There are no Extra Puzzle Pieces in the Universe, Every Piece has a Home

by artifex_vitae_artifex_sui

Summary

Felicity has been a genius her whole life, and genius attracts attention, carries demands, as Felicity would say "With great genius, comes great responsibility!" What if from the beginning Felicity was in some way a part of everything the undertaking would unfold? Her genius garnering the attention of a very guilt ridden Robert Queen, desperately wanting to undo years of sin.

How far would she go to help, to solve the unknown, the puzzle that was everything Queen Family related. Would the chaos of the return from the dead of the prodigal son be her undoing or her salvation.

Notes

Hello everyone, this is my first ever fanfiction the reboot. Read the first chapter to see what exactly that means.
Read, rate, comment, constructively criticize, and of course make suggestions because am always looking for ideas and inspiration to come from everywhere in life.

Just some necessary details, this story will be an AU, although it will follow a lot of the shows story lines I will be creating new stories and my own history to the characters. For now it is rated T, but that might change, I will do my best to warn you of any changes or triggers.

Because the characters have such complicated backgrounds and side stories I will be using flashbacks, in honor of the TV show, to give you all a look into whom they were and how they got to the present time. I will note the flashbacks with --> and they will be in italics-->. I hope you enjoy what I have cooked up. I will be posting on a Sunday schedule. Thank you all!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Hello loyal and any new readers that may stumble upon this old and regrettably abandoned fic. I have been writing this story on and off from 2013-2016 which seems crazy to me, 5 years and I have yet to finish this monster of a story.

But unlike when I started this, I have finally discovered why I struggled with this story and what was holding me back. I have shed all pretense and have pretty much rewrote the whole story, the premise and everything that was key is still there but I think it finally reads like I always wanted. I am editing and cleaning up as I am my very own beta, so I will be posting on a schedule. For those of you that were loyal readers after the posting mess of the past, the least I can do this time is have weekly updates.

I will be posting when permitted seeing as grad school has taken over. Most chapters are written or in the process, they just need final editing and cleaning before I post. I hope you all enjoy the changes.

I opted to simply delete the chapters and start anew rather than delete the whole post, nothing was harder than deleting all your lovely past comments.

Thank you to any of you that continue to support this story you are deeply loved and appreciated and to any new readers that might wander into this story, HI! Hope you like it!

So with that, here we go!
Chapter Summary

Felicity makes the determining choice that sets her on a path where her life will forever be interlocked with everything Queen Family related.

Chapter Notes

This first chapter is just an introduction, the necessary set up for everything that makes this story and AU. It will give you some insight into whom the Felicity of this story will be and if you read carefully enough the why, too.

Hope you all like it!

Ever look back at your life and wonder how in the world did you get here? When in your journey did you come upon that Frostian fork in the road picking the path that would determine everything, unbeknownst to you? Felicity Kutler had no such dilemmas. She knew the exact moment that her life changed, for the…well frankly the jury was still out on whether it had been for better or worse. But she knew very well when it happened, what was said and more importantly she knew she was exactly where, her very well thought out, choices had taken her. She knew the importance of every exact point of her life. She had assured she had the advantage and she had yet to regret her path.

Precocious failed to properly describe a young Felicity, although it had been her mother’s favorite adjective. Donna might have never quite understood her daughter but she was proud of her intelligence. Yet, no one was as proud as her father, they spent hours pulling appliances apart, much to Donna’s annoyance, and “improving” the design, albeit not always successfully.

Her curiosity got her in some tight spots but never anything serious, her father understood her need to explore and release all her excess boredom, technology was their chosen medium and had mostly worked. Until the day her “dad” never returned. They had spent her spring break building a supercomputer, her excitement at building her very first faraday cage could not be contained and had even caused Donna to sit with them and watch them for hours. She had 2 days left before she returned to school and the supercomputer was almost done, so why would he leave now. Two days she waited, insisting that he would come back and finish what they started. Her mom knew better, the heavy sadness she physically carried should have told Felicity everything she needed to know, but her dad, her hero, he wouldn’t hurt her like this, he couldn’t.

For one week the unfinished computer sat in their living room, for one week Donna cried herself to sleep every night her unmeasured anger towards her husband and utter heartbreak for her daughter fueling an endless stream of tears. Her sweet Felicity, she could see her light dimming and she was incapable of doing anything about it.

On day 11 she was pulled out of her favorite class, she might not have always been happy at her school, as might be expected from a 9 year old in the 8th grade, but she did love her chemistry class.
She walked towards the main office and before she made it into the room she saw her mother’s tear
stricken face just sitting there, shoulders hunched and the counselor trying and failing to console her.
She didn’t need to get hear what they were whispering, she knew, she felt it in her gut and her heart.
She knew if she walked into that office it would all be real, so she ran as fast as her little legs could
take her, tears already soaking the collar of her shirt.

Donna waited, her grief blinding her to the panic on the faces of the school administration. Minutes
must have gone by before she heard her name being called, “Ms. Kutler”, her eyes met the worried
brown of the school director and she knew something was wrong, where was Felicity? Gone.

She didn’t think her heart could break any further, she had been wrong. The nice detective at the
precinct had told her to go home wait for her little girl there, he assured her that in his 15 years on the
force kids always came home in these situations. After screaming at the well intentioned detective
Donna had stormed out of the station, immediately heading to her neighborhood and knocking on
every door asking them to please look out for her little girl. Mrs. Walters her longtime neighbor
finally convinced her to go home while her and her son kept knocking on doors. Donna sat and
stared at the stupid computer on the floor, waiting. A quick rapt on her door bringing her out of her
stupor. She was pulling the door open before she knew it.

That might have been the first time Felicity would be escorted home by the police but it most
definitely would not be the last. As the years passed Donna became well acquainted with the Vegas
PD and later in an effort to not lose her daughter completely and leave their ghosts behind along with
the last name Kutler, she came to be well acquainted with the Starling PD in their new home just on
the edge of the Glades.

By the time Felicity, was 14 yrs old she already had a sealed juvenile record and within the
"Hacker", a word she hated, community she was infamous, notorious, and respected. For those that
knew her personally she was infamously notorious for babbling, going off on long winded
completely off-topic tangents full of freudian slips and sexual innuendos that left her covered in the
flush red of her own embarrassment. Being a walking cliche and contradiction all at once only
propelled her insecurities. Physically, she definitely did fit the role of “hacker” with an undisclosed
number of piercings, a couple of strategically placed tattoos, hair that rivaled the rainbow and a bit of
an antisocial personality, in that CPUs were her bffs, she was the total cliche package. With all that
also came an uncomfortable awkwardness and shyness, that as many discovered over the years
should never be mistaken for weakness. Her tendency to inappropriately babble, well, that was the
icing on the contradictions cake.

Throughout her teens life hadn’t been easy and that was putting it lightly, but she always figured that
the teen years were never easy, a rite of passage of sorts, but she had stopped striving for happiness a
long time ago and had settled for closure. Fifteen, yes, at 15 years old was when Felicity realized
closure would never be enough and that her mother had never raised her to settle, for anything.

Midway through her senior year of high school an opportunity to earn enough money to pay her way
through any university and work out of love rather than need presented itself, with a delightful
addendum, a mysterious puzzle. In that moment Felicity realized she might still have a shot at
happiness or something akin to it.

At 15 yrs old she met a handsome older man, full of poise, obvious money, charm and a debonair
smile that still held a twinkle despite his age. This man stepped into her life and turned it upside
down.

"Hello Miss Felicity Smoak, it is a real pleasure to meet you. I must say your reputation precedes
you, Robert Queen" he said extending his smooth hand with a wrist wrapped in elegant gold.
"Excuse me, Reputation? Wait, Queen? As in Queen Consolidated? As in that monstrosity of a building that blocks all views of the sunset from the glades?" she flinched immediately regretting her words. “Dammit! Sorry… Queen you said, right uhmm Hello Mr. Queen.” Foiled once again by her notorious foot in mouth disease she avoided looking at Mr. Queen directly, much to her surprise, once she did she found what seemed like amusement, at least she hoped that’s what it was.

"Relax Miss Smoak, and please call me Robert. Unfortunately, I do not have a lot of time and must be rather blunt in my proposition and for that I apologize. I was told you possess a certain set of computer skills which I would love to utilize, How would you like to come and work for me Miss Smoak?"

"Ohhh, Thank God, for a second I thought you meant…absolutely nothing" she blushed with embarrassment at almost voicing where her mind had gone, against her best efforts to simply pay attention. "Computer skills, yes, of course… proposition, what sort of proposition? Wait you said job, What sort of job?" It wasn’t everyday that someone ran into the richest man in the city, or if she remembered correctly the Western seaboard. Let one when said billionaire approached you and offered you a job, to say her interest was piqued was putting it lightly, that infamous Smoak curiosity winning over logic once again.

That introduction had been her life altering moment, one year later she was a full time student at MIT, while simultaneously working as Mr. Qu…Robert's personal researcher. At first she was fully aware that he was only feeding her bits and pieces of information just enough so she could do her job but never enough to determine what it all connected to and meant. She felt like she was building a puzzle but the pieces were being held hostage.

To Robert’s misfortune she fully lived up to her label of genius sprinkled with cat killing curiosity and slowly began to piece together said puzzle. It didn't take much longer before he trusted her fully and decided to make her part, as much as he could without endangering her, of his crusade to right his wrongs and save their city. Of course being a key component of the destruction of said city required that in order to do the right thing, you did a lot of what was considered the wrong things.

As time passed they developed a father-daughter relationship, one fueled by illegal activity and mysterious puzzles, but close nonetheless. Like in any relationship they developed a routine, every time he wanted to let her in a bit further into his crusade it would begin with files being delivered, packets for her to tediously examine and research until she had her EUREKA! moment and knew exactly what they all meant and connected to. She would then send him her findings, which 99% of the time were spot on. With a proud satisfaction he would put her out of her insomnia filled, caffeine fueled misery. It wasn’t until years later that Felicity came to a realization that would only make her heart swell with more admiration and love for Robert.

She always had the lingering feeling that Robert didn’t fully trust her with his secret to let her completely in, or at the very least that he was waiting for something, whether it was for her to prove herself or for him to be ready to say out loud what he held so dearly inside. It wasn’t until it was too late that she realized that this was their game, Robert knew very well that despite her skills and maturity she was still very much a child and maintaining her interest piqued was a hard driving force and the best way to keep her curiosity at bay, therefore, keeping her safe. She would fluster when he would deem some of her ideas or behaviors as child innocence, it took years to realize that he was complementing, admiring her innocence. He had played a hand in robbing so many of their childhood innocence that maintaining Felicity’s, as much as possible, was a point of pride. Many times she found herself regretting not ever thanking him for that, thanking him for many things.

Her second life altering moment came after the biggest delivery she had received to date, a large box filled with files, pictures, layouts, blueprints, audio files and even a hard drive. More importantly
there was a note attached. There had never been a note before in any of his deliveries.

My dearest Felicity,

I know you must be thinking that I've finally lost it, well with this delivery and all, but I promise it will all make sense in due time. When I was at school I was forced to memorize a poem, at the time I hated it but in time I learned just how meaningful and true those stanzas read. You might be asking yourself where am I going with this random factoid, maybe I have finally been infected with your amusing ramblings, foot in mouth disease as you call it. Rest assured you are still the sole carrier of said disease. I have a point, I promise.

The Charge of the Live Brigade, Tennyson's masterpiece. A poem of balance, sacrifice, and loyalty but above all, the brutality of nobility. I admit, I might read a far darker side than Tennyson intended but it is there, you need only look closer.

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!
"Charge for the guns!" he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

"Forward, the Light Brigade!"
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Someone had blunder'd:
Their's not to make reply,
Their's not to reason why,
Their's but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred…
Now, my smart sweet girl I know I need not say more but, I will. I have faith that you will solve this puzzle much like you have all the others. I will not be in contact for a while, I will be taking a trip with my son not sure yet, when I will return. Just know that once I do everything will change. All I ask is no matter how difficult it gets or how much time passes, do not return to Starling City. For it is from this city that the six hundred never rode out of. I will see you soon and then this crusade will become a war. Best of luck, take care and remember Miss Smoak every puzzle must be solved for without a solution it is only chaos.

Fondly,

RQ

Her enthusiasm was short lived.

The night the Gambit went down she was, as always, tediously working over their puzzle. When she heard the almost deafening news she felt her heart sink, and then completely stop. When it started again she realized one very cold hard truth, it would never ever beat the same again she had lost a father, again, but this time around she was determined to not lose her hope.

The crusade had seized, cold turkey. It took every last bit of her control to not go to Starling City, she couldn't betray him. She knew that just her luck, which she greatly lacked, the minute she got there he would appear and find her there exactly where he had told her not to be, cheeks red as can be and foot in mouth disease at full blast.

But their puzzle haunted her, day and night. She couldn't leave unfinished business just be, well, unfinished. It wasn't in her nature. She hated mysteries especially of the unsolved variety. His last words haunted her every waking moment. A puzzle's sole purpose was to be solved, to be put together and made whole. If it was never finished then it could no longer be called a puzzle, it was simply chaos. How could she allow their puzzle to descend into chaos when she had the tools and the right to make it whole. With newfound determination and a silent apology to Robert she started down a road she was still trying to find an end too.

Chapter End Notes

If you are still with me, like I mentioned this fic will have a weekly posting schedule, every Sunday. Thank you all!
The Return of Lost Souls

Chapter Summary

Felicity begins her mission, against Robert’s wishes, to search for him after the Gambit goes down. She finds a Queen, just not the one she was looking for.

Chapter Notes

Okay so I know I said I would post on a weekly basis but I realized that my first two chapters are what set up the background and introduction into the characters. So I decided to post this chapter now, don't think you all would mind, thanks again for reading.

Also there are some visual aids, enjoy!

For five long relentless years she had planned, researched, fought and of course hacked. Every action and choice she took was with one final purpose in mind, find Robert. She reminded herself of this purpose almost like a prayer, everyday, everynight.

She refused to give up even when life literally beat her to the ground. The ends of the earth weren’t enough in her search. The constant reminder that Robert would turn over every grain of earth were their roles reversed. Every time the weight became too heavy she reminded herself that her puzzle was still missing pieces and no one else was looking for them. It wasn’t a question of whether she could do it but how she would do it.

Yes, there had been sacrifices, lies, betrayal, and pain both physical and emotional, but, getting confirmation just a little less than an hour ago that a survivor, a Queen survivor, had been found made all the hard work worth it.

Five years ago she had set a plan into motion, a plan that nearly cost her her life on more than one occasion. It had begun the day she got the news of the Gambit, she had sat down and meticulously went through everything Robert had sent her, looking for a hint, a clue, something to help her understand and keep the grief at bay.

For three long months she combed through every file, photograph and even the boxes they were delivered in. There had to be something, Robert was a man that always had a plan B, C and M. So why did she feel so alone, so lost. On the fourth month she received a letter, no return address, no post mark just a simple letter, a blank letter.

She sat at her kitchen table for what felt like hours simply staring at the paper. Turning it in her hands contemplating if it was even real. What was she supposed to do with it, was it a clue? She asked out loud to one in particular. Nowadays no one usually meant Robert. Her hopeful heart fluttered with the possibilities, was he reaching out? From where? What did it all mean, dammit!
She laid in bed trying to clear her mind and keep the memories where they belonged, the past. As her lids grew heavy one errant memory pushed forward and had her bolting out of bed. Grabbing her blow-dryer she headed towards the discarded letter atop her coffee table.

Slowly the words that would break her heart appeared before her with the heat of the dryer and somehow she wished that this had been one puzzle she never solved.

My dearest Felicity,

As the old cliché goes, if you are reading this letter something has happened to me, I don’t know what, but it is obviously final, I wish I could say this letter will make it better or hold all the answers I am sure you have been desperately seeking, as always I apologize but this is not that letter.

Over the time that we have known each other I have learned three things about you; you are beyond trustworthy, you are determined, and your moral compass is uncompromising, which is probably my favorite thing about you. It is because of those truths that we are here today. Everyday I wished that I had never dragged you into this horrible reality, put you in danger and deterred you from what I am sure was going to be a fulfilling and peaceful future, once again I apologize. With that said I know there is no use in me asking you to leave all this be and just walk away, but I shall try anyways.

Included you will find a bank card it has been set up under your name in an overseas account that is completely untraceable, I know that because you created it. In it you will find enough money to live a comfortable and fulfilling life, plus I have included a steady stream of incoming money through safe stocks and bonds as to ensure you and your mother never want for anything. I have also assured that once you graduate you accomplish your goal of working for Google, I made calls and the day you graduate they will be there with your dream offer. When you are ready to start your company like I always hoped you would I have set up some contacts and investors that will eagerly be keeping an eye out for you. I do all this in an attempt to set you back on your path, the one I so selfishly ripped you from.

Now, if that is not enough I have taken some further desperate measures, I have ensured that you will not be hired at Queen Consolidated, I know you must be furious but believe me when I say you have no idea what you are up against. We just touched the tip of the iceberg, there is so much more and this runs so incredibly deep. Yes, you are good but believe me when I say you’d have to be perfect to go unnoticed by those that will not be deterred.

I wish we would’ve had more time and that eventually I would have been able to reveal the whole truth to you but time was not on our side and to do it now would just add fuel to the fire I am sure is already burning within you. Please, I beg you don't let this consume your soul, my sweet, sweet Felicity. Live the life you were meant to, enjoy the freedom this letter grants you.

I know at this point my words might have not been enough, if that is the case and God I hope it is not, please Felicity be careful, trust no one, and bide your time, for the task
that you are choosing to take on, against my wishes, will require everything of you, it will make you question who you are and if you let it, it will make you hate yourself. You need to be the best, there is no room for error, you have to be invisible and that will tear at your soul, destroy your relationships, and soon you will realize that the collateral damage and cost is too high, take my word for it.

Be careful, stay alive, fight to survive, you need to survive, nothing else matters. Be that smart girl I know you are and recognize that your best option for survival is to walk away. SURVIVE FELICITY, for the both of us!

With everything,

Robert

Tears cascaded down her face as she read the letter over and over. How could she walk away now, how could he ask that of her? He was afraid for her life, well so was she, but if she let fear guide her how could she live with herself then. The way she saw it if she walked away she would hate herself, that she was certain of, if she stayed and fought, he said she would hate herself but he couldn't be sure of that, she could be stronger and better than he or any of them could imagine, she could succeed. She would succeed, fear was her enemy and she refused to yield.

Wiping her face clean, she carefully folded the letter and tucked it away with everything she held dear in her closet inside a box mainly filled with an old unfinished computer.

She knew she needed a plan a well laid out plan. A plan that could only work if she returned to Starling City and found a way to work for Queen Consolidated.

In a matter of months she changed everything about her life, she made sure to live within her means and never beyond, preventing people from questioning where the money came from. She minimized the relationships in her life in order to not worry about the people she cared for. That meant the one relationship in her life which had been on the mend, her mother. She knew it would be made easier by the fact that Donna Smoak had returned to Las Vegas the year after she had left for Boston. She had slowly forgiven herself for what she had put her mother through and had began to mend that relationship, now she just hoped she had done enough so that it would survive this new journey she was embarking on.

She changed her look, from what was uniquely Felicity to professional attire, bright blonde hair a silent ode to her mother, the final touch glasses she hadn’t worn in a long time. With all that she became unassuming, invisible Felicity, minus the bright nails and lipstick.

Most importantly she had managed to graduate early with an accelerated double masters program and due to some expert hacking and money in the right hands she was actively recruited by QC to work in IT and development, a job she gladly took, the youngest one there at 19 years old.
Step one to infiltrate Queen Consolidated and go against Robert’s wishes had gone off without a hitch.

Yes, she knew she had defied Robert, she felt the guilt when she allowed herself to look out her window to the view of the gleaming QC tower in the distance. But would he complain when she brought him home? When she found him? When she delivered the justice that had been denied to 9 year old Felicity. Nope.

Two years at QC, a plethora of dead ends and countless travels and punishment to her body, brought her to a truth she had feared since the beginning. Sabotage! The Gambit’s downfall had been no accident. Robert’s fears had been true. It definitely wasn’t the news she wanted but it was a spark of truth in a life encompassed by lies.

Now she knew where to go, what to do next. She just needed to hold on to the hope that Robert would be there, waiting, relieved to see her and very much alive. She begged to that non-existent entity that she directed all her desperation towards.

“I’ll do all the work, but please I beg you be alive don’t leave me alone to finish this; I don't know if I can continue to do this alone. I’ve never been so afraid, I can't even begin to fathom that you might actually be gone. I don't know what to do, please.”

Every time she lost hope and wondered if Robert was truly gone an all too familiar rage would fill her and push her towards revenge. She had the means to carry it out but she didn’t have a target and every time she realized that one detail she would remember Robert’s words. Her enemy was far superior and maybe, just maybe she should walk away. Leave Starling City as he had once asked of her and never look back. Like it was scripted every time those thoughts invaded every corner of her mind she would yell at herself to Stop it! She would reprimand herself for giving in to the fear and allowing it to consume her. Then as if by magic her focus would sharpen and her drive would solidify just a little more and she would concentrate on her breath, in and out, in and out.

This time was different, she had the truth. One truth closer to finding him.

Step two, finding out what happened to the Gambit had set her on the path of no return.

Five painstaking years later, some hard earned strategy, and dumb luck had her standing on the proverbial X that marked the spot. She had hoped with every fiber of her being that Robert would be alive, that they would resume and finally bring full circle the life of their little chaotic puzzle. She had never been that lucky in her life, no reason to start now, when it mattered.

She found Robert, in a fucken shallow grave, but there he was, had that been all she found her soul and heart might have been allowed some much needed reprieve, given time. Instead she also found a history of injustice and violence so long that she was sure she had found hell on earth, and its name was the island of Lian Yu.

The stomach churning spiral of possibilities as to how Robert's life had ended had her ready to empty her stomach. She feared what else she would find on the island, but nothing could have prepared her for whom she would find on the island.

In all her searching and effort not once did Felicity ever think of Oliver Queen as more than a means
to finding his father. Even now being almost positive that the grave Robert laid in was most likely
dug by his own son, killing any last remaining innocence in him that Robert might have safeguarded
up to that point. Her grief blinded her from seeing the cruelty of a son burying his father and made
her mind go where she instantly regretted. Where roles may be selfishly reversed.

Robert loved his son more than she had ever seen a father love a son. Oliver surviving while he
perished would have been exactly what Robert would have ensured. He would be grateful that she
never gave up, that she found whom he loved most, his son Oliver Queen. That was a win anyway
you put it. But what was she to do now?

She couldn’t help think, what about her? What about justice.? Dammit! Never had happiness turned
to anger and then to resignation so quickly, but if the last 5 years had taught her anything it was that
wallowing in emotions was a sure fire way to get yourself killed. She wished Robert was there so
she could reprimand him for not doing the one thing he so strongly asked of her, survive!

Robert had been so fucken wrong. He placed all this effort in trying to protect her, sending her across
the country when he clearly was the one that needed the protection. Okay, so maybe she still had a
bit of that anger but focused anger was good, she reminded herself as she cursed Robert once more.

In her darkest moments she would play over and over the words Robert had left for her in writing.
She would twist and turn them until they meant nothing and everything all at once. In her anger she
would internally yell at him, throw his words back at him. “Sometimes a puzzle is meant to be chaos.
Because it never really ever was a puzzle, we just called it that, in an attempt to fool everyone but
most of all ourselves. Chaos that only pretended to be a puzzle, a traitorous puzzle! Impostor,
Dammit!”

Then her mind would clear, the tears threatening to drop would dry and her focus would sharpen
once again. She allowed herself one minute to feel that desperation, one minute to grieve and then
count her blessings because Oliver surviving was what Robert intended, she was sure of it, and if he
survived there would be a reason, Robert always had a plan, she just had to keep reminding herself
of that.

Step three, find Robert. As bitter as this accomplishment felt as much as it caused a shift
in her plans it also started her on a new path, a path to honor Robert.

New Plan 2.0

Bring Oliver home and put Robert to rest here in Starling where he belonged.

None of this made sense to him. He had returned to Lian Yu with the full intention of finally
returning to Starling by his own choice. It had been a little under two years since he had last seen the
island as he drifted away in the heavy salted water. His return had all been planned, had that plan
actually succeeded he should have been home five months ago all thanks to the fishing boat he had
planned to rescue him. What he hadn’t accounted for was getting deathly ill within the first week
back on the island, missing the boat entirely as fevers wrecked his body and kept him unconscious.
At this point he had no idea exactly how long he had been on the island, he knew he had been here
more than anyone should have been able to survive under his conditions. You would think the
second time around this would of all been much easier.

What he knew for certain was that it had been about 5 years since he last saw his family, since he last set foot in Starling City, but beyond that he didn't know, nor did he care to know about dates. If he knew the month, the day then he would be forced to acknowledge that such things exist, if it was Monday him from 5 years ago would normally be nursing a hangover and scooting someone out of his bed, him from one year ago, well those were memories he’d rather soon forget. Those thoughts were dangerous, he had enough danger in his life, so the date, he didn't care for such things anymore. Now he was just trying to not think about how much longer he would have to wait until the fishing boat ran this route again, 6 months which is why his initial timeline had been essential, the problem was his ghosts kept him company and his mind was starting to turn on him. Lian Yu held more than it seemed Oliver was capable of coping with, he needed off this island, now.

Few things surprised Oliver, especially while on a deserted island. Today would prove to be the exception, had it been month six and that small fishing boat came over the horizon rescuing him as he set fire to carefully placed wood on the shore, he would have been relieved but not surprised. Yet, sitting on a plane surrounded by exactly 23 highly trained men, all heavily armed, stoic, and definitely lacking any resemblance of a rescue team, well, that was a heart attack inducing surprise. He would remember today, the exact date, because today everything started again, his biggest desire and his biggest fear all came crashing down on him in one fair swoop and before he knew, he would be home.

Rescued, yes, that was right he had been rescued, he had no idea how, if everyone that knew Lian Yu existed was dead. Anyone that knew he was linked to the island was dead or presumed him dead. So how did they find him?

At first he thought his mind was playing tricks on him. Remnants of the fevers bringing back to life the enemy troops he fought so hard to escape once before, they moved, coordinated and looked like the enemy but something in his gut told him this was a whole other species. So he stalked them trying to convince himself that they were real. When he realized they were here for him, it sent a shrill of fear running down his spine, he wasn’t fully recovered weak from illness and hunger, his mind was sloppy and his nightmares were plenty. He took out a few men before he realized this was a rescue mission, they, whomever they were had found him and they were taking him home.

Home, a word that had almost lost all meaning.

Now as he sat in this plane, heading home in complete silence, no one had any questions for him, no one had even addressed him beyond confirming his identity. One of the men had stepped into the cockpit, satellite phone in hand. As the minutes ticked away his mind cleared and his instincts took over. He cataloged every detail every movement. Making notes so he could later visit this memory and get answers. For a second he thought he had been muttering out loud but the fact that no one even glanced a curious look in his direction calmed him while still something inside him remained unsettled. He recognized this level of professionalism and his gut told him to stay alert. Yet, the minute he touched ground in China and headed to the American Consulate all the questions came at once, he found he now missed the silence.

“Mr. Queen what happened? Mr. Queen how did you survive? Mr. Queen you need to see a doctor?”

God he hated being called that. He repeated his rehearsed story from five months ago, the one he hadn’t had the chance to use, to anyone that asked, he was the sole survivor, landed on the island alone, managed to survive alone, and most importantly he was ready to go home. It took only hours for his mom, Moira Queen, with friends in high places and always a force to be reckoned with, to
show up, biting everyone's head off to get him on his way home, finally. He had so many questions of his own but they could wait, what mattered now was his return to Starling City and his inherited crusade to right his father's wrongs. He didn't know what to expect or how he would be received, all he knew was that nothing would be the same and he was ready for that.

All that planning and maneuvering. Twisting and manipulating lives like chess pieces and he hadn't accounted for one thing. He never considered his own reactions and impulses; he had anticipated everyone else and neglected himself. He knew he was strong and capable, the island and time had assured that, but never had he felt more fear than when he stepped foot into Queen Manor for the first time after five years. He was a stranger to this world. He didn't belong. That feeling of maybe never fitting in again and always being an outcast in his world hit him like a freight train.

As his eyes scanned the room as if taking it in for the first time he wondered whether it had always been this large, had the city always been this overwhelming and encroaching creating a stagnant unforgiving air. How was this the home he dreamt about? The home whose aroma he tried and failed to recreate on more than one occasion. It was so over the top, demanding and lacking. Everything seemed so unnecessary. Clarity he never possessed overcame him in that moment, making him realize how blind he truly had been before, disgustedly blind. He had refused to accept it but every second brought the unyielding truth forward, that island had been his home, his only true home in a long time. It was the only place he was ever truly himself, the real Oliver had been born on Lian Yu. Lian Yu had been his miserable haunted home. This was just a house, now a necessity in saving his city.

Would he ever feel safe anywhere again? With acerbic clarity he realized he probably never would.

He almost wanted to reprimand the spoiled, entitled, asshole, he had been but how could he when he was still envious of the freedom and innocence that asshole held and didn’t even know it.

His mind was overwhelmed and he wanted to run right back out, every instinct in his body had been honed to survive and now they were shouting at him, run! The minute you stay here, the minute you bring them all back into your life is the exact moment you have lost them all forever. He felt like the lost boy on the island shouting at his father's grave for answers, he would never get.

He had survived like his father had asked, but what now? Where was he supposed to start? His father had told him he would not be alone but the overwhelming sense of solitude that weighed on his shoulders spoke otherwise. His father spoke of allies laying in wait where he least expected them, but if he was meant to trust no one how would he recognize them. Time had taught him that the distinction between enemy and ally was so faint they were practically interchangeable. He needed to stop his mind and bite down on his emotions, he’d had 5 years, 7 months, and 19 days to plan this out to the last detail, he was stronger than ever and he would save his city from those that had failed it.

Thea's voice ripped him out of his thoughts, instantly all the years of waiting came rushing in, god he'd missed her so much. The question was who had she missed, who had she grieved, she had waited all this time for Ollie her carefree brother with the easy smiles. The one who left this house 5 years ago, never to return. He sympathized with her because he had grieved him long ago too, and he no longer existed. This new Oliver was a stranger, could she love him just as much, could she be his speedy too, could any of them accept him. Once again he realized that was probably not possible.

Well, it seemed that he would have to find that inspiration somewhere inside him and quick, because his not so little anymore sister was running down the stairs aiming for his arms with her eyes filled with tears and her heart full of hope.
What ever shadows of the old Oliver remained he needed to compel them to the forefront. The love he reserved for Thea would come easy and honest but it wouldn't be enough, as the way his mother kept looking at him demonstrated.

Now, how did this go again, arrogant chin up, boyish smile wide, and carefree attitude on display, just like riding a bike, now he just needed to breathe.
Chapter Summary

Oliver returns to Starling after 5 years and Felicity has a satellite with his name on it.

Chapter Notes

Now in this chapter we get a bit more into the canon of the show, obviously it will be a mixture of everything, leaving intact some important key parts of the story. I know there is a lot of set up an filler that must be addressed before I can get to all our favorite interactions but they are necessary in understanding the characters and their motivations.

Flashbacks will be in italics and marked by-->

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Bringing back billionaires from the dead was not only expensive, it was tedious and required too many outside forces, these were all things that made Felicity extremely nervous. Ideally she would have preferred to have done it all herself, a quick recon mission, nothing new in her life. Yet, in order for this to work she needed to be as far removed from the process as possible. Falling back on contacts she had acquired in some of her more unsavory moments, she now had 23 mercenaries to deal with.

"This is everything we have Ms. Tyler. All the audio from our comms, the video, statements and debriefing of every single man. All paperwork, well what little existed, has been destroyed as per your request and all the men were left where they were hired, paid and never knew where they went in the first place."

"Thank you General, my employer is extremely pleased with your men and all payment has been made to the designated accounts. We hope there wasn't too much trouble with the men or any questions and of course there is no need to remind you of your agreement"

"Nah, no worries these men are used to this type of work, they never ask questions. Tell your employer thank you and that anytime he needs, well, no tell him thank you because I was never here, never even planning on visiting, as a matter of fact South America looks warm, and cozy this time of year."

"Thank you, as always a pleasure General."

"The pleasure was all mine, Rose" he winked and with his index finger and thumb pinched her chin as he walked away murmuring about how he loved redheads.

The minute he was gone she quickly made her exit, got in the car that was idly waiting in the back alley and told the driver to take her to Hub City. She gave him precise directions to the cafe she
would be dropped off at.

One mocha latte and 30 minutes later a dark haired, all dressed in black and metal woman walked out of the crowded cafe, making her way down the main boulevard stopping at a few stores before reaching an apartment 12 blocks away.

Pulling a single fob from the hidden inside pocket of her jacket she opened the coded number lock hidden in the wall paneling and in less than 10 seconds found herself in the safety of an apartment. Pulling an elaborate computer setup from what was once a murphy bed, she uploaded all the data she needed onto her private little nook in the dark web. Once done she destroyed the hard drive disposed of everything and exited once again still nursing her latte.

She flagged down the third cab she saw and headed to the train station hub where she boarded a train among thousands of people heading to Starling City. Heading straight to her private room and with the door locked and her breathing back to normal she finally got comfortable and changed for the final time as she disposed of her clothes and wig out the train window at random moments.

She had never taken Robert’s words lightly, she meticulously strived for caution. With all that, she still never imagined this level of elaborate planning, she was sure as hell neither did Robert. Well technically she had imagined it because she was the one that came up with the elaborate plan but, 5 years ago Felicity would of needed a benzo or three to stomach this ordeal.

As she rambled in her own head she couldn’t help but release a frustrated huff, she really needed to talk to actual people more often, her internal thought rambling was getting worse. And now she was chastising herself for the way she talked to herself, she really was hopeless.

Taking a deep breath she settled down to comb through all the audio and video, trying to understand just a little of what Oliver Queen experienced. To know whether she could trust him, she was sure that when Robert said to not trust anyone he was not intending for that wide net to capture his own son, but if 5 years taught her anything it was that trusting no one meant even your own shadow.

As she settled and pulled out her tablet to start sorting the data by time stamps and location while coordinating it with the video she stared at the play button building the courage to tap the screen.

It had been a very long day for Oliver, the only positive being his reunion with Tommy. No one could breath lightness and carefree smiles into a room like Tommy Merlyn, he was glad to see that was still the case. Seeing as so much had changed this one fact was refreshing and welcomed. Especially when facing dinner with his family including one Walter Steele. He didn't like it, at all, there was something about the abrupt change to his much cherished memories, someone usurping his father that brought out some bitterness.

Even as he tried his best to play his part he could sense that Tommy’s hesitance stemmed from more than just his sudden return. There was something underlying in Tommy’s caution that almost made Oliver’s skin itch, but his mind was still trying to catch up with everything that rather than dwell, his mind speed through to what had been weighing him down.

He needed more details about his rescue, to dig a little deeper because not knowing was going to kill him. The assurance with which the rescue team arrived and methodically searched for him had him questioning everything. Who had know he was alive? How long had they known? Not knowing whether the people he held closest could be trusted was not what he expected when he was told by his father not to trust anybody. Even more frightening was the idea that there was this outside force
that had the upper hand and was a possible danger to those he loved and just recovered.

Allowing these type of thoughts was what Slade had tried to teach him to reign in when he was at his weakest, images of Thea’s innocent face running through his mind, his mother’s hugs, Laurel’s picture. He had learned long ago that if he allowed it, his mind would be his greatest weakness. Yet, after 5 years he thought he had beat that weakness out of himself.

A foolish notion within him made him almost believe that his demons, at least some of them would be left on the island because he believed them to be a product of the island, he was wrong.

His hands wrapped around his mother's neck as his panicked eyes saw beyond her, saw only what haunted him in his nightmare filled nights, clearly proved otherwise.

Now, as he sat there still sweat soaked, his mother reluctantly back in the safety of her room he allowed for memories to resurface, mainly about his rescue.

As the men gathered in the concealment of the shrubbery off the coast they regrouped and whom he assumed was the leader began shouting orders

"This is an intel and asset recovery mission we are here looking for our targets. The landscape is treacherous and vastly unknown all we have is the intel Red provided. Remember men anyone we encounter we neutralize and we DO NOT harm them, unless absolutely dire, as a last resort. You are all equipped with your darts use them avoid the live ammo. We DO NOT kill, understood!"

"Yes, we get it now where is the intel little Red gave...

At the familiarity of his tone the leader directs a deadly look towards the man that felt silent agreement was not enough and decided to open his mouth. The soldier whom may not be as stupid as he looks swallowed hard knowing he had made a mistake by calling her little Red and revealing more than he should, snapping his mouth shut, quickly was his best decision.

"Here is the intel, keep your comms and cameras on at all times, talk to no one, hurt no one and we will be off this place in no time"

He'd assumed at the time that his mother had hired the rescue team, who else would be looking for them. He, now, knew better. Had it been his mother she would have already told him and used the good PR for QC. He wouldn’t have faulted her either it was part of the Queen heritage.

That left one very large question unanswered. Who was this Red they spoke of, and why did the other guy call him little Red? As he tried to recall the nuances of the tone he couldn’t help but linger on the memory of playfulness, maybe Red was a woman after all. So who was this mystery person? What was their motivation? He figured no better place to start than with the men that rescued him.

The quickest of researches told him that finding them would be an impossible task, searching about his rescue kept bring up the same manufactured story that he had been rescued by a pair of fisherman who found him on the island because of a fire they saw on the shore. As a matter of fact, now that he focused on those memories he realized he was never asked at the embassy about who rescued him. They landed at a private airfield and then he was taken by car with only two of the men dressed in civilian clothes and an embassy official, once they reached the American Embassy they were taken separately and he never saw them again.
He wanted to curse the sky, he had been so preoccupied with everything else he hadn't paid attention to this, now, very important fact. These men had vanished, there was no record of them ever even being in China or his rescue. All there was, was the story of the two fishermen who by chance found him. Who ever this Red was he or she was very good, too good, and he didn't like it. That kind of skill and secrecy was dangerous, he should know.

He knew there was nothing more to do until Red resurfaced, without a lead he couldn’t waste his time any further, he had his own path to follow. When Tommy had offered a day out, he was relieved to leave the haunting manor and experience first hand the damage that had been done to his city.

More importantly it gave him a chance to do the one thing he had wanted more than anything in the past five years, apologize to the one person he had hurt beyond what an apology could offer, but he had to try.

As they drove through the surprisingly bustling streets of the Glades he was a bit taken aback. He could see the poverty, empty storefronts and how most of the side streets were not as busy, yet, it wasn’t the desolate abandoned wasteland he had expected. As if Tommy could sense his thoughts he offered some insight.

“It used to be worse. A couple of years ago I started looking into reopening my mom’s clinic, the Glades was doing really bad Ollie. I saw a news report of an 8 year old that was involved in a hit and run while on his bike, 9 calls came into the SCPD and yet, not one ambulance came into the neighborhood. After waiting over 30 minutes, someone picked up the boy and drove him to starling general, a 30 minute drive, the kid died in the car, 8 years old man” the connection wasn't lost on Oliver, he had been in Tommy's life forever and he knew exactly why that hit so hard.

“You were 8 when your…”

“Yeah.”

“That’s why you reopened the clinic, that’s great Tommy, am sure…”

“I said I tried, buddy. Couldn’t find a contractor that would build here and when I tried a temporary mobile clinic as a trial run to show the Glades we meant well they were robbed at gunpoint four times before the med staff refused to go back. So that was the end of that plan.” he shrugged as the light turned green and his eyes moved to the road missing the darkness that veiled Oliver’s eyes.

“But in the last year or two there’s been some noticeable changes, some would even say improvements. I’ve been considering reopening the clinic again, especially after talking to Laurel” he saw Oliver’s eyes snap towards him as he swallowed the rest of his sentence. He internally cursed himself for bringing her up especially in such a familiar way.

At hearing her name Oliver remembered the other reason he was here.

“Speaking of Laurel…”

He should have listened to Tommy, going to speak to Laurel had been a mistake, Laurel's words still rang in his head and stung in his heart “five years wasn’t enough...it should have been you”.

She wasn't wrong, it seemed he also had some sins to atone for. He had failed the people he loved. Unfortunately, he would have to continue failing them in order to protect them, it didn't sit well in his gut but it didn't have to. He never realized how hard it would all be, the thought of sacrificing the family he had just gained back really hurt.
As he approached the car Tommy brought him out of his internal thoughts with his usual charm and wit.

"Well that went well, now if you aren't tired of fish I say we get some sushi and eat it off some models” he was about to reject his offer when he heard the screech of tires as Tommy reacted “What the hell?"

Before he could decide the best way to react the 3 guys that had exited the van shot and killed some poor guy and shot them both with tranquilizers.

He and Tommy were out for the count.

When he began to feel the vestigial of wakefulness he felt the sharp pain of a slap across his face "Hey wake up, princess" unbidden everything faded again sending him back to the nightmares

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"So sorry my boy, I thought I had more time, am not the man you think I am, I didn't build our city, I failed it and I wasn't the only one"

"Dad? What?"

"Listen to me Ollie, you need to open your eyes. It is time to grow up. I know it isn't fair but time is not on our side son."

"Dad you're scaring me, just stop. Save your energy"

"Ollie, my past is shrouded in sin, sin I desperately tried to right too late, but I was trying son, you must know that. In my efforts I made allies, good people, when you survive and get back seek them out. They might seem unassuming but don't trust that, trust your instincts. I wish I could tell you more but doing so could have unforeseen consequences not only for you but for others, innocents. Just know I wasn't alone. We all failed the city, and reaped in its destruction. We built our empires on the backs of these people.” Robert’s voice begins to slur as his body lulls from side to side. He tries to push the words out, struggles to keep going “You are not alone, I wasn't alone, she was there and she will be there for you,” he’s speaking so low that Oliver struggles to hear what he says moving closer to check on his father he’s able to hear his murmurs, “find her she will be your anchor, find her." he passes out as he keeps murmuring to find her.

"Dad, dad what are you talking about? Where dad? Who?” he tries to wake him knowing that after 2 days at sea this can’t be good, he tries to move but his body has started to fail him and any effort seems monumental.

"It's the heat, it's making him delusional, causing him to ramble. I wouldn't put too much stake in his words” the sailor tells him dismissively. Oliver turns wide eyed at the voice, almost forgetting anyone else was there with them. As his heart settles and reality comes into focus he slumps back leaning into his father.

"Too late" he whispers to himself

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The second Felicity had decided that Oliver would be her new mission she had put all her skill set to
good use, facial recognition and GPA tracking were the first steps. She had made full use of the satellites she borrowed from time to time and wasn’t surprised when she saw him leaving with one Thomas Merlyn in his brand new car with the completely hack-able computer system and GPS.

As Felicity sat in her apartment in her PJs keeping tabs on Oliver she wondered why out of all the places in Starling he could have made his first stop the Glades. That was of course until she saw the car turn on to the street leading to CNRI, where one very familiar face was employed.

She’d like to say that the reunion of these two playboy billionaires starting off with visiting a beautiful woman, was surprising, but she would be lying to herself. No surprise there, when said woman was one Miss Laurel Lance. She hoped, for the sake of the young Mr. Queen as she had taken to calling him, at the very least was there to offer an apology and not trying misguidedly to rekindle something.

