a bathroom. She took a seat on the tile floor and opened her tablet. They left Annie and Raisa at home at eight thirty. The video started at two thirty. Meaning…Felicity gulped. She could’ve been missing since eight thirty-five. And no one would’ve known.

If they found Annie, how much trauma would she have to deal with the rest of her life? On top of everything else that had happened. Felicity dropped her head back against the wall and closed her eyes. “God, wherever she is, keep her safe. *Please.*”

******

“I’d seen pictures of this place.” Ellie looked up at the ‘Verdant’ sign as Roy pulled the car into the empty parking lot. “But I never imagined it could hold a lair.”

“Me neither.” Thea stepped out of the car and led the way to the side door. She unlocked it, and hurried down the hallway to a steel door with a keycode. “When I bought the place several years ago, Ollie told me the basement was flooded, and he installed a lock on the door so that drunk people would find their way down there and drown. I always believed him. Turns out he was running a secret organization right under me while we went five years without speaking.” She rolled her eyes as she typed in the code Oliver wrote down. “Typical Ollie.”

Ellie went first. What would she find down here? She’d imagined a place filled with weapons and darkness. And it was dark. Until Roy flipped the lights on. They lit up the room as computers started up. “This was not what I was picturing.” She walked to the middle of the room and spun around, taking in the sights. “At. All.” Her dad created all this? Never had she viewed him as someone who built things. Sure, he could put together a few Playmobile sets but that was it. This…he’d built a Batman cave down here, complete with pictures of their family by the computers. He’d been down here after he came back from the island, because the picture that they took at the gala was sitting in the middle of several other family photos.

Roy read off the list of devices they needed to get. “What the heck is a taser arrow? How is that a thing?”

“I don’t know but that’s what Ollie said to get. Five of them. So maybe try not to hurt yourself with it, okay?”

“I see the arrows here…oh wow.” Ellie stood in front of the glass case, her eyes glued on the suit. She’d seen the pictures of her dad in a suit, but never up close. This was different than the one that the feds found in the bedroom. This was different than the one that the feds found in the bedroom. This had more holsters and more shine to it. Even on the mannequin it looked majestic. “Y’know, I remember reading about the hood. It happened to be a night I was mad at Daddy because he was two hours late picking me up from dance. And the past five years…he’s gone all the time, and he’s missed birthdays and pick-up times and left during dinner. I was
always so mad at him but now I realize... that he was saving someone’s life.”

“And looking mighty cool while doing it,” Roy whistled. “Wowsa. Maybe I should volunteer to
become a vigilante.”

“Not funny. Ellie, take the suit off and pack it in this box.” Thea twirled the bow around. “Ollie said
that this thing breaks down, but I’m not sure—oh.” She set the now small bow in the box. Ellie
folded the suit and set it on top.

“Is that all we need?”

“I got the tasers and the...” Roy held up a bunch of little arrows. “Baby arrows?”

“Flachettes, according to this.”

Ellie walked around the lair, checking out all the things that looked weird. Some of the stuff had to
be from a movie. To the right of her dad’s glass case, there was something similar covered by a
sheet. This was definitely from a creepy movie. And just like the dumb person on the screen, she
reached up and pulled it down. “Holy crap.”

“Shut the front door.” Roy came to stand by her. “That’s the Flash’s suit.”

“One of them, probably.” She touched the suit and grinned. “I wish Daddy let us in on the secret
because the Flash is pretty amazing.”

“Red is so much cooler than green. But don’t tell your dad that.”

“Guys...” they turned at Thea’s voice. She leaned over a computer, her eyes wide. “I think I figured
out who the Flash is. Or was. I’m not so sure.”

“Is he hot?”

“I’m married. I can’t say if he is or not. But he’s...good looking.”


“Either that or a doppelganger.” When the ladies shot him looks, Roy shrugged. “What? I know
things.”

“The weird things apparently,” Ellie muttered. “That’s Felicity’s best friend. And there’s no way that
she knows.”

“And we’re going to keep it that way.” Thea shut off the computer and turned away from it. “Ollie
told me not to touch anything that could be important, and this was why. And it also explains why
Felicity said that she got the job so easily. She knew Barry, Barry told Oliver that he knew a nanny,
and Ollie trusted him.”

“Because they worked together.”

“Okay, you two. Let’s move past our freaking out and go. You’re going to be taking the car; I’m
gonna take the motorcycle.” Roy winked at Ellie. “I’ve always wanted to ride one, and I think that
Oliver’s gonna need that.”

Thea sighed and tossed the bag over her shoulder. She put her hand on Ellie’s back and steered her
to the exit. “Ordinarily I would yell at you, but we’ve got a niece to find. Well, Felicity’s got Annie
to find. And as soon as she does, Ollie needs to go.”
“It’s been four hours. What if she’s dead by now?” Piper cried against Oliver. It had been like this since they put him in an interrogation room and gave the Queens permission to go in there and talk to him. He had provided all the information that he could and now, until Felicity found something, he had to just sit here and try to calm his kids down. Which wasn’t working, because he wasn’t being convincing.

“We’re gonna find her, Piper, I promise.”

“What if she’s dead? What if she dies?”

“She’s not gonna die, Piper.”

“And how do you know that?”

“Sweetheart…” Oliver put his hands on the back of her head. “I know that because I have faith. It’s not a lot, because I’m still learning, but I do have it. I have enough to have faith that Annie will come back to us. I don’t know how, but she’s gonna come back. Okay?”

“Usually Felicity does that speech.”

“Well,” he kissed her forehead and smiled. “She’s started to rub off on me.”

********

“Miss Smoak?” The guard waved his hand to request Felicity to remove her earbuds. “The expletives are getting a little out of hand. Is your favorite cook losing that bad on MasterChef?”

“Oh, you have no idea, sir, so shut up.” She put the earbuds in and switched back to her other screen. After four hours of searching, her eyelids hurt from staring at the computer for the entire time, only glancing up when one of the kids came into the room or the annoying guard asked her questions like that one. She told him the truth; he had no idea how this was. How much she wanted to throw her tablet across the room and smash it into the wall.

All they had—her and the police—was that Annie had been taken at ten o’ three in the morning. And they got that from Raisa. Four hours of typing and contacting every dark web artist that she knew and they couldn’t find anything. Whoever did this was good.

Typical of the Russian mafia. Of course they would…“Oh, God.”

“Ma’am, do you want me to—”

“No, shut up. Just shut up for five seconds, will you? All I need is like ten seconds without you talking. Which I realize contradicts my last sentence. I need to go.” She stood up and glared at the man who stood up also. “Back away, buddy.”

“I’m assigned to keep you here. Your…whoever is an assassin.”

“And an assassin is the only person who is going to get Annie Queen home. So move away.”

“Miss Smoak.” The man’s hand reached towards his walkie-talkie. “You need to calm down or I’m going to call this in. You’re staying here. End of discussion.”

“Fine.” She slammed her hand on the table and dropped back to her seat. In ten seconds, she had the walkie talkie communications down. With a sweet smile, she stood up and walked to the window.
The sun had set an hour ago. “Sir, I’ve only lived in Starling for several months. What is that building there?”

“The really tall one?”

“Yes. My eyes hurt, and I can’t really get a clear look at it. I know it’s stupid, but I need to take my mind off everything and MasterChef doesn’t work right now so I need to think about—”

He swooped down next to her. “It’s Malcolm Merlyn’s building.”

“Ah, thank you. So much.” She spun and slammed her fist into his jaw, sending him tumbling to the ground. “Dear God that hurt.” But the pain in her hand couldn’t be thought of now, even though she was pretty sure she just broke it. Felicity took the keys from the guard’s carabiner, grabbed her tablet from the table, and left the room, making sure to lock the door. She snuck down the hall to Oliver’s room. She smiled at the two guards who apparently didn’t realize that she’d been regulated to seclusion for the past few hours, and slipped in. Piper and Harper sat in there with him, a book of some sort between them. Math.

“Oliver.” She whispered his name. He lifted his head, and caught the urgency in her eyes. With a few words, the girls took the book and left. She disabled the security cameras and recordings and took a seat. “I’m gonna need you to tell me everything you know.”

“Okay, but you need to tell me what I know first.”

“The deal. The deal that Adam Donner put on the table.”

His forehead wrinkled. Either she was crazy, he had too much heartbreak for his life, or she was so on point that he didn’t even know what to think. Felicity leaned forward. “There’s a connection there. I can’t find any information anywhere. But hold on.” As Oliver leaned back in the chair, the exhaustion wearing him thin, she grabbed his hands. “There has to be a connection there, Oliver. Something happened between the government or whatever. I was just thinking…why can’t I find anything? None of my friends can either. That means the Bratva is good. And not good in that way. They’re—”

“The FBI came to see me.” Oliver’s eyes widened. He pulled his hand away as his face went white. “Oh, God, Felicity. It was right under my nose and I didn’t see it.”

“What was?”

“They…they wanted to know. About the Bratva.” His mouth opened but he couldn’t form the words. Just shake his head. Felicity whipped out her tablet and started entering any and all the information that Oliver had just told her. They’d been played. Oliver had been anyways. Whatever had happened, this was—

“William was right. This is all my fault.” His voice cracked on the last word. “I gave them what they wanted. I told them every bit of information I knew so that when the time came, they could out-smart me. Annie’s gonna die because of me.”

“No, no, Oliver. She is not going to die. And it’s not—”

“Felicity, stop it.” He kept himself away from her. “There’s no way we’re gonna find her. Don’t you understand? It’s over. A man came to the prison saying he was the director of the FBI. I believed him, and after a little coercing, they got me to tell them everything I knew about the Bratva. And it was them. They didn’t knew what I all know, but after that day, they did. No one is going to be able to find her.”
“But you didn’t tell them about me, did you?”

“They know about you. I’m sure they know. They know everything. No one is gonna—”

She stopped listening. Oliver was spiraling. Rightfully so. But that couldn’t happen. Not after all they’d been through. Not after what she’d done. “Oliver!” That got his attention. “Listen. I just decked a member of the police department. I left him lying in the room they put me in.” Could his eyes get any bigger? “I just committed a crime. And I’m going to commit a bigger crime when Dig and I break you out of here. So don’t you dare give up and start whining. Because I will punch you. Or…something. So sit up, stop crying, and help me for God’s sakes!”

Oliver just stared at her for several heartbeats before he took a deep breath. The sullen expression disappeared almost entirely as he drew himself up. “Okay.” He crossed his arms. “What do I need to do?”

“You need to get prepared to break out of here. Because I’m gonna figure out where their base of operations is.”

“And how are you gonna do that?”

“With my magic fingers. Now shut up. When did they come to the prison?”

“June fifteenth. The day we kissed.”

“I need information about what I don’t know.” She cast him a small smile before focusing all her attention on finding information. “Sure the Flash can’t help?”

“He’s injured.”

Her fingers flew across the screen as she drew up information from that day. “At three twelve, a man by the name Fred Alexander visited. Ring a bell?”

“No, but is there a picture?”

“Just lots of…got it. Security cameras come in handy every one thousand years.” She turned the tablet towards Oliver, who nodded. “Perfect. And last October, a Fredark Alexia was a suspect in a murder in Italy. The man who was killed was…ah.” She showed Oliver the picture, smiling when he looked at the tablet and then up at her. “That’s where you were, right? Before you came home and I yelled at you?”

“Yes, but I don’t know how I didn’t recognize him.”

“That’s because he can change people.”

“What do you mean ‘he can change people’?”

Felicity continued to read information that only she could find. “He’s actually a man by the of…” she scanned the document written by a woman named Amanda Waller. “Gendark Paul. What a boring last name. Anyways, this man is highly renowned throughout the world for being able to assume other people’s identities. He calls himself Human Target. And this ‘Gendark’ is a member of the Russian Mafia.”

“So basically he’s—”

“Don’t ask questions I’m not going to be able to answer. I’m tracking the phone that was last
associated with him, according to A.R.G.U.S. Don’t ask what that is; clearly you haven’t met Dig’s girlfriend. Alright. Five days ago, this phone was deposited somewhere in Starling.”

“No, that’s not Starling. It’s a mile from the mansion.”

“They were spying on us.”

Oliver muttered something under his breath in Russian. “B—The Flash has been injured for a month. They’ve been spying since then.”

Tingles ran down her fingers. Felicity took a deep breath. She could not feel fear right now. All that mattered now was finding Annie. The panic could be dealt with later and everything that came with it. She refocused on her tablet. “I can possibly find a hide-out of some sort where we can find Annie. Just hold on for a few minutes, okay?” God, help me. They needed some help, and the best place to get it now was from up above. Her magical fingers could only do so much. Please help me.

Ten minutes later, she pumped her fist in the air. “I got something. I have no idea what it is, but it’s something. And all signs point to the Bratva being stationed there. Temporarily.” When Oliver planted his hands on the table, she stopped him. “Oliver.”

“No, Felicity, I need to go.”

“I know, but…” she glanced towards the door. “What about all those trained CIA agents or whatever they are out there? Why not tell them and get help?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because if the Bratva even smells something wrong, they’ll kill my daughter. I can’t trust anyone else but myself. I’m the one who knows how to take down a member of the Bratva because I was trained by them. Whoever is out there was not. Meaning I’m Annie’s best shot at getting out of there alive.” Oliver stood up. “Get Dig. I need to go.”

Clearly they weren’t negotiating it, and even if they were, she didn’t have the energy to argue with an angry man like him. Felicity got to her feet and opened the door. A guard stood there with a Taser. Before she could scream, a hand slapped over her mouth and pushed her down as a fist went over her head. The man fell to the ground. Oliver jerked Felicity back up and took her out into the hall. “Get Diggle. Now.”

“O-O-Okay.” She scrambled to get her tablet open but before she could send the message to their bodyguard, he appeared in the hallway. His gun glinted in the light.

“Let’s go! We’ve got twenty seconds to get out of here!”

Oliver grabbed Felicity’s arm and squeezed. “I’ve got a com in my suit. You need to get one of your own and get the frequency to work with mine. That way you can tell me where to go. Got it?”

The fear and panic grabbed ahold of her. She was sending the only man she wanted to love out into an unknown territory, knowing that he might not make it back alive. In an hour, two Queens could be dead. Because she gave him an address. When Oliver yelled her name, she nodded. That’s all she could manage. She let go of his hand and watched him run down the hall just as the SWAT team swarmed her. She raised her hands, muttering under her breath as they pulled her hands behind her back. At least Oliver got away. It would take him a while to get out of the busy area and head towards the location, meaning she had a while to convince the cops to let her go.
Because that was her life now.

********

“I might be a bodyguard but I’m not very well suited for this.”

“I know, Dig, but you gotta get me out of here.” Oliver drew up at a corner and peeked around. No one. “We’re good.” He cocked the gun—the non-lethal one—and stepped into the open. They had two more hallways to go, and then he could go find Annie. If the cops didn’t get Felicity. His heart tugged. He’d left her there to get arrested. No way she wouldn’t be. Diggle too. His sister as well if they found out she went to get his suit.

“John—”

“Don’t think about it, Oliver. We’ll deal with it. But first you need to get Annie back.” Diggle took the lead as they ran down the hall. “Once we get out, Roy’s there with a motorcycle. The suit’s in the back.”

They came around the corner and were met with armed men. Oliver pushed Diggle to the side and fired the tranquilizer bullets into six of them and took the last two down before they could fire a shot. When his friend took a moment to just stare at him, Oliver shrugged. “There’s a reason why the Bratva didn’t slice my head off the first day. I could do stuff.”

“And you’re confident you can get Annie back with those skills?”

“There’s no other option.”

“There’s the SWAT team. And the FBI.”

“I can’t trust anyone else, Diggle. For all I know, these people here could be working for the Bratva.” And with the newest information about ‘Human Target’ he didn’t know who to trust. This man could become anyone; could be become Felicity? One of his kids? After seeing what Barry could do, and what this other speedster could do, he’d stopped doubting the impossible. The idea that someone could transform into other people didn’t seem crazy anymore. “I need to get my daughter back, and I’m going to. No matter what the cost.” Annie deserved a life that her mother had been denied. Even if it meant turning himself over to the mafia, which in turn meant ending his life. Tonight, she would come back. And she would be alive.

Oliver pushed open the door and stepped into the dark alley. Roy stood next to the motorcycle, a gun in his hands. Ooh, boy. He would be dead before he even left. “Hey, Roy. Don’t shoot.”

“Bike’s ready; I filled it up with gas, and your suit and bow are here too.”

“Thank you.” Oliver slung the quiver over his back and set the bow on the front. “I need you two to get Felicity out of those handcuffs. I need her to get Annie. You have a good twenty minutes to do that.”

“Got it. Now go. And Oliver.” Roy sent him a hard look. “Both of you get back here in one piece, okay? I can’t handle anymore death and neither can my wife.”

He couldn’t promise anything, but he nodded before sliding the helmet on. Oliver flipped the bike on and roared towards the street. Three SWAT vehicles pulled out behind him. He smirked. Motorcycles could go twice as fast as trucks, and even with the entire city in lockdown, he could get out of here.
And get his daughter back.

*****

“You do know that you just committed a crime that can send you to prison?”

“Very well aware, Captain Lance, but if you haven’t noticed lately, I’m going to do whatever it takes to get Annie back and you clearly are not. So I, along with some others, got Oliver out of here so he could go save the person you are unwilling to save!” The anger heated up at the end. Felicity slammed her handcuffed hands down on the table. “You aren’t going to get Annie Queen back without Oliver Queen, and he’s more skilled than anyone else in this entire place. Watch the videos. Annie’s best chance is her father.”

Lance crossed his arms. “Says the person who just committed a felony.”

“I don’t care!” Felicity kept her hands still; she knew from Oliver’s struggle that the hands didn’t move much and it looked like weakness. “Don’t you see? I don’t care. I’ve put my entire life on the line for a year now to save the Queens. Do you think I’m just going to sit in a room with a guard and watch MasterChef while a little girl is kidnapped by the mafia? Do I look like someone who is going to do nothing? I have skills. Dig has skills. And Oliver has skills that are a heck of lot more dangerous than anyone else. So we broke him out.”

“Dad!” The door flew open and Laurel stepped in. Lance rolled his eyes.

“No. No, you are not going to be involved in this.”

“Yes, I am. Because I am Oliver’s friend. The one I kissed back in grade school, remember? And I’m a lawyer. And even though I’m not on that case that caused Annie to get kidnapped, I’m on this case. And you’re releasing Felicity.” She slapped down a piece of paper Felicity could only guess would tell Lance to take the cuffs off.

“You can’t do this, Laurel.”

“Yes, I can.” She stepped up to her father. “I will because I’m going to do what’s right. And if you wanted to do the same, you’d take those handcuffs off Felicity so that she can get Oliver to wherever he needs to be. Now.”

Felicity closed her eyes when Lance swore and leaned over the table to take the metal off. “Thank you, Laurel.”

“We all need her back, and some of us realize it might be by the means of some vigilantes.”

“I’m not exactly a vigilante.”

Lance scoffed. “You are now, Miss Smoak. Like it or not.”

Not anything she wanted to hear right now. “Okay, I need computers. And a com device. Oliver has one, and that way I can communicate with him.” Felicity rubbed her wrists. Thank goodness for being out of those. How did Oliver ever handle it? Besides the fact that he could hide discomfort better than anyone. She glanced at the two Lances who just stood there. “Like now.”

“I know where we can get everything you need. And Dad,” Laurel turned around. “Call off the SWAT teams. Let Oliver do his stuff.”

“Just because he kissed you in grade school does not mean you are entitled to put all your faith in
“No, but Felicity believes in him.” Laurel flashed her a smile. “And that’s good enough for me.”

They left the room together. Laurel led the way. They passed several mouth-open people. Felicity ignored them. She needed a computer. And five minutes later she got one, and a com. She programmed it to Oliver’s and turned it on. “Oliver? Can you hear me?”

“Yeah. I’m heading towards the location.”

“Yep, I see you.” She glanced back when Ellie and William entered the room. “Can I send you directly to the place?”

“I have my suit on if that’s what you’re wondering.” The faint echo of the motorcycle reached her ears. “They let you out.”

“Turn left on West Boulevard. You’re ten minutes out. I’ve got a lot of cool recordings going on for whoever’s there at the building. They’ll never see you. And yes, I’m out. Obviously. Take a right at the intersection.”

There was silence for several minutes. Thea and Diggle joined them in the room, followed by Harper and Clayton. Piper stayed with Roy and Tommy. Felicity continued to give directions, but after a while there were none to give. Only a straight road to the warehouse. When Oliver neared the place, he cleared his throat. “Hey, Felicity?”

She pressed the com further in her ear and leaned forward. “I’m here.”

“I love you.”

She bit her lip to force away the emotions rising in her chest. In her heart. Oliver was saying goodbye. And rightfully so. She knew how dangerous this was. How easily he could be killed or how quickly he would turn himself over to the Bratva in order to save Annie. For so long she’d been hopeful, but for one split second, she needed to be honest with herself. With him. “You want me to tell the kids that?”

“Not right now. Let them believe that everything’s gonna be okay. If something happens…tell them that I’m sorry. And that I love them. Especially William.”

She glanced back at Oliver’s son, his arms crossed, just staring straight at the wall. Every few seconds his jaw twitched as if he were holding the pain back. “Okay. I’ll do that. And Oliver…” she watched as the bike got closer to the destination. “I love you too. But please, for all of our sakes, do everything you can to get back here. Because…oh, God.” She was going to cry in front of everyone. She lowered her voice. “Because I wanna marry you.”

Felicity could almost see his smile, but he switched personalities. Just like that because it was completely normal to him. “I’m here. What are you seeing on the computers?”

“Readings are telling me that they’re in the middle. There’s a…okay, Oliver. You’re going to have to listen carefully. And I can tell you that this is definitely the place.”

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Standing outside the building, Oliver braced for the inevitable bad news. “What’s wrong?”

“The whole area is rigged with explosives.”
He swore. “Of course there is. Because they know how much I hate explosives.”

“Well, they haven’t met me yet. But thanks to some software I borrowed from Lyla, I can tell that the explosives up top are not real. And I was just able to disable the ones on the fire escape. The only problem is getting there.”

The Bratva didn’t know about the newest arrow Cisco designed for him, did they? Oliver locked the arrow in and pulled back the drawstring. “You sure they’re disabled?”

“I’m sure. I’m not getting any readings around here.”

“Hold on.” In three seconds, he landed on the roof and walked to the fire escape. “I’m going in.”

“Do you need my help?”

“Not right now.” All he needed was his head and his bow. And a heck of a lot of help from the miracle giver. Oliver cracked open the fire escape and slid in. Everything needed to be done at the Flash’s pace in order to keep himself undetected. Felicity’s fake video footage would only last so long. Oliver crept along the corridor, firing tranq arrows at each guard he came across, catching them as they fell to stifle the noise.

He couldn’t snap anyone’s neck. If he wanted to give himself any hope of winning the trial, he couldn’t kill anyone.

Though not making it out was becoming less of an option and more of a reality.

Just as long as Annie made it out of here.

Oliver continued to move towards the middle of the building. In the distance, men were talking.

And then he heard Annie’s voice. His heart clenched, and then erupted into a million pieces of anger.

“Jack is the prettiest dog in the world so shut up!”

“If you don’t shut up young lady, we’ll gag you again. Or maybe I’ll just shoot you.”

She screamed. A gun cocked. Oliver clutched the bow and ran towards the sound of his daughter’s cries.

“I’ve got a—” Oliver hurled a flachette into the man’s throat before he could speak any further. He jumped over the body and continued running. Annie’s screaming increased.

“No! You can’t kill Daddy! Don’t hurt my Daddy!”

They’d found him. Oliver dropped back against the wall to catch his breath. He slid an arrow into the drawstring. Get Annie out. That’s all that mattered. His body could handle a lot, but his daughter couldn’t. Oh God the trauma she would deal with the rest of her life because of this. I’m sorry, sweetie.

He fired another flachette at the next assassin and peeked around the corner. Annie sat in a chair, her hands behind her, staring up Anatoly who aimed a gun at her head. Bile rose in his throat. Oliver raised the bow to fire at the gun, but someone clipped his knees. He fell to the ground and lost the bow. A knife pressed against his throat.

“Twitch, and your daughter is dead.”
“Let her go and you can do whatever you want with me.”

“We’ll see.” The man yanked Oliver up and dragged him down the stairs to the open area where Annie sat. She swung her head around and yelled, “Daddy!” just as Anatoly fired a shot at her leg.

“No!” Oliver screamed louder than Annie as the bullet found it’s place. He slammed his elbow into the man behind him and rushed forward.

A gun fired.

Pain exploded in his abdomen.

Oliver collapsed to the ground next to Annie, who screamed his name. But he couldn’t get up. The bullet had rendered him helpless.

“Don’t hurt Daddy!” Despite her own wound, Annie’s words continued to come, but they’d become shriller, as if each word was her way of expressing her pain. “Get away from him!”

Oliver closed his eyes and tried to steady his breath. Get up. He had to get up or they were both dead. But he couldn’t.

“Let’s get rid of this.” Anatoly yanked away his com and smashed it.

C’mon, Oliver. Felicity’s face flashed in his brain. Life is precious. And you should want so much more than this. He did want so much more, didn’t he? Just to see his family happy. One way or another. It starts with not losing hope in yourself. He could do this. Even with a bleeding-out stomach.

“Don’t…touch her.”

Anatoly laughed. “What are you going to do about it?”

He pushed himself up to his hands and knees, biting back the cries of pain that tried to come out as the fire spread throughout his body. “You know what I can do. So don’t. Touch. Her.”

“We had a deal, Mr. Queen. You continue to work for me, and I leave your family alone. You broke that.” The gun cocked again. Anatoly raised it to Annie’s head. “I might be the one holding the gun but you’re the one who fired it.”

His hand squeezed around the trigger. Oliver scrounged up the last remaining bit of energy and jumped to his feet in front of Annie. As a gun fired from above, he flung a flachette into Anatoly’s neck. The bullet crashed into his stomach, knocking him backwards, but the man who’d killed so many people—including the woman most precious to him—fell to the ground, an arrow through his neck.

Oliver grabbed Anatoly’s gun as it fell and fired a bullet at the sniper in the rafters, and then at the remaining assassins in the room. As each of them fell, the life was sucked out of him. He couldn’t stop it. Neither could he call for help. The com was Felicity’s way of tracking him. There was nothing. No option but to gather Annie in his arms and try to make it all the way to the court house. That was the only place with help. With his family.

“D-D-Daddy.” Annie cried. “D-Daddy, my leg hurts.”

He dropped the gun and reached for the knife at his hip. “I know, sweetie.” He needed to get her help. She would bleed out first. Yeah, she would bleed out first. He could make it, but Annie might
She’s not gonna make it if you don’t get her there. “B-But don’t worry.” He slit the rope off her wrists and lifted her into his arms. Her body pressed against his bullet wounds, stifling the blood. Oliver closed his eyes for a second and let his head drop to her shoulder. Because of his daughter, he was gonna make it to the court house.

With her legs wrapped around his waist, and her little body pressed against him, she would keep him from bleeding to death.

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“I can’t.” Felicity put her hands on her face. “I can’t handle this anymore.” She glanced up at Ellie, who kept her hand moving on her back, her face crinkled with worry. “When did they go out to look?”

“Half an hour ago. And no, there’s been nothing.”

“Maybe they were killed.”

“Felicity, you can’t—”

“Ellie, I can’t be positive anymore. There’s nothing left in my heart for that.” The screams that had come over the coms still echoed in her ears. And then the ‘crunch’. That hurt the worst. They lost communication with Oliver. There weren’t any trackers in the suit or the bike. They knew nothing, and until they had contact from the SWAT team, there would be no confirmation.

“I think we need to prepare for the worst.” William sat in the corner, arms crossed, his eyes glassy. “Maybe I’m not the best at this whole vigilante thing, but it sounded like they were both shot.”

“Head shots make people go pretty quick. Some are a little longer.” Felicity winced when the pain in the kids’ faces grew. “Not helping, but at least we know that—”

“I think I’d rather live my life knowing that they died quickly.” William stood up and walked to the desk. With his arms crossed and brow furrowed, he looked so much like his father, down to the hair. He glanced at Felicity. “Cuz if they got shot anywhere else, they’d bleed to death.”

“At least they weren’t alone.”

Felicity braced for the bitter comment that would come from William, but instead his voice cracked when he whispered, “Yeah.” It wasn’t anything but still it was something. Maybe Oliver’s wish would come true; in death, there would be forgiveness. She reached over and squeezed William’s hand. He held on for a few heartbeats before letting go.

“I think—”

Someone ran down the hall, followed by several armed men and women. Felicity pushed herself up and followed Ellie out. “What’s going on?”

“There’s movement on the street!”

William met Felicity’s eyes. Without saying anything, she knew what he was thinking. Asking. Begging. Needing it to be his dad or his sister.

It wasn’t possible. But then again, they’d all prayed for a miracle, right? Maybe this was it. Felicity pushed her way through the crowd of guns and people to get to the front of the pack. She ran down the steps but stopped at the bottom to collect herself for one split second. The police force rushed past
her, guns raised, all pointing at Oliver, who walked towards them, one agonizing step at a time, carrying Annie. Even from the distance, she could see how the little girl clung to him.

Ellie let out a cry. ‘They’re alive.’

As the SWAT team surrounded Oliver, Felicity ran to him. Blood smeared on his face, and with each step, he grimaced. For a second, he swayed, but regained his balance. “F-Felicity…” her name came in a gasp. He pried Annie’s hands away from his neck and began to turn her around. The little girl screamed, and clawed against him.

“No! No! I want to stay here!”

“No, honey.” Oliver shook his head. “You need to go to Felicity. She’s…she’s gonna…” he lost his breath for a moment. “She’s gonna get you help.” She continued to scream as Oliver pulled her away and transferred her to Felicity. A little hand slapped against her face; blood smeared onto her bare arms.

Felicity let out a cry as the blood dripped down to her fingers, and then to the ground. Oliver raised his hands in the air per the police officer’s request. As he lowered himself to both knees, she looked down at him. He wasn’t all there. His head lolled to the side as someone cuffed his hands behind him. Like the criminal they thought he was.

“Please…he’s hurt.” Her words got lost in the mess of handcuffs and Annie’s crying. She cupped her hand on the back of the little girl’s head and pulled her close. An ambulance backed up towards them as several medical personnel ran towards the group. To Annie.

Two police officers pulled Oliver to his feet. He swayed, but took four steps. As he moved into the light, Felicity screamed. Blood spread up and down his jacket, and down to the green pants. Red pants, now. He’d been shot. In the stomach.

And he still managed to get Annie home.

Just like he said he would.

It took two seconds for someone to realize the injuries that the alleged criminal suffered from, but it was fifteen seconds too late. Just as the woman called to stop, Oliver’s knees buckled and he collapsed to the ground.

“Oliver!” She could do nothing to help. Annie refused to let go, even as the blood continued to pool around them. Medical personnel got to Oliver first, their devices ready to perhaps keep him from dying right on the sidewalk, the courthouse’s lights the only way to see anything.

But it was William who was the first Queen to get to him.

The boy who had refused to visit his father in prison for five months; the boy who called his father a murderer was the one who knelt over Oliver’s body, screaming ‘Daddy’ over and over again.

Chapter End Notes

I promise this is the last cliffhanger for a while. There’s going to be happy times coming up, but first there’s a relationship to heal, and sometimes, the best way to do that is through pain and a lot of terror.
But then again...I told someone last week that Annie isn't the Queen we need to worry about. :P I gotta say...those forums that tell you about things weren't really handy in my research about bullet wounds. There's different kinds of guns, different kinds of adrenaline, different kinds of bullets...it was very complicated. So I did my best. lol Have an awesome week! Only nineteen days until Arrow comes back!!!
“Daddy!” William jerked up in his bed and felt around for the stuffed animal. Where was it? Mama had gotten it for him when they went to the hospital to get his new baby sister. Kind of an ugly sister, but she was growing on him. “Daddy? Mommy?” He found the elephant and slid out of bed. He padded down the hall to his parents’ room and opened their door, quietly sneaking to his daddy’s side of the bed. Mama needed to stay sleeping, he always told him. She got tired because of his ugly sister apparently.

“Daddy?”

His dad opened his eyes and sat up on his elbows. “Hey, buddy. What’s wrong?”

“I had a bad dream.” He tried to stop the tears, but they came anyway. As his cries grew louder, his mom stirred and mumbled something about cuddling. His dad whispered to her and then turned back to him. “You wanna talk about it?”

“No.” He set his elephant on the bed and hoisted himself up. “I just want to cuddle with you.”

“No.” His dad’s arms came around him and pulled him to his chest. “You have nothing to be scared of, buddy. Nothing to be scared of, because I’m here. Daddy’s here.” As William closed his eyes and floated back towards dream land, his dad kept whispering to him. “Daddy’s here.”

But he wasn’t here right now. Wasn’t here to wrap him in his arms and let him cry; reassure him that everything would be okay. The memories and words echoed through his head while the ambulance whirled towards the hospital. The four medics talked; some in hushed tones, sometimes loud, depending on how fast the machines beeped. Depending on how close their patient came to death’s door.

His dad. The one whom he’d hated for years—had gotten his little sister home, all while bleeding out because of two bullets in his stomach. How could he have done that? Get Annie out of there and get her back? William dropped his head back against the wall and closed his eyes. He’d been wrong. So, so wrong. Several hours ago he’d told the man who’d loved him for fifteen years that everything that had happened was his fault. That he was a murderer and deserved to rot in prison. The same man who got Annie all the way home before collapsing on the pavement.

And now he lay on a stretcher, with tubes running up and down his arms, medical doctors trying to keep him from dying. The medics had thrown the green leather jacket, along with holsters with knives, little arrows, and the quiver into a basket near William’s feet. When they weren’t looking, he reached down and pried out the jacket. Ellie looked at him, but didn’t say anything. She hadn’t said a word since the medics shut the doors of the ambulance.

With the one person who would yell at him in too much shock to say no, he set the blood-stained jacket on his lap. The sides fell over his thighs. He had a lot of growing to do before he could fit into this.

“Hang on, Oliver. We’re almost there.”

She sounded like his mom. William glanced up to see one of the nurses with her mask off, her hand on Oliver’s shoulder as the other doctors worked around her. She looked like his mom, with the red
lipstick that had been ever present, even on weekends. She loved lipstick, and especially the red colors. That was something he’d always missed after she died. No one ever wore red lipstick.

But this lady did.

Even after wearing a surgery mask for who-knows-how-long, it still stuck to her lips.

Their eyes met and just for one moment, he got a glimpse of his mom. It wasn’t her; he didn’t exactly believe in people coming back from the dead, but it was still his mom. She turned away from him just as the ambulance hit a bump. He turned around and glanced out the little window. They were here. Somehow, they’d made it to the hospital without becoming orphans.

William stood up as someone from the outside opened the doors. People yelled information back and forth about different medical terms he didn’t understand, but a few words he did. His dad was dying, and if they didn’t get him into surgery in a few minutes, they’d lose him.

Daddy would die thinking that his oldest son hated him.

They’d made it an hour. William sat in a chair in the waiting room, with his siblings, minus Annie, staring at a brochure about having a baby. He dropped it to the ground and stood up. “When did they say we’d know more?”

“They said the surgery could possibly take several hours. So, just like the last time you asked, we’re not gonna know anything for a long time.”

“Can’t they just tell us now? Whether or not we’re gonna have a dad when they get done?”

“Willie…” Ellie lifted her hands. “What do you want me to say? That’s it’s all gonna be okay? Cuz I don’t know. I don’t know anything anymore. Daddy’s in surgery fighting for his life and Annie’s in surgery too. Don’t you get it? There’s no rule book for this. I can’t tell you anything because I. Don’t. Know.”

Because they didn’t know. Death could happen at any second.

And his father would die thinking that his son hated him.

William gulped back a sob as he stared out the window. He couldn’t let people see anything. They couldn’t know the fear that strangled his heart right now, trying to drag him to the ground and keep him there. The regret that circled around him, haunting his thoughts. What if he did die? What if there was no chance to do things over again?

From behind him, a commotion started. He turned around to see a doctor enter the room, wearing a mask and gloves. He cleared his throat. “Hello, everyone. Some of you remember me from Piper’s accident. I’m here to inform you that your little sister is going to be just fine. Your dad got her back in time, and she’ll have no problem recovering. She’s sleeping right now but you’ll all be able to see her soon.”

“What about—” Ellie choked and turned away, her hand covering her mouth. William put his hand on her shoulder and squeezed.

“What about Daddy?”

“That…” the doctor shifted. “That’s a different story. He’s still in surgery, and he will be for a while.
But one of the bullets grazed two vital organs, and he lost a lot of blood. We’re doing our very best to keep him with us. The biggest thing is that he needs to keep wanting to live. We can’t save someone who doesn’t want to anymore."

“But he does.” Harper’s chin raised. “He does, because he has all of us.” Her hand gestured to everyone in the room. There were a lot. Besides the Queens—counting Felicity under that name—Thea and Roy sat in a corner, along with Laurel and Tommy. Diggle had Piper on his lap, and Lyla sat next to him. Donna, Raisa and Quentin Lance were there too. Everyone here because of Oliver. Because somehow, he’d touched each of these people’s lives.

“So if you have to yell or scream it in his ear, go ahead.” His sister continued, even though her lips trembled. “Because he has to make it.”

The doctor smiled and nodded. “I will remember that, Miss Queen.”

When the man left, William took a seat next to Felicity. Her blue dress had blood stains on it, and under her un-painted fingernails, there was more of it. “You can go wash it off if you want.”

“I don’t really want to leave.” She rubbed her hands against her legs and sniffed. “I should’ve done a better job. I could’ve prevented this all from happening, if I’d just—”

“None of this is happening because of you being bad behind a computer. In fact, the only reason Annie’s back is because of you. And I think…” he shrugged. “I think Dad would rather die than not be able to save her. Which I know is pretty rich coming from the guy who—oh my God.” He squeezed his eyes shut to hide the tears. “I—I—”

“Don’t think about it, William. Do not think about it.”

“Just leave me alone.” He jerked her hand off his shoulder and left the room. When he got outside and to a picnic table that the paparazzi hadn’t found yet, he allowed the tears to run. He’d been so wrong. About so many things.

But especially about what he’d said yesterday after Annie had been kidnapped.

He told his dad that it was his fault that another Queen would die. But he’d been so wrong.

This was happening now because of him. Because of William Queen. It wasn’t his father’s fault. No, it was his. All because he wanted to get revenge. To make his dad hurt.

“Oh, God.” With a loud sob that seemed to come from the darkest, deepest parts of his heart, William dropped his head down to the table. “I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry!” Annie would have a bullet scar on her leg because of him. They might be orphans because of him. And if his dad survived, what would happen with the trial? It wasn’t possible to win something like that, was it? Not even with the best lawyers in the world.

How could anyone ever forgive him for this? His little sister couldn’t; none of the other kids would be able to. Maybe not Felicity. And if Oliver did wake up, how could he honestly say ‘I forgive you’? It was his own son’s fault that they were in this situation.

I’m sorry, Daddy. The image of his father collapsing to the ground flashed through his brain. I’m sorry.

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Felicity sat in Annie’s room, watching her little girl take breaths on her own. Every few minutes
she’d moan, which should make her hurt, but today, knowing that Oliver was under a surgeon’s knife, fighting for his life, the moaning told her that one Queen would be okay.

Oliver would be okay too. It’d just take a lot longer.

Her brain kept replaying the scene a few hours earlier. William’s screaming. And despite the panic, knowing in the back of her head that she could have prevented this. Made sure that Oliver’s com wasn’t the only tracker. Insisted on him taking back-up. Yelled a little louder when she realized Oliver was near death. It would’ve been a minute earlier. Maybe it could’ve saved him from the horror of collapsing due to blood loss. At least saved all the Queen children from watching their father fall to the ground and not wake up, despite William’s screaming.

She could almost see his head spinning during the scene from a horror movie. As he realized that his dad might die. William had fallen back on the pavement as the medical team attached Oliver to an oxygen mask and blood, thanks to Diggle knowing what blood type he was. His eyes flitted to and from, from the medics, back to his dad, and then to the rest of his siblings, all surrounded their father, begging him to wake up.

“F-Felicity?”

“Yeah, honey?” She jerked herself into a ram-rod straight sitting position and forced a smile onto her face. “I’m glad you’re awake.”

“Are the…” Annie’s eyes flitted around the room. “Are the bad men gone?”

“Your dad—”

“Where’s Daddy?”

“Well, honey, that’s a—”

“Where. Is. Daddy?” Her squeeze cut off the circulation in Felicity’s hand. “Where is he? Because he was hurt. Really bad. Cuz he saved me. He saved me and I don’t want him to die!”

“Annie, Annie! It’s okay. Your dad’s alive. He’s in surgery right now. He’s gonna be okay.”

“G-Good.” She rubbed her eyes. “My leg hurts. I’m gonna be able to walk again, right?”

“You’ll be able to walk in a couple weeks. Sooner, if you get a miracle. And this family has gotten a lot of miracles in the past few months, so you never know.”

“We’re like the family of miracles, right?” Annie closed her eyes, but a smile stayed on her face. Felicity kissed her cheek. “Yeah, we really are.” And now they just needed one more. One more and they could figure out the rest, including the rest of the trial that had been postponed for as long as it took Oliver to recuperate.

She stepped out of the room to see Quentin and Thea talking. “Hey, what’s going on?”

“The SWAT team got back. With four dead bodies and one very excitable un-dead man.”

“Oliver…”

“Killed ‘em. It can be called self-defense. One man lay close to the chair where, according to the one who made it out alive, they held Annie. Two other men were scattered around with their guns laying next to them, and a man in the rafters, whom I can assume shot Oliver.”
A little while ago the idea of someone she cared about killing would’ve caused bile to rise, but now it brought a level of satisfaction that it shouldn’t have. But those men deserved it. “Did the guy say what happened?”

“Yeah.” Quentin shook his head and looked at Thea. “I don’t know what kind of man your brother is, but he’s one tough cookie.”

Thea crossed her arms as a wave of emotion washed over her face. “Well, he’s strong.”

“You can say that again. Anyways, Oliver came in from the roof, like you both know, and tranquilized one guy, who is the one who told me what happened. Apparently Oliver took his weapon so when he woke up, he just watched. Like a psychopath. Anyways, the man who was standing by Annie—Anatoly—pulled a gun on her. When he shot her, Oliver reacted and ran forward, only to get shot in the stomach.”

“That’s what we heard.”

“Yeah. Apparently Oliver begged Anatoly not to kill Annie, but he pulled the trigger anyways. Oliver jumped in front of the bullet and managed to kill Anatoly and the other three in the room before his body realized he’d been shot. Again.”

Felicity glanced in the direction of William, who caught her gaze and then looked away. He couldn’t hide the fact that he’d been crying. Her heart went out to him, but she couldn’t deal with that right now. “So Oliver killed members of the Bratva. Isn’t that exactly what he wasn’t supposed to do? Not that I’m judging, because I’m actually quite glad they’re dead, but isn’t that what Oliver couldn’t do? Kill a brother; the living brothers come after you?”

“Security around this hospital is prepared to kill anyone who tries to kill anyone in here, Felicity, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“Miss Smoak and Mrs. Harper?” Felicity whirled around to see the doctor standing there. She grabbed Thea’s hand and squeezed. “Uh…yes?”

“I am happy to report that Oliver has made it through the surgery.”

The entire room erupted into cheers. It sounded like the high school team won state. Tears flooded Felicity’s eyes. If only Oliver could see this. They were all here because of him, and this…he needed to see this. It would prove to him that he’d brought love to all these people’s lives. Because if he hadn’t, why would they be here, all screaming and jumping up and down? Piper wrapped her arms around the doctor’s waist and yelled her thanks. The man looked around, eyes wide. He peeled Piper off and cleared his throat. It took a few seconds, but everyone calmed down. “He is in a medically induced coma. We predict that it may take one to two days before he wakes up. I know you’re all excited, and rightfully so, because it didn’t look like he was going to make it at the beginning, but he’s not out of the woods yet. I don’t know if you all believe in miracles and all that, but it’s going to take one.”

“And we’ll get one. Right?” Ellie shared a look with Felicity before flashing a smile at the doctor. “Daddy’s gonna wake up and he’s gonna be fine.”

“Yeah, cuz it’s…” Piper shrugged. “Cuz it’s Daddy.”

“Then I think you can all assume that Oliver is going to make it. Everyone can go see him, but I would like you to keep it to a few minutes. He needs to rest. And young lady, no screaming.” The doctor winked at Piper. “Okay?”
“But he likes screaming. He even told me so.”

“Just not right now, sweetie.” Felicity put her hand on Piper’s head, knowing the emotional reaction would be coming soon if she didn’t put an end to it before it began. “Daddy needs to sleep.”

“He can sleep after I tell him how much I love him.”

William walked up to her and slid his hands into his pockets. “C-Can I, uh, go see him? By myself?”

“Go ahead. We can switch off in a little bit.” Did she dare hope that this tragedy would show William the true Oliver Queen? By the look on his face, and the tear tracks from earlier when he disappeared, forgiveness would happen. And Oliver would wake up to his son loving him again.

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He could do this. He needed to do this. Taking a deep breath, William stepped into the hospital room. He closed the door and leaned against it. And just stared.

Ever since he was a little boy, he always thought his dad was strong. One time, he punched a kid who told him that his dad was bigger and stronger. Some people could argue that it was little boy pride, but it had never gone away. Even in his hatred he knew how strong and how powerful a man his father was. Nothing could really hurt him. He was Oliver Queen. The billionaire guy who ran a ginormous company. No one could knock him down.

He didn’t look like that anymore.

William moved towards the hospital bed, swallowing back a sob as his eyes took in everything. Machines beeped, and above the bed some sort of something kept track of his heart rate. His dad had a breathing tube inserted, along with two tubes that ran from his nose. Several things of blood were attached to his wrists.

This was Oliver Queen. The man who would give everyone piggy-back rides throughout the mansion without breathing hard. And now a machine had to help him get a breath.

The man who would come in at four in the morning and tickle William until he woke up. They’d go fishing together. All day on Saturday, and if Mom would’ve allowed it, all day on Sunday too. And now…William dropped to the chair and stared at his dad. Couldn’t he move or something? Just twitch? Give him something to know that he wasn’t gone forever?

“Hey Daddy. Since I’m the first one in here I should tell you that Annie’s gonna be fine. She’s actually been awake, and the bullet is not gonna do anything to harm her. All because of you. Apparently you got her home before she was even in any danger.” If only they could say the same thing about him.

“Listen…” he let out a breath, but it came out as a sob instead. He squeezed his eyes shut and dropped his head to the edge of the bed. No words could come out right now. But he didn’t want to say anything. All he wanted to do was cry in his father’s arms like he used to do as a kid. But because of the stupid mistakes he made, he couldn’t. Because his dad was lying in a hospital bed, in a coma.

William squeezed his fists as the anger rushed at him. But for once it wasn’t anger towards anyone else. It was anger towards himself. And pain. The pain threatened to cut off his breathing. Why? That’s all he wanted to know; all he needed to know. Why? Why did he let himself get so caught up in his hate that he didn’t see what would eventually happen?
This. This would happen.

“I’m sorry.” He mumbled the words the first time, but after a moment he lifted his head. “I’m sorry, Daddy. I-I… I didn’t know. I thought that you were awful and you deserved to rot in prison, but I was so wrong. You’re… you’re not any of those things. You’re exactly the opposite. Because tonight, you sacrificed yourself for Annie. And you brought her back to us with two bullets in your stomach. That’s…” he grabbed Oliver’s hand and squeezed. “That’s not who I hated. Who I tried to hate.

“But now you’re here, and you might not wake up, and it’s all my fault. I was wrong. None of this was your fault. It’s mine. And I’m so, so sorry.” He looked up at him, still unmoving. The machines beeped every few seconds, and the heart rate monitor kept moving. “You gotta wake up. I need you. Okay? Because I’ve spent a quarter of my life despising you and I can’t do that anymore. If there’s one thing I’ve learned tonight… it’s that you don’t deserve to be in a prison. Or here. You deserve to get married again. To Felicity. You deserve to have all of us love you. Not… not to have me call Captain Lance and give him a recording.”

William dropped his head back onto the bed and closed his eyes. Maybe if he laid here for a while, maybe something would happen. Something good. For once. Maybe there’d be something to give him a little bit of hope.

And just like that, he squeezed his hand. In any other situation it couldn’t count as a squeeze—it almost felt like that time his ninety-eight-year-old great grandma gave him a hug—but it was like someone had just given him the biggest, best birthday or Christmas present ever. Life.

And a knowledge that at some point, his dad would wake up, and then he could apologize. And give his father the best gift ever by telling him how much he loved him.

“William.”

He looked back. Felicity stood there. “Hi.”

“Hey, buddy.” She joined him at the bed and squeezed his shoulder. “The doctor wants you to come out.”

“Seems like it’d be a better idea to stay in here.”

“I know, but it’s the doctor’s orders. And seeing that none of us know a thing about medical stuff—”

“I’m sorry.”

“What?” Felicity leaned down. “What’d you just say?”

“I’m sorry.” The words didn’t come out any louder than the first time, but Felicity heard them. Her eyes widened, and then softened. She pulled up another chair and as she sat down, she took his hands.

“There is nothing to apologize for, Willie.”

“No, there is. So much. We’re in this situation because I thought that it would be a good idea to hate Daddy. Yesterday I told him that Annie was kidnapped because of him, but it was really because of me. If I hadn’t turned him in, the Bratva never would’ve had the option to do anything like this. And now…” his voice went higher as the emotion got bigger in his chest. “Now he might never wake
“Oliver is going to wake up.”

“He looks like a dead person right now, Felicity! The only reason we know he’s alive is that heart rate thingy. And…”

“And what?”

“He, uh, squeezed my hand. It was really gentle, and it almost couldn’t count as anything but—”

Tears tracked down Felicity’s cheeks, but a smile spread across her face. “That should tell you all you need to know. Oliver’s saying that he’s gonna wake up. It just might take a while. Right, honey?” She stood up and planted a kiss on Oliver’s cheek. Her fingers played with his hair as she leaned in close to his ear. “I love you. And when you wake up and this stupid trial is finished, we’re gonna get married. And I promise I’ll wear all my short skirts.”

He didn’t know whether to smile or be completely mortified when the pressure on his hand happened again. After that last sentence. “Um, Felicity, you can stop talking now. Because I think, even in a coma, Daddy likes the thought of you wearing short skirts.”

“What?” She whapped his arm. “Be quiet.”

“You were the one who said it out loud.”

“Miss Smoak and Mr. Queen?” The doctor entered the room. “You’re three minutes past your allowed time.”

Felicity gave his dad one more kiss and then led to the way out. William dropped to a chair next to the door the lady who would eventually be his mom left the room. The idea of having her as a parent brought a smile to his face, despite the doom and gloom. Well, she would officially become their mom. She practically had been one since last July.

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It happened. The one thing she feared the most had happened, and jumping off a cliff seemed like a better way to deal with it. Felicity’s heels clicked on the tile floor as she walked to the area Diggle had gone to. Likely with Lyla. When she rounded the corner, she let out a little ‘thank God’ when they weren’t kissing. Not that they’d kiss in this type of situation, but couples had done grosser.

“He guys.”

“Hello, Felicity.” Diggle shifted away from Lyla to smile at her. “How’s Oliver?”

“He’s just laying there. With a breathing tube in his mouth.” She sank to the chair. “Never thought I’d see him like that. Then again, I didn’t think I’d see anything like this. Or ruin a second dress with someone’s blood. Or watch a man wearing a leather suit collapse. Or…anything. And I’m sorry I’m rambling. Anyways, we have bigger problems now. Which I realize is really saying something.”

“What’s wrong?” Diggle put his elbows on his knees. “And if this is about the Bratva—”

“A.R.G.U.S. has that handled.” Lyla finished the sentence for him.

“No, it’s not that. It’s William.”

“I think the trauma that they all experienced—”
“He realized what he did.”

“Oh, God.” Diggle dropped his head to his hands. No one said anything until he lifted his face. “So he’s forgiven him?”

“There was a lot of sobbing in the room, if that’s any indication. He’s going to blame himself. For all of this. He already is. And he doesn’t want Oliver to die because then he’d die thinking that he hated him. And John, I don’t know what to do.”

“Let Oliver deal with it.” Lyla glanced at Diggle, then at Felicity, her expression soft. Sometimes it was hard to understand how she could be such a violent, scary A.R.G.U.S. agent. “I have some experience in the area of forgiveness. And the best way to deal with it to let the person who was hated deal with it.”

“So we just…wait for Oliver to wake up?”

Diggle nodded along to Lyla’s words. “Because Oliver Queen understands better than anyone what it means to be forgiven.”

“And as soon as ’I’m sorry’ comes out of Willie’s mouth, Oliver’s gonna forgive him.” She could see how this could work. In the moments of grief and pain, her brain couldn’t function properly, but thankful some people could. Lyla and Dig were right; Oliver would forgive William because he’d been forgiven. “What do we do until he wakes up?”

“Make sure he knows that other people forgive him too.” Lyla caught Diggle’s look and smiled. “But you can never be truly set free until that person says it.”

“Sounds like you have some experience in this category.”

Diggle stood up and clapped his hands on his thighs. “I think you could say that.” When they both left, Felicity leaned back against the chair and closed her eyes. Everything ached, from the depth of her heart to her toes. Yesterday they all got up and the biggest worry was what horror would happen at the trial. Now they were all here, in the hospital—again—waiting to know if their lives would ever be the same.

The quick version of that answer was that they wouldn’t. Never. Normal went down the drain when she first walked into the Queen mansion last July. In fact, normal dissipated into the humid air when she picked up the phone and called Raisa. But for the rest of the family, normal had flown away a long time ago.

The long answer though…they needed to know if there would be any family left.

******

“Miss Smoak?” Quentin Lance came around the corner. “How is Oliver and Annie?”

Felicity closed her tablet, but not before she checked the time. 2:30. In the morning. They’d been here for almost a day, and she still hadn’t slept more than a few minutes. “Annie woke up a while ago, and she’s in pretty good spirits. Oliver, uh, is still comatose. He probably will be for a while.”

The police captain let out a deep breath. “Wow. Okay, if Annie’s awake, I’d like you to go in and ask her a few questions. They don’t have to be hard questions. We’d just like to hear her point of view, and I don’t want to scare her by bringing other people in the room. Could you do that?”

“Yes.” She drew her fingertips underneath her eyes. “I can do that. Thank you for all that you’re
“Especially after I arrested Oliver and drug him off to jail?”

“I was going to use nicer words, but yes.”

“Well, Felicity,” Quentin shrugged. “These past couple days have shown me a different side of Oliver Queen, and though I still believe he needs to brought to justice for some of the things he’s done, he certainly doesn’t deserve this, and his family doesn’t either.” He gave her a curt nod and headed back to where he came. Felicity sighed and walked to Annie’s room. When she peeked in, Ellie sat on the bed, telling an animated story to the giggling little girl.

“Hey, guys.”

“Hi!” Ellie tossed her a smile. “We were just finishing a story about—”

“About a prince and his princess!”

“Good.” Felicity walked to the bed and took a seat. “Ellie, could you give us a few minutes? If you’re done, that is.”

“I bet you can finish it.” Ellie squeezed Annie’s hand. “I’ll be back in a little bit for round four.”

“Thanks, Ellie.” Felicity scooted closer to the bed and smiled at Annie, who gave her a little smile. “Honey, I need to ask you a few questions. Do you think you can answer them?”

“There were bad people.”

“I know, but did they say anything weird? Or—”

“Daddy saved me. And he’s gonna die because of that, right?”

“No, no.” She tightened her grip on her little girl. “No, Annie, he’s not gonna die.”

“But he’s not waking up.”

Felicity closed her eyes, wincing when Oliver’s body morphed in front of her. Still, so close to death. Never mind that he hadn’t flatlined. In fact, the pressures on her hand had gotten stronger. He could breathe on his own now, meaning they took the breathing tube out. Every several minutes he’d moan, and then twitch as if he could feel the pain. He was coming out of the coma, yes, but how long would it take until he opened his eyes? What would happen after he did?

“Annie, he’s going to wake up. I promise.”

“Good.” She cuddled closer to her. “Cuz I really love him.”

“I know you do, sweetie. But it’s all gonna be okay.”

“Hey Felicity?”

“Yeah, sweetie?”

Annie touched the cast with one finger. “Do you think that boys are gonna like me even though I have a scar on my leg?”

“Aww, honey.” Tears filled her eyes. “No, no, no. Sweetheart, you know what I think?” she put her
hand around the cast, gently so that Annie felt no pain. Her other hand caressed her little girl’s cheek.
“I think boys are gonna think that you, young lady, are even tougher than you look. Not many girls can make it through what you went through. And someday, when you’re grown up and you’re ready to meet some really handsome guy—”

“Like Daddy?”

“Yeah, like your dad.” She smiled. “And when you meet a guy who’s like him, and he sees that scar, he’s gonna realize how strong you are, and he’s gonna love that about you. And he’s gonna especially love that scar.”

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“Why do you keep staring out the window like one of those people in the movies?” Felicity laughed when Harper spoke, but she didn’t turn around. “Which I realize basically is what you’re doing right now. We’re all doing it.”

“Sorry, sweetie. I just like looking out the window and imagining things.” Happier things. Not them all crowded in the hospital room, playing Monopoly, waiting for Oliver to wake up. Felicity turned around and surveyed the scene. The kids sat on the floor, the board game in the middle. Annie was sleeping in another room with Thea and Roy watching over her. It’d been almost two days since they came in here, and by any of the signs lately, it would be a lot longer until they left. Ellie looked up at Felicity and smiled.

“You can go sleep if you want.”

“No, I’d rather stay here. But all of you should go sleep.”

“No!” Clayton shook his head. “I don’t want to leave.”

“I know. But we don’t know when he’s going to wake up. It could be in ten minutes but it could also be in three days.”

“B-But he’s been moving a little bit.”

“Which means he’s waking up. But it might take some time. The room upstairs is all ready for sleeping children, and I think you should all at least try to get some rest. I’ll stay up for a while and then when I get ready to pass out, I’ll come and get one of you so Oliver isn’t alone. Sound good?”

With Ellie leading the group, each of the kids said goodbye to her and then to Oliver. Felicity took a seat next to his bed and pulled out her tablet and opened skype. Barry picked up and raised his computer to his face. “Hey, Felicity. You look exhausted, but don’t get mad at me for saying that because you’re understandably very stressed. How is everything going there?”

She turned her tablet towards Oliver. “Like that.”

“Oh, Felicity, I’m so sorry. Is there anything I can do?”

“Barry, you can barely walk, let alone speed over here and give me a hug.”

His jaw clenched when he nodded. “Still, I wish I could do something to make you feel better.”

“Maybe tell me that you and Iris are married?”

“I think we realized a while ago that you would be getting married first.”
“Oh, no. Did something happen?”

“I’ve been extra snippy lately. That hasn’t helped at all.”

She gave him her best mama-is-so-disappointed look. “Barry.”

“You can’t criticize me. You haven’t had a love life for…oh, wait. Never mind. I forgot about you and Oliver. Which makes this whole situation even worse.”

“If you think that this situation is sadder because of my love for Oliver, you’re wrong. The big problem right now is that William realized that he doesn’t hate Oliver and he’s begun blaming himself for everything. Annie’s worried that when she’s older, guys won’t like her because of the bullet scar, Oliver’s still not waking up, the Bratva—”

“Hey, Felicity?”

“I’m sorry, Barry.”

“No, that’s not the problem. Before you go off on everything that sucks, which I agree, there’s a lot, why don’t you tell me all the good things that have happened.”

“William’s forgiven Oliver. Annie’s safe. Oliver’s still breathing. Someone fairly high up in the Bratva is dead.” She took a deep breath and focused on Barry, not on the unconscious man lying a foot away from her. “The biggest one is that Willie has forgiven Oliver.” Tears welled in her eyes. There had been so many months of hate. Disgust. Blame. And it took two bullets to the stomach and bleeding out on the pavement for that to change.

Blessings did come from pain sometimes.

“Uh, are you off in your dream world right now or should I just, like, hang up?”

“Oh! Sorry. Yeah, I’m good now. Thank you, Barry. You go and apologize to Iris, okay? Love you.” She set her tablet down and leaned forward. “Hey, Oliver. We’re all alone in here because I sent all the kids to bed. So that’s why it’s so quiet. Obviously.”

She took his hand, wincing at the freezing temperature of it. She’d warm it up. Warm him up. Her eyes hurt. Too much crying. Too many hours not sleeping. Felicity laid her head on the bed, cherishing the feeling of the softness. Who said that the hospital beds weren’t nice to sleep on? At least they were for a person who hadn’t slept in over twenty-four hours. “Goodnight, Oliver. Or good morning. I don’t know. Either way, I love you.”

She could feel someone’s eyes on her. And not in a bad way. Especially because someone had his hands in her hair. Felicity lifted her head and smiled. Oliver eyes lit up, and a weak smile spread across his face. Her heart rate spiked, but it didn’t wipe away the sleepiness right away. “How long have you been awake?”

“Long enough to know that you’re really pretty.” The words came out in a whisper, but they were words. And oh, they were so beautiful. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she sat up straighter and leaned in closer.

“It’s good to see you awake. It’s been a…long while with you laying here. Looking mostly dead. But you aren’t anymore. How come I didn’t hear you wake up?” Not that she knew how people
came out of comas, but didn’t they normally gasp or something?

“I got trained a long time ago to do things quietly.”

“And waking up softly from a coma is one of them?”

“You were sleeping pretty hard.”

No use arguing with that one. Her eyes tracked down his body to his abdomen. “How are you feeling?”

Clouds gathered in his eyes. “There’s a lot of things I’ve learned to hide.”

“Oh, I’ll get the—” she sat back down when he shook his head. “What?”

“I don’t want doctors in here yet.”

“You scared of them?”

“Is Annie okay?”

Okay, yep, he feared doctors. Felicity hid a smile. “She’s okay. She’s enjoying all the attention the nurses are giving her.”

“But she’s okay?”

“She’s okay, Oliver. You got her back in time. She’s gonna be just fine. All because of you.”

“I think…” he winced, and the muscles in his jaw and forehead twitched. “That’s debatable.”

“I think I’m gonna get the doctor. And don’t pretend you’re not in pain, because your hiding methods only work with males and not with women.”

Oliver squeezed his eyes shut and nodded. Felicity squeezed his hand and then stood up. A glance out the window brought the tears to her eyes. To the east, a glimmer of the sun poked out and shined up into the sky. “Hey, Oliver. Open your eyes. And look out the window.” When his heard turned towards the light, she leaned over the bed. “Kinda ironic, huh?”

“Technically I was awake before that started.”

“Way to ruin it.”

He smiled.

“The thing is, Oliver, you’re gonna get a nice surprise in a little bit. And I got a really nice surprise to wake up to you being alive. I think…” Stop crying, Felicity. “I think today could be described of a dawning of a new day here. And I know that was dramatic, but I’ve had a really rough—”

“What’s the surprise?”

“I’m going to get the doctor now.” She left the room and bumped into their doctor just as she rounded the corner. “Oh! Hi. Oliver woke up.”

The man’s eyes widened. “Wow. How is he?”

“Lucid. And he’s in pain, though he’s doing a good job hiding it. If I were a male.” The man’s
eyebrows went up. Felicity winced. Could she ever phrase anything right? “Sorry. I mean, he’s not capable at hiding the pain from me. A female. But you should probably come in there. Please.”

“Right behind you, Miss Smoak. I’m going to get everything I need.”

Felicity nodded and went back into the room. “Hey, Oliver?”

“I’m not dead, if that’s what you’re worried about.” He didn’t turn his head to look at her though. Felicity moved to the bed and took a seat.

“The doctor’s coming in, and then he’ll get that pain settled down. I think. That’s what you call that, right?”

“I don’t want painkillers.”

“Oliver, your eyes are red. You need drugs.”

“If I’m on drugs—”

“Lyla and the cops and A.R.G.U.S. are taking care of all that. You do not need to worry about not being drugged up. You can be drugged up and not feel anything. Or maybe you feel something drugged up. I don’t know. But the doctor is coming in here and he’s gonna put painkillers in you.”

“Hello, Oliver.” The doctor walked in just as Oliver opened his mouth to likely argue. “How’re you feeling?”

“I’m…fine.”

“Ahh, the manly words when there’s a lady in the room.” He chuckled as he looked over vitals and whatever. She didn’t need to know what he was looking at. All she cared about was that Oliver was looking at her, and despite the pain in his eyes, he was smiling. How he could do that, she did not know. She’d be on the floor, sobbing, by now if she were the one with bullet wounds. Or any wound. How could she ever handle having a baby? Focus, Felicity.

Alright, Oliver. I put a weak dose of painkillers into your system. You’ll begin to notice a difference in a few minutes, and then we’ll analyze the level of pain you’re in after that. Your vitals are going back to normal. Everything is looking good.” He shared a smile with Felicity. “I think it’s safe to say that miracles still happen today.”

Oliver’s eyes flitted to Felicity. “Miracles?”

“You needed quite the miracle to live, Mr. Queen.” The doctor smiled at them. “But it looks like you got one, because I can confidently say that you will make a full recovery.”

“Can I go get the kids?”

“If you give them a lecture beforehand that they are not allowed to jump on him.”

Felicity waved her hand. “They would never do that.” The man leveled a glare at her. “Okay, they would. I will let them know that. I’ll be back in a second, Oliver.” She ran all the way up two flights of stairs and down the hall to the room the Queens had taken over. “Hey guys!”

“What the heck, Felicity?” William, who had chosen the floor with a few blankets underneath him, sat up. Clayton, who must’ve slept next to him but had burrowed underneath the blankets, sat up and slid his glasses on his nose. The girls all mumbled similar words to their brother. Clearly they had
needed a night’s sleep.

“Oliver—”

Piper screamed and jumped out of bed. Before Felicity could grab her, she slipped past and ran down the hall. “Guys! Everyone needs to…” Yeah, nope. She couldn’t do anything about this. Felicity sighed when Harper went past her, soon followed by Clayton, who wore a blanket around his shoulders. The doctor spoke correctly when he told her to tell the kids they couldn’t jump on Oliver.

Ooooh, boy.

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It had been four minutes and the pain still hadn’t gone away. Not that he’d expected it to, but he’d hoped that the meds would’ve dulled it a little bit. Maybe this was how Annie used to feel when she complained of cramps during her period. If so, he owed the entire population of women an apology. Because this hurt. And though he’d never show it, the urge to cry was imminent.

He’d gotten a miracle, according to the doctor and Felicity. Who’d fallen asleep with her head on the bed. The first thing he saw when he opened his eyes was her hair, sprawled on his hand. He’d never seen her sleep—the time in the closet didn’t count—and boy oh boy did she look like an angel. A slightly deranged angel—she drooled—but it made him smile nonetheless. And it took his mind off the pain.

A scream echoed in the hallway. Not a scream of pain or terror. He knew those. And this was definitely not one of those. Mostly because they didn’t include ‘Daddy’s awake!’ in them. The door flew open and Piper burst into the room, her high-pitch screaming continuing as she ran towards the bed. And she wasn’t slowing down.

She was gonna jump on him. The doctor, who’d been in the corner, writing his notes on a computer, yelled, “No, no, no, no!” and ran to block Piper, just as Oliver freed his arm from under the blanket and raised both of them. His daughter shoved—yes, shoved—the doctor away, and fell on top of Oliver. He winced when the movement jarred his stomach, but it didn’t cause pain. Just a little hurt.

“You’re awake. You’re awake, and you’re gonna be okay.” Piper cried against his shoulder, just as Harper came flying up to the bed. Clayton bonked into her, and she nearly fell on top of him.

The doctor looked ready to have a heart attack.

“It’s okay.” He accepted Harper’s hug from the other side, sending up a silent ‘thank you’ when she stayed away from the wounds. “I’m okay.”

“Y-You…nearly died.” Harper sniffed. Right in his ear. “We had to sit in the waiting room for six hours while you were in surgery.”

“But I’m okay now.” He tousled her hair. “I promise.”

“Daddy!”

“Please!” The doctor raised his voice. “You are going to kill either him or me with the almost-jumping-on-the-patient antics.” He looked at Felicity, who’d just entered the room, with exasperation. “I thought I asked you to tell them not to do anything crazy.”

“They, uh, ran out of the room before I could say anything. Sorry. Are you okay, Oliver?”
“Just fine.” He smiled at his oldest, who’s chin quivered. “Hey, sweetie.”

“Well, the suckiest part of this situation is that Felicity can’t see your abs for a little while since they’re all bandaged up.”

Oliver choked, and then coughed. Both of them hurt to do, but the pain was masked by the fact that Felicity’s face had turned bright red, and his oldest son stood next to her, a giant grin on his face.

“William!” Felicity whacked his arm. “That is the most inappropriate thing I have ever heard you say.”

“You were the one who told Daddy that you were gonna wear all your short skirts around him in front of me. Don’t worry, Dad; you reacted to that one really nicely.”

Why William was in here, and acting like this? Felicity said…that, and he—oh, dear God. “What’d I do?” People couldn’t talk in comas, right?

“Squeezed my hand.”

Oliver glanced at Felicity, who nodded. His eyes moved to William, who grinned at him. Something that hadn’t happened in years. He was missing something. A lot, actually. His son had been in here talking to him. And holding his hand. Felicity had been appropriately talking dirty to him. One day and everything had changed.

“You know what we haven’t seen yet?” Ellie’s eyes twinkled as she switched her gaze between him and Felicity. “You two kiss.”

“No.” Felicity crossed her arms. “Not something you need to see.”

“Come on.” Harper used her whiny voice. “Kiss.”

“Do it, do it, do it, do it!” Piper bounced up and down. “Please?”

“Okay.” A smile teased Oliver’s lips. He used his hand to beckon Felicity over, and then looked around the room at the kids and sent them a glare. “But just one, and then no more pressure.”

“I thought you said that we’re not supposed to give into peer pressure.”

“Yes, but you’re younger than both of us. Plus, I want to kiss her. So there’s no such thing as pressure.” He winked at Felicity, who smiled and leaned down. The kids all cheered. He couldn’t help but grin, which messed up the kiss a little bit. Never would he have imagined his kids all screaming and clapping after he kissed the nanny. His grin widened.

He’d fallen in love with his kids’ nanny.

When Felicity pulled away, he kept her close by intertwining his hands in her hair. “I love you.”

She gave him one more peck on the lips. “I love you too.”

“Well, it’s about time we got to see that happen.” Ellie clapped her hands. “Does that—”

“Not mean you get to have a boyfriend.”

“I was not going to ask that.”

“I know, but that’s not happening. And since you’re probably curious, the Flash is taken, and way
“Too old for you.” Her eyes flitted to Felicity, and then to the window. Oliver groaned internally. She and Thea had gone exploring, hadn’t they? Figured out who wore the red mask. Something that Felicity couldn’t know about.

“Alright, guys. Let’s let your dad rest for a little while.” Felicity waved her hand to the door. “Go eat some breakfast and shower. Maybe put some clothes on. Not that you don’t…just go and do something.”

When they left the room, she took his hand. “How’re you feeling?”

“I’ll be okay.”

“Is that macho Oliver speaking or the truth?”

“When you make me laugh, it really hurts.”

“Sorry.” She bit her lip. “I just want to love a guy who doesn’t have to hide things from me.”

Barry being the exception, hopefully. “The only difference between me and anyone else is that I can function better when in pain. It still hurts, but that’s all. Don’t worry. Like the doctor said, I got a miracle, and I’m gonna be okay.”

“Good.” She went quiet for a few heartbeats before she tapped his hand. “I think you should tell them.”

“What?”

“The baby.”

Oliver muttered a swear word. “No.”

“It’s a perfect opportunity to do it. Whenever that trial starts, there’s a chance it comes out and we both do not want that to come out like that. Plus…” she fingered his palm, tracing the scar from that came from blocking a knife a long time ago. “One of the kids already knows.”

“What?”