As she watched from the CCTV cameras what appeared to be a very heated, one sided conversation she internally cringed, she kind of felt bad for the guy. His dejected stance painted a very obvious picture of where that conversation was going, as she was deciding whether to stop watching feeling very much the intruder in what was meant to be a private moment, the argument was over and Oliver was walking back to Tommy.

Losing him as he turned into the alley in a blind spot she had decided she was okay with in this particular stake out she caught the tail end of a van blocking the exit. Feeling a familiar itch in the back of her neck that she had honed into trusting over time she quickly positioned the satellite she sometimes borrowed only to watch as Oliver and Tommy were dragged into the van unconscious.

Felicity typed away hacking traffic cams as fast as the car drove past them trying desperately to keep up. She needed to know where they went it was daytime and she was on the other side of the Glades there was little she could do, so she would have to resign herself to relying on the SCPD. Once the car stopped and she saw them pull the bodies she called in the tip to the SCPD making a strong argument as to why they needed to get there, now.

She tried to get eyes on the inside but it was impossible, that warehouse had been condemned for awhile and only the occasional homeless person at night protecting themselves from the elements would venture in. She waited for the SCPD to show up almost regretting not having tagged that location months ago. She didn’t do well not knowing.

As his mind startled out of the nightmare, Oliver’s body flinched into awareness. Immediately feeling the restrain of his hands being bound. Playing the part he looked around scared and marked off where Tommy was and where each of the men were standing as a plan formulated.

When they asked him about his father his surprise was genuine. The first shot of electricity from the taser running through his body let the realization that this was connected to everything he had learned about his father and his secrets sink in.

Knowing he had very little time to waste before they truly hurt him or Tommy he made the choice that he was going to kill them making sure to verbalize it for their benefit.

In the blink of an eye the 3 men went from mockingly laughing to fighting for their lives. The First going down with a chair to the throat, the second by the gun of the third as Oliver used him as a shield. The third and final one deciding to make a run for it gave him time to check that Tommy was okay as he followed in pursuit. Quickly catching and subduing him he asked a question he was
pretty sure he already knew the answer to.

“Who hired you?”

“Please, don’t do this”

“Tell me who hired you” he asked as he applied added pressure to the man’s throat.

The man coughed out a response as best he could “I don’t know, never met anyone...money drop” before he could finish Oliver broke his neck, he knew the hired gun would know nothing and now he would never share what little he knew, like Oliver’s secret.

As he searched the man he heard the sirens fast approaching and made a run back to Tommy.

By the time the police arrived the men had been killed and Tommy and Oliver were fine.

Felicity didn’t understand what exactly had happened but that sensation on the back of her neck hadn’t gone away and she knew she had to figure this all out.

Knowing there was little she could do now she waited for the detectives to be sent to collect statements, hoping it was one of the ones she had a tag on. When she pinged Detective Lance at the Queen manor she knew she was in luck as she activated the bug she had on the cell phone of one of the few good cops left in SCPD, in her opinion.

As she listened to the young Mr.Queen retell the accounts of what had happened inside the warehouse the crease between her brows grew deeper and deeper.

She had a pretty clear view of the front and sides of the building and she hadn’t seen anyone come in to the building, she had caught some movement towards the back of the building but it was spotty at best since that was the exact moment ARGUS had realized someone had “borrowed” their satellite. She couldn’t get a clear look just some movement and silhouettes but a green hood? She’s positive she would've seen that.

She wasn’t sure what was going on, something felt off or maybe five years of suspicion were affecting her. What she was sure of was that she would get to the bottom of this and that she needed to mute the conversation, there was something about the Lance family pain that she deeply sympathized with, especially that of one grieving father that hit too close to home. Deciding she had what she needed she turned the bug off.

Things were unraveling faster than they could have ever imagined.

Oliver needed to jump into the process and start crossing names off his list, and setting up his base of operations.

On the other hand Felicity was realizing that she needed to figure out who had returned from that island, because from what she had witnessed so far it definitely was not the shallow, selfish, playboy troublemaker that Robert had talked about years ago during one of their first late night meetings. She had asked about a photograph he had on his desk and he had gone into a long story about a kind hearted boy that had grown into a careless young man. His frustrations evident but his love far more
overwhelming.

Robert loved his son and now here she was trying to find a reason not to trust him.

Actually she didn't need a reason, her mind didn't trust him and the fact that she didn't know why was killing her. She needed to change her game plan, she needed to get closer yet, remain unseen.

She needed Oliver to give her a reason to trust him. Show her that Robert had been right, and that he still held a piece of that kind hearted boy. She desperately wanted to trust him simply because he was Robert’s son, and he had his father’s eyes. But the fact that he was surrounded by so much mystery prevented her from being able to move past the logical part of her brain that was adamant in unraveling his secrets. She hated herself for that. Every instinct told her that she should trust him, but her mind kept pulling at that thread like a dog with a bone.

They were both in over their heads and seconds away from discovering it.

Chapter End Notes

So I went to bed on Sunday after a nice day out with my friend and am laying there relaxing getting ready to fall asleep when I literally pop up from bed as I remember that I have a posting schedule now and that is every Sunday. Hence the update being posted at about 12:30 am Monday. Sorry about that but I have added reminders to my calendar.

Let me know what you think. Thank you for reading.
Oliver’s welcome back party brings a couple of revelations and Oliver realizes some of the names in his book are no longer relevant.

Chapter Notes

The flashbacks I include are more for you the reader than actual memories from the characters. Although sometimes they will correlate with current events playing as both memories and extra snippets for you guys, just thought I would clarify that.

Oliver had thought that his fast thinking had worked out in his favor, he introduced the concept of this hooded man while simultaneously giving himself a future alibi. That is until the next day he was met with one very formidable bodyguard courtesy of his mother.

John Diggle, on the surface seemed like a good enough guy. Ex-military, experienced and professional. He was sure the practiced line “My ability to keep you from harm will outweigh your comfort, sir” had been reassuring to his other charges. Yet, to Oliver it just meant that he would need to put actual effort into making him look incapable of doing his job. He would also need to get better at playing the playboy because even through the rearview mirror he could sense John Diggle’s calculating eyes assessing and reading all his cues. Which meant he would need to minimize their interactions, hence him jumping out of the car and ditching him at the first opportunity.

John Diggle knew entitlement, 4 years as a bodyguard had crossed his path with people in all walks of life, this was the first occasion of someone jumping out of a moving car. It seems he had underestimated Mr. Queen, a mistake he would not repeat.

Oliver didn’t have time to waste he needed a base of operations and the Queen Steel factory would do just fine. He already had everything he needed it was simply time to remodel and start crossing names of the list. Conveniently, one of the names at the top of his list was one Laurel seemed so intent on taking to court, ridding the world of a scumbag like Adam Hunt while keeping Laurel safe, well that was two birds one stone.

Deciding on a forceful demand that he return the money he stole and threat of death, was nothing new for Oliver.

Following him into a parking structure he makes quick work of neutralizing his companions to focus solely on Hunt. Pinning him down he demands that he deposit the $40 million he stole into account #1141 by 10pm.

Expecting some push back from a man like Hunt who gets what he wants, the last thing he expected to come out of his mouth was that he didn’t have the money.
“I already returned that money, there is no $40 million, what more do you bastards want from me”

“This is not a game Adam Hunt you will deposit the money by 10pm or you will not like what happens next” as he lets go of him to make his exit Hunt pleas in one last effort

“I have nothing left, do you hear me nothing”

Oliver shoots one final warning arrow and disappears. Not believing a word Hunt said he makes his way back home, he has a party to get to, unfortunately.

Adam Hunt, knows that his words fell on deaf ears and turns to the SCPD. Just his luck they send the only straight cop on the force. As Det. Lance takes his report the exasperation is evident as he hears Hunt recount what happened. Confirming the existence of the Hooded man was not something Lance was keen on happening. As they leave his partner, Hilton, confirms what he wasn't willing to admit just yet, Queen had been telling the truth about the green hood.

Once the Detectives are gone Hunt confirms with his new head of security Constantine Drakon that his office is a certifiable fortress and that when that crazy hooded guy shows up tonight he will regret ever doing so.

As Felicity prepares for just another day in her week, one that frankly doesn’t start until she has her 2nd cup of coffee she hears her computer ding in the living room just as she was about to serve herself the aforementioned glorious 2nd cup.

Normally she would have prioritized her fuel if it wasn’t for the fact that the particular ding her laptop had emitted had frozen her in place. One name occupying all the space in her mind, Constantine Drakon. As she made her way back to her computer, coffee all but forgotten, she pulled up the alerts and confirmed that this particular piece of unwanted trash was in Starling City.

Although she had decided on justice over revenge some time ago, she couldn’t help but feel that this might be fate knocking at her door serving him up on a silver platter. She was far more skilled now than she had been 3 years ago, maybe she could confront the man that had taken everything from her.

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Everyone likes to travel. Seeing new places was all about circumstances, her current flight was Panama bound under less than ideal circumstances. Flying to Panama to follow a lead on Constantine Drakon, the man responsible for her first heartbreak was the definition of shitty circumstances. Five months ago she had inadvertently discovered that Drakon had killed her father and now she wanted answers. Her mentor at the time had taken the information she had provided one emotional night and used it as a teaching moment on self control. Yeah she was quite pissed at the moment, but it was a long flight and she hoped that by the time the plane landed she would be able to focus that anger. This was a moment for her to learn that strength came from justice and not revenge.

Her mission was to find Drakon gather intel but not confront or harm him, even if she had the capabilities, in her mind, to do so.

Felicity had always been an overachiever, but not this time, she failed said test as she did exactly what she wasn’t supposed to. Drakon had a ruthless reputation as one of the best for a reason, he made her and taunted her without knowing who she was or why she was there. He was actually quite amused that she had the guts to even try and one up him.
When she leaped from the shadows ready to attack she was met with a countermove that sent her skidding across the patio of the compound he had entered.

Immediately taking a defensive stance he beckoned her forward and she ignored the voice in her ear and attacked with every skill she had acquired in the past months.

In confronting him, Drakon proved to be a far more skilled adversary, yet her anger made her an unpredictable opponent.

Her anger also made her show her hand as she sent one brutal hit after another making sure he knew “this was for Noah”. As he sent her skidding back with a blow to her shoulder, she sprinted towards him only to stop dead in her tracks at the mention of her father.

“Noah Kuttler, Las Vegas” he chuckled. “Now by sheer fact that it’s been 10 years since I killed him I am assuming you are his daughter, Meghan, was it?”

She tried in her shock not to react to the name, at least her father had the foresight to not use her actual name when dealing with seedier endeavors.

“Meghan, if your daddy could see you now, what would he say? I don’t know what heroic image you have of your father, but he was not a good man and if he is dead it is because he deserved it. It was nothing personal, simply business. I was hired and I did my job. Believe it or not there is honor in that so this is your one opportunity, walk away now and this ends here. My job was to kill Noah, I did that 10 years ago and I have no need or want to hurt his daughter.”

She knew what she should do but it was so hard, it was tearing her apart on the inside. So she did nothing, hoping that he would take her silence as affirmation without her having to agree or utter one word to her Father’s murderer. The voice of her mentor in her ear telling her to stand down.

Luckily that is exactly what Drakon did, leaving her feeling empty and hating herself even more.

As she made plans to leave Panama that same night, she couldn’t seem to let her encounter go, deciding that although she couldn’t serve justice for her father she could still prevent Drakon from hurting anyone else’s family again.

Tipping off the various consulates and interpool of his presence in Panama she boarded the plane heading back to Starling City, her mentor having decided she needed a reprieve and sending her home.

The gratification at one up-ing Drakon was short lived, specifically the exact time it took for her to get from Panama to her front door.

She arrived home to find a package outside her door with no postage. Immediately on high alert she carefully inspected and determined she could open it. Inside the first thing she saw was a picture of her mother in the Bellagio standing under the TV in the bar which was playing that day’s 5pm news. On the back of the picture there was a note.

Your father might have ensured that your identity was almost all but non-existent but, I actually met your mother, once. You never forget meeting a woman like Donna Kuttler, even in a town like Vegas.

I tried to do the honorable thing and you betrayed me, you could argue that I killed your father first so we are even but, I have a feeling this is not the last I will hear from you. So here is a little incentive, you cross my path ever again and I will make sure to leave your mother’s body where they found your father.
I won’t warn you again.

Throwing the package across the room she cursed and screamed out loud. In her need for revenge she had put a target on the only family she had left, her mother. In that moment she decided she needed to do better, be better. Not for her sake but because her mother had experienced enough heartbreak and deserved only good things for the rest of her hopefully long life.

She hoped, her distancing herself once again wouldn’t add another crack to her mother’s heart. She couldn’t risk Drakon discovering who she was. Reaching out to contacts she had in Las Vegas she asked them to keep an eye on her mother having settled that for her peace of mind she decided she needed a workout and a hot shower.

Never anticipating how much this choice would crumble her relationship with her mother.

Following the trail she isn’t surprised to see that Drakon has been hired by one Adam Hunt, a sorry excuse for a human being that she had already scrapped from her shoe once before.

Although she had taken all of his money over a year ago, his influence and backers still carried a lot of weight in this town.

She had hoped that the evidence she presented to Laurel Lance, in the case she had been pursuing against Hunt, would help her close said case quickly and effectively. But it seemed that he was putting up a fight.

No matter how hard she tried to clean up her city she couldn’t help but seethe at the continuous return of parasites like these.

As she is contemplating her game plan she gets a ping from the SCPD that Hunt was attacked by a green hooded man.

Red flags and alarms start ringing in her head, this cannot be good, she has enough to worry about without adding a wannabe Batman to her repertoire.

She had her own run ins with Adam Hunt and his bird of the same feather Martin Sommers back when Robert had blackmailed them to stop their illegal activities but ever since Robert’s disappearance they had resumed their old ways, she had tried to deter them as best she could but the whole remaining invisible made that difficult. So she had hit them where it hurt, in their bank accounts. Some had toppled others like Hunt refused to take their exit.

Robert refilled his tumbler while taking in the NY skyline from his office in the QC Manhattan subsidiary. He needed to let Adam Hunt sweat it out a little longer. In order for their plan to work they needed Hunt afraid enough without ever uttering a single threat.

“Look Adam you say everything is secured and your accounts are untraceable but Hannibal said the exact same thing and you see where he is now. This is just a friendly warning, you want to secure your assets, doing it through QC is your safest option. We are not talking untraceable accounts only, we are talking an entire network and server room dedicated to making every last thing untraceable. “

“You are also talking putting my entire fortune into your company. Robert, I didn't get to where I am by trusting any one person entirely or by putting all my money in one place. So I am going to have to
“Understandable, just thought I would offer like I have done with everyone else. Just make sure to keep a close eye. Martin called me before you arrived, it seems his untraceable account misplaced 10 million just this morning.”

Hunt fidgets slightly with his phone in his hand and Robert knows he almost has him he just needs to let him squirm a little longer so he walks over to his desk to get some paperwork and in the process takes Hunt’s glass to refill. He taps his chest twice indicating to his partner to be ready as he sees Hunt bring his phone to life.

Around the corner from the office in a perfectly hidden nook sat Felicity with her teal hair, her body completely engulfed by her red and white sweater and laptop in hand. She furiously typed away well the temp secretary they had assigned to Robert for his week long business trip kept shooting looks her way, making sure to lock her purse away in her drawer. Causing Felicity to audibly scoff.

She kept perfecting and updating the code she had written in order to trace Adam Hunt’s accounts. Hunt had been playing hard to get for awhile and Felicity was really starting to hate the guy. Robert’s plan was to take what Hunt had stolen but if he kept trying her patience she just may take all $378 million, roughly estimated.

Just as she got up to get some water using the comm in her ear to stay on top of things she heard the ding of the elevator. Standing behind a particularly tall plant she spied one Oliver Queen making his way to the flustered secretary with a devilish smile on his face.

Blatantly flirting with her they talked, she giggled while she explained that his father was in a meeting and had asked not to be disturbed. As she sipped her water trying not to roll her eyes out of her head she heard the distinct double tap in her ear.

She made her way over to the seating area as discreetly as she could, now very grateful for their flirting as it was the perfect distraction.

Quickly accessing her program she silently fist bumped the air as she picked up the trace on Hunt’s phone. Robert’s ploy had worked and Adam had accessed his accounts from his phone giving Felicity the opportunity to slip in through a backdoor and following the rainbow to the pot of gold.

Once she had secured her access she double tapped her comm. No more than 3 minutes later the door opened and Robert bid goodbye to Adam Hunt, she was happy to see him leave a little flustered.

Robert sought out Felicity for physical confirmation and noticed that she had maneuvered herself so that she was giving her back to his door.

Soft giggles pierced his thoughts and he quickly caught on as to the reason behind her behavior.

“Hey dad, just stopped by to see if you wanted to get lunch rather than dinner, I have stumbled upon some plans for tonight that could not be postponed.” he said suggestive smirk perfectly in place.

Trying not to call any attention to Felicity, Robert quickly agreed “Sure thing son, how about you go ahead to the car and let the driver know while I take care of some last things here” at Oliver’s nod both Robert and Felicity felt relief that she had gone unnoticed. That was until the poor unknowing temp spoke up.

“Mr Queen what about your lunch appointment, she has been waiting” she emphasized as she extended her arm in Felicity’s direction. Oliver’s eyes immediately snapped to before unseen person
on the couch, his eyebrows raising as he is met with bright teal hair and a beanie staring back at him telling him to ‘Give Ashit’.

Robert seeing the curiosity in Oliver’s eyes made a snap decision.

“Lunch appointment? I wasn’t aware I had anyone waiting” he whispered.

“She was sent as a candidate for the QC R&D scholarship fund, sir, the meeting was in your calendar” the temp whispered back a bit confused.

“Right, of course this will only take a minute. Go ahead Oliver I should be down in 10 min”

“What’s the hurry, if we are giving scholarships to the leaders of the future I’d love to be involved, you are always saying that I need to be more..” with one look Robert stopped Oliver. Taking it in stride Oliver simply chuckled, winked at the secretary and made his way out, waiting at the elevator he sent one final look towards the waiting area only to see the scholarship candidate walk towards his father’s office noticing her particular choice in clothes and the tattoo on the back of her shoulder where her heavy sweater hung.

→ → → → →

She was ready to put him out of commission and this green hood fool was not going to interfere.

As Oliver set his phone for his 10pm timeline, he contemplated how he would be ditching one John Diggle. Opening the door to the waiting car he was surprised to see Mr. Diggle sitting there a no nonsense look on his face waiting for him. His surprise quickly turned to amusement as he took his seat.

“Mr. Queen in the interest of full disclosure I want to clarify that your comfort has gone from being a minimal priority to not one at all. I am here to keep you safe even from yourself, do we have an understanding.”

Although John knew that beneath the smile there was a calculating look he couldn’t help be annoyed by the laugh Oliver offered as a response. Promptly, ignoring him for his phone.

As they arrive to the venue John exits the car walking to open Oliver’s door, noting the tension in his shoulders he is trying to pass off for excitement.

Making his way down the stairs the instant suffocation he feels at the quantity of people in the room almost has him climbing back up the steps. He tries to reign in the panic that is creeping up his spine, while everyone in the room begins to cheer his descend, John and an observant blonde at the bar make note of the panic that crosses his eyes for a split second.

The fact that he is expected to play every part the playboy at his welcome fit for a king is not lost on him as he throws back a shot of tequila.

Making his way to the bar with Tommy, because apparently staying completely sober tonight will not be an option if he wants his alibi to be believable.

“So buddy does your life size GI Joe come with an off button, I think he is making the guest nervous, hell his biceps are the size of my head, he’s making me nervous.”

“Unfortunately the only setting on Diggle is high alert.”
“Well, we can work with that because if my math is correct you have gone sexless for about 1839 days. That is unacceptable, may I make some suggestions”

Oliver plays along in good nature as Tommy points out his top choices, the women waving back as if they are fully agreeing with their conversation. Noticing his lack of reaction he takes a new tactic.

“If you wanna play the field, your wing-man is here to help buddy, there’s a red head over there by the DJ, if I recall she meets all your criteria unless your taste has changed, in which case then how about” he looks around quickly spotting the perfect candidate, “pixie blonde in the velvet dress walking down the stairs. God Damn she makes me nervous but in really good way” he suggest with a raised eyebrow.

As he turns his head towards where Tommy is pointing he is distracted by spotting Thea in the crowd seemingly looking to party a little harder, he only catches the red velvet dress in his peripheral as his full attention is on Thea. He walks towards her as the red velvet dress jumps right into his eye line. The blonde bumping into Thea and apologizing profusely as she heads the opposite direction.

Reaching Thea he realizes that she may have already been partying before she arrived. Compelled to look after his sister he can't help but let the disappointed tone slip into his words.

“Ollie stop you don't get to judge me for acting like you. For finding my own way to survive when I was alone. Five years brother dearest, five years where my dad and my brother were dead. Where I thought I would never see them again, I knew I would never see them. I figured out my own way and you don’t get to come back and play savior, got it”

He tries to stop her as she walks away, grabbing her bag and arm as a distraction while he tries to lift the drugs from her bag only to come up empty handed. As Thea pulls away he lets her go turning to find Diggle standing right next to him fully aware of what he was doing.

At Oliver’s confused look Diggle raises an eyebrow, his vantage point allowing him to see what Oliver missed when he focused in on his sister. Surprised that he understands Diggle’s non verbal communication he looks around for the red velvet dress and platinum hair. Turning back to ask Diggle, all he is greeted with is a smirk and a shake of his head.

Tugging on her red velvet dress, Felicity exits through a side door disposing of the drugs she pick-pocketed, not for the first time, from Thea Queen. Over the years keeping Thea Queen safe had probably been her hardest task, she had succeeded more times than failed to keep her sober but on some level she sympathized with her pain and understood her rebellion, if anybody knew what rebelling after a losing a father looked like, it was Felicity.

Pushing everything Queen related out of her mind she looked at her phone, 9:38pm, she made her way to her bag as she infiltrated Adam Hunt’s building, the SCPD patrol proving useless, once again.

As Oliver checked the time, 9:38pm, he knew it was time to leave, looking up and finding himself looking into Laurel Lance’s eyes threw a not entirely unwelcome wrench into his plans.

The fact that Laurel is here and he has Tommy to thank warms something in him, the fact that he is not sure if his friend did it for his benefit or Laurel’s is something he’s not ready to address with him.

Making their way upstairs Oliver makes up his mind that although he selfishly sought out Laurel, he doesn’t have the luxury to risk any more lives than he already has and that means pushing Laurel Lance away, definitively. Leaving her in tears and seeing the disappointment in her eyes gutted him but he couldn’t think about that now.
Making his way down the back corridors, Diggle is waiting for him. He should really be surprised but he is quickly learning that John Diggle is too talented for his career choice and any other time could come to be a useful ally, but not today, he decides as he leaves him unconscious in a closet.

The clock in the security room reads 9:56, one minute ahead she notes as she blocks and interferes with their feed and makes her way up the building through the elevator shaft. She easily makes it to the 2nd to the last floor, reaching the top floor through the ducts without being noticed. Easily spotting Drakon as she drops down silently from the vent she has to contain the burst of anger that crawls up her throat.

As Drakon makes his way down the hallway she knows it is now or never. She quickly tranqs the six men in the hallway by the time Drakon is in Hunt’s office hearing the electronic look click. She cleans up after herself just like her mom always taught her and then makes her way over to hack the keypad. Prepared to face off with the man she has waited to see again, the lights go off and she knows that can only mean the man in the green hood is here. She can’t risk exposing herself so instead she takes cover in the shadows.

Oliver reaches the top floor and as he prepares his exit out of the elevator into the hall leading to Hunt’s office he is ready to fight his way through, arrow nocked and all. Yet, he is met with silence. At first glance it seems there are no men and he figures they might have created a stronghold in the office. He carefully walks over far more on high alert than before.

As he nears the door another elevator opens to his right, turning he finds two armed men standing there in shock as six other men lay unconscious at their feet.

The bullets fly and he quickly neutralizes one while he sends the second man flying through the glass door where he is met with more gunfire. Using the distraction of bullets and glass he accurately takes out the armed men in the room one by one. Not forgetting that there is some other threat here as well.

He shoots an arrow into the wall behind Hunt only to be promptly attacked by Drakon, they exchange blows equally paired as they seem to dance through the room with no reprieve. The odds quickly turning against Oliver as Drakon raises a gun. Felicity sees the green hooded man throw a fletching aimed straight for Drakon's chest as he jumps for cover landing hard and hitting his head. Instinctively she deflects it while simultaneously tranquilizing Drakon, she’d like to say it was an action for the purpose of sparring life but she knew that selfishly she refused to let someone else take the justice she was due.

As the green hooded man and Drakon lay unconscious she battles with what to do but all choices are out of her hands when the SCPD arrives on the top floor. She makes her exit as she hears more gunfire ring out, knowing that the green hooded man managed to get away as she heard in the distance the SCPD calling for backup to the venue downstairs, where he apparently zip-lined. Show off was all that came to mind.

Felicity makes her way back to the party knowing she more than likely won't find anything. This green hooded man was using the cover of hundreds of people and alcohol, much like her. Making sure she walks by a couple of people dropping comments here and there and making sure her back is visible to the cameras she reaches the main floor just in time to see Oliver mid speech.

“Two million dollars to anyone who can find a nut-bar with a green hood”

God he really was making it hard to root for him, Felicity thought as she walked out of the venue once again in her red velvet dress. Pretending to be on her phone she listened through the bug on his cell as Detective Lance multiplied whatever remorse still lay in the young Queen, his words causing even her to cringe at the brutality and pain they held as he accused him of not even trying to save his
daughter, Sara.

The notoriety that the green hooded man could gain, especially in places like the Glades, was unsettling to say the least. Not only were these type of hushed rumors already common place in the Glades but with his preference for the dramatics, he could become poised for imitation.

She had gathered all the footage of that night yet, he was very aware of cameras and mostly stayed out of view and never looked up. In her mind the jury was still out on whether this was a good thing or not. She could relate to his motivation but the ease with which he played judge, jury and more importantly executioner did not sit well with her.

At the same time this could not be her priority. She had to remind herself that this ridiculous vigilante wannabe was better left to the authorities. She still had work to do.

Her current priority was going through the rescue footage she had collected from the mercenaries. Her focus was currently on trying to wrap her mind around the fact that in 30 seconds of video it really looked like some jungle man had effortlessly taken out 4 of the General's men before the others could even register it, now the question was, if that was Oliver, where did he pick up those skills? What was Lian Yu hiding.

She was almost certain that it had to be Oliver, logic and evidence all pointed to that one conclusion. What sort of trauma had he encountered and what did that mean for Robert?

Her life had truly become B.R and A.O, Before Robert and After Oliver, set moments in time that will forever determine the memories in her life. Oh she would always remember, fondly, when she could walk down the street and not check every 30 seconds if she was being followed, the gool ol’ B.R days.

Now her A.O days were plagued by a damn playboy, her, Felicity, spending endless nights researching a playboy, going to bed thinking about a playboy, the young Queen hadn’t even registered on her radar 6 years ago and now here she was determined to no longer remain completely invisible, ready to take a more hands on approach.

“I need to get my hands on Oliver...” she audibly groaned before she clarified to the empty room “no, not my actual hands, metaphorical hands, dammit I need to stop calling him a playboy, it’s messing with my filter. Young Queen, or Mr. Queen from now on let's keep it professional, I mean he is kinda my boss.”

Another notification from her laptop caught her attention and she quickly opened up the browser, it seemed the wannabe vigilante was forcing himself to the forefront once again. The $40 million dollars she had put in Adam Hunt’s account on a whim, not sure at the time if she wanted it to remain there or if she wanted the green hooded man to get his hands on it so she could follow the money trail.

She got to doing what she did best. Tracking the money to account #1141 at Starling Trust. Only to watch it sit for all of 5 seconds before it started to move around pinging off of various accounts. Deciding to funnel it back to the originating account, as it had served its purpose, before she actually lost it. Once she had set a cyber trap ready to triangulate and pinpoint any location, she quickly glanced at the data and realized that he wasn’t stashing the money away he was making deposits, to names that she clearly recognized because she had once done the same.

She decided that in the spirit of what the green hooded man was trying to accomplish she would make some sizable donations, including one to CNRI for their continued efforts in getting not just
retribution but justice against men like Adam Hunt, she hoped this would help with putting him away to join his buddies Mr. Redman and Mr. Sommers.

Felicity quickly realized that the originating account, #1141, was a dead end so she opted to simply trace any further activity and began to compile data on the green hooded man. His sudden appearance was more troubling now than before and it couldn’t be coincidence, Felicity didn’t believe in coincidence. It seems she had one more thing to worry about, again, great.

Oliver’s satisfaction at his hacking arrow working and siphoning $40 million dollars from Hunt’s accounts was short lived. As soon as he tried to move the money everything went out of whack and the money vanished into thin air. As anger arose inside him, thinking Hunt had gotten the upper hand on him, a news report on the Adam Hunt attack came onto the screen constantly streaming the news.

“As residents of the Glades may recall it was only about 2 years ago that Adam Hunt’s fortune was rumored to have been wiped clean and the rumors escalated when people started affirming that the victims whom had accused him of theft and fraud had their money returned, speculations arose that someone had stolen Hunt’s money only to return it to his victims in some kind of Robin Hood-esque aspirations, but nothing was ever proven and it was deemed another Urban Legend of the Glades garnering little to no attention from both police and the media.

Although Hunt never confirmed the rumors about his fortune he still had his influence and backers within his business and as a prominent figure in Starling City that carried a lot of weight. Some would argue widespread corruption and intimidation being the leading cause. Lawyers at CNRI had been trying without result to bring him to justice and it wasn’t until this year that a formidable case had been made against him, lead by Miss Laurel Lance. Further rumors of an anonymous tip and a cache of evidence being the catalyst for the trial.

With this new attack on Hunt who knows what it will mean for the trial and justice in the glades…”

As the news report continued Oliver wondered if Hunt had no money where had those $40 million come from and where had they gone. Obviously his limited computer skills wouldn’t help him in this matter.

A new question entered his mind, had anyone else from his father’s book had similar rumors roaming about. A quick search of his next target led him to Iron Heights, Mr. Redman was already serving 20 years in prison and he had returned all stolen pensions one year ago out of his own accordence therefore, reducing his sentence. At least that is what the public records stated.

As he realized Redman was being kept company in jail by Martin Sommers he started to believe these rumors might be true and if so who had gotten to Hunt, Redman and Sommers, and other minor players in the book before him? There was no possible way this was a coincidence, Oliver didn’t believe in coincidences.
Coincidence is an Illusion

Chapter Summary

An old foe to some is a new foe to other's. His return to Starling pushes Oliver and Felicity closer. Meanwhile it seems that a Bratva past is not exclusive to one Bratva Captain, Oliver Queen.

Chapter Notes

I assume you all know about the great fall of Polyvore, I have requested adownload of everything I had. Hopefully I can share that once I receive it.

I didn't have time to add more detailed descriptions but I will try to update the chapter today or tomorrow to include at least that in lieu of Polyvore.

If any of you have suggestions for another platform I will be happy to hear them, thanks!

Days had gone by since the incident with Adam Hunt and Oliver had spent most of his free time training, finishing his base of operations and researching the names in the book hitting one dead end after the other.

The names had begun to be ticked off a little over 2 years ago, small players had ended up in Iron Heights or disappeared from Starling City all together. Some of the bigger players, like Hunt had seen their illegal activity greatly dissipate or struggle to stay above water.

He had found some blogs that boasted of a guardian angel of the Glades but nothing was ever proven and everything was just left at rumors. For now with his limited reach he would have to settle for moving on with his list, especially seeing as one James Holder had just won and gotten away with not paying the over 40 families who lost all their possessions and more importantly the families of the nine deaths in his apartments in the Glades due to faulty fire alarms. He may have been sentenced to 5 years at Iron Heights but he had managed to move his money before the courts could make him pay.

Paying a man like James Holder a visit before he was behind bars had moved up to poritrity number one.

Seeing the Verdict on the news only proved to Felicity why it was getting harder and harder to let due process render justice to the victims of Starling whom time and time again were crushed by the elite. This one hit home and although the courts were not able to find Holder’s money and make him pay, she could. She would take it all, including his companies, she would decimate his entire board that backed him in court for 2 years, knowing very well that he was guilty, she would show no
mercy, just like he had shown none when he was interviewed leaving the court boasting how he would appeal and never serve a day in jail. She would make sure he served a life in his own personal hell, penniless.

She had taken to patrolling the streets of the Glades as the petty crime rates had significantly increased since the presence of the Triad had grown battling for territory with the Bratva. She would roam the more vulnerable areas and try her best to stop any petty thieves and criminals she would run into.

It seemed to have been making some impact all the while keeping her identity or even existence hidden from the residents of the Glades. The occasional online forum mention was easily taken care of.

It had been just another patrol, stopping a hold up at the local mini mart, interrupting some low level drug deals and pickpockets had gone without a problem. She was almost ready to call it a night as she gathered some final intel on the Triad, something she had recently taken to doing most nights, when she heard the commotion and then saw the smoke in the distance.

As she climbed the nearest fire escape she rushed from roof to roof, quickly making her way to the building and the flames, already devising a plan to get the people out. As she marked off all possibilities she saw the roof as the only option, having the residents jump to the neighboring building, on the east side of the apartments, which was close enough to make the jump and slightly lower making it the easiest option. Taking one final leap she made quick work of the roof door.

Using the fire hydrant she found in the stairwell she made her way down immediately running into people already making their way up, she quickly guided them and told them to gather on the east side of the building and wait for her. As she passed them people offered help informing her where some people were trapped.

She kept working her way down clearing apartments and guiding people up the stairs. On the third to the last floor she ran into a young man whom had been helping people evacuate, she immediately noticed the dog tags around his neck.

“Hey soldier” the young man quickly turned her way.

“I will get the rest of the people, guide all those heading out to the east side of the roof, I sent the top floors there already. The building on the east has a max 2 foot gap and is about 3 feet lower than the roof, everyone should be able to make the jump”

“What? Who are you?”

“I am trying to help, now go” the shock from her tone wore off quickly as he gave her a quick nod and made his way up to the roof.

She continued to work her way down the halls only to hit a wall of fire on the 5th floor, seemingly where the fire had started. She could hear people screaming and knew she had no time to waste. She screamed at them to try and get wet blankets and stay away from the flames. She made quick work into the first apartment and did the same for herself in order to be able to get through the flames with minimum injury.

With effort and determination she had cleared half the people on the floor when half the roof caved in trapping the west wing of the building. She got word to the fire department that they needed to
concentrate their hoses on that section.

As she worked her way through the debris, the flames licked at her side and it was getting harder and harder to breath. She was trying to get closer as the desperate cries from the trapped people mixed with the shrill scream like sounds of the fire. She knew it was burning too fast and too hot and her time was running out.

She made a last stitch effort to suppress the fire in order to get the people across when she heard the floor begin to give out. She saw it in their eyes, they knew there was nothing she could do, as the tears streamed down her face she saw a father holding his young daughter plea with her and she knew before he moved what his intentions were. She ran towards them as the flames tore through her top she saw the father use all his strength to toss his crying daughter across the collapsed walkway.

The minute her cries hit her ears and she felt the weight in her arms the remainder of the floor gave out and she knew they were all gone. Without turning back she ran as fast as she could to the east starwell she had come down through and didn’t stop until she hit the open air of the roof. She saw the red hoodie before the young soldier’s face was visible through the smoke, making eye contact as she sprinted over and with a hard shake of her head she told him everything he needed to know as he leapt across the roof and she followed behind him. Struggling to take a breath she handed him the tear stained baby girl, squeezing his shoulder as she walked away in the opposite direction. The wind carrying a “thank you” in her direction.

Nine lives were lost that day including the parents and teenage brother of Milagro, the little girl whose parents sacrificed everything for. Milagro, was truly a miracle, not only in namesake, and as such was embraced by her new family, a loving family, which Felicity made sure of. That was one of the biggest regrets of her life, not getting to Holder on time, not looking out for the people in the Glades, the real victims. She had attended all 9 funerals, she still sent a birthday gift to Milagro every year. She had made sure everyone of the victims had a proper place to rest, somewhere their families, and someday Milagro could find solace from their loss. The memory lived with her everyday, and not only in the puckered and marred skin of her right side above her hip.

Yeah, she was ready to rid the Glades from the vermin that was James Holder. She immediately started hacking through his company finding every shell company and international account. One by one she started to shift money setting trojans in place so that as soon as Holder and his people started to panic and tried to move their money it would all disappear, every last cent.

The ding from her chat window brought her back from her unpleasant memories, she hoped this brought better news and a much needed distraction from the guilt that was starting to crawl up her throat, she knew better but it took effort to remind herself sometimes.

**AcidBurn**: I got wat u need now whos the best? Come on!

**GFG**: Me, still me, but second isn’t bad. So what you got?

**AcidBurn**: hell w/ that kind of <3, NOTHING!

**GFG**: Sensitive and second best your case is diminishing by the minute, come on seriously what you got am kinda on a schedule here

**AcidBurn**: Well damn all business 2nite k party pooper, I got everything u asked 4 I cleaned up the video feed u sent me well as much as I could considering the initial shitty quality. Can I say DAMN
that boy got mad skills I mean 4 a second I thought it was an old school asian movie. He laid a mean
ass whooping to those dudes. I must admit u always bring me the best stuff. Now the audio clip, lets
just say creeeeeepyyyyyy, I think I will have nightmares 4 a wk lol

GFG: Less commentary more facts

AcidBurn: Mmmmkay

AcidBurn: I cleaned up the audio removed the background noise & then had my resident terracotta
warrior translate it & cryptic definitely but hey maybe to u it has meaning. I am sending u all the info

GFG: Thanks as always, talk later. I’ll send you my thank you note tomorrow morning.

AcidBurn: Anytime I <3 ur thank you notes they are the best EVER ;)

As Felicity quickly opened up the downloaded files she went through the video first which only
finished confirming all the statements from the “rescuers”, the ape man was definitely Oliver, and the
degree of skill and training he had was beyond anything anyone with his ‘history’ should have. As
one of the men pointed out so uniquely in their statement “That island done fucked him up good, that
boy went from kitten to lion, some fucked up shit.” Felicity couldn’t agree more.

Moving past the video she opened up the audio file and listened to it again, it definitely was far
creeper once it was all cleaned up. It was all breathy, growly and intense with splatters of white
noise between, she was sure she could play this during Halloween and scare some kids straight.
Then she opened up the translation written out in Chinese first, each word time stamped on the
audio, AcidBurn, for all the annoying traits was definitely thorough. She took a breath and moved on
to the translation:

I am a survivor, I am a redeemer, I am an equalizer, I am my father’s son, I am my father’s
salvation, My sacrifice is my destiny, I will find her, I am no longer lost, I am not Oliver Queen. I
have lost, it will not be in vain. My father, my mentor, my partner, my second chance, my brother
over and over and over and over.

She knew what he meant by his father, that was Robert but who were all these other people he spoke
of? Was the her he spoke of, Felicity? What the actual fuck had happened to Oliver? She had more
questions than answers, which was a ratio that Felicity was never happy with. Her need to find a
way to get closer to Oliver had grown exponentially and jumped to priority number one. She felt like
he was a ticking time bomb and there were too many possible victims.

Oliver had managed to slip by John Diggle once more although he was sure that after this latest stunt
his bodyguard would be watching him pee for the foreseeable future.

Weaving through the streets to the high rise James Holder called home he used the night as cover as
he made his way to the penthouse. The minute he reached the railing he could hear Holder yelling
over the phone, using his shouts as the cover he needed, he got closer only stopping as he began to
tune into the conversation.

“What do you mean it’s fucken gone? That’s impossible. Everything can’t be gone, that’s over $750
million, you said they were untraceable. I don’t care what you have to fucken do, you find that
money or else you better fucken run you worthless piece of shit because I will hunt you down.
Priority is securing the Unidac Shares, do you hear me” as Holder yelled and hung up he dialed
another number.
Oliver had no idea how to react, it seemed one more name from the list had been wiped clean of all his assets. There was someone electronically taking down criminals in Starling for the past 2 years and no one even knew. Holder’s voice immediately reminding him he couldn’t afford to lose his focus.

“Call a board meeting within 1 hour, I don't care what time it is wake everyone up and tell them if they aren’t there to not bother ever coming back.” as Holder threw his phone on to the lounge chair and took one large gulp of his drink he never saw the arrow fly across the roof into the bottle he was about to grab.

“What the hell? Don’t come one step closer or I will have you killed” Oliver pulled the hood deeper over his eyes as he tossed the guns from his security detail onto the floor.

“What more do you want from me you son of a bitch? Here to finish me off, taking everything wasn’t enough, I will find out who you are and I will kill you I sw…” two shots point blank took the words from Holder. Oliver immediately took cover noticing belatedly that one had grazed his arm. Knowing a sniper shot any day of the week he made his stealthy exit from the roof, he had no more business here, Holder was dead probably at the hands of one of his many enemies.

As Felicity looked at her handy work she couldn’t help but pat herself on the back. She had managed to move large sums of money, but Holder’s assets and fortune was close to the billions and that would take days to move undetected.

Being the genius that she was she had created a ghost protocol program, the name deriving from the fact that it made money invisible. The money was still very much in the same place but all records and access showed $0. Allowing her the time she needed to move billions, if she wished, undetected out of the US and into truly untraceable accounts. Shifting ownership on companies was a little more difficult and that's where her ghost protocol really came in handy. Erasing the companies from existence allowed for others to pick up the shares legally, in this case one of her shell companies and some trustworthy investors a process which if done right took even longer.

As the police scanner notification came onto her screen she let out an audible groan. This dude was truly relentless, the vigilante had struck again, this time killing James Holder, things were escalating quickly and she didn't like it. Using a gun was new but he may have realized just how ridiculous a bow and arrow really was. James Holder being his victim kept raising red flags, he had specific targets and they kept aligning with her own. This was her city to protect in Robert's name and this vigilante was getting out of hand. Knowing she was in for an all nighter she put a pot of coffee and got to work, visiting the crime scene would have to wait until the police cleared the building.

Across the city Oliver laid in the basement of the old steel factory, unconscious, struggling to move with remnants of island herbs in his mouth still fighting the effects of a poison laced bullet that had grazed his arm over 5 hours ago. So much so that it was morning and once again he had not made it home. He had come close to death many times and this wouldn’t be any different. Well, his mother’s disapproving look when he made it home would be a little different than the norm.

Having spent half the night going through the police reports and sneaking into the crime scene to do her own investigation, unsurprisingly the SCPD had put very little effort into their investigation, she had come home to run some test on her mass spectrometer. Felicity dug further once the updated reports had been entered into the SCPD network, reaching the conclusion faster than the detectives that this had not been the vigilante it was not his M.O. It had clearly been a professional sniper.

As the spectrometer beeped she read the results and knew immediately who had killed James Holder, Oliver had identified the poison and its owner as well, although a couple of hours after Felicity.
"Floyd Lawton, Deadshot? What are you doing in my city?" questioned Felicity

Both Oliver and Felicity knew exactly what they had to do next, they just had very different ways of going about it. He had a clear goal, find him, and kill him. She on the other hand was in the business of outsmarting and setting people up, never physically harming, well almost never.