“Harper. She overheard me telling John about it, because, uh…I’ll let your sister explain that. That’s when she decided to come see you.”

“Because of the baby.” Oliver closed his eyes. He’d guessed that there was something behind Harper coming to see him, besides wanting to see him. That didn’t just happen. Plus, she hadn’t even known about being forced to join the Bratva. “She never told me.”

“I’m not surprised. I think she just realized that she had to move on and bring her math. But the kids deserve to know. Then there’s no more secrets between you and them. It’s gonna hurt them, yes, but then you don’t have to worry about it anymore.”

“What if they decide that I’m not to be trusted because I hid that secret?” Oliver stared out the window. “Because I hid it for five years. Six, now. And…I don’t know if I can handle telling them. And what if they can’t?”

“Oliver, you made me not tell them about the Bratva and such for four months and it turns out that they handled that just fine. So maybe you should tell them and just go with it. And I’ll be here. But I’m not telling them. You need to.”
“Is that your version of a pep talk?”

“That or, I don’t know, wedding vows. The latter I’m kidding about. Which reminds me, you need to rest. You are not in very good shape right now and I’m not talking about your abs.”

“Don’t worry, those are intact.”

She punched his arm. “Considering you nearly died a day and a half ago, you are quite the flirt.”

“Are you saying I should stop?”

“I’m going to get the doctor and he’s going to drug you up so you can sleep.” She tossed him a smile over her shoulder as she left the room. A few minutes the doctor came in, and put more drugs into his system, and told him to count backwards from ten. It took four seconds before everything faded to black, but that was still time for four questions.

Did Ellie figure it out?

Would the kids make it through finding out about the baby?

What about the trial?

And why did William even venture into the room?

He opened his eyes to see his son looking at him. Nothing hurt. In fact, he couldn’t feel anything. “What’d…what’d they do?”

“You were moaning and groaning a lot so the doctor guy drugged you up on whatever you call that drug so you can’t feel anything for a while. And he told us that we had to tell you that that does mean that you can move around and sit up.” William’s hand shot out as Oliver made a move to attempt to push himself up to a sitting position. “He also said that he’d strap you down to the bed if you did.”

“He doesn’t really seem like the kind of guy who’d do that.” Though Felicity would. William laughed. Oliver gave him son the side-eye. “Did I say that out loud?”

“You did. And you’re right; Felicity would do that.” His smile disappeared. “Uh, can we talk? And not about any of that.”

“You came in and talked to me when I was in a coma, didn’t you?”

William took a deep breath. “Yeah. And I’m guessing you didn’t hear any of it, because you’re looking at me with a really weird look on your face.”

“It’s just that…” Oliver licked his lips. They were cracked. He should’ve checked that before he started kissing Felicity. “When I left to get Annie, you were pretty clear on the fact that this was all my fault.”

“But then you got back.”

What on earth had happened when he got back? Had he flatlined? Was that the problem? Oliver shook his head. “I don’t really remember anything, William. I remember giving Annie to Felicity, but that’s it. I don’t know how I got back to the court house and I certainly don’t remember anything after I knew she was safe.”
“They didn’t realize you were hurt. Well, they probably did, but given the fact that you’re…either way, they handcuffed you and you took four steps before you collapsed.” He looked up at the ceiling as tears flooded his eyes. “And the doctors had to put an oxygen mask on you and put you on a stretcher. And then we had to sit out there for six hours before they came out and asked if we believed that miracles still happen today. So that’s basically what happened.”

He’d been close to death before, but never that close. “I’m sorry I put you all through that.”

“No, I’m sorry.”

Oliver’s forehead crinkled. “For what? Cuz you don’t really—”

“Think back a few months.”

“Son, you don’t need to—”

“No, I do, Dad.” For a few seconds, nothing came out of his mouth, and when he found his voice again, the words sounded like a cry. A cry for help. “I do.”

Oliver closed his eyes for a moment to collect himself. He needed that heartbeat to cherish the apology, and then put it aside. Because he knew what came next. He’d dealt with it before too, and now he—with the help of Felicity and Diggle and others—would have to help William through it.

“I turned you in. I’m responsible for everything that’s happening right now. What will happen. All because I was stupid and angry and…awful. I recorded you and gave Captain Lance the tape, and then just stood there when he dragged you off to prison. I was the one who caused this. It wasn’t you. It wasn’t you! It was all my fault!”

“Hey, hey.” Oliver put his hand on his son’s shoulder, and refused to move it, even though he tried to pull away. Like father, like son, apparently. “This is not your fault. Okay? It’s not your fault. You might’ve turned me in, but I was the one who made that call a long time ago. I didn’t know it, but… William, I dug my grave—all of our graves—the moment I accepted the Bratva’s offer.”

“But you didn’t…accept it.”

“I—”

“No. If there’s one thing that I realized the past couple days is that you would do anything to protect us. Most people…they would’ve laid down on that warehouse floor and never got up. But you did, and you managed to get a six-year-old home. With two bullets in your stomach.” William leaned forward, the intensity in his eyes reminding him of Annie. How she would knock down his bull-crap with a lecture.

“You didn’t accept the offer. You were forced to. And…” William shook his head as tears fell down his cheeks. “You gave up your freedom for us. I know I said differently for the past five months and I’ve hated you for the past five years, but…what you did kept us alive. We’re safe because you said that yes to those awful people. And the Hood…you saved a lot of lives. And the people you killed…they were bad people. So thank you.

“And, uh, I just want you to know that I forgive you. I think I know how it awful it is to have to sit in a prison and know that your child hates you, so I want you to know that. I forgive you for lying to us, and I forgive you for—”

“William.” Oliver caught his son as he fell forward into his arms. Never mind the sudden pain in his side. He just closed his eyes and treasured the hug. Like when his five-year-old boy would have a
bad dream and come flying into the bedroom, screaming about ‘fishies’ and bad sharks trying to eat him. Oliver would tell Annie to go back to sleep and pull his little boy up onto the bed and hold him until he fell back to sleep.

It felt like that now, ten years later, with William practically laying on the bed, his head on Oliver’s chest, sobbing. Oliver cupped his hand on the back of his head and let him cry. It wasn’t two in the morning, and these weren’t tears of terror about sea creatures. But William was still his little boy, and he still needed to know his daddy was here for him. “I forgive you, buddy.”

“I-I turned you in.”

“That doesn’t matter. I know why you did it, and it’s alright. It’s okay.”

“I don’t know…” William lifted his head to look at him. “You really shouldn’t forgive me.”

Oliver chuckled. “Maybe not. But the thing is…” he gulped back a sob. “You all forgave me for what I did, and I did far worse. Why wouldn’t I forgive you for doing an eighth of what I did? Plus,” not crying wasn’t an option right now, “You’re my son. I’ve watched you grow since you were in your mom’s stomach.” He tousled William’s hair, which drew a broken laugh from him. “There’s no way I wouldn’t forgive you. And listen, buddy, you gotta let go of all of it. Don’t be like me and carry around guilt and all of that for years because trust me when I say it’s not a good life.”

When William sat up, Oliver leveled his gaze at him. “You’ve been forgiven and that means you need to forgive yourself. That make sense?”

“Yeah.”

Oliver drew in a deep breath. Felicity’s words echoed in his head about telling the kids. Now was the time to do it. Lay everything out and hope that they could handle it. “Hey, William, can you go get everyone else and tell them to come in here? I need to tell you all something.”

“Are you dying?”

“No, I am not dying. I just need to tell everyone something.”

“O-Okay.” He cast him a weird look but left the room. A couple minutes later, four of the kids came in. Felicity came in behind William, who pushed Annie’s wheelchair. The littlest smiled and waved.

“Hi, Daddy! I got out of bed before you did! Though…” she looked up at William, her brows furrowed. “You did get a little more hurt than I did.”

“Hey, honey.” He smiled at her. “How’re you doing?”

“My leg hurts a little bit, but I’m gonna get all better. And I get to have my own scar. Right, Felicity?”

“Yes, sweetie, you do.” Felicity tapped Annie’s nose as she glanced at Oliver. He nodded. She smiled.

“Are you okay, Daddy?” Ellie sat down on the couch opposite the bed. “You aren’t like, dying, are you?”

“I promise I’m fine.”

“Okay, so then what do you need to tell us? William made it sound like it was urgent.”
Oliver looked at Harper, who shrugged. “There’s one more thing that I need to tell you all. One of you already knows it.” His daughter bit her lip and looked down at the ground. “It’s about something that happened five years ago. Or…more like something that didn’t happen. I avoided telling all of you because I knew how much it would hurt me, but Felicity pointed out that you not knowing would just cause more problems.”

He took another deep breath, wincing when his abdomen started pulsating pain. “Your mom and I…” Please let this go well. Please. “We were expecting a baby.”

It took three seconds. He knew because he counted. Ellie and Piper burst into tears, while the boys just stared at him. It took three more seconds for Clayton to start crying, followed by William. Annie looked around the room, lost. Harper didn’t react; just stared out the window. Oliver looked at Felicity, who gave him a reassuring nod. “I’m so sorry I didn’t tell you sooner. I just…” his voice cracked. “I couldn’t. I didn’t want you to know because I knew it would be like losing—”

“Like losing a sibling,” Ellie whispered. She looked at Harper. “You knew?”

“I overheard Felicity—”

“You knew about this?”

“I accidentally stumbled upon it a while ago.”

Ellie closed her eyes. “How…how far along was she?”

“Six weeks or so. We found out a few days before and we were, uh,” Oliver looked up at the ceiling. Help. “We were planning on telling you the day she died.”

Annie looked around the room, lost. “So I wasn’t supposed to be the littlest?”

He tried to say ‘no’, but his voice cut off. It took him a few seconds before he whispered, “No, you weren’t, honey.”

At that, Ellie ran out of the room; her sobs could be heard down the hallway. Oliver dropped his head back against the pillow, and winced. The painkillers were beginning to wear off, and it brought back the agony of the bullet wounds, and the agony in his heart wasn’t helping with anything. Someone squeezed his hand. When he opened his eyes, William looked at him. Piper stood behind him.

“Hey, Daddy?” His second littlest scooted in front of her brother. “I have one question.”

“Yeah, sweetie?”

“Now that we know…can we have a little funeral for the baby? Maybe—”

“Maybe we can bury…him or her next to Mama.” Clayton looked at William, his chin trembling. “Seems like it’d be a good thing to do.”

His dad had told him a long time ago that there would be days of hardship. Days when life dragged a person to the ground and tried to keep him there. But, he’d told him as they worked on an English paper together, the worst days would be when you could do nothing about some else’s pain. Back then, with only fifteen years on his life, Oliver had laughed him off. But then his parents died and he endured years of putting his sister to bed, singing songs to her to keep her from crying herself to sleep.
And today those words his father had told him came rushing back. He could do nothing to stop the pain in his children’s faces. In their hearts. He knew how they felt; his heart ached every day for the very reason. But there was no remedy for pain like this. Nothing that he could say that would bring any healing to their souls. Right now at least. This moment was a time for grieving. A time to let anger out. To scream at the wind and ask ‘why’. He knew how it worked, because he’d dealt with it too.

The only difference is that when he dealt with the pain, he’d been alone.

This time, they would go through this process together.

Oliver looked past his daughter who had her head on his legs, crying, to Felicity, who formed her pretty, pink lips into a smile and nodded at him.

They would get through this as a family.

In fact, they wouldn’t just get through this. They’d get through the trial. The aftermath of that. Whatever came next. No one would be alone in this. Not even him, the man who deserved no love. No wife. Nothing.

Somehow, he’d done something good. Something that made them all stay.

His children wouldn’t be alone. Neither would Felicity.

And he wouldn’t be either.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed it!!! It took a lot of dramatic music to write this, but I made it. Hopefully I made a few people cry. :) The last part was very close to my heart, and there will be more story with that in the next chapter. But my favorite part was any part with William. (Hopefully everyone can forgive him now!) There’s been a lot of hatred for his dad, but he's finally realized everything he has done for him and his siblings. Quick question: how do people feel about a sequel? I've been starting to plan the first part out, and I was curious about how people would enjoy that. So please let me know!!!! :)
“If I fall, will you catch me?”

Oliver grunted as he leaned back against the workout equipment. When Annie continued to stare at him with wide eyes, he shook himself out of the pain and focused on his daughter. “I will catch you if you fall, but you can walk almost perfectly now. I don’t think you’re gonna fall.” In fact, if anyone fell, it would be him. The three weeks since the near-death experience had proven that his body could only handle so much before it didn’t work right anymore.

“Okay, but you gotta watch me carefully cuz I don’t wanna fall. Actually,” she scooted closer to him. “Can you walk beside me? That way no one can hurt me.”

“Alright, sweetie.” He put his hands on the outside of his thighs and pushed himself up. “But we gotta go slow.”

“Cuz Daddy is very weak.” She tipped her head and smiled. “Right?”

He chuckled. “Right.”

They spent two minutes walking the rehab center’s walkway before Felicity came in. She wore her ‘CEO clothing’, as she described it. Clothes that he bought her. Oliver帮助Annie sit in her wheelchair and moved to give Felicity a kiss. “How was work?”

“Ah, thrilling. Not really, but I’m going to say that so that you don’t get stressed because the doctor said that—”

“Felicity.”

Her lips puckered. “Yes?”

“I can see it in your eyes. What happened?”

“First, let’s sit down.”

“No, it’s okay. If I sit down, that means I have to get up.”

Her hand rested on his still-bandaged abdomen. Oliver smiled as her fingers warmed the pain away. He clasped her hands and pulled her closer to him. “Are there any people I need to go beat up or did you take it initiative and hack them to death already?”

“Actually, it was just some problems I had with a computer. No one came in today, besides Jerry. I’m just…stressed. How was your day?”

“You mean in the hospital corridor that I’m not allowed to leave? We watched movies. Figured that with the trial starting in a couple days that we might as well do something fun instead of rehab the entire time.”

She nodded. “You ready for that?”

“I just need it to be over with. I’m tired of being here with a band around my ankle and guards
walking around. Either go back to prison or go home.”

“Well, let’s hope that it’s a verdict of ‘go home’.” She patted his chest before moving past him to Annie. “Hey, honey. How’s everything feeling?”

“Better than Daddy looks right now.” She flashed him a sweet smile and turned her attention back to Felicity. “We walked together so that if something happened, he could protect me. Even if he is a little hurt. But he can keep me safe no matter what. Right, Daddy?”

Someday, someway, the Bratva would pay for what they did to his daughter. Because of their actions, she couldn’t sleep alone; she refused to be alone in a room during the day. Any little out-of-the-ordinary sound brought her to tears. Oliver clenched his fists but channeled a smile for his little girl. “Yeah, honey. I’m gonna keep you safe. And no one’s gonna hurt you ever again.”

“Good.” She grabbed Felicity’s hand. “Because I only want one scar to show my guy when I grow up.”

He really did not want to know. Mostly because Felicity and his six-year-old exchanged a smile. What kind of things did she talk to his kids about? They all seemed to share secrets with her. Whenever they sat around and ate together, they were always giggling with her. At one point, she said something in a different language and all the kids laughed. Of course it happened to be one of the languages he couldn’t speak or understand.

“Oliver, did you hear me?”

“Uh, no. What?”

“I was asking if you have a suit for the trial.”

“Someone brought one from the house. The rest someone has.” Once the trial started, he’d be released from the hospital and spend the nights in his cell. First time in almost three weeks. He almost missed it. There he knew exactly where he could be; the bars on the windows and doors took care of that. Here, the only thing that stopped him from leaving the hallways or even the hospital was the pain in his stomach. And the cops downstairs.

“What did the doctors say today when they ran the tests?”

“That I’m recovering. Faster than most people who got shot in the stomach twice.” Probably because no one else ever survived an ordeal like that.

“So you should be happy. Not all mopey.”

“I’m not being mopey.” When she cocked her head, he rolled his eyes. “Okay, maybe a little bit. I have a lot on my mind right now.”

“Have you talked to Ellie at all?”

“She hasn’t said much to me, besides saying that she’s not mad. Which is apparently something teenage girls say.” Oliver shrugged and put his hand on a post to steady himself. “I missed so much that I never realized how…stubborn she can be.”

Felicity fingered with the sleeve of his sweatshirt and mumbled, “She gets it from her dad.”

“Excuse me?”
“Oh, did you hear me?” She puckered her lips and looked up at him with a teasing light in her eyes. She’d done this often as of late. Given him her cutest looks to distract him from the physical and emotional pain and terror he felt. He knew she was trying to distract him, but it always worked. Oliver let go of the post and slipped his arms around her lower back and pulled her as close as he could without endangering his stomach.

“You think I’m stubborn?”

“You bought me an entire wardrobe of clothes after I slammed the door in your face and told you no.”

“Clothes that you are wearing right now, so you’re welcome.”

“This outfit is ugly.”

“I think it’s cute.” He glanced back at Annie, who didn’t seem to be listening. “A little sexy, too.”

“Hmmm.” She tugged her shirt—peplum top, because he knew things—before giving him a flirty grin. “You did a pretty good job with the outfits.” She gave him a peck on the lips that elicited a moan from someone at the doorway. Oliver pulled away and peeked around her head. “Hey, Willie. Everything okay?”

“Thrilling, after seeing that.”

“Oh, that wasn’t even the steamiest of the kisses—I’m going to stop talking.”

“That would be my preference.” With wide eyes, William shot Felicity a look before he looked at Oliver. “I’ve already got this figured out with Carly, so you can’t stop me, but I thought you’d like to know ahead of time. I’m gonna do one of those testimony of characters things at the trial.”

Of all the things he’d expected William to say, that wasn’t on the list. Just because he’d forgiven him didn’t mean that he would be willing to sit at the witness stand and be cross-examined. Oliver took a deep breath and steadied himself against Felicity. “You don’t have to do that.”

“No, I’d like to. Carly said it would help, and since I was the one who put us into this situation, I want to at least give you a chance to get out of it.”

At least they’d moved from ‘this is all my fault’ to ‘I put us in this situation’. Oliver smiled. “Okay. That…that means a lot.”

“Good.” He flashed him a grin and left. Felicity let out a sigh and moved to stand in front of Oliver again. “Well, would you look at that. Three weeks ago you were wondering if he would ever come around, and now he’s gonna change that trial big time.”

“Now I just gotta talk to Ellie.”

“She’ll be okay. It’s a lot to deal with. But maybe you should talk to her.”

“I’m not very good at that, especially with someone who’s almost an adult.”

“Sometimes a girl needs her dad. Trust me; I would know.” Felicity patted his arm and turned to Annie, who still sat in her wheelchair, just watching them. “Shall we go get something to eat? After all of that work, you’re bound to be hungry.”

“I don’t like hospital Jell-O.”
“I don’t either.” When Felicity pushed Annie out of the room, Oliver grabbed his phone and texted Ellie. *You around the hospital?* Two minutes later, his phone rang. “Hey, honey.”

“Hi, Dad. I’m down in the cafeteria. Me and Harper are.”

“Can we talk?”

“Dad…”

“The trial’s in two days and I think we should discuss things.”

“What is there to discuss? I told you; we’re cool. There’s nothing to worry about.” She sighed. “Dad, I know what you want to talk about, but I don’t want to. It’s not worth it, mostly because I’m dealing with it.”

“But here’s the thing…you don’t have to deal with it by yourself.”

She let out another sigh. Harper could be heard saying something along the lines of ‘just listen to him’. Not that that would help. Ellie cleared her throat. “I know you’re trying to be our dad again, and that’s great. I love it. But that doesn’t mean you need to help me with. I’m getting through it. Alone. And if I need your help, I know where to find you. That’s what you need to do right now. So I’ll talk to you later.”

Oliver dropped the phone to the bench and leaned against the wall. Ellie was right. To make up for not being there for years, he’d been trying his best to be there for everyone, even if they didn’t want help. All the old instincts that had been pushed far beneath the layer of death and violence had come back now, and when he knew one of his kids needed him, he stepped in. Much to the irritation of Ellie, apparently.

“There. All set.” The doctor finished wrapping the bandages, and straightened. “No unnecessary movement, no jumping up and down, and absolutely no hard hugs. Other than that, you won’t have to worry about breaking anything open. You’ve healed remarkably fast, Mr. Queen, and I hope you get another miracle in the next couple days.”

Oliver shook the man’s hand. “Thank you for everything.”

“Yup.” He looked around at the family scattered around the room. “Make sure he doesn’t do anything stupid.”


“I’ll miss you all. You were definitely the best group of people we’ve ever had in here, and I hope I never have to see any of you again.” He waved as he left the room. Oliver lowered himself back on the bed and sighed. They had twenty minutes until the police would transport him to the courthouse. The trial would hopefully last a couple more days, and then they’d know for sure what would happen.

He already knew the verdict.

Which was why he didn’t want the kids there. He’d tried his best to convince them not to come, but to no avail. They all wanted to behind him, no matter what happened. “You guys don’t need to come.”
Harper rolled her eyes. “We discussed this. Several times.”

“I know, but I’m giving you—”

“Daddy, for heaven’s sakes.” Ellie rolled her eyes as she stood up. “We handled the first couple
days, we handled Annie being kidnapped and you nearly dying, and we’re gonna handle this. We’re
not gonna let you do this alone.”

Oliver looked up at her. “No one has to do anything alone if they don’t want to.”

“Not relevant. But we’re coming. We all are. And if you try to resist anymore, I’ll punch you.”

Three weeks ago, the organization who killed Mr. Queen’s wife kidnapped his youngest daughter.”
Carly turned towards the jury. “His family has requested that we do not show the video in the court
room, but you will be given the video if you request it. Mr. Queen went to rescue his daughter, as he
was the only one with the skills to bring her home. He did, but both he and Annie Queen suffered
injuries.”

William ducked his head in order to avoid seeing the pictures on the screens. And the video of his
dad collapsing on the pavement. He’d seen that once and that was all the times he needed to see it,
thank you very much. A quick glance down the row of Queens, all looking at the ground or books
that they’d brought was proof that once was enough for them too. Only Felicity watched it, her eyes
getting red.

He nudged Harper who scooted closer to him.

“Yes?”

“Have you gotten yours done?”

“Almost. You?”

“It’s a little long.”

“As is mine, but the longer the better, huh?”

“It’s not like he’s gonna say no.”

“But it’s the perfect incentive to make it happen sooner.” William glanced at Felicity, who had her
eyes on his dad’s back. Again. His mind wandered back to the moment in the hospital. *I promise I’ll
wear my short skirts.* And then the pressure on his hand. That brought a few horrifying thoughts to
his head. He’d been taught a long time ago that adults thought different than kids, and for as long as
he remembered, he’d been able to avoid those ideas. But with Felicity, the problematic babbler, those
thoughts could not be kept out. Especially since she and his dad weren’t shy about kissing with them
around.

“William.” Harper elbowed him. “What is with that face? You look like Dad just described to you in
detail how to kiss a girl.”

“Not far off that.” One eyebrow went up. William winced. “Not like that.”

“Just gonna ignore it. One romantic pairing in this family is enough for now.”

At that, Oliver turned around and sent them an odd look. They both shrugged. He rolled his eyes and
turned back around. William cleared his throat and focused back on the trial. He would testify on the last day—hopefully tomorrow. Until then, they all had to sit here and listen to both sides either try to get his dad out of prison or send him back there. The tables had turned, though. Not fully, but they’d moved. Adam Donner stayed away from the Bratva topic; because there wasn’t any juice on that anymore. Today, he went after the Hood.

“Mr. Queen claims that these deaths were in self-defense. But ask yourselves. Would you consider self-defense if he attacked first?”

He’d heard this already. William shut off his listening capabilities and instead looked down at the papers in his lap. With a smug smile, he wrote ‘number thirty-five’ and then, after glancing at Felicity, who’s eyes still rested on his dad’s back, he scribbled out, she looks at your back like it’s the sun. Seriously.

******

“Sir, can you explain what you saw the night of February second, 2006?”

Oliver sucked in a deep breath and focused on the witness, preening on the stand in his suit and tie. Adam knew how to pick the rich ones. But he didn’t know how to pick stories that he couldn’t provide an answer for.

“I was, uh, walking to my car when I heard the sound of glass smashing and then screaming. Lots of yelling.”

“Could you understand what was being said?”

“I remember a few words. Cheater. Liar. Uh…stuff like that. I called 911, but when I was on the phone it all went quiet. I gave them the address, and then went around the corner. The guy had an arrow in his heart.”

Oliver glanced at Carly who had a whole page scribbled about lying. He didn’t look back at his family. They promised they wouldn’t let anything get under their skin, but deep down, what were they thinking? Their dad was on trial for killing a whole lot of people. Couldn’t he have gotten angry at a few people and decked them all? They didn’t deserve to sit here and endure this.

“I got this handled.” His lawyer tapped his arm as she stood up. “Wipe that look off your face.”

She reminded him of his mother. Commanding, and unwilling to deal with his grumpiness. Carly took the floor and spent a moment staring at the man at the witness stand. “Mr. Clark, when Adam asked you what words you heard being yelled, you paused. Stopped, actually. As if you were debating whether or not to say everything that the Hood yelled. Would you like to explain?”

“Uh, no, ma’am. I told you the words I remembered.”

“Do I need to remind you that lying at the witness stand is punishable in the court of law? Because I can—”

“No! No, ma’am, that’s okay. I have a family, and they need me to stay out of prison.” Mr. Carter cleared his throat. “The Hood…Mr. Queen, whoever he is, was yelling about how the man took a woman’s innocence and her life.”

“So this man assaulted a woman. And killed her?”

“I would assume so.”
When Oliver took the stand, Carly asked him about the date. “My wife found this man online who lived in Starling City, and had a habit of assaulting women. I made sure that he never hurt anyone ever again.”

After she finished her string of questions, Adam stood up, his smug expression more annoying than ever. “By making sure he never hurt anyone again, you mean murder, correct?”

“I’d discovered him a month before, and I gave him a warning. A,” he shrugged, “persuasive one. That night…Annie had found evidence that he was still going around, hurting women. I might be a killer or…an assassin. You can lock me up for the rest of my life for that. But I’m not going to let people roam on the streets, hurting girls who are my daughters’ ages. That’s not what I stood for as the vigilante.”

The entire courtroom went still. Felicity ducked her head to hide a smile. Harper and William high-fived. Something that they shouldn’t have done, but it brought a soothing touch to his worried heart. Despite everything, they were still here. Practically cheering him on. Much to most people’s exasperation. Last year at this time he would have rolled his eyes and told the kids to go play.

But then Felicity walked into their lives, and demanded he pay attention to his family. Before then, he didn’t know his children. And though he was far from knowing everything—Ellie, for example—he had taken steps in the right direction. And made Felicity proud.

When he took a seat, Adam fired back.

“So maybe he was right in killing this man. But what about all the others? What about him?” He pointed to the TV where a dead body was shown, three arrows in his chest. “His name is Michael. Was. He went by Mikey. He had a brother who had special needs. A mom who had a drug problem.” He clicked his remote and another photo showed up. “This is Carl. He owned a shop in the Glades where he sold cowboy boots. His mom said that was his passion. This next victim is Janie.”

Oliver gritted his teeth. ‘Janie’ ran a prostitution ring. She refused to shut it down so he did it for her. Mikey beat his special needs brother. Carl was best friends with Janie. But he couldn’t prove any of that. The only person who could have helped him was his wife, and she wasn’t here anymore.

“This man’s name was Johnny.” Another picture of a dead person showed up. Carly stood up.

“Mr. Donner, don’t you think you could explain the people instead of showing these children and everyone in the room these photos?”

“This is considered evidence.” Adam cast them a glare. “And if you are so worried about the children, maybe they should be escorted out of this courtroom.” He turned to the jury. “This a lot of people, isn’t it? All of these men and women, this man murdered.” He pointed to Oliver. “But still, there’s more.” He hit the remote again and a picture popped up that caused Oliver to whip around and attempt to cover his little girl’s eyes. But it was too late. They all saw it.

“And this, is Annie Queen. The Hood’s wife.”


Oliver didn’t turn back around, but instead kept his eyes on his kids, watching them react to seeing their mom. Six years ago, Ellie and William had gone with him to the morgue to say goodbye, but he never dreamed of bringing anyone else. He didn’t want them to know. Wanted them to remember their mom as she had been: beautiful and full of life.
“It’s…” Harper hiccupped. “It’s okay, Daddy.” She looked down the line of her siblings. “We’re all okay.”

“Mr. Queen might not have been the one who crashed his vehicle into his wife’s car, but he created that accident a long time ago when he decided that he was going to go out into the night and kill people for a living. And here’s what I’ve been wondering.” Adam came to stand right by the desk. “You lost your parents when you were young. You also lost your wife. And a child.” There was an audible gasp from the crowd. “So what I don’t understand is why you would kill someone, knowing how it feels to lose a person close to you. All of these people…” he motioned to the TV and looked out towards the jury. “All these people had mothers. Fathers. Some of them were husbands and wives. They had kids.

“Mr. Queen made their spouses widows, but worse, he made their children orphans.”

Oliver closed his eyes. Don’t feel it. He couldn’t let the guilt take hold of him again. It wasn’t your fault. Not Annie’s death, anyways. Making children orphans…that was his fault. Then again, it wasn’t. He did what he thought he had to do. Maybe it was wrong; maybe it was right.

He had to believe that. To survive wherever they put him when the jury reached a damning decision. Because though he saved lives, he ended them as well. There was no getting around that.

But he did do good.

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“And then the man with the green suit shot an arrow through his heart.” The witness wearing a green suit sent a fiery look at Oliver. “And in one second, he was dead.”

“But then he saved me.” With tears streaming down her face, a woman gave him a smile. “I’m alive because of him. You can’t put him in a prison, because then people like me; innocent people will die. You can’t do that.”

Adam took the floor, and with his arms stretched wide, he addressed the jury. “What you have to ask yourselves is if you want a vigilante running around on the streets. Maybe he does good. Maybe he has saved lives. But what happens if he stays on the streets? What if, one day, this man decides that he doesn’t like the Mayor. Or that he wants to take down the city council? He’s proven that he can do it. He took down the mafia alone. Mr. Queen is a danger to this city, and to the people in it.”

Oliver sighed and continued to take notes. Adam was right. And wrong. People had every right to worry about the vigilante. What if he did decide he wanted to run the city and kill the rich people off? It wasn’t like he would do that, but how could he tell the people that he wouldn’t? They wouldn’t believe him.

“And what happens when another vigilante decides to join him? We already have the Flash appearing here every now and then, and the rest of his time is spent in Central City. So what if someone else decides to wear a mask? We need to let the people know that vigilantes won’t be tolerated, and they will suffer. For the rest of their lives.”

At the lunch break, Harper came into the room first and gave him a hug. “Are you okay? I wanted to deck Mr. Donner to the ground and leave him—”

“Honey, that’s not a nice thing to say.”

“We’re all thinking it.”
“Maybe, but…” he let out a long sigh as the rest of the family gathered in the room. “He’s just doing his job. It sounds like it’s mean, but it’s just him earning money.”

“He’s still a jerk.”

“Harper…”

She crossed her arms and flopped to a chair. “He’s a jerk. End of story.”

Over the past few weeks, he’d been the parent who watched movies and played games with his kids, but he hadn’t dealt with any bad attitudes or anger. In fact, he hadn’t been in this situation for years. After sharing a look with Felicity, Oliver set his hands on his hips. “Harper, listen to me. You can’t be bitter about this. The reason we’re in this situation is because I got bitter and angry. I know this is different, but I’m not letting it happen again. Understood?”

There was an eyeroll, but she nodded. He would take that as a win.

“Hi everyone.” Carly stepped in and shut the door. “We should expect everything to wrap up today.”

“Is that…” Ellie looked around the room. “Is that a bad thing?”

“It can be. But you never know. This is unlike any case I’ve ever dealt with, so I can’t predict. We have this afternoon, which means, William, you’re going to be up. Think you’ll be ready?”

“Yeah.” William nodded, a curt smile on his face. “If all those people can get up there and say things, I can too.” He flashed Oliver a thumbs-up. “Don’t worry; I got this.”

******

He definitely had this, and maybe if he told himself that a million times, it would actually come true. When Carly called him up, William set his notebook down and made his way to the stand. After swearing over the Bible, he took a seat. Deep breaths. His family smiled at him, and Ellie mouthed, “You got this.” Maybe he should have let his big sister handle this. She actually knew how to form words while the best he could do was stumble and fall flat on his face without dying.

But he was the reason they were in this mess, and everyone needed to hear what he had to say. Especially his dad.

“William, can you explain why you turned your father in?”

“I was angry.” Unfortunately Carly had told him before that he needed to elaborate. “For a long time, I harbored a lot of bitterness towards him. For a variety of reasons. And when that truth came out, I felt that that was the only way to get back at him, and stop my anger.”

“Could you elaborate on the variety of reasons?”

“He wasn’t always there for us.” William closed his eyes when his dad lowered his head. “That was the big problem. I felt that he avoided us after my mom died, and that made me angry. Every time that he didn’t help us with something, or left for weeks at a time, I got angrier. So when I opened the box and saw the arrows, everything just exploded.” I’m sorry, Daddy.

“But you’re here now, testifying for him. What changed?”

“Me.” You can do this. “I realized how stupid my hate was, and how I nearly caused our family to lose more. You see,” he shifted in his seat so that he could look at the jury, “Every time that my dad
missed a birthday party, or had to leave during dinner, or went overseas for two weeks at a time, he was saving someone’s life. He was saving our lives. The only reason I wish he’d told us right away is so that he wouldn’t have had to deal with the hatred that we all felt towards him for not being there. Because, when you think about, he was there. Daddy was watching over us; making sure we stayed safe, by doing things he never should’ve had to do.”

“And what do you think about the Hood?”

William smiled. This was the easy part. “Here’s the thing, and it’s what people really need to ask themselves. How would you feel if you could walk outside and not have to worry about some terrible person jumping you? How would you, as a parent, feel if you could let your children play outside without any worries? What about being a child in the Glades and knowing you can take the garbage out at night? Because that’s what the vigilante does. What the Flash helped with, but mostly what the Hood did. Or, as I like to call him, the Arrow.” He looked over at his dad, who had his tears in his eyes. “That’s what Daddy did. He kept us safe. We might know it, but we might be alive today because he was willing to sacrifice a lot.”

Half an hour later, when he stepped off the stand, William took the long way back to his seat, stopping to clasp his dad’s shoulder. Oliver looked up and smiled. “Thank you.”

“It was the least I could do.” As he took his seat, he accepted the high fives from his siblings. He did it. He’d done everything in his power to change what he did. Whatever came after this had to be accepted, because the Queens gave it their best shot.

All he could do now was pray that that shot went out of the ballpark, especially as the closing arguments finished, and they were sent into a little room, where they had to wait until the jury came to a verdict.

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Everything seemed to be extra beautiful today. The sun shined brighter; the tall grass danced in the wind. It sounded sappy, but deep down Oliver Queen was a sappy man. He’d married his middle school sweetheart. That sappiness had been suppressed for a long time, but gradually, with a certain blonde guiding him, it had blossomed again. Which was a good thing.

Because today, when he walked into that court room, he’d need the hope and light that went along with the sappiness. To be able to withstand whatever sentence they threw at him. Winning both charges would be a miracle. Maybe even winning one.

He turned around to face his family, all standing there, looking at him with such love that it could bring him to his knees. William’s words from earlier echoed in his head. “Whatever happens, we’re gonna get through this together.” He looked at Ellie, who smiled at him before ducking her head. “And you can’t worry about me. Six months ago this was totally different. I didn’t have any of you. Besides you.” He winked at Felicity. “But now you’re all here. So I’m gonna make it.”

Felicity looked around the room. “Would you give your dad and I a second? Please?”

“Yes. Let’s go.” Ellie ushered the kids out of the room and shut the door. Oliver let out the breath he’d been holding. He dropped the confident façade from his body, letting his shoulders slump forward, lowering his head so his eyes focused on the ground; not on Felicity. How could he do this? Stand there and listen to someone read his life away?

“I-I’m…” he bit his lip. “I’m not strong enough for this.”
“Yes, you are.” She stayed a few feet away from him, but her voice swooped into his heart and took root. It would take a while to blossom but it was there for when he needed it.

“When I started this… I just wanted to help me. Eventually I wanted to help people. And then I had to save my family. But I never imagined this.” His hand swept out towards the bars on the windows. “Never imagined that I’d have to do this. That you… the kids… that they’d have to do this too.”

“But you helped people. And you saved your family. They’re all here, and those people in those fifth and sixth rows? They’re there because you kept them alive. Because you saved them.” Her hand rested on his arm, where it always came to be when she spoke to him like this. Oliver kept his eyes on the ground, playing out what could happen in a few minutes. Either he’d be guilty or innocent. There was no middle ground. And how he’d react to either… he didn’t know. Didn’t know if he could be strong enough to keep himself together if he finally knew what would happen.

“Felicity.” He raised his head to look into her eyes. They were glassy with tears. He gulped back the emotion and stepped closer to her. “I-I don’t know if I can do this.”

“Neither do I.” Her eyes closed for a few heartbeats, and when she opened them again, the tears were gone.

She smiled.

“But I do know two things. You are not alone.” She moved to face him as he lifted his head to the ceiling to fight off the tears. When he looked at her again, their eyes locked. “And I believe in you.”

The kiss lasted longer than it should have for a moment like this. But Oliver needed to taste her love; to feel her love. Someday—hopefully one day in the not-so-distant future—he would be able to taste all her love, but for now, her lips gave him the hope and the strength that he needed to get through this. When he finally pulled away, he let his forehead fall to hers, taking that moment to just stand there, breathless, connected. “Thank you for always being by my side.”

“No place I’d rather be.” She kissed his nose and then backed away. “I’ll see you in a few minutes.”

Oliver stood there, staring at the door, until the guard came in. They walked—a little slower than the first few times—to the courtroom door. The man patted him on the shoulder. “Good luck in there, man. I hope you win.”

He just nodded, and stepped into the room. As he took his seat, he glanced back at the benches behind him. They were all there. Even Raisa. All there because they loved him.

The judge rapped on his desk. “We have the verdict.”

Oliver pushed himself up and shared a look with Carly before turning his attention back to the judge. He felt like a kid, back at the principal’s office, waiting to hear if his parents would be called or if he could just apologize and get on his way. Except now… if only his younger self would have known what lay ahead. Maybe he wouldn’t have done so many stupid things, and instead, lived his life like a normal person. Wouldn’t have ignored his parents. Definitely wouldn’t have gone to all those parties.

There was one thing he wouldn’t change.

He would still get married at eighteen, and he would still have six kids.

Maybe he would’ve had more.
His mind wandered to Felicity. Maybe he still would.

“On the charges of association with the Bratva, the jury finds the defendant not guilty.”

Oliver closed his eyes as several people behind him gasped. Harper started crying, soon followed by Ellie. But it wasn’t over yet. He could be found innocent on one charge and guilty on the other one. It was likely. The Bratva charge was the one he was likely winning, if he won anything. The Hood, on the other hand, that one was—

“Not guilty.”

People started screaming. Carly grabbed his arm and said something with a smile on her face. Oliver squinted at the judge, who set the paper down. No. No, that wasn’t possible. He couldn’t have won both. He couldn’t have. He was guilty on the second charge. Guiltier than anyone would ever know. He couldn’t have won. It wasn’t—

“Daddy!” A little child flew at him. Piper nearly knocked him over when she wrapped her arms around his legs. Another one of his kids—Harper, came from the back, and wrapped her arms around his neck. Ellie came next, sobbing. William held Annie and came towards them, tears streaming down his cheeks.

He won. He won.

He didn’t have to spend the rest of his life in a prison. There would be no more handcuffs. No more looking over his shoulder, waiting for someone to jump him. Oliver wrapped his arms around his kids, pulling them close, not caring if anyone hit his bullet wounds. That didn’t matter right now. He got to go home.

Annie held out her arms to him. “Daddy!”

He took her from William, pulling her close to his chest, burying his head in her hair. “We won, baby. We won.”

Harper left the group and hopped onto one of the benches. She raised her hands and howled, “We’re gonna have a party! Because Daddy’s coming home!” She spun in a 360 circle, her arms spread wide. “Did you guys hear that? Daddy’s coming home!”

Oliver chuckled, but it grew into a laugh as Clayton, usually the quiet one, joined Harper on the bench and started howling. Annie squirmed back into William’s arms, leaving Piper and Ellie. The second littlest hopped over the fence and jumped up to the back of the bench, balancing well enough to yell her own version of Harper’s comments.

“C’mere.” Oliver wrapped both arms around Ellie and held her like he used to do so often, but there had never been a feeling like this. “I love you, sweetheart.”

“I love you too.” She rested her head on his shoulder. “Mama’s smiling right now. Cuz we won.” Her grip tightened on him. “You won.”

“We did.” He opened his eyes and spotted Felicity, standing off to the side, watching him. He kissed Ellie’s cheek and pulled away. His oldest smiled and moved to yell at the kids for being dangerous. Oliver picked his way through the crowd of reporters to find…his girl. Yeah, that’s who she was. His girl.

Her arms came around his neck. “You won.” She let out a little cry and leaned against him. “You won.”
“No, Felicity.” He pulled away just enough to see her face. “We won.” When she nodded, he slipped his hands to her cheeks and pressed his lips to hers. This was different than the one from several minutes ago. While the last one held a sense of sorrow in it, this one was joy. Pure, unremitting joy.

Because he got to go home.

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Oliver took the backway to avoid the paparazzi and stepped out into the humid July evening, just in time to see the last bit of the sunset. He paused there and took in a deep breath through his nose. The air smelled good. Even the back of the courthouse, with the garbage cans looked good.

“Got everything?”

He smiled and descended the stairs. “Someone will bring my things to the house tomorrow. I didn’t have too much. Just some books.”

Ellie slid into the limo first. “I thought you burned Twilight.”

“They don’t allow lighting fires in prison. Or flushing things down the toilet.”

She giggled. “They’re good stories.”

“Honey, they’re terrible, and if you ever find a guy like either of those jerks, I will put an arrow through him. I’m not kidding about that.”

“Don’t worry. I’m going to find a man just like you.”

“Oh, dear God, no. I could never handle that.”

With a smile, she stretched out on the bench and rested her head against his shoulder. He curled his arm around her and stared out the window as they drove through the city. He’d taken this route home a thousand times, but none of them had been like this. Coming home from QC, he’d always been exhausted, ready to get home to Annie and the kids. The past few years he wanted to hide up in his office and plan on who to take down next.

Tonight his body ached, but his heart grinned. For the first time in a long time, he’d be coming home to a family. One that he wanted to be around, that is.

“Hey, Daddy?” Ellie looked up at him. “Do you think it was a girl or a boy?”

It took him a moment to consider her words before he realized what she was talking about. Oliver pulled her closer and rested his chin on her hair. “Just after they died, I was digging around in your mom’s closet, trying to find something, and I knocked over one of her jewelry boxes. A pin that had a little girl on it fell on the ground, and…I don’t know.” He smiled. “I felt that that was God saying that it was a girl.”

A tear trickled down her cheek as she nodded. “I guess these past few weeks I imagined a girl. She’d probably be a brat because she’d be so adorable that you wouldn’t discipline her, and she would definitely still sleep in you and Mom’s bedroom because you’re a softie.”

Oliver chuckled. “Probably so.”

“Do you ever, I don’t know…think about what it might’ve been like?”

“Sometimes. I used to think about it a lot. What our lives would have looked like today if nothing


happened. It was actually an obsession. But,” they met eyes and the reason why the obsession had stopped passed from father to daughter. “It hasn’t happened as much anymore.”

“I feel like our lives have changed so much over this past year to wonder about what might have been. Besides that it would’ve been nice to avoid hospitals a little more.” Ellie made a disgusted face. “I was really upset these past few weeks. Not at you. Just at…everything.

“But then today happened. And when the last ‘not guilty’ came out, I realized that I was okay with it all. I miss Mama, and I will certainly miss my little sister, but it’s gonna be okay. It is okay. Because there’s all of us, and now there’s Felicity.” She raised her head so she could look at him again. “Does that make sense?”

Oliver chuckled and kissed Ellie’s forehead. “It makes total sense, sweetie. When did you get so smart?”

“You didn’t help as much as you think.”

“Oh, I know I didn’t help much.”

She giggled. “I know I said it already today, but I love you.”

“I love you too.”

When they pulled into the driveway, Piper ran out of the house and started jumping up and down, soon followed by Clayton. Ellie sighed. “Eventually everyone’s gonna break a leg or an arm if they continue celebrating like that.”

“You’re not wrong.” Especially since Piper’s legs still hurt occasionally. Oliver slid out of the limo, wincing when the kids enveloped him in hugs. “Oookay, kiddos. We have to be a little gentle. Daddy’s still a little injured and not high on adrenaline like I was a few hours ago.” He looked up as Felicity stepped out of the mansion, wearing the orange dress he rebought her. They both smiled.

Harper grabbed his arm and tugged him to the open door. “Raisa made dinner, so we should go eat. I’m tired of hospital food, and I’m sure you’re tired of six months of eating food equivalent to Donna’s cooking.”

By the looks on their faces, he missed a few good meals. “Where is she, by the way?”

“She went back to Vegas to give us some time to ourselves. And Harper’s right. We should go eat.”

Half the meal was spent updating him on the disasters that had befallen the light fixtures and the glass vase on the mantel. After they were all on their second servings, Annie put down her fork. “Hey, Daddy? Could I sleep with you? Until I stop having nightmares?”

Oliver took a deep breath before he smiled at her. “You can sleep with me as long as you want. It’d be nice to have the company. It gets lonely by myself.” He looked up just as Ellie, William, and Harper shared looks. He knew those looks. The one that said ‘we have a secret and no one can know’. “You guys have anything to tell us?”

“Hmm?” Ellie straightened. “No. Why would you think that?”

“You’re all looking at each other.”

“We were exchanging intel.” William winked at Harper. “Right?”
“You’re not helping your case.” She giggled. “There’s no reason to think that we have anything to
tell you. If we do, it will be told in time.”

“I see.”

He didn’t want to know. Oliver raised an eyebrow, but dropped the subject. If he’d learned anything
from the past few weeks—day—it was that the kids told him things in time. If he pushed subjects,
issues would arise. Right now, though, seemed like the perfect opportunity to address something.
“Just because I’m back does not mean that we’re completely out of danger.” He raised his head to
look at Felicity, who sat across from him. “This is not to scare anyone, because I don’t want anyone
to worry about it. But everyone needs to know that the Bratva is still out there. There are steps that
will be taken to make sure that nothing ever happens, but I want all of you to know that. Okay?”

“But you’ll protect us, right, Daddy?” Annie grinned. “Because—”

“Honey, I do not want to know about the scars, thank you very much.”

She puckered her lips. “How do you know I was gonna say that?”

They spent the next two hours around the table, laughing about random things, and telling old
stories. Oliver cherished the moments, and tucked them away for the days when they weren’t all
together. It would happen. Maybe. Tonight, he didn’t care about the Bratva, or the Hood. This was
his family, and he’d been given the gift of grace and mercy today; he intended to use it.

After dinner and a game of Monopoly that ended with Harper throwing the ‘bank’ across the room,
Oliver retreated up to his office to make a phone call to Barry. Before he could dial his number, there
was a knock on the door. Oliver spun his chair around and called, “Come on in.” The door cracked
open, and one by one, all of kids entered the room. “Uh, hello. Am I in trouble?”

“No.” Ellie put her hands behind her back. “We just want to talk to you about something.”

“Okay…” His eyes flitted to his oldest, then to William, then to Clayton. All of them had smiles on
their faces. Very suspicious smiles; like they had an agenda for this conversation. “What’s the issue?”

Harper smiled. “We want you to propose to Felicity.”

If he’d had anything in his mouth, he would’ve choked and died. Oliver’s eyebrows shot up. They
all just grinned at him, as if they’d had this battle plan down for weeks. It wasn’t that he wasn’t
planning on proposing to Felicity; he just didn’t expect his kids to come into his office the night he
was released and ask him to do it.

He chuckled. “Guys—”

“And in case you were still unsure, we made you this.” Clayton handed him a stapled-together stack
of papers. Oliver read the title and laughed, but as he scanned the first of several pages, the words got
bleary as his eyes clouded. “You guys put this together?”

“We all wrote a page. Or more, in a few people’s cases.” Ellie moved closer to him. “We figured you
were already planning on it, but we wanted you to know that we really love her too and we want her
to be our mom.”

Oliver flipped the page and chuckled. Clayton’s number three reason was ‘you wouldn’t need to pay
her anymore’. Piper’s number four reason said ‘Uncle Tommy says she looks great in fancy clothes
(and that is very necessary for a Queen, right?)’. “I don’t think I ever imagined you’d do this. Was this what you were working on at the trial?”

“It took our minds off things. By planning you and Felicity’s wedding. Kind of. We’ll let you guys do that.”

He set the paper on his lap and leaned forward as much as the bandages around his abdomen would allow. “So you’re all serious.”

Piper cross her arms. “Very serious.”

“We all want a mom again.” Ellie shared a look with William. “And we all love Felicity.”

“And clearly you do too. Right, Daddy?”

“Right, Annie. And all of you, thank you.” He shook his head and chuckled. “I wasn’t going to propose without your blessing, but now that I do, I think I can move forward with that. But no one start screaming. Felicity will hear you. I promise I will tell everyone when I decide to do it.”

“You should do it tomorrow.”

“Honey,” Oliver chuckled. “You can’t just…propose.”

“Why not?”

“Because that’s not how it works.” He glanced at the clock. “And I think everyone needs to go to bed.”

“But I think you should propose now.”

“Annie…” Oliver pushed himself up, wincing when a stinging pain began in his stomach. “It doesn’t work that way. A man is supposed to make a thought-out, sweet plan before proposing. And I need a ring.”

Piper cocked her head. “Would she like diamonds or just a gold band?”

“Things we need to figure out before I ask her.” Though she seemed liked the kind of woman who’d like some bling. Right? Maybe? His head started swimming. It should have started a long time ago, but he’d been so focused on the trial, recovering from the wounds, and helping his kids that he’d pushed away thoughts of marrying Felicity.

But now…

He squatted down to Annie’s level and put his hands on her knees. “Listen, sweetheart, okay? We’re gonna get you a new mommy. All of you.” He looked up at the rest of the kids, giving them each a smile, but he paused the longest at Ellie, who smiled through her tears. “And I’m going to have a wife again. But you have to give me a little time. When I do, you’ll know.” He raised his eyebrows at his littlest. “Deal?”

She grinned back at him. “Deal.”

“Good.” He rose to his feet. “I need to get something downstairs, so everyone start getting ready for bed. Or doing whatever you normally do. And you, young lady,” he tapped Annie’s nose. “I’ll be in my room in a little bit. Bring some books.”

“Little House?”
“I’ve missed the Ingalls family.” When they headed to their bedrooms, Oliver slid the document titled ‘Why You Need to Marry Felicity’ into his drawer and made his way downstairs. Just before the kitchen he stopped and listened to the muttering.

“Can’t you just, I don’t know, boil? How hard is it for to do something like that?”

He rested his head against the wall and attempted to hide a chuckle. It didn’t work. One year ago he could have shut himself up, but not now. Not after all the changing that happened over twelve months. And the falling in love.

“For heaven’s sakes! I just want coffee!”

This time, a laugh erupted from deep inside him.

Something clattered.

“Who’s there?”

His girl came around the corner, a spatula pointed in front of her. Her eyebrows shot up, and she slowly lowered the utensil to her side. “Hi, Oliver.”

“Hey, Felicity.” He pulled away from the wall and moved towards her. “Is this spatula the weapon of your choice?”

“Also the only thing available when I heard some creepy guy laughing at me.” She backed away from him and reentered the kitchen. When he stopped chuckling, he followed her in, stopping at the entryway. She stood with her back to him, pouring her coffee, because of course, after she left, it boiled. The old saying was true. A watch pot never boiled.

Just like a person never fell in love when they were looking for it.

“Would you like some?” She looked over her shoulder.

His heart froze, and then after a heartbeat, it fluttered.

Annie was right.

He couldn’t just wait to propose. That wasn’t possible. Maybe for some people, but him? Felicity? No, he needed to do it soon. In fact, he needed to do it tomorrow. Just like his littlest said. Because why not? He’d waited long enough for this. His family had too.

Felicity Smoak would become his wife and his children’s mommy as soon as possible.

And it would all start tomorrow night. He could find a ring and get a somewhat romantic setting before then. Thankfully his soon-to-be-fiancée had willingly taken over his company which meant he still had money. That could come in handy when he needed someone to design a ring in…fourteen hours.

“Oliver, are you okay?”

“Hmm?”

“You look a little teary-eyed. And you didn’t answer my question.”

“I’m okay. And no thank you. I’m gonna read the Little House books to Annie, and hopefully that means we both fall asleep quickly.” He tapped his fingers on the counter and smiled at her. “You
should enjoy a night to yourself.”

“I will, and tomorrow I need to go to QC for most of the day to get some paperwork done that I
neglected to do.”

“Perfect. I mean, that sucks, but we’ll be fine here.”

“You’ll need to promise me to stay sitting down and not exert yourself by stressing about anything.
‘Kay?” She stopped just a few inches from him. “I’ll see you in the morning, Mr. Queen.”

“Goodnight, Miss Smoak.”

She grinned and left the kitchen, leaving Oliver alone, but he could only play one thought through
his head as he listened to Felicity climb the stairs and walk to her bedroom. Goodnight Mrs. Queen.

Chapter End Notes

This entire chapter was a struggle to write - you never know the horrors of having to
write during writers block until it happens to you (I'll tell you: it's horrifying, terrible,
painful, and tear-worthy) - but I made it, and it turned out alright, I think. :)
Operation 'buy Felicity a ring before she gets back from work' will begin next Friday!

P.S. True story about the pin. That's how we decided that the first baby we lost was a
girl. :)


“Alright, everyone.” Oliver raised his voice over the breakfast noise. “I need you all need to listen very closely.” When they all set their forks down and looked up at him, he fought away the urge to smile. “I changed my mind.” When they squinted at him, he grinned. “I’m proposing to Felicity. Tonight.”

Even Raisa started celebrating.

“But I need a ring. So as soon as everyone gets ready, we’re all going into town. Felicity’s gone for the day, and when she gets back, we need to be back. With a ring.”

Diggle, who walked in on the celebration, raised his eyebrows. “Think you can get a ring in that amount of time?”

“Thankfully, we have money. And I also need Donna’s number so I can find out Felicity’s ring size. So everyone eat up, and then we need to go.”

“Oh, I’m all done.” Harper wiped her mouth and stood up. “Shopping for an engagement ring is good enough food for me.”

In ten minutes, Oliver stepped into the garage and reached for the keys, but Ellie swiped them before his fingers touched them. “Excuse me?”

“I have my license now, and the doctor said that you should avoid driving for a while. Plus, your license is expired.” She tossed him a sweet, but sassy smile. “So I’m driving.”

No way he was letting her drive. He hadn’t ever done that, and it wasn’t happening today. The very idea put his stomach in knots. “Ellie, give me the keys.” When she refused and walked to the driver’s seat, he sighed. “Elizabeth, c’mon. I can drive.”

“You are not. I’m seventeen now, so carefully get in the passenger’s side, and be thankful your daughter is old enough to drive.”

That was what terrified him the most. Oliver took a deep breath and trudged to the passenger side of the Suburban. He should be driving. What if the Bratva decided to attack? Stop it. He couldn’t think like that. Not right now, anyways. They would deal with it when it came. For now, they were going ring shopping. To take his mind off Ellie backing out of the garage, he dialed Donna’s number.

“Hello, sweetie pie. How are you?”

“Uh, hi. It’s Oliver.”
“Oh! Well, you’re still a sweetie. How are you? Is everything okay?”

“Everything’s fine. Listen, I called to ask you about Felicity’s ring size.” The kids laughed when he pulled the phone away from his ear to avoid becoming deaf. When she stopped screaming, he spoke again. “Don’t breathe a word of it, please. The kids and I are going shopping now.”

“It’s a…” she took a deep breath. “Size five. At least that’s what she was in college. I won’t ask questions because I want you to get shopping, but thank you. You’re the man my daughter needs and loves.”

“Thank you, Donna. For a lot of things.”

She giggled. “You’re welcome. Now go make my daughter happy.”

He set the phone down and glanced at Ellie. “So how long have you been able to drive?”

“Since my sixteenth birthday.”

Which was a long time ago. Oliver winced. “I didn’t even take you driving.”

“Don’t worry about that. Dig did, and the other nanny.”

“Yeah, that’s part of the reason she quit!” Clayton yelled from the backseat.

Oliver sighed. “I missed a lot, didn’t I.”

“A little bit. But the thing is,” Ellie tossed him a smile before she turned her attention back to the road. “You’re here now, and sometime soon you’re gonna get us all figured out.”

“Like how she can’t park the car.”

“Shut up, Clayton!”

“It could be considered a good thing that we brought the older of the two cars that fit us. Because, yeah, she can’t park to save her life.” William made a gagging noise. “She also pulls in front of cars all the time. But, you know.” Oliver glanced back at him as his son’s grin widened. “If we end up in the hospital again, at least I won’t be even remotely responsible.”

“Hey!”

“Well, I say we ignore Ellie’s bad driving and focus on the task at hand.” Harper leaned closer to the front seats. “What kind of ring are we looking for? Lots of bling or just a band or…a necklace?”

How was he supposed to know? The research he’d done last night wasn’t helpful. In fact, the only thing that it helped him with was increase his anxiety and annoyance. He should’ve planned this sooner. Asked Diggle to bring options to the prison or into the hospital and this could already be done. Instead, they had roughly ten hours to get a ring and get back home. “I think we’re gonna go and ask for help.”

“I think we should get the most expensive ring we can find.” Annie spoke, and everyone agreed with her. The anxiety started dissipating. Oliver chuckled. He’d have the kids’ help. They were the ones who gave him this idea, anyways. And the ones who crafted ten pages of reasons why he needed to marry Felicity. Some of them were duplicates, but a few of them had him smothering his laughter in order not to wake Annie up. Ellie’s were carefully thought out, and mature, but a few of the other ones were…outrageous.
Clayton’s number ten said, ‘she’s too pretty to just be the nanny’. Apparently William thought that Felicity stared at his back like it was the sun. His littlest girls, though, said it best. Piper wrote, ‘you need a wife’, and Annie said, in all caps, that they needed a mother. That was the truth. He needed someone to keep him in line, and the kids needed someone to deal with their father. And also deal with them.

But mostly the first part.

When they pulled into the parking lot, Oliver pointed to an empty area far away from other cars. “Park there, honey.”

“Yeah, cuz we’re just paying for a ring, and not several destroyed cars!”

“Clayton, that’s enough.” He sent his son a warning look. “Just let her park.”

Ellie did without much a problem, but when she turned off the car, she cast him a concerned look. “Are you gonna be okay today? Cuz you’re still not completely healthy.”

“Well, if something happens, you can get a taste of what it’ll be like when I’m ninety-five.”

“That’s not funny.”

“I think it is.” He stepped out of the car and went to the back to get the wheelchair for Annie. William beat him to it. “I got this, Dad.” In a few minutes, they entered the mall. Ellie led them to a map.

“So which ring store do we want to look at first?”

“The closest one?” Oliver shrugged. “If it’s got rings, we’ll go there.”

“Y’know, a long time ago you would’ve only gone to the fanciest store around.” Ellie looked up from reading the list of jewelry shops, her eyebrows raised.

“A few months in prison will change a lot of things. Plus, a few years of spending half my time in Russia.”

Ellie straightened and pointed left. “There’s one close, so we’ll try that one first.” As they started walking, she cleared her throat. “Was it really cold there? Because when I think of Russia, I think of freezing cold weather and Napoleon’s army dying.”

“I think it would be fair to think that.” He held the door for the girls and then stepped up to the counter. “Hello, ma’am. I’m—”

“We’re—”

“Looking for an engagement ring. And, uh, we need it today.”

The lady stared at them for a moment with her mouth open before she recovered. “Uh, didn’t you get released from prison like…yesterday?”

“That would be correct.”

“And you’re looking for an engagement ring. For tonight.”

“Also correct.”
“Wow, you’re a little more messed up in the head than people thought. Okay, let me get my manager. He might be able to, uh,” she scanned the group of kids lined up around him before she plastered a smile on her face. “He might be able to help you.”

When she disappeared, Oliver sighed. “I almost forgot that some people—”

“Don’t even think it. Actually, let’s go.” Ellie grabbed his arm as the rest of them headed out the door. “We don’t need to give anyone money for a ring if they aren’t very nice. Plus, no one’s touching Felicity’s ring if they aren’t very loving themselves. Or forgiving, because that’s basically who Felicity is. So that place doesn’t deserve anything.”

Piper spun around and walked backwards for a few steps. “Yeah, they suck.”

No use being hypocritical and yelling at her for saying the same thing that he felt right now. “We’ll find a different store. There’s several shops in here, and we have a while. So let’s take our time.”

Three hours later, after finding one shop closed, one shop unable to get a ring ready by tonight, and the other one with ‘no nice people’, they stopped at the food court. Annie tapped Oliver’s leg. “Hey, Daddy, can we get ice cream? Please?”

“Why not?” He handed his wallet to Ellie. “Go ahead and buy whatever you want. I’m gonna sit here. And no, I do not want anything.”

She passed the wallet to William and took a seat opposite him. When they left, she scooted closer. “What’s it like? Shopping for two different rings, I mean.”

“Annie actually had my grandma’s ring.” He smiled and fingered his phone for a moment before looking up again. “But I know what you’re asking. It’s different. It doesn’t feel like I’m divorcing your mom. This is definitely not one of those situations. It’s like,” he looked across the area where the rest of the kids stood in line for ice cream. William and Harper were in an animated conversation about something. “It’s kind of like when your kids are born. As more of them come, you wonder how you’re ever going to love them all. It seems impossible, but it’s easy.

“I’m never going to love Annie less. She will always be a part of me, and not just because there’s six of you running around.” Ellie giggled. “But Felicity is here now, and I love her too. They can share my heart. Just like all of you have your own special place. And maybe there’s room—”

“Do not even think about finishing that sentence.” William strode over with two ice cream cones. He handed one to Ellie and then glared at Oliver. “This is one thing I’m glad I didn’t have to experience when I was little. Knowing things. Yuck. And now I think I just ruined my appetite.”

Oliver chuckled and extended his hand. “I’ll take the ice cream, then.”

“I thought you said you didn’t want any.”

“If me and Felicity kissing bothers you, then I’ll have it.”

William jerked the cone closer to his body. “No, it’s mine.”

Ellie sighed. “Well, now that we got that not-actual discussion about love lives out of the way, shall we continue shopping for a ring? Because it’s noon. Meaning we need to get something by five thirty. Right? Plus, Raisa needs to do dinner, and Dig needs to decorate. If he even knows what that means.”

Harper raised her pointer finger. “Now that Lyla’s around, he’s probably learning it.”
“I can do a few things to delay her.” Oliver opened the phone app and drew up the number he knew by heart. Ellie squinted at him. “It’s an old friend.” And also the only person who could ever delay Felicity.

“Oliver! Hey, man, I meant to send you a congratulatory text about yesterday, but I got distracted.” Did he ever not have his mouth filled with food? Cisco cleared his throat. “What can I do for you? I’m assuming I should do something, or maybe not, because you’re not yelling yet.”

“Well, I’m in a good mood. Listen—”

“Wow, that’s a new thing. Are you feeling okay?”

“Cisco.” Oliver let out a sigh. “Listen, I need you to do something for me. It’s weird, but—”

“I’m weird. Yeah, we get it. What’s the thing?”

“I need you to keep Felicity occupied at Queen Consolidated for longer than she actually needs to be there. Preferably longer.” When Cisco didn’t say something smart, Oliver went on. “The kids and I are at the mall trying to find Felicity a ring.”

“A ring…oh. Oh, wow. That was quick. Anyways, you want me to keep her at work for a while. Got it. How late?”

“Uh…” he lowered the phone and looked at Ellie. “How late?”

“Six thirty should be okay. That will hopefully give us time.”

“Kay. Cisco, six thirty. Don’t tick her off too much. Just put something on her computer that’ll take her a little bit of time to deal with.”

“Oh, I got somethin’ planned already. I’ll talk to you later. Good luck.”

Oliver set his phone down on the table. “We got some time.”

“Who was that?”

“No one you know.” He tickled Annie’s neck, eliciting a giggle from her. “It’s just a friend I’ve known for a while who’s good with computers, and he can distract Felicity for a while until we get everything ready. Because when we get home, everyone needs to take showers. Whether you want to or not.” Clayton stopped mid-eye roll and gave him a thumbs up.

“I’ll wash my hair for Felicity.”

As they started walking towards the next ring shop, Piper caught up to him. “Hey, Daddy? We grew out of most our clothes and the really nice dresses that we bought were for the trial.”

He could see where this was going, mostly because all the girls nodded along to Piper’s statement. Though he doubted they didn’t have cute outfits to wear for dinner, Oliver drew up as they walked by Macys. “Do they have nice dresses?” When the girls, with smiles, nodded, he handed Ellie his credit card and took a seat outside the store. William and Clayton went with the girls, but Annie stayed with him, after making the rest of the crew promise to get her a dress.

Oliver helped her out of her wheelchair and set her in one of the massage chairs. “How’re you feeling?”

“My leg doesn’t hurt much anymore. I think I can start walking more soon. Mostly cuz I don’t like
that wheelchair.” She fingered her frilly shirt before she looked up at him. “Daddy, can I ask you a question?”

“Anything, sweetie.”

“Are those bad guys…are they gonna try to hurt me again? I saw that gun case under the bed, and you have one in your nightstand. Don’t worry; I’m not gonna touch them. But they’re there. And that scares me. Because that means you think people will hurt us again.”

God, help me. Oliver pulled Annie closer to him. “Can I tell you the truth?” When she nodded, he continued. “If I could, I would protect the whole world. Trust me; I would. I’ve tried protecting Starling City, and I’ve failed a lot doing that, and this is just one city. I’m not the Flash; I don’t super speed, and I’m definitely not Superman. But what I am is your dad. And as your father, I can do everything in my power to protect you. For me, that means having weapons in the house. There might be other dads who protect their families in different ways, but for my family—for you—that means doing things differently.

“It’s okay to be scared. Sometimes I get scared.” Oliver messed up her hair, laughing when she let out a cry of disdain. “The nice thing about a big family is there’s lots of people to protect you. Especially when you’re the littlest.”

“I want to be a big sister, though.”

We could arrange that. Oliver chuckled. “You never know. But does that make sense? About the bad guys?”

“As long as I can keep sleeping with you. Cuz my dreams aren’t so scary when you’re with me”

“We got ‘em!” Ellie stepped out of the store, carrying four giant bags. “Don’t worry; it’s not what it looks like. We each got a dress. Now we need to get a ring.”

“I agree, and I think I know the best place to find one.” Oliver pushed himself up, and after settling Annie back in her wheelchair, headed straight. When they entered the shop, the man at the front set a necklace down and smiled.

“Oliver! It’s good to see you. And look at that! You brought the kids.” The man who wore the same pair of glasses since middle pointed at Annie. “You’ve grown up a lot since I last saw you.”

“Nice to see you too, Ricky. Kids, this is an old friend from high school.” Oliver leaned against the counter. “Listen, buddy, I need a really big favor.”

Annie rested her chin on the countertop and smiled at the man like they’d been best friends for years. “We need an engagement ring. It’s for the lady who’s been our nanny for a year, but now we want her to be our mom, and Daddy wants her to be his wife.”

“The problem,” Ellie put her hand on Oliver’s shoulder. “Is that we were kind of busy and we didn’t get a ring. And now we need one for tonight.”

As Ricky’s eyes got bigger, Oliver grimaced. The more they explained the situation, the weirder and more stupid it became. Who bought a ring and proposed the same day? It was ridiculous, and it would almost serve him right if he couldn’t find a ring.

“And this special girl has blonde hair and glasses.” Ricky nodded. “Sounds great. But you need it today? This could be interesting, but I think we can do it. Because getting a mom is a very special occasion.” He winked at Annie. “What size is she?”
“Five.” It would be just his luck if Felicity’s finger had grown since college.

Ricky turned around and started unlocking drawers. “I’m assuming price isn’t a problem?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Oliver whistled when his friend set out the tray of size five rings. Annie’s ring had been his grandma’s, which meant four or five diamonds. These were huge. How could a woman even wear one on her hand? “Is there anything…smaller?”

“Daddy.” Ellie whapped his arm. “These are what every woman wants.”

“Sweetie, they’re huge.”

“Yeah, but that’s what a ring is supposed to look like.”

“Absolutely not.”

Ellie sighed. “Ricky, can you explain to my dad that wearing a big ring is kind of a thing for engagement rings?”

“Oliver, they normally look like this.”

“It’s so—”

“Big, we get it, Dad. But this is how they look. And we also have a very limited schedule. So,” William waved his hand over the batch of rings. “Look at them and see if there’s any that you like. That one is really pretty.”

“There has to be something that looks less like glitter exploded everywhere.” Maybe the best option was to propose with a ring with the candy on it and have Felicity pick something out for the wedding. Oliver glanced at his watch. They had time; he needed to calm down. Relax, and think relationally. “Okay, girls. What would Felicity like the best? This is not something I’m good at.”

“We’ve all noticed.” Harper pushed him out of the way and leaned in closer to the rings. “I feel like she’d like bling, but not one of those ones with the gigantic bauble on it. This one’s pretty.”

“No, this one’s prettier.” Piper pointed at one off to the side, but Ellie gagged. “Okay, never mind. Ricky, you’re the expert. Do you have any ideas?”

“Is Felicity a lot like the person she appears to be on TV?”

The kids nodded.

His friend chuckled. “Perfect. I have a few rings in the back that you might like. They’re not too blingy. Be right back.” When he disappeared into a closet, Oliver’s phone rang. He winced when he saw the name. If she had his cell phone pinged…”Hi Felicity. How’s your day going?”

“Terrible. Well, it was going fine until ten minutes ago when my computer got a virus. But I wasn’t calling about that. Should I bring some pizza home for tonight? I’m really hungry for pizza.”

Oooh, crap. Oliver squeezed his eyes shut. What was he supposed to say? No? Yes? They could have it for breakfast tomorrow. You lied about being a vigilante for years. He could figure something out. “Uh, well, I was talking to Raisa this morning and she said that she was planning on making some fancy chicken dish that she wants us to try.”

“Oh.”
"You can bring it home if you—"

"No, no, that’s fine. I’ll order pizza sometime else. Where are you? You keep breaking out."

"I am in, uh, the basement. Getting some wine."

"I’m going to need some after I get this fixed. I’ll text you when I’m on my way home. Oh, and I like red wine."

As he hung up and let out a sigh of relief, Ricky reappeared. “Alright, Queens. I didn’t have much luck, but with the luck I did have, I found one more ring. It’s expensive, but that shouldn’t matter.” He set a cloth on the counter and put the ring on top. “I think it’s beautiful.”

The girls squealed, while the boys murmured their approval. Oliver grinned. It said Felicity. It wasn’t too showy or too blingy. It was just…her. “This is the one.” He picked it up and let it fall into his palm. It looked so small. But so perfect. “I think we’ll take it.”

On their way home, Harper tapped his shoulder. “Do you have a speech planned?”

“I have something in mind.”

“Don’t be too sappy.”

“Naw.” Ellie waved her hand. “The sappier the better.”

Oliver chuckled. “I think I’ll do it my way. But, I used to be known as a romantic guy, so maybe I can pull this off. No candles though, if that’s what someone’s thinking.” In an effort to ignore his daughter’s driving, he shifted his gaze out the window. He closed his eyes and allowed himself to go back to his eighteenth birthday.

“Annie, if you don’t hurry up, you’ll miss the fireworks!” He dragged his girlfriend at a pace that should have been illegal, but every year—on his birthday—the neighbor across the lake set off fireworks. And thanks to the kissing episode in the kitchen before Raisa shooed them out, he might miss his chance.

“Oliver, I don’t know what the big hurry is. We can see them just fine from here.”