As Felicity began typing away digging deeper and deeper into all that was Floyd Lawton she came across two very important and useful facts; the first and most immediate one was that there was a link between those that hired him and the Bratva.

Although she hated the Bratva, she really had no choice. They could never be trusted and she always ended up in a load of trouble when she dealt with them. Realizing that for this type of recon a softer touch might be required she wondered if she should call Maksim, get him to help her for old times’ sake. She knew it might be time for Irina Vlacic to resurface, hopefully her good standing with the Russian community was still intact.

As for the Vigilante if the information she had analyzed and her math was right, the first bullet that hit Holder had been with less impact than the second. Gauging that he had been standing still for the first shot that should not be the case. Having noted that the bullets hit nothing else but center mass, she had to guess that it had nicked something else slowing its trajectory and dollars to donuts that something else had been the green hooded man. If her theory was right he was more than likely dead unless he still had some luck left, then maybe he was at a bar somewhere nursing his ego and thanking the gods, all of them.

“A bar? You want to open a bar in the Glades?”

Tommy stated more than a little confused yet curious enough to still look around the steel factory and see potential.

“Not just a bar, a nightclub” Oliver pitched, this would be the perfect cover for his late night basement activities, but nobody needed to know that.

Slowing smiling and nodding, Oliver knew Tommy was in.

“Man, this is going to need a lot of work but just imagine the hordes of women that are going to walk through that door, all at our disposable.” Tommy said with a giant grin on his face and a glint in his eyes.

“Is there any other reason to open a club in the Glades” they both laughed.

“The kings are back and on home territory these women don’t stand a chance. I will definitely need an office with a secret room if you know what I mean” Tommy winked at Diggle who just stood there stoic and unimpressed.

“Already ahead of you, our own private playground”.

“That’s what we should call it, The Playground” Tommy said with a wide grin while Diggle proved he wasn’t made of stone letting out a scoff.

“Oh, now you say something big man, don’t worry you will reap these rewards too, Oliver takes care of his friends, don’t I know it” at the comment Oliver simply grins at Diggle as he and Tommy continue discussing ideas. Their fun only interrupted as Tommy gets a phone call and steps outside. Oliver takes the opportunity to keep gauging John Diggl, he ask him what he thinks although he can already guess based on the loos he was giving both of them.
“I doubt your rich friends would come to the Glades” Diggle states trying to sound unbothered.

“If we open a club they will make line all night just to get in’

“I bet nobody in the Glades will see a cent of that, much like the inside of this club, with the exception of the staff, of course” Diggle added sarcastically.

“Well, it will create jobs which even you can admit are needed right now, and we can gentrify the community” Oliver stated somewhat defensively

Slightly laughing he stated what he thought was obvious, “I was wondering when we were going to get to the white knight swooping in to save the disenfranchised and all by his lonesome with no help from anybody”

Oliver slightly taken aback simply says “Wow! You don’t think very much of me do you?”

“No, actually sir I have a very high regard for how perceptive you are, sir” he smirked as he walked away, adding “I also care about my ability to remain employed, sir”

Tommy was completely unaware of what they were setting in motion and Oliver hoped he wouldn’t regret bringing him in as partner.

As Felicity got off the phone, she realized she liked talking to Maksim, he was nice, he liked her, a lot, and her time with him had been fun while it lasted much like her stay in Blüdhaven.

She was ready to go, or rather she should say Irina was ready to go into the lion’s den. She had straightened her hair and added long blonde extensions put on her contacts and drove to the auto shop hoping her Russian persona wasn’t too rusty.

“Hello I need car help please…” before she could finish her statement in her trademark soft Russian accent, a rough and very unpleasant voice dripping in a thick Russian accent interrupted her.

“How you get in, we are closed”

“Oh no, please I need help. My name is Irina Vlacic, my friend Maksim recommended this place said it was the best in Starling City. Back home I used to go to Demetri’s Shop on 1st Street” she was actually doing pretty well and her mention of Maksim and Demetri seemed to be putting her in the shop owners good graces.

“Yes, of course Maksim called said you might be coming, he never said you were so beautiful, true Russian beauty”

Oh thank goodness Maksim had come through, she would have to visit him the next time she was in Blüdhaven and thank him.

“Come in, and let’s see what is wrong with your car, and we fix it for you quick and cheap. So, how is old Demitri”

“Haven’t seen him since I left the city 3 years ago”

“Now you have new shop, in your new home” he smiled at her as they filled out the paperwork with her fake information, including the number to a burner cell and he brought in her car. She took that opportunity to put 2 bugs in the garage not to mention the one she put in the car.

“Will be ready tomorrow, we call you”
“Spasibo” she said as she left the shop getting into a cab just as a motorcycle pulled up.

As she settled into the cab taking out her tablet to access the live feed she gets it working just in time to hear 2 men having a discussion in Russian, one voice she recognized as the old man, the other she didn’t know but she was going to find out.

As Oliver passed the interrogation into him being an actual Bratva Captain, chest tattoo proving to be insufficient evidence, Felicity’s agile fingers began hacking any cameras she could access to back trace the man in the motorcycle, her Russian was out of practice but she understood enough to confirm this was business and not friendly, plus she knew the sound of a gun being taken apart anywhere.

He needed information on who hired Deadshot and as much as he had hoped to distance himself from the Bratva, they were a valuable resource.

Felicity also knew how to track a bike jumping from street cams, to ATMs and online security feeds she managed to trace him to the west side of the Glades where she promptly lost him, no surprise the city cameras didn't work in that part of town. Opting for the cameras around the shop she got images from different angles but it seemed he never took that damn helmet off. She quickly decided that tracking him when he left was her best bet.

As she accessed the live feed she waited for him to leave and sure enough he had the helmet on and apparently knew where the blind spots were in the city. She tossed her tablet exasperated onto the seat just as the cab pulled up at an apartment complex in the glades, certainly not her apartment but to prying eyes this building was as good as any.

The next day as news broke of the second murder both Oliver and Felicity were becoming anxious, they needed to stop him now. Just as Felicity did more digging she quickly realized exactly what was going on. Unidac Industries bidders were being killed off one, by one. Which meant that any of the other bidders were both potential suspects and victims, including her boss Mr. Steele. She knew the SCPD would need help so she did what she had done so many times before, she tipped them off in order to help them put two and two together. Hope the police worked that angle she would go out tonight looking to beat a sniper at his own game.

Just then she saw the time and realized it was time to head out and pick up her car.

“Dobryj vyechyer”

“Irina, good evening to you too, your car is ready as promised”

As he brought out the car she gathered the bugs not wanting to risk suspicion falling on her if they were found. Last minute she opts to leave just one, just in case. She thanks them and hands them a business card. She knows staying in the good graces of the Bratva is important.

She leaves in her car and quickly returns it to the long term lot where she keeps it, changes the plates again, then changes her hair, clothes and puts on her glasses leaving on foot as she checks her tablet. The facial recognition tracking system she designed for once working, 3 out of 10 times wasn’t bad, lets her know that Oliver is within a mile of her at a club. She decides to walk by and maybe do some recon on the young Queen whom lately had fallen by the wayside. As she gets closer she recognizes the angry man standing outside and quickly stops to write something down before continuing directly towards him.

Mr. Queen’s bodyguard, John Diggle, former Special Forces, highly trained and highly deadly. This
was a perfect opportunity to clone his phone and put a bug on him, her lucky day she guessed.

She waits for him to be distracted, well as distracted as John Diggle ex special forces could get, and crashes into him “accidentally” with a loud hard ‘TWACK’ brick wall hard, so much so that she ends up on the ground. Said brick wall immediately goes to help her, repeatedly apologizing and asking her if she is okay. She meekly smiles and tells him it is okay. As she stands up she bumps into him pretending to lose her balance and in a swift move bugs him and drops a note in his inside breast pocket. She thanks him while holding onto his arm in order to put her shoe back on and then walks away. Immediately turning a corner and tapping a few keys on her tablet to get a live feed. She hears the sounds of the city outside of the club and then abruptly there are other voices.

“Well that’s one more club I never get to go back too, now we really have to open our own because at this rate and with your past track record that might be the only place we ever get into” said Tommy laughter very evident in his tone.

“Well, looks like I jumped the shark when I questioned my job safety” an amused John Diggle commented

“Please Diggle let’s just get out of here before they come back out. I’m starving so maybe get something to eat. Oh, and bringy the way Diggle you didn’t happen to see Thea come out, did you?”

“No sir, but how would she have gotten in, in the first place?”

“Oh Diggle you have so much to learn” quipped Oliver

At the mention of Thea, Tommy begins to wonder just how to address the bomb she had dropped on all of them by telling Oliver that he had been sleeping with Laurel.

As they pulled up to Big Belly Burger he decides the best way address it is just to be upfront about it. As he slowly guides th conversion to the topic, Oliver gets a phone call from a Russian model, he realizes he was a fool for worrying. Oliver like with everything never stopped too long to dwell on just one thing or one person. As Diggle sends them home for the night hoping, that is where Oliver will stay, he heads home.

Oliver on the other hand had just received a friendly Bratva confirmation about the location of Deadshot and was gearing up to put an end to him. As he gets a glimpse of his reflection on the metal table in the foundry, he can’t help but wonder and question why he was deviating from the book, from the mission but somehow this seemed right, necessary. Yet, he couldn’t shake the feeling that even though he told himself this deviation was a singular event it was more of a gateway. Was this what his father intended?

As Oliver rested, Robert stroked his hair and contemplated an exhausted young boy, he looked so small and broken in his arms. Yet, Robert knew he was stronger than he gave himself credit for and it broke his heart to think that his final choice may definitively break his heart, but someday he would understand. He had to, for all their sake.

“My sweet boy, I had hoped to redeem my life without ever bringing you into it, letting you continue your life careless and happy. To see you grow into a man full of devotion and drive filled me with pride. I had hoped to someday meet the woman that would change you forever, that would make you leave your young delusions of love and lust for the explainable illusion of being truly in love, loyal and devoted. To one day see your life come full circle as you became a father, to hold my
grand-kids in my arms, free spirited and full of energy as you were once. I had so many hopes and dreams for you and your sister, so much left to do and see. I am not the man I was 10 years ago, I am but a shell of that man, so I do not know what naivete allowed me to believe I deserved such a future, but you, you did son, you still do. You will make it through this you will find your way back home” he leaned in and whispered in his ear “you will find Felicity, and you will save us all.” He leaned back to see a stirring Oliver begin to wake. “I know it is too much to ask, but life has stripped me of my choices and left me with a last resort and too many have suffered because I have taken the happiness of a few, of my family, over the happiness of many, I won’t make that mistake anymore. Someday you will understand it wasn’t my choice, it was my last resort the only one life cruelly and ironically left me.”

“Dad? What’s going on?” a hazy voice questioned.

“Nothing son, just rest, rest my sweet boy, this will all be over soon I promise.” He soothes as he kisses the top of his head, exhaustion taking over again as they both fall asleep.

“How wrong you were dad, it has all just began” he pulls the hood tight over his head and heads up the stairs.

At the same time that Oliver received the phone call Felicity had listened in on the Russian part of that phone conversation and was now looking into the address they had provided. She grabbed her gear, hesitating on the high power sniper rifle before she decided on better safe than sorry. Grabbing her tech she made her way out through the her private exit to meet up with a super scary contract killer, great.

Deciding to try for the tech before resorting to her really big gun she settled on the roof of the building right next to the motel with a clear view of his room. Sending her bijou bug™ to get a closer look she quickly confirmed it was him, and had eyes and ears in the room and the laptop on the desk. She got to work on trying to hack said laptop. The first wall of information told her it wasn't his laptop, as she moved on to the encryption the loud impact of a door being kicked in had her grabbing her gun and focusing on the window the sound of rapid gunfire and the distinct sounds of arrows had her scrambling for a clear shot.

Using the scope she ‘picked up’ on her last visit to Gotham she made quick work of stopping the arrows before they made contact with their target. Recognizing the weapon on Deadshot’s wrist she took a shot in disabling it. Although successful she also noticed the blood flowing out of his wrist. Seeing himself outnumbered and outgunned he jumped out of the window, the glass shattering as green hooded man’s bow hit the ground from one solid shot from Felicity's gun.

Hesitating only for a second in shock Oliver realized he was a sitting duck for this sniper who would not miss again, that is if he missed at all the first time, grabbing his how and the laptop on the desk he made his speedy exit.

Knowing she couldn't leave all these supplies on the roof to chase after either of them, the sirens already getting closer, she gathered her things cursing at the interrupted hack and was out of there and on her bike before the first officer got out of his car.

Making it home with some answers, her hack revealing that the laptop belonged to Warren Patel, she set up her searches and went to bed. She could try to salvage her night and get at least 3 glorious hours of sleep.

While Oliver would have to wait until the morning to get any answers from the battered laptop he
Oliver got into Queen Consolidated just as all the employees were clocking in, realizing as he stood at the back of a crowded elevator that maybe he was a bit anxious and might have shown up a bit too early for a party all night playboy.

“Hold the elevator please” an out of breath voice called as one of the men held the door, a frazzled petite blonde carrying a laptop, a tablet, 2 bags and more papers than any one person should, made her way into the elevator. Oliver slightly smiled, amused at the rambling and cursing the young woman did as she tried to hold together everything she was carrying, had he been closer he would have helped her since it seemed they were going to the same floor. As the doors opened she was a blur of pink and black and white stripes as she ran out.

Making his way out of the elevator at a much slower pace, he walked over to the receptionist asking to see the head of the IT department, while sneaking a look into the main corridor trying to see if the frazzled blonde made it intact. An all smiles redhead slinked from behind the desk and offered him every beverage they had before letting him know that the IT Director was on his way up.

Felicity made it to her desk, she was going to miss this desk, hmm maybe she could get them to transfer it to her new office as Head Tech and head of Security Software, probably not. Yesterday's little adventure with one international assassin and Starling's own poor man's version of Robinhood had left her so on edge and with a million questions that she completely forgot about her promotion. She had planned to arrive early while the halls were still empty so she could make her move to the big office without the whispers and bitchy rumors of one redhead Caroline. She knew she had earned her position but her budding friendship/partnership with one CEO, Walter Steele, opened the door to ridiculous rumors about a man that could be her father.

Setting aside everything for now, she walked into her cubicle almost losing her footing in her haste only to be welcomed by a mess in her cubicle. Remembering how she never finished packing yesterday she let out an audible groan. She never realized changing floors and offices would be so much trouble. She had planned to finish packing her things but she was more concerned with other matters, for one setting up her live feed of Mr. Diggles bug along with the alerts on the clone phone directly linked to her tablet. She also had to create a new system to be able to track all their movements and her alerts while at work, and more importantly it had to be completely undetectable. Now that she thought about it she really did need her own office because with as many laws as she was breaking the last thing she needed was coworkers getting wind of anything. Yes, her own office was ideal and just in time.

“Hello Mr. Queen, Sorry for making you wait, how can I help you?” said a slightly embarrassed IT director knowing very well that he had made one of the owners wait while he was late to his office.

“No worries, I actually just wanted a reference. Walter said that I would be able to get good help from anyone here.” Walter had also mentioned that the best help available would probably not be available as that person was in the middle of a promotion and move from the IT floor to the applied Sciences floor.

“I need help to recover my things from my laptop and was hoping one of your employees cou…”

“That is out of the question, I will help you myself, top priority” the director interrupted.

“That’s not really necessary”
“It is my duty and my pleasure Mr. Queen”

Just as he handed him the laptop his assistant came in to remind him he had a meeting with the heads in about 15 min. Jumping out of his seat having completely forgotten he apologizes to Oliver while walking him out of his office. Oliver lets him know he is kind of in a hurry and really needs this done now, so the director calls over one of the IT guys by the name of Josiah and ask him to take Oliver to the Head Tech and make this priority number one.

“Mr. Rhys, Felicity is kind of busy what with the mo…”

“Josiah, now. Mr. Queen is in a hurry”

Nodding Josiah usher's Oliver down the hall. As they walk Josiah can’t help but comment “You know you are probably better off with Felicity than you would have been with him, she could practically run this department all by herself” with a fondness that Oliver easily detects.

“This is the office her name is Felicity Smoak, can’t miss her, cute blonde with glasses” he says as he walks away, Oliver noticing a bit of a wince as he retreats.

Oliver walks into the cubicle that looks like it was just hit by a tornado. Catching a flash of pink to his right he turns and immediately spots her and internally smiles.
Be Aware of the Danger but Recognize the Opportunity

Chapter Summary

Oliver seeks out some tech support from the best at QC, while Felicity finally gets her in, with Oliver Queen and makes connections her brain wasn't ready for.

Chapter Notes

First apologies for the delay, I was out of the city and by trip got delayed far more than expected. I hope I do our two favorite characters interactions justice. Obviously with the last chapter the deviations start to get a bit wider, although some conversations I will keep because they are just too precious. Also, I love Diggle and Tommy! So if I include a lot of their interactions with the characters it’s out of love.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“This is the office, her name is Felicity Smoak can’t miss her, cute blonde with glasses.” he says as he walks away, Oliver noticing a bit of a wince as he retreats.

Oliver walks into the cubicle that looks like it was just hit by a tornado. Catching a flash of pink to his right he turns and immediately spots her and internally smiles.

The frazzled blonde from the elevator, was not who he expected when he walked into the office. His first thought was that she was cute, not that he should be noticing that right now, which he quickly reminded himself of.

Far more surprising was how much younger she was than he expected, he contemplates her freely, as she is seemingly immersed in the binders she is packing and wonders if maybe that’s not her, maybe Josiah misunderstood. The more he looks at her the more he is convinced that she could not be the Head Tech. She looks fresh out of college for goodness sake.

As he looks around he spots someone in the cubicle directly across looking at him a bit bewildered, he quickly decides that before he disturbs the frazzled blonde he should maybe confirm that she is, Felicity Smoak.

“Hi, I am looking for the Head Tech, I was told that was Felicity Smoak” he asks as he points towards the blonde’s cubicle.

“Yes, that’s right you’re at the right cubicle, can’t miss her only girl in the room” the tech confirms with a bit of a snort. Oliver nods both in acknowledgement and also feeling impressed by her accomplishments at such a young age. He takes a quick deep breath and walks over.

As he stands right in front of her desk he waits for her to notice him but she seems pretty pensive with a small crinkle between her eyebrows, so he decides to take the initiative.

“Felicity Smoak? Hi I’m Oliver Queen” the deep delighted tone of his voice is unexpected and
surprising to even him.

Her body immediately jerks with a slight jump out of her seat that has him fighting to suppress a smile at her reaction to the sound of her own name. Her wide eyed shock at the sound of his name, makes the amusement in his eyes harder to suppress. The red pen that drops from between her lips which she manages catch before it hits the desk adds a bit of surprise to his current mood. Nice reflexes, he thinks to himself.

It takes a second for her brain to restart, “Of course, I know who you are, you’re Mr. Queen” she tries to say calmly, failing miserably while internally all she keeps repeating is ‘oh shit oh shit oh shit’

“Nooo. Mr. Queen was my father” he always hated being called Mr. Queen now he hates it more.

“Right! But he’s dead, I mean he drowned, but you didn’t which means you could come down to the IT department and listen to me babble,” she continues tapping the pen on the desk and looking everywhere but at him “which will end in 3,” she raises three fingers as if visuals are necessary for the effectiveness of her countdown, and breathes out heavily “2,” lowering one finger as she semi turns in her chair looking down and seemingly regaining some control “1” she whispers out as she bites on her lips almost like she is trying to keep them from further betraying her, finally she looks at him, expectantly as if her behavior was completely normal.

She hopes she looks under control or at least professional in some capacity because her head is a whirlwind of chaos.

In the couple of seconds it takes him to process her word vomit and respond, internally she manages to chastise herself ‘What the hell was that Smoak?! Great first impression.’ She has been waiting all this time to arrange some form of meeting the young Queen and when he falls right into her lap, the image her brain conjures has her internally cringing and the internal babble it triggers is of epic proportions ‘okay not my lap, like my literal lap because that would be highly inappropriate, interesting, but he would probably crush me in the process, I mean seriously he is much bigger in person, like car side mirrors, objects may appear ...FOCUS SMOAK!’

She imperceptibly shakes her head trying to get her synapses to function, remind herself what normal person behavior is.

Oliver finds himself genuinely smiling, probably for the first time since his return, and it’s not because she is cute, or because he obviously makes her nervous but because as flustered as she is, she is honest, obviously capable and now that the nerves seem to have subsided she seems secure, confident like she holds a secret, an ace she isn’t revealing. He likes that. Realizing he has let the pause go on for too long he offers an excuse for his intrusion.

“I’m having some trouble with my computer and they told me that you were the person to come and see. I was at my coffee shop surfing the web and I spilt a latte on it” he says as he hands her the laptop, for a second he thinks he reads recognition in her eyes but at second glance he thinks it might be surprise at the condition of the laptop, he doesn’t blame her.

The second Felicity holds the laptop she knows it is the same laptop from Deadshot’s room, Warren Patel’s laptop to be exact. The bullet holes littering the cover are the same ones she found all over that motel room. The first thought is obvious, how the hell did Oliver Queen get his hands on this laptop? The answers and possibilities are scary but not as scary as the connections her brain is trying to make. She knows she has to say something, in her experience the Queen men value honesty and she hopes that proves true once again.

“Really?” she states sprinkling her words with just a bit of disbelief.
“Yeah!” he answers knowing there is no going back, he has to stick to the ridiculous story he already started.

“Cause these look like bullet holes” she counters, her voice now dripping in disbelief, sprinkled with sarcasm.

“My coffee shop is in a bad neighborhood” the chuckle almost escapes through her lips. For a second she sees the “Ollie Queen” she heard so much about. She imagines this sort of charm and humor once worked on any female he crossed paths with, maybe even a few males.

As Felicity sits there with a tilt to her head looking at him expectant of the truth and impatient of his lies, as if she wasn’t the one reminding him of his dead father just a minute ago, he realizes that in her 5ft 5in, 120 lb frame, give or take, she manages to slightly make him fall off kilter. Makes him doubt himself, though he will never show it, or admit it.

“If there is anything you can salvage from it I would really appreciate it”

Giving up she simply hums in agreement and gestures for him to take a seat motioning to the chair in the adjoining cubicle. She knows she will have to open it up and connect the motherboard onto a surrogate and boot the system that way, she knew that when she saw the poor baby get shot yesterday. Knowing exactly what she needs she goes in search of her tools, thankfully she also knows exactly where they are, benefits of slight OCD.

She needs to take this one step at a time, she will get the information off the laptop and then figure out how the young Queen and the green hood are linked. As she spins her chair back around she jumps when Oliver is standing right next to her. He smirks at her, knowing very well that she is surprised he didn’t sit.

She continues to work only every so often watching him from her peripherals. Opening up the computer as he hovers over her, she lets out a small huff, she hates it when her boss does that and she hates it twice as much when Oliver Queen and his cologne do it. She sighs and probably harsher than she intended she tells him to sit down, he responds with an offhand “I’m okay” as if he didn’t register her tone.

She continues to work hooking up and booting the computer to hers. As the system begins to react she turns to tell him it might take a minute and he simply nods eliciting another huff from her. Knowing he won’t sit willingly and because frankly his looming figure is disconcerting and attracting attention from her co-workers she simply gets up as he follows her with his eyes, gets the chair from the cubicle next to her rolls it over and places it slightly behind her chair. She pointedly looks at him and when he doesn't move she huffs again, keeps eye contact with him as she pushes the lever on the side of the chair sending the seat sinking all the way down, if anyone was going to loom it would be her. She tells him sternly “Sit” and he does before he realizes that he is doing it, she smiles internally and continues her work a bit smugly which she does nothing to hide.

The data comes fast and she is sure that he is tech impaired because she is backing up the data to her home hard drive and so far he seems none the wiser.

“Looks like blueprints” she points out

“Do you know what of”

“It’s the exchange building”

“Never heard of it”
“It’s where the Unidac Industries auction is scheduled to take place” she responds, her mind already working double time deciding what information to tell him, and what to use against him. He looks at her with utter confusion and she decides to keep the young Queen on his toes. She feels triumphant and actually allows herself to smirk as she remarks,

“I thought you said this was your laptop”

“Yes” he says suddenly realizing that the owner of the laptop would not be surprised by its contents.

“Look I don’t want to get in the middle of some Shakespearean family drama thing” she couldn’t voice her actual suspicions but this worked, this was believable. She was glad that her actual thoughts were kept to herself because where her head was going, the green hood, bidders’ deaths, deadshot, it wasn’t good.

“What” he says confused much like a child would be at the mention of Shakespeare.

“Mr. Steele marrying your mom, Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet,” she says the last pointing to him like this should be an obvious comparison.

He simply deadpans “I didn’t study Shakespeare in any of the four schools I dropped out of”

She sighs and continues, “Mr. Steele is trying to buy Unidac Industries, and you’ve got a laptop of one of the guys he is competing with” not to mention he might be the next possible victim. What are you doing Oliver Queen? Why are you involved in this? Of course she didn't say the last part out loud.

Oliver, still processing the whole thing lets out the one name he knows is a definite, “Floyd Lawton”.

Felicity takes a quick imperceptible breath, in which a million thoughts at once rush her head. No denying now that the young Queen is far more involved than she wanted to admit. She needs to end this interaction and take this new information to find answers.

“No. Warren Patel” she says pointing to the name on the screen taking the opportunity to gauge one more response from him.

“Who’s Floyd Lawton?” he seems taken aback as if he hadn’t been the one who let the name slip, but quickly composes himself and offers her an answer, well more like he thinks aloud but she’ll take a win where she can get it.

“He is an employee of Mr. Patel, evidently.” he says as if coming to a sudden realization, she knows the dots that he has connected and can’t help but feel that the young Queen is over his head and is bound to get himself killed. What ever he is doing with the green hooded man needs to stop and she will make sure of it.

As she watches him, she has her own realization, Patel may not be the boss but the next target. The realization makes her jump out of her seat startling Oliver as she disconnects everything, piles it up in a jumbled mess and drops it on his lap as she urges him to get up pushing the office chair towards the door with him still sitting in it. She is rambling about being late, when she realizes what she is doing and stops pushing the chair and pushes him out of the chair. She continues her ramble about a very important meeting and moving offices and checking the server security and before he knows it he is standing in the hallway and once again the frazzled blonde is a blur flying down the hallway. He can’t help the confusion chuckle that slightly escapes him.

The laptop in his hands reminds him of why he was there and just as quickly the reminder of the looming danger takes over and he knows he must prepare for his next move, a move he can’t do
alone and although he hates admitting that he needs help, he knows just where to get it.

By the time Felicity exits the QC building she has sent an anonymous tip to the authorities about the next attack at the Exchange Building, she managed to hack into Mr. Patel’s finances and realizes as the floors tick on the elevator that he is looking more like a victim and not the bad guy, well he kind of was a bad guy, shady dealings and white collar crime but, not murdering the competition bad. Regardless, not being able to resist she sends a quick email attachment to the FBI, about Mr.Patel.

By the time she exits the garage her tablet dings letting her know that she had access to the security mainframe at the Exchange Building.

By the time she gets to her apartment she realizes that she is going to have to make an appearance at the auction not only to attempt to stop Deadshot, without being seen by Deadshot but also to do some recon on the Queens, and make sure no else dies tonight. The coincidences are becoming astronomical and as is well established by now, Felicity Smoak doesn’t believe in coincidences, only in cold hard facts.

Where years of doing this kind of work has made Felicity efficient in dealing with all the players and getting them to do exactly what she needs, the Hood’s inexperience has him resorting to stalking and slightly attacking people before requesting their assistance. The whole using honey over vinegar concept completely lost on him. Detective Lance as expected does not respond well to the use of vinegar.

Not that anyone would respond well to being slammed against a car and being told how to do their job, “You need extra men, extra everything he will attack tonight and any of the bidders could be the target” growled out the Hood.

“Why should I trust you, you’re lucky I am not putting a bullet through your head, you lunatic” spat out Lance

“Listen to me we have no time for this we need…”

“I know what we need we already have it all set, we know about the attack at the Exchange Building tonight”

“What? How?” the shock in his tone almost giving way to his actual voice.

“Unlike you, it seems like others still understand how things work, you, the citizen gives us an anonymous tip, we, the cops do OUR JOB, GET IT!”

“Who? Who called it in” demanded the hood

“ANONYMOUS” before he could even finish Lance felt the pressure lessen and the Hood was gone.

Felicity’s world had tilted on its axis, every assumption she had made needed to be reevaluated. As she got ready for the auction she knew the stakes were high, there were too many faces that could recognize her and she had to find a way to be in two places at once. Tonight was going to suck.

Apparently, it wasn’t going to be anyone’s night.

“Dig got your eyes open?” Oliver had been beyond tense from the moment he left QC that morning
and John Diggle seemed to be getting the brunt of that tension.

He would have preferred for the auction to have been cancelled or moved but there was no deterring Starling City’s elite.

“That’s what I am here for, that and answering patronizing questions” Diggle’s patience long gone for the day.

Oliver too far in his own head simply nods paying no attention to his comment. As he moves away towards his family a very curious pair of eyes holding a tray with drinks follows him.

Felicity had managed to get in by posing as one of the waitresses, knowing nobody would take a second glance at a small brunette with thick glasses and a tray hovering around her face. She was making use of her disguise tech and was hoping that the glitches she encountered before would take a break, just for tonight.

She had managed to run some recon on the surrounding buildings and although there were 3 possible options for a sniper to take post if it was her she would use the southeast building, better view, empty as it was under construction and an unlimited number of exits.

Regardless of her best guess, she comandered surrounding video surveillance and any camera with even the most minimal angle on any of the buildings was currently sending direct feed to her computers. Having hacked the SCPD and local first responders she made sure that they carried anti-cholinesterase to counteract the curare from the bullets.

Taking a shot in the dark she had installed some motion sensors on the southeast building and placed some laser disruptors on the windows in hopes of counteracting Deadshot as much as possible, given that simply hunting him down was off the table.

Just as she moved to the next room to get closer to the young Queen she overhears him ask John Diggle to take his family out of there, immediately her watch beeps as one of her motion sensors is triggered promptly followed the first shot ringing throughout the floor, barely only grazing its target. Panic overtakes everyone as three more shots pierce the windows and miss their targets.

Diggle rushes Thea and Moira out while Oliver runs in the opposite direction. Felicity rushes past the man on the floor using the knife in the toe of her boot to get the anti-cholinesterase into his bloodstream. The shout he lets out letting her know she pierced the skin, and he will live.

She rushes to the kitchen where she left her equipment hidden and she pulls up the video camera feed. Immediately she notices that he definitely is in the southeast building as it has gone dark. She tries to spot where the shots are coming from, the flash from the rifle confirm her second guess, he is o the 15th floor, she send the information to the SCPD and starts to make her way to the roof.

Oliver having seen where the first shot came through is already climbing the floors of the southeast building. He spots Deadshot and before he can sneak up on him an all out battle breaks out between the two.

Tracking the cameras as she rushes up the steps she sees that a couple of minutes before her mad ascend of the stairs, Oliver had rushed up the same steps and the fear that he may do something foolish has her pushing faster. She hears more shots as she reaches the second to the last staircase. Having made up her mind that she will have to confront Deadshot, because letting Oliver Queen die was not an option, she maps her options to getting to the weapons she left in the southeast building, she may have not wanted to face-off with deadshot but that doesn’t mean she hadn’t planned for it.
Starting to shed her vest as she climbed closer to the top floor she stops dead in her tracks as the top floor door burst open, automatically she has to revert back to the role of innocent scared waitress. She curses under her breath as she hears footsteps approach her. She puts her things away and pretends to be crouched down in fear, the approaching officer thinking nothing of it instructs her to head down towards the exits. More than likely not thinking twice as to why she was going up to the roof, blaming it on the panic and tears streaming down her face.

Knowing that with the amount of officers on the scene she wont have a chance to sneak back she opts to use the police force in her favor. She puts in a distress call for the southeast building hearing as the swat team rushes the building and send one John Diggle an SOS from one Oliver Queen, secretly wishing that they are already together and well on their way home and not playing cops and robbers with the green hooded man and Deadshot.

As she rushes to her car which she left parked a block away under a dark underpass she swears she sees a shadow in the alley between the two buildings leading to the underpass, on high alert with her eyes on her tablet she rushes over and although she hears him before she sees him the alley is slippery and her head is in a million places and she can’t stop her momentum before she smacks right into the wannabe vigilante carrying who is clearly an injured John Diggle.

She falls to the ground with a hard thump and all she hears is a grunt of pain from Mr. Diggle, before she can catch her breath she is on her feet, back pressed to what she can only assume is the green hooded man’s chest being held quite forcibly by her arms. It takes every last bit of control not to defend herself and pin him down.

When she yelps, playing the role of the innocent, he realizes she is not a threat and loosens his grip on her and simply puts a finger to his lips with a faint “shh” as he picks up John Diggle. She opens her mouth to say something and he simply glares at her, well she assumes he is glaring, his face is cast in shadows and the little overhead light that gives any sense of shape to him allows her enough to know he is standing as if he is glaring. She doesn’t often enough to recognize the stance.

She closes her mouth and for whatever reason compels her she raises her hand to the side of her mouth and pretends to lock it shut and then puts the imaginary key in her pocket, his stance minutely relaxing he slightly tilts his head and looks at her for a beat before he is off cutting around the building. By the time she reacts and follows, he is gone. She looks around for any cameras that she can access but there is none. Dammit!

Once she gets home, she is exhausted and ready to go through all the footage and put a timeline to the events of the night.

It bears repeating that tonight, was not her night. She didn't manage to stop Deadshot, She has no idea what the young Queen was doing or where he went. To top it off she finally meets the green hooded man and all of a sudden she’s mute, she didn’t follow him or bug him or anything, well at least she didn’t fight him either, cause that would of opened up a whole other can of worms.

Her biggest regret she has been reprimanding herself about the whole drive home. What was she thinking? Was she in middle school with the mouth locking the mouth, she might as well have pinky promised, he must think her an idiot. She rubs her temples and drops her head in embarrassment and frustration.

There she was, pressed against his rock hard body, groaning, she audibly reprimands herself for that slip up, “stop it Felicity his body is not relevant.”
Flopping on her couch her arm over her eyes she grunts as her mind pays no attention to her reprimand. But how was she supposed to respond or react when she was being overwhelmed by the overpowering smell of musk, sweat and leather mixed with cologne and gunpowder. Also, why would a vigilante wear such a nice smelling cologne? Ugh, she really needed to focus. With a sudden burst of adrenaline she pops up off the couch, eyes wide and mouth open.

“MR.DIGGLE!”

How had it taken her this long to remember that John Diggle was being carried away by the green good. Was it her fault that he had been taken, had she sent him rushing into a building to his death. Had he been there already when she texted him, had Oliver? She needed more answers and she needed to focus on her best path to getting those answers.

John Diggle was injured, she could track his movements through the party and set up an alert at the hospitals maybe, even talk to him, unless, he was with the green hood. She wants to dismiss the thought right away, years of reading people has John Diggle pegged as the type of man who would scoff at the idea of joining a misguided vigilante, but could she have been wrong. Seems like she had one more name to add to her ‘must have conversations with immediately’ list.

She continued to search through the camera footage and after an hour or so she realizes that Mr.Diggle hasn’t appeared at any hospitals, and she begins to worry. Maybe, she just let the green hood take him lost in her confusion and worry about one Oliver Queen, she let a goodman be killed. She begins to slightly panic and then remembers the cloned phone from a couple of days ago. She would bang her head against the wall but it seems that her brain is already damaged enough and she can’t understand why she is so off her game. Praying to the gods that his phone is turned on so she could trace him, she hits a few key buttons and finds there is no signal, cursing out loud not really helping the situation, but slightly helping in her distress. She immediately goes for the bug she placed on his jacket and it’s just white noise, louder cursing ensues.

She realizes that the conversation she has been avoiding with one Oliver Queen is becoming far more urgent and undeniable. She sighs loudly as she changes and gets comfortable on her couch for a long night of trying to shake the buzzing in her ears away, she hates being shot at, well not really her being shot at but she was in the room so that counts, she’s pretty sure it counts. Tonight was definitely not her night. she would go as far as to say that since the return of a certain young Queen, most days have not been kind to her. She breathes out heavily voicing her thoughts,

“Whatever connection there is between the green hood and Queen, if it cost the life of a good man they will regret it” slumping back into her couch her lids suddenly becoming overwhelmingly heavy, she decides that she needs to recharge and there is nothing more she can do that her computers aren’t already working on.

As Oliver carries Diggle down into the foundry steps, laying him on the med bay in the center of the room he knows he has a limited amount of time before the curare has gone too far into his bloodstream. He preps the island herbs and forces them down his throat. Knowing all he can do now is wait he takes care of his injuries and then just sits hoping Diggle regains consciousness and isn’t too pissed to hear him out.

As Diggle slowly comes around he has an awful taste in his mouth and a sharp pain in his, well, everywhere. He tries to focus his sight on one object while he becomes aware of his surroundings, as he turns to look around he spots a figure approaching him, part of him automatically goes into fight mode but his body is too weary to respond. The figure comes into focus and his brain may be foggy but he doesn’t miss the meaning of Oliver, dressed in green, with grease paint across his eyes, ‘son of a bitch’ is the first words that come to mind.
“Oliver, you're that vigilante” he spits out managing to use his rage as strength to speak and lunge at him.

“Son of a bitch” he shouts as Oliver avoids his attack, not that it was hard he was still pretty weak from his injuries. When he turns and makes eye contact with him he knows there is no time for formalities he has a small window to make Diggle see his side and that that window is getting smaller and smaller.

“I could have taken you anywhere, could have taken you home. I brought you here” he looks pointedly at Diggle.

“You really did lose your mind on that island, what are the voices telling you now?” Diggle responds not really expecting an answer but more to gauge Oliver’s response.

“Clarity” he gives Diggle a few seconds to process what he means and then adds, “I want you to join me” he is so sure of himself that Diggle’s response throws him for a loop.

“You are a criminal” Oliver knew that some saw him that way but expected more from a man like John, Diggle continues “and murderer” he knows that too but no one has ever said it to him and he realizes it stings more than he would have expected.

Diggle saunters off towards the stairs and Oliver simply lets him leave, he doesn’t think he can take more of his truths, not tonight. He hears the door shut and drops on the chair uninvited his mind replays the events of today knowing there are some loose ends and unanswered questions.

Tonight was not his night. Scratch that, stopping Floyd Lawton was his mission and he accomplished that, and that is what matters. Everything else is irrelevant. Except, the damn girl in the alley, he was so preoccupied with Diggle that he let his guard down and a little odd girl got the drop on him. He’s not sure what he was thinking letting her go, He is certain that she didn’t recognize him but he should have at least assured himself that he would be able to recognize her.

He tries to recall anything, brunette, about 5ft 4in, 110 lbs thick glasses and a distinct smell of cherry blossoms and perfume. He tilts his head down while lifting his jacket and inhaling, it is a very distinct smell, belatedly he realizes he is still taking slow deep inhales of the lingering perfume and he lets go of the jacket. No real way of finding her unless he goes around smelling every brunette he see.

Remembering his family is probably worried sick about him, that come tomorrow the SCPD may be knocking down his door thanks to one ex-bodyguard, he realizes the girl is unimportant and will more than likely not say anything, if her interesting gesture of silence is anything to go by.

He sighs, he is exhausted and knows it is time to go home he quickly changes and heads out answering the 10 missed calls he had purposely ignored. If he is sure of anything it’s that the night is definitely not over.

Yet, the last thing he expected when he walked in was to find an angry yet, concerned Laurel standing in the foyer. He understands why she is in his home but he really wishes that after his party she would of turned around and never looked back. Tonight solidified the fact that he is good for no one and he makes sure she knows it.

“I am not the same person I used to be. What you need to believe once and for all Laurel is that I will never be that person again, ever.”

Laurel leaves not quite knowing what to say for once no last words, which for some reason is far more hurtful. I that moment Oliver realizes she might never understand or accept the new him,
quickly shaking that thought too tired to go down that path and start analyzing all his relationships, tonight has not been his night he doesn’t need to add to that.

One last thought runs through his head, the girl in the alley. She didn’t look at him afraid or disgusted, she seemed more curious and surprised than anything. She was quick to accept his request for silence, she didn’t question him, her childish gesture being one of the most reassuring non-verbal conversations he has had since he has been back. He shakes his head and decides he’s better off trying to get some rest, if possible.

As he walks up the stairs he runs his hand over his face and inhales stopping at the top of the staircase, his hands smell of cherry blossoms and perfume, walking to his room he every so often runs his hands over his face an inhales he won’t admit it but that smell offers him some comfort and with nights like this he’ll take it where he can get it consciously or not.

Chapter End Notes

So you made it to the end of this chapter, I hope it was enjoyable, and that the changes added to the story. More importantly, I hope that I am staying true to the characters. I look forward to your reviews, they fuel me to continue as your stories inspire me to be a better writer. Thanks again and until next time.
Chapter Summary

Oliver realizes that both he and the vigilante aren’t as untouchable as he believed. Someone is on to him and making his life hell. Felicity can smell trouble a mile away and right now Oliver is starting to reek.

Felicity’s entire game plan had changed over the last three days. Finding the connection between the young Queen and the green hooded man had become her priority. In the back of her mind her subconscious was telling her that the connection was evident but there were so many inconsistencies and she knew that in order to make that kind of accusation she would need cold hard facts.

Until she saw the two stand side by side she would not dismiss the possibility but she also wouldn’t dedicate herself to proving it. Time had shown her that seeking truth and not ‘a’ truth always rendered better results because you never limited the possibilities.

New approach meant, Oliver Queen all the time, every time. She might not like it but her life would have to revolve around billionaire playboy return from the dead and if it turned out that he was the green hooded man, well she would cross that bridge when she got there.

Three days with a truth he didn’t quite know what to do with had Diggle beyond conflicted and that was putting it lightly. As he sat at Big Belly, Carly knew instantly something was wrong.

“Are you going to tell me what happened to you” Carly said nodding towards his arm in a sling

“It’s just my shoulder, am fine”

“I knew this Queen guy was trouble” anger evidently lacing her words

“I never said this happened protecting Queen” Dig said trying to get off the subject of Oliver Queen.

“Oh, Yeah! Then what is he doing here?” she asked nodding towards the door as more anger boiled up inside her.

As Diggle turned he saw Oliver making his way into the restaurant with whom he could only assume was his new bodyguard, poor bastard had no idea what he was in for, let alone that Oliver Queen needed no one’s protection. Oliver made his way to them directly approaching Carly who was standing arms crossed glaring at him blocking the empty side of Diggle’s booth, he figured this was a time for the old Queen charm.

“Hello Diggle’s sister-in-law, Carly. Olive...” he said with his best smile extending his hand

“I know who you are” she spat out without taking his hand, okay he was wrong, this was not the time evidently.

“No, you really don’t” Diggle commented on the side
“You’re right John, and maybe that’s a good thing because it might cost me a visit to the hospital” she glared at him once more for good measure and made her way to the kitchen. As Oliver sat he noticed Diggle stare at her half amused and half proud.

As he saw Oliver settle into the seat he was sure he was not ready to have any conversation about his recent discovery, but it seemed like he was about to have no choice. What he did have was the choice to make this as difficult as possible and the opportunity to be 100% honest, because he was no longer a Queen employee.

As Oliver watches Dig sit up and his face go stern, he realizes that this conversation may be a bit more difficult than he anticipated. He was sure Diggle would accept his proposition but if he didn’t, what then? Threaten him, he was sure that a man like Diggle didn’t scare easy, if at all. So that only left killing him, and he really didn’t want to do that to a good man. He figured he had sat there in silence for too long and Diggle was sure as hell not going to start the conversation so he went for light and slightly humorous.

“I couldn’t help but notice the distinct lack of police cars when I got home, after we last met”

“The news is still young” responded an unamused Diggle, he should have known humor wouldn’t work, but Oliver was a slow learner.

“I knew you wouldn’t drop a dime on me. I knew you liked me more than you let on. Have you considered my offer?”

With an audible scoff and a sardonic smile Diggle said it all but just to be safe he added, “Offer? That’s another way to put it. I, personally, would define it as ‘threat to be an accomplice to felony murder’, but that’s just me”

Oliver decided to ignore his dark remark and press on, “It is an offer, it’s a chance to do the kind of good that compelled you to join the military.”

“Good, by whose standards? Yours? Because I would really question your definition, hell I question your sanity.” Oliver was about to answer when Dig cut him off.

“Besides what do you know? You were born with a platinum spoon, Queen, and now what, you spend 5 years on an island without room service and suddenly you found a crusade to redemption?”

“Look Diggle, there are things about me you don’t know or understand. I have my reasons for becoming what I am today”

“You’re a psychopath, who murders people, never knew psychosis needed reasoning” Diggle snapped back sarcastically.

“That night you said the island changed me, you weren’t wrong. Much of the change was inevitable. When your father gives his last confession to you while stranded on a raft in the middle of the ocean and in doing so he cast his sins onto you and begs you to right his wrongs and absolve him of those sins, you might be inclined to question and even deny him his request. Yet, when he follows his plea with shooting himself in the head to increase your chances of survival and with the hope of his last request being granted, sure you hate him and curse him... “

“Oliver...” Diggle tries to stop him knowing that what he is sharing is effectively tearing down his defense against him but Oliver simply raises his hand to quiet him and continues.

“Five years on an island is a lot of reflection time, time to forgive and come to the realization that the son inherits the sins of the father. Not out of duty to the father but out of sheer humanity to those he
wronged. When that truth becomes your will to survive, you realize that you might have found a crusade but redemption won't necessarily be granted.” he finishes as he hands Diggle the small worn out notebook.

“What is this?” he asks as he thumbs through the book slowly, clarity and understanding begins to dawn on him. He looks up at Oliver who simply nods,

“When no name remains, my debt is paid.” There is a bit of silence while Oliver considers his next move knowing that he might be pushing too far but he has to lay all his cards on the table, he can’t afford to play this one safe, safe is no longer an option.

“You know about debt, don’t you Dig?” seeing his confusion Oliver continues,

“Your brother, Andy, the police never did find his shooter.”

“Careful Queen, you know nothing.”

“Floyd Lawton” at the mention of the assassin Oliver sees Diggle’s entire body tighten.

“He laces his bullets with curare, just like your brother’s killer. I stopped him, the sniper. This is your chance to help other families. I am going to keep doing this and I hope you will join me.” before Diggle could even answer Oliver gets up to leave, knowing that he will need time and if he is right Diggle will come looking for him when he is ready. He takes three steps before Diggle’s whispered words stop him dead in his tracks.

“So, it was you!”

“What?”

“The note, in my pocket. The bug on my jacket. Why leave me a note and bug me if you were going to tell me anyway?”

“What note? What bug? Diggle I never…” Diggle takes out his wallet and pulls out a note neatly written in all caps it looks like its been open and folded many times over,

JOHN, WE HAVE A MUTUAL ENEMY. FLOYD LAWTON. HE KILLED YOUR BROTHER.

I CAN HELP YOU AND HOPEFULLY YOU CAN HELP ME.

WE NEED TO TALK.

I WILL CONTACT YOU, SOON. :)

“This wasn’t me John” Oliver’s demeanor completely changes, Diggle can only assume this is what he sounds like as the vigilante.

“Then who? Because in order to know this information you have to have some pretty high security clearance or have the inside track” Oliver immediately sits back down, he knew this wasn’t good, he assumed the sniper from the night at the motel was after Lawton but why would he get close to Diggle, why seek out him out of all people? Could the sniper possibly have been there for him too, could he have been tracking the hood too?

“When did you get this note, how did you get it? Where is the bug?”

“I found it a week ago in my jacket inside pocket. I don’t know how it got there. I’ve been asking
myself the same questions you are probably asking yourself right now, for a week. I have read it so many times that it’s engraved into my mind, yet, I still have no answers. As for the bug I only found it after the note. I checked that jacket inside and out. It was damaged so there was no signal. I am assuming it got damaged that night, the night” Diggle sounded frustrated

“Well go over your day, every last detail. I will find where that bug was purchased, who bought it and when. Now did you take off your jacket leave it alone somewhere, did anyone at any point have a chance or access to your jacket.”

“Dammit Oliver, you don’t think I’ve done that. The bug is a dead end. It is custom made no serial, no anything. As for the note only three ways this happened, someone did it while it was in the car, your house, or my apartment. Believe me all three are pretty bad, I am aware of that.”

“How good of a custom job?”

“Let’s just say my buddy asked me that if I found who made it to give them his card, and he is the best in business.”

“Fine! Then let’s focus on the note. Are you sure there wasn’t another incident, maybe you left it unattended in a booth or someone slipped it into your jacket, or...”

“SHIT!”

“What?”

“The blonde” still not following Oliver waits for him to elaborate, “outside the club, when you got in a fight, there was a clumsy blonde, she crashed into me, twice.” They stare at each other for a bit then Oliver opens his mouth but Diggle raises his hand and stops him,

“I can’t tell you. All I remember is wild strawberry blonde hair, glasses, a black peacoat past the knees, red shoes, and the slight smell of oil, like engine oil or something and perfume, son of a bitch” Oliver is about to say something and Diggle once again interrupts him with a look of annoyance, “She kept her head down and her hair in her face, it was late, it was dark and I was more preoccupied with trying to get into the club where I had been left outside of, than paying attention to this blonde. That’s all I remember besides the fact that she was white, which in that neighborhood is, well everyone.”

Oliver simply nods at him knowing that is truly all Diggle can help him with, the rest is up to him, “I will look into this, there has to be cameras or something, don’t worry I will find her or hopefully she will contact you and we can set a trap for her. Meanwhile, if she is this good I would also suggest you dump your phone and get a new one”

“Already did that, not an amateur. And don’t think this means we are a team now, I am still not working for you. So, thank you but, no thank you I will handle this myself.” Oliver simply nods and gets up as his bodyguard approaches, he excuses himself to the restroom as he disappears Diggle lets out a long breath. He is about to get up and leave, when he sees the poor guard waiting, that having been him not too long ago he takes pity on him and simply says

“Oh, that boy is long gone” he makes a swoosh noise and just smiles and nods.

Felicity was all settled into her new office and for once since she started working at QC she felt like she actually fit in, the conversations with her co-workers had gone from mundane to challenging. Even with all the positive changes some things never changed. Like the elevator ride from the 17th floor felt the same from the 25th floor when the destination was the CEO’s office.
Walter Steele had called her up and even as he did it he was afraid that his instinct wasn’t justified. Moira had told him she used the money for an investment, but he didn’t believe her. He hoped Ms. Smoak would bring some clarity and prove herself in other matters.

As the floors counted up towards the top floor Felicity’s mind was going crazy. Were they going to fire her, her gut told her she was about to be fired, at least she thought it was her gut. If she was being honest she had been out of sorts the last couple of days. Although she had reason to fear being fired, there had been that breach in the firewall at the Chicago headquarters, but they have to know that she just created the software she didn’t moderate it and she had told them there were bugs in the install, if they ignored her warnings that wasn’t her fault.

Shit! Mr. Steele was going to fire her, well not without getting a piece of her mind. She had worked too hard to get into this company and she was not leaving without a fight.

As she stepped out of the elevator on the top floor and looked up at the cameras she couldn’t help but remember the last time she had walked this same path.

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“Is this at Disneyland? I went as a kid, best day ever, as you can see” she says pointing at her sweater, “haven’t been again. Is this the whole family? You look very happy, all of you look very happy, almost can’t help but smile as you look at the photo. That’s probably why you have it here, duh.” she definitely was on a roll and as he had a tendency of doing he just let her keep talking. “Do you guys go to Disneyland often, it’s pretty expensive, not that you would care you’re rich, I mean it’s not an issue, not that you don’t” Felicity looks up to see Robert trying to suppress a smile, looking amused rather than ominous sitting behind his giant desk.

Smiling back she simply hands him the picture and says “It’s a nice picture” as she sits down, well flops down slightly defeated. He lets out a chuckle and as usual moves along, for which she is grateful.

“So, I hear MIT is going wonderfully, top of your class, setting records and keeping your computer professors on their toes.” Felicity looks at him slightly confused, so he clarifies.

“That’s what the President says.”

Felicity’s eyes go wide and he simply adds “I told you I would be keeping tabs on you, and I am impressed, few people still surprise me, you definitely rank high on that list”

Felicity blushes a bit and Robert can’t help but think that he wishes he had this type of relationship with his son, Oliver. The last time he talked to a University President was to beg and pledge a new wing to their Law Library, not because Oliver was planning on studying law but because it was the only way to keep the president from pressing charges after Oliver snuck into the President’s office with a girl and proceeded to have sex on his desk while breaking his computer and his antique 18th century oak desk. It was also the first time he was glad that all Oliver got was expulsion, unfortunately, that was the 3rd university and it looked like it might not be the last.

“Thank you, I am really just trying to absorb as much information as possible. I never thought I would be able to afford MIT.”

“Well, I am glad you are enjoying it and I think the university is also enjoying paying your tuition.”

“We’ll see in three years” she added with a bit of a laugh. “Although I do miss Starling City.”

“We miss you too. Now, we could talk about this for hours but I am sure you have better things to do
on your spring break so I’ll cut to the point. Did you get my last delivery?” she nods, with a smirk.

“So?” her grin only grows a bit smug and Robert responds back with a proud grin “I knew it! When I saw all those businesses in the Glades about to close, pleading with the banks for loans and then this morning Geoffrey at Starling National tells me that all of a sudden they all withdrew their loan applications, I knew it was you.”

“Oh, it wasn’t me it was Mr. John Nickel, he kindly forgave all their payments and personally paid the banks and changed the deeds to all the businesses back to their rightful owners, who knew that slumlords could be so compassionate and generous.” Robert simply nodded and winked at her then they both laughed.

“So, does Mr. Nickel know of his generosity?”

“He will at 6am when the banks open, and his weekly account summary shows that it is lacking 15 properties and 5.5 million dollars. Yet, I am sure he will not bother to say anything because at 6am, the summary will be accompanied by a video of him talking about how he robbed those families of their businesses and how now he robs them of their profit and livelihood. If he’s a smart man he will just let it go”

“Nice.” she hands him back the files he mailed her and he proceeds to put them in the safe while bringing out new ones and handing them to her.

“This should keep you busy for the next week or so” he pulls back the file as she goes to grab it, “but after spring break, okay?” he gives her a poignant look and she nods with a smile.

“What are you and your family doing for spring break, I thought people like you went to beach houses or Europe in the spring, isn’t your son home too?”

“I wouldn’t know, unfortunately, he talks to me about his life probably as much as he studies, which believe me is almost never.”

Felicity gives him a sympathetic look and tries to make light of the sudden turn her attempt at small talk had taken.

“He’s young, handsome, rich and in demand. I mean even the girls at MIT, when they know I’m from Starling City, ask me if I ever met him, if he is as handsome in real life as in the magazines, and all kinds of other nonsense. I can’t imagine a reputation like that, or fame for that matter comes easily. I think he’s just doing his best to deal. Not to mention that it can’t be easy being a Queen and especially being your son” Robert physically reacts to that comment and Felicity quickly realizes how it could be interpreted and rushes to clarify.

“No! No, not that you’re a bad dad or anything, on the contrary, it can’t be easy living up to the expectations. I mean, I am not your daughter but you make me nervous, your approval is important to me and I worry more about what you will say about my life than I do of my mom if she... Anyways what I am saying is that it isn’t easy being seen not as an individual but as the son of the successful, powerful, demanding Robert Queen. It must be hard to disappoint you and I think that maybe he just doesn’t know how to live up to that so he just decides to not even try. I can understand why he would make that choice. I mean you come from a long line of successful businessmen. I am sure your father was a strong imposing man, it couldn’t have been easy being his son, either.” Robert stares at Felicity for what seems like forever. She couldn’t help but fidget feeling like maybe she had crossed a line. They had never really talked about his family before and when they finally do she offers her opinion as if she knew better than him. Finally with a soft smile Robert speaks.
“Felicity, you’ve never even met my son, yet, I have the growing suspicion that you just managed to understand and explain my son better in the last five min than I have in the last 10 years.” he pauses briefly then smiles wider at her while adding, “my father Jonas Robert Queen was a hard ass and ruthless, it wasn’t easy being anything to Jonas Queen.”

She smiles wide and adds “maybe all your son wants is to know that he isn’t a failure and that he hasn’t disappointed you, at least not forever. He needs to know he will always be able to right his wrongs” she says the last bit with a knowing look, “I know that’s all I would want to hear from my father when I made a mistake.”

“Thank you, I will definitely do that, impressive as always Miss Smoak”

“Thanks, now uhhhhmmmm about this file”

“After. Spring. Break. Young. Lady” she slightly slumps and pouts and Robert can’t help but laugh. As they make their way out of the now empty halls of QC and into the elevator Robert simply looks up at the cameras and then at Felicity. She cocks her head and then smiles, catching on.

“No, worries I’ll take care of it tonight, I was never here” she says the last part in an eerie long winded voice as they both laugh.

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Reaching the secretary’s desk she's surprised when she simply motions for her to go right in, she takes a deep breath holding herself back from storming into Mr. Steele’s office ready to fight.

Felicity isn’t always so blatantly wrong, she is usually within the field but today she wasn’t even in the game. Turns out, she didn’t need to fight at all, although if her ramblings were considered maybe she had just done more harm than good and Mr. Steele might actually question her employment. Although she must admit that was an incredibly secretive meeting, she had never thought to thoroughly investigate Moira Queen, never had a reason to find her suspect, Robert had definitely never mentioned her in their many conversations.

Seeing how he never mentioned Oliver and he was turning into a plethora of surprised she figured now was as good a time as any to cover the full family.

She stops to wait in front of the elevator, as she watches the number count up she allows her thoughts to bounce off the empty halls.

“Thanks Robert,” she whispers to herself before letting her words come out more clear, “seriously you couldn’t have warned me, you know a simple ‘hey Felicity by the way my family is a little on the sketchy side, watch out’ too much to ask?” She sighs

“Not too much if you ask me”, Felicity spins with a yelp as she uses her body to shove the figure standing behind her on his ribs. As he lets out a grunt and stumbles back he looks up to see her taking a swing, she doesn’t register anything just a figure and her flight or fight instinct kicks in, five years ago she would of ran, now she fights.

She swings in the direction of the voice coming from behind her. Luckily for both of them she slightly stumbles on her heels giving his overly alert self a chance to redirect her punch. He manages to grab her wrist and that’s when she sees his, Oliver Queen’s, surprised face and a flash of something that genuinely puts fear in her body. She knows she’s just made a mistake as he turns her around into him. She allows it to happen only letting out a grunt when her back hits his chest. Frozen for an instant she quickly pulls away from him and only turns to look at him when he finally speaks.
“Woooaahh” he looks at her wide eyed, she almost got him, she managed to make him stumble reacting faster than he could and on top of that her punch almost landed, immediately he went from surprised to intrigued.

“Shit” she doesn’t know what to do, what to say, she almost punched her boss, dammit.

“Those are some impressive moves for an IT specialist” he quirked an eyebrow at her with an amused smile as he honestly rubs his slightly achy ribs and ego.

Thinking quick on her feet she plays the part of startled and nervous while she tries to suppress the adrenaline and hypervigilance, not that she has to try so hard it is kind of her default, especially around, well him. She doesn’t want to think why, not the time.

“When you live in The Glades, uhmm, you have to know how to defend yourself. You know cause it’s not so safe, crime is kinda high and the SCPD is underfunded and there is rampant corruption. Plus, I tend to stay late all the time, you’d think at least the overtime would be worth it, but we don’t usually get any and...” she realizes what she is saying and she quickly tries to mend her word vomit.

“It doesn’t matter cause I LOVE working here, love my job, The Queens are the best YAY” she says the last part with a bit of a fist pump and cheerleader bounce, she really hates herself right now, and she hates him, yes she hates Oliver Queen and his smug smile.

“You love your job, got it” he says trying not to laugh, still unsure about her explanation. Maybe he was distracted or maybe he let his guard down thinking it was only Felicity Smoak, IT genius, last time he makes that assumption.

“This elevator takes forever, I am going to take the stairs, cardio is always good. Nice seeing you again Mr. Queen, once again sorry, bye” she scurries off to the stairwell before he can say anything else.

He contemplates following her or asking Walter what she was doing there but his relationship is already tenuous at best with his stepfather and inquiring about Felicity, might give him the wrong idea.

Besides, he has more important things to focus on, like getting the footage from Poison. As he walked in to Walter’s office per his mother’s request, he realizes that Felicity might have been the perfect person to get him that footage.

As Oliver makes his way back home he can’t help but feel the disappointment at not finding Felicity in her office, he had hoped for her help while taking the opportunity to try and figure her out a bit more. Parking the car and walking into the foyer he can't help but smile as he rubs his ribs once again, not noticing his sister’s devilish smirk as she approaches him.

“What is wrong with your face”

“What do you mean?”

“You have something on your mouth, kinda looks like a smile, but that’s impossible” says Thea sarcastically

“Ha ha cute”

“So I am assuming whatever it was that had you grumps has been resolved, girl problems was my guess? And by girl I mean Laurel, of course” she says gauging for a reaction.
“Yeah, well you would be wrong, there is no girl therefore no problems. Maybe I'm just happy to see you, speedy” he says with a sincere smile, first one she's seen in a while and probably the reason why she decides to push a little further than she would have normally done.

“Come on Ollie, you can confide in me, I got mad relationship skills, bro. Let me know if you need places to propose, to whomever” they both laugh,

“I think you are getting a little bit ahead of yourself, just a little bit as there is no girl”

“You know, I also have mad detective skills and I couldn’t help but notice that the other night you smelled a bit like flowers and Fucking Fabulous, and I know for a fact that Laurel wears Chanel, she’s always worn Chanel” Oliver looks completely confused and Thea thinks she might of actually gotten it wrong this time.

“Fucking Fabulous? What are you talking about, Speedy?” he really is confused but Thea knows something is up she can feel it, so she simply presses on.

“You know, Tom Ford” at his complete lack of recognition she huffs “Nothing Ollie, nothing.” she walks away as she shouts over her shoulder.

“But I hope I get to meet your new girlfriend, soon. I already like her choice in perfume, and perfume says a lot about a woman. Soon please, bring her soon.” she's halfway up the steps when she finishes by waving a hand in the air to dismiss him.

He has no idea what she is talking about. So he shakes it off and concentrates on his actual problems and possibly getting some sleep.

Felicity was having another night for the record books, Mr. Steele’s suspicions were right, there was no investment for a friend, Tempest was just a shell company, and now there was a mystery warehouse. Felicity had her own suspicions but she couldn’t share them, she needed more time and outside help.

She headed out from QC determined to search the warehouse first, before Walter decided to do whatever the hell he would do. Things were not going as planned, things were spiraling and the unexpected was replacing the perfectly planned.

Managing to hack the keypad to the warehouse, she sneaks disabling the cameras and the lights. She should feel nostalgia that the password was ROBERT, but really it makes it all the more ominous.

She manages to get down the stairs in the dark when she hears the lock disengage and quickly hides in the shadows when the overhead lights flicker to life.

Seems she was right about Walter having plans of his own, his face carring all the betrayal of a man who discovered that the woman he loves hides things that are far more frightening than he could imagine and that she hides them so well, that he never even saw a hint of a lie from her.

With every step Walter takes more lights turn on, until the whole warehouse is flooded with light revealing her worst nightmare, The Gambit sitting in the middle of the room in shambles. It took true effort for her to not let out the whimper that caught in her throat.

All this time Moira Queen had the Gambit here in Starling, while she searched land and sea for answers. She had no idea how she had missed it, how she had never seen Moira Queen as more than a widow and business woman.
Then Walter’s request opened up a whole other can of worms. All her recent searches on Moira Queen gave away absolutely nothing. A few dead ends some questionable purchases and business dealings but for the most part everything had been cleaned up, professionally, if she had never been suspicious of the Queen matriarch in the past five years, now she was on alert level red.

She can see the same shock on Walter’s face as he takes in the massive yacht. She knows she has to wait until Walter leaves before she can get what she needs from the Gambit, as he makes his way towards the door she hears him on the phone arranging to have everything moved, always the businessman she knows he is trying to cover up Moira’s tracks. While she admires Mr. Steele, she knows part of that admiration comes from his efficiency and that means she must act quickly, get everything done tonight.

She was quickly realizing that doing all this alone was becoming extremely difficult, the Queens were becoming more trouble than she could have imagined. Her A.O. (after Oliver) time was really testing her and she was starting to consider the straightforward approach. Now on top of that she had Moira and Mr. Diggle to worry about. Days like these she missed being at MIT clueless and ignorantly happy, days like these ignorance was truly her bliss.

The silence in the room, rivaled how silent her mind had gone all of a sudden. As she approached the gambit she felt the tears stream down her face. Now that the answers seemed so close she was afraid of the cost. She wished she had time to stand here and wallow in the pain this brought, she felt like teenage Felicity, in that moment it didn't feel like 5 years had passed.

She made quick work of contacting someone she hadn’t needed in quite some time. But she needed this to be done professionally. She needed samples and a thorough cataloguing of everything. Sometimes it paid to have contacts from the wrong places with the right skills.

Having made a definite decision and arrangements for the Gambit she heads home before she has time to second guess her instincts. Walking in to her apartment she has sends one final message that she knows has been a long time coming. This was the determining step she needed to take she was done waiting and watching. Making quick work of sending her message, she is ready to take solace in her bed. As soon as her head hits the pillow her alerts goes off, of course, because it simply is never that easy in her life.

She begrudgingly gets off the bed, the alert big and glaring, a warrant for Oliver’s arrest had been issued, SCPD was claiming he was the vigilante and he would be arrested in the morning.

“FUCK” tonight was not the night for censorship “SHIT”.

The morning comes too quickly, Felicity hasn’t slept a wink. Planning how to infiltrate a police station is hard work, Walter barely slept, he discovered that laying in a bed next to a spouse who was hiding so many secrets brought forth insomnia. Oliver, well he rarely slept and Diggle having actually slept and contemplated the past days was now at the Queen Mansion because although his night had been just fine, this morning was starting to look hellish. With a print out and determination to accept an offer he never thought he would he stood in the Queen’s living room.

“I got the meet place, time and day” he says handing Oliver the printout. Oliver grabs it and breathes out his anxiety with the prospect of what this could mean.

“This is in two weeks, why send it now?”

“Because of this” he hands him another printout.
“She has a list of things she wants me to do before we meet, that’s why she is giving me two weeks. Now I don’t think she knows you are the vigilante but, she definitely knows that I have met him.”

“So, with this new development, the only way to catch her is to join the vigilante. So does that mean you are in?”

“Just to be clear I’m not signing on to be a sidekick or an assistant let alone a babysitter. We mutually benefit from this partnership. I just want you to know that I had made this choice before I got the email. You were right, fighting for this city needs to be done and I have a feeling you are going to continue to do this with or without me”

“Yeah” he confirms.

“But with me there will be fewer casualties, including you.”

“Diggle, I am not looking for anybody to save me, that time has passed. We are both here to gain something from each other”

“Maybe, maybe not” the meaning evident in his statement, he continues

“But you need someone just the same. You are fighting a war Queen. You have no idea what that does to you, how it scrapes off little pieces of your soul until it consumes you, and those around you like a cancer. You need someone to remind you who you are, who you once were and who you are capable and deserving of being and not this thing you’re becoming. We both need this, so now that I am here we are doing this right.” Diggle extends his hand, shaking hands as a show of trust and loyalty and for the first time he truly feels he can trust Oliver Queen.

The moment is immediately broken as the SCPD invades the Queen mansion.

“Oliver Queen you are under arrest on suspicion of obstruction of justice, aggravated assault, trespassing, acting as a vigilante.” Lance list his crimes with a smug smile on his lips.

“Are you out of your mind” argues an outraged Oliver Queen as his family protest attempting to get some answers.

“and MURDER” spits out Lance like the cherry on the ‘I told you so’ cake.

As they escort him out while continuing to read him his rights he can’t help but think that sometimes plans do fall into place.

He is taken into the precinct and is processed he knows the hard part is going to be facing off with Detective Lance. He can’t say he wasn’t relieved to see his mother when the guilt over Sara started to roll over him, what he needed now was focus and for his plan to work, Laurel Lance, his lawyer, hopefully.

Waiting has never been his virtue but he needs it now more than ever as he presents his plea, sans a lawyer.

Fashionably late has never been Laurel’s style but making the decision to represent Oliver Queen merited the extra minutes. Barging in and getting him out with a simple ankle bracelet was what made her a great professional lawyer, the harsh blow to his character well that was personal.

The ankle monitor was not planned, and an obvious setback, but he could be flexible.

So much so that by the time he gets home he already has a new plan that will rely on the skills he
perfected in his twenties, a party.

“Oliver I don’t think a prison themed party is the best idea.”

“Come on Tommy, when is an opportunity like this going to come around again.”

“With your luck, in a couple of months.” Oliver glares at him and he raises his hands in surrender, “Okay, okay you win so do you want cells with scantily clad dancers, guards, prison uniforms, the whole nine”

Sending his best friend a gleaming smile he heads to his room.

A very concerned Diggle is there to meet him, yet it seems that concern is one sided, Oliver’s seemingly total lack of concern makes him worry until Oliver confesses that he meant to get arrested and that what matters now is stopping an arms dealer whom he has been tracking. Diggle can’t help but feel there is more to this plan but as an official member of the team and with Oliver’s new accessory he agrees to shadow the dealer.

With Oliver being due back at the precinct for the polygraph he so stupidly agreed to, Laurel’s words not hers, Felicity knows she can’t stay on the sidelines and if she is honest she agrees with Laurel, Oliver is an idiot.

Watching him arrive seemingly unphased by everything puts her on alert in a way that is becoming customary with the young Queen. Getting in the right position with eyes and ears in the room she watches as Lance begins the questioning, while she settles into the roof of the adjacent building.

She can’t help the smile that rolls over her face, even under these circumstances, dire by anyone’s standards, he seems smug and confident and she can’t help but slightly laugh at his predicament.

Personally, Oliver doesn’t remember polygraphs being this difficult before, this particular polygraph brought more truths out than he had ever expected, the torture on the island, which confirmed he wasn’t alone to people he was not sure he was ready to reveal that to, his guilt over Sara's death, that had really been the tipping point, admitting out loud that he had murdered her. Now as he stood outside attempting to take a deep breath he hated how close he came to faltering.

As Felicity watched him from the roof she couldn’t help but sympathize with him. She didn’t pity him, she sympathized with the fact that everyone around him seemed to, arrogantly, think they had him figured out. That they knew exactly who he was. But even from where she stood she could see a change in him. He was not the boy Robert used to talk to her about. He was not the playboy from the tabloids. He was a damaged man who went to hell and came back. She still had no idea who came back from that island but she could be sure it was not the man who left, oddly she finds solace in that and it makes her rethink her strategy. Maybe he could be an asset, even as the green hooded man if that is who he was, just maybe.

With the party planning on its way Felicity was determined to kill two birds with one stone, infiltrating the Queen Mansion gave her access to both Oliver and Moira and that was an opportunity she could not pass. Relying on her default waitress go lucky outfit, she hoped to get closer to the answers she needed. She had to admit she liked playing Donna, she imagined she had a warm full life surrounded by a lovely family and friends.

Unlike her, who rarely talks to her mother who visits her maybe once a year, and only has friends whom are far and few between, she couldn’t help and live a little in the imaginary life of Donna. She
would love to deny it but the proof was in the call she had made 30 min ago, canceling her plans with Josiah for the second time in the last week, and both times because of a Queen Family issue.

She knew there was a reason why she had opted for something casual with him rather than the relationship he kept hinting at. Thankfully she had been able to keep that at bay by reminding him of the company’s non-fraternization rule.

Now, was not the time to feel bad about Josiah she needed to make sure her plan went off without a hitch. As soon as she arrives in her uniform to the Queen mansion, she sees Mr. Diggle leaving and reminds herself she needs to bug him, again. She begins to set up and picks her moment to sneak off and recon the house. She needs to be thorough and pick the perfect place for the bugs and above all else avoid Oliver Queen, this setting was too close for comfort even in disguise.

As the guests arrive she quickly realizes that there is no need to worry, nobody is going to take a second glance at her. As she picks up a drink tray to pass around she catches the tail end of the young Queen’s speech, noting that his eye line is focused on the patio doors she follows it and catches Mr. Diggle making his way into the party, his face does not look good. She quickly puts down her tray and rushes over trying to bug him here and now but Oliver is at his side before she can get to him.

Things had taken a turn for the unexpected, at least that is what Diggle thought as the arms dealer he was shadowing decided to make the sale tonight.

“The man in the Hood, he is going to stop him”

“Oliver, you can’t leave the house”

“It doesn't have to be me in the Hood” at his statement, realization spreads across Diggle’s face and it quickly turns to annoyance.

“That’s why you threw this ridiculous party. So you have a hundred witnesses placing you here at the house while I am suppose to be across town dressed as the vigilante. You set me up as your guaranteed alibi?” his annoyance quickly turning into anger

“I thought that it was going to be good enough just for you to be seen in the Hood. I didn’t count on Muller showing up and I didn't count on the possibility that the Glades could be flooded with machine guns. Look, I promise it was never my intention to put you in harms way or set you up.”

“Oliver, I didn't think joining your crusade was ever going to be risk free. I just don't like being played. You asked me to join you, remember? That means you share the plan with me, you don't conspire behind my back and then throw me for a loop with a last minute change of plans. Now you might have gotten used to lying to everyone else in your life but, I am the one guy you don't lie to, the one guy you should never lie to”

“You're right, I am sorry” Diggle simply nods not fully believing that Oliver understands what he is telling him and knowing very damn well that he will lie to him again, repeatedly. Oliver sees the contemplation in his eyes and has to ask him as he makes to leave the room.

“So am I going to jail?”

“No, man. I've got to stop an arms deal”

Felicity having anticipated that Mr. Diggle would be down eventually, in preparation she had shed
the glasses, borrowed some red lipstick from one of the other waitresses and along the way lost some buttons on her blouse. Intently watching from the bar she sees Mr. Diggle make his way to leave through the back exit, looking very serious. She knows this is her chance so she steps in front of him with a drink tray and offers him one, which he kindly refuses.

“Are you sure the champagne is quite delectable”

“No thank you”

“You don’t seem to really fit in around here, definitely not like the other boys around here” she is flirting with him, she is standing there with her hand on her hip talking to the tall, handsome, deadly man from under her lashes and he looks a bit flattered yet, not all there. She knew she was losing him.

“Sorry miss but I really have to go” she reaches up to him and runs her fingers down his lapel and plants the bug as she leans in whispering,

“That’s a damn shame, bye handsome”

“Excuse me” he says curtly before exiting the mansion. She smiles at him and quickly puts her glasses back on and wipes at her mouth, even she has to admire her quick hands.

She takes one last look around deciding her work is done and goes to gather her things. As she heads for the door she does a double take at the figure she sees heading to the side stairs.

Her mind can't process what her eyes are seeing. No, that couldn’t be him, there was no way he was back in the states she had made that impossible for him. Maybe it wasn't him, whomever it was they had no business sneaking into the side stairs and the second floor. She follows after him and as he rounds the steps she gets a clear view of his face and she can't help the curse that leaves with her next breath “dammit” it was him. She didn't know what that scumbag hitman was doing there but she was definitely gonna ruin any plans he had. He obviously had not learned his lesson the first time.

As she follows him to the second floor and to the west wing of the mansion she realizes he is heading for Oliver’s room. “Dammit”.

She is grappling with him trying by all means to avoid the barrel end of his gun. As she manages to lock his left arm with her legs she makes a play for his gun and successfully disarms him. Taking the gun into her left hand she pistol whips him and before his head hits the floor she is out from under him and running out the door.

She is sprinting as fast as she can, she has no idea how her legs haven’t given out after 30 minutes of constant running but all she knows is that she just has to keep running.

She is starting to have a hard time breathing the freezing cold air being of no help, her vision is beginning to get a little blurry so she focuses on just putting one foot in front of the other. She can hear the sirens in the distance and that's motivation enough to keep moving. The safe house is only two miles ahead and she just has to make it there.

As she enters there is no time to catch her breath she leaps towards the computers and starts to type, solely on adrenaline she keeps functioning. She wipes video and sends reports and evidence to interpol. Everything they need to arrest him and keep him overseas. As soon as she is done making sure he never steps foot in the states again she allows herself to finally relax only to feel a pulse of pain radiate from her shoulder.
She looks over to see she is bleeding. She curses out loud and realizes that one of the bullets grazed her, she’ll survive, again. She patches herself up and makes all arrangements to head back home. Amsterdam is beautiful but she is ready to go home and get off the radar of the Ethnic Albanian Mafia. Seeing as she made quite a dent into their sex trafficking she may need to stay out of their territory for some time.

She subconsciously rubs at the scar on her left shoulder and knows she must act now. She doesn’t stop to think any further before springing into action. Picking up the pace she catches up to him and realizes he is dressed like a bartender. Attempting small talk about how tedious these rich kid parties are she keeps pace with him. He simply nods while trying to get rid of her. When he realizes she isn’t budging she clearly sees the shift in his eyes from considering her someone who is annoying him to someone who is a hindrance and must be taken care of, he can give it his best shot because she is ready.

She sees him grab for his weapon and she is quickly on him and in one swift move she pulls it out of his grasp and sends it flying across the hall. She punches him in the gut and as he doubles over, she knees him in the face. She turns to go for the gun when he grabs her heel and pulls her down, she really hates fighting in heels, he gets up and tosses her against the wall but not before she delivers a blow to his ribs clearly hearing one of them break under the impact. She hits the wall hard groaning when she sees the bastard refuses to go down. He makes a play for his gun and as he bends to get it, Oliver opens the door having heard the commotion outside. Felicity sees the door open and immediately hides.

Oliver instantly sees the gun and goes into fighting mode, well active fighting mode because he was always in fighting mode. He struggles with the assassin realizing in his movements that he is already injured. Felicity takes advantage and decides to run down and get the police, when she gets up Detective Lance is already coming and she simply points to the room as he rushes past her and enters the room, she hears gunshots and knows that is her cue to leave, it really should be everyone’s cue to leave she thinks as she runs down the stairs.

The party is ends instantly, gunshots have a tendency of doing that, and the police everywhere. She knows there will be no way she will make it out without giving a statement.

She spots what is clearly a rookie officer and manipulates him into taking her statement by the time she is finishing up Oliver and the detective are making their way back down. She hears the officer ask her if there is anything else and she simply shakes her head, no.

“Can I go?”

“Yes, thank you Mrs. Noble”

She risks one last glance in Oliver’s direction and realizes he is staring at her, intently. She holds his gaze for a bit but then she sees Lance follow his line of sight and now his eyes are on her too. She immediately bows her head and heads for the front door in seconds she is in the driveway and inside a cab. She turns one last time to see both men standing on the front porch glaring at the cab.

Lance approaches the officer she was just talking to, he recognized her as the waitress from the stairs,

“Who was that?” he points to the cab “the girl that just left?”

“Sir? The waitress?”
“Yes” responds Oliver and then shrugs at Lance, like there is nothing out of the ordinary about his interest.

“Uhmm, that was Mrs. Donna Noble, 30 years old lives in Coast City simply here covering for a friend. She said she was upstairs looking for empty glasses when she heard commotion coming from a bedroom, then she saw a tall slender man with a gun run up the stairs when she realized it was an officer she pointed to the room where the noise was coming from and then heard the gunshots and ran downstairs.”

Detective Lance is satisfied with the statement but Oliver only has more questions. He recognized her, the girl from the alley, if he wasn’t sure before the lingering smell of cherry blossoms and perfume in the foyer confirmed it. He needed to get this over with soon, so he could find out where cab 17584 went.

Shit! That was a close call, she was really hoping to head home after tonight, but apparently that was too much to ask for. Now she had a whole night of clean up and figuring out how in the world to make this cab disappear. Prompting herself to take deep cleansing breaths, she began to formulate a plan. Pretty soon she would need index cards and diagrams to keep all this in order.

Felicity makes quick work of clearing her tracks and can’t help but let the sadness sink in at the loss of another one of her undercover identities. Now, she would need to create an ending, hopefully a happy one to Donna’s story.

Finally making it home she makes quick work of checking all her bugs, one in the Queen living room another in the foyer and a last one in the west wing hallway. Everything else being locked would have to remain bug-free, she knew she could have picked the locks but she really didn’t want to push her luck. Mr. Diggle’s bug was up and working and she couldn’t help the relief that came over her at having that one particular bug back up. Unfortunately, finding how the hitman got back into the states was not as successful it just gave way to another dead end.

Yet, the biggest concern of her night had been the saw recognition she was sure she saw in Oliver’s eyes, her greatest fear is that he might of recognized her as the blonde IT girl, but the only way to know for sure would be to wait. She had always been a woman of patience but in the last month she had been tested and at this point she needed to beat the living daylights out of something. It looked like she was going to need to visit the gym more this week. Well, maybe after the pain in her shoulder went down, those damn mansion walls were harder than usual, “the rich and their quality” she mused to herself as she shifted the ice pack.

Finding herself in the gym at 3am was all a result of the reports of the green hooded man thwarting an arms deal in the glades all while the young Queen was being attacked at the Queen mansion. Something was rotten and it all reeked of Queens.

On the other side of town an infuriated Moira Queen barges into Merlyn senior’s office, he knows what is coming and frankly he is getting tired of the Queen’s and all the problems they bring him. He knows pretty soon it will be better to disable them completely, but for now he would play the apologetic part and move forward from this ‘mishap’.

“I offer my sincerest apologies” Malcolm says half heartedly.

“I know you found out I had the yacht salvaged, just as I know you had Mr. Hudson head of security killed.”
“Well accidents tend to befall people who are too curious.”

“I’ve been the good soldier, I’ve done everything you’ve asked but, if any member of my family gets so much as a paper cut I will burn your entire world to ashes.” with that Moira leaves, she knows her threat was sincere but that doesn’t dissipate the immense fear she still carries for her family. Malcom on the other hand is amused by the momma bear routine but his patience is approaching its limits as well.

The next day brought much needed clarity to Diggle and Oliver. He was no longer a wanted man all suspicion having been removed, they decide to meet at the steel factory.

Having made a rule to not discuss any business outside of the factory giving their past bug issues they make their way to the back entrance of the steel factory. As they cross the threshold an alarm goes off, Diggle is about to say something when Oliver simply puts a finger to his own lips to let him know it is not safe.

“What the hell why is the fire alarm going off, shit the sprinklers”

That’s the last thing Felicity hears before Mr. Diggle’s bug goes silent, she curses and simply grabs her gym bag again and leaves slamming the door to her apartment.

Oliver takes the bug off the jacket and Diggle gives him a knowing look.

“We can talk now, it’s dead”

“What was that?”

“A cover for the alarm.”

“I can’t believe this, this woman is making me look like an amateur. How? How the hell did she get another bug on me?”

Oliver chuckles beyond his better judgement, earning him a hard look from Diggle.

“Look Diggle, I am also starting to worry. This isn’t good. Whoever this woman is we need to find her and I think I have a lead.”

“What are you talking about man?”

“Last night at the party, I saw the woman from the alley. She was a waitress.”

“Didn’t you say the woman from the alley was also dressed as a waitress. She might of just been working”

“No, no you see...”

“Wait! You said brunette, about 5’5, petite, right?”

“Glasses smelled like cherry blossoms and perfume” adds Oliver

“Okay, I ran into that woman, minus the glasses. She was hitting on me at the party, she grabbed my jacket lapel. Shit! That tiny criminal did it again” Oliver looks at him as if asking him to elaborate and he simply raises a hand and nods.

“You know this means we have to check the manor for any bugs?”
“Well, it would seem so. I have the cab number that she left in and we have to go through the party footage. Then we will sweep the manor.”

As they get to work on trying to track this mysterious tiny criminal they are soon faced with the same frustration that Felicity had been dealing with. They have nothing. They can’t find the cab because it never came back from Coast City. All the footage in the house shows her back, her side but never her face, almost like she knew where all the cameras were at. The footage from upstairs is completely gone, erased. They don’t know if that was her or the person that sent the hitman, but then again they don’t know if they are one in the same.

“You have to give her credit for something, she is good, damn good”

“I’d rather like to tell her that in person, Dig”

“As would I but it seems that if that ever happens it will be on her terms and when she seeks us out. Looks to me like that is the only time we get near her, when we don’t know it is her.”

“Well, let’s hope that lack of knowledge is mutual and that she was there for you and not because she knows that the vigilante and Oliver Queen are one in the same”

“Hell, if she already figured that one out I say we recruit her rather than interrogate her. Wouldn’t mind having that kind of skill set on our side”

Oliver is getting tired of this woman and Diggle, although impressed doesn’t like having one pulled over him, let alone two. As they decide to focus on other worries, for now, Oliver tells him about everything else that happened including the problems his arrest brought forth with his mother and sister.

“What can you expect Oliver you lie to them or maybe you just give them a version of the truth and they can sense it”

“I tell them what they need to hear, Diggle. I can’t let them get too close”

“Sad thing is I think you actually believe that. I think things didn’t go down exactly as you planned. You didn’t count on so many people having questions, doubting you. You didn’t think about what happens when you lie, especially when you lie to the ones you love the most. When you were stuck in that island, plotting your grand plan to save the city, I don’t think you stopped to consider the effect it would have on the people in your life, or how it might hurt them.”

“You are wrong. I think about it all the time” Oliver pauses then adds,

“and just to be clear, not being able to tell my family the truth, it doesn’t hurt anyone, more than it hurts me.” he says the last bit as he grabs his bow and arrows.

“Where are you going?”

“Mueller still has to sell those guns and I have to stop him. You head to the manor and sweep it top to bottom.”

“Oliver?!”

“Just do it did. Mueller had his chance!”

Oliver arrives at the warehouse in the Glades and notes that things are a bit too silent. He makes his
approach and notices the warehouse is empty with the exception of a very frightened Mueller standing alone under one of the overhead lights with all the guns all around him. Immediately, this felt like a trap.

He manages to stay in the shadows as he approaches, eventually realizing there is no one else there. With his arrow pointed directly at Mueller he comes out from the shadows. Mueller quickly makes eye contact and raises his hands in surrender. Clearing his throat he slowly points at the cell phone on top of one of the crates as it starts to ring. Oliver doesn’t answer it, experience has taught him that cell phones can be deceiving pains in the ass.

As he keeps rounding Mueller the phone rings again. Once again he doesn’t answer it. The third time it makes a high pitched sound rather than a ring, followed by a computerized voice.