“No, no. We gotta be down on the beach.” Just as the first firework exploded in the sky, they hit the sand. Annie drew up, and gasped.

“Oliver…”

“C’mon, sweetie.” He walked backwards until they reached the circle of candles. “I wanted to do it here since there was no wind. If there was wind, I was going to do it in the beach house, because you deserve the candles. And the fireworks.” He pulled her close to him, looping his hands around her lower back. After a kiss, he stepped away from her and reached into his shorts pocket. “So without further ado…” he chuckled when Annie covered her mouth to hide a squeal as he lowered himself to one knee. “Annie Lee Taylor, will you continue to light up my life and become Mrs. Queen?”

She had nearly knocked him on top of one of the candles when she hugged him. And they temporarily lost the ring. Oliver smiled. They spent the rest of that night laying on the beach, looking up at the stars and planning their wedding. He wanted four kids; she wanted five. They couldn’t agree on where they wanted to get married, or practically anything else. She wanted big; he wanted small. It hadn’t mattered though. In the end, he didn’t care where they got married or how. All he
wanted was her to be his candle for the rest of his life.

And she had been. She became more than a candle for him. She’d been his fiery light in the night sky, leading him down the path that he often stumbled on. When that light was snuffed out, he fell flat on his face, and eventually tried continuing, but ended up taking the wrong turn.

Until Felicity.

She came along at a time when he was nearing the ravine that would’ve killed him. At first, his darkness fought with her light. He’d been so used to it that he wanted the dark. But then it started to win, and the darkness gave up. The firefly became a candle, and then candle became a flame, and then that flame became a firework.

Because of her love and her grace, he stopped himself from falling over that cliff and moved back to the path that Annie had started him on so long ago. And with her memory, and Felicity’s light, he would continue on that path for as long as he lived.

******

“How can a virus be this big?” Felicity looked up at Jerry, who stood near her desk, waiting for her next outburst. “Seriously. It’s like a million pages long and it’s trying to take over my computers. It’s ridiculous!” She’d been sitting here for three hours, combing through data, trying to force the virus off the computers, but it wouldn’t budge.

“Maybe you should take a break from it. Go home. It’s six.”

“I’m not going home until this gets done. Even if I have to sit here all night.” An odd looking file popped up, so she sent it to one of her drives to check out later, and continued to dig deeper into the virus. “What is this thing made of? It’s like—oh. Wow.”

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s gone.”

“What do you mean it’s gone?”

“The entire virus just…disappeared.”

“How is that possible?”

“I have no idea.” She glanced at the clock. Six fifteen. Only an hour and a half late. “Well, it’s gone. And that means I get to go home.” She stood up and grabbed her phone. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Jerry. Hopefully. It all depends on what happens tonight. And by that I mean whether or not I decide to go to Vegas and get married.” She had one foot out the door before she turned around. “I should clarify and say that that will not be happening.”

“Felicity, go enjoy your night not getting married.”

“Thanks.” She took the steps down to the parking garage—if she could avoid the elevator, she would—and headed home. How did a virus disappear like that? It appeared suddenly, disappeared even quicker. If someone wanted to pull a prank on her, she would find out. And that person would likely wish that he’d never done a thing like that. It made her late for dinner, and it meant less time with her family.

It bugged her the entire way home, but after fifteen minutes of annoyance, she shoved it aside and
headed to the house. The door opened, and Harper, wearing a pink, frilly dress stepped out. Felicity stopped and stared for a heartbeat before a, “Hi?” squeezed out. “Why…why are you dressed up?”

“We decided that tonight would be the first official dinner as a, you know, family, so we thought we’d dress up.” She spread her skirt out, a grin on her face. “Isn’t it pretty?”

“You usually don’t like dresses.”

“Tonight was the exception. Anyways.” Harper took her arm and led her into the house. “We thought we’d give you a few minutes to change into something a little fancier. Once you’re ready, we’ll be out on the veranda.” She tossed her another smile before heading towards the kitchen. Felicity let out a long sigh and tossed her purse and phone on a chair. What on earth was going on? Oliver couldn’t have…delayed her with that virus, could he? He wasn’t that smart. Though he knew people that smart.

That’s quite enough, Felicity. They were having dinner together. On the veranda. In fancy clothes. Her heartbeat quickened. Felicity groaned and headed upstairs. She swept her hair up into a bun, tossed her ‘CEO’ clothes in the closet, and pulled on one of her fancy dresses. After a quick make-up job and confirmation that she looked fancy enough, she took the side stairs down and stepped out onto the veranda.

She smiled.

The Queen family sat at the table, their plates and utensils pushed to the side, playing Monopoly. Harper wasn’t kidding when she said they dressed up. Meaning they went shopping today. Don’t do it. Oliver would never put ring shopping off until the night of the proposal. That was stupid, and unlike him. At least the man she met last year. Maybe this man—the one who was, right now, scooping all the cash from the middle of the board, into his lap, a huge grin on his face—was different.

So different that instead of buying a ring weeks in advance like most men, he went shopping for it the day of the proposal.

Stop it. This was dinner. No strings attached.

“Hi everyone.” She stepped up to the table. “You all look very nice.”

Oliver let the Monopoly money fall to the ground as he stood up. “You look beautiful.” She laughed when he kissed her cheek.

“I could’ve used a little more of a notice for this. At least I showered today, but that’s about it. And I had an exhausting day at the office.”

“We didn’t want to spoil the surprise. And hopefully dinner will make you forget everything that happened.” Oliver winked at her as he sat down. Felicity took a seat on the other side of the table and gave them a rundown on her day as Raisa and the new housemaids served dinner.

“So that’s the reason I’m late. Now why don’t you tell me about your day?”

“We played Monopoly a lot. Then Raisa needed some stuff from the store for dinner so we went and bought new dresses.” Piper pulled the fabric of her purple dress up so Felicity could see. “Isn’t it pretty?”

“It’s very pretty, honey. Did your dad help pick them out?”
“Daddy and I sat outside the store and talked.”

“Ah, I see.” She shared a smile with Oliver. They left their days at that, focusing all the attention on the meal Raisa prepared. What a meal. Felicity could only imagine cooking like this. In fact, she would be ninety years old before anything remotely like this would come out of her kitchen. Maybe she’d get her own miracle in the coming years and learn how to cook. Halfway through the meal, she raised her eyebrows at Oliver. “So…is there a special occasion tonight? Did I miss a birthday or something? Because I have been known to do that.”

“No.” Oliver set his fork down. “This is my—our—thank you to you. It’s been about a year since you came here and since then, you’ve changed all of our lives for the better.” As the kids echoed his words, tears crept into Felicity’s eyes. “You’ve made us all better people, Felicity. And though we’ve told you that a hundred times, we wanted you to really know.”

Clayton handed her a Kleenex. Felicity blew her nose and then started to laugh. “Thank you. All of you. But the thing is…you changed my life too. Perhaps more. Though I didn’t get along with all of you at first,” she pursed her lips together to keep from breaking into a grin when Oliver chuckled and looked down at his plate, “I found my home here in a way that I’ve never felt before. You made me feel loved. So thank you.”

“I think we should have dessert.” Everyone laughed at Annie’s declaration. Raisa brought out a raspberry cake as Oliver poured red wine for himself and for Felicity, and after a minute of whining, a few drops for Ellie.

When they all had something to drink—the kids had ‘kid wine’, Oliver raised his glass in the air and smiled at her. “To family.”

“To family.” She clinked glasses with Harper and William before taking a sip. Ellie coughed and spit the wine back in the cup.

“Yuck. How do you like this?”

“I drank much worse at that age. Which none of you need to repeat. So good. I’m glad you don’t like it.” Oliver chuckled. “There’s more kid wine in the fridge.”

“I’m gonna go chug that down. I have a terrible taste in my mouth.”

As they talked about summer plans—which included sky-diving, fall plans, which included no school, and the chance that Ellie would have a boyfriend by the end of the year, the sun disappeared behind the trees, and the porch lights flickered on. Felicity relaxed in her chair, cherishing the moments with them all together, spit-spatting about who would get Fluffy’s puppies if she had any, and the next animal they needed to buy. Regardless of the raised voices, they were happy. It was all she wanted when she came here. To make the Queens happy.

She’d succeeded.

“We’re not getting any more hamsters. End of discussion.” Ellie pushed herself up. “Listen, Dad, it’s getting late. I’ll put the little ones to bed, and then we’ll come back out. Sound good?”

He nodded and beckoned Annie over. She walked without her crutches to him and gave him a kiss on the cheek. “I love you, sweetie. Sleep tight, okay? I’ll be in there in a bit.”

“‘Night, Daddy.” She whispered something in his ear that made him laugh and then went inside. Piper came next, and then Clayton. The other three waved before going into the house. Oliver pushed himself up. “It’s a nice night for a walk.”
“Just let me take my heels off quick.” She tossed them in a corner and caught his smile. “What?”

“Just remembering how you tossed your heels like that when we were running away from those shooters. You were quite the trooper that day.”

“Well, you took me out a window. Not exactly the first ‘took me out’ I would’ve expected.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you what you were getting yourself into. Maybe that should’ve been on the nanny website.”

“I knew what I was getting into.”

“Really.”

“I walked in and saw this guy working out. Shirtless. With a six-pack.” She elbowed him. “I knew exactly what I was getting into.”

“I didn’t.” As they walked along the gravel path, Oliver chuckled. “I should’ve known that this would have all happened, but I was blinded by my stubbornness so when you walked into that weight room, I thought there was no way you would last for very long. Then you sat on that whoopee cushion and told us all that you were gassy.” He laughed. “In the back of my head I think I told myself that you were gonna be an epic nanny. I think… I think that’s when I first realized I could fall in love with you. You were so pure. It terrified me, but at the same time, I saw you and my heart wanted to fall in love with you.”

“I think I first realized I could fall in love with you when I took you into the pool with me.” Felicity giggled. “You climbed out of the pool and stood huffing and puffing, with that angry face on. You were so mad, and so gorgeous, and just…I think my heart turned a bit that day. And then you made me the omelet. Still the best thing I’ve ever had.”

When they reached the gazebo, Oliver pulled her towards it. “It’s cooler in there. The kids will be a while, knowing their ability to read an entire book in one sitting.” When they stepped into the glass case of beauty, Felicity let out a deep breath.

“It really is beautiful in here.”

“So are you.”

“Oliver…”

“You really are.” His hand slipped around her neck, and then his fingers slid into her hair. “But not just on the outside. Despite the pain and anger and tragedy that you endured, you found a way to stay beautiful. That’s what drew me to you. I was so deep in my darkness that you just needed to flood it with light.” He took a step closer to her. “I know I resisted for a while, and I’m sorry, because I didn’t exactly resist nicely. But then you completely pushed open the door, and you let that light flood into the closet I was living in. All that light came in, and it just…” he looked up at the sky, the moon giving away the tears in his eyes. He found her gaze again, and smiled. “It just took ahold of me and pulled me from where I’d been for five years. You changed everything, Felicity. And now,” he pulled his hand from her hair and reached into his jacket pocket, “I was wondering if you would change your last name.”

Did that groan come from outside? Felicity covered her mouth to hide a squeal that would likely wake her mother in Vegas as Oliver lowered himself to one knee. He was proposing. To her. Sure, she knew it would happen eventually—the thought passed her mind earlier tonight—but a part of her couldn’t imagine any man, let alone Oliver, kneeling before her, smiling up at her as if she were his
“Felicity Megan Smoak,” he opened the ring box, and just then, the moon fully broke through the clouds. It caught the ring’s light, casting shimmers around the room. Oliver took a moment before he spoke again. “Will you marry me?”

Did her little girl self ever imagine this? Well, she had, but after a while she stopped hoping. Stopped dreaming of the perfect man. Reality had set in, but it turned out that fairy tales did happen in real life; the only difference was that the middle happened to be very different than a Disney movie. Felicity closed her eyes and laughed. When she opened them again, she nodded. “Yes.”

“Good, because this ring was really hard to find.” He slid the diamond on her finger and stood up. Felicity collapsed against him, and wrapped her arms around his neck. Tears trickled down her cheeks as she raised her hand so she could see the ring. It said her. The only thing missing was her name. He loved her, didn’t he? After all those years of wondering how any man would want to marry her, this man adored her.

“What did I ever do to deserve you?”

“Something good,” Oliver murmured against her ear. “But I was going to ask that same question.”

She closed her eyes and smiled. “Something good. Something very, very good.”

Someone slammed into them, screaming. Little hands came around her waist. Felicity and Oliver laughed as the kids encircled them, yelling hyped-up versions of congratulations. As they celebrated around them, she scooted closer to Oliver and smiled up at him. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” He slid his hands along her cheeks and kissed her. The kids cheered. Her heart did too. If only she could go back in time and tell her younger self that it would turn out okay. That, after years of wondering her worth, she would find a man who told her that she was worth it. Then again, maybe it was a good thing. She’d been strengthened because of her hardships. That’s how she got through this year. She knew how to handle heartbreak, and how to deal with anger. Like her mother said, she’d become a stronger person because of it.

And along the way, she’d fallen in love.

Chapter End Notes

It's always fun when I get to write a fun chapter. And when happiness is the main theme. Hopefully everyone smiled a little bit!!! Next up...it's the wedding!!!
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

Fair warning: there’s a love scene at the end. Also fair warning: Brianna attempts a love scene and for some people, DO NOT GET YOUR HOPES UP. Okay! We got that cleared up! Enjoy the chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 29

“I have a pimple. On my forehead. Because of course I do.” Felicity reached for the make-up brush for the hundredth time in two hours, but grabbed nothing. “Ellie, give that thing to me. I can’t have a pimple on my wedding day.”

“You need to calm down, or you’re going to have a heart attack. Daddy’s probably having one downstairs right now, and we can’t lose both of you.” Ellie spun Felicity away from the mirror. “Take a deep breath and think about anything other than the fact that you’re getting married in two hours.”

“It’s still two hours away?”

“I thought that was a good thing.”

“I need to get this over with.” When Ellie sent her a quizzical look, Felicity shrugged. “As in, I need to get married and be done with the ceremony. Everything after that will be smooth sailing compared to this.”

“I get it.” Ellie stepped away from her and began curling her hair. “I wish you could go on a honeymoon right away.”

“It’s safer for all of us if we stay close to home.”

“You mean in the bedroom.” She rolled her eyes. “At least you guys could’ve gotten a hotel room. And please don’t make an inappropriate comment. Because you just opened your mouth to say something and I don’t want to hear it.”

“I wasn’t going to say anything nasty.” Truthfully, she would end up saying it anyways. Felicity turned back around and examined her hair. She’d decided to leave most of it down in a curly mess, and pull up the sides into a ponytail that the veil would attach to. Just before the ceremony, Ellie would help apply the pink lipstick. Oliver had picked out the shade. He’d helped with everything but the dress shopping. That would be her surprise to him. And the things she wore underneath, but only he got to see that. Tonight would be their night to celebrate their love.

And even though it wasn’t in some resort like she imagined it, it would be with him. That’s all that mattered to her.

“I’m gonna get the other girls so we can start getting them ready. Be back in a few minutes. And don’t panic and die in that amount of time.” Ellie tossed her a grin over her shoulder.
“Don’t worry, I’ll wait ‘til just before the ceremony. That’s something I’ve always been good at. Having anxiety problems just before I’m supposed to do something.” She kept rambling, but there was no stopping the nerves. Getting married would do that to a person. She hadn’t been nervous for any of this for the past two weeks. Not for the getting ready part, the ceremony, or what came after. Now she just couldn’t stop freaking out. What if something terrible happened? What if she tripped? Or did something ghastly at some point during the day?

“I can tell you’re freaking out. You’ll do just fine. Just think about all the good things that are going to happen. Yikes, that made me think of some gross things. Okay, Felicity, I’m going to go get everybody so we can all get ready.” Ellie gave her a pat on the shoulder. “And clear my head of traumatizing thoughts.”

“Sorry.” Not that sorry, but it was worth saying. When Ellie left, Felicity relaxed against the counter, and let out a laugh. Getting married. Her. Felicity Smoak. This wasn’t just a good dream. In less than two hours, she would marry the love of her life.

“So stop freaking out, Felicity.” She pulled herself up and looked in the mirror. “And also stop talking to yourself.”

*******

Ellie let out a deep breath as she walked down the hallway. Today was the day. It’d only been two weeks since the proposal; they had money and they put it to good use to get everything they needed before now. No one wanted to wait, especially her father. In fact, the first discussion had been a court house wedding, but then the doctor told him he couldn’t do anything other than kiss his new wife for two more weeks. That put an end to that idea.

It was absolutely lovely knowing that was the only reason they waited a little longer.

She pushed open Oliver’s door and smiled. He lay on the bed with Annie cuddled next to him, Piper at his feet, and Clayton and Harper sprawled on the floor. They were watching some Disney movie. “Hey, everyone.”

“Hi, sweetie.” Her dad sat up. “How’s everything going?”

“Looks like you’re a little calmer than your fiancée is right now.”

“Oh, no, he’s not.” Harper let out an exasperated sigh. “He’s being ridiculous.”

“I am not.” He shot his daughter a glare before focusing on Ellie. “You need something?”

“I need the girls. It’s time to get ready.”

“Yay!” Piper jumped off the bed and left the room, followed by Annie. Harper gave Oliver a kiss on the cheek before she left. “Try not to throw up. Or cry.”

“No, you should cry cuz we’re videotaping.” Clayton let out an uproarious laugh. “Then we can watch it again and again.”

“I don’t think I can guarantee anything.”

“And boys, you need to start getting ready too. The photographer wants to get shots of us kids before everything starts. So why don’t you go do that now.” When they left, Ellie took a seat on the bed. “How’re you doing?”
He cocked his head. “I’m more nervous than I’d like to admit.”

“I told Felicity I can’t have both of my parents dying of an anxiety attack.”

“I’ll be okay. It’s just…” he shrugged. “It’s bringing up a lot of old memories. They’re all good. Just bittersweet. I’m happy all of you get to be here for this.”

“I am too. I look forward to having a mom. Officially. She stopped being our nanny a long time ago.”

“Because she’s too pretty to be a nanny.” Oliver chuckled. “That was Clayton’s reason for why I should marry her.

“Well…” Ellie slid off the bed and flashed him a sly smile. “Just wait ’til you see her. She’s reached a whole new level of pretty.” She gave him a kiss on the cheek and then went back to the bedroom. Piper had her white knee-length dress on, while Harper still lay on Felicity’s bed. “Do you need help or something?”

“No, just thinking. How I thought we’d never ever have a mom again. A few years ago I asked Daddy if we would, and he told me no. I guess I always believed him, until Felicity came. And then…” the sister who rarely showed emotion had tears trickling down her cheeks. “And I started to hope that we would. And today I get to wear a pretty bridesmaid dress.”

“C’mere.” Ellie opened her arms and enveloped Harper in a hug. She shouldn’t be crying, but she did anyways, likely ruining the first layer of make-up she put on. They needed this moment together. They’d been through so much, and today, they got to walk down the aisle, one by one, to begin the ceremony that would make them officially a family. Not that they hadn’t been before, but now they would have a mom to go along with it.

Harper pulled away and rubbed her eyes. “We got a lot of miracles in the past few months, but I think this is the biggest one of all. Don’t you think?”

As she nodded, Felicity opened the door. “Oh my, what’s the problem? Did something— oh.” She caught Harper as she put her arms around her neck. “Hey, sweetie, it’s okay.”

“I’m just so happy you’re gonna be my mom.”

Felicity squeezed her eyes shut. “Me too, Harper. I can’t wait. Which means,” she scooted back a few inches and smiled, “We need to get everybody ready. Once your dress is on, then my mom will do your hair. Ellie, make sure the boys come in here at some point for inspection. And…” she took a deep breath. “I’m officially calm. At least I’m going to keep telling myself that. How’s Oliver doing?”

“He’s excited.”

“Tell him—”

“Oh, no, dear, you’re not going to be exchanging messages with your soon-to-be-betrothed.” Donna yelled from the bathroom. “This is not grade school, and you’ll see him in a bit.”

“Okay, fine. Is Thea—”

“I’m here!” The door flew open and Thea stepped in, her hair already curled. It fell in kinky ringlets around her smiling face. She set her dress bag down and gave them all hugs. “Sorry I’m late. Roy and I had to run a few errands, and such. Felicity, you look amazing already. My brother’s gonna fall
head over heels. Not that he hasn’t already.”

They spent the next hour getting dressed and doing hair and makeup. After getting help from Donna and Thea on her hair and makeup, Ellie took a seat on the bed and took it all in. Annie and Piper ran errands for the adults, fetching different blushes and lipsticks from Donna’s room, and even getting Roy to come up and help with getting a box off the shelf that contained the necklace and earrings that Felicity would wear. Her new mom looked like a vision. Tears welled in her eyes when they did a test run of putting the veil on. Felicity looked like an angel. Here to save them all from destruction. Especially her dad. She’d saved him, and while she slowly chopped away his stubbornness, she’d saved the kids with her other hand.

*******

Felicity smiled at Ellie as they waited in the kitchen. The three other girls plus Thea stood outside, waiting for the music to start. They would have a little longer. “Have you ever been in a wedding?”

“I was a flower girl in a distant cousin’s wedding when I was five, but that’s it. Didn’t really imagine this to be my next chance to look cute and flaunt myself in front of guys, but this works. And don’t tell Daddy that.”

“It’s probably the reason why there are a total of two in the crowd.”

They both turned to see Diggle standing there with his arms crossed. Felicity giggled. “Hi, Dig. Are you sure there’s two? That seems like a lot.”

“I made sure that all the cute ones were escorted out by the National Guard. I just thought I’d come in here and check in on everyone. We’re just about to start.” His hand rested on her arm. “How are you doing?”

“Nervous, but I’m excited to get this over with. And the reception, because it’s high time Oliver and I—I am so sorry.” She squeezed her eyes shut to avoid the awkwardness, but Ellie’s cough and Diggle’s clearing-of-the-throat brought heat to her cheeks. “Please ignore that comment and anything that I say in the next five hours. Probably tomorrow too.”

“There are some things I never want to hear again, and any comment about what you and Dad are going to do tonight is not acceptable.” Ellie let out a groan. “I think we should just not even mention it.”

“That would be my preference.” Diggle gave Ellie a kiss on the cheek and then squeezed Felicity’s hand. “You’re going to be a wonderful wife. The key is to not freak out too much when you walk down the aisle.”

“You’re saying that like you’ve been here before.”

“I just know how nerves can be. Mostly because I’ve been dealing with Oliver’s for the past few hours. And he’s been getting on my nerves for the past fifteen years. I’ll see you out there.”

“Dig’s right. You’ll do great.” Ellie set her flowers down and moved to stand in front of Felicity. “And you’re going to be an amazing wife. And an amazing mom.”

She let out a deep breath to keep back the emotion. “I just worry. What if I’m not? I never had parents that loved each other. I have absolutely zero idea how to sustain a marriage. Or even be a mom. I can be a nanny, but this? I don’t know.” And why was she voicing these fears with three minutes left before the wedding started?
“Daddy didn’t have very good examples. I’ve heard about my grandparents. They didn’t have a relationship that should be sought after. But he and my mom made it. They learned. Together. And that’s what you’ll both do. There will certainly be some days that are rough, because marriage isn’t a fairytale. At least that’s what I’ve learned in all the books I’ve read.” With a sheepish grin on her face, Ellie shrugged. “We’ll all help you. For real this time. There won’t be any snakes or frogs.”

“Thank you.” Felicity pulled Ellie into a hug. “For everything. And like I’ve said before, I can’t wait to go on this journey with you.”

“Alright, almost-Queen,” Thea opened the door. “We’re almost ready.”

Felicity sent Ellie a smile before stepping out onto the veranda. She was really doing this. These past couple weeks had seemed almost surreal, as if she were floating in the happiest place on earth. There were quiet talks into the early morning hours, exchanging stories and working on ways they would conduct their marriage. She spent the days with the girls, planning the meals, and shopping for their dresses. All things she never thought she’d do.

And now, here she stood, ready to marry Oliver Queen. One of the most sought-after men in the country, who’d only loved two women. His late wife, and now her. As little Annie and Piper started down the walk towards the gazebo, she smiled. She wasn’t just marrying Oliver. She got to be the mommy to six children who loved her. For her, marriage came with a family that she never got to experience as a child.

Thea began walking, and after a thumbs-up and a ‘stay calm’ from both, Ellie and Harper went around the corner. Felicity took a deep breath. She could do this. Walk down the aisle, say her vows, manage not to cry through the whole ceremony, and become Mrs. Queen.

The music changed.

She tightened her grip on the bouquet and looked up at the sky with a smile. “I should be saying help me, but God…thank you. And help.”

*******

Oliver clasped his hands behind his back to hide the major finger twitching and stepped up to the edge of the guests. He shouldn’t be freaking out, but he was. In fact, his heart was skipping beats. All the training he’d done to stay calm under gunfire didn’t apply to getting married. In fact, if he ever wanted to go back to the Bratva, he’d have to let them know they missed a spot.

Annie and Piper came around the corner. Instead of traditional white flower-girl dresses, they both wore light-pink lacy dresses that could only be described by him as ‘poofy’. According to Clayton, who went along for the shopping escapades, they were the first dresses they tried on. They both threw the rose petals up in the air as they walked, dumping a handful on Raisa’s lap. Annie stopped to say hi to Raisa, but her sister dragged her along.

They both gave him a kiss before moving to their spots. Thea came next, and took her place by the girls. Harper came around the corner and grinned. Oliver chuckled. Over the past year, his daughter went from being a little girl who hated the majority of anything ladylike to a beautiful woman. Felicity helped with that. Along with a million other things.

Harper winked at him as she walked past. “Just wait ‘til you see her, Dad.”

His oldest began her walk towards the gazebo next. He still didn’t know her as well as he had years ago, but they were getting closer. She’d blossomed into the version of Annie like her mom always
prayed she would.

“Just wait until you see her, Daddy.” Ellie tossed him a sly smile. “She’s absolutely beautiful.”

The music changed.

The guests in the back stood, meaning she was coming. Coming to marry him.

The man who had thrown away all hope of ever loving again. That was him. He didn’t think he could love his kids, let alone a woman who would take his last name. That’s who Felicity wanted to marry. Who she said ‘yes’ to his proposal. She looked past the mistakes he’d made, and all the horrible parts of him, and decided that she could love him for the rest of their lives.

Felicity came around the corner and stopped for a moment. She took a deep breath and looked across the path to him. Her eyes lit, and her smile grew. When she started towards him, one bare foot at a time, Oliver closed his eyes for a heartbeat. Ellie was right. Felicity was beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. It wasn’t just her dress. He loved that, and he couldn’t wait to take it off, but what brought the tears into his eyes and trickling down his cheeks was her smile. It was if, right as she started the procession, she’d forgotten all the terrible things that had happened in her life, and decided to embrace the future. As if she loved him so much—loved them all so much—that everything else didn’t matter.

And it didn’t. At least to him. Today, tonight...the Earth didn’t matter. He had his world right here, and nothing could destroy it. Not the threat of the Bratva, not prison, not death. Over the past few months, he’d put together one thing: nothing could separate love. Bad times would happen. They would come, and they would face those challenges as a family. Whatever happened during them didn’t matter. Because they had their love.

And today, they were all here, and he intended to celebrate that. By marrying Felicity.

She slowed to a stop next to him, and took his offered arm. In a voice that sounded like a breathy laugh, she said, “I made it.”

“You look beautiful.”

Her eyes flitted down his body. “As do you. Now let’s get this show on the road, shall we?”

Oliver chuckled and led her up to the minister. The man motioned for the crowd to sit down. “Dear beloved, we are gathered here today to celebrate the marriage of Oliver Queen and Felicity Smoak.” He spoke about love, and the power of it, but Oliver didn’t pay attention. He’d heard this the night before during the rehearsal, and right now, he just wanted to stare at his fiancée. It’d taken too long for her to become his wife, and now that they were here, he wanted to soak in her beauty. She watched the minister as he spoke, but every several seconds, her eyes would flit over to Oliver, and she would smile.

“Now we will continue with the vows. Oliver, you may go first.”

Felicity handed Ellie her bouquet and turned to clasp both of Oliver’s hands. He looked down at their fingers, intertwined together, and smiled. He raised his head to look at her. “Felicity, the first thing you said to me was ‘wow’. And then that you expected less abs from someone who had six kids.” He bit his tongue to keep from laughing when her face turned scarlet. “That was the first time that I remember when I had to keep from breaking a smile. Right away you took ahold of my darkness and started tugging it away. You dragged me away from that closet I was living in and made me start breathing in the summertime. After a while I realized I liked it, and that I loved you.
So,” he blinked back tears as he took a step closer to her. “I promise to keep enjoying that summertime, but this time, with you as my wife. I promise that when it rains, I’ll keep an umbrella over your head, no matter what the cost. And when it’s sunny, I promise to hide all your sunglasses so you have to enjoy the light with me. But most of all, I promise to love you when we’re laying in bed together in the morning, and when we fight. No matter what, I promise to love you for the rest of our lives.”

“How am I supposed to top that?” Felicity laughed and let go of his hand for a moment to catch the tears that fell from her eyes. When she joined them together again, she smiled up at him. “Oliver, even though you don’t think so, you are my light. And my knight. The most gorgeous knight in shining armor, I must add. But that’s irrelevant right now. I came here as Felicity Smoak, a woman who didn’t know what to do with her life, and someone who thought I wasn’t capable of being loved. That all changed when I met you. You let me know that I was worth loving. So today, I take you to be my best friend, and to be the man who I know will always protect me. I promise to be your best friend, and, as you said, to keep you in the summertime. I promise to make sure you don’t blame yourself for anything that’s happened. I promise to be there when there’s nightmares. I know I’ll be there for all the fun times we’ll have together.” Despite her quivering lip, she winked. “And I promise to love you—to love us—in the times of happiness, and especially when there’s hardship.”

The tears weren’t stopping now and his voice wouldn’t work, but Oliver squeezed her hands and smiled. What had he done to deserve this woman? Her words echoed in his head as he took Felicity’s ring from John. Something good.

Oliver lifted his eyes to Felicity’s as he slid the band on her finger. “With this ring, I thee wed.”

She took hers from Ellie and turned back to him. For a moment, she just held it, looking at him. Then she slid it on his finger. It felt good to have a ring on again. He’d taken his off after Annie died, and the one thing he missed was the feeling of it. It protected him. Mostly from all the women who wanted him, but each time he looked at it, the gold band reminded him of what he had at home.

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“With this ring, I thee wed.”

“I agree.” Oliver laughed when William spoke.

“With the power vested in me, I now pronounce you man and wife. Oliver, you may kiss your bride.”

He slid his hands around her lower back, enveloping everything in her and pulling her towards him. For just one split second, they stood there, looking at each other. But he couldn’t wait any longer. Oliver’s hands moved to her sides, then slid up her body to her cheeks as he pressed his lips to hers. The crowd cheered, but none louder than their kids behind them. Oliver pulled away from her and whispered, “To be continued.” She giggled and rested her forehead on his chest.

“Can’t wait.”

When the celebratory music began, they linked arms—the doctors gave him a ten-minute lecture about how he couldn’t carry Felicity across the patio—and hurried down the steps. When they reached the end of the walkway, Felicity raised their hands and let out a scream. Oliver pulled her along to the kitchen where he kissed her again. This time, it deepened, but before it got to any rating over PG, the doors slid open and little children screamed. Oliver whirled around and caught Annie in his arms.

“You’re married!” She squealed and transferred herself into Felicity’s arms. The hugging and celebrating continued until Thea yelled above them.
“Hey, sis.”

“Congratulations, Ollie, but we need to do pictures. Thankfully you’ll have plenty of time to kiss and celebrate then.”

“So I just have to stand there and kiss my wife?”

“Basically.”

“Sounds amazing.”

*******

She couldn’t stop smiling. Not through the hour of photographs, or through the dinner. The first dance as husband and wife brought a few tears, but the grin remained. Every several seconds, she looked down at her ring to remind herself that she was no longer a Smoak. She left those years behind her several hours ago. She was now Oliver Queen’s wife.

And she loved it.

He slipped up behind her and put his hands on her hips. “How’s the party so far?”

“It’s been amazing. The kids are tearing it up on the dance floor.” She laughed as William and Ellie’s Macarena intensified. “I didn’t know they were such good dancers.”

“The older ones probably are more adapt at it then the little ones. But basically everybody knows that dance.”

“I’m terrible at that dance.”

“Then let’s go do it.” Despite her protests, he set down his glass of champagne and pulled her onto the dance floor, just as the song went off.

“Oh, look at that. It’s all over.” She turned, but Oliver caught her arm and transferred his hold on her to William.

“Keep her there for a sec.”

“Oliver, it’s not really necessary, because I don’t need to know how to—no.” The song started over again. No, no, no. She loved dancing with Oliver—slowly. Not at the speed of light. When he ran up to her again, she backed away. “I’m going to look terrible.”

“Well, it’s either that or I’ll be dancing alone. Maybe with your mother.”

That thought brought some grossness to her head. “Oooh, no. I’ll dance.”

He grinned. “I knew you’d say yes. Okay, so position your hands like this.” He slid in behind her, and put his hands on her lower arms. For the first part of the song, he guided her along, but then moved away from her and performed the moves next to her. Felicity watched him throughout the whole thing, but at the end, she got it. Everyone cheered. They took a bow together and walked to the edge of the dance floor. Felicity rubbed her face. “Wow, that was exhausting and I’m not going to do that again.”

“Hey, guys?” Annie came towards them, her bobby-pins long since pulled out, leaving her hair in shambles. “I’m getting really tired. Could I go up to bed, please? As long as you save me some cake for breakfast.”
Oliver chuckled and scooped her up. “How ‘bout I take you upstairs? You look tired.”

“Cuz I am. But hold on.” Annie wiggled down to her own two feet and put her arms around Felicity’s legs. “Goodnight, Mama. I love you.”

A wave of emotion swept over her. Felicity knelt to Annie’s level and pulled her into a hug. She closed her eyes and treasured the moment. Mama. She was a mama now. “I love you too, sweetie. Sleep good, okay? I’ll see you in the morning.”

“I’ll see you in a bit.” Oliver lifted Annie into his arms and headed to the stairs. Felicity sat down at the make-shift bar. Her feet hurt.

“Hey, Felicity.” Barry tapped her shoulder. “How are you doing?”

“Very tired, but very happy. How are you? You’re moving well.”

He shrugged. “I’m good. It’s been a long process, but I was able to stand to watch you walk down the aisle. I’m proud of you. It’s been a long journey, and I’m super happy for you. You did it.”

They clinked glasses and drank. Felicity set hers down and looked around the room. “Since Oliver will be a few minutes, wanna explain why your future wife isn’t here?”

His eyes bugged out. Felicity rolled her eyes. “C’mon, Barry, we all know it’s gonna happen at some point. But it looks like there’s been a hiccup.”

“She and I had a falling out after my accident. We don’t seem to agree on a lot of things. That’s the biggest problem.” Barry swished his drink around. “I don’t know, Felicity. It’s not like we’re not friends. It’s just that—”

“There’s something missing.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, Oliver and I spent a lot of time fighting. I’m sure we still will. Thing is, Barry, don’t lose something that a lot of people never find. You and Iris have something special that I never thought I’d find. So take advantage of that, and go apologize.” When his eyebrows rose, she cocked her head and sent him an exasperated look. “We know you owe her one.”

“Correct. And thank you. And Oliver walking over here is probably my cue.” He gave her a hug. “We’ll talk soon.”

When Oliver got to her side, she put her hand on his arm. “Did Annie go to sleep okay?”

“She fell right to sleep. She was exhausted.”

“She’s not alone.”

“Hopefully not too tired.”

“Nope. But it’s eleven. And the kids are beginning to look tired as well. Roy’s sleeping.”

“Well, Roy has always been a sleeper.” Oliver took her hand. “Let’s go say goodnight to everybody.”

Half an hour later, Felicity shut her - now their - bedroom door and relaxed against it. Oliver stood a foot or so away from her, smiling. She giggled and dropped her head back. “I’m just gonna make
you wait for a few seconds so I can catch my breath. It’s hard work walking up those steps in a wedding dress.”