“You know green hooded man it is courtesy here as in any part of the world to always answer a ringing phone. Especially when the call is for you.” Oliver remains silent not ready say anything, simply looking around trying to see if the person on the other line was anywhere near them.

“Well I guess a man who shoots arrows into others isn’t bothered with courtesy. Okay, then I’ll get to the point. Mr. Mueller here is no longer an issue. His business is done, his money is gone and straight from here he will be turning himself in to the authorities. Now, I know you had plans to riddle him full of arrows but take this as a sign of good will, from you to me. There are many ways to stop men like Mr. Mueller, death is not the first and only. Now, as much as you are hoping that I am there, somewhere near watching, I am not. So, if you decide to put an arrow through Mr. Mueller I cannot stop you from doing so. But, I can stop you from doing it again. It is your choice. Kill him and I am sorry to say I will put my full efforts behind disarming you next. Let him live and I will owe you one. We have a mutual friend, as I am sure you are aware of already. I will contact you through him. ‘Fac recte, Et nil time” and just like that the line goes dead.

Walking away from Mueller was tough but he had bigger fish to worry about.

As Oliver enters the foundry he tosses a cell phone to Diggle, who has been sitting there waiting to talk to him, three cameras neatly tucked in his pocket. He simply looks at the phone and then at Oliver, the cameras pushed to back with what was sure to be an interesting new development.

“We need to find anything we can about that phone. You need to keep it with you. Always with the battery out, put it somewhere safe and only turn it on once a day to check it. You are apparently our mutual friend through which She will communicate”

“Oliver? What is...”

“She called me on that phone, well more like talked to me through the phone. She had already stopped Mueller and left it up to me to kill him or let him turn himself in willingly.” Dig gives him a look and Oliver knows what he is asking.

“I let him go.”

He tells Dig everything that happened and notes the impressed look on his face. He would also be impressed if he wasn’t so angry about being threatened. Whoever this woman was she was starting to become a giant hindrance. He was going to have to step up his game.

“Not to add salt to the wound but found these” he says, tossing the three cameras directly at him.

“You’re fucken kidding me” he growls

“Wish I was, so what now?”
“We wait.”
Power is not Revealed by Striking Hard or Often, but by Striking True

Chapter Summary

Oliver knows that someone is out to get him and that, that someone is way better than him, whether he can admit it or not. Felicity has played her cards and now, minor panic aside, she will see this whole thing through.

Chapter Notes

hey just realized that I meant to post in the last chapter that there would be no update last Sunday and for some reason i didn't. Then I left and had no internet so never realized my mistake. But here is the next full chapter. It was supposed to be two chapters because it's 10K+ words but seeing as I left you all hanging I decided to make it one chapter. Enjoy :)

It had been almost two, silent and uneventful, weeks for the vigilante. Felicity was honestly grateful seeing as she had so much to do at QC plus everything she was working on for Mr. Steele while he was in Australia. She knew exactly why he had left–the Gambit– and she was still waiting for the last of the results on the particulates she had taken from the warehouse. She was glad she had managed that much because three days after she and Mr. Steele found it, it had been moved and she was still trying to track the people that took it. Another reason why she cursed the vigilante, she had been so distracted with him she had waited too long to return to the warehouse.

Although, if she was being honest she kind of missed trying to track his moves and messing with him. Yet, she figured her last little stunt had made him retreat into his 'metaphoric' cave. She worried that he might be planning and conspiring against her but, not enough to seek him out when he was staying out of trouble. Oliver Queen on the other hand, that boy seemed to be getting harder and harder to figure out and she was really considering infiltrating his inner circle. She had her run-ins in the past with one Tommy Merlyn, well one of her more flirtatious personas had a bit of history there, she figured she could always play that card again.

→ → → → →

Two years to the date, after the disappearance of the Queen men Felicity was deep into her search for answers. She was determined to exhaust all possible leads and interrogate everyone and anyone who ever came in contact with Robert and Oliver Queen.

That is how on a Friday night she found herself in a high end bar in downtown Starling City. The bar was full of suits and pristine, model like women, Felicity would never fit in here, Cordelia on the other hand could be a regular. With her long wavy highlighted chocolate brown hair, designer pencil skirt, sheer blouse and sky high Jimmy Choo's, she turned heads the minute she walked in, including that of one Tommy Merlyn.
She walked towards the bar pretending to be oblivious to all the attention she was getting then made sure to sit a couple of seats down from Tommy while making eye contact with nobody.

"Blue Label on the rocks, please" she said without missing a beat as she laid her jacket and bag on the seat next to her.

As the bartender brought her drink and took her card she heard the seat next to her shift as the pleasant smell of expensive cologne hit her.

"I'll have what the lady with such remarkable taste is having" as she turned to the voice the disappointment was hard to hide as she realized it was not Tommy Merlyn at her side, but a random businessman, good looking but she was here with a purpose.

She turned to the bartender and with an unimpressed and slightly annoyed tone she said "put it on my card and the gentleman will have his drink to go" she looked at him pointedly, handed him his drink and then turned to give him her back as she sipped her drink.

She heard a chuckle come from across the bar and it took everything to not turn around. After her little dismissal she couldn't come off too eager.

Suddenly she felt another shift next to her and a voice oozing with amusement and charm chimed in "If I give you an overused cheesy line will it earn me a free drink as well" she couldn't help the smirk that took over her face, luckily she reeled it in before turning to look at him.

"No, but your overused clichéd attempt at sympathizing with me through the use of humor and pointing out the stupidity of your gender might earn you a roll of the eyes and an empty chair at the bar" the sudden look of surprise, followed by the wide grin that took over his face told her that she had him right where she wanted him

Hook, line and sinker.

"I personally prefer charm over humor, and to point out the obvious about my gender would only be counterproductive to my end goal of impressing you. I would have gone more with the typical but never old 'we aren't all the same' line followed by flattery, lots and lots of flattery"

She couldn't help the smile that tugged at her lips, he was really good at this. She raised her hand getting the bartender's attention and softly pointed to Tommy's drink, within seconds he had a new drink in front of him and an even wider smile on his face

"I assume that would have been your next move, right?"

"Oh, so you have played this game before?" he chuckled

" Probably not as long as you have." she said with a sidelong glance

"Touché, Tommy Merlyn" he said raising his glass towards her

"Cordelia" she answered raising her own glass

"Cordelia, what?" he asked with a tilt of his head

"Cordelia for now, but the night is young." she smirked at him.

"Indeed. Cheers Cordelia."
She would have to really think whether bringing Cordelia back to Starling City was a smart choice, if anything she could tutor Thea Queen, again. Although, that would be a bit too close for comfort, too many people in the Queen family already knew her as Felicity.

She let out a long winded sigh and willed herself to open her eyes and get ready for work, she couldn't help come back to that nagging sensation in the pit of her stomach that kept telling her that something was off. That something or someone was not at all what they seemed and she hated that she couldn't pinpoint where it was coming from. She once again resigned herself with a groan and opened her eyes.

Trying to focus on starting her morning, the arm that suddenly draped over her reminded her that those two weeks had also helped in moving along her "relationship" with Josiah, her cute as a button co-worker, whiz kid? Boy? Man? She really did hate mornings. Last night this had been a fantastic idea and treat for all her hard work in the past months, now, not so much.

She chastised herself for breaking rule #5, no sleepovers. The repercussions could be endless including putting his life in danger, hence why early on she determined the need for rules. Yet, at the moment she had immediate repercussion to deal with like having to tell him that they should go to work separately and pretend nothing happened. That was bound to be awkward enough to last her the rest of the day. As she pondered her options she thought that is maybe she was very quiet she could get ready and only wake him once she was out the door. Considering her skill set that could definitely...

"Morning beautiful" a groggy voice called her attention from across the bed interrupting her train of thought and her plans.

Oliver and Dig had spent those same two weeks trying to run down leads on the mystery woman. Diggle would religiously turn on the phone once a day looking for messages. He had only received one, 2 days ago, and he hadn't shared it with Oliver because he knew it would only piss him off more.

He had arrived home and after settling on the couch had placed the battery in the phone and checked it, within seconds he received a text,

F-Would you stop turning it on once a day, please the notice is getting annoying. When I said I would communicate with you I didn't mean through this phone. I have other ways, as you already know. So toss it or forget it in a drawer because I am throwing out the number.

D- Should I expect another note in my pocket?

F- Even I know you only do that once, well maybe twice ;) 

D- We need to meet

F- I know, soon.

D- When?

F- On my time, goodbye Mr. Diggle.

D- I NEED A DATE!

F- Try ok cupid
D- His patience is running out

F- That sounds like a him problem, bye bye.

D- WHEN?

When he didn't receive an answer, Diggle couldn't help but laugh. He didn't think he would ever get tired of saying it, she was damn good. He had done as she said and left the phone forgotten in his junk drawer. Every time Oliver asked he simply said "nothing". Eventually he would have to tell him. But not this morning.

As Oliver hit Diggle in the face while sparring he was reminded as to why he hadn't told him.

"Where did you learn that move?"

"His name was Yao Fei" even as the words left his mouth Oliver knew that he was opening the door to something he wasn't ready to share, must of been all the adrenaline that had him blurting out before he could stop himself.

"Did he give you those scars?" Diggle couldn't help but ask, Oliver had casually given him an opening and he was taking it.

"One of them" he said a little more tense

"And the others? You know, one of these days you are going to be straight with me about what happened on that island." Diggle continued to pry as they started sparring again.

"Absolutely," the tension having slightly ebbed from his voice as he smirked seeing an opening to catch Diggle by surprise again, as he takes a swing at his legs, Diggle stumbles and nearly falls as Oliver finishes his statement, "but not today."

Before Diggle could ask anything else he brings up the next name on the list, Scott Morgan.

“He has control of the power in the Glades and a nasty tendency to hike up prices in the summer and winter. Then he cuts off the power to buildings in the Glades when tenants can't afford the raised prices.”

“Seeing as winter is a couple of months away, we have time to build our case. Meanwhile, there’s been a recent spree of bank robberies which until now have not had any victims but in the last one The Royal Flush Gang, as they have been labeled by the media, shot an off duty cop who is now in critical condition in the hospital.”

"I think you have the wrong impression about what it is I do" annoyance clear in his tone

"You take out bad guys with a bow and arrow" he answers very matter of fact.

"I don't fight street crime. That's a symptom of what is wrong with this city, I'm trying to cure the disease"

"Maybe you can make a difference, if you think beyond the scope of those pages. I'm sure your father wouldn't mind"

"No, you don't get it. My father died so that I could live. Live and make a difference by fixing the city that he and the people in this book ruined. Every name that I cross off this list honors that sacrifice." his annoyance turning to anger, quickly.
"Oliver, there is more than one way to save the city." a frustrated and angry Diggle shot back.

"Not for me! Crime happens in this city every day. What do you want me to do? Stop all of it." he doesn't know why Diggle can't just understand that this is not what he is doing.

"Sounds like you have a narrow definition of being a hero." Diggle says more disappointed than angry at this point.

"I'm not a hero" Oliver spits out not sure anymore if his anger is directed at Diggle or himself.

His side hurts, he knows he has been laying without moving for far too long, yet he can't bring himself to even turn on his back. When he first found the cold, damp, dark cave, he thanked god for the blessing of being out of the elements, fearing he wouldn't have survived one more day in the unforgiving wind.

Now this cave represented his living tomb. All hope lost, he can barely feel the hunger and he knows that is not good but is thankful for the reprieve. The sharp pain in his hip bone forces him to turn on his back, he feels a hand land on his shoulder as he turns and the breath is punched out of him in disbelief.

"You died" he says wide eyed, staring at his father, looking like the last time he saw him.

"I asked you, I begged you to survive, but if you don't think you can" he pulls out the gun he shot himself with, Oliver hesitates at first but reaches for it, solace clear in his eyes.

As he wraps his hand around the barrel Robert tugs it back pulling Oliver closer so that they are eye to eye, "but Oliver my death is made meaningless by yours. The lives of so many will be cast aside by your choice." He lets go of the gun. Nothing has ever weighed this heavy in his hands. Yet, the pain has been so grand that the release that one solitary bullet could bring seems like hope.

"I'm starving. I'm going to die anyways and I just want it to be quick. I want it to be quick like yours was, I don't want to be here anymore dad." he responds his voice devoid of any strength or desire to continue living.

"You can survive this. You can get back to everything. I promised you that you wouldn't be alone son, and you won't I swear, she will be there!"

"No I can't. I am not as strong as you think I am, I'm sorry" Oliver begins to raise the gun to his temple, seeing his dad’s face fade like a dream he pulls the trigger, hears the click and then the weight is gone and his hands feel lifeless. In shock he looks around into his tomb and decides today was not the day. Today he lived.

In the past two weeks Oliver had been home more often since his return. His relationship with Thea had seemed to settle into this mutual understanding where neither was truly happy, he wished she would allow herself to be kid just a bit longer and appreciate all she had and she wished her brother would be carefree and boisterous like he once was, but the took what they could. Moira had also noticed the shift and had even attempted to rope them into a family brunch with the Bowens.
That suggestion had obviously not gone over well, but it had been set much to their dismay. Oliver knew he had to make an effort with his family but it was difficult when he had to continuously lie to them.

He is taken out of his thoughts when he receives a call from Diggle about how Scot Morgan tried to commit suicide. His mood quickly changes as he gathers the keys to his bike.

Opening the door he is greeted by Tommy's grin, the uncertainty he sees in his eyes has his steps faltering but he knows he has a somewhere to be.

"Hey, just the man I wanted to see. I got these killer tickets from a contact to a party, super exclusive and one of them has your name on it." said Tommy as he walked in the door.

"That sounds great but, something came up. I gotta jet"

"Oh, well it’s not until Saturday at 10pm so maybe you can pencil me in" he says more to himself as Oliver has already left. Well there went the one person he just wanted to spend some time with and talk to.

"Moves fast doesn't he?" says Thea as she enters the foyer

"It's ironic since you are the one we call speedy"

"Called, please for the love of god, but if you need someone to talk too or another Queen to take that ticket off your hands" she smirks

“Nice try speedy” he responds as he ruffled her hair. “So how’s school treating you?” he ask as he drops onto the long couch followed by an amused Thea.

When Oliver arrives at the hospital, he immediately sees Dig waiting outside for him. He’s here for answers and has his gear in case interrogating Morgan here would be necessary. Seeing his determined stare and eagerness for answers Dig has no choice but to confess that it was all a ruse to get him to the hospital.

He introduces him to Stan Washington's wife and tells her that Oliver is taking care of her expenses and they will be moving her husband to a better hospital. She thanks him and he realizes exactly what Dig is doing and he is definitely pissed yet, somewhat contrite when he shakes the poor woman’s hand. As she goes inside with her husband Oliver turns around slowly and Dig knows what is coming.

"You lied to me” Oliver reprimands.

"And you asked me to work with you not for you and when you did, you said it was because you understood the kind of man that I am. Well, Oliver I'm the kind of man that doesn't walk away when there is a chance to make a difference, and neither does Stan Washington. If you are worried about Scott Morgan, don't be. He has been taken care of and is no longer a problem."

"What are you talking about?"

"The water and power company was bought out by Green Angel Initiative, they specialize in low cost solar and environmentally conscience energy and water. Morgan stepped down and left Starling City this morning and was kind enough to pay two months worth of water and power for every resident of the Glades at his old rates.”
"What? How?"

"That is all I know. I got a message this morning with the information, from her."

"Dammit, and you tell me now Diggle" Oliver yells.

"I tried everything, there was no way of knowing where it came from. Plus, I realized this would leave an opening for dealing with these robberies, unless you are still adamant?" Oliver walks past him and heads to his motorcycle

"Oliver I'm not finished talking, where are you going?" he yells at him immediately regretting telling him the truth. It seems she was right when she told him not to tell the vigilante it was her who helped him because that was simply asking for trouble.

"To go make a difference. Seeing as my schedule just opened up, let's catch some bank robbers." he says as he jumps on his bike "but we, are not done John."

Arriving at the foundry he is not surprised to find Diggle has made some progress and begun to research the footage and identities of the RF gang. He shows Oliver the video of one of the robbers punching the bank manager in the face he points out the ring the robber was wearing and he catches on quickly.

Oliver figures a ring that size would definitely leave an imprint behind. He decides they need that image if they are going to track the ring to its owner which he knows will be in evidence lockup.

"Please tell me you are not going where I think you're going?" Diggle asks already knowing his argument against will be useless.

"Diggle why do you even ask" Oliver responds.

As he starts to walk away Diggle calls out to him, noting something different in his voice he stops and turns. He can see the hesitance in his eyes and clearly recognizes when it switches to resignation.

Diggle turns the computer screen over so he can see the white letters slowly appearing before their eyes until the message is clear.

HELLO STARLING CITY'S OWN GREEN HOODED MAN, SNOOPING AGAIN I SEE

He rushes to the computer to try and figure out where the message is coming from or at least stop it before the person knows exactly where they are, but before he can do anything the message changes

HERE IS ANOTHER SIGN OF GOOD FAITH FROM ME TO YOU

an image slowly appears, it's the imprint on the manager's face from the robbery. Underneath the words LARCHMONT HIGH appear.

Followed by another message..

IF THIS FEELS LIKE A TEST, THAT IS BECAUSE IT IS. TREAD CAREFULLY VIGILANTE. I WILL BE WATCHING YOU. HAVE A GOOD DAY, YOU TOO MR. DIGGLE :)

The screen goes back to normal as Oliver gets up and tosses his computer chair across the room. Waiting was not working they needed to find her NOW!
The Royal Flush gang had also caught Felicity's attention. As has become habit over the last couple of years she decides to aid the SCPD in finding and stopping them, she has a couple of programs running trying to find as much information as possible while hacking the video cameras and analyzing the footage.

Having become accustomed to this routine she has found ways to do this kind of work from her office while on her tablet. Taking full advantage of the secure server network, she developed herself, along with the backdoor she left for her own needs.

As she opens up her programs to check on the progress of the identities of the RF gang, she sees that someone else is hacking the video feed. She back traces the feed and quickly realizes that is is being pinged off various locations. If she had more time she could get to the source but setting up the trace from her office would take too long if she wants a clean hack.

She can send a message through the connection as long as they don't log off with little to no effort then she can follow the message later to its final destination. Her gut tells her that it must be the green hooded man and she can’t help but seize the opportunity. She will bait him with information and when he follows it she will have the answers she seeks. She just hopes he doesn’t log off before she’s done.

She quickly begins to type away and sends him some of the information she has already forwarded to the SCPD.

Oliver and Diggle come out empty handed not that Diggle expected it to be that easy, if he has learned one thing it is that this woman should not be underestimated and that she is way better than them put together. They settle on solving what they can right now, after much convincing from Dig, and Oliver decides working on this case might lure her out. They look into the information she sent by hacking the Larchmont High records and cross referencing the description of the robber.

Just then Felicity receives another two alerts she triumphantly pumps her fist knowing she has her man.

She quickly starts the trace of her message using the self designed military grade tracking programs she has at home and puts them to work in finding the exact location of the connection. As she settles her laptop down, content to wait for the results she sees the image of Kyle Reston pop on her screen. She must admit he is pretty good at what he does, he found him almost as quickly as Kelton, the SCPD computer tech, yes they were on a first name basis, well she called him by his first name, he didn't know she existed.

With the programs running on both sides, each are hoping that the trap they set would work.

Just then Oliver realizes he is late for brunch with his mother and the Bowen's and quickly changes and heads out leaving his computers logged on, just like Felicity expected.

The brunch quickly proves to him once again that five years on an island changes many things and that his pop culture knowledge is so lackluster it is embarrassing but it also proves that some things never change as Carter Bowen is still the walking image of perfection. Just as he begins to regret having agreed to this brunch Diggle steps in with an update.

There has been another robbery and as he excuses himself his mother discreetly pulls him aside before he can head out

“At least have the decency to put effort into your excuses and don't think me a fool. Your sorry
attempt at spending time with us your family is an insult. In the future either be here or don't bother to show, Oliver.”

He feels guilty over her statements but knows that it is part of the choices he made many years ago.

Leaving the thoughts of his family behind, Oliver enters the subterranean room that he and Diggle discovered and knew would be the exit point for the gang. Diggle waits as back up two blocks down near an alley passageway. Knowing Oliver is ready to move, he focuses on keeping his eyes on a swivel, when he feels his cell phone vibrate.

Felicity had also been alerted to the new robbery and quickly got a live stream of the bank and surrounding areas in hopes of helping the SCPD catch them this time and hopefully getting a glance of the green hood. What she finds is one Mr. John Diggle two blocks away which could only mean one thing, the green hooded man was on site, armed and deadly. Making a choice she sends a message to John Diggle.

F- I hope your partner isn't feeling trigger happy, one man in the hospital is already one too many.

D- He's trying to help.

A soft smile pulling at his lips as he realizes that whoever this woman is she has a genuine concern and what seems to be an unyielding moral compass, he likes that.

F- Warn him that I am watching, closely.

D- He won't like that.

F- Too bad.

F- I could do it myself, Mr. Diggle.

D- Point taken.

F- Thanks.

To top it off she is polite, everyday he realized he really wants to meet her. He quickly relays the message to Oliver over the comms getting only a low guttural growl as a response. He knows not to ask anything else, they fall into complete radio silence until the sound of footsteps echoing on hard pavement fills the room Oliver is in, followed by yells and panting.

The Hood draws his bow and sends a warning arrow straight into one of the money bags, instantly the gang stops dead in their tracks. Looking around to try and figure out where the arrow came from, they panic and begin to run. The Hood shots another warning arrow and tells them to lay down their weapons and surrender the money, the youngest in the gang laughs incredulously while he lets out a couple of rounds into the shadows.

The rest of teh gang pulls him away just as the police enters the room and shouting the same warnings that the Hood had already said and had been ignored. He decides he needs to hide deeper in the shadows before they know he is there. He tries to get closer and stall them in order to give the police a chance but they are gone before he can interfere any further and now he is the one making a run for it as he is spotted by an officer.

He makes his way out towards Diggle, spurting curses over his steady and slightly labored breathing.
Diggle curses knowing they got away and while he contemplates texting Nia, that's what he has decided to call her as she reminds him of an old Swahili folk tale his grandmother used to tell him about a young warrior woman named Nia, which means 'purpose', he gets in the car ready to drive off, he smiles to himself for picking such an appropriate name. As he starts the car his phone dings,

F- I said don't hurt them, not let them get away.

F- Until next time boys.

D- I had a feeling I didn't need to let you know the mission was a bust. Probably knew before me.

F- You learn fast Mr. Diggle ;)

Just then Oliver gets in the car and Diggle takes off straight for foundry, only tossing his phone so that Oliver can see the messages. He lets out another grunt as his irritation grows.

"We need help finding the Reston's, they are off the grid and now that they know the Hood is after them they might not surface again."

"What did you have in mind?" asked Diggle a bit confused

"Tomorrow morning we go to QC."

Diggle eyes him through the rearview mirror and Oliver simply shrugs while he continues,

"You're going to meet the 3rd unofficial member of the team."

As Felicity gathers the last bit of information and footage and adds it to her ever increasing file on the green hooded man, she can’t help but smile at the progress she is making. She was sure she had Mr. Diggle on her side, if the day where she had to reveal herself to the green hooded man came, at least she had one ally.

Yet, she couldn’t get too comfortable just because Mr. Diggle seemed friendly enough. She needed to be 100% sure before risking being completely exposed. There was something that just didn't add up. How did Mr. Diggle spend so much time with the Hood and still manage to guard Oliver Queen.

More and more this trio was making her suspicious. What if Oliver Queen was in on it all? Maybe he was the unofficial donor to the Hood. That could be how he has all those gadgets and it would explain Mr. Diggle's involvement and why Mr. Queen seems a bit off kilter, not to mention how he got his hands on Patel’s laptop.

The sheer force of that train of thought had her standing from her couch, it was a trio, Oliver Queen was the money, Diggle was the backup and the green hooded man was the muscle. That had to be it.

Maybe Robert did tell him about the mission and the young Queen did what his family has always done, hired some muscle and threw money at the problem. Damn she needed more intel and she needed to stop getting distracted and focus on uncovering all their truths.

Felicity realized that she might not need to track the Hood which carried a certain degree of risk, she could concentrate on Oliver Queen him she could handle, no problem. She was going to focus her full effort into infiltrating his world and he would lead her to the Hood and all the answers she needed. All she needed was to determine if Robert had set him on this path and if he had then she would gladly offer her services. They had the money, the backup, the muscle and now they would
have the tech.

Proud of her deduction skills she gives herself the night to sleep, the next morning she begins to set her plan in motion by sending one Tommy Merlyn a message. It seemed it was time to bring the british powerhouse, Cordelia, back to Starling.

In her message she informs him that she would be visiting Starling City over the weekend and would love to meet up. Her Cordelia persona was the easiest and least obvious way of infiltrating the billionaire inner circle, she was tired of waiting and playing it safe she was ready to push through it all. Having set the pieces into motion she gets ready for work.

Stepping off the elevator two hours after her shift began, all thanks to her boss sending her to a meeting he was supposed to attend, before she could even reach her office she is informed that Mr. Queen has been waiting for her for two hours. She quickly composes herself and runs into her office to leave her things and get her laptop which she suspects she will need, she hears the receptionist tell her again how The Oliver Queen was waiting for her, and how bad of an idea it was to keep him waiting. She runs past the receptionist shocking the already frazzled older woman "if he waited two hours it is safe to assume he'll wait five more minutes".

She finds the young Queen and Mr. Diggle sitting, stoic and silent, in one of the executive conference rooms on the top floor. She internally smirks thinking that she could have easily bugged him for a third time, not really for info, but for fun. She makes eye contact with Mr. Diggle first, as she is about to smile, widely, she remembers that technically she doesn't know him so she offers him a small smile as she approaches the young Queen.

The minute he sees her he stands being reminded again of their first meeting, he categorizes all the things that he already associates with her, she is still all smiles, cute, and with a glint of 'I have a secret you are not privy to' in her eyes. At least some things remain consistent.

"Good Morning Felicity that must have been some meeting to keep you away from the office so long. Josiah said you would be back an hour ago. I think that might have been wishful thinking on the part of the IT department. I don't think they could survive without you for much longer." she practically cuts him off with a sweet smile and a greeting.

"Good Morning Mr. Queen," she turns to Diggle and smiles "Good morning sir" she greets him as Dig slightly chuckles at her formal greeting.

"Call me Oliver, please, and this is John Diggle, no need for such formalities Felicity." he interrupts her, she slightly tilts her head not sure if to respond or simply move on, so Diggle decides to respond.

"Speak for yourself, I like this whole sir business," he chuckles.

Felicity smiles wider and nods at him appreciatively. She turns to Oliver and simply continues the conversation,

"In reality, it pretty much runs itself we just check the computers."

"Well, your colleagues would beg to differ. Including your...friend? Josiah." he smiles, noting how her brows slightly furrow only to quickly be replaced by what he thinks is a bit of defiance and amusement.

"Now, I know you didn't come here and wait two hours to discuss how indispensable I may or may not be to the IT Department, so what can I help you with Mr. Queen and Mr. Diggle?"

"Felicity, call me Oliver, please."
"I'm okay, I like Mr. Diggle."

"Me too" she said a little too loud and for everyone to hear, her eyes going wide as Diggle smiled and Oliver looked amused. There was a bit of pause as Felicity squirmed and Oliver finally decided to take her out of her misery.

"I have a friend that I am trying to reconnect with. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to locate him and I was hoping you would be able to work a bit of your magic and help me."

"I guess I should add personal internet researcher for Oliver Queen to my job title," Oliver looks at her slightly shocked and amused while Diggle was all amusement, knowing she might have, maybe, taken it a bit too far she added "happily, I mean." as if it would make a difference.

Oliver exhales as a smile tries to pull on his mouth and ponders a witty remark before deciding against it.

"His name is Derek Reston, we were close, before I went away and I want to get back in touch."

"Guess you didn't have Facebook on that island," she says before she can stop herself.

"Nope, not even a Myspace account. It was a very dark time." she gives Mr. Diggle another appreciative smile a thank you for making light of her slip up. She begins to type away as windows pop up rapidly on her laptop.

"There is not much here that is recent. No credit activity, no utility bills," as his QC employee ID appears for her eyes only she makes an assumption and voices it, "So you guys must of met at the factory?"

"What? What factory?"

The instant she sees that confused look on his face she knows that once again he has made her a part of one of his poorly constructed lies, and once again she is not going to let him get away with it.

"The Queen Steel Factory!" she answers very matter of fact and with a bit of sarcasm, she decides to go full force, because if Mr. Queen wants to play with the big boys she'll gladly give him a crash course.

"Derek Reston worked there for 15 years before it was shut down in 07." gauging for his reaction.

"Derek Reston worked for my father?" he said full of disbelief and more as an affirmation to himself, not fully intending to voice and completely destroy his own lie. There it was again that 'you are full of shit' tilt of the head, he had a feeling he would be seeing a lot of that.

"You were really close friends, huh?" she smiles as her voice oozes sarcasm and annoyance. She pauses making sure he notes her disappointment and continues.

"Looks like Derek was a factory foreman until your dad outsourced production to China, 1,500 employees got laid off and the finance guys even found a loophole in the union contract"

She knew this well, she had helped Robert as he attempted to fix as much of this as possible. He couldn't re-open the factory, that would have raised too many questions but he did have her set scholarships and funds for the families, some of them even managed to get their houses back. She had also made sure those finance guys, that brought the idea to Robert about screwing all his employees, got what was coming to them. She felt herself being overwhelmed with the memories to the point that she wasn't even reading the information off the monitor she was recalling from
memory, her voice carrying all the disdain and contempt she held for the actions, not the people, but
Oliver didn't know that. It was hitting him hard and she was pulling no punches as she continued.

"So they didn't have to pay severance packages and pensions to their employees. They all pretty
much lost their homes, including your friend." She said the last word emphasizing the ‘d’ at the end
to make a point, she knew by his downcast and slumped shoulders he understood.

He quickly stood and started walking towards the conference door. Realizing he had said nothing he
turned and walked half way up to apologize and thank her, but before he could she got up and
started walking towards the door, she stopped in front of him and handed him a business card.

"If you need anything else that's my contact information." She turned with a genuine smile towards
John, "It was a pleasure meeting you Mr. Diggle." As she walked towards the door she heard him
sigh deeply and she's not sure what compels her to start speaking but like many other times with this
particular Queen she finds herself speaking before she can stop herself.

"Mr. Queen" she notices his eyes remain unfocused and contemplative. "Oliver" at that his eyes
quickly connect with hers. "You might be a Queen, but you are not Robert Queen. You are Oliver,
so simply be Oliver." she smiles and makes her exit not once turning back although she could feel
both men staring, burning holes into her back.

→ → → → →

"Dad I need the keys to the Ferrari, mom said you had them and I have..."

"Oliver Jonas, don't you knock? This is my office you can't just barge in making demands. I know I
have raised you better than that. Now excuse yourself and wait outside."

"But Dad I just need the keys"

"Now Oliver!"

As Oliver makes his way to the large double doors of his father's QC office he catches a glimpse of
multi-colored hair peeking over the wingback chair. He immediately stops anger rising up knowing
just how to push his father's buttons.

"Where are the manners my father so proudly boast about, hello Oliver Queen." he says as he walks
back towards rainbow brite on the seat. Before he can reach her and see her face his father is
standing in front of him with a stern look he knows not to question. He raises his arms in surrender
and simply walks out of the office.

"I am so sorry about my son, Felicity, he can be quite exasperating at times but he's a good kid, he
means well. It's not his fault, I've made him into what he is by spoiling him and now I want to make
him into a better man. It's not easy."

"It's okay Robert. I'm young, I get it. Plus you don't need to tell me he's a good person, he's your son,
he was bound to be good"

"I do want you two to meet eventually, under the right circumstances. I think you would be good for
him, I hope you can be friends. Maybe when all this is over I can share everything we have done
with him."

"I would like that."

"Felicity, can I ask you something?"
"Of course"

"Keep an eye out for my son. How only you can. I would worry less if I knew you were watching after him."

"I will keep an eye on him."

"Promise me, Felicity."

"I promise." she answers not quite sure why he had gotten so melancholic all of a sudden and asked her something so personal. As she watches him stare at the office doors as if he could still see Oliver on the other side, she feels a knot in her stomach.

It would be one of the most important promises of her life. Feeling it come full circle the day Oliver Queen returned to Starling City. A promise she was still intending to keep.

Oliver knew exactly what she meant, she was telling him that he was not his father that it was not his fault and he wanted to believe it but the guilt was too strong. Diggle squeezed his shoulder and gave him a knowing nod as they made their way out of the building. As they exit the tension is palpable, Oliver wants to give Reston a chance to redeem himself, his guilt making him feel like he owes him that much, Dig believes they had plenty of chances to do the right thing, including a new start in a new city they squandered. He feels they now need to be stopped. He follows Felicity's example and reassures him it is not his fault but, Oliver is already on his bike and out of sight in seconds.

On his way back home he receives another message from Tommy reminding him about the CNRI Gala, he already knows he is going to be horrible company but he has a persona to uphold.

Yet, he can't help but be distracted he, as Oliver Queen, had given Derek an opportunity, a way out that he seemed unwilling to take. Instead Reston lashed out against what he represented, his father, and he couldn't blame him for his anger and resentment. Once all is said and done it seems he hadn't been persuasive enough as the communication he and Diggle listened to through the bug he placed on Reston, clearly showed that they were doing one more job before ending it once and for all. Derek seemed hesitant and Oliver could only hope he would change his mind and not be pushed by his son Kyle. If not he would have no other choice but to take them down.

He reluctantly gets dressed and heads to the Gala, although he is still on edge he knows that he has disappointed his mother one too many times already so he has to make an appearance.

**Felicity** was on edge she knew that the dynamic trio, as she called them now, would be trying to stop the Reston family. Yet, she stayed on task and decided to keep a close eye on Oliver Queen, in hopes that if the Reston's acted they could lead her to the green hooded man. She had planned to sneak into the event either as an employee of sorts or through the good old back door. Yet, she didn't have to do either. She had ran into an old friend at her local coffee shop and he had invited her to accompany him to the gala which she gladly accepted. No easier cover than being herself.

Exited the car in front of the gala with the help of Carter Bowen's arm she smoothed out her **floor length lavender gown** and smiled at him. He told her again how beautiful she looked and ever the courteous guest she thanked him, again. Just as they made it through the door, Carter is almost side swept by a rushed Oliver Queen making his exit, she tries to turn her head quickly, but right before her curtain of hair can give her some cover she registers recognition in Mr. Diggle’s eyes yet, he doesn’t stop or react and she knows very well why.
She doesn't wait even a minute, before feigning an emergency and leaving a very confused and worried date at the door calling after her as she ran around the building towards the back, not before noting the direction of the Queen car. She makes quick effort of her change of clothes as she hops on her bike, which she had left hidden earlier that day, and takes off after them. Immediately, sinking with the police transmitter. As the chatter comes through she knows exactly where they are going.

When she arrives, there is a full on battle going on. The Hood is fighting who she assumes is Kyle Reston, she is so focused and has her gun aimed at the both of them that she doesn't register the guard that has woken up and is now heading back with a shotgun.

When the guard orders them to drop their weapons Oliver tries to get him to drop his weapon, but just then Derek comes out gun drawn and everything happens so fast she barely has time to react, shooting a rubber bullet and disarming Derek but not being able to do the same to the guard before he lets out a shot at Kyle. As any father would, Derek leaps in front of the bullet at the same time that Felicity releases a blade.

As Derek drops to the floor in a heap, the green hooded man knocks out Kyle and orders the guard to call an ambulance. Yet, his eyes are scanning the whole room looking for where that shot and blade came from. He thinks he sees a shadow, but is drawn back by Derek calling out for Kyle, his son. As he calls for him again the green hooded man hovers over him and pulls his hood further down to conceal his identity.

"He's okay, he's just knocked out" he says noticing that the bullet went through him just missing his heart.

"It…It wasn't his fault. I turned my son into this" he says with labored breaths. Pleading one last time for mercy, for his son.

“Don’t worry you will live and you will tell him yourself.”

"You can do this son, you will survive this, you will be a better man than me. Promise me Oliver, promise me."

"I promise, dad. I promise." he kept repeating over and over as sleep and exhaustion began to take over his body and his lids closed letting the dark in, a darkness that continued to haunt him every time he closed his eyes.

Many times he would wake up whispering those same words "I promise dad, I promise"

Many times he would wake screaming "I can't dad, I can't."

Most times he was just grateful he was awake, alive and surviving. He had a promise to keep.

"Get out, you need to go. The police are coming," he heard a voice yell across the room. The minute she sees him get on his feet and turn in her direction she bolts.

He hesitates for a second before hearing the footsteps of the SCPD when his body reacts he is sprinting out of the bank to meet up with Diggle.

His mind is still processing the warning he heard, but there is no time to stop and think. He quickly gets in the car without saying a word and Diggle knows very well something has gone very wrong.
but, doesn't say anything.

As they reach the foundry they are both unaware that they have been followed.

Felicity stood in the bank lobby watching the green hooded man hover over an injured Derek Reston, yet the last thing she expected when she saw him reach for his hood was to see Oliver Queen’s face. She froze in place, she was speechless, she was angry, with herself.

In that instant it all came forward, hindsight was really 20/20. She couldn’t believe she missed all the coincidences, the set-up, his build, the video of him taking out the military team she sent to rescue him, and his cologne, his damn cologne. Now she could piece it all together and she was fucken pissed. It had all been there and she was blind to the most important part of it all. She had fallen victim to the same presumptions she always hated in others.

She wondered how everyone could be so blind. How could those that knew him before the island not see how broken he was? How far down the rabbit hole he had traveled? Then she heard the police and SWAT giving orders to rush the lobby and she had to get out, she focused on his looming figure and realized he wasn’t moving. Before she could worry about her own safety she yelled at him to “get out”.

The instant his eyes made contact with her, she swore he could see her, but she knew that was impossible. She waited until he got up and then she was gone. By the time she reached Mr. Diggle she was three rooftops over watching and waiting to follow.

She approached the old Queen Steel Factory and couldn't help but laugh, he really had made it so obvious. She waited until they entered before preparing for her next move.

As soon as Diggle and Oliver enter, Oliver runs down the steps and paces around before he throws his bow across the floor shouting in frustration,

"She was there, DAMMIT!"

"What?" Diggle couldn't believe it.

"She was at the bank, she shot at Derek." Oliver ground out.

"WHAT? Is he…?" Now Diggle was really shocked he never thought she would shoot someone.

"Rubber bullets."

"Oh" he shouldn't of sounded so relieved but he did and he knew Oliver noticed.

"But Reston was still hit" he added as he stiffly walked over to the training area

"How?"

"The guard" he said in the distance, once he stopped. Diggle could see his entire body tense as he added,

"She saw me."

A long silence passed before Diggle knew what to say, she had been there, helped him and now she knew his identity. To say he was worried was putting it lightly. They no longer held any cards, this was her game now and they were just spectators, he knew Oliver didn't like that at all, he didn't like it either.
He decided to give Oliver some space moving towards the computers he checked for updates from the Police on Reston’s condition. When nothing came up he decided he would text her, ask her what her next move was now that all their cards were on the table.

Felicity feels the vibration in her chest but ignores her phone after all she is working to break the code for the door, and she knows it’s probably Mr. John Diggle worried out of his mind. She had no answers for him because she herself still doesn’t know what she is going to do.

She was sure Robert had either revealed part of his secret or Oliver had somehow figured it out, but what else did he know? Did he know about her? And if he did why didn’t he seek her out? In that moment she makes a choice that is only reaffirmed by Diggle's next text.

**D- If you don't talk to him he will never trust you.**

Trust, that was the keyword. As much as she wanted help, wanted someone to talk about the last 7 years of her life, her journey that began at 15 when Robert Queen walked into her life, she had to be honest. She didn't fully trust him, either. Her entire survival was dependent on not trusting.

She couldn't tell him who she was until she knew who he was, truly. Until she knew he trusted her, she was going to play her cards close to her chest and she wouldn't make him privy to anything he didn’t need to know.

Whatever information she did share would be with a purpose. 1) To gauge his reaction 2) learn his motives 3) be able to decipher the true Oliver 4) earn his trust as Felicity.

For once it would pay off to simply be herself, no secret identities.

Once she manages to rewire and get the doors open. She can hear voices echo off the large concrete walls. She gets closer and is able to tune into the voices in the room and hear everything.

"What went down wasn't your fault." he hadn't said anything but Dig knew very well that Oliver was adding something else to his guilt list.

"I didn't say it was." he sounded confident but, his eyes gave away to the guilt that was coursing through him.

"Oliver, it wasn't your fault, man. You gave Reston a chance, that was more than he deserved."

"I'm not so sure about that?" He said not daring to look directly at Diggle.

As Felicity slinked her way closer she was beginning to see all the cracks in Oliver's armor. He was nothing but a battered, broken boy unprepared and so full of guilt, anger and pride. She knew he wouldn't last much longer. She had been there and she had almost lost herself in that same dark hole.

"Well, listen I'll tell you this much. You say going after the guys on that list is a way to honor your dad," Oliver slightly looks up and simply nods at him.

"well, if your dad could have seen you this week, the way you cared about the people he had hurt. The way you stepped up to try and help them, I'd say he'd be pretty damn honored. So maybe there is more than one way of saving the city."

He pauses for a bit considering the words that oddly enough did give him some respite, "Maybe" he says with a tinge of hope.

Diggle notices his face turn dark and once again he knows he needs good news and thankfully he
“By the way Stan Washington woke up, he's going to be fine” Oliver looks up, finally some good news. As he stands up to finish putting away his equipment they are both suddenly startled by an unexpected, yet, highly anticipated voice.

“Robert would have been proud.” her voice carried through the room with a softness and truth that if it wasn’t for the fact that she was an intruder which had put him on high alert he would have found comfort in her voice.

“I might have misjudged you Mr. Queen, you might be more like your father than I thought.”

Oliver reacts quickly almost inhuman, halfway through turning to face the intruder at the door his bow is already armed and ready to release. Yet, it is not quick enough, he never really stood a chance.

When Felicity entered she might have been taken by the conversation she encountered but she was no fool. Before she made her presence known she already had her gun aimed and ready, directly at Oliver. Not to belittle Mr. Diggle's training but she knew Oliver was a shoot and ask questions later kind of guy and Mr. Diggle was far more logical. Before Oliver even registered the boom of the gun his bow hits the floor with a loud clank that echoes all throughout the cavernous basement.

"Tsk tsk Mr. Queen" She says as she points her gun at Dig who is now aiming his gun directly at her.

“Manners, boys! Is that any way to welcome a guest?” Dig begins to create some space between himself and Oliver to have a better advantage. She immediately turns to him and slowly nods her head and with her gun motions for him to move back, he obliges begrudgingly.

Oliver has remained motionless the tension in his body invading every inch of him, the anger boiling within, she can see it and knows she has very little time left before she is truly in danger.

"Now, can we talk or are you going to try and kill me again?” she smirks at them, not that they could see her face, and not that they didn’t try but she never moved from the shadows as she continued to talk.

"I figured I should come and talk to you seeing as the cat is out of the bag.”

"What do you want?” Oliver's voice was so rough and unyielding that it almost caused a shiver to run down her back.