Oliver inched closer to her, and put his hands on her shoulders. His fingers trickled down her arms, to her hands before they came to rest on her hips. He leaned closer so that their noses almost touched. Before they kissed, his hands went around her waist and tugged her off the door and transferred her into his arms.

Felicity slipped her arms around his neck, and leaned in. Still, the smile remained, even as the kiss deepened. When they reached the edge of the bed, they stopped, breathless, and happy. She helped with undoing the back of the dress, and carefully set it on the trunk. When she turned back around to face him, he gave her a little push. With a squeal of laughter, she fell onto the bed. Oliver tugged off his shirt and dropped down next to her. She cast him a look as they lay there. “Ready?”

Just as he grinned and reached for her, someone screamed.

“That’s Annie.” Oliver jerked up and went for the cabinet that likely held a bow or a gun. Felicity wrapped herself in a blanket and ran to the door. She jerked it open, and was body-slammed by the littlest Queen.

“Hey, hey, hey.” Felicity knelt to her eyelevel. “It’s okay, Annie. It’s okay.”

The screams continued, and as Felicity tried to calm her down, they got louder. After a few seconds, they stopped. Annie eyes bugged out, and her chest stopped moving. “Oliver? What’s—”

“She’s having a panic attack.” Oliver set the gun on a dresser and squatted down. “Give her to me.” When Felicity transferred Annie into his arms, he stood up and walked to the window. Ellie appeared in the doorway, her eyes wide. William came next, his cheeks red. Felicity tightened the blanket around her and pushed herself to her feet. “Any idea what happened?”

“She must’ve had a bad dream. We were all upstairs in the attic and we heard screaming.” Ellie’s eyes flitted to the dress which now lay on the ground, and to her dad, who hadn’t put a shirt on. “I’m really sorry.”

“No, it’s okay.” Oliver walked towards them, his eyes focused on Annie, who cried against his chest. “We’ll take care of it.”

“But it’s your—”

Felicity put her hand on Ellie’s arm and smiled. “It’s okay. I won’t make any inappropriate comments because I promised I wouldn’t, but we’ll—” she pursed her lips. There wasn’t any way to phrase this…unawkwardly. “Annie is who matters right now. Everything else can come later. Did I do okay?”

“As good as it could be.” Ellie took a step backwards. “Are you sure you’ll be okay with Annie?”

“We got this. Go back to your party. We both know that’s what’s going on in the attic.” Felicity waved her hand. When they left, she shut the door and looked across the room to where her husband stood, holding their littlest. He rested his chin on her hair and continued to whisper. Their eyes met, and she smiled. “Y’know,” she started towards him, walking as if she were taking a trip down the aisle again, “I didn’t think it was possible to love you more, but I think I do.”

He ducked his head to hide a sheepish smile, before he looked at her again. “Thank you for marrying me.”
She gave him a peck on the cheek. “Wouldn’t have married any other guy.”

“We’ll talk about that later. For now,” Oliver sat down on the bed and settled Annie’s on his lap. “Can we talk about what the dream was about?”

“B-Bad guys.” Annie clung to him, tears still trickling down her cheeks. “They…they were t-trying to hurt me. And they hurt you. And Mama. And they kept ch-chasing after me.” Her crying started again and she clung to Oliver. “I don’t want them to hurt me, Daddy! They can’t hurt me again!”

“And they won’t. I promise.” Oliver put his hands on Annie’s cheeks. “I promise they will never hurt you again. Because I’m going to keep you safe. It’s okay, baby. I got you.” He caught Felicity’s gaze and whispered, “Go get changed.”

She hung her dress up in the closet, and found shorts and a t-shirt. What a day. And night. They went from passionately kissing on the bed to sitting on the bed trying to calm down a little girl who had a nightmare. Some people would be mad, but she wasn’t. In fact, she told Oliver the truth; it made her fall even harder in love with him.

“Hey, Felicity?” When she stepped out of the bathroom after taking her makeup off, Oliver and Annie lay in bed.

“What’s up, sweetie?” Felicity slid in next to Annie. “You feeling better?”

“Yeah. And I’m sorry for wrecking your night. William said that this was supposed to be a special night, and cuz I—”

“You don’t need to feel bad about anything. We’re just glad that you’re okay, and now you should try to fall asleep, because you look tired.” Felicity kissed Annie’s forehead. “I love you.”

“Love you too. Night, Daddy.”

They lay in silence for several minutes until Annie’s breathing evened out. Felicity yawned and giggled when Oliver did as well. “Guess we’re more tired than we thought.”

“That, or old.” He reached over and flipped off the lamp. “I wish I could protect her from the nightmares. I can keep her safe during the day, but not now.” He sighed. “And I know how terrifying those dreams can be.”

Felicity ran her hands through Annie’s hair, smiling when she cuddled closer to her. “I know. The good news is that you’ll never have to wake up alone again. She won’t either. And for tonight, you can have my sexy feet.” She put her feet on his legs, laughing when he groaned. “Anyone who has ever been in a bed with me has said they’re freezing.”

“They’re correct, but I’ll take it.” His hand tickled the bottoms of her feet. After a few seconds of giggling from her, he pulled away and relaxed. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” Who would’ve thought? Her wedding night would end up with her feet on her husband’s legs, a child between them. The latter part had to be the biggest surprise. Another thing she would tell her younger self when someone invented time travel. Maybe the idea would horrify her fourteen-year-old self, but right now, lying here under the covers, drifting off to sleep, her heart couldn’t be smiling bigger. She had a family. A husband who loved her, but cared about his children’s safety more. That’s what she wanted. When she came here, she fell in love with the kids first, and they deserved the protection that their father could provide for them.

And she deserved the love that Oliver could give to her. It took a long time, but finally she realized
that. She deserved to be *loved*.

A buzzing noise forced herself to open her eyes. Oliver and Annie still slept, but her husband’s stirring had to be a sign that he heard the noise too. She rolled over and grabbed her phone on the nightstand. Jerry. What on earth would he be calling about? “Hello?”

“Hi Felicity. I am so, so sorry for calling. But there’s a major issue with the computers here and the supposedly IT geniuses can’t get it figured out. I know it’s your vacation and all, but…could you come in and fix it real quick? It’ll likely only take you a few minutes, and then you can go home.”

She sighed and met Oliver’s eyes. “Work,” she mouthed. He made a face. What she was thinking. “Fifteen minutes. Tops. I’ll be there in half an hour. Can you hold it until then?”

“Yes. Thank you. And again, I wouldn’t be calling unless it’s an emergency.”

“Yeah, it’s fine.” She set her phone back on the nightstand and stretched her arms over her head. “Something’s wrong with the computers at the office.”

“Can’t it wait?”

“Oliver, Annie’s still here. I will only be a little bit. It’s only seven thirty, so the kids won’t be up for quite a while.” She slid out of bed and wrapped herself in a blanket. “Maybe go back to sleep.”

“You will learn very quickly that I can’t fall back asleep after I wake up.”

“Stop grumbling.” She stopped to give him a kiss. “Good morning, Mr. Queen.”

“I’ll see you in a little bit, Mrs. Queen.”

Boy, did she like that name. Felicity tossed him a smile and headed into the bathroom. Fifteen minutes later, she exited with her orange dress on. Oliver lay sprawled out on the bed. She kept walking, but when he let out a snore, it elicited a giggle. *Can’t fall back to sleep, eh?*

Half an hour later, she walked into her office. “Alright, Jerry, what’s going on?”

“Oh, thank God. It’s almost like it’s a cyber-attack. Or just a terrible virus that shut everything down. All the computers are connected, y’know, and I don’t know what’s going on.”

“I brought my computer from home, so we should be able to figure it out from here.” She flipped her laptop open as she took a seat. “When did you notice it?”

“The IT team called me about five thirty. I didn’t want to disturb you. How was yesterday?”

“Well, the night ended with me and Oliver on the sides, and little Annie in the middle,” Felicity muttered before her brain registered the words. “Oh! You weren’t supposed to know that. I mean, it’s not like people thought we weren’t…Oh, God. Please ignore that. Anyways, the wedding was amazing. I like being Mrs. Queen.”

“I’ll ignore the first part, and be happy about the second part. I’m sorry I had to ruin your morning.”

“No, it’s okay. We’ll get this figured out quick and then I’ll be on my way home.”

Three hours later, Felicity ran her hand through her hair and muttered another swear word. “I honestly have no idea, Jerry. I’m skilled at this kind of stuff, but this is ridiculous.” She glanced at her phone for the millionth time, willing it to light up with a text from Oliver. Not fair that he got to
stay sleeping while her fingers and brain slaved away at QC. The company that he should be running. “I just wanna go home.”

“How about trying…” Jerry leaned over her and typed in a code. “That.” When she hit enter, the computer turned on. From outside the office, a cheer went up. Felicity collapsed against her chair. “Thank God. I can go. Good job, Jerry.” She grabbed her phone and stood up. “I will not be coming in here for a very long time, so have fun.”

She left the office and headed to the stairwell. Just as she opened the door, she stilled.

“Hello, Mrs. Queen.” A hand slipped around her waist and spun her around. Felicity looked up at her husband—yes, she loved that word—and giggled.

“Hi, Oliver. I didn’t expect you to come drag me home.”

“Oh, I didn’t come to take you home.” His hands wandered around her body. “I thought, since we had our night interrupted just as it was getting good, that I’d take matters into my own hands and make sure we don’t get interrupted this time.”

Her heartbeat picked up. Felicity caught his hand and squeezed. “I’m curious to see what you have in mind, considering we’re in Queen Consolidated.”

“You underestimate my ability to be romantic.” He pried the door open and led her down several flights of stairs. They didn’t say anything on their way, but when they stepped out onto the floor where they’d landed after their trip through the window, Felicity drew up. “Oliver, where on earth are we going?”

“Well…” he walked backwards a few steps, his eyebrow cocked. Something she found very attractive. “It was my understanding that if I waited two weeks to get married, I could love my wife with everything in me.” Her heart rate quickened when he moved closer to her, his gaze intensifying. “Last night, we got interrupted, and tonight we probably will too. So…” his hand encircled her waist. “I decided to take matters into my own hands. So stop lollygagging and asking questions, and you’ll see in a second.”

The heart eyes were in full effect now. So was the heart. Felicity grabbed Oliver’s hand and followed him down the corridor and into the storage closet. When he flipped on the lights and continued walking, she laughed. “You are seriously the sappiest, most romantic man I have ever known.”

“I thought that since we had our first moment of connecting in there, we should finish it off in there too.” Oliver typed in the code and pulled open the steel door. Felicity peeked over his shoulder.

“You really look care of all of this, didn’t you? Even my favorite wine.”

“The kids were still sleeping when I left, and they’re all too tired to do anything all day, so we can have a mini party in here if we want.” As Oliver shut the door, Felicity shrieked.

“We’re gonna be locked in!”

He pulled his phone out of his pocket and winked. “I got Dig on it.”

“Did you seriously tell John to wait until—” her question was cut off when he kissed her. This time, they didn’t wait; didn’t pause to flirt. The leather jacket came off, and then his t-shirt. Though she loved the black ones. They could be stared at later from across the table. Right now she wanted to love him. Love all of him.
She’d fallen in love with the man who spent five years in the worst kind of hell to keep his family safe; the one who spent years protecting the people of Starling; the one who tried to convince the Bratva to kill him to keep Annie alive. That was the man she loved, and that was the man who, today, made her feel loved. He took his time, gently caressing her, gently loving her. Despite the desire, he yearned to keep her safe. Just like he’d done from the very beginning.

And she was now officially Mrs. Queen.

Chapter End Notes

Well, I hope you liked it!!! It took me some time to write anything resembling a wedding night (or day after). My sisters said it worked and that it was sweet, so hopefully you all enjoyed it. I know how it is to read a story and wait for the marriage, so.....:P I'm an old-fashioned person; I like to see them wait for the wedding night, and to avoid any sort of controversy, I put Oliver in prison for six months and shot him in the stomach a couple times.
Now everyone knows how well I can avoid things, right? LOL
Have an awesome week!!
Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

I am SO sorry it's late!!! I had a heck of a time with this (most of it was written today), and my siblings and I were home by ourselves this week, which gave me about zero time to write. But it's here, and it turned out decent. :P So enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Annie slid out of bed and ran out of the room, Oliver closed the gap between him and his wife, and kissed her nose. She kept her eyes closed—he’d noticed she did that a lot in the wee morning after their daughter left. In fact, she didn’t open her eyes until he did something to make her shriek, and it usually came by the way of tickling. She had to be the most ticklish person he’d ever met. His hand wandered along her body as she snuggled up against him. They had time during the day, but this was their time to be together. Meaning no one interrupted them.

“You gonna open your eyes?”

“No.”

“I promise I’m really cute. At least that’s what you said yesterday.”

“Well,” one eye popped open for a second. “I can confirm that that is still true, but if I keep my eyes closed, you’ll keep kissing me, and I really like that. And I know I said this a few times, but I really enjoy not worrying about making terrible comments.”

“Diggle still isn’t impressed. Now open your eyes. Please?”

Her eyes opened, and she enveloped his lips with her own. Oliver wrapped his arms around her and pulled her closer to him, encircling her with his love. He loved having her as his wife. Not only for moments like this—he loved these times—but for her presence. He hadn’t had a nightmare in weeks, and the guilt trips he often took during the day had stopped. Every time he looked at her, whether her hair looked like it did now, or swept up in some fancy style he couldn’t describe, he was reminded of the good things he’d done to somehow get her. And his kids…he smiled. They were all finally happy.

“Speaking of the kids,” Oliver broke off the kissing, but kept them in a tangled mess of sheets. “Did any of them say anything about having reservations about today?”

“Not really. Ellie said that she was happy we were finally doing it.”

“Money can’t buy a proper gravestone in one week, apparently.” Oliver let go of her and stretched his arms over his head. “I’m happy we get to do it. It’ll bring closure that we never got to have. And I’m especially glad that you get to be there.” As he leaned in for another kiss, Felicity put her finger on his nose. “What?”

“It’s eight thirty. There’s fifteen minutes until breakfast, meaning we need to get up.”

“You were the one who delayed kissing for five minutes while you stubbornly refused to open your eyes.”
She sat up and shot him a teasing look. “You were kissing me, so it worked out.”

He gave her a pouty look. “I like it most when you kiss me.”

“Get up, Oliver.” She tossed her pillow at him as she slid out of bed. “Or they’ll send that terrifying hamster in again.”

According to the kids, the best thing that came out of that morning when he and Felicity weren’t downstairs for breakfast was the fact they got both their parents to scream when ‘Hammy the Hamster’ ran across their feet while they were kissing, oblivious to the time. That was also the last time that they didn’t check the clock.

Ten minutes later, they stepped out in the hall, only to be met with Piper and Annie sitting cross-legged on the ground outside their door. Oliver set his hands on his hips and glared at them. “Were you eavesdropping?”

“Nope.” Piper stood up and ran to give him a hug. “We were just looking forward to saying good morning. Cuz we didn’t get to do that for a long time.”

He wrapped his arms around both of his daughters and smiled. “Well, I missed a lot of mornings like this, so we’ll just keep making up for them. Sound good? C’mere,” he lifted Annie into his arms and cast a look at Piper. “Sorry, honey. Daddy’s still a little injured.”

“But a lot less injured than a couple months ago, right?” Annie patted his wet hair. “I think we should have another party sometime soon.”

“Oh!” Felicity perked up. “I totally forgot to mention this.”

“Mention what?”

“I was digging around in Queen Consolidated files, and I realized that this Thursday is the forty-fifth anniversary of the company. So, after some discussion with my team, I decided that on Thursday, there’s going to be a party. A big one, in celebration of your family, and the company.”

No, no, no. Of all the things… “Uh, really?”

“Gee, don’t look so excited, Oliver.”

“I mean, that’s great, and thank you, but I’m a barely-let-off-of-life-in-prison kind of guy. I don’t think it’s such a good idea to throw a big party for me and my family.”

“Well, we’re going to, and if you disagree, we will have our first fight as a married couple. And I will win it.”

“Technically arguing is different than fighting.” He put his hands on her arms. “Felicity, thank you, but I don’t like the idea. It’s just not me. Celebrate with your staff; give them bonuses, and maybe throw a party for some people, but don’t expect me to come.”

She folded her arms across her chest. “Oliver, this company means a lot to you. To this family. I’ve done the research. Your parents loved QC! Plus, they created it. Most companies don’t last this long. If ever. So come to the party, say a few words, and then you can come home.”

“No.”

“Oliver—”
“Felicity, no. I was perfectly fine with standing up before all those people at the wedding because I was marrying you. But I’m not gonna stand in front of all the richest people in Starling and possibly the United States and talk about my family and the company. Like it or not, I don’t think I’ve ever dealt with my parents’ death, and neither has Thea. Maybe if you can magically bring them back from the dead, you can have them speak. They’ve done a heck of a lot more for the company than I ever have.” He started down the hall, but stopped and turned around to face his wife. Yes, they were just about to have their first day without any kisses. “Actually, maybe you should speak. You’ve done more for QC than anyone else has.”

He ignored Felicity’s huffing and muttering and turned to go downstairs. When he reached the landing, Ellie stood there with her arms crossed. “You ticked Mom off.”

“Thank you; I didn’t notice.”

“You should go to the party.”

“No.”

“Why not, Dad? You afraid of what they might thing?”

“I am not. Now, let’s go eat before we all get into a fight.”

“You’re the one causing problems. Unshockingly.”

That did it. Oliver spun around, and clenched his teeth to avoid an outburst that would feature expletives. “Why can’t anyone see I don’t want to do it? I’ve done barely anything for that company; I don’t deserve to speak at any forty-fifth anniversary party.”

“Well, then who should?”

“Felicity. Or Jerry. Or anybody. I couldn’t care less.”

Ellie rolled her eyes. “Make a stronger case for yourself, because right now you’re being ridiculous.”

He didn’t want to go. Didn’t want a crowd of people staring at him. Some of them had to be resentful, or hurt. Only a handful people were on the jury; they decided whether he was innocent or guilty, but what about everyone else? And just like he’d told Felicity and Ellie, he wasn’t fit to speak. Just because his parents started the company didn’t mean he deserved to make the forty-fifth anniversary speech. He wasn’t going. End of story. “You guys have fun; I’m not going. There’s nothing that’s going to change my mind.”

Breakfast went just as well as those discussions. At the end, Oliver let out a long sigh. “Okay, apparently everyone is mad at me, which is fine.” Not fine, but he would convince himself of that. “But ignoring that for a second, are we gonna still do what we planned on doing?”

“I don’t see why your stubbornness would affect it our plans.”

Oliver pursed his lips and gave one slight nod to Ellie to confirm the correctness of that statement before focusing his attention on his less spiteful children. “It’s a nice day, and the stone came. We could do it a different day, but…”

“No, we decided that we need to do it.” William shared a look with Ellie. “Our sister deserves to get a little recognition, even though she didn’t get be here with us.”

Harper tapped her brother. “We also discussed it, and we don’t want any funeral clothes. In fact, we
want everyone to wear clothes that look happy, because when we do this, we’re officially moving on.”

When did they all get so smart? They’d done more getting over their problems in a few short months than he had done in six years. Oliver swallowed and nodded. “Okay, let’s go after we’re done with breakfast. Sound good?” He glanced at Felicity, who gave him a curt smile. “Listen, guys. I’m sorry about what you overheard with me and your mom. I know we haven’t talked about this a lot, but sometimes…we’re gonna fight.”

Harper giggled. “You’re acting as if we haven’t seen or heard you fight before. Because…wow. Compared to the ones you’ve had, this one isn’t that bad.”

When William pursed his lips and nodded, Oliver winced. “Alright, we’ll ignore that. Will everyone be ready to go in five minutes?” After getting varying degrees of ‘yes’, he stood up. “We’ll meet you outside, okay? Felicity, let’s go.”

She looked like she would say no, but she pushed away from the table and followed him outside. “Yes?”

“I’m sorry about how I overreacted.”

She rubbed her eyes with her fingertips. “It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not, and I’m sorry.”

“Does this mean you’ll come?”

“No.” When she sighed, he grabbed her arm. “Just hear me out, okay? I really appreciate that you’re doing this. I know my mom and dad would love it. But I spent six months in jail for murder, and I got off…I don’t know how or why I got off. Regardless of whether or not I’ve forgiven myself for what happened, it doesn’t change what I did. How can I walk up there and speak about anything? I’m not worthy enough to speak at a forty-fifth anniversary party for a company that was started with the intent to help.”

“But you have helped, Oliver. As the Hood Arrow guy.”

“Queen Consolidated was created to help people the conventional way. And Felicity,” he tossed her a small smile. “You deserve to stand up there and make a speech. My parents would be proud of what you have done.”

“Okay.” She took a deep breath. “For the sake of what we’re doing today, and because you eloquently explained yourself, I’m going to say I forgive you, and just…okay. And there’s two days. Plenty of time for you to change your mind.”

Last time around, with Annie, he would’ve pulled every string and continued fighting, but not now. If he wanted this to work, he had compromise, and make his wife happy. Not all the way—he wasn’t going to that party—but they needed to be one today for this to go well. Oliver gave her a smile and clasped her hand. “Ready to go?”

The kids came out the front door. Harper clapped her hands. “Yay! Now no more fighting.”

Oliver glanced at his wife, who giggled. “Looks like we’ll have children who will watch over us at all times.”

“That’s probably a good thing.”
They drove in silence. There wasn’t a need to talk. Oliver focused on the road, but let his brain float to a place he didn’t like to allow himself to go. It was the what-if land. What if Annie survived the accident? What if the baby lived? Their lives would be different. But that’s where the questions stopped. Those questions, that is. Would he still have ended up in jail? He couldn’t be the Hood forever and expect no one to figure it out. Would William still have hated him? Possibly; their relationship had teetered on not good before Annie died.

Today was a day of accepting. Fully accepting. He wasn’t the Flash. Wasn’t Superman. And he certainly couldn’t go back in time to change things. What if he could change it? Would he? Or would time correct itself and make it worse? He looked over at Felicity, who stared straight ahead, her blonde hair curling around her face. She caught his gaze and shared a smile. He wouldn’t change it. Though he lost almost everything, he didn’t lose it all. And God gave him grace. A second chance. With his family, and with a wife. This time he wouldn’t lose it. He would strive to stay close to his children, so they never had to wonder what it would be like to have a father who loved them.

And he would keep his wife safe. He would love her in a way that he couldn’t with Annie, because this time, he knew how precious having someone in bed with him was. How easily it could be taken away. He wouldn’t let that happen again, and he would keep any future child safe.

Which meant he needed a way to keep the Bratva out of their lives.

When they reached the cemetery, William carried the small gravestone ahead of them to the Queens plot of land. Oliver put his arm around Felicity as they walked. She leaned against him. As they reached the plot, Annie ran up and grabbed his free hand. “I love you, Daddy. And I don’t want to be the littlest.”

When Felicity coughed, Oliver smiled down at his daughter. “I love you too. We’ll see. Maybe you won’t be.”

William set the bag down and pulled out the stone. They named the baby Angel. It was the few times there wasn’t a big argument over something. After Oliver shared the story about the pin, they all agreed on the name, because, according to Piper, ‘she flew up to heaven and she’ll be waiting for us when we get there’.

“Angel Queen.” Ellie squatted down to help William arrange the stone where one of the workers would put it in the ground. “There are certain names that are just perfect, and this is one of them.”

They didn’t have any plans on how they wanted to do this; the Queens never made plans like that. But when the gravestone was settled down how Ellie and William wanted it, each of the kids got on the soggy ground and gave Angel a kiss. The last one to do it, Annie whispered something that carried on for several seconds. She stood up and dusted off her hands. “Okay, we can go now. Because she’s happy, and I’m happy.”

Oliver smiled through the veil of tears. He knelt to the ground and touched the stone, trying to imagine the touch of a baby. He’d done it so many times before, during his mopey moments, but now he couldn’t. He could still see her; how he imagined she’d look, but he’d let go.

“Hey God,” he began the prayer that he’d crafted in his head. “We all know she’s up there with You. Having lots more fun than we are down here. Help us to know that. To know that she’s safe, and happy. And help us to know that someday we’ll all be together.” He looked up at Felicity, who, though she had her eyes closed, smiled. “Give us all peace about that. And about everything else. Just...let her know we all love her, okay? In Your name, amen.” He stayed on the ground for a second before pushing himself up. “Anyone else have anything to say?”
“I think…” Ellie took a deep breath. “I think that was perfect.”

******

Felicity set her computer on the table and pulled her cup of coffee closer to her. She needed it after a day and a half of planning the forty-fifth anniversary party. And after doing her best to avoid conflict with Oliver over the issue, she needed a shot of whiskey. They were going to make it through their first month without a fight. Arguments, yes, but no fights.

“We need to talk about something.”

She shut her computer and smiled at her husband. “Speak of the devil.” When his brow furrowed, she made a face. “Sorry. What do you want to talk about?” She glanced at Diggle, who came in through the side door.

“The Bratva.”

Her stomach clenched. She would prefer a fight to discussing this. “What about it? My security cameras have proven there’s nothing to worry about.”

“Which is what I’m concerned about.” He winced as he took a seat. “It’s bound to happen at some point. They’re a ruthless group, but sometimes…especially in my case, since I nearly died, they might’ve given me some time.” He shrugged, and continued to avoid Felicity’s eyes. “They’re not going to just…leave me alone for the rest of my life.”

“But what if they do? We can’t just live our lives in fear. What if they never attack and we spend all our time worrying?”

“Well, the past couple months I haven’t, Felicity.” The words came out hard enough that Diggle let out a low whistle. Oliver sent him a quick glare before continuing. “I have completely ignored the threat on my family so that I could put all my strength into loving you, and learning how to be a dad again. I could have been freaking out about it all, but I wasn’t. Now it’s time I pull myself back to reality and make a battle plan.”

Felicity pulled her glasses off to rub her eyes. “Oliver…I don’t know.”

“It’s not something to be scared—”

She stood up and began pacing the kitchen. “Oliver, how am I not supposed to be scared? There are people out there who want to kill us. At least you. And what…are we just going to let the kids believe that their lives are perfectly normal?”

He sent her an exasperated look. “I think they know that their lives are different than most kids’.”

“So are we not going to tell them about anything? Just leave them and when something happens, we just say ‘eh, whatever’?”

“I think what Felicity is trying to say is that there’s a thin line that we’re walking right now.” Diggle folded his arms and leaned back against the counter. “You’re saying we should be prepared for what might happen.”

“What will happen.”

Felicity swore. “Oliver, what is wrong with you?”
“What’s wrong with me?” He tossed his hands in the air. “I think it’s called being realistic. And also being the head of the household. I’m responsible for keeping you and the kids safe. For this family, it means making sure everyone knows what’s going on.”

“So they can be afraid. For the rest of their lives. Which, according to you, might not last long.”

Oliver closed his eyes for a moment, and when he spoke again, the tone was gentle. “Felicity, on the way over the cemetery yesterday, I realized something. God gave me a second chance. And I…” tears filled his eyes. “I can’t lose the second change that He gave me. I realize I can’t do this all on my own, so I need you and Dig to realize the danger we’re in.”

Why couldn’t she get behind this? Normally, a tearful Oliver would help make sense of it. But Felicity didn’t want to deal with this right now. Not ever. “And the only way we can know the danger we’re in is by being fearful.”

“It’s called being careful.”

“I can’t, Oliver.” The fear was pressing around her, suffocating her. Flashes of Annie’s kidnapping, and Oliver’s almost-death kept replaying through her head. There was blood on the ground. When she blinked, it disappeared. “I can’t deal with this right now.”

“Hey, hey.” He stood up and caught her arm. “We’re gonna get through this together.”

“You might be strong from all those years in the Bratva, and Dig might be strong from all those years in the army, but I had none of that.” She pulled her arm away from his grip. “I signed up to be the nanny, and I became so much more. I’m so happy I did, don’t get me wrong. But this…this isn’t what I was made for. Talk about it with Dig. Make some decisions. But I can’t be a part of it. Not right now.”

He didn’t stop her. Nor did he when she kissed Annie goodnight and went to the guest bedroom. It didn’t last long. At midnight, she awoke with Oliver next to her, holding her close. She tried to get out of his grip, but he held on tight. Finally, she relented and relaxed against him. “What…what are you doing in here?”

“You were crying.”

“How…” she swallowed back the tears. “How’d you know that?”

“Once Annie fell asleep, I went and laid by the door. I knew you’d wake up at some point.” He kissed her sweaty forehead, leaving a cool trail down her cheeks, and to her neck. “I’m so sorry, Felicity. I didn’t realize how badly I scared you.”

“It’s…okay.” She closed her eyes and pressed against his chest. “Just as long you’re always next to me…I’ll always be okay.”

Her eyes flickered open. Oliver still had his arms around her as he continued to sleep. She needed to clear her head, and finish prep for tonight’s party. The main issue was that he wouldn’t let her go.

“Oliver.” Why on earth did he sleep so hard when she needed him to wake up? “Oliver, honey, you gotta let me go.”

“Hmmm.” His arms loosened. “Sorry. You going to the office?”

“Yeah. I have things to do. Lots of them, actually. So I’ll see you tonight. At the party.”
“No.”

No time to argue. He looked too adorable. Felicity kissed his forehead and ran her fingers through his fluffy, bed hair. “I love you.”

“Love you too. I’d love you more if you kissed me here.” When he pointed to his lips, she giggled. Who knew Oliver Queen could be such a sappy, tired guy? And sexy. Well, everyone knew that. She leaned down and gifted him with a kiss that could have lasted a lot longer had she not been anxious to get to work.

“There you are, my husband. More on that later.” She grabbed her phone from the nightstand and headed to the door. “I’ll see you tonight.” He mumbled something and rolled over to his stomach. Lazy. And oh, how she wished she could go back to bed with him. “That’s enough, Felicity.” She gave herself a hard shake as she walked to the garage. “It’s time to be the CEO of a multi-billion dollar company. Not a newlywed.” She needed to work. When she entered QC, Felicity gave the front-desk lady a wave and slowed down. “Hey, Angela, how’s the party planning going for tonight? I know it was very last minute, but I assumed that all the rich people can easily get plane tickets.”

“We should have no problem getting everything ready. Over two hundred people are expected. It should be fun. Don’t worry about it; we have it handled.”

“Thank you.” Felicity continued down the hall to the stairs. When she reached her office, she opened her computer and typed in the password. Her email popped up right away, with dozens questions about tonight, and requests for a meeting. Jerry took care of most of that on his own computer. They shared the same email for these type of issues, but she had a separate one for more private matters. Like the email she was expecting from Cisco Ramon any day.

When she logged into her private one, Cisco’s email was at the top. The tagline read ‘information about the recent virus’. He’d come clean about the one that kept her at the office, saying that Oliver called Barry asking for someone who could slow Felicity down, and he gave the phone to Cisco. But the one that interrupted her first morning as a Queen had been weighing on her for weeks, and now she’d have her answer.

Instead of that answer, the only thing on the email was ‘call me’. Felicity sighed but grabbed her cell phone. Cisco picked up the second ring.

“Yo, Felicity. You got my email?”

“I was hoping for some better news.”

“Sorry. Especially if you and Oliver got into a fight. Which I don’t want to hear about. Anyways, I need you to establish a secure connection with the phone. No one can hear this.”

“Cisco…” As her heart rate picked up, she cupped the phone against her shoulder and set about blocking anyone from sneaking into the phone call. “Okay, it’s done. What on earth is going on?”

“So you sent me the information about the virus because you’re too busy to do it yourself. Which was fine. Anyways, it took me a really long time to find the origin, so you’d better believe this is true. Mostly because I didn’t think it was possible until I did a little more digging. Which is why—”

“Cisco! Please just tell me what’s going on.”

“The virus…it came from inside Queen Consolidated.”
“How is that possible?”

“I have no idea. But this wasn’t the hands of some dirt bag just goofing around and sending companies viruses. This was someone good. So good that I can’t decipher it. I would send it, but I don’t want anyone catching on.”

“How could possibly be…bad?” Felicity took a deep breath to ward off the feeling of panic. The conversation from two days ago echoed in her head. The Bratva. But they couldn’t do this. They were guns, ammo, and…manipulation. Breathe, Felicity. Breathe. “Send it, Cisco. There’s no way anyone’s bad in this company. Maybe someone made a mistake, and refused to own up to it. Thank you for getting this far for me, and yes, Oliver and I are in a disagreement, and I don’t want to go home right now, so I’ll take it from here.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure. Now please send it.” When it popped up in her inbox, Felicity thanked her friend and opened the file. Before she advanced, her fingers paused on the keyboard. Was this her life? Digging around through a virus? Most people would just move on, but not her. She needed to know what happened. And she needed to know who in her company could create a virus like this. One that took her three hours to go through. In fact, Jerry fixed it. With a few clicks.

“Felicity, you’re being paranoid.” Reason why she didn’t like talking about the Bratva and the ‘what-if’ situations. None of the problems in front of her were a part of that Bratva and the what-if situations they discussed two days ago.

In an attempt to silence her thoughts and to avoid talking to herself, she flipped on music and went to work. The first pile of information was what the virus affected on the computers: all of it. But the second file made her turn the music off. It contained the footprints of whoever did this. Meaning she could have this punk arrested in less than an hour.

As she dug deeper, her phone rang. Oliver. Who she didn’t want to talk to right now. If she answered, he would ask what she was doing, and she would have to work around the information so he didn’t panic, and in turn, get her panic spiking even more. Her stomach clenched when the call went to voicemail. She should have answered. Done a little begging about tonight. Instead, she was worried about an evil organization wanted to destroy them. That was her life now. Most days she couldn’t care less, but right now, tears welled in her eyes.

How could they live like this? Constantly wondering if a virus on her company’s computers was the work of the Bratva. When Oliver didn’t return home on time, worrying that they got him. “Okay, Felicity, that’s enough. Time to stop your spiral.” This was what happened when she gave herself too much time to think.

She shut her computer and headed to the lower level where the decorating had started for the party tonight. “Guys, this looks awesome! I absolutely love it. What’s the dress code for something like this?”

One of the assistants stepped off a stool and set the garland on the ground. “Well, your family is the Queens, so I would suggest something fancy. Long dresses. Tuxes for the guys.”

“Perfect. Also, where’s Jerry? I haven’t seen him in the office all day.”

“That’s a good question.” One of her favorite women in the building, Athena, who got to run all the fun stuff down in the IT department, came running up to Felicity. She handed her a package. “Jerry normally takes care of this stuff, but since he’s not here today, I need you to deal with it.”
“What is it?” Felicity pried open the package to see a USB. “Athena, I thought Jerry isn’t the smartest computer geek in the world. Shouldn’t you take care of this? Or me?”

“They get sent every now and then. He long ago instructed me to send them to him. They were supposed to be finished and sent back to the owner in the first day or so.”

“Uh, sure. He’s probably doing something sweet for an old lady who doesn’t know what a USB is. Thanks, Athena.” She climbed the steps to Jerry’s office and took a seat at his desk. If he had specific files on his computer, she would use his instead of hers that was still brimming with wedding ideas. Eventually she’d take those off. Not today.

She plugged the USB in and drew up the files. The first one titled ‘surroundings’ popped up first.

Everything stopped moving.

Her heartbeat sped up, but she couldn’t react. Her fingers stayed still, unable to click away the images.

Oliver knelt at Angel’s gravestone, his eyes closed. The rest of the family stood around them, heads bowed.

It was a photo of them.

In the cemetery.

*React, Felicity. You have to do something.* She blinked away the tears and opened the next file. It was Oliver in the work-out room. He climbed the salmon ladder with ease, his body rippling with muscles. The scars were almost healed, especially evident in the next video as he worked with a sword. His wife sat on one of the benches, in clear view of the cameras, ogling her husband.

They had cameras. In the house.

In the house.

The phrase ran through her head as she looked through the rest of the photos and videos. All of them in the past few weeks. A kissing episode in the attic. Family game night in the kitchen. Another make-out scene in the attic. Ellie and Oliver talking. Annie rehabbing.