"A little more good faith, from me to you. Most importantly the phrase you want to hear I believe is, your secret is safe, and it is.”

"More importantly, how do YOU know my father?”

"That is a story for another day, in the future when we have more trust.” A look passes through his face and she knows it is confusion.

"Would you believe anything I said, otherwise?” she says in a knowing tone.

Oliver instinctively takes a step forward as Diggle puts his hand on his shoulder and holds him back. Felicity shifts where she stands knowing very well she has to get out, she was pushing him too much.
"Look I think it is evident that we are on the same side and we have been set on our paths by the same goals and probably the same person. I am here if you need my help, I will send you contact information where I can be reached at all times. You need to trust me and I need to start trusting you. I know there are lots of questions and I promise in due time I will answer them all."

As she slowly walked back towards the door, Oliver spoke almost inaudibly

"Find her, you can trust her, she will help you, you are not alone" Diggle turned and confused asked "What is it Oliver?"

At the sound of one of her footsteps his eyes cut to her as he says loud enough for everyone to hear him this time "You are not alone" something unleashed inside of him, he wanted all the answers now, he wanted to see her face he needed to know.

He sprinted towards the stairs as she let out a warning shot only grazing him, but it did nothing to deter him.

She quickly reached the door and opened it as she sprinted across the factory towards the front door. She could hear his footsteps behind her and with a quick glance she looks back, drops and slides across the floor as she shot at his feet with the rubber bullets. Almost instantly Oliver's feet give out from under him and he hits the ground hard and fast barely avoiding hitting his face as his hands sprawl out in front of him.

He hears the door open and he immediately jumps to his feet and runs only a breath away from her, he can almost reach her. When he reaches the door she has just gone through the doorway, he looks outside and she is gone. The entrance is empty, not even a shadow. He curses loudly and punches the door as Diggle gets there and realizes she has done it again.

She has vanished.
Our Mistrust of the Future Makes it Hard to Give Up the Past

Chapter Summary

Felicity’s past is full of surprises that really show how she became the person that she is, who helped her along the way and how it all somehow comes back to her connection with Oliver and the people in his life.

Chapter Notes

This chapter will cover quite a bit of background. There will be appearances by a few other DC characters. Please remember most of this is AU. Thanks. ENJOY!!!

It had been 2 days since her little impromptu appearance in the Hood’s lair and if she learned one thing it was that she wasn’t planning on doing that again, well at least not anytime soon. It had been too close for comfort and to be honest she was still kind of reeling from the experience. In all her years delving into the mystery that was everything Queen related she had never let her guard down to the point that she was almost discovered. She had broken her number one rule and she hated herself for it. She wouldn’t be making that mistake again, ever. Her survival depended on it and a recently resurrected playboy with a boyish grin was not going to jeopardize all she built in the last 7 years of her life.

She had kept radio silence no matter how much Dig sought her out and how far and deep Oliver dug to get more information on her. She was thankful for one thing, their computer skills were lackluster at best, it seemed island living doesn’t come with technological upgrades. She made sure they hit every roadblock possible and sent them on one wild goose chase after another.

She had almost caved the last time Dig had called her. She even answered the phone deciding to let him talk and then hang up.

“Finally, why haven’t you picked up?” she heard the anxiousness in his voice yet, didn’t answer. He quickly realized she could hang up at any moment and decided to say everything he needed to say whether she answered or not.

“Look, I know our last encounter got a bit out of hand, but you have to understand it was a lot to take in, especially for him. He was… we were not expecting everything you revealed about Mr. Queen and your involvement with, well, everything. It seems as… That isn’t important, what we need now is to talk, clear everything up and begin to work together. He might take some convincing but in time… we just need to meet again, with less hostility”

A long silence passed and Diggle was ready to give up when he heard a long sigh come from the other end, so he waited. She tried, she really did but regardless of all her promises to herself she was finding it increasingly hard to ignore one John Diggle. There was something about him that she identified with, so she caved and answered him.
“Time, I can give him time, what I can’t give him is answers, not right now. Soon, I promise. Until then Mr. Diggle.”

“Okay” was all he could say, in reality what more could he say he was powerless in this battle. He had put his cards on the table and now it was up to them to move forward and he hoped they knew that but, more importantly he hoped that she had Oliver pegged and figured better than him, because he was at a loss from this point on.

“I guess until next time then, oh just one more thing” he took the silence as assurance to ask away “What should I call you?”

“Does it matter?”

“I’d like to think it does”

“What do you call me now?”

“Her? And well I…nothing”

“Mr. Diggle, spit it out”

“Nia” he hears her lightly laugh and he is sure that is the first time he has heard her actual voice, it was airy, lightweight, and different. With obvious amusement she answers him

“Like the warrior in the Swahili folktale your grandmother would tell you?”

“How the hell did you…there is no way…how?”

“I like it, let’s keep it.” she knows his heavier breathing is him racking his brain to figure out how she knew but, she is enjoying this way too much to give away her secret, which is just an email he once sent where he wrote about the story and his grandmother to his brother.

“So, it’s settled. Until next time, oh and Thank you Mr. Diggle, for everything” the click of her hanging up was what made him react, but he was too late. He tried to call back and it went straight to an automated message about the number being out of service. He used to think she was pretty impressive, now, he would be lying if he didn’t admit he was seriously creeped out.

To say that his conversation with Oliver went, horrible, would be putting it lightly, the proof was in the new supply table that was being delivered seeing as he had broken the last one out of anger and frustration. He didn’t understand how Diggle could be so calm. There was a complete stranger out there who knew all their secrets and possibly more than even he knew and yet, he was at her mercy. She had all the balls in her court and he hated it, a lot.

Felicity knew very well that she was like a moth to a flame when it came to the Queens, and if she was being completely honest she was especially partial to one Oliver Queen, but she wasn’t in the business of honesty, she was a puzzle solver.

Knowing that now more than ever she needed to tread lightly and play her cards just right she began to set her plan into motion. Contacting old friends and not so friendlies in order to completely and fully infiltrate the Queen’s lives, she was not taking any more chances. As she settled her last plans and booked her flight to a city she had hoped not to return to this soon she sighed and let it settle. The next couple of weeks were going to be anything but, enjoyable.

As she sunk into her couch with a glass of her favorite wine to run over her plans one last time her computer dinged that distinct tone she had set. She took one last long swig of wine knowing very
well that ding could set everything off kilter.

**AcidBurn:** Hey there love

**GFG:** What you got for me, been waiting long enough

**AcidBurn:** Hey, hey you requested a lot of information, a man can only do so much

**GFG:** Well I thought I was dealing with a top level analyst, not just a man. My mistake!

**Acid Burn:** Ha! Ha! Alright I get it, well I don’t know what you were expecting but if that was a shit storm coming your way, wish granted

**GFG:** I’ve never been the wishing type.

**AcidBurn:** I totally see that. Well hold on because here I come. I analyzed everything you sent for particulates, chemical composition, and origin just like you asked. Origin was simple enough most of it was an alloy composition mainly used on boats, top quality. Now some of the bits sent my spectrometer off the wall. Whatever boat those pieces came from it is now resting somewhere in the Indian sea, because those other bits were from a bomb.

**GFG:** Indian Sea?

**AcidBurn:** Sea minerals and deposits from the Indian sea were found, I am sending you the coordinates of the approximate area.

**GFG:** What about the bomb?

**AcidBurn:** Remnants of high level explosives, white phosphorus to be exact, was the main cause of the explosion. Nasty stuff and highly unstable. Now the interesting part is that when I searched into the use of white phosphorus along with my other findings one name kept coming up, they seem to be very much the trademark of one Ulysses H. Armstrong, also known as

**GFG:** The General, I know him well. What else?

**AcidBurn:** that’s it, with the limited information that is as far as I got. Besides that, all I can tell you is that the boat was under water at least 2-3 years based on the corrosion of the material.

**GFG:** Great, send me all the results, you know where to send it

**AcidBurn:** You know if you give me more details maybe I can look into the finances of The General and backtrace who hired him

**GFG:** Or I can do that

**AcidBurn:** Right! Hacker, my bad

**GFG:** ;)

**AcidBurn:** Well, I just sent it, happy findings

**GFG:** Thanks and like always payment is in the metaphorical mail

**AcidBurn:** Much appreciated
Dammit, she didn't know what the hell The General had to do in all of this but it seemed that she was taking this trip not a minute too soon. Robert, knew something had gone wrong but she had no idea the extent. Just when she thought she had gained an advantage she ended up three steps back. She had to admit the young Queen came into her life probably just in time. She made a silent promise to Robert, she would keep his son safe.

For now her only immediate concern was how many vacation days she had available at QC.

As Oliver finished taking out his frustration on Diggle, he couldn’t help but shake the idea that there was someone out there who knew the whole story. He had a confession from his father, a book he later found, and his hallucinations to guide him. While it was evident that she, whoever she was, knew everything and had all the answers to his past five years of questions, he knew nothing about her, didn’t even have the simplest form of communication.

He knew it was his fault, he had been rash and aggressive and scared her away. Well, maybe not scared, he had a feeling she didn’t scare easily. But he had sent her running and cutting off all communication, he had been an idiot.

As Diggle approached him with a bottle of water he was so entrenched in his thoughts he didn't quite hear what he said, only catching the last part which was enough to catch his attention.

“What? What are you talking about my IT Girl? What about Felicity?” He asked genuinely concerned, he could feel the tension growing in him, he had feared seeking any type of outside help knowing that he could be putting them in danger as he wasn’t even sure what he was dealing with.

Registering his concerned face, Diggle, moved quickly to clarify.

“Relax, I was just saying that I saw her, your IT girl, at the Gala last week”

“Felicity Smoak.”

“Yeah, Felicity. Unless you have some other IT girl I don’t know about?” he said trying to make light of the conversation seeing as his small talk had just got turned on its head.

Oliver’s glare and growing frustration for him to explain where this was going made him sigh in resignation as he continued.

“She was there, at the gala, with that dude you had lunch with at your house with your mom.”

“BOWEN? Carter Bowen??”

“I guess, you think that’s her boyfriend? She was obviously his date.” Seeing Oliver’s expression he has to ask the next question and he would be lying if he didn’t feel a bit of worry begin to creep up on him as well.

“Is that going to be a problem, is he a problem? Oliver if she is in some kind of danger we have...” seeing Dig’s concerned and confused face he reigns in his features and simply adds,

“Not at all. I was just surprised. She didn’t strike me as the, nevermind. It is not a problem. So what do we have on the next name?”

A long silence passed between them and as he watched Oliver walk towards the salmon ladder to continue training. He knew that was a conversation he had to bookmark for later.
As Oliver began training he wondered why he hadn’t noticed Felicity at the gala. Feeling a little uneasy about the whole thing he decided to check in on their unofficial member the next time he was at QC.

Felicity knew her time was scarce and that if she wanted to make a move on the whole Tommy/Cordelia situation she needed to do that now, precisely when his father had cut him off, financially. Seeing as he had been so receptive to the contact she had already made with him, it was now or never. She had a meeting set for drinks in a couple of hours at a hotel near Starling City National Airport, using the excuse that she was only in the city for a couple of hours before she had to head back home. As she finished getting ready and summoning Cordelia she found herself a little rusty when it came to the very breathy posh british accent she used. She couldn’t help but admonish herself for falling out of practice and becoming too comfortable as just Felicity. She had been warned of the dangers of complacency.

→ → → → →

“Look, you say you want this that you know exactly why you are doing this, but all I see is insecurity, doubt and fear. Sorry, sweetie but that shit is just not going to cut it. You need to toughen up or get the hell out and stop wasting my time.”

“I am not going anywhere and you can’t kick me out, you OWE me, or did you forget?”

“How could I? You remind me every step of the way, my gratitude will run out, soon.”

“You’ve been saying that for the past three months.”

“And you haven’t improved in the last four.”

As she stared at him mouth agape and with slowly narrowing eyes she couldn’t help but agree with him.

One year prior she had found herself in the middle of a fight that wasn’t hers, she had no idea until it was over, who she was fighting and just who she had just made her enemies.

The minute she heard the words ‘Suicide Squad’ she knew, for lack of a better word, she had fucked up, royally. She was already in her own war and here she was now jumping into a fight, fresh out of training, disobeying her mentor and friend. Halfway through she realized she was standing there face on display for all to see, man she truly was a newbie.

Just as she decided to resort to defensive maneuvers and get out of there ASAP she was hit with a powdered substance right in her face. She lost sight for a bit and immediately dropped low, all her senses going into overdrive. As she walked back she stumbled on something and clearly heard a groan.

Regaining her balance she looked down and saw a blonde man in black tactical gear wounded and weak. She immediately grabbed him from his shoulder holster and began to drag him away. Stumbling more than once and unable to properly coordinate, she was beginning to worry for both their safety.

She quickly made it to one of the jeep convoys and managed to throw him in and drive
away, vision blurring and minor spasms began to tell her something was seriously wrong. As she began to swerve she felt a limp hand lay on her arm, she turned and made eye contact with half hooded blue eyes and was surprised to see the man had propped himself up in the seat.

“Pull over.”

“I can’t. I need to get to the safe house.”

“Pull. Over.”

“No, now concentrate on not dying.”

“If you don’t pull over we are both going to die, 100 meters turn right cabin down the road stop there.”

She didn’t question him she didn’t have the luxury to do that her tongue was going numb and she could feel the spasms spreading to her hands and her feet which was evident by her suddenly hitting the brakes. She drove faster, the fear was taking over.

As soon as they reached the cabin she went to get him out, she helped him up and felt a prick on her neck. How the hell did he inject her? How did she not see it? Out of surprise she dropped him on the ground. He landed with a loud thump and an even louder groan. Before she could turn on him he said one word that stopped her dead in her tracks.

“Antidote”

In a flash she understood, the powder had been poisoning her. She was starting to feel better so she quickly picked him up and took him inside to tend to his wounds. She was still reeling and her senses were still all wonky but the spasms had stopped. As she tried to help him he simply nodded and told her that all they both needed was rest.

She couldn’t agree more, she had been struggling to keep her eyes open for the last 10 min. As she began to give in she saw him get up and grab the first aid kit, last image she registered was of him cutting his shirt open and gathering supplies.

When she woke up 2 hours later she felt like, well, like she had just been run over by a freight train, twice. Her head felt like it would explode and the low burning light of the candles felt like halogens in her eyes. She tried to get up and quickly laid back down.

When she opened her eyes again she saw those blue eyes scanning over her and with a glass of water in hand, he was her new favorite person. She gladly took it and drank it all. When she looked up he had a smirk on his face and was reaching his hand out.

“Welcome back, that’s some nasty stuff, huh? No worries the headache will pass, eventually.”

“What was that? Who were they? Who are you?”

He slightly chuckled before he took the glass from her still weak hands. She couldn’t help but notice the wince when he reached and she knew his injuries had been worse than he had said earlier. She could also tell he was favoring his left side, she made note of that in case she had to get out of this cabin, in a hurry.
“My name is Nemesis, nice to meet you?”

With a tilt of her head and a look of disbelief she questioned him “Seriously, Nemesis? That’s what you’re going with? Sounds like a comic book villain.”

“Then you are going to love this, those guys were the Suicide Squad…”

“Suicide Squad? That is just as ridiculous. They’re not real, that’s just ridiculous”

“Maybe, but we are effective”

“We?” it hit her like ice cold water, he was one of them a member of this secret government squad composed of criminals and convicts that up until a couple of hours ago she thought were just a conspiracy theorist’s wet dream. She had been wrong, obviously.

She didn’t even know when she had picked up the large fire iron and taken a defensive position but his raised eyebrows and surprised look told her he wasn’t expecting that. Had he wanted to kill her he would have done it while she slept, she realized belatedly.

As he raised his hands in surrender he opted to sit down,

“Seeing as you did save my life, the name is Thomas Tresser, pleasure to meet you?”

“Felicity, just Felicity”

“Well, just Felicity, now that we are acquainted I guess it’s only appropriate that I thank you for saving my life, Thanks, I owe you.”

“I’ll hold you to that. Now what the hell was all that.”

He laughed at her complete change in mood, she looked more relaxed and almost feisty, he would be lying if he didn’t say he kind of liked this girl, she had spunk.

“That is a long story, the point is some people are not happy that we are working for the government and some hate it even more when we come to their ‘territory’ and well sometimes fighting ensues. As to what that was in regards to you, that’s a little nasty substance created by one of my less than friendly squad members, a lunatic by the name of Count Vertigo”...

A quick and hard smack to her head took her out of her memory. She was about to respond but realized she had gotten distracted, again. She gave him an apologetic smile and took the ready stance.

“You ready to do the exercise again and again until you are flawless?”

“Yes!”

“Great, this is a skill Felicity, the minute you become overly confident or stop practicing it, is the minute you get caught in your own lies, get tangled up and you lose, everything. Got it?”

She simply nodded and continued to practice. She was thankful that an expert of disguise of Tom’s caliber had taken her under his wing even if that meant the occasional scuffle with the ‘good guys’ she had a mission and Tom was a necessary asset.

“Now sing, and make me believe you are Cordelia from London, Cambridge graduate and yada
She still didn’t quite understand how this would train her to disguise her voice but she trusted him having seen him on the field. She knew damn well that if he asked her to sing row row row your boat while jumping on one leg and spinning down a busy interstate, she would probably do it, but he didn’t need to know that.

As for how to disguise her face she had a good friend with some great tech that was going to help her in that department.

She entered the Ritz feeling fully confident that she was Cordelia from her overly primped hair to her Louboutins. As she sat at the bar to wait for Tommy she knew she had to play this just right, she could not burn through this identity like some of the others, Cordelia was a valuable asset.

Tommy wasn’t quite sure why he had agreed to this meeting. He had always been attracted to Cordelia but it had become clear from the beginning that she was all business and that had made him like her even more, over time. Now here he was 40 minutes outside of the city having drinks with her at a hotel bar.

When she contacted him he didn’t know what to think when she said she had a business proposition, he couldn’t help but notice she had appeared at exactly the right time.

He easily spotted her in the small crowd and walked eagerly towards her. As he approached her she instinctively turned, eyebrow raised and lip slightly turned up.

“Cordelia, wow you are quite a sight for sore eyes”

“Oh Thomas, always the charmer, thank you.” She waves over the waiter with a barely noticeable gesture and they are quickly being seated in a quiet private table. His favorite drink being placed in front of him before he could even order it. With a devilish grin he thanks her.

“Now, let us get to business.”

“Always the same with you Cordelia all work and no play. How have you been? How’s life?”

“Busy. Now, I contacted you because I am looking for a partner I can trust in Starling City whom can protect my interest, and naturally my favorite Starling resident came to mind.”

“Well, I hope I rank higher in your favorites list than just within Starling City” he said with a smirk. She allowed herself a subtle chuckle before she continued.

“I am expanding my marketing and public relations business to the west coast and I need a field manager for the whole west coast. Let us be honest Thomas, nobody handles the media and public quite like you and I would love to tap into that particular skill set.”

“Years of being a tabloid darling finally paying off, and here my father said that all that bad publicity would never amount to anything.”

“So you are interested?”

“Very”

“Great! I am heading to the US home office to settle last minute details. Meet me there next week
from and we shall go over the details, your contract and negotiate. If all goes well in two weeks time we will be partners.” She said the last bit with a wink and a raise of her glass. He gladly toasted with her. With a promise to see her in four days time they said their goodbyes.

Felicity was surprised by how well that meeting had gone, she honestly thought she would have a little convincing to do but it seemed like Tommy was more than eager.

Everything was set for her plan, now she had to finish prepping. QC had given her the time off she needed and her flight was set to takeoff in three days time. Meanwhile she would have to prepare herself to reunite with people that might not be too happy to see her.

The three days passed in record time, as the seat belt light lit up and the captain announced that they would be landing soon, she took a deep reassuring breath. She was ready for this, it had been three years but she was coming back to one of her dearest friends and that outweighed the fact that some other acquaintances might be waiting too.

As she walks through Gotham City International Airport she looks for her hired driver but can’t seem to find him, she is already running 10 minutes late for her meet with Cassandra and there is nothing Cass hates more than tardiness. She hurriedly makes her way towards the exit resigned to take a taxi when she hears an unmistakable voice.

“Well, to what does Gotham owe the pleasure of your visit Ms. Todd?”

“Business, Mr. Todd” she says turning slowly, chin up, an unaffected stare into deep blue unyielding, cold eyes.

“Well then, shall we?” the unwelcome ‘acquaintance’ says with a smirk.

“I have a driver” she says quickly turning around and continuing on her way.

“That would be me, and I prefer to think of it as an old friend doing you a favor” he smirks at her as he catches up and stands in front of her impeding her from continuing any further.

“I’ll take a cab” she says with aggravation as she walks around him.

Before she can go too far, not that she could get very far in those stupid Louboutins, he grabs her arm and turns her into him

“Seriously, Cordelia I love our cat and mouse play but Cassandra is waiting. You know how she feels about waiting” she sighs deeply and simply nods, he winks at her and she can’t help but roll her eyes as she walks ahead of him.

If she knows him and she does, he is parked directly in front, illegally and not really caring. That used to be charming and alluring now it’s exasperating and immature, especially when she is supposed to be the one in her early twenties and reckless.

He opens the door and helps her in letting his hand linger a bit too long on her elbow, With a poignant look he lets go and they are on their way. Of all the people she expected to see, he, was the last she ever expected to make an appearance. To say that his unexpected presence worried her was putting it lightly, it set her on edge, yet again he always had a way of setting her on edge, setting all her emotions to their max and not in a good way.
“Jesus, Cass did you have to move to the sketchiest neighborhood in Bludhaven? It took me two weeks to find you and believe…”

Before he could finish his sentence the butt of a sword was hitting him upside the head the room going instantly black. When he came to, he had a pack of ice on his head and a pair of apologetic eyes scanning him over, apologetic beautiful eyes he noticed once his sight focused a bit more.

Sitting up he saw Cass come into sight with a smirk and a couple of aspirin. “Here you fool, you know you’re lucky she was here.”

“HA! Lucky? Getting knocked out isn’t necessarily lucky”

“Well, had I been here I would’ve killed you”

“I guess I am lucky” he answered sarcastically.

“What are you doing here?” she asked

“Our friend sent me to find you”

“Well, you did, now you can go back to Gotham.”

“and bring you back”

“Oh, I am afraid that part of your mission will be a bust.”

“Come on Cass. We need you back home. You can’t tell me you would rather be here in this shit hole with baby blue eyes there.”

“Careful, Todd or I’ll let her show you how much more effective she is with the other end of that sword.”

He snorts loudly before getting up and walking directly into her personal space and extending his hand, “Jason Todd, and you are? Besides gorgeous”

Felicity makes quick eye contact with Cass and she gives her an approving nod, “Felicity, just Felicity”.

Three weeks later Jason had made himself at home with them and had even partaken in her training. He definitely was impressed with her martial arts skills even more when he learned that she had previously trained with Richard Dragon.

“Wait, wait you trained with Dragon and now you are here training with Cass, what can she possibly teach you that a master like Dragon didn't already?”

“Many things, more importantly modern weaponry. Also let us not diminish the value of training with a woman who understands your limitations and knows how to turn them into an advantage.”

“Modern weaponry? You call the sword modern, cause sweetheart let me tell you your definition of modern…”

“Dragon showed me the sword” she interrupted him. He raised his eyebrows in surprise before he continued,
“Well, aren’t I glad you never showed me your skill set that first night we met.”

“Lucky, you were lucky” she smiled at him.

“So, I’ve been told” he winked back at her.

Six months later her training was coming to an end but she had one last job to do as payment to Cass. She had to assume a new identity and infiltrate a company in order to gather intel.

“Everything is set, all you have to do is enter your name and you will be cleared to enter the company under your new identity as an overseas consultant.”

“Name, damn I need a new name. How about Cordelia?”

“I like that, it suits you, fucken sexy” emphasized Jason as he came to sit next to her leaving no room in between them. “Cordelia what?” he asked as he brushed some hair away from her face and tucked it behind her ear.

“Uhmm I have no idea, Cass?”

“It needs to be something easy to remember that you won’t get tripped up by, maybe something common.”

“How about Todd? Cordelia Todd! Damn, I always wondered what my last name would look like on a beautiful lady, I like it. How about you Ms. Todd?” he says as he stands and extends his hand to take hers.

“Has a nice ring to it, Mr. Todd” she answers with a smile as she takes his hand and stands up.

“So it is settled, the birth of Mrs. Cordelia Todd” he says as he raises her hand and places a kiss on it.

“Uhmm not quite. It’s actually Miss Cordelia Todd, single” she says with a smirk and a wink as he raises his eyebrows and a sneer overcomes his lips which are still lingering on the back of her hand.

His hand on her arm and the sudden stop of the car brought her out of her memory. She would have never imagined back then that only a year later she would find herself showing him those precise sword skills she had once mentioned in friendly conversation. Life definitely had a way of turning friends into strangers and lovers into enemies. His voice finally brought her completely out of her reverie.

“Anytime, sweetheart.”

She simply nods at him as she makes her way out of the car and towards the cafe.

She sees the woman she has called a friend for many years sitting and looking as lethal as always. Normally she would attempt to sneak up on her and spark that glint of surprise and pride every time she got one up on her but with Jason she knows that is impossible he is as inconspicuous as an elephant in a china shop. The minute they park, tires screeching, she knows Cass is waiting for them.

“Hello Cordy” she says with a warm smile and a look that lets her know she really means “Hello ‘City”. She smiles back and can’t help the rush in her step as she hugs her, something about Cass always felt like home. They sit and quickly move past emotions and catching up and dive right into
As Jason comes and takes a seat putting a cup of Moroccan mint tea in front of her she sighs, her irritation evident she is about to say something when Cass, ever perceptive, beats her to it.

“You had many request, some required pulling some strings that are not mine.”

“That’s where I come in Gorgeous, oh and by the way you’re supposed to say thank you when someone brings you your favorite tea.” he says leaning forward and into her personal space.

“I prefer coffee” she says without even looking at him keeping her eyes on Cass.

“Since when?” He is genuinely surprised seeing as when they were better acquainted he had a cupboard full of different exotic teas just for her. Her favorite being a moroccan mint mix he had brought back from Morocco.

“Always.” She looks pointedly at him out of the corner of her eye and then purposely turns her whole body to look at Cass ignoring Jason she continues, “If he has to be here then he has to be quiet.”

“Fine by me” smirks Cass.

“HEY!” but that is as much protest as Jason gets in before they both turn to look at him so intensely he almost squirms, almost. He smirks then snorts before sitting back and sipping on his coffee.

They continue to talk business for the next two hours until Cass gets a call, the building she rented to be the face of Cordelia’s business is ready and the crew is there for any last minute changes. They head out and continue to discuss their plan on the way, Jason only chiming in every now and then.

Everything was set and so far no one had caught wind of her return to Gotham City. Tommy was set to arrive in a couple of hours. She had arranged to fly him over privately. The business aspect was running flawlessly and Jason had even agreed to make an appearance as himself in the waiting room, in order to chat up Tommy and legitimize her business even more.

As Tommy makes his way into the Lobby he makes no effort to look around or take in any of his surroundings. Having grown up in big fancy buildings they didn’t impress him. As he approaches the receptionist she immediately greets him without him uttering a word.

“Mr. Thomas Merlyn, pleasure to have you in Gotham City. I hope your flight was pleasant. Ms. Todd is waiting for you on the top floor one of our security will accompany you. Now if you would please check in your cell phone and any other electronic devices we would greatly appreciate it.” At his confused look she further explains,

“It is company protocol. We have many high profile clients and privacy is our number one priority.” she states with a smile.

“Of course” he responds placing his cell phone and laptop in the secured drawer.

“Now go ahead and pick your own password and I will lock this in front of you so that you are assured that no one will have access, but you sir.”

At that he smiles as he enters his code and shuts the drawer. He is escorted to the top floor and asked to please wait while they inform Ms. Todd that he has arrived.

As he sits and waits he hears a loud laugh carry into the room before he sees the man it belongs to,
immediately recognizing him.

“Tommy Merlyn as I live and breath, what the hell are you doing in Gotham City? And more importantly why aren’t we getting drunk with a pair of beauties on our arms” he says as he embraces him.

“Jason Todd, it’s been ages. I see the Wayne lifestyle is treating you pretty great.”

“Can’t complain. So what are you doing here at ninelmuses”

“I have a meeting with Cordelia Todd”

“Oh, please tell me that is a business meeting and not a pleasure one. Because I have been trying to change that woman’s name to Cordelia Todd- Todd, if you know what I mean, for ages and if a green billionaire playboy like yourself beat me to it, I am going to be devastated.” They both laugh loudly before Tommy finally clarifies.

“No, not at all. All business on this end. But I see you are still same old Jason on that end.”

“Until the day I die. Honestly though no one does the talent, marketing and public image thing like Cordelia, she is the best. Only person Wayne Industries uses.”

“Glad to hear it.” with that Jason excuses himself feigning a phone call. A minute later Cordelia comes out and welcomes Tommy. They jump right into business and a couple of hours and a lunch meeting later everything is settled and his contract is signed as the new Lead of the West Coast headquarters.

As she walks him down to the lobby they are about to say goodbye when Jason intercepts them again calling both their names from across the lobby floor. Knowing very well that she will have to put on her business face he goes full force and takes advantage of her predicament.

“Tommy boy leaving so early? No way I cannot let you leave Gotham without having dinner with me tonight. Cordy and I have dinner reservations at Rioja Crianza, best red wine in Gotham and you have to join us.”

He shots a knowing smile to Cordelia as she cringes at his use of her nickname. She then turns to face Tommy and puts on her best business smile.

“Of course Thomas you should join us, enough business for one day.”

Tommy concedes and they make plans to pick him up at 7:30pm.

“Cass did we get all the info from his cellphone and laptop?”

“Yes we did and the tracker has been set on both. We have full access to his devices, I already tested everything and it is up and running. FYI he got an email from his father, let’s just say he is making it awfully easy to keep him working with us. He just asked him to pick up his things and move out of Merlyn Manor.”

“Hardly a father, I’d say. Poor guy no wonder he got in so much trouble growing up. I always thought he was exaggerating when he said his dad was a monster”

“Guess not” adds Felicity.

As she sat down to add some ghost programs onto his computer she couldn’t help but smile at how
well her plan was evolving. Quickly finishing up she starts to get ready for her unplanned dinner, hoping Jason didn’t have anything up his sleeve, but he rarely did anything without an agenda.

As she finishes getting ready and slipping into an elegant lace black dress she expertly ties her knife holster to her thigh

“I see old habits die hard” Cass’ satin voice carries through the room with a melancholic smile.

“I could say the same thing to you. What ever you are trying to read, stop. I am not hiding anything.”

“That’s not what your body is saying”

“Yeah, well you aren’t an open book either. I saw your reaction, subtle as it may be, to the information on the laptop. Whatever you suspect you know you have to share with me.” Cass slightly huffs in amusement before she sends a defiant look towards Felicity.

“Hey, I was taught by the best.”

Trying to change the subject she focuses back on the knives

“You still favor the Cold Steel throwers”

“Only after I have them modified” she winks at her.

“I remember” she says subconsciously ghosting her hand over her left thigh, where a 5 inch scar lay.

As Cassandra Cain leaped gracefully from rooftop to rooftop keeping in her line of sight the dark haired woman dressed all in black she couldn’t help but hope this was the woman from the picture she had been searching for high and low. Her last link to the man that could save her life.

As the woman turned the corner into an alley Cassandra rushed to try and keep an eye on her but she was gone. As she came to a halt and started to look around she saw a shadow on the fire escape of the adjacent building yet, heard nothing. Shifting to get a better look she lost sight of her again, only to see her take a swinging backwards leap onto the roof from inside a window on the top floor.

Immediately taking off running behind the woman trying and half the time failing to keep her in sight. This had to be her. The way she moved and glided through the high skyline of Bludhaven only confirmed this was the young brunette from the picture she found, her only link to Richard Dragon.

Reading her movements she realized she was getting ready to lead down the building, judging by the way she shifted her center of gravity and tightened her body, anticipating her next move she leaped down and immediately took off to intercept her descent.

Her plan paid off as she came around the corner just as the woman hit the ground with a grunt. Immediately picking up some heavy debri tossing it and taking her legs out from under her. Before the woman could fall she twisted her body and before her body even touched the ground Cassandra felt a sharp pain in her left thigh, as she looked down she saw a jagged throwing knife embedded deep in her leg.

With surprised eyes she turned to look at the woman who was already up and running again. After what seemed like hours of chasing she had lost her in the twist and turns of a city that the woman obviously knew better than her. As she slowed down to take in her surroundings and try to track her, she felt another knife push up against her throat and a strong arm band around her.
“Who are you? What do you want? Why are you following me?”

“I am not your enemy, I just need some information”

“Nice try, crazy leather lady. You don’t hunt down someone that you want information from.”

“Look, I mean you no harm I am just looking for Richard Dragon and I know you…” Cassandra didn’t even get a chance to finish her statement before she was being punched in the ribs repeatedly and tossed to the ground. The mention of Dragon obviously setting her off.

Cassandra had no choice but to fight back, immediately taking a defensive stance and dodging a knife that flew straight at her chest. They both knew they were in for quite a fight. What the woman hadn’t expected was for the crazy leather lady to counteract every move she threw her way and predict every next move she planned.

Exhaustion was quickly taking over as she realized her predator was blocking her every move never really hitting her unless absolutely necessary. As she began to recognize her strategy she drew back her attack, thankful, seeing as she was on verge of collapse after running more than 5 miles, jumping off a building and fighting for the better part of an hour.

With heavy breaths she asked again, still with a knife in her hand, she was no fool after all, “Who are you?”

“Cassandra Cain, and please don’t hold it against me.”

With evident shock she stated “Daughter of Lady Shiva” Cassandra only nodded while raising her hands in surrender.

“What do you want with Master Dragon?”

“I am hoping he can save my life” she said sincerely.

“How?”

“Well that is a long story, and it is quite cold and I am aching. Can we talk somewhere else?”

Hesitantly she reached down for her phone made a few precise strokes then nodded for her to follow.

“You know my name, but I know nothing about you.”

The woman stopped abruptly contemplating her next move, Cassandra saw her shoulders relax in resignation before she turned to face her and extended her hand “Felicity, just Felicity”.

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As a very cocky Jason, a slightly sad Tommy and an irritated Cordelia made their way into the restaurant they were quickly seated and the best bottle of red wine was presented to them. Cordelia gave an approving nod, noting Jason’s knowing smirk at her approval of his choice. They talked and ordered dinner as the night passed without a hitch. Cordelia couldn’t help but notice the sadness that laid behind Tommy’s smile.

She had no doubt he had read his father’s email and she couldn’t help but sympathize with him. She really hoped that this new venture although in many ways fake would provide him with some pride and much needed distraction from his family problems.
As the night ended and they said their goodbyes Cordelia couldn’t help let a little Felicity out as she took a minute to talk to him alone

“Thomas, I know this is none of my business and I have no place in this but, as you know within our circles news, especially gratuitous gossip, spreads quickly. I don’t pretend to understand your relationship with your father, but if he fails to see what I saw the first time I met you then there is no more you can do than live your life for yourself and hope that time will show him otherwise. You’re a great man, and a great businessman Thomas and I hope, in time, I will be proven correct in assuming you are also a great friend.” She squeezed his hand which she still held and gave him a soft smile, unbecoming of Cordelia Todd but very much that of Felicity Smoak.

He could do nothing more than nod from the surprise of her sudden speech and couldn’t help but return her smile with gratitude and a new sense of admiration for more than just the businesswoman.

With the days quickly passing she finished up her business in Gotham City, and was thankful that everything on the home-front had been quiet.

Enjoying finally being done with her little ruse she enjoyed laying on the couch drinking a great red with one of her closest friends. She couldn’t help but admit that she missed this, the familiarity and ease of having someone on her side.

Taking her first deep breath in weeks, six to be precise, she hoped that everything she had set in motion would be well worth it and that her many lives wouldn’t collide and drag her down with them. As she contemplated her next move in Starling City she heard Cassandra shift and sigh for the 3rd time.

That was enough to remind her of their pending conversation.

“Spit it out Cass.”

“City...”

“Don’t Cass. You saw something in that laptop that set you off now spill.”

Taking a deep breath she slumped into the couch and Felicity knew she had won. “Merlyn’s dad?”

“Malcolm Merlyn. CEO of Merlyn Global, what about him?”

“I ran into some of his pictures on Tommy’s computer, he looked familiar, something about him set me on edge and I can’t quite place it. How much do you know about Merlyn Senior?”

“Not much, but I am starting to think I should maybe look into him?”

“Yes, you should. I might be confusing him but my instincts are telling me that...”

“Say no more. If I have learned one thing it is to never doubt your instincts. You know my hands are pretty full right now and well maybe you...”

“No worries, I will look into him maybe get in contact with some people and scratch this itch.”

“Thanks Cass.”

“Now that that is settled I can almost see the bottom of your glass and that is” she says pointing at
Felicity for her to finish her sentence,

“Unacceptable and atrocious” they both laugh only being interrupted by a ding from her tablet which is immediately followed by a couple more dings.

She reaches for her tablet and quickly opens her programs only to see the flurry of news of a shooting at Queen Consolidated in which one Moira Queen was almost injured and one very well known and notorious mobster, Paul Copani, part of the Bertenelli Family was killed.

She grunts in frustration as she quickly access the street cameras and is not surprised to see a very quick and agile Oliver Queen almost run down the mysterious motorcycle shooter. She grunts once again as she calls the hanger and requests they prepare the plane, she needs to be in Starling City before sunset.

Cass gives her a knowing look to which Felicity just shakes her head raising her hand in pause telling her to not even ask. Cass smirks and gets up to help her pack. She figures it was nice while it lasted but they both had complicated lives and they needed to get back to them.

They say their goodbyes and reassure each other that they need to do this again, soon. When Felicity arrives at the runway she isn’t surprised to see Jason waiting for her, that man really did have his finger on the pulse of Gotham City.

“Whatever it is Jason, I promise you I have no time and even less patience,”

“This is all business Felicity just some info that I think you should be aware of.”

“Okay, what is it.”

“Wayne and I recently encountered two old friends of ours while overseas on business. Normally, I wouldn’t share any of this with you but seeing as one of them went out of his way to mention you, I figured it was courtesy to inform you.”

“Okay now you piqued my interest Jason. Spit it out already.”

“Constantine Drakon and Deathstroke.” He couldn't have missed the slight gasp that left her lips as she heard the name of the man that killed her father and held his mother’s life in his hands.

“When?” she asked through gritted teeth. She had been looking for him ever since he got away from the SCPD at the Hunt building.

“Two weeks ago when I left the country.”

“And you tell me NOW?!”

“Look Felicity, Drakon made no mention of you I don’t think he realized that the you that Deathstroke spoke off was the same you that Drakon knows.”

“How does Deathstroke know who I am, he’s never met me as me. Tell me everything.”

“How much spinach has this asshole been eating? Would of been nice if you had mentioned super strength in the file you sent” he gritted out still feeling the impact of Deathstroke’s punch to his ribs. He heard the click in the comm as the frustrated voice came through.

“That’s because he didn’t. Dammit we need a new tactic. Get out of there , we will finish this fight
“Another night”

“Are you two kidding me, right now. There is no need to regroup we just need to avoid close range combat. We can still get what we came for. I didn’t get dragged all the way out here to run.” she perches on top of the trash bins getting a better view and empties out a full clip. She knows she managed to catch the small portion of skin exposed where his collar ends and his mask begins, the slow trickle of blood a good indication.

She sees him raise his hand and touch the blood and release a boisterous laugh. “Seems like you aren’t so useless after all, Red.” his tone dripping in arrogance.

“Red that is an order, both of you get out of there now, we don’t know what we are dealing with and we need him alive. We can’t risk either of you being exposed or worse” he knew ordering her around wasn’t a good idea but he was frustrated with himself as his injuries had him uselessly sitting in a damn cave.

“Red, he’s right. I can barely stand and we have no idea what this dude is on. You always say that it’s better to fight smart than hard, so let’s be smart about it.”

“Fine. I hate it when you use my genius against me, on our way back” she mutes the comm as she starts to retreat, she can hear the cackle and taunts behind the creepy black and orange mask.

“Runaway now children, run and hide and tell the bat I’ll be waiting for him when he’s ready to show his coward of a face. Next time you two cross my path I won’t let you walk away.”

“You know I had already decided to leave when he didn’t even flinch when I emptied the whole clip into him, I just didn’t want to give Batboy the satisfaction”

“I know Lizzie, but when he’s right he’s right. Plus he knows Deathstroke, very well, if he felt something was off we need to trust his instincts. Also he called you by your codename.”

“I know I heard him. It doesn’t matter it’s a throwaway name anyway.”

Bruce had no choice but to let him go and lose him again after years of searching. He couldn’t take the risk his super strength had been a surprise and he wondered who made the already deadliest man in the world even more dangerous.

Luckily for him before the trail went cold Felicity managed to track what he was doing in his city and make a sizable dent in his funding and more than likely managed to piss him off even more and draw a bigger target on herself. Her pride was going to end up getting her hurt, or worse.

“Felicity the video message was reckless, now he knows it was you.”

“That was the point Brucy boy.”

“You girl takes too many risk and it will cost her.” he barks at Jason as he exits the room.

“I am not his girl”, “That’s what I like about her” they both say at the same time. His comment earning him a shoe to the head her’s pulling an honest laugh from him, the kind she’d grown to like more and more everyday.”

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“Deathstroke mentioned Red, it seems he hasn’t forgotten you. He sent a warning, he said you might of tried and hid but he’s kept his ear to the ground and knows you’ve been meddling. He’s out for
blood Lizzie, he threatened to find you and kill you for your interference on the island.” She said nothing as he contemplated whether to continue “Felicity, this mission of yours seems to come at a price…”

“Don’t Jason, just don’t. We’ve had this conversation before and we agreed to disagree.” she interrupted clearly upset.

“Not sure a sword to my neck and a broken nose and rib is an agreement but fine. Just promise me you will be extra careful and I will let you know if I hear anything else. Please Felicity, take care of yourself. Deathstroke, he...something was off like deadly off. just be careful.”

As she walked away she said over her shoulder “Aren’t I always.” She boarded the plane and just as the doors closed Jason whispered to himself,

“No, and that’s what worries me Lizzie.”
As her plane landed in Starling City she took a deep breath and prepared for the inevitable, she would have to re-initiate contact with Oliver and she wasn’t quite sure how that would all go, especially since she now had, in Cass’ opinion, one too many identities roaming around Starling, and one too many potential people whom could figure it all out.

She had scoffed at the, as she saw it, criticism of her abilities. Cass should know better, hadn’t she fooled her once before to prove this point. She would never admit it but Cass’ worries did affect her. She had felt herself getting tired and some nights everything seemed to overwhelm her and threaten to drown her just as sleep would creep in. If the panic attack she had after her last encounter was an indicator she wasn’t as put together as she told people. Hell after her conversation with Jason, the almost panic attack she had on the plane spoke volumes to where her head really was at.

Yet, she didn’t have time to dwell, especially not as she was leaping across buildings following this mysterious leather clad woman on a motorcycle. Well, she suspected it was a woman her figure and mannerism were a dead giveaway. She was going to put an end to these hits, the right way.