At that, Felicity turned her head and puked. It splattered over the desk, but it didn’t matter. She didn’t care. Jerry wasn’t who he said he was. No one was. Could she trust anyone in this building? In her own house? How had people gotten…”Oh my God.” Her stomach clenched again, and this time, she retched over Jerry’s papers. Scumbag. Somehow, he’d become involved. With the people who wanted to burn the Queens to ash.

How did they not see it? That the poison had spread? Oliver was worried that the Bratva would attack.

“But they already did.” She bit her lip to keep from crying. She loved Jerry. He always brought her coffee, especially when they had a deadline. He listened to her rants, and calmed her down afterwards. And somehow, someway, he’d been turned. Or maybe he’d always been like this. Just trying to get under her skin. Make her trust him.

What were they planning? There were videos from the weight room. From the attic. From the kitchen. They knew everything.
She needed to call Oliver. Tell him to get the kids out of the house and out of the country. But maybe they couldn’t hide. Maybe it was too late for all of them. Felicity yanked the USB out and pocketed it. She grabbed her phone from her desk and left the room. As she came around the corner, the elevator doors opened. *Oh, God.*

“Hello, Felicity.” Jerry smiled at her, but it faded when he scanned her. “You look like you just saw a ghost of some sort. Are you okay?”

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine. Just a long day at the office.”

“It’s only ten.”

“I was here early. Plus, Oliver and I got into a little scuffle. Just worn out. I’ll be back for the party tonight, though.”

“Oh.” He took a few steps towards his office, eliciting a sigh of relief from Felicity. “Oh, hey, Felicity. Can you do me a favor?”

Felicity stutter-stepped before turning around to flash him her most convincing smile. “Anything.”

“Next time, make it a little harder for me to catch you.”

“Wh-What?” She stepped backwards as he walked towards her. “I don’t know what you mean, Jerry. Seriously, what is your problem?” She tried to turn on her phone, but it wouldn’t work. When she looked up at him, he smiled. “Jerry…stop.”

He lifted his jacket to reveal a gun. “It seriously took you a lot longer than I thought it would. But that geek in Central City really peaked your interest, didn’t it? Don’t worry, he’ll pay for that. Athena already did.”

“What…what did you do to her?” She covered her mouth when his eyes flickered to the gun. “No. It wasn’t her fault. She didn’t—” his hand slapped over her lips.

“Shhhh, Mrs. Queen.” He chuckled as she fought against him. “You did say you liked being called that, correct? It’s almost a little funny. If you hadn’t accepted that nannying job, you wouldn’t be in this situation. In fact, you’d still be hanging out with Mr. Allen every weekend, without a care in the world. You wouldn’t have to worry about dying, or your husband. Or your children.”

He wasn’t going to kill her yet. Too humane. Plus, why murder the wife of a Bratva member without that said man there? Why panic—more than she already was—about dying right now when it wouldn’t happen until her husband—the Arrow—was watching. Felicity relaxed herself and let the drugs take over.

Last time she got kidnapped, her ex-boyfriend came back to life and tried to force her to reroute trucks filled with money to his doorstep. She’d wondered how anything could be worse than that. In a way, she was thankful life played out this way. She loved Oliver; loved the kids. If she died today—if they all died today—it would be okay.

If only it didn’t come to pass because of betrayal.

Chapter End Notes
This is...well...the beginning of the end. The next chapter will pick up right where this chapter left off, and then the last one will pick up where 31 left. It'll be a rollercoaster ride, but it should be awesome. I just finished watching the inspiration behind this story, so I've got my ideas all there...now I just have to write it!
Looking forward to sharing the rest of the story with you!
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

The Bratva attacks!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

If she’d learned one thing from Oliver’s rambles at night, it was this: in a kidnapping situation, don’t open your eyes until you’ve surveyed everything you can with them closed. As Felicity’s brain started whirling again, she tilted her head and listened. Men talked in hushed voices several feet away from her. One of them seemed to have a weapon. When she got all she could, she opened her eyes, expecting a dark room filled with torture weapons.

Instead, she sat in her living room, tied to a chair. Why bring her here? “Well, this is really nice. You guys better not have used my coffee maker. It’s a very special…” okay, getting slapped hurt. Felicity grimaced and took a moment to gather herself. The sassier she was, the more she could hide her fear. You’re gonna be okay. Oliver would come for her. Get her out of this mess of crap. “What…what do you want?”

The man who slapped her smiled. “You’ll find out.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not too interested in waiting. In fact, I have zero patience. So if you’re going to kill me, maybe you should, y’know, do it now?”

He didn’t seem to like her very much. “We aren’t interested in killing you. You could be collateral damage, but you—and the children—aren’t the ones we want.” Sweat trickled down her back as he set a gun on the end table. “You aren’t the one who betrayed the Bratva.”

“Because you forced him to. What do you think he was gonna do? Not tell you? You threatened us.”

“And we’ll do it again, because it worked well last time.”

What were they going to do to Oliver? Felicity raised her chin and glared. “You stay away from him. He’s off limits. I’m skilled in more ways than one, Mr. Bratva guys. You don’t want to mess with me, especially after you threaten the man I love.”

“That’s why we recruited him.” The man pointed to the entryway. Jerry walked in, carrying a briefcase. Felicity jerked against her handcuffs. The very sight of him made her want to throw up. In his face. Preferably down his throat. “We needed someone in the deep inside, and he was willing to do it.”

“So Jerry knows that I hate spiders, don’t like Frappuccino’s, have a very bad taste in pop music, an equally bad taste in words, and that Oliver and I make-out a lot?” Felicity managed to snap her fingers. “But, oh, wait. You already know that. Because you have been spying on us!” She looked past the Bratva man to Jerry. “You put cameras in almost every room of this house. Even in the attic! Can you imagine how it must feel, knowing that someone has watched our every move?”

“Maybe you should have thought of that before you married Oliver.”
“You shouldn’t even say his name,” she spat. She needed to control herself. Get information out of them before they tried to kill her husband. “What’d you get out of me? Or did you drug me up and… I don’t know… get me to tell you everything?”

“Let’s just say this, Mrs. Queen.” Jerry made his way towards her, his walk cocky, his gaze threatening. “You will never be able to make any moves on any Wi-Fi that I won’t know about. I’ve got everything, Felicity. Your footprints, how you track, and how far you can make it into a super virus before quitting.”

She closed her eyes as the truth washed over her. That’s what the Bratva had done. After taking notes on how far Oliver could go, they realized they had another player: her. Maybe Jerry had been bad before, but then they needed to get information about her, so they had him shadow her, learning her every move. On a computer. The only place she was powerful. Oh, God, help me.

“So now that we delved that information out, it’s time to give Mr. Queen a call.” Jerry reached for the phone. “Or would you like to do it yourself? Maybe speak to your husband for the last time?”

“Jerry, that’s enough.” The other man grabbed the phone. “We’re getting this done quick and easy.”

She could only hope it didn’t involve torture.

*******

Oliver rolled his eyes when Harper walked by him towards the dressing room with another pile of dresses. How many outfits did they have in there? They’d been here for two hours, and only one child had declared they had a dress for tonight. If this was Ellie and Felicity’s ploy to make him feel bad for not coming, it wasn’t working. In fact, he wanted to go home and sleep. “Is that it? Please?”

“No, because so far I haven’t found anything I like.”

“Harper, there are literally a thousand dresses here. Maybe you should work on—” his phone rang. As he worked to get it out of his pocket, he continued. “Becoming less picky so everyone has time to actually get ready before the party tonight. Which is probably what Felicity is calling me about.” He glanced at Diggle, who sat a few feet from them, reading a newspaper. “Watch them, will you?”

“Always.”

“Thanks.” He went around the corner and answered the call. “Hey, honey.”

“Hello, Oliver.”

He fell back against the wall, nearly knocking over a rack of clothes. That voice… he knew that voice. That accent. The threatening way the man spoke his name. Oh, God. Help us. He finally grasped his voice and spoke. “What do you want?”

“First of all, let me say that one of my assistants has a gun pointed to your wife’s head. Second, know that we have two agents in the store right now, prepared to kill your entire family.” The man paused. “Unless you do what I say.”

Oliver rubbed his hand over his eyes. “You know I’ll do whatever you want.”

“Come to your house.”

They were at his—
“Come alone, without John. I’m sure he’s fully capable of watching the kids.”

“If you touch even a hair on any of their heads—”

“We know, Oliver.”

“No, Oliver! Don’t! They have—” Someone silenced his wife. Oliver clenched his jaw to keep from screaming. When the phone went silent, he lowered it, his hands shaking. It happened. Everything he feared. His eyes flitted to the shoppers mingling around. Any of them could be Bratva. They could fit in with the crowd so no one saw them until too late.

He needed to go. Save Felicity. But he couldn’t move.

“Daddy?”

_No, baby, no._ Oliver shook his head and pointed to the dressing room. “Harper, keep trying on dresses. I need to go do something.”

“Okay, but do you like this dress?” She did a little curtsy. “I think I finally found one.”

“It’s…” his voice cracked. “It’s very pretty, sweetie. I like it.”

“Are you okay? You look like you’re about to faint.”

“I—I’m fine. Go ahead and buy that one. I like it.” Ignoring her questions, he spun around and strode down the hall. After rounding a corner, he broke into a run to the car. He couldn’t call Barry. He couldn’t call Captain Lance. There was no one. The Bratva had backed him into a wall with no ways to turn. He had a bow and quiver. To save his whole family. Oliver let out a little cry and dropped his head on the steering wheel. He couldn’t lose them again. This time around, it would kill him.

The trip home would take twenty minutes, and after the first five, he calmed down and transformed his fear into anger. That anger turned into the drive to get his wife out of whatever situation they were in. Safely. He could do that. He was trained by the people who had kidnapped her. Though they knew what he would do, he knew how they worked. He knew work around issues, and save her. Quarter of a mile from the house, he parked the car and ran through the woods the rest of the way. Back in the day, he would ditch Diggle on this route. Eventually Annie figured it out and he never used it again.

He slipped in through the basement entrance and climbed the stairs. They could be anywhere in the house, and no matter what, he wouldn’t have the element of surprise, but it enabled him to grab a spare quiver and bow. It wouldn’t help him, but it would give him a certain comfort.

Oliver pushed open the door and stepped into the hallway. They weren’t hiding. Whatever the Bratva wanted, he would do. He’d prepared himself for that. But as he walked down the corridor towards the noise, tears welled in his eyes. For the past few months, he’d worked hard to restore his humanity. What if he had to throw it all away again? Become the killer? He didn’t want to do it. To save Felicity, he would, but he didn’t want to. Ever again.

He set the arrow on its rest and pulled the string back. After one deep breath to steady his hands, he stepped around the corner. Three Bratva men stood several feet away from him, their guns aimed at his head. That didn’t matter. His eyes went to Felicity, who sat tied to a chair, a gun pressed against her temple. By their office assistant. “You son of—”

“I’ll blow her brains out, Mr. Queen. Put the bow down. Now.”
He lowered the bow and set it on the ground. “I did what you asked. Now point that gun anywhere other than at my wife.” Jerry glanced at the men in front of him. When they nodded, he aimed the gun at the ground. Oliver took that opportunity to get a good look at his wife. A red mark streaked across her cheek. They hadn’t hurt her. Much. Still, the anger rendered him helpless. She’d been at the office planning the party for tonight. Had they attacked her there? Dragged her here and chained her up in her own living room? For what?

Felicity shook her head. “Oliver…you shouldn’t have come.”

“I promised you on our wedding day that I would hold an umbrella over you when it rains. This is me doing that.” He raised his hands while sending the men looks of fire. “I’m not going to ask twice. What do you want?”

One man went to stand behind him, while the other blocked the other exit. Alexei took a seat on the couch and took a shot of whiskey. “Six years ago, you swore your allegiance to the Bratva. I do not need to explain anything else.”

The umbrella over his wife quivered, and fell, exposing them both to the pouring rain. Oliver closed his eyes. No. Please, no. Not today. Not tomorrow. He couldn’t do this. “I-I…you can’t do that.”

“We can. And we will.”

“What’s going on?” Felicity looked from him, to Alexei, to Jerry. “What are you asking?”

He couldn’t answer. His mouth couldn’t move. The dread wrapped him into a cocoon and wouldn’t let him go. His brain replayed the words he promised to the Bratva years ago. Everything he promised to do. How he said he would never betray them. How the members were his family. But it was different now. Now he knew who his family really was. Not the men who killed.

He couldn’t go back there. But that’s what they were asking. He’d been the exception for the Bratva. He lived in Starling; when they needed him, they called him. He was always on the next flight to Russia. No one else did that. They lived where they were stationed. Some in Russia, some in France. That’s what they wanted him to do.

They wanted him to leave his family and never return.

“I live in a compound that the Bratva owns. I work only for the Bratva. The Bratva is my family.” Alexei smiled, showing off his missing teeth. That’s what happened in the Bratva, but the losses were much more than just teeth. “They are the only family I need. And if you want to fight with us knowing that your family is safe, you will say yes.”

“No!” Felicity screamed. “You can’t take him like that! This is his family. Not you scumbags who murder for a living. That’s not him anymore!”

“Felicity….” Her name brought no relief. Only the agony of what he would have to leave behind. Oliver shook his head. “There’s no way out of this.”

Her face crumpled. “You can’t, Oliver. You belong here. With me. With us.”

“We’ve given you enough time with your family. You’re healthy again. You will come with us.”

How did they know that? Oliver looked across to his wife, who closed her eyes.

“They’ve been spying on us. They know everything. E-Everything.”
He clenched his fists and stared down at the ground to collect himself. He’d been trained to stay calm under fire. Usually it worked. However, they hadn’t trained him to stay calm when it was his family being threatened. What had they seen? What did they know? Get a grip. He needed to get information. “You failed to kill my daughter. What was your point in kidnapping her? Did you have a point?”

“We needed you to know that we were in charge. Always in charge. And always watching.” Alexei set his drink down and stood up. “We realized that you lost respect for us. That you weren’t bothered by us. Clearly, as you so easily told us about us. We knew that the best way to instill that respect and fear was to make you fear us.”

“Why not just kill me?”

“Because you’re worth too much to us. You’re one of our best men. We can’t just let that go. And we couldn’t just let you rot in prison.”

A cry escaped. Oliver grabbed the wall for support as his strength left him. Pain crushed his sternum as black spots appeared before his eyes. Felicity started crying. “Y-You…” he tried to take a steadying breath, but it didn’t work. Instead, something close to a sob came out. “You changed the verdict?”

“After kidnapping Annie, and you saving her, that didn’t need any help. But being the vigilante… that did. We got you out of there.” Alexei smiled. “You’re welcome.”

Oliver jerked away from the wall and took three steps to stand face-to-face with Alexei. “I would’ve rather rotted in prison.”

“We could gladly put you back there. But it’d be with the rest of your dead family.” Jerry raised the gun again. “Unless you come with us immediately.”

With tears streaming down her face, Felicity shook her head. “Oliver, please. Don’t go. It’s okay. Don’t go. You can’t give into that again.” After that last line, Jerry cocked the gun and jammed it against her skull. She squeezed her eyes shut. Oliver jerked forward, but Alexei put his hand on his chest and pushed him back.

“As stupid as he is, Jerry is correct. You must come with us immediately. If you resist, we’ll kill Felicity first. You can hold her body in your arms as her blood drains onto your body. But that won’t be the last. We’ll kill Ellie. Then Willie. Then Harper.” As Alexei spoke each name, it was if he was digging a spear deeper into Oliver’s chest. “After that, we’ll take you to Russia where you can spend the rest of your life as a member of the Bratva. But, if you don’t resist, they will continue to live here. They will all grow up to be beautiful people. Your wife will stay alive. They will all be okay.”

But he would never see them again. The Bratva wouldn’t let that happen. Oliver looked around the room. He could think of good things that happened everywhere in here. A baby had been born on the couch by the fireplace. Not on purpose, but a snowstorm did that to people. A long time ago, he and Tommy had thrown the football around, and spent three hours coming up with how to explain the broken light fixtures. Several months ago, he’d shared a moment with Ellie that would change his life. A week ago, he and Felicity made love on the couch, and then watched a sappy romance movie that made them both cry.

His gaze came to rest on the mantle. The photo from the gala hung there, and since they hadn’t had the time yet, the wedding photos were leaned against the wall. In one, he and Felicity shared a kiss with the sunset behind them. Another picture was him and the girls, and then him and the boys. But he lingered on the smallest one. It had gotten messed up in the order. They’d taken a picture of all
their hands, for some sappy reason. There were eight. Felicity’s diamond ring sparkled in the sun, and his glimmered. Ellie’s rings shined.

This was his family.

The Queens.

Rain or shine, they were in this together. That’s what they’d both said in their wedding vows. And as long as they had love, and they were still breathing, they had a chance. A chance to live. That’s what he needed right now. A chance to live. Maybe it was a small chance, but as long as he had her, he had a shot, right?

“Yes, I understand. I really do.” Oliver took a deep breath. “But here’s the thing. And before you shoot her, Jerry, hear me out. I think I’m entitled to that, correct?” When Alexei nodded to Jerry, Oliver took two steps forward. “I will go with you. Under one stipulation.” Felicity raised her head and stared at him, unblinking. Oliver refrained from winking at her. “My wife stumbled upon something a couple days ago. Apparently it’s my company—our company’s—forty-fifth anniversary. Which is today. She went through a whole lot of trouble to plan a party, and that’s tonight.”

Felicity ducked her head, but he still caught the beginning of a smile. It gave him strength to plug on with his story.

“I’ll go with you. After I say goodbye to my family. And after that party.”

“What makes us believe that you won’t try to run away?”

“Because you trust me. And you need me. What makes you think that I couldn’t just take a gun and blow my brains out right now? Plus, Alexei, you have a family. Had. You know how hard it is to leave your wife and children, and now you’re asking me to leave mine. So give me this time to say goodbye to my wife and my kids. Let me say goodbye to the company that I ran for years. Then I will come and join you. I promise.”

Jerry scoffed. “That company isn’t yours.”

“It says Queen on the building, correct? And my last name is Queen. Which probably means that I’m speaking.”

“Fine.” Alexei picked up the gun. “Just know that we will know if you step out of this house, and we will know if you take one wrong turn on your way to the party. In fact, we will escort you. I will see you tonight, Mr. and Mrs. Queen.”

When they left, and the doors shut. Oliver ran to the kitchen to get a knife. He cut the ropes off Felicity wrists and pulled her onto his lap. She wrapped her arms around his neck as she cried against him. With his own fears threatening to suffocate him, he ran his hand up and down her back, calming her down. “It’s gonna be okay. It’s gonna be all okay. We’re gonna find a way to get out of here.”

“No, no, you don’t understand.” She kept her head against his chest, but her breathing rate increased. “They have cameras everywhere. They know everything about us. Even my abilities. I can’t hack us out of here to save your life. They’re gonna take you away.” Her fingernails dug into his shoulders. “I can’t do anything about it!”

“Hey, hey.” Oliver pulled her away so he could put his hands on her cheeks. “Thanks to your party, we now have a chance. This gives us about six hours to create a plan. You are a talented woman, Felicity. We’re gonna give it our best shot. ‘Kay?”
She nodded. “I’m so sorry, Oliver. About…”

“Yeah, I know. But I can’t…” he was out of prison because the Bratva coerced the jury into a different verdict. He’d been guilty after all. Oliver rested his chin on Felicity’s hair. “I should be in prison right now, and if it’d make this family any safer, I’d just go and turn myself in. But I really can’t. They’d shoot one of the kids the minute I walked out the door.”

“Why do they want you so badly?”

“Because, for one, I’m good. I learned the skills fast, and despite how much they pretend to not like me, they were happy I was there because I can do things that most people can’t. Two, I betrayed them. This is how they work. They kidnapped Annie to prove a point, and they’ll drag me away because they can. And whatever they did…I can’t think about that right now. You need to tell me what happened.”

She explained the events of the morning, finishing with Jerry telling her that he’d been at QC to get information about how she worked. “Oliver, we can’t trust anyone. Someone was in this house, and someone put cameras everywhere. It could be anybody! Raisa…Diggle…can we trust anyone?”

The very thought tore against his heart, but Oliver shook his head. “We can’t. There’s no way of knowing, and any little thing could get me sent to Russia a few hours early.” He pushed himself up. “I’m going to call Dig and ask him to bring the kids home. But we can’t tell him.” What if his best friend was bad? Could that be possible? Someone needed heavy access to the house to plant cameras everywhere. Maybe they threatened Lyla. Or his family he never talked about. Or maybe he’d been bad for years, just like Jerry.

He should have seen this coming. Well, he had seen it coming. Just too late to prepare for a disaster like this. Oliver clicked Diggle’s number and raised the phone to his ear. “Hey John. Have the kids finished shopping?”

“Actually, they have. Harper got worried about you, and convinced everyone to finish up. I can hear why. What’s up, man?”

Oliver rubbed his hand over his eyes. “I’m fine. Just…head home, okay?”

“Something is wrong with you. Are you and Felicity good? That fight yesterday was ugly.”

“No, we’re okay. I’ll see you in a little bit.” He set the phone on the chair and leaned against the wall. What was he supposed to do? Kill him? Lock him up in the basement? Lock everyone but his family down there until they could figure out what to do? “Felicity?” He beckoned her to come over so they could talk without anyone hearing.

“Yeah, honey?” She slipped her hands around his waist and leaned against him.

“Do you think they have audio on us?”

“If they do, that’s gonna be pretty embarrassing.”

“Okay, let’s ignore that. Can you determine if they have audio?”

“I could do that without anyone noticing. But we’re very stuck in terms of what we can do. However,” she mustered up a smile. “Like you said, we have a chance, which is a miracle in itself. So we’ll try. There’s no cameras in the bathroom, and I have a tablet on the end table right next to it, so we should be good. When will the kids be home?”
“Twenty minutes or so.” Oliver grabbed his weapon and followed his wife upstairs to their bathroom. If only life was different. He sat on the counter as she went to work. A little smile escaped as he watched her. Even with her hair in disarray, and in emotional distress, she looked beautiful. What would he do without her? She had pulled him from the brink of emotional death, and if or when he was taken away, she wouldn’t be there to save him. He’d lose himself. For good.

“Got it!” Felicity set the tablet on the ground. “There’s no sound. Unless they’re a million times better than me. Which they—”

“I trust you.”

She slid the tablet into the seat of her pants, because of course she did, and grabbed his hand. “The kids will be home soon. Which means that we need to figure out what we’re going to do. Do you have any ideas?”

“None that are ideas that will save any of us.”

“From the mouths of babes’, hopefully.”

Oliver led the way down the stairs and checked their own security camera feed. “They’re here. But they’re not getting out of the car.”

“Well, they’re probably fighting over who has to tell their father that they spent over a thousand dollars.”

“Nice try cheering me up.” He opened the doors and stepped out. Movement in the bushes made him stick his arm out behind him to keep his wife away from whatever happened in the next five seconds. “Felicity, get back in the house. Now.”

“What’s—”

Queen Consolidated’s executive assistant stepped out of the bushes, with a cocked pistol. Oliver raised his hands and took three steps backwards, enough to shield Felicity if Jerry fired. “What do you want?”

“The Bratva is going to give you plenty of time to get out of here. I know because they need you. But you don’t deserve to live in Russia for the rest of your life. You deserve to die.” Jerry pointed the gun at Oliver’s head. “For all you’ve done. You are—”

Shots rang out. Felicity shrieked. Jerry dropped to the ground.

John Diggle stood behind him, his gun tracing Jerry’s body to confirm that he’d been silenced before he holstered the weapon. “What the hell is going on here?”

Guilt washed over Oliver as he spread his hands. Why did he ever think his bodyguard was a part of it? “John…” his shoulders slumped forward as Ellie and William appeared in the driveway, their eyes wide. His daughter covered her mouth and turned around to bury her head in William’s chest. Oliver rubbed his eyes. “Felicity, can you get the kids in through the back door? Dig and I will dispose of this—”

“Douchebag.” When he stared at her, she shrugged. “What? It needed to be said.”

Oliver knelt down and touched Jerry’s throat. Dead. “Thank you, John. And I know you have questions, but I’d prefer to answer them when we’re all together.” Without another word, they put the body behind the garage and went into the house. The family sat in the living room, all wearing
looks of terror. He glanced at his wife. “Did you tell them?”

“No. I think you should.”

His body was suddenly exhausted. Oliver grasped the edge of the couch as he took a seat. “Six years ago, I swore an allegiance to the Bratva. A while ago, I broke that allegiance. Today they came to make me pay for that.” He took a deep breath to keep the tears away. The little kids needed to know the situation, but not the panic their father felt. “I’m supposed to go to Russia, and…” his emotions got the better of him. “And never come back. That’s supposed to happen tonight.”

“No,” Ellie covered her mouth. “No, they can’t do that.”

“Yeah, that’s not…right.” William grabbed Harper’s hand. “They can’t do that.”

“They can. And they will, unless we figure out how to get out of here.”

“Why not?” With tears falling down her cheeks, Harper shrugged. “They can’t take you away.”

“We’d never be able to come back here.”

“Who cares? You’re our dad. We can’t let them take you away like that. We need you.”

“And I need a new baby sister!”

Oliver knew that if he squeezed Felicity’s hand any harder, he’d break it, but the last line nearly caused him to the fall to the ground and sob. Instead, he looked up at the ceiling for a few heartbeats to collect himself before looking at the couch that the kids sat on. “I really have a special family, don’t I?”

“Well…” Ellie smiled. “We love you very much. And we’re not gonna let them do anything. You’re not going anywhere.”

Felicity shared a look with Oliver before she stood up. “I think I’m going to ask that the little kids go play. Doesn’t have to be far, but this is not a conversation for little ears.” She ruffled Clayton’s hair. “Please?”

He nodded, but ran to give Oliver a hug. “Please don’t go, Daddy. You can’t go.”

“I’m going to do everything I can to stay. Now please go watch a movie or something.”

When the three younger kids left, and Felicity had set up her security cameras in the room they were watching a movie, Oliver told Diggle and the rest of the kids about what happened earlier. “We can’t trust anyone, and Felicity’s expertise can only be used in last resort, because they…know what her, uh, um—”

“My footprints can be tracked.”

“Thank you. So with that, anyone have any ideas?”

“I have one.” Ellie raised her hand. “And I think you know who I’m talking about.”

Oliver let out a long breath. “He’s hurt.”

“He’s basically a supernatural being. Don’t you think he could figure something out?”

At the wedding, Barry could walk. Could he run again? And even if he could, where would he take
them? Across the country?


Felicity ignored that, and leaned in closer to him. “How does Ellie know about the Flash?”

What if Barry could save them? Could he get past the idea of telling Felicity that her best friend and her husband had lied to her about a lot of things? A while ago, he had vowed that he would never reveal Barry’s secret, but with his life on the line, he had to. Oliver shot Ellie a look and shifted on the couch so he could take both of Felicity’s hands. “I need to tell you something. It’s going to come as a shock, but you’ll have to deal with it later, and not now. Because after I tell you, you’re gonna have to figure out how to establish a secure connection so we can call people.” Here goes. “Barry Allen…is the Flash.”

Her eyes widened. She pulled away from him and just stared. “No. No, that’s not possible.”

“I’m sorry, Felicity. He didn’t want you to know and—”

“That’s why you hired me. Because he called you and told you…oh my God.” She let out a laugh that was definitely an angry one. “I can’t believe it. Barry Allen. Is the Flash. And you’ve known for what? Years? And you didn’t tell me?”

“It wasn’t my secret to tell, Felicity. When we became partners, we vowed to never tell people about our secret identities.” He reached for her hand, but she stood up and began pacing the carpet. Silent Felicity was a very scary Felicity. “You have to understand why we decided to do that. Caitlin and Cisco knew, but that was it.”

Felicity glanced at Ellie. “How long have you known?"

“Thea and I figured it out when we went down to Dad’s lair. I only brought it up now because there’s a chance that he could help us stay together. And we have to get past the fact that he’s your friend, because we need you. Fight with Dad on the way out of here, please?”

“Yes, yeah.” Felicity took a deep breath. “I can do that. Mostly because I’ve done that a few times in my life. I have to get past something to save a life. Or all of our lives. So he didn’t get into a car accident?”

“No, and the last time I checked, he didn’t have any speed.”

“So he’s going to walk us out of here?”

“It’s worth a shot. They’re good over at Star Labs. Maybe they can get something to give his speed back. Can we call someone without them noticing?”

“Somewhere that there’s no cameras. So in a bathroom. But first I need to establish a secure connection without them picking it up.”

Diggle crossed his arms. “It should help now that tech guy is dead. Speaking of, why aren’t they coming to kill us for killing one of their own?”

“Probably because Jerry was just a guy they recruited a long time ago. Threaten a family, you’ll do a lot of bad things. Trust me; I know. Which probably means they have their own computer geniuses, so be careful, Felicity.”

“Careful is my middle name.” She stood up and sidled up to him, her eyes glinting with desire. “So
with that in mind, let’s go have fun in the bathroom. Lots of kisses before we get in there so they think we’re…y’know. Dig, I’ll yell if I get in, and then you need to contact Lyla. See what she’s willing to do. Ellie, there are no cameras in yours and the other kids’ bedrooms. Tell everyone to gather a couple of pairs of clothes. That’s it. We can sneak in a backpack or two for the *Flash* to carry.”

The level of shade hurt, but Oliver kept up to her as she climbed the stairs to one of the bathrooms. Just before they reached the first option, he grabbed her arm and spun her around towards him. They spent thirty seconds kissing, playing the part of a married couple who wouldn’t see each other again. He opened the door and pushed his wife into the bathroom. But as soon as the door shut, they pulled away from each other. Felicity took a seat on the toilet and Oliver sank down to the edge of the tub. “Is there anything that I can do to help?”

“Just pray.” She pulled her tablet out of her pants and went to work. “Do you have your phone? Because as soon as I get this wall up, you need to call. I just need to pretend to be someone completely different. And appear to be in France. Which, if I was my father, it wouldn’t be too difficult. But I’m me.”

“Hey.” He slid to his knees and scooted to Felicity’s side. Her fingers stopped moving across the keys, and transferred to his hands. “Remember all those times you believed in me? I was able to become a better person thanks to you. This is a totally different situation, but Felicity, I believe in you. You can do this. I know you can.”

She looked down at him, tears in her eyes. “I always did this for fun. And now I have to literally save your life.”

“And that’s why you’re gonna be able to do it.” He stood up and planted a kiss on her forehead. “You got this, sweetheart.”

Five minutes later, she raised her fist in the air. “I’m in! I mean…never mind. Call Barry.”

Oliver dialed his friend’s number. When Barry picked up, he breathed a sigh of relief. “Hey, buddy. We need a big favor.” He turned it on speakerphone. “Felicity’s with me. She knows.”

“Oh, God.” Barry swore. “Felicity, I am so—”

“Apologies later, buddy. Right now we need your help.” They split off telling him what happened. “We need you to get us out of here.”

Barry let out a loud moan. “Guys, I can’t. I have limited speed at the moment. I could maybe get one person out of there, but that’s it. We can certainly do all we can but…there’s nothing that I can do with my speed.”

Oliver took a deep breath. *Don’t lose faith.* There were other options. But this was the best one. He caught Felicity’s gaze and shook his head. “Barry, it’s okay. We had to exhaust all avenues and—”

“Give me the phone.” Caitlin spoke and must have pushed Barry away. “Hi, guys. First of all, I’m so sorry for what’s happening. I can only imagine what you’re feeling right now. But there’s a chance we could help. Barry could. I’ve been working on a serum that would give him his speed back for a short time. There’s a chance…a good chance that it could be done by tonight and he could get you all out of there.”

“It’ll have to be out of Queen Consolidated.” Felicity stood up and opened the door. “John, call Lyla!” She sat back down and leaned forward. “Are you sure you can get it done?”
“We will do our very best, Felicity. We’re not gonna let Oliver be taken away like that. We’ll text later. Don’t worry about them finding out.” Caitlin hung up.

“Get everything figured out in there?”

Felicity tousled her hair and opened the door. “Hopefully. What’d you find out?”

“There’s a plane that can be used and no one will be able to trace it. But the plane can’t be anywhere near Starling or it could be. Did you get a hold of your speedster friend?”

“We did. I think we have a plan. Tell Lyla to put it somewhere and Barry will get us there. Thank, Dig.” Felicity shut the door again and rubbed her hands together. “So. Are we going to do this for real this time? Because, like it or not, something might not work and I could never see you again. So while we have time,” her arms encircled his waist. “I want to make sure that we never forget this.”

“I’ll never forget us, Felicity. But,” he opened the bathroom door and stepped out into the hallway. “I need one more moment with you. So let’s go.”

With the knowledge that they might not ever have a chance to do this again, they took their time. Oliver soaked in the moment, treasuring each part of his wife’s body, making sure he knew everything about her so on those nights alone he had something to remember. To smile about. He wouldn’t forget her. Their love. Because of her, he would have something to fight for. To live for.

Afterwards, they lay on the bed, looking at each other. Finally, Oliver lifted his hand to Felicity’s face. “You are so beautiful.” When she closed her eyes and smiled, he pulled her closer. “Never forget that, okay? Whether we wake up tomorrow on opposite sides of the world, or together, please.” His voice cracked. “Please never forget that.”

“And you’re worth it.” Her hand caressed his cheek. Her fingers tickled his stubble, earning her a smile. “I know you might not always think so. But know that, okay? And know that I will always,” she brushed her lips against his before pulling away to smile. “Always love you.”

Just as he leaned in for another kiss, someone knocked on the door. Oliver sighed and rolled over towards the entryway, making sure to pull the covers over them both. “If it’s one of the kids, come on in.”

Ellie pushed open the door. “Hey, guys.” She walked to the bed and handed Oliver Felicity’s phone. “This came from Cisco Ramon a couple minutes ago.”

*Hey, just wanted to say have lots of fun at the party tonight! Looks epic! Wish we could come, but my brother is in San Francisco this weekend, and I need to prepare for that.*

“Caitlin said that she’d get the information to us without anyone finding out.” Felicity took the phone from him as he closed to his eyes and breathed a prayer of thanks. They were getting out of here. All of them. To where, they didn’t know, but he would have his family. Oliver glanced over at his wife, who had tears shining in her eyes. “I think we can hold off on more making out.”

She tossed him a flirty look. “And we might want to start considering that little baby sibling Annie wants.”

Ellie gagged. “Oh, it was great until that. Should we wear the dresses we picked out for tonight?”

“We don’t want anyone to think we’re leaving afterwards, so yes. We’ll be out in five minutes.”

When she left, Oliver sat up and gathered his clothes. “Can you establish that line again? We need to call Lyla and tell her to put the plane somewhere decently close but far enough away that they can’t
figure it out until it’s too late.”

“Does Barry need any hints on when to come?”

“No. He’s not dumb. But if we can call him and get as much lined up as possible, that’d be nice.”

She let out a laugh. “I still can’t believe he’s the Flash.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.”

“No, I understand. I’m mad; mostly at him, but I know why you didn’t tell me. I would be pretty mad if you told anyone about how my real hair color is black.”

He chuckled. “He’s a hero.”

“Like you.”

“I don’t know about that.”

“No, you are.” She pushed herself up to her elbows. “The Flash is a speedster. He’s a metahuman. You’re not. And you still chose to help people. You’re a hero in my books, Oliver. Always will.” She gave him a kiss before sliding out of bed. “Let’s go tell the kids. We need to get everyone prepared for what’s going to happen.”

In a few minutes, they walked down the hall together. As they headed downstairs, giggles erupted from the kitchen. Someone howled about sugar and butter tasting so good, while Clayton shouted about how they were going to burn the house down because the butter was bubbling. When they stepped into the foyer, Oliver put his arm around his wife’s shoulders and stopped. He didn’t need to go into the kitchen to see the action going on. He could imagine it.

Just as he could imagine what life would be like if they made it out of here.

He turned his head to look at her. “We can never come back here, Felicity.” In response to that, she put her hand around his back and leaned against him. With her there, he had the inklings of hope. But it still didn’t change the fact that he would have to leave. They would be going as a family, but this had been his home for as long as he could remember. “We have to get out of Starling, out of this house. Forever.”