She saw the bike come to a stop in the distance near a dark warehouse, she hurried across the last three rooftops to catch up and get a better look. Propelling down the side and landing silently in the alleyway she sneaked into the warehouse before the door closed, sticking close to the shadows. Her eyes adjust just as the helmet comes off revealing long brown hair, she had a bet going with herself that it was a woman, guess she had just won.

She considers confronting her just then but thinks better when the woman turns and she realizes that she looks awfully familiar. She snaps some pictures and stays to gather some intel before heading off to better plan her next move.

As she is about to leave she feels her phone vibrate and silently curses herself for forgetting to turn it off. Luckily the woman is gone but had it gone off just two minutes prior she might be in the middle of a fight she didn’t want to have, not yet at least. Looking down she is not surprised to see the 10th
message from one exasperating Oliver Queen. She is beginning to regret ever giving him her number. Wow, she never thought she’d say that about the playboy billionaire, how quickly time changes everything.

**Oliver: Where are you? What was the point of this number if you don’t answer? We have a problem in Starling City.**

She smiles down at her phone at his use of “we”, at least it seems he is warming up to the idea of teamwork. She puts the phone away and finishes taking pictures before heading home. On her way back she receives three more messages the last one from Dig, stating an emergency. She simply rolls her eyes, boys can be so dramatic.

Tommy is man enough to admit that what he is about to do is scary, really fucken scary. Yet, he knows that with the way his luck is going lately he better ride this high before it turns on him. As he knocks a young man comes to stand next to him, he sighs deeply, and damn he spoke too soon.

“Hi Laurel, to be fair I was here 10 seconds before this guy” Tommy says as charming as he can possibly be standing outside of Laurel’s apartment carrying take out next to the pizza delivery guy. As she pays and lets him in, he decides he needs to jump straight in, before his luck further declines.

“Look Laurel, I know we went about this the wrong way from being friends for a very long time, to friend's with benefits, very good benefits, and now I would like to take you out, to dinner”

“So you brought dinner, to invite me to dinner?” she smiles at him

“Yes, I feel like recent events in my life are finally taking me in the right direction and I’d like for everything else to also fall into place, and that involves you going out with me, on a date.”

She can’t help but beam at him, damn he is charming she must give him that and he is also right, the benefits were great.

“Fine, dinner sounds great then, maybe you can tell me all about this new direction in your life.”

“Well, dinner is right now so sit down and let me tell you about my new job.”

“You have a job?” she teases with amusement

“Yes, woman of little faith. I am an executive.”

“At Merlyn? I thought your dad…”

“No, at ninelmuses, Cordelia Todd’s PR Agency.”

“Cordelia Todd’s agency?” she ask a little suspicious.

“Yes!”

“Huh?”

“Huh, what?” he ask curiously

“Nothing, you were saying?” she responds a bit weary of this woman’s reappearance into their lives.

“Oooookay, well…” Tommy excitedly tells her all about his trip to Gotham and the great job that Cordelia recruited him for. He seems genuinely happy and quite proud of himself and Laurel can do
nothing else but smile at his happiness. Maybe she needs to reconsider her first impression of Ms. Todd.

“Laurel Lance this is Cordelia Todd, she’s visiting from Gotham City” said Tommy as he introduced the two women.

“Pleasure, are you enjoying your stay in Starling City?”

“Absolutely, Tommy has been quite the tour guide and so accommodating, I might never want to leave Starling” she responds, holding Laurel’s gaze.

She knows exactly what Laurel is doing and if it was her, Felicity, she would rush to clarify that she had no romantic intentions towards Tommy and she would blush profusely at the implication. Yet, right now she is Cordelia and she doesn’t bow her head to anything or anyone.

Women like Laurel are her equals and if anything are intimidated by her. This will not be the exception. She squares her shoulders and with a glint in her eye she aims to complement and kill with kindness without ever losing the upper hand. She quickly succeeds as Laurel can’t find one, damn thing wrong with her.

Laurel contemplates this woman with all her poise and confidence as she talks politics, science, art, philanthropy, fashion and really any topic anyone brings up with command and certitude. Yet, there is something about her that doesn’t sit well with her. She tells herself it has nothing to do with the way Tommy looks at her like the new toy in the store or how everyone hangs at her every word but she has to admit it is partially due to that.

“You know Laurel, if you give me a chance you’d be surprised by how much we have in common.” Laurel is startled by her sudden appearance right next to her, how did she get there that fast and without her noticing? She focuses on answering when she sees Cordelia give her a curious glance.

“What do you mean ‘give you a chance’?”

“You are far more transparent than you think. You’ve been looking at me like I am one of your case files all night.”

“Sorry I didn’t…”

“It is quite alright. I get it, newcomer on your grounds, I would expect nothing less from a strong, smart woman like yourself. Yet, like I said we could get on famously, if I pass the test, of course” she said with a genuine smile.

Laurel couldn’t help but smile coyly at being caught, gauging her teasing tone she gives in “I like you more already, Cordelia.”

“I can be quite the charmer!” she says with a wink.

Both women laugh heartily. She hates to admit it but she does like her, she just can’t figure her out and that she definitely doesn’t like. For a few seconds they do get along quite well that is until she asks too many questions about the Queen family sending all of Laurel’s red flags up and with them her wall of doubt. Immediately putting distance and causing Cordelia to lose the hard to gain ground she had accomplished.

Years later as she maintained contact with Tommy and occasionally that meant run-ins with Laurel
she realized that the Queen family subject was as delicate a subject for Laurel as it was for her. Of all her youthful, eager mistakes losing Laurel as a possible asset was one she regretted the most.

As they settle to eat Tommy’s phone rings, he looks at the caller ID and excuses himself.

“Cordelia, what can I do for you?”

“Thomas, hope you are back and ready in Starling City?”

“Absolutely, thank you for flying me back.”

“My pleasure, just one of the perks. Now I presume that you have settled in and are ready to get to work?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Perfect. Being the new kid in the west coast game we need new clients if we hope to keep this expansion going. Seeing as our reputation precedes us we already have some clients, yet we are hoping to have a full portfolio come the end of the year. That is where you come in.”

“You need me to make the rounds at the parties and get you new clients?”

“Not necessarily, I need you to get our publicist and agents into the parties and introduce them to the right people, so we can get exclusives on the hottest places in Starling City, for example the Verdant Night Club and Per Se Restaurant grand opening, they will do the rest. Remember Thomas, you are there to run the office, not work the grime, they have that handled. I just need you to close the deals after the work has been done. Is that okay?”

“Absolutely.”

“Perfect, we will be in contact. Keep me posted on those two events. Best of Luck!”

“Yes, The Verdant and Per Se grand openings will be a great start and luckily I already have my invitations. Thanks.” As he hangs up and heads back to the table, he can already see the stealth in Laurel’s look. He knows Cordelia is a sore subject especially when Cordelia and the name Queen is in the same sentence.

“So, I take it that was your new boss” she says with what he can only describe as disgust.

“Yes, looks like I have my first assignments.”

“I heard, so Verdant, huh?”

“Yeah, and Per Se, so?” he ask already knowing exactly where this is going.

“Convenient that you happen to be best friend of the owner who also happens to be the heir to Queen Consolidated and more importantly back from the dead Oliver Queen.”

“Laurel” he says in a warning tone.

“Do you want the pizza or noodles first?” she ask with an apologetic smile

“Both” he says smiling back.
He’d be lying if at first he wasn’t hesitant by the sudden contact Cordelia had made especially after the topic of Oliver Queen came up, although mainly brought up by Jason Todd, his return had been big news and many were trying to get a piece of that cake. Yet, his worries lasted up until she gave him his little pep talk, as he called it. The sincerity with which she approached him and expressed herself could not be faked. He didn’t know why but he trusted Cordelia Todd even if no one else did.

As Oliver continues to take out his frustrations on the dummy he is reminded by Diggle that he needs to go home and that Thea is waiting for him to relieve her of babysitting duties to which he simply scoffs knowing very well that he needs to follow up on Bertenelli on his own.

“Bertenelli has a lot of enemies. The best way to figure out who is targeting his organization is to get inside of it”

“Let me get this right Oliver? Your mother is shot at nearly killed and the way that you process this emotionally is by going undercover with the mob.”

“I am not trying to process it emotionally.”

“Yeah well I think that’s your problem, man. Ever thought about just being there for your family.”

“I tried that today with Thea. She told me I wasn't being honest with her, and she is right. I can't very well explain to her that I left our mother alone and bleeding on the pavement because I am fast enough to almost run down the attacker. But what I can do is protect my family. Diggle when I find out who this guy is, he is a dead man.”

“That very well may be the case Oliver, but you still should go home, spend some time with them while we wait and figure out a plan.”

“I have a plan.”

“Yes, undercover, got it. Now let’s wait for your back up and maybe some more intel from her.”

“I don’t need backup. In any case you sent her the message, right? And? Nothing!”

“Yes, for the 5th time. I told her it was an emergency and NO, she hasn’t responded. Probably because she knows it’s a lie” Diggle mumbled under his breath. Oliver having heard him grunts in frustration and acknowledgement because he is probably right.

As he walks away he tosses his escrima sticks across the room and curses out loud. He would be the first to admit that he was adamant, to say the least, in letting the mysterious woman join their efforts, but he can’t deny that she always seems to be one step ahead. Therefore she must know what is happening with Frank Bertenelli’s people and more importantly who is taking them out.

“Will you relax, she comes around on her terms. If she felt there was something we needed to know she would have contacted us already.”

“How can you be so sure? She has been silent for over a month.”

“I don’t know man, but she seems like the type that doesn’t go away that easily”

“I hope you are right, She... I just hope you’re right.”

“We all have questions and she seems to have the answers, I get it, but we have to play this right,
Oliver simply nods. Knowing Dig is right doesn’t make the waiting any easier.

His cell phone dings. They both turn immediately and rush over to the desk. Diggle answers the phone, but before he can say anything she answers.

_Felicity: Frank Bertenelli's people, on it. Talk soon._

And just like that without waiting for a response, much to Oliver’s dismay, she hangs up.

“Told you, man” Dig says with a smile as Oliver simply grunts and mumbles angrily under his breath as he begins to punch the mannequin, poor defenseless mannequin thinks Felicity as she watches him from the remote access camera she hid in the basement.

“DAMN, I am so good, it’s scary” she praises herself, out loud which she said she would stop doing even sarcastically.

She laughs at her own ego, before checking her running searches on the entire Bertenelli mob family and begins her training, mimicking Oliver and learning his moves. You could never be too prepared to fight Oliver Queen, another thing Cass had reminded her of.

Just as Oliver heads home Felicity’s searches end and she begins to review the data while checking the face recognition software she has running on the pictures of the woman she took. Settling and skimming over FBI surveillance photos she suddenly pauses, there she is on Frank Bertenelli’s arm at dinner and coming out of his house. She goes over the surveillance photos as dread falls over her.

His daughter is the one carrying out these hits, the question is why? A little more digging gives her the answers she wants and she knows this is truly trouble, a woman scorned and heartbroken is no easy feat, especially when she is determined and trained.

She decides to investigate a little further and much more in depth and there is no better way than to appeal to Mr. Bertenelli through his business and offer him a deal he cannot resist. She preps everything and using contacts in the mob that are on her payroll she gets a meeting with him for that afternoon, in his home per her request. She figures if she can beat Oliver to the punch then maybe he would be more willing to spend time with his family. Family was always so important to Robert and she hates to see Oliver so distant from his.

“Felicity, Felicity, guess what?” a squealing and flustered Iris yells as she enters the coffee shop where Felicity is sitting and trying to finish up some research.

“Jesus, Iris. Calm down you spooked half the patrons to death. What’s going on?” Felicity had met Iris while at a Harvard frat party where she had an unfortunate incident with a pot brownie, not because of the pot but because of the nuts, which she happened to be allergic too. Iris was a Harvard 3rd year student and had noticed Felicity’s adverse reaction and had helped her out and gave her a ride back to MIT. After that they had been fast friends, I guess anaphylaxis has that effect sometimes.

“Don’t you tell me to calm down when I have incredible news that is going to make this trip to your hometown totally worth it!”

“Oh gee thanks, here I thought spending the holidays with my mom and I was enough, not to
mention the all expenses paid trip to a thriving west coast metropolis. Sorry, my mistake”

“Oh come on Lis, you know what I mean and you know there is only one reason that would make this trip so much better than it already is which is difficult because this has been bar none the best most amazing…”

“Okay, okay I get it, nice save. Now what’s the big news that has you so flustered? The last time you were this flustered it… OHHHH NOOO no, absolutely not! This has to do with Oliver Queen and my answer is no!”

“Come on Lis, don’t do this to me. I got us an in to the Queen annual Christmas party, the biggest party of the year and you have to go with me. You just have to.”

Felicity didn’t know how it happened but she found herself in a dress riding a taxi and approaching the front entrance valet at the Queen mansion. She had sent Robert and encrypted email warning him on the way there but she highly doubted he was in front of his computer checking his emails. As they exited the car and Iris gleefully extended the invite to the security at the front door Felicity prepared herself. Robert and Moira Queen were there greeting their guest, as they approached them she clearly saw the look of surprise and fear that crossed Robert’s face as she shot him an apologetic smile. They said hello and welcomed the girls.

Iris immediately made quick task of searching out Oliver while Felicity stayed as much out of sight as possible and tried at some point to talk to Robert, alone. Finally being able to make his way from talking to the mayor towards the bar she hurried to intercept him catching him right before.

“Mr. Queen I would just like to commend you on such an amazing party and express my deepest apologies for the unannounced visit.” Robert simply smiled at her pulling her by the elbow towards the bar he placed his order and ordered her a soda. While they waited he slightly leaned in to respond.

“Felicity, you are always welcomed in my home and your visit is never something to apologize for. I hope you know that under different circumstances I would have invited you personally” he warmly smiled at her.

“Thank you Mr. Queen, my friend somehow got an invite and forced me to come with her.”

“I am glad she did. Meet me in my study in 20 min I have something for you.” Felicity simply nodded and smiled at him as he handed her the soda.

Felicity made her way back to the crowd looking for Iris as she spots her, she makes a beeline towards her only to stop 10 feet short as she notices that she is talking to none other than Oliver Queen. Knowing it best to avoid that introduction she immediately turns around, not so subtly and walks away, she figures she will deal with that problem later after her meet with Robert and possibly with his help.

She waits by the bar and then heads for the study as inconspicuous as possible. She makes her way into the room where Robert is already sitting with a drink in one hand and completely lost in thought. She makes sure to clear her throat and make her presence known. Robert immediately looks up at her and smiles. As she takes a seat he leans over and takes out two envelopes and a small box with a bow from his office safe and hands them to her. Only slightly laughing at her genuine look of surprise.

She reaches over and takes the gift as he holds her hand and begins to speak.
“This is just a little token of my appreciation but, please open it until you get back to school, as a favor to me.” He adds letting go of her hand.

“Of course, although I will admit I am not the best at being patient and surprises. Actually, I am quite horrible and the likelihood of me waiting is slim, but I will do my best” she adds shyly as she realizes that once again Robert Queen was staring at her extremely amused.

She thanks him once again as she opens her bag and pulls out a small gift, with a coy smile she hands it to him along with a letter.

“Not until I leave” she says.

“Deal” he smiles warmly.

“You know Felicity, I am really pleased that this worked out this way and that you got to be a part of one of my favorite events of the year. You know that the Queen family has been throwing these parties for over 25 years, ever since Moira and I married. We actually began the tradition our first Christmas as Mr. and Mrs. Queen. Now this is the one party I actually look forward to every year.”

“I know. I’ve read and heard about the exclusive Queen Christmas party ever since I moved to Starling City. Never really thought I would actually attend one, let alone be sitting here with THE Robert Queen”

“As a guest of honor, as a matter of fact.”

“Well, look at that moving on up in this world.” She laughed thoroughly amused by their current situation. Any outsider would be puzzled as to the link between the two. She guessed that was exactly what made them the best of allies.

“You know years back the best part of these parties came after when everyone had gone and we would gather around the tree and open up the first Christmas gift before sending Oliver and Thea up to bed. Now we are lucky if Oliver even makes it to the house by Christmas day let alone if he stays long enough to open a gift with us.”

“He’s young, I know how that feels, priorities get all screwy, we are kind of dumb, even us geniuses” she said with a smirk in an attempt to lift his spirits.

“Are you trying to reassures me Ms. Smoak that it will get better given time and maturity?”

“Nope. Just saying that we kids sometimes disappoint our parents because, we don’t always realize that the things we find small and mundane are important and many times precious to others. Like a simple family tradition by a Christmas tree or coloring Easter eggs for Passover rather than going to spring break by the beach.” At his raised eyebrow and questioning look she simply said “don’t ask.”

He smiled as she continued, “All I am saying is that yeah he’s a jerk now but he’ll grow out of it and someday he might even start this tradition with his own family.”

As she saw his smile grow at the possibility along with the silence between them she began to get up and make her way out only stopping when he called her name.

“Felicity” as she slowly turned to face him he walked around the desk with the most relaxed and sincere smile she had seen on him. She realized that that must have been the smile that at one point came naturally to Robert Queen. The Robert of Christmas past, before his burdens and guilt had grown to overwhelm every part of his life. He must have been so easy going carrying a sweet and
fatherly smile. She could see in that smile, that he probably thought he had lost, that given time the Robert of the past could return. She guessed Oliver Queen wasn’t the only Queen whom had changed over the years.

“Thank you, once again for everything but, more than anything that keen sense of wisdom that is beyond your years and continues to amaze me. Now, I know without a doubt that I made the right choice in your gift. I really hope you like it.”

“Well that is just not fair because now I really won’t be able to resist” she said with a mischievous smile.

They both laughed as she headed for the door only slightly hesitating as she turned back around and without warning hugged Robert tightly, like a daughter hugs a father. He hesitated for an instant and then hugged her back extremely moved by her gesture. Before she pulled away he quietly told her,

“I hope one day you get to see the Queen Family tradition in person. I really hope you are a part of it because to me you are like my daughter. Thank you, again Felicity.” He gently kissed her on the cheek as she simply responded,

“I’d like that”.

As Felicity drove up to the Bertenelli’s house she took one last long breath. If there was one persona she hated ever having to create it was this one but after years of trying different methods she was resigned to having at least one opposite end of the spectrum, someone with her hand in the criminal world, it was old and it was a cliché but it was true some evils were necessary.

→ → → → →

“Look I am tired of your shit, this is the first and last time I say this, YOU sought me out not the other way around. You know my rules, no exceptions. Now, my cut is 10% and my work is guaranteed, don’t come in here and disrespect me by trying to haggle. You don’t like it, there is the door. Are we clear?”

“You know little girl I am not the Falcone or Odessa family, so your empty threats are worthless…”

Before he can finish his sentence she pulls out her waist knife and throws it across the room, directly into the hand of his lead man who was pointing a gun at her at the moment, making him drop the gun and everyone turn giving her time to pull out her gun and place it under the chin of the nephew of the head of the Triad.

“I really would have thought that Zhishan would have taught you manners. You come into my place of business seeking my help and my services then you try to not only skimp on my percentage but threaten me, you are lucky I respect your uncle or else the insides of your head would be all over my ceiling right now and if you want to keep your grey matter inside your thick skull don't ever call me little girl again.”

She sees one of his men move and quickly throws another knife straight into his knee and watches him drop. She further pushes the barrel of the gun into his chin as she glares at him while simply saying,

“I think it is time you and your men leave, and I think it goes without saying but seeing as you’ve proven to lack common sense I’ll say it, for your benefit, NEVER come back.”
With that she moves the gun and starts to walk away before looking over her shoulder and adding “and take the trash out when you leave” and just like that she leaves behind bullet proof glass and three men with guns come out to make sure they leave.

Not more than 20 minutes after they leave she receives a call from one very apologetic head of the Triad promising that his inept nephew would be taken care of and will never bother her again. She smirks and thanks Mr. Zhishan as she sets up a meeting with him and another of her associates to finish laundering his money.

Man, did she hate being this woman but never had she been more effective with the organized crime in Starling City. She had managed to rid the city of the Falcone’s and the Odessa family before they tried to expand from Gotham and Chicago. Now she was infiltrating the bigger families in order to track their money and make one big power move at some point. Plus this way she knew faces and could set up lower level players and throw the occasional wrench into their organizations.

She talks business with Frank, as she calls him, having come highly recommended by associates of his and offering a better business deal than his current associate he quickly takes a liking to her.

Like any good mob family he introduces her to the rest of the family mainly, Nick Salvati and his daughter Helena. She manages to place a couple of bugs on the property along with a tracker on all three of them. With Frank all it took was a handshake, Nick a bit of flirting and a missed step yet, Helena proved the most difficult and she settled with placing one on her purse which was in the foyer on her way out of the house.

She manages to pique his interest and before she leaves they are in full business and they have scheduled a test run of $100,000 by the end of the week. As they finish their last drink Oliver arrives at the Bertenelli house. Her phone dings letting her know he is close by and she curses under her breath. Man he really is an impatient fool.

Unbeknownst to her, which was rare, Oliver had made plans to visit Bertenelli that same evening. He was relying more on his charm and Bertenelli’s already expressed interest in doing business with QC than any mob connections to garnish a meet or rather an unannounced meet.

As Oliver arrives at Bertenelli’s the first thing he notices is a black and tan sports car sitting in the roundabout. He is immediately taken by it, it is an exact match to his father’s favorite car. He remembers every detail of that car perfectly, it was not only his father’s favorite but his as well. He remembers how angry he was when his father seemingly got rid of it from one day to another. He had argued and fought with him about the car eventually storms out of the house and not returning until six days later, hung-over and with some model like girl on his arm to celebrate the New Year.

Running his hand across the body of the car he can’t help the nostalgic feeling that overwhelms him, if he didn’t know better he would swear this was his father’s car. Just as he comes around the car still admiring it he notices the front door open and Frank Bertenelli accompanied by an unknown woman appears.

The woman is about to leave as Frank helps her down the steps meeting up with Oliver’s current position. He apologizes and introduces himself and she seems to take very little interest in introductions. Saying goodbye to Frank with a kiss and walking around the car she comes to stand in front of Oliver with a courteous nod and an amused smile, he is standing in front of her door and doesn’t seem to move or realize it.

Frank tells her that his offer still stands, anytime she wants he’ll take that beauty off her hands,
gesturing towards her car. Then noting Oliver’s obvious admiration of the car and now the woman it belongs to he turns to him before saying “I saw her first Mr. Queen” an impish smirk on his face at the double meaning of his statement.

Oliver realizes that the car belongs to the unknown woman who by the way did not introduce herself, now that he thinks about it. As he moves and turns to ask her she makes her way into the car winks at him and without saying anything the car purrs to life and takes off.

Before even thinking she immediately parks outside and watches as they go inside. Once she is sure the coast is clear she contemplates her next move. She knows she is taking a risk and frankly doesn’t know why. Cass would say that she wants to be discovered, that she wants to drop the facade and tell Oliver Queen everything. Cass would also say that she wants to prove her wrong and show that she can interact directly with Oliver Queen in all her different personas and have him be none the wiser.

Shen then realizes that if Oliver was going to continue his path in taking down all the scum in Starling, her money laundering persona was one he would need to be aware of and not interfere with years of work. Quickly making up her mind she decided that exposing this one identity didn’t mean she couldn’t still keep him on his toes. In a matter of minutes she finds herself breaking into Oliver’s car and leaving a note in his jacket that simply reads

**What did I say, Queen? We are really going to have to work on Patience and Trust!**

She heads back outside and hops back into her 56’ Porsche Roadster, her favorite Christmas gift from one Robert Queen.

Inside the Bertenelli house, none the wiser to everything outside Oliver quickly pulls his playboy persona and gets straight into business.

“Mr. Bertenelli”

“Call me Frank”

“Call me Oliver”

“Thank you for agreeing to meet me in my home. As you can see I had a very important meeting with a very beautiful woman and in any world that is always priority.”

“Of course, who could blame you. Well, my father used to say that living rooms make the best conference rooms.”

“Oh, I am going to steal that” he points to the man standing behind him and introduces him. “Nick Salvati, my associate.”

“How do you do.” he greets him as Frank pulls him into the main living room.

“Let’s have a drink.”

He follows him and sees Helena on the second floor and is immediately taken by her beauty yet, there is something in the way she is looking at him that tells him that she knows exactly who he is
and she doesn’t like him very much.

“So Oliver I will be honest with you I was surprised to hear from you, it was my impression from the local news that you were not going to be involved with your family’s business.”

“Apparently, there were a few catch phrases that I missed while I was away for five years. One of them being lame stream media.”

They all laugh at his comment before he continues.

“The press never gets anything right.”

“Oh, I know a thing or two about that.”

Nicks excuses himself as his cell phone rings. A call that Felicity is immediately tapped into and listening in from her phone as she drives home. Meanwhile, Oliver and Frank continue their business meeting.

Frank quickly informs him that he wants the contract to the new applied sciences division at QC, which Moira had denied them. Oliver assures him that he wants to do business with him. They exchange condolences for the recent events involving Paul Copani and his mother.

“You know sometimes I wonder why I stay” adds a thoughtful Frank.

“I have the same thought.”

“So why did you come back after that island? You could have settled anywhere in the world.”

“Because Starling City is my home” he says pointedly and with deeper meaning than Frank can understand at the moment.

Just at that moment Helena walks in speaking Italian “chi si volta e chi si gira sempre a casa va finire… no matter which way you go or turn you always end up at home.” Oliver looks at her with deep regard and it is still there that disapproving look directed at him.

“Oliver this is my daughter Helena.”

“Hello.”

“Nice to meet you. I am heading out” she directs to her father.

“Alright, just take one of the guys with you.”

“I can take care of myself” she says with childlike irritation.

“I wasn’t asking sweetie.” Frank adds trying to maintain composure in front of a possible future business associate.

Just in that moment Nick interrupts letting him know that the meeting they had asked for is set for right now. Oliver excuses himself but, Frank won't have any of it and ask for a minute while he talks to Helena.

As they walk into the next room Helena finally says what Oliver has been reading in her eyes.

“Oliver Queen the rich man’s Lindsay Lohan.”
“Look, I’ve got to go to this other meeting but I need someone to take him to dinner.”

“No you pimp out your daughter?”

“No, I ask her to help me close a business deal. I remind her that the family business is dying and that we need this contract and Oliver Queen can give it to us. Please sweet pea for us, for me.”

She nods reluctantly agreeing. Oliver is hesitant but Frank insist and he agrees to go to dinner with Helena as they all leave.

Frank heads to his meeting unaware that right on his tail is Felicity. Knowing very well that a meeting between Bertenelli and the Triad can turn deadly quick she decides this is one meeting she needs to attend in person. To say that she was worried about an unaware Oliver having dinner with the very person he was looking for was putting it lightly which was why she decides to text Diggle and tell him to keep an eye out for their boy simply saying, he might be a little above his head on this one.

The Triad meeting goes as expected a lot of denying and a lot of threats. But nothing more. Now she really had to stop Helena before this escalated into a gang war. She quickly patches the audio over to the SCPD where Lance and Hilton are on the case.

“Sounds like Bertenelli is ready to put pressure to whoever pays him protection money” observes Hilton.

“Yeah well three of his best men have been murdered. He’s got to make up the cash somewhere. Whoever is pruning the family tree is looking to make Bertenelli suffer.”

“So you do think it is one of the other families.”

“No.”

“Then who?”

“Well according to the crime reports none of the vics took a clean shot about half the bullets missed. Our killer is not a pro.”

“That’s not stopping him from pulling that trigger, innocent bystanders and all.”

“Then it’s up to us. Or this is going to blow up into an all-out mob war.”

Felicity contemplates simply letting the police know that Helena is the bike riding assassin and getting it over with. Then she remembers that Oliver is with her and that might turn out very bad. She also can’t help but feel there is more to the story of a daughter turning on her father, even if her father is a mob boss. She decides to simply keep tabs on her and not allow her to kill again until she can figure everything out and give Bertenelli an answer he will believe that will not cause a mob war.

Oliver knows having dinner with the mob boss daughter is not the best game plan but he is the carefree playboy and right now that is the best advantage he has going.

Oliver and Helena arrive at the restaurant and are welcomed by the owners, Oliver can sense that they are bending over backwards to please Helena. Something tells him they have some involvement with her father if the fear he sees in the owner’s wife is anything to go by.

“I heard about your mother’s accident. Is she going to be okay?”
“She is going to be fine, thanks.”

“I am glad. So, why would you want to go into business with my father? You know who he is and how he made his money.”

“You don’t approve of your family’s enterprises.”

“We share a name, that name defines us whether we want it to or not. You already made judgments about me just like I’ve already made judgments about you.”

“Right, I am the rich man’s Lindsay Lohan.”

She scoffs a bit embarrassed before saying “sorry.”

“That’s okay”

“Hey, can I ask you something?”

“Yeah.”

“I know it must have been hell for you alone on that island for 5 years but…”

“But what?”

“But was there ever a day when you were just happy to be away from everything no pressure from your family no need to be the person that everyone else expects you to be. Was there ever a day when…”

“When I didn’t feel lost and felt free? More than one and uhm, those are the days that I miss,” Oliver didn’t know why he was being so honest with her. But something about the way her eyes desperately searched to make a connection. The way she spoke about her family made him feel like she would understand. She would accept without question his reasoning.

“People are always asking me what I missed the most… Air conditioning. Satellite radio. Tagellte-”

“Tagliatelle?”

“Right. But those are the answers that I give people because those are the answers they are expecting.”

“Why can’t you just be truthful?”

“I don’t know how truthful I can be.”

“You’ve been through a crucible and it changed you how can it not.”

“That’s beautiful” he said changing the subject and nodding towards her necklace. “Your cross?”

“It’s a gift from my fiancé.”

“Fiancé”. He breathes out slightly embarrassed “I didn’t know you were engaged” he says apologetically.

“I’m not” at his confused look she elaborates, “anymore, he died.”
“I’m sorry.”

“Me too. That was my crucible.”

“Well it’s nice to... It’s really nice to be with someone that I could be myself with.”

“It’s nice to be with someone who knows how hard it could be.”

Meanwhile Dig is in the foundry keeping tabs on everything when he realizes that the Bertenelli family has been going around hurting people and strong arming the local businesses. He goes to call Oliver and warn him, when his phone rings.

“So how is our boy doing on his date?” Diggle immediately knows it is her, or Nia as he likes to call her.

“I was about to call him.”

“About Salvati and his little visits. Looks like at least two of us are keeping our minds on the job.”

“Why am I not surprised that you already knew?”

“Been there done that. Well looks like they will be hitting Russo’s next and our boy happens to be right there having dinner so call him, have him get out and suit up, I am on my way.”

“How do you… never mind, I’ll call him, by the way why do you call him ‘our boy’?”

“Do you think he would like it?”

“Hell no!”

“That’s why” the phone clicks and Dig can’t help but laugh. She was really going to make Oliver work for this, he kind of liked her more for it.

Oliver’s phone vibrates interrupting their conversation, he sees that it’s Dig and excuses himself to answer. Dig tells him that something important came up and to call him back immediately, of course he leaves out the part about their mutual friend.

“Helena, I have to go there’s something that I have to do. It’s about my mother or otherwise I would uhmm I would stay.”

“Yeah, I would like that.”

He puts money down she reaches over and grasps his hand as she says,

“My father would kill me if I let you pay.”

He takes it back and smiles “I have a confession” he says as he stands. “I didn't want to go out with you tonight.”

“That makes two of us.”

“I am really glad that I did” he adds.

“That makes two of us” she says with a coy smile.

He smirks and hums his approval then turns to leave only turning back when she calls his name.
“Oliver, be careful with my father.”

He simply nods and steps outside and around the building to make his call.

“What happened?” he asks a bit irritated at Dig.

“It’s what is about to happen. Bertenelli’s enforcer Nick Salvati.”

“Yeah, drank a scotch together, he seems like a real stand up mobster.”

“Yeah, well he has been paying visits to everyone that owes the mob protection money.”

“Diggle, I am trying to figure out who took a shot at my mother not take on all of organized crime.”

“Well, listen Oliver, Salvati and his goons have already put 4 people in the hospital tonight and if somebody doesn’t stop him. The poor bastard who owns Russo’s will be next”

“Wait, wait Russo’s?”

“Yes, where you were just at having dinner. So suit up and…”

“How did you?”

“What? Know that you were having dinner with Beretnelli’s daughter? Which by the way Oliver, you are supposed to be going undercover not speed dating.”

“I didn’t have a choice.”

“Yeah, well I’ve seen her on the web, you made quite the sacrifice.”

“Salvati is here. We will talk later.”

“Duty calls” with that Diggle hangs up as Oliver runs to his car to change and intercept Salvati.

Salvati and his men enter the restaurant making threats and asking for payment. Mr.Russo tries to argue and they begin to wreck the place, when they are about to hurt Russo and his wife an arrow pierces through the room and takes out the lights.

The Hood takes out the first man and avoids getting shot by Salvati, as he is about to take the other man out, Helena in her leather and wearing her motorcycle helmet dashes in opening fire on the entire place and hitting Salvati on the leg. Oliver recognizing the helmeted person from the attack at QC immediately responds by disarming the attacker. They fight back and forth and his bow strikes the face mask of the helmet breaking it and jerking the helmet off to reveal his recent dinner companion.

As she runs out he is stuck in place shocked by the discovery and extremely confused. Just as he turns towards the door he sees a figure jump down from the fire escape across the street and run in the same direction disappearing around the building. He is about to run out after them when his phone vibrates with an incoming text

Felicity: you could have stopped her, put an end it to it all. I will take care of this now, just stay out of my way.

Knowing he won't be able to track them and needing answers he heads back to the foundry.

“I don’t understand why she is targeting her own family?”
“I don’t know. Here I thought you had parental issues.”

“It is not a joke Diggle, and how was she there? You knew. That is how you knew I was at Russo’s. Did she know about Helena? Did she tell you what she was going to do to Helena?”

“Oliver, you are not falling for this girl, are you? Because I know you can’t be that crazy. Helena Bertenelli shot at your mother and she also murdered four men in cold blood.”

“She has to have reasons for what she is doing. I need to find her.”

“Reasons? Since when do you care about the bad guy’s reasons? Oh, because she is the bad guy, Oliver. She is the killer and whatever is going on in your head you better get it straight, man. Any attempt on his right hand is going to send your new friend’s father on the warpath. She had the right idea, you should have stopped her. You’ve been compromised. Let her take care of it now and let’s just stay out of the way.”

“I know what I am doing.”

Diggle stares at him almost not believing what he is hearing before he sighs, resigned, and says all he has to say before he leaves. “Now, I know how your family feels when you lie to them.”

Oliver heads home knowing that going out tonight to look for Helena would not be a good idea. He needs to clear his head and more importantly he needs to make sure he doesn’t have a run in with her, the new unexpected part of his life. Although, he can’t help but wonder if she caught up to Helena and if so, what exactly did she mean when she said she would take care of it now?

As if he had spoken out loud she shows up on his terrace. Staring at him as he paces the room waiting for the right moment to interrupt his contemplative state.

“I didn’t kill her if that is what you are worried about” she says as he turns around quickly flinging with great accuracy a throwing arrow across the room. She grunts and doubles over as his eyes go wide realizing who he just stabbed. As he goes to move she raises one hand up to stop him and chuckles.

“Just kidding” she says showing him that she had actually caught the arrow as she rotated it in her hand.

His eyes go wide and then he glares at her. He is about to step forward, when she smirks and clicks her tongue at him.

“Now, now calm down just wanted to teach you a lesson, if you are going to be so pensive don’t lose sight of your surroundings even in your own home. Isn’t that like survival 101?.”

His response is to simply growl, she wouldn’t believe it if she hadn’t clearly heard him growl, she might be wearing him out far more than she thought, that kind of makes her feel a little proud of herself.

“A growl, that’s what you are going with? Great choice! Alright before you lose your cool completely I’ll just tell you what I came to say and be on my merry way. Like I said I didn’t kill her, not that that was even an option, not my M.O. She and I had a very calorie burning conversation. Your girlfriend has some moves, some, as in limited.” At his exasperated look she simply raised her hands in surrender and continued. “I made her an offer, stop this crazy killing spree and I would help her bring her father and his whole organization down, the right way. I would also give her a new identity and a chance at a new start, unless you want to offer her the role of future Mrs. Queen, well, then that is fine as well. But just make sure that she never does it again or else I will, and you won’t
like it when your little love match turns into a threesome, and not the good kind.”

“Do you find this amusing? Is her crucible entertaining to you?”

“Oh, I see we reached the pissing contest part of the evening. My crucible was worse than yours, no mine was. Spare me, I frankly don’t care who suffered more or the reasons behind it, or how little you were hugged as a child. We all have plights, we all have regrets but we don’t all turn to murder to satiate those pains. For that matter we don’t impose pain or fear on others, either. A lot can be accomplished with truths. Whether you tell them or make others face their own. So spare me your righteous rant, you want to show me how deep her crucible runs then get her to see reason and move forward with her life. Make her see that murder was never the answer to any of her pains.”

As she turned around to leave she stopped while precariously standing on the terrace rail and looked over her shoulder, “Oliver, you should talk to her, the real you, maybe if it comes from a place of honesty she will see reason.” She took one foot off the rail and suddenly pivoted back around to face him balancing simply on one foot the entire time, as she said,

“And Oliver, you should never have to worry about how truthful you are to the people that truly love and care for you. Robert wouldn’t want you to live life the way he did, shrouded in secrets.” As he was going to respond, wanting to know how she could possibly know his exact words from his conversation with Helena, she simply leapt off the terrace into an elegant backflip keeping her legs completely straight until right before she made contact with the floor. Peering over the terrace he saw her crouching in a feline like stance before she got up and just like that she was gone into the shadows.

Deciding that he had way too much to think about he opted to work off some of his energy and then for the umpteenth time he would attempt to sleep.

The morning came too soon and with it a plethora of unanswered questions but far more suspicious was an unexpected visit from one Detective Quentin Lance. Having seen Oliver at dinner with a mobster’s daughter the detective did something that he never thought he would.

“Detective is everything okay?”

“Your uhmm… your buddy with the arrows was at Russo’s last night” he just couldn’t seem to address Oliver Queen without taking some sort of jab at him, baby steps he told himself.

“And I was there earlier with a date, so what?” he responded already sensing where this was going, once again. “You think I’m the hood guy again?”

Lance can’t help but scoff before answering “no, your date Helena Bertenelli, if I were you I’d stay away from her. Her family is bad news on a good day.”

“Why the sudden concern for my well-being?”

“A few weeks ago I made a mistake. I almost got you killed.”

“And you felt like you owed me one?”

“If, I did as far as I am concerned this clears the books.” Without another word he leaves as Oliver stands there slightly perplexed and the tiniest hint of a smile playing on his lips.

Felicity begins her day going over everything that happened while also catching up with everything
she missed. Making herself comfortable on her couch the first thing that manages to catch her eye was Tommy’s predicament at the local Indian restaurant where his card was declined and confiscated, sighing she realizes that must have been during his date with Laurel Lance. She makes a point to contact him later that day and maybe make up something about an executive expense account or something to help him out until she can make a paycheck acceptable.

Continuing her review she sees that she had also missed the visit of one Malcolm Merlyn to one Moira Queen, that shouldn’t be suspicious seeing as they were lifelong friends but at this point in her life she knew that nothing could mean everything so she also put a pin on further looking into that visit.

Just then she sees that Tommy has had quite a busy morning, his car was repossessed all his accounts frozen and as she checks into him he is currently at his father’s home, which cannot be good. She taps into his phone and listens in on their conversation.

“Do you think it is a joke?” She slightly smiles, he and Oliver had a lot of things alike.

“No you are. Although, I must say your chronic irresponsibility and terminal laziness has lost its humor.” Ouch she knew that had to hurt, Malcolm really was far more ruthless than she had ever thought. “Hmm you are wondering, why now? The better question is why not sooner.”

“It is my trust fund!”

“Which is comprised of my money. Oh excuse me, was comprised.” Felicity can almost hear the disdain and smirk on his lips. Salt into his own son’s wounds, she’d seen animals with more parental instincts.

Tommy goes to walk away but before doing so he adds. “You know a lesser man would let this end him but I was recently told that I cannot do anything about the assumptions you have made about me, the only thing I can do is continue to live my life knowing that in time all will be exposed for what it is. That is what I intend to do, keep your money and along with it keep your need to be a father because I don’t need anything from you I don’t think I ever really have.”

Felicity can’t help but let her lips tug into a sad smile at Tommy’s use of her words. Now she knows for a fact she really likes one Tommy Merlyn and even if the last thing she needs is one more enemy and mission in life she will help him prove his father wrong and turn him into the most successful PR guy, or whatever his passion is, so that he can confidently walk with his head held high in his father’s presence.

She waits a beat before calling Tommy, crossing her fingers that he would answer, he does trying his best to sound as normal and pleasant as always.

“Hello Cordelia, great to hear from you but I am starting to worry that you don’t trust that I can do this job.”

“On the contrary Thomas, I am constantly told by my legal team that I might be trusting you a little too much, pishposh. I actually wanted to let you know that I have set up a ridiculously high expense account for you, along with a company car at your disposal. We also have a couple of executive apartments in the city which we offer although I don’t know if they will be of any use to you, as well as the car but it is something we give all our executives. I have it all set up I just need an address to deliver everything to, hence my call.”

“Cordelia you are a godsend.”
"Excuse me?"

"Nothing, at the moment I am staying, well that is irrelevant but you can send it all to a friend of mine’s home, I bet you remember her, Laurel Lance. I’ll email your assistant the address."

"Nonsense, it is Saturday my assistant has the day off just text me the address I already sent it to Starling I just have to make a call and you will have it by this evening."

"Great, it really does pay to work for Cordelia Todd, thank you Cordelia, really thank you"

"My pleasure Thomas. Also if you need anything and I do mean anything please do not hesitate to ask. I know that over the years we have become no more than acquaintances but I really feel we can be great friends and a token of that is extending my hand for anything you might need, simply ask."

"I would really like us to be friends as well. Thanks again Cordelia."

"You are welcome, Thomas."

"If we are going to be friends, then please feel free to call me Tommy"

"I much rather prefer Thomas."

They both slightly laughed and said goodbye before hanging up. Tommy didn’t know how she could have such great timing but he was not about to look a gift horse in the mouth. With new conviction he texted her the address adding a final thank you, to which she sent back a smiling face saying “at some point you will have to stop thanking me, I highly encourage it as a matter of fact.”

He then headed to Laurel’s to share the good news as Felicity simply sank back into her couch with a new found smile, that was until she remembered her unfinished business with Helena and Oliver. Sighing deeply she sends a text before heading to the shower.

_Felicity: I gave her a 5pm deadline, make sure and speak with her before that._

At that Oliver almost tosses his phone across the room but simply takes a deep breath and decides to head over to her house and follow Helena in order to find an opening to talk to her.

Oliver finds her at the graveside of her fiancé deep in thought. He knew she was contemplating the ultimatum that she had proposed. If Helena was anything like him she was probably not taking kindly to being given an ultimatum, god knows he wasn’t dealing with it all that well.

“You said that losing him was your own crucible that it changed you, you didn’t say how?"

“When you love someone as much as I loved him with all of your heart, you can’t just turn that emotion off when they are taken from you. You still feel things as deeply. And if it can’t be love that you feel then it becomes hate.”

“Hate for who?”

“Oliver, you should stay away from me.”

“Helena…” just as he is about to plea with her to abandon this path they are interrupted by Nick Salvati and some of his men. They are taken at gunpoint and forced into a van driving for about 20 min, he was counting, before they are loaded off at a warehouse in the Glades. One glance let’s Oliver know where they are and the fact that he wasn’t blindfolded tells him that they intend to kill
them both.

Once they are tied up and Nick is standing defiantly in front of Helena she speaks. “My father is going to kill you for this.”

Nick simply smirks as he slaps her across the face and knocks her down, chair and all. As Oliver tries to escape from his zip ties his patience is wearing down, and knowing that it is nearly 5 pm he is not sure if he should be relieved or more worried.

“I’ve wanted to do that for years. Spoiled bitch. I knew it was someone from the inside waging war against your father and me. I just never thought it would be this inside the organization.” Nick said with deep hate towards Helena as he pulled something out of his pocket and showed it to her as he continued. “You dropped this at Russo’s.” He had her cross necklace.

“You’re smarter than I gave you credit for Nicky.”

“You’re not.”

Oliver can’t help but interrupt their little back and forth in hopes of still getting out of this unharmed or at the very least buying some time.

“Hey! You’re a businessman right, so let’s talk business. I can offer you a lot of money if you let us go.”

“This isn’t about money Richie rich, this is about loyalty.”

“He’s got nothing to do with any of this.”

“Then what the hell is it about.”

“My father had Michael murdered.”

He laughs “of course he did he didn’t want you to know the truth about your rat of a fiancé. He was gathering evidence, he was talking to the fucking FBI. The love of your life was going to destroy your father.”

“You’re wrong.”

“I found a laptop in Michael’s bag, Helena. Everything that could send your father and me to prison for the rest of our lives was on it.”

“That computer WAS MINE.” She screams at him tears already clouding her eyes. “Michael wasn’t the one talking to the FBI, I was.”

“You?” Nick says in disbelief.

“My father is a monster he doesn’t care who he hurts to keep his money and power and I wanted it to stop.”

“Well, then it is your fault Michael is dead, not your father for ordering the hit or me for carrying it out. Yours.”

“You shot Michael?”

“In the chest so he knew it was me just like you will” he says pointing the gun at Helena’s chest.
Oliver knows he can’t wait any longer and he would be lying if he wasn’t disappointed that the mystery woman did not show up. He rips through his zip ties and tackles Nick. Helena follows his lead and rips hers as well and goes for Nick while Oliver stops the other two men in the room. As Helena is choking Nick he tells her,

“You are going to burn in hell for what you have done.”

“It will be worth it.” She responds almost breaking his neck. Just before she does his body goes limp in her hands and she sees the dart in his shoulder. Oliver is about to kill the last goon when he turns to see Nick on the floor and feels the body in his hands go limp as he turns he sees that the man has a dart in his neck. He turns to Helena and she is also passed out on the floor and he can’t help the pang that hits him as he says her name and sees a flicker of pain in her eyes before she completely passes out.

Before he can react he feels a dart hit him, he drops to his knees and hears footsteps walking towards him. He tries to react but can’t. His vision is blurry but he can clearly hear Her voice tell him what a fool he has been. He hits the floor with a loud thud, the last thing he sees is a pair of black boots and then he hears that voice, again, that all too familiar voice now “why can’t you just listen, for once, Oliver?”

She calls in the three men in the warehouse to the SCPD along with a slew of evidence as to everything they have done. She doses them with a special chemical blend she acquired on the black market in Marrakesh, a little something they call نسي (nasiya) which means to forget. Then she calls Diggle and has him meet her with a new set of clothing for Oliver in a nearby warehouse. Diggle would never admit it but the tone in her voice told him everything he needed to know. They were in trouble, big trouble and she was beyond peeved.

The SCPD picks up the one dead body and the two unconscious ones along with all the evidence and Lance can’t help the cold chill that runs through him at what the consequences of this might end up being. When they can’t explain what happened or how they even got the drop on the warehouse he knows that trouble is just around the corner if Bertenelli decides that he needs to exact revenge. Whoever left all this for them better have a plan for all the aftermath.

As he picks up the evidence a note drops, all it says is,

_I know how to stop the mob war, I will contact you soon._

Once she is sure that the SCPD has left she turns to face a tied up Helena and an unconscious Oliver with now two darts in his neck.

As Helena wakes up, Felicity assures her that she is safe, for the time being.

“Look Ms. Bertenelli, I get it. You wanted revenge, you needed it, but there were other ways, there were better ways. Now, because you decided that murder was the only way we are here at this crossroads. I don’t do this often but I sympathize with your plight and Mr. Queen”

“You mean the vigilante.”

“Well, I guess that cat is out of the bag. He seems to have taken a liking to you and sees something in you that might or might not be there. I promised him I would try and trust him so I am trusting his instinct just this once and giving you a second opportunity.”

“I didn’t know you had given me a first” at Felicity’s nod she continued “because all I remember is
an ultimatum and I don’t do well…”

“Yeah I know, prideful people never do. You two really are kindred, aren’t you? Look, I frankly
don’t care what you saw it as before. What it is now is your final chance. Take my original deal and
then disappear, staying in Starling is no longer an option for you, I never want to see you in my city
again. Start all over somewhere else and all will be forgotten. I will make sure that your father pays
for his crimes, all of them” she added pointedly.

Helena simply sits there not sure if she has the strength to truly let go of all that hate she has so
deply harbored. Knowing that she needs to respond she hastily agrees under the condition that she
gives her an opportunity to settle her affairs and say goodbye, the last bit she says pointedly looking
at Oliver. Felicity simply nods and darts her in the neck, again. Just then Diggle walks in to an
unconscious Helena and Oliver.

“Do I even want to know?”

At her low chuckle he shoots her a half smile and ask what they should do next. She tells him that
she has to drop off Helena at her apartment in the city and that Oliver is his to carry.

“Once you drop off Oliver at his house meet me at your arrow cave in 2 hours.”

At Diggle’s questioning look towards Oliver she simply says,

“This is between you and I Mr. Diggle, and yes I call it an arrow cave” she winks. He nods and they
both head on their way.

As Felicity arrives at the foundry her phone pings letting her know that Oliver is at Helena’s place
she takes a second and a deep breath. She should have known that after Thea’s heartfelt conversation
with her brother, telling him all that stuff about needing to open up, be honest with someone, and
needing to connect with someone in order to be happy, that he would run to none other than Helena.
She just hoped that Helena stuck to their plan and said her final goodbye. She hoped for all their sake
that this was the end of the Bertenelli/Queen affair, at least for now.

She decides to trust Oliver and let him handle this last bit. She places her phone on silent and hacks
the code to get into the arrow cave.

As she walks down the steps the light go out and only the dim emergency lights turn on.

“Always with the dramatic entrances I see” echoes the voice of an amused Diggle.

“We secret identity types live for the drama, to be enigmas wrapped in mystery.”

“I get it now.”

“So, our boy?”

“I left him at home.”

“Well, he is at Helena’s now.”

“What? That boy is gonna be the end of me, I swear.”

“Us, Mr.Diggle, us!”

“You know you can call me Diggle or Dig”
She smiles at him before saying “You can keep calling me Nia, for now.”

At his understanding smirk she continues.

“We need to talk about Robert Queen.”

“I think I should sit down for this.”

Oliver makes his way into Helena’s apartment, he’s not surprised when she senses him and before he can say anything she speaks.

“I’d ask how you got in here but the Starling City vigilante goes and comes as he pleases, doesn’t he?”

“How did you know?”

“I saw you fight, then I saw your eyes and then, your friend? Confirmed it.”

“She’s not my friend” he says through gritted teeth.

“That island changed you in ways that only someone like me could understand, Oliver.”

“If you truly understood you would see that what you are doing right now, although it may feel like justice, trust me it is not. It’s revenge.”

“Sometimes revenge is justice. Or are you under the same belief as your non-friend?” Helena knew she should have been saying goodbye and not trying to rattle Oliver and put him against this mystery woman in hopes that he would side with her rather than that woman, but she couldn’t help it she had to play all her cards. If anyone was going to take down her father, it would be her, no matter who she had to run over to do it.

“Your father killed your fiancé.”

“And what did your father do to you? Isn’t the man in the hood fighting to set things right? Why is your vendetta more valid than mine? We’re the same, you and I!” Her anger was rising and getting the worst of her she could see it in Oliver’s sympathetic eyes. At least they showed sympathy and not contempt, she could work with sympathy, she could manipulate sympathy.

“No, we’re not.”

“Hiding in plain sight. Concealing our anger with smiles and lies, don’t try and lie to me Oliver, you feel the way I do, I know it and deep down in your bones you know it too.” She couldn’t hold it together anymore she needed him on her side she needed someone on her side. Her emotions were overwhelming her and she couldn’t hold back the tears anymore. In all reality behind all her anger she was still very much a scared little girl whom was betrayed by the one man in her life that should have always protected her, her father.

“Why are you crying?” Oliver asked, something inside of him dying to come out, soothe her and hold her. He stepped closer to her and wiped the tears from her face cradling her face in his hands.

“I don’t know maybe it’s because I have been alone in my hate for so long, it feel…” her voice breaks but Oliver doesn’t need her to finish, he knows exactly what she feels, because it is embedded deep in him as well.

“It feels so good to tell the truth.” He says in a deep voice closing the space between them he kisses
her. She gives in completely yet, in the back of her mind she can’t help but feel that maybe just maybe he can still be on her side. That if she stayed he would fight for her and stand up to that mystery woman. She could hope, she could give in to him.

Oliver knows that she is still uncertain yet, he can’t help but get lost in the idea of being with someone that truly understands him, that knows his secrets and accepts them. Accepts the murderer and doesn’t run away. Someone that he could help and guide to control her hate and cause some good.

He couldn’t help the tiny voice that plays in the back of his head telling him that only fools trust so easily, that only fools let a pretty face manipulate them, that voice sounds a lot like Slade. Yet, he also hears a voice tell him that he needs to let her go. She is not ready for this she is not disciplined like him, not forged out of survival and need. She made a choice to follow this path, to ease her pains with the death of others, to let her crucible run so deep that it stained her soul and hands with blood. Something physically shakes in him as he realizes that it is the voice of Her in his subconscious, he has no idea when that happened but he tries to shake it off as Helena leads him to the bed. The instant he hits the mattress all his doubts leave him and he decides if just for tonight to give in, tomorrow he could make a choice.

When Felicity finally arrives home after an exhausting day, she showers and gets ready for the few hours of sleep she hopes to get, feeling thoroughly pleased with the conversation she had with Diggle and the fact that he is now completely on Team Felicity and Team let’s save Oliver, from Oliver. She settles into bed, checks her tech one last time and sees that Oliver is still at Helena’s, not surprised. Cuddling into her down comforter she feels sleep begin to seep in when her tablet dings.

She lets out an audible groan and just as she is ready to ignore it, to hell with the world, her tablet dings 3 more times. She reaches over and picks it up only to see her recent pain in the ass, Queen love interest has decided to venture out. She makes a bet with herself that Helena is probably up to no good and our local vigilante is none the wiser that he has just been given the slip.

She scrubs her hands over her face jumps out of bed and decides it is finally time that Helena gets sent away rather than told to leave.

Chapter End Notes

This was awfully long so the climatic confrontation will come in the next chapter. See you guys next Sunday!
Chapter Summary

With Helena now a major player in Oliver’s life, Felicity must decide whether to interfere further but, she might not have the patience to deal with Oliver’s new girlfriend.

Chapter Notes

So here is the first part of this chapter I had to break it up because, 1) it was getting too long and 2) the next half has a lot more reveals about Felicity and how she manages everything she does as well as the first major turning point in Oliver’s new life. I hope you all enjoy it.

This isn’t how it was supposed to turn out. This was not the plan, everything had gone to hell in the blink of an eye and he only had himself to blame. Losing an ally he never even knew he wanted, creating a rift between the one ally he was sure he had and all because of what? Pride, Fear, loneliness… all for nothing.

Oliver sat in the foundry contemplating the last week of events and wallowing in his self hatred. More importantly, the last 72 hrs, he slammed his fist into the desk at the sheer fuck-titude of the downward spiral spanning the last three days. Foresight, every man’s personal reminder of their failures and shortcomings. Three days ago Oliver came up short.

ONE WEEK EARLIER

Felicity leaped into her closet and opened the false paneling that concealed the hand scanner, she placed her palm initiating a mechanical sound that caused the entire side wall to open, leading straight into the small studio apartment next to hers. The small studio was supposed to belong to a man by the name of Eitan Noah Ashan, a man that only used it on the rare occasion when he was in the city. Only a couple of tenants had ever seen him in the three years that he owned the studio. If you walked inside it looked like a simple studio, not much in it and seemingly a lot smaller on the inside. If anyone ever paid closer attention they would notice that there was something odd, like the fact that even though no one was ever there it was spotless or the fact that nothing in there was what it seemed, it was no studio at all.

When Felicity moved into this building it was extremely small, standing five stories high, only three apartments per floor and fairly empty. It was perfect. She quickly rented the two bedroom apartment on the top floor, six months later the couple in the next door studio broke up and moved out. A day later Eitan Noah Ashan bought out the lease, three days later movers came with minimal furniture. A week later the manager posted up a notification that apartment 5C was going to be thoroughly repaired and remodeled so there might be some noise and commotion but it would be quick and they
would all be receiving a price cut on their rent for the duration of the construction.

If anybody asked why only 5C was being repaired, a vague answer was given and any further inquiries were ignored. The truth was Eitan had paid off the manager to let him remodel the place and even offered to cover half the other tenant’s rent. The construction lasted two months with only one incident. While remodeling the bathroom the tub ‘accidentally’ fell through to the downstairs apartment. Apologies were made and repairs covered. When the tenants moved back into their apartment they were none the wiser that the ceiling above them had been reinforced and was now almost impenetrable. A week after that the manager quit his job, left and a new elderly lady was brought in. She quickly took a liking to Felicity and when the noisy people moved out of 5A she made sure to only rent it out to quite kind people, Felicity was grateful.

Eitan’s studio at first glance was the typical bachelor studio, one couch one bed a TV and a set of three drawers. Yet, half of it was an illusion every surface every wall had purpose and use.

What better place to hide weapons, from small throwing knives to a bazooka, if it was needed, than in the walls. Where else do you store high level computer systems? In a false kitchen within a studio that served as a high level faraday cage with extensive insulation against satellite imaging, thermal readers and any listening devices while rendering any cell phone useless, except for her own, of course.

A walk in closet full of a variety of clothes, wigs, shoes, and everything to be 100 different people in a coat closet with false paneling and mechanical racks. Including a pair of photostatic veils that allowed her to change her identity with the help of complex programming and technology, courtesy of a very good friend, one Mr.Fox.

In what should be a tub laid a high level Döttling vault, let’s just say that the lead designer for Döttling had a thing for blondes and a loose tongue after a couple of shots of vodka. The once almost unbreakable vault had been modified with personalized security software now, it was unbreakable. An electronic password that changed every hour, a hand and retina scanner and a two key protocol. Not to mention that once you opened it each individual compartment had its own protocols. Each compartment had an identity, each identity a life and a persona and everything necessary for it to pass any background check from any agency.

The largest compartment the most secure which should hold money or jewels or nuclear launch codes had paper files, a book, pictures of all sorts, a framed picture with a 5 year old blonde ray of light each hand being held on either side by a man and a woman. If you took the picture out and turned it over the inscription read

Cooney Island 1994

Donna, Noah and Lissie

Smoak Family vacation.

On top of all that were a couple of handwritten letters from one Robert Queen, a couple of flash drives, a stock portfolio and the keys to a porsche.

She immediately accessed her computers and grabbed her gear. As she was changing into her combat gear her monitor pinged again. It seemed she wasn’t the only one losing sleep for this woman, Oliver seemed to be right on her heels. For some reason that helped her relax, she allowed herself to slow down and clear her head. The last thing she wanted was to attack this woman after
she had slept with Oliver, well she assumed he had slept with her, playboy after all.

She gathered her gear, weapons, sent a text to Diggle and climbed out of the small studio through the roof access in the living room. As she overlooked the city she took a deep cleansing breath and leaped off the roof to the next, doing it a couple of times until she reached where she stored her bike and took off like a blur.

Oliver found himself nearing where Helena was and contemplating exactly what he would do once she was standing in front of him. He spotted her just standing in the shadows of the alley as her viewpoint came into sight he realized she was targeting the Triad, again.

He rushed as fast as he could but not fast enough to stop the first shot from exiting her gun with a loud bang that was only echoed by the rapid fire of the Triad muscle. He manages to pull her away as the Triad car takes off.

“Let go of me Oliver” she shouts shoving him into the alley.

“You need to stop this, now.” The frustration evident in his voice.

“I have weakened my father’s organization to the point that they cannot survive the onslaught.”

“What then? You’ll have your revenge”

“Then, I have justice for what he did to Michael and me.”

“It is not justice” he pleads with her.

“And what you do is?” She scoffed as she reached for her keys, ready to leave.

“Would you let me show you, that there is a different way?” he begs taking hold of her hand where she holds her keys.

“How about I show her the way out of Starling instead?” A no nonsense voice they both immediately recognized came from above them. As they looked up they saw her leap from the roof on one side of the alley to the low standing fence on the other side balancing on the narrow beam and then gracefully dropping right next to them.

Helena immediately saw red and without missing a beat turned on her “You again? You bitch!!”

She leaped towards her pulling out and aiming her gun, Felicity quickly ducks down swinging her leg in a fast sweeping fan motion from the ground all the way around rotating her entire lower body making impact with the gun sending it flying in the air as she came back around and back up in fighting stance, it all happened faster than Oliver could react.

The gun landing on the roof with a loud clang.

Helena spun trying to make contact, which Felicity easily deflected using her own weight against her and sent her barreling onto the floor splayed out like a newborn calf.

“Stay! The adults need to talk now!” she said with a hint of irritation in her voice as she pointed her finger in reprimand at Helena. She took two steps back to be out of her reach and turned to Oliver while simultaneously pulling out a gun and pointing it at Helena. Oliver’s eyes immediately grew wide when he saw the gun but she simply mouthed “tranq gun” and he visibly relaxed but still maintained a fighting stance and eyes on Helena.
It was hard to miss the concern that flashed in his eyes when he looked at Helena and the anger and disconcert directed at her. But she didn’t have the time or the want to reassure him of anything else but the fact that she had no intention of killing her.

“You were supposed to say goodbye. So, why am I now going to have to stop a mob war? Care to explain, Queen boy.”

The change in his face was immediate. Rage and impatience flashed red and she knew that he would strike at any other provocation, she could do nothing more but nod her head heavy with disappointment.

“Tread carefully” he warned “you watch the way you speak to me. I have no hesitation towards…”

“What?” she interrupted, the ire growing in her as well “hitting me, putting me in my place, please. Stop acting like a child throwing a tantrum and then you might have a say in what is going to happen, but not this time, SHE” she says pointedly nodding and following Helena with her gun as she had slowly been moving towards Oliver. “Is gone, Tonight!”

“I can help her I can…” he began to shout, but was immediately cut off.

“You can stay out of my way is what you can do.” She says as she takes determined steps towards him “Think with your head. She is beyond your help.” The instant she realized that she let her frustration place her within reach of Oliver she knew she had made her first mistake that night.

Oliver’s hand snapped out and grabbed her wrist, she saw him swivel to disarm anticipating the movement she quickly twisted and pulled her wrist lose taking out a knife to keep him at bay but his movements were quick and she felt the blade slice through something, mild panic rose within until she heard the quiver land at their feet. She spun to avoid his hold and locked his arm behind him slamming him against the wall face first and pinning him so that his own movements would break his wrist therefore, forcing him to stay still.

She heard her take a ragged breath before she felt the arrow pierce into her right shoulder only stopping from piercing all the way through her shoulder because Helena had used her hand rather than the bow to stab her.

She immediately used her body to push back, released Oliver and used the full force of her uninjured arm and directed her elbow straight into Helena’s face knocking her out cold. Oliver turned ready to keep fighting but, she was gone.

All that was left was a broken half of one of his arrows on the floor and an unconscious Helena.

The fact that tonight ended with Felicity cleaning her wound and gluing it shut had her cursing against the walls of her base thankful for the soundproofing. She cursed louder as the sting carried through her entire body, in a truly asshole move Helena had twisted the damn arrow when she had embedded it into her shoulder. She had tried to reach back in order to stitch it close but that wasn’t happening.

At the same time Oliver was in the foundry cleaning up Helena’s wounds. She had scrapes on her hands, a popped lip, a possibly fractured cheekbone and she was going to have a very noticeable bruise across her face, luckily her nose wasn’t broken.

It had taken a whole lot of convincing and promises to get Helena to stay and not go out seeking, “That bitch!”
“Helena” muttered Oliver a hint of warning in his tone.

“What?” she nearly spit out. Sensing that if he said the wrong thing he might lose her he decided to change the subject.

“Nothing. Just let me finish cleaning your wounds. Look if we are going to do this we need to stay off Her radar. I already have a friend working damage control. Take it from me, we do not want to cross Her and we are sort of on the same side.”

“If you work with Her I am leaving.”

“Look, let me just make sure you don’t need any stitches on your lip and we will get some food and talk it over.”

Oliver knew it would not be easy to convince her to stay without dealing with Her but he was also very aware of the fact that there was nothing he could do to stop Her from interfering. He had to resign himself to mediation and damage control rather than full control and he didn't know if this was the best mindset to be in while trying to reign in Helena.

He needed solutions and finality to this back and forth with Her. He needed to get ahead of Her and that meant starting with Her identity, screw the consequences.

Shaking his head, reminding himself to take it one step at a time he opted for the problem at hand, getting Helena to stay and doing things his way. As they talked precisely about that he added that letting him train her in order to seek justice could be the best solution to all their problems, he had to admit to being taken aback by her brash honesty.

“Thank you for the coffee and the sex but I am not interested.” Helena didn’t seem at all remise as she got up from the bar and headed towards the door. He knew it was now or never.

“Okay, Stop, wait. Let’s compromise, I will let you help me look further into the identity of the mystery woman but, only if you let me show you what it is I do. At the end you decide what you want to do with that.”

“I want to deal with your little ginger girlfriend my way, I get my time with her.”

“She.”

“There is no compromise here, Oliver.”

“Okay how about we take a day to cool off and come back to this see where we are?”

“You take a day, I want that bitch” she said as she left Verdant.

On the ride over to the foundry Oliver had called Dig and informed him of what had happened, there was something in Dig’s voice when he asked him to please contact Her and try and smooth things over. Dig’s responses were clipped and short and he hung up before Oliver could finish. Oliver knew they would be talking about this later, Diggle would make sure of that.

As Dig sat in his apartment contemplating whether or not to contact Nia he felt his anger and dislike towards Helena grow more and more. He was in his own head trying to figure out how to make Oliver wake up and whether he should even play mediator when his phone began to ring.

“Have you ever tried to stitch a wound on your own back? Not pretty. I actually gave up.” She said
with clear annoyance in her voice.

“How bad is it? Need help?” Diggle decided is she was going to skip the pleasantries so should he.

“Nope. What I need is self control and at least 100 feet between me and a weapon.”

“I suspect everything is a weapon to you.”

“Good point.”

“So…” he asked carefully not really sure how to breach the subject.

“I AM DONE, with OLIVER… not you.” she quickly corrected. “He wants to save his little girlfriend well, then he will do it alone. This is all going to hell and he is driving the bus and I will not interfere.”

“This could have consequences beyond just them two.”

“I know” a clear sadness in her voice.

“He has good intentions, misguided as they may be but…”

“Look Dig, you don’t have to convince me of his intentions, I know he is a good man. That’s not what this is about. I saw the look in his eyes, the desperation to see something in her that you and I both know is not there anymore. Helena is just waiting for an excuse to get back on track with her vendetta, but Oliver will never see it, he is going to have to live it. So, as far as my involvement, there will be none, I will let him make his mistakes and see this one out to the bitter end. I will diminish the collateral damage where I can but that is all, my life does and will not revolve around Oliver Queen. If you need me, contact me, anytime. Take care Dig and good luck.”

“Thanks.” was all he could say as the call ended and he dwelled on everything she had said. There was something in her voice, he thought it was disappointment, but he couldn’t be sure. He decided that it was better to not let Oliver in on this conversation and much like Nia take a back seat to this, well after he said his piece. He figured he would give him a day, or rather himself a day to decide what he really wanted to do.

Oliver bent over and propelled himself into a controlled headstand against the wall he had a million thoughts running through his head and no energy or time to sort them. He was frankly surprised that She had not made an appearance and even more surprised that when he called Dig to check on his progress, he simply texted him back

_Dig:_ We will talk later.

Something was up with Dig, Helena was still not committing to anything and this damn woman.

Damn Woman!

Everywhere he turned, there She was meddling into his business, telling him what to do, denying him the truth, slamming him into the wall and almost breaking his wrist. “DAMN WOMAN” he grunted as he pushed up from his headstand push up.

“I don’t know where the next olympics are at but you might want to think about signing yourself up. So you want to talk about last night?...Okay! last time you and I spoke you were on your way to stop Helena Bertenelli from her one woman war against the mafia.” at Oliver’s non- answer he continued
while rounding the table to stand right in front of him. “How’d that work out for you? Well, let’s see, Nick Salvatti is in the ICU along with one of his henchmen and the other is dead.”

At Diggle’s tone Oliver swung his legs over and stood up face to face trying to convey his strength as much as he could “We got jumped. We didn’t have a choice.”

“We? Wow, it’s we now?”

“She knows Diggle.”

“Riiight. I guess I should be thankful because all three would probably be dead if it wasn’t for Her. Funny how she didn’t default to killing unlike…”

“Dig” he said warning him that he wasn’t in the mood.

“Oh sorry, do you not want to talk about this? Because I would of preferred Helena not know our secret but we don't always get what we want.”

“It was my secret or her life” he spat out.

“It’s not just your secret anymore, Oliver. This woman is a killer. She’s been dropping bodies all over the city.”

“Diggle, she’s not what you think she is. Three years ago she was going to turn her dad over to the FBI, and it ended up getting her fiance killed, under her father’s orders.”

“I am not going to belittle how messed up that is but, she is still dangerous. If Bertenelli retaliates against the Triad or is perceived to, the Triad is gonna rain down hell and innocent people are going to be killed and Starling City will be a battleground.”

“Dammit Diggle she is lost, whether she knows it or not. I can save her. Stop her.”

“That’s just it, you can’t save her, ok? Some people don’t change. She had two, Oliver, two opportunities to choose a different path.”

“Those were ultimatums not choices, that damn woman had no business intervening. She made everything worse.”

“Really, man. She saved those people, she gave her an opportunity to stay here and have her father brought to justice and what did she get? An arrow through the shoulder that’s what.”

“She was forcing Helena to leave the country, she pushed her too far.”

“So naturally she stabbed her, oh yeah, you can save her” the sarcasm dripping from his statement.

“I CAN, I can help her.”

Seeing that he just wasn’t getting through to Oliver, Diggle decided he needed to bring his voice down and say this last bit because Oliver was ready to dismiss him if he kept at this pace.

“All right, maybe you think you’re more persuasive than you are or maybe she thinks she is fine the way she is on her mission of righteous fury. Whatever it is, either way all of this, it ends badly and the further you push down this road the lonelier you will find yourself Oliver. The few allies you have are dropping like flies and when you hit the wall at the end of this, I really hope you do what needs to be done.”
Jumping on the salmon ladder with his teeth clenched Oliver responded with the only truth he had at that moment “Either way, I got to try.”

Oliver needed to hold on to the only truth he had at the moment, that he owed Helena, that he understood her pain and could help her be better, and that he would do everything to accomplish that. With that conviction he sought her out and now found himself standing in front of Sara Lance’s grave with Helena. He knows he needs to appeal to her love, to whom she once was by showing her that he knows similar tragedy and yet has found solace in justice and not revenge.

Making a connection with his pain Helena agrees to try it his way.

It begins slow and frustrating. He feels that archery is the best way to teach her patience and control. She obviously disagrees but after he demonstrates his impressive skills she figures learning a new, stealthier weapon could be a far greater asset than she anticipated. As they are training and flirting Oliver can’t help but admit that this is the most he has enjoyed training and one of the first times he has felt that his mission and knowledge was truly helping and saving someone he cared for.

But of course because everything in his life is short lived he hears the foundry doors open and sees Diggle descend the stairs. The minute the man’s eyes land on Helena his face turns sour.

“Dig this is Helena” he turns to Helena faltering a bit “Dig is my...Associate.”

With a smile Helena reaches out to shake his hand as she says “Well, any associate of Oliver’s…”

“Is absolutely nothing to you, ma’am.” Diggle quickly interrupted leaving no room for misinterpretation.

With a calculating look Helena simply stood up “I’ll leave you and your ‘associate” as she left. The minute she was out the door, Diggle turned hard eyes on Oliver.

“She knows my name and my face well that is just lovely.”

“You can trust her like you trust me.”

“Except I don’t trust her and you are treading a very thin line. You sleeping with this girl, Oliver?”

“I am sorry to to hear that Dig, but understand one thing my relationship with Helena isn’t any of your business, John.”

“It became my business when you brought me into this and then decided , on your own, to make her a part of this including my identity. And when I signed on, I told you I was gonna keep your head straight. Well, Oliver you’re lonelier than you want to admit and that’s why you think you can change this girl. Because you need to believe you can, because you refuse to fail. You’re like a dope fiend who thinks he can deal with his own addiction by making another addict go straight. Oliver, what you do is dangerous and getting confused about who’s good and who’s bad is a good way to get yourself dead.”

“Oh, like your little best friend. She’s good? How are you so damn sure about a woman you know nothing about, who shrouds her entire life in secrets, whose name you don’t even know? Yet, Helena who is here putting her truths before us and who I am telling you, you can trust, you can’t even dignify to shake her hand. How are you so sure?”

“The same way I was sure about you. A name tells me nothing, actions Oliver, those are a person’s truths those are their reality and she has said so much more in actions than Helena has with both.”
“You done?” Oliver responded as his body vibrated with frustration.

Sighing deeply Diggle let his shoulders hang a bit low yet, held his chin high. “Yeah, I’m done. With this. Everything else, I don’t know. I don’t know, Oliver. You tell me.”

As Felicity typed, well more like pounded on her poor innocent keyboard she kept telling herself to just let him fall. Easier said than done a small voice quipped, she hated that little voice, she hated more that it sounded like her father. She could see him standing in front of her arms crossed, shoulders relaxed with an amused and all knowing smile on his face, head slightly tilted to the side letting her know he was not buying anything she was selling.

She sighed deeply as she picked up her cell phone and answered Diggle’s text. It had been four days since the last time she had seen Oliver and now here was Dig telling her that he was still hell bent on this mission and was going as far as training Helena, which she already knew, she might of looked at the footage last night when she couldn’t sleep, Oliver was on a sure path to getting himself killed.

**Felicity:** I Know. I am still not interfering. That might be what he wants Diggle.

**Dig:** Would you at least stay on them and only interfere if things get really bad.

**Felicity:** She can kill him for all I care, might be just desserts.

**Dig:** You don’t believe that.

She sighed and slumped back on her chair knowing very well if she had a chance to save him or anyone she would take it.

**Felicity:** You’re right but I might let her knock him around a bit before stepping in.

**Dig:** As you should.

**Dig:** Can I rest easier then?

**Felicity:** Yeah

**Dig:** Thanks

**Felicity:** :)

As she put her cell phone down her tablet pinged and a heaviness fell over her chest, dammit all her digging into Moira Queen was sending her down a different rabbit hole and she hated every bit of it what she hated more was the look on Mr.Steele’s face everytime she revealed something to him, she hated hurting good people.

Making her way up to the top floor she knew she had to address this carefully and only give him minimal relevant information. She braced herself, deciding small talk was the best ice breaker for ‘your wife is in some shady shit and she is lying to you about everything’ she really hoped she didn't babble into that conversation.

“How was your trip to Australia? I’ve always wanted to go down under, it’s just I have this thing about kangaroos, more of a phobia. They wig me out, they look evil and am sure their picture is up on everything, everywhere in that country. Don’t think I could handle that plus ozone layer, bum deal.” Well that was a babble sans revelation so she would take the half win.
Technically she had been to Australia, once before. More of a layover, which ended up being a 22 hr stay in which she missed her plane, got chased, shot at, and made some actual friends. While at the airport bar her cell phone picked up on a secure connection with high level encryption. That lead her to a possible lead on some of the islands off the coast of China she was just starting to investigate, these people had genuine knowledge that she had been seeking on her trip.

Okay so over the years she had become severely paranoid, especially when abroad, too many run ins with Suicide Squads, Leagues of Assassins, guys named Dead-something that she stopped taking chances and started relying on her number one truth: Technology Doesn’t Lie. She created a program that would pick up any secure connections with high level encryption with in a 5 mile radius of her current location. This particular connection was less than 10 feet from her, causing her to go on high alert. She pulled out her tablet and started typing away. The minute she locked into the connection one of her ghost programs carbon copied everything that was being shared without leaving a single trace, at least that’s what it was supposed to do.

In the communication she learned of 2 secret service agents that had been sent to a remote island off of China the name was obviously a code name-- Fallen General, she could work on that later. She focused on trying to figure out who these 2 men were and the easiest way was hacking into the Australian Secret Service for unredacted files on the mission. Fifteen hours later she found out that her ghost program needed some work. She reprimanded herself as she ran through rural Australia, was attacked by a group of kangaroos granted she startled them, and fled from the Australian Secret Service into New Zealand where she met a wonderful family that helped her by chartering a plane to get her to the safe house in Thailand. Where for 2 days she hid out cleaning up her tracks and making sure no one knew she was ever in Australia. So, yeah she hated Australia, but thanked the Australian Secret Service for setting her on the right path. Funny how chance and dumb luck, her mom would say destiny but her mom did say a lot of crazy things, played such a huge part in her life.

She was brought out of her memory by Mr. Steele’s cool accented voice “You had something important to tell me, Ms. Smoak?”

“Yes, I did. It’s about Tempest. Your wife’s mysterious LLC, the one she diverted company funds to.”

“I appreciate your diligence on this but it’s just a simple misunderstanding between my wife and I and it has been resolved.” she understood why he was being so cold and distant, discovering the Gambit could not have been easy. Although, she really had hoped that her continued attempt at keeping him in the loop would help in keeping him safe because after all knowledge was power.

“No, see it hasn’t. There is something about the money transfer that felt hinky to me. The money your wife withdrew from the company I wasn’t the only one who tracked it. She was being shadowed by another entity and who ever it was, was good, NSA good but as you know I am good too. So, even though they left almost no trace of their presence in our system, I did manage to find one thing well, one image.” As she pulls out the image that she had been trying to decipher for the past day, in hopes that he could identify it she hands it to him.

“Does that symbol mean something to you sir?”

“No! What means something to me is one of my employees prying into my wife’s private business without my authorization. Should it happen again I’ll have you suspended. Is that clear?!”
“Crystal” she says nodding and leaving the office. She presses for the elevator she can’t help but mutter under her breath. “sure all of a sudden he doesn’t want to hear it. Well, he sure let me say everything I was going to say and kept the image I printed before kicking me out. Figures, I should have known.”

“Did you say something dear?” asked the secretary. Felicity quickly turned remembering she wasn’t alone and simply smiled before nodding and entering the elevator that had opened just at the right moment. She leaned back against the wall and couldn’t help but think that the conversation Moira and Walter had upon his return had obviously had an impact on him. He was either listening to her and setting this aside or he was more curious than before but far more cautious. Either way she was going to have to reach out to some contacts and get to the meaning of that image because, she was sure it was important.

Quickly getting back to work, she did after all still have to maintain the security system at QC seeing as the day job was her actual ‘normal’ life. Of course she was not, at all, worried or contemplating what Queen and his girlfriend were up to in the last 3 days since she last had seen them. She was done, she reminded herself.

Oliver was feeling much more adventurous and secure in his mission to save Helena, especially since he had basically been given free range and She has been staying out of his way.

Dig had also taken a backseat, so here he was now sharing every last bit of his life with this woman and hoping to change both of their lives, for the better. They were going to work a mission together and they had even created a new costume for her, purple, because as she said ‘I like purple’.

Their target for the night was one of her father’s biggest drug dealers and producers, none of that cheap $20 for a dime bag shit. This was prescription drugs, oxycodone, the kind rich privileged kids paid top dollar for. With this they would practically destroy Bertenelli’s main money supply and all they had to do was take out one Anthony Venza.

As Felicity decided to call it a day she cleared her mind of all and heads to her car relieved that for the first time in the past week she gets to go home with ZERO Oliver worries to deal with. She drives past her favorite deli contemplating on stopping when her phone pings that dreaded sound that has become her nemesis, the one that tells her one vigilante playboy is up to no good. Glancing from the deli to her phone she decides on food, definitely food and tosses her phone in her bag. Halfway through turning her car around she remembers her conversation with Dig and the worry in his voice, with a deep sigh she makes a u-turn, again, and heads towards the docks.

Leaving her car in a warehouse, she happens to own, she heads out on foot and notices she is right on top of them. She stops a couple of buildings over and watches as they near the building on the far end. Immediately she knows it is Anthony Venza’s operations. She had managed to hit them twice before but like nuclear holocaust roaches they just kept coming back.

She recognized one of the gunmen at the door, she had broken his arm in three places two years ago it seems she hadn’t made as much of an impact as she hoped, maybe this time it would stick. She prepared to enter the building then remembered what she had decided earlier that day and pulled back.

This time she would just wait and see, deciding to only intervene if things seemed to get out of hand. She spotted a perfect place where she could perch once they had entered the building. As she watched them enter from two different vantage points she also made her way to the warehouse.

She could see Venza and his men preparing to distribute and something itched in her to simply show herself knowing very well that Venza would surrender and no blood would be shed. His two month
stint in the hospital thanks to one very angry and very determined Felicity had put him out of business for a year, half his men in Iron Heights and cost him some broken bones and millions. Yet, it seemed like leaving the Bertenelli Family was not an option for him, she should have known.

Felicity watches Oliver and Helena make their grand entrance and in unison deliver his catch phrase, Felicity can’t help but roll her eyes and whisper “seriously guys, come on. This is why nobody likes your bow wielding ass”.

She watches them fight and stop the distribution of a couple of kilos of drugs. All of sudden she catches sight of Helena taking things too far and she is about to drop into the warehouse from the skylight, when she sees Oliver pull her away and talk her down.

She would be lying if she didn’t admit she was somewhat proud that he was using sincerity in order to help Helena. She wondered if maybe she had been too quick to pass judgement on Helena. It was very possible that Oliver had seen something in her that he hoped someone saw in him. Something worthwhile, a slither of something worth a second chance. She truly hoped that was the case, she wouldn’t mind being wrong this one time.

She gets ready to leave and gives them one last look only to see them argue a bit, which more than likely has something to do with the fact that Venza got away, followed by Oliver placating an angered Helena and a kiss. She feels a bit of warmth and ice invade her. There is a sense of hope and happiness that Oliver might be able to make this work. Find some normalcy and carve his own little bit of happy, the way his father would have wanted.

Maybe not with the type of woman Robert would have wanted but given the life Oliver lived now, exceptions had to be reevaluated. She tried to focus on the hope and ignore the cold shiver that reminded her that if it went south, if she was right this could further break an already broken man and leave him with nothing left to lose and that scared the hell out of her.

She decides to wait for them to leave before she makes her way over towards where she saw Venza hide out a couple of warehouses over. She makes her way down into the warehouse where he is hiding and quickly finds him. As she sneaks closer she realizes he is on the phone with whom she can only assume is one very angry Frank Bertenelli.

Before Venza even realizes that she is in the room she takes his phone. To his credit Venza is quick to draw his gun and turn to face her, that is until he sees her and recognition lights his eyes. Immediately his face goes pale and he raises his hands in surrender, pleading with her to spare him. She puts one finger over her lips and he quiets down, then she motions for him to sit down and he does so without argument as she raises the phone to her ear.

“Mr. Bertenelli, as your associate has already informed you this operation you run, quite nice by the way, is over. Now, if you want to avoid further damage to your business you will meet with me in three nights. Don’t worry about the when or how I will come to you.”

“Who the fuck are you?” he grounds out through clenched teeth.

“I’ll let Mr. Venza introduce me, we are very well acquainted.” With that she tosses the phone back to Venza but not before warning him that he has 24 hours to disappear he quickly nods and in the seconds it takes him to glance at the phone and look back up, she is gone.

By the time she gets home she is exhausted, her shoulder is sore and she can feel the headache building behind her eyes. Out of habit she turns on her computers and immediately regrets it when she sees all the updates and notifications. With a deep guttural groan she kicks hers shoes across the room and decides to text Digg first, followed by a hot bath, then updates and lastly much needed
As the sunlight from the new day broke through her thick curtains, way faster than she had hoped, she couldn’t help but dwell on her upcoming meeting with Frank Bertenelli, she contemplated just how difficult that entire situation was bound to get but figured that would be the worst of things, it turned out that there was always more complicated things waiting for her.

She was definitely to blame for making a fake identity so fucken real. Having left ninelmuses as a fully functioning company, of course Tommy would call the company, specifically her incredibly efficient assistant, when he couldn’t get a hold of her after several attempts.

And of course having previously told her assistant that Tommy had complete access to her, Cordelia, at all times, and being an overachiever which is why she hired her, she happily informed Tommy that “Ms. Todd is in Starling City at the moment.”

When she called to ask her how she knew, Elisa her assistant simply told her that she had heard her conversation with Mr. Todd where she had mentioned that she was returning to Starling City, indefinitely.

Damn, Elisa really was efficient.

She took a deep breath before checking her voicemail from Tommy, which was what had prompted her deep dive into her assistant. Before the message even started playing she already had a dozen scenarios playing out in her head followed by a dozen solutions.

Hey there Cordy, I am really trying hard not to take offense to the fact you are in Starling and I haven’t received a single text or a call. What is a guy to think when their boss is in town and doesn’t even check in? I will assume you were so busy that it escaped you and will forgive you but, only if you come out to dinner with me, I will not take no for an answer. I need to thank you for everything you have done and catch you up on the progress I have made so far. Meet me, today at 7pm at Table Salt. Oh yeah, by the way this is Tommy…Merlyn. Okay see you there, bye.

She really didn’t have time for this but she also had no choice, which is why after apologizing for her inconsideration she accepted dinner and she now had 4 identities roaming around Starling, perfect just perfect, she thought, Cass would really get a kick out of this.

Deciding to take it ne identity at a time she goes about her regular morning routine, grateful that she could start her day as simply herself, even if it wouldn’t last very long and soon enough she would have to bury another identity.
It is Easier to Build Strong Children than to Repair Broken Men

Chapter Summary

With complications everywhere Felicity ends up face to face with Oliver, Helena and an unsuspecting Tommy. Meanwhile trying simply trying to keep her boss alive long enough to help him and finally with Helena spiraling out of control Felicity and Oliver find themselves at different ends of a fight with dire consequences for all.

Chapter Notes

The second part is here and things just got real in many ways. As the title states this shows how two children whom come from broken childhoods and become broken adults ultimately forge two very different paths.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

previously…

This isn’t how it was supposed to turn out. This was not the plan, everything had gone to hell in a blink of an eye and he only had himself to blame