Chapter End Notes

Anyone seeing The Sound of Music, yet?!? Haha I had to put that last moment in there. I just watched the movie again last weekend, and it’s one of my favorite parts. Next week will be the last chapter!!!! I’m sad to see it finish, but also happy. It’s been a lot of writing since July. (Speaking of, my mom is reading this story now. She’s on chapter 20 and apparently she likes it.) Anyways, I hope you enjoyed the chapter. There was a little bit of everything in it.:P
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

The final chapter!

Chapter Notes

Important note at the end announcing the sequel!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Her hands were shaking. She couldn’t slip her earrings in. Felicity finally stopped trying and set her hands on her lap. “You’re fine. You’re fine. You’re gonna be just fine.” They would get out of this. Somehow. But how was she supposed to function as they waited for Barry to come? They had a plan now, but what if didn’t work? Could his speed quit and two kids would be left stranded with them in Starling? Or what if Oliver was the only one left?

From downstairs, Oliver yelled that they had ten minutes before they needed to leave. Somehow, he had stayed calm. At least on the outside. She caught him looking at photo books at one point, but she left him alone. This wasn’t a sad moment for her. It was pure terror. If only she could control her emotions like Oliver. That way her earrings would go in correctly.

Five minutes later, she came down the stairs. Oliver smiled at her. “You look pretty.”

“Thank you. You look nice.” Instead of wearing a suit or tux, he wore cargo pants and a leather jacket, fully prepared for whatever came after the party; Russia or an unknown location with the whole family. Attractive, but her heart moved too fast to pay attention to that.

“You okay?”

“Am I okay?” The question rubbed on her nerves, which wasn’t good, because they were about to explode already. “Oliver, how could I be okay? What we’re doing is crazy. It’s stupid! And we’re going to do it anyways, because we all want to be together. And I’m stressed out right now that any stupid little thing is going to make me explode.” More than she just did, probably.

He let out a long sigh as he pulled her into his arms. “I know, and I’m freaking out, too.”

“You aren’t showing it,” she grumbled against his leathery and very strong chest.

“Just because I’m not running around like a chicken with its head cut off does not mean that I’m not scared.” He tapped her back and spun her around as the girls came down the stairs. “Everyone all ready?”

“I feel fat with these clothes underneath this thing, but I’ll survive.” Ellie spread her dress and then let it fall back in place. No one would be able to tell she wore pants underneath. Only one of the girls wore the dress they bought today because the rest of the outfits couldn’t hide travel clothes. “Do I
“No, you look fine. But we need to go. We’re taking the Suburban. Diggle will follow us. Everybody has everything they need?” Oliver reacted to the sniffling before she did. He let go of her and squatted down next to Piper. “What’s wrong, sweetie?”

“I’m sad, Daddy. Just really, really sad.”

“Aww, baby.” He pulled her into a hug and pressed his hand on her hair. “I know. I’m sad too. This is something that…” he looked up at the rest of them, and Felicity ducked her head when she saw the tears. “I never thought we’d have to do this. And I’m so sorry we have to. But I can’t bear to lose you. I can’t live without you guys, okay? And I promise, wherever we go, we’ll make a home there. Together.”

Ellie dropped to her knees next to Piper and Oliver and wrapped her arms around her dad’s neck.

“We’ll go anywhere, as long as we’re together.” She was joined by the rest of the family. They knelt on the ground in the foyer, the sound of rain splattering against the roof, and cried. Everybody did. Maybe for different reasons. Felicity wasn’t sad to leave this house. She was terrified. Afraid that this was their last happy moment. It had to be on everyone’s mind, because as each of the kids stood up, they hugged their dad tighter than usual.

Finally, Oliver stood up and scooped Annie into his arms. In a broken voice, he said, “Let’s go.” He glanced back one last time before stepping out into the rain. When everyone stood beneath the overhang, he locked the door, handed Felicity the key, and headed out into the rain. She glanced down at her floor-length dress. It hid pants and boots, and a compression shirt. Her coat she wore now could be worn anywhere. In their last communication with Lyla, she promised to stack the plane with food and a few extra coats. And money. They would need that for their trek across Europe. If they made it that far.

No one said anything on the drive to the company. Felicity held Oliver’s hand. Eventually their fingers slipped away. She fiddled with her tablet that would go inside her dress for later. Oliver gripped the steering wheel, and every several seconds, his jaw clenched. When they parked, he stayed in his seat as the kids got out. He didn’t move for a time, but finally, he turned towards her. “I love you, Felicity.”

She smiled. “I love you too. Now let’s go and face this head on.”

“I’d like to speak, if that’s okay.”

It was tempting to sassily mention that this morning he said he wouldn’t be coming. Now he wanted to speak? “I didn’t want to say anything anyways. I’d probably tick everyone off by saying that everyone in the company is bad. Which they might be.”

“No, they’re not. I’ve known some of those workers since I was five. They’re not bad people. They can’t be.”

But what if they were? She wouldn’t say it; she could keep her mouth shut about some things. Felicity stepped out of the Suburban and adjusted her dress. Twenty feet from them, a man stepped out of a car. She grabbed her husband’s arm. “Oliver…”

He sighed, and raised his voice to yell, “Stay there, or you’ve lived your last day.”

“We just want you to know that we’re here.”

“I know. And I said that I’ll come after the party. It’s only the start. So stay away.” Oliver reached
for Felicity’s hand. “And tell the others to do the same. I see one person close to anyone in my family or my house, you’ll regret it.” With that, he steered her towards the entrance and beckoned the kids to go in front of them. “Remember what we talked about. Act like nothing’s wrong.”

Was he talking to just the kids or to her too? Because all she wanted to do was scream at the top of her lungs. And call her mom. What would happen to their loved ones? Barry only had enough speed to maybe get the entire Queen family to safety, let alone anyone else. Only Diggle and Lyla knew anything; the Harpers wouldn’t, and neither would her mom. Would that stop the Bratva? The Flash team had promised to do their best to protect everyone, but was that possible? I’m sorry, Mom. But this part of her family came first.

“Hey!” Angela ran up to them, a big smile on her face. “Everyone looks lovely. Interesting choice of outfit, Mr. Queen but I’m so glad you came. Felicity, you will be speaking in about half an hour.”

“Great, but uh, Oliver’s doing it.”

“Oh?” She shrugged. “I don’t see why not. Your last name is on the building, and your parents started this, so…I’ll see you in a bit.” She hurried off. Felicity let out a long sigh and muttered, “I never knew how irritating it is to talk to giddy people when you feel like a cockroach.”

One eyebrow raised as a smirk spread across Oliver’s face. “You feel like a cockroach?”

“That’s the only thing I can think of to describe this feeling.”

“Well,” he guided her down the hallway to the noise of the party. “A cockroach is easily squished, and that,” he let go of her so he could open the door for them, but still managed to cast her an encouraging smile, “is the exact opposite of you.”

“Stop flattering me.”

“I might only have another hour to do so.” He put his arm around her and pulled her close to him as they walked. “Something might go wrong, and I don’t want to have any regrets, okay?”

“Oliver…”

“But we might get out of here. Which means that you need to take a deep breath and believe that that’s what will happen.” He brushed his lips against her temple. “Now go get us some champagne.”

She did as he asked and took three long breaths before letting go of him and walking to the refreshments counter. “Can I have two glasses of champagne, please?” She came back to where Oliver stood away from the crowd and handed him one. “Maybe you should go talk to some people.”

“I’d rather stay here. Just because I came does not—”

“Absolutely not.” She grabbed his arm and tugged him towards people. “You came; you’re doing the whole thing.” He rolled his eyes, but said hi to an elderly couple. The lady smiled and set her glass down so she could give him a hug.

“Oliver, it’s so good to see you again.” She tapped his arm and raised her eyebrows. “Your mom wanted me to make sure you didn’t do anything crazy, y’know. Turns out, crazy was exactly what you needed.” She extended her hand towards Felicity. “I’m one of Moira Queen’s best friends. I was so happy to hear that you and Oliver were getting married. How has it been?”

Oliver dug his elbow into Felicity’s ribs and shot her a look before he chuckled and said, “It’s been
“very nice, Abby. We all love her.”

“Oh, I’m sure. I’ve always kept tabs on you all, and I just got more and more depressed as more nannies left. Then you came along, and look at you now. CEO of Queen Consolidated. Hopefully Oliver helps out once and a while.”

“Not really.” Felicity winked at him, giggling when he glared at her. “Well, he did in the beginning, but my EA and I work well together, and we’ve got everything figured out.”

“Speaking of your EA, where is Jerry? I loved his dad, and his son seemed like a very nice man.”

Smile. “Uh, he wasn’t feeling well. Excuse us, Abby. We need to go check in on the kids.” When they were out of earshot, she leaned in closer. “She seemed really nice. One of your mom’s old friends?”

“Yeah. She helped out a lot after they died. Mostly with Thea. It’s been a long time. Hi, guys.” Oliver waved at the kids, who stood in a circle by one of the tables. “How’s everybody doing?”

Ellie flashed them a strained smile. “Okay. But the best thing right now would be a taste of that champagne.”

“Absolutely not.” Oliver pulled the glass to his chest. “You’re way too young. Plus, there could be whiny people here and I could get arrested again.”

With that, Felicity left the group and went to talk with her guests. It helped her springy nerves. Most of them asked her about where the company was in terms of investments or what she planned to do the next year. Those were questions she could answer. They weren’t the truth; she couldn’t go around telling people she wouldn’t be here come nine o’clock, but everyone believed them.

What would become of these people? As she made her rounds to all the rich men and women who came to celebrate Queen Consolidated’s success, guilt hit her. Not much; she had much worse to worry about, but it was there. They planned to disappear off the face of the earth. Someday people would figure it out, but what about all the people in this building who believed in the Queens? What would become of the company that was celebrating forty-five years of power? Would the Bratva take over?

“Mrs. Queen?” An older lady touched her arm as she passed through. “Can I ask you a question?”

“Anything.”

The woman pointed her wine glass at Oliver who stood several feet from them, talking with one of the employees. “Why is your husband here?”

“Because, like you said, he’s my husband, and two, his parents started this company. He has every right to be here.”

“He spent six months in prison for crimes that weren’t purse snatching.”

Her fists tingled. “And?”

“He narrowly escaped life in prison.”

“The jury decided. He’s innocent. He’s saved lives.” Her mind flashed back to the moment earlier today when they found out that was a lie. It didn’t matter to her. Felicity flashed the woman a smile that had to look like a devilish one. “Clearly you don’t think so.”
“I think,” she sniffed, “that he doesn’t deserve to be here in the presence of a crowd like this.”

Though a lovely thought, giving this woman a hard-earned punch wasn’t a good idea, but she could give her a fiery dish of words. Felicity stepped into the woman’s personal space. “Well, I think that there a lot of people who don’t deserve to be in the same room with him. While he has put his life on the line to protect me, and our children, and also random strangers, there a lot of people who have barely lifted a finger their whole life and somehow managed to get here and the only thing they know how to do is judge without really looking at a situation. And I also think that are a lot of people here—”

“Hey.” Oliver swooped in next to her and stopped her words before something terrible came out. He pulled her away from the woman and sent her an apologetic smile. “My wife isn’t feeling well. Sorry.” He didn’t wait for another word from her, and took Felicity down the hall to a storage closet. After shutting the door and locking it, he let out a long sigh. “Seriously? You cannot take your anger out on some old lady.”

“You’re one to talk.”

He muttered several swear words and turned away from her. Felicity crossed her arms and glared at his back. This felt like a fight they would have had ten months ago, not now. But if her feelings couldn’t be directed at an innocent old lady, she could give them to her husband who could handle things. After several seconds, he turned around to face her. “Felicity, do you think I’m happy right now? That I’m not angry? All I want to do right now is blow a freaking gasket and punch everyone in that room. But I can’t. Instead, I have to smile at all those people and pretend that everything’s okay; that my life is not falling apart right now.”

“Well, in a shocking moment of truth, I’m not like you. I’m not trained to do that. I can’t go into a situation with my head on straight, because I didn’t spend five years—”

“It doesn’t work that way.” As he let out a long sigh, he rubbed a hand over his face. “I get that you’re angry. I know how helpless you’re feeling, because I’m feeling that too.” His voice cracked as he gestured towards the door behind her. “I can’t stop looking at those people dressed up and wondering who’s Bratva. I want to protect my family, and instead I have to rely on a guy who is using a serum to have speed and some lady who kind of owns a jet.” The last words came to her in almost a whisper. “But there’s nothing that we can do about it. Which means that being angry at some old lady about her dissing me is not going to help you.”

Felicity kept her arms crossed but let her walls down. One inch at a time. “I’m not angry, Oliver. Well, I am. But it’s not like that. I’m just scared. So scared.” Her arms fell to her sides as a cry broke through her words. “I’m so scared about what’s going to happen. I’m scared to lose you.” Tears tracked down her face. “Last year, I let myself fall in love with you, and…I can’t do that with anyone else. Not ever. What if you go? What if—”

“Felicity.” He cut off her fears and pulled her to his chest. She sagged against him and let him hold her up. They had nothing left but each other. Their family. In a few hours, they would have a few thousand dollars in their pockets, the clothes on their backs, and a few backpacks filled with food. She would have her adopted children, and her protector. The man she loved.

“It’s seven thirty, which means that in ten minutes one of us has to speak.” Oliver pulled her away and looked straight into her eyes. “You gonna be okay?”

She sniffed and nodded. “Your leather jacket gave off some really nice smells and a lot of strength, so I’ll be okay. You sure you’ll be okay?”
“You give off a lot of strength too.” He kissed her forehead and then wiped the tears off her cheeks. “We’re gonna be okay, Felicity. No matter what happens. Now let’s go and try not to blow up at any more old ladies, ‘kay?”

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He told Felicity the truth. They would be okay. No matter what happened in the next few hours. Their definitions of ‘okay’ were different, though. His wife and the kids would be fine. They would miss him, but they would have each other, and a big house with plenty of money. He would be… okay. Oliver walked with Felicity down the hallway back to the party. Angela winked at them as they walked past. He’d forgotten about that, but a random storage closet was the best he could do in this situation. At least everyone would know that he loved his wife. Enough to fool around in a closet during a party.

He wished.

“Where’d you guys go?” Harper leaned against a high-table, sucking on a licorice. Despite what would happen in a little bit, she—and all the kids—put on a façade of being thrilled to be here. Better than both of their parents. Oliver couldn’t help but smile when she made a disgusted face and set the licorice on the table. “Turns out, if you bribe the people at the drink place, they have nonalcoholic stuff too. In the form of this disgusting piece of candy.”

He chuckled and tossed the licorice into the garbage. “Harper, why don’t you come with me. William, you too.” In their haste to make plans for tonight, he’d forgotten that the party wasn’t expecting kids, which meant they only had wine and some gross candy. “We’ll go find some good stuff.” They took the stairs up to one of the break rooms. “The only person who uses this room is a really old guy who worked with my dad. And, I’m pretty sure the only thing he eats is candy. So…” he opened the fridge and gestured to the food. To others, it would be called sugar. “Take whatever you want.”

“Sure he won’t be mad?”

“I think his wife would be happy if you ate it all.” He grabbed the box of cupcakes. “Take a few things and we’ll bring them down for the rest of the group.” When he stood up, they were both looking at him with weird faces. “What? We’re not stealing.”

“No, it’s just that…” Harper shrugged. As her body started trembling, he set the box down and stepped closer to her. “What if they take you away? Who’s gonna be our dad? I don’t want anyone else, and though our mom is awesome, she’s not gonna take us to a weird person’s office to take their food. And you’re not gonna be here to tell me about how boys work and just…”

As she started crying, Oliver stood there, helpless. He could yell at Felicity for taking her anger out at an old lady, and he could try to stuff his emotions into a bottle and hope they stayed in there. But this? He didn’t know how to handle this. He could tell her that tonight would end with them on a plane, but that could turn out to be a lie. Any little thing went wrong, he was either in Russia or dead. Or it could work.

But they didn’t know.

“Honey, I don’t know what to tell you.” He put his hands on her arms and searched his brain for fatherly wisdom, but nothing came. “I really don’t know. If you want, I can tell you that it’s going to be alright.”
She lifted one shoulder and whispered, “It might not.”

“Okay.” He looked up at the ceiling and took a deep breath. “Then here’s what I’m going to tell you. Both of you.” He looked at William, who had tears in his eyes. “I love you. No matter what happens tonight, I love you, and I always will. Remember that, okay?” He gave her a kiss on the cheek. “Now let’s go and eat some cupcakes.”

As they headed back to the party, Oliver tried to shake away the thoughts of what could happen. Harper was right. He wouldn’t be around to give the boys advice on how to woo the girls, and he wouldn’t be able to help the girls understand the guys. Not only would he leave Felicity without a husband, he would leave his children without a father. His stomach clenched, and as he opened the door for William and Harper, his strength seemed to give way. Fight it, Oliver. He had to. But he couldn’t.

Felicity waited for them in the hallway. “I assumed you disappeared to raid Mr. Fred’s office, because I have a couple of times, but I wanted to make sure.” Her hand on his arm brought his mind back to a stable place. “It’s time for the speech, but you don’t look so good.”

“I’ll be fine.” He looked down at her blonde hair, done up in some weird extravagant style. He liked it whatever way she had it, but tonight it looked extra beautiful. Shining, so he could always remember it. “Y’know, Felicity.” He slipped his hand around her waist. “You have the most beautiful hair.”

“I could say the same about yours. Just don’t let them cut it off, okay? I’d like to think of you with pretty hair.”

“Felicity…”

“I get it, Oliver. Things could go either way, so we need to talk like it. Hopefully I’ll be able to run my fingers through your hair for the rest of our lives, but if not…keep it fluffy.”

They came to stand together several feet from the crowd. Angela went up to the speaking platform and tapped the microphone. “Hello everyone. I hope you’ve all enjoyed yourself so far. You all know that this party is to celebrate forty-five years of Queen Consolidated. We thought that there was no better person to speak than the son of the couple who brought this business to life.”

Everyone clapped, which was almost worse for him. Oliver thanked Angela and stepped up to the platform. “Hi, everyone. On behalf of my family, I’d first like to say thank you for coming. Some of you knew my parents,” he smiled at Abby who raised her glass to him, “and some of you did not. For those of you who didn’t, I can’t say that I’m a good example of how they loved and ran this company. How they did anything, for that matter. My sister is a better person to look at, and my wife.” He winked at her, which made a few of the old women giggle. “But I do love this company. I think my first memories happened here. My mom didn’t let me eat sugar at home, so my dad would take me here and give me soda. He taught me at an excessively young age how to run this place, and when they died, I convinced everyone to make me CEO. That was arguably a stupid decision, but I loved being here.” He glanced down at the ground for a moment and took a deep breath. “I made a lot of mistakes. Most of them were highly publicized. And…and in a way, some of those choices caught up with me. Some of you might know what I’m talking about, and the rest of you will, uh, figure it out sometime.”

“There comes a time in all of our lives when we have to decide what we’re going to protect. Or who. I made that decision a long time ago, and that was my family. It’s all of them,” he pointed at the kids and Felicity, who stood several feet away from him. “But it’s also all of you here. My parents loved this place with all their hearts. Sometimes I wonder if they cared about it more than they cared about
my sister and I. I love this place, but everyone who works here has to promise me something. Don’t change. There will be a lot of people who want you to, and some of you might already be tempted to. Don’t do it. Because—” his voice stopped working. He clenched his jaw to keep the emotions from coming out, but nothing came out of his mouth when he tried to speak.

“Because this is our home.” Felicity appeared at his side. She put one hand around his back and one hand squeezed his arm. He closed his eyes and smiled. “This is where we belong. And not just Queen Consolidated. Starling City. I know I haven’t been here long, and I’ve only been this guy’s wife for a couple months, but I think I speak for our whole family when I say this. We love you, and we always will.” Felicity’s wedding rings shimmered in the light as her fingers enclosed around his own. “And thank you. All of you. We couldn’t do this without you.”

He looked to the side, and smiled when he saw the kids. They had crept up towards them, and when Felicity said the three words, they nodded. Annie scooted away from Ellie and came to stand by Oliver. She grabbed his hand and looked up at him with a smile on her face. Like she trusted him to get them out of here. Safely.

Everyone clapped. Oliver bent down to give his wife a kiss and lingered there to whisper, “Thank you.” She didn’t say anything; only looked up at him with her eyes filled with love. He knew that look. It had taken a few months for it to come about, but every now and then—even in the beginning of their ‘relationship’—she’d look at him that way. He first noticed it at the gala when they danced. Her eyes had gone from annoyance to caring. He liked to think that she was wondering how the heck she ever fell in love with him.

Oliver brushed his lips against hers one last time, and then stepped away from the podium. He motioned for the kids to follow him to a private alcove off to the side of the main room. Ellie put her arms around his neck and started crying. Oliver held her close and whispered, “I love you, sweetheart. I love all of you.” He extended the hug to the rest of them, not caring what the gossip magazines would come up with tomorrow. They would be correct. Despite the plan they had in place, this could be the last hug.

He hugged his bodyguard, silently thanking him for all those years that he’d dealt with him and protected their family. He couldn’t say goodbye to his sister; she was home with the flu. According to Roy, this ‘flu’ could be a baby. The letter he left for her would have to be enough. “It was a pleasure knowing you, John. You were the best man I’ve ever known.”

“I look forward to telling my kids about you. All of you.” The rest of the family couldn’t say goodbye for fear of who would see them, but Diggle nodded at Felicity, and quietly spoke. “Keep making sure his head stays on straight.”

Felicity put her hands on Annie’s shoulders and nodded. “I will do my best.”

Two armed men approached them, followed by Alexei. Oliver squared his shoulders and stepped in front of the group. “I would like ten minutes alone with my family before I go. Just to say my final goodbyes. Please.”

“Five. With two guards in the room.” Alexei nodded at the two men, and then stared at Oliver. “After those five minutes are up, your family will take your car back to the mansion to live a life filled with happiness, and you will be taken to one of our many bases in Russia. And don’t try to find him, Mrs. Queen. You never will.”

“I think you underestimate my love for him, you psychopath.”

“Perhaps. But I did not estimate his love for you.” The Russian accent sent tingles down his spine.
Oliver stepped back and put his arm around Ellie. “Give us the ten minutes alone, Alexei. What do you think we’re gonna do? Jump out of the windows?”

“Men and their families have been known to do worse.”

“Men and their families?” Felicity let out a disbelieving gasp that caused Oliver to take a step towards her in case she decided to forget what he told her earlier and deck someone. “This isn’t the first time you’ve done this?”

“No, Mrs. Queen. It is not. In fact, it is quite common for this to happen. Your husband must sacrifice himself for the good of his family. You children can all be very—”

“Don’t you dare speak to our children like that,” Felicity bit out. “If anything, this is proving that you are a heartless you-know-what. So back away.”

Alexei’s eyebrows raised. “Five minutes. Two guards. It starts in thirty seconds, so I’d move if I were you.”

Felicity looked back at Oliver and shook her head. He caught up to her and pulled her close. “You’ll have to dismantle the guard.”

“I punched a security officer once. Not a Bratva agent.” Whispering didn’t hide the panic in her voice. “I can’t do that.”

“What other choice do we have?”

“Oliver…”

“Felicity, there’s no other options. I can’t disarm two at a time, and Barry’s not gonna get here fast enough.” Oliver put his hand on the soft part of her neck. “You hit there, they’ll be out.”

“What if I can’t hit hard enough?”

“You have to. Just get him to the ground and I’ll take care of the rest.” Her look asked him if he was going to kill them. Oliver shook his head. “Not with the kids in the room.” But he would. In his book, some people did deserve death and the men in here were two of them. This wasn’t the time. They needed to be knocked out; they could pay for the crime’s later. He was done being judge, jury, and executioner.

Just before he stepped into the storage closet that would provide the necessary means to save them, he glanced up at the security cameras. A blue light flickered. Diggle had done his job. Anyone watching on security cameras would see an altered version of what was happening in the storage room, and when he shut the door, it would automatically lock, giving them a few extra precious seconds.

Oliver stepped into the middle of the room, casting a look at Ellie, who nodded. Please let this work.

Felicity’s arm came around her guard’s neck. Oliver disposed of his guard and ran to his wife’s side. She allowed him to finish the work, immediately whipping out her tablet from underneath her dress. Ellie and William ran to the wall with the racks of office supplies, and began pulling things down. Oliver pulled a wire from his pocket and attached it to the door.

“I signaled Barry. The serum’s ready.” Felicity set her tablet down and unzipped her dress. It dropped to the floor, revealing pants and a long-sleeved shirt. “And the security cameras are working.”
With everything off the shelves, Oliver and William pulled them away, revealing an elevator that had been disabled years ago. Only the Queens knew about it, and now Barry. He tried open the doors and turned around. “We went through this at home, but I’m going to say it again. No one’s dying tonight by falling.” Poor choice of words. Usually Felicity would say that. “No one’s dying in general. But I need everyone to be very careful. Got it?”

Ellie stepped in first, and found a ledge. William followed her, and then Harper. Oliver glanced at Felicity. “Are they on their way yet?”

“No movement. But I’m sure they’re coming.” She handed him one of the guard’s guns. “I’d feel better if you had something.”

He stuck the pistol into his belt and turned to help Piper onto a safe area, and then Annie. “Everyone good?” When Felicity found her place, he did a scan of the room. No need to hide the fancy clothes lying on the floor. They would see what happened right away. With that, he stepped into the shaft himself and glanced back at his wife. She moved closer to him, and with one hand on a metal bar, she pressed her free hand against his back to keep him steady while he closed the doors.

They’d made it this far. Oliver let out a long breath and dropped his head back against the wall. “How long do we have?”

“Thirty seconds until Barry comes and three minutes and twenty-two seconds until the Bratva come get us. Less if…” Felicity trailed off. “It doesn’t matter.”

“Hey, Mama?” Annie, who held on for dear life in the corner where Ellie and William stood next to her, asked the question. The darkness in the shaft couldn’t hide her fear. “Remember when you said that it helped to talk about your favorite things when you were scared?”

Felicity let out a low moan. “No, honey, not right now. We have to be very quiet, and we can’t move.”

Her eyes flitted to the expanse below, before she looked at Oliver. He stood at the doors, where he could easily send a Bratva guard or two into the hole, and shield his family with his body. She knew it; the kids knew it. He would do anything to keep his family safe, but today he needed them together. For all their sakes.

In a red blur, Annie disappeared. Clayton slapped a hand over Piper’s mouth before she could squeal. Before his second youngest left, a bow and quiver appeared. Clayton went next. As they waited for Barry to come the third time, Oliver helped the rest of them get to a more unobvious spot in case the Bratva came to check on them earlier. They would, and thanks to Barry, he’d be able to hold them off.

Clayton disappeared, but the time between the kids leaving was too long. Oliver looked across the way to Felicity, who shook her head. Don’t think about it. He couldn’t. Shouldn’t, but he did anyways. What happened if half of them were on the plane and the other half weren’t? What would become of that part of the family if Barry’s speed died?

With a shriek, Harper left. Thirty seconds later, the red blur appeared and whizzed away with William.

“They’re coming in.” Felicity’s head jerked up. “Oliver, they’re fifteen seconds from the storage room. And Barry’s taking an average of thirty seconds. At least.”

He didn’t say anything, only pulled Ellie closer to him. He kissed her forehead and whispered, “I
love you, sweetheart. Take good care of everybody, okay? If anything happens—"

“They’re opening the doors.”

An explosion rocked the walls.

“Know that I love you very much, and you’re going to be amazing.”

She looked up at him and though her lip quivered, she smiled. “I love—"

With a “Save it for later!” from Barry, Ellie disappeared.

Oliver kept the bow loaded, but he stepped over to Felicity. “Hey.” She didn’t smile; only managed to look up at him with a quivering lip. “You’re gonna get out of here. Barry’s going to make sure of it. And if I don’t make it out, you take the kids and get out of here, okay? Go start a different life where you can be whoever you want.”

She pulled off her wedding ring and handed it to him. “I knew there would be a reason we haven’t remembered to band these two together. You keep this. I know you have your own, but this ring literally is me, right? If something happens, and you have to go to that hellhole, keep it near you, and always remember that there is something waiting for you when you get home.” Her touch sent tingles down his spine as she looked up at him with those trusting, loving eyes of hers that had changed his life in so many good ways. “No matter how many years it is.”

With shaking fingers, he pocketed the diamond ring. “Yeah.” They kept their hands intertwined for a few more moments, before he let her go, just in time for Barry to come swooshing in. He ripped her away from him, but this time, Oliver welcomed it. In several seconds, she would be safe on a plane.

Would it have been less traumatizing for them all if they’d just given up? Maybe. But at least he could go to Russia—or die tonight—knowing that he’d tried. That’s all that he wanted to prove to himself.

A little over a year ago, he barely knew his children. Never imagined that he’d be a married man again. He loved his family, but he didn’t care about them. If the Bratva asked him to become a full-fledged member, he would have arranged for a permanent nanny, and been on his way. He had nightmares almost every night about a wife who didn’t make it home.

Oliver swung himself up to a higher rung so he would have a better shot as the noise outside the shaft increased. They were working to get the elevator open, but Felicity must have done something techy which slowed them down.

Today he’d proved to himself that he’d changed. Last night, he cuddled his wife and calmed her down with kisses when she had a bad dream. His nightmares hadn’t woken him up for two weeks. And he’d done the unthinkable: put his family in danger because he wanted to be with them. Because he couldn’t imagine his life without them in it. Maybe it wouldn’t succeed, but he tried, and in doing that, he did what no one thought he ever would.

He’d chosen life.

Oliver pulled the bowstring back and aimed at the coming men. They weren’t getting him without a fight. The doors pulled open and guns fired. He sent the first man tumbling down into the abyss, along with the second man. As he loaded the third arrow, he glanced up. A red streak ran down the shaft towards him. He shot three men on the landing before Barry grabbed him. They stuttered on the way up, and almost fell, but then they whooshed forward. Oliver clenched his jaw and closed his eyes to avoid seeing things whirl past him. It didn’t matter now. Even if the speed disappeared before
they got to the jet, it meant freedom.

Suddenly, they slammed to the ground. Oliver pushed himself up and looked around. They were at the airport. The lights illuminated a jet thirty or so feet from them. He’d made it. They’d made it. “Barry.” He helped his friend up and gave him a hug. “Thank you.”

“Well, I told you I’d get you to the plane, right? Apparently I was a little inaccurate in my guessing on how much speed I needed but…” with a smile on his face, he shrugged. “I got you here. This counts, right?”

“Yeah, it does.” Oliver extended his hand for a handshake. “I didn’t think it would be possible to really appreciate you and your bubbliness and speed, but I do.”

“That’s the best thing that I ever heard.” Barry gave him a salute but before walking towards the hangar, he stopped. “Oh, Oliver. Lyla wanted me to tell you this. The plane can be tracked. It’s highly impossible, but it can be. Everything else is taken care of, including passports. I took a good million out of your bank account before I grabbed one of the kids, so you’ll have plenty. And your family.” Barry smiled. “You’ve got them.”

Tears welled in his eyes. Despite all of his attempts to scare everyone out of his life, they stayed, and in the end, that’s what saved him. Even Felicity. He never thought she would last two weeks in the mansion, let alone a month. And he never imagined she, as his wife, would love him enough to risk her life to save his. “Watch out for everyone we had to leave behind, okay? And again, thank you.”

“Happy to help, Oliver. Now go tell everybody that you made it, cuz Felicity was crying when I left.” With that, he turned and walked to the hangar. Oliver almost felt bad for him; he’d used every bit of speed he had left to get them all here. What would become of him now? Eventually the speed would return, but what if the serum—stop it. It didn’t matter now. He turned around and sprinted to the plane. He dropped his weapon near at the entrance and stepped through the door.

“Daddy!” Annie screamed and ran at him full speed. He caught her in his arms just as Piper hit him around the legs. With a laugh that came out as a sob, Oliver sank to his knees to catch all his kids as they surrounded him. He made it. There would be no prison. No Russia. Only his family.

His beautiful family.

He kept his arms around Harper, who sobbed against his chest, but turned to give his wife a kiss. She rested her cheek against his and cried. Oliver shifted his hold on his daughter to one arm and curled Felicity close as his heart rate returned to normal. He didn’t want to ever let go of them. No one ever needed to know how close he had been to not seeing them again. Only he would know that, and that’s why he wanted to sit on the ground and just hold his kids and kiss his wife.

After his legs went numb, Oliver pushed himself up, but kept Annie in his arms. The rest of the family crowded around him in a circle. He smiled and kissed his littlest’s hair. “It’s going to be rough going for a while. We can only take the plane so far before we’ll have to do some trekking. Maybe on foot.”

“Don’t worry, Dad. We can make it.” William grinned. “We can help the little kids.”

“I don’t need help!” Piper spun around and glared at him. “My legs are nice and strong now. I bet I might have to help you.”

“They’re kind of right.” Ellie put her arm around William’s shoulders. “We can make it. It’s going to be trying, but with all of us, and with you, we’ll be just fine. I do expect that we get a say in where
“we settle down.”

“And if we have chickens.” Clayton made a face. “I hate those things.”

“But I want a horse.” Annie rested her head on his shoulder. “Can we get horses, Daddy?”

“We’ll see, sweetie. We’ll see. For now, we need to get up in the air. But before we do that,” he transferred Annie to Ellie’s arms and took ahold of Felicity’s hands. He’d noticed something missing when he hugged her a few minutes ago. A side affect of Barry’s speed and the ring not fitting perfectly. “There’s something that we need to do.” He released one of her hands and reached inside his pocket. Her eyes lit up as he withdrew her wedding ring and gently slid it back onto her finger. His large, rough hands enclosed around her small ones. His gaze wandered to his wife’s lips, and then to her eyes. She was crying. “Hey.” He caught one of her tears with his finger. “Felicity, I can’t promise you really anything right now. Not a nice house, or a fancy wardrobe. I can’t promise any of you that. But I can promise you this.” He tapped her ring with his finger. “I’m going to do my best to be a good husband. And a good father.

“When I was alone in that shaft, I realized that last year I would have turned myself over to the Bratva easily, because though I cared about you guys, I had nothing to lose. Now I do. I have seven people here who I love more than the world, and that gives me something to live for. And I realized a few minutes ago that I did everything that I could to scare everyone away, but you all stayed.” He smiled through his tears. “You all helped save my life, so thank you for that.”

William cleared his throat. “And thank you for being our dad. We all know it wasn’t easy, and I certainly didn’t help, but all of this…it doesn’t seem so bad cuz we have you, and we have a mom.” He grinned at Felicity, and then at Oliver. “And we love you both very much.”

After the rest of the kids echoed the last line, Oliver leaned down to kiss his bride. Her hands pressed against his cheeks as his arms encircled around her back, drawing her close, cherishing her. For several hours today, or yesterday—he didn’t know—he thought he wasn’t going to get to love her completely again. But, just like every other time, they’d gotten a miracle, and he intended to hold onto that miracle, and take full advantage. When they pulled away, he kissed her nose for good measure. “I love you, Felicity.”

“I love you too.”

Chapter End Notes

"He'd chosen life." That sums up the progression that Oliver Queen made, correct? In chapter 1 to probably 10, he would have accepted the results and left. It wouldn't hurt him much. But today, Oliver chose life. He chose love. He chose his family, which includes Felicity. She came to the mansion thinking there was no way anyone could love her, and now she's married and has six adopted kids who adore her. Don't get me started on my baby kids. :P

So wow!!!! I made it!!! All 200,000+ words. It's basically been constant writing since July, and I'm ready for a break. BUT. After my break, which will consist of more relaxing writing for a while, there will be a sequel. Hopefully not as long as this one. For my sanity's sake. It will be called Edelweiss (Bless My Homeland Forever). Look for it in a few months. Maybe I'll post a sneak peek of it sooner. I will keep updating people on my Tumblr, which lovejesusarrowavengers.
I'd just like to thank everyone for following this story!!!! Whenever I got stuck, I always went back to my inbox and read all of the beautiful comments. Seriously, guys, you were awesome. So thank you again!!! (And because I promised them: a special thank you to my sisters for hanging with me the whole time. They were my 'beta' readers, and they helped come up with a lot of the stories. This wouldn't be as special without their help.)

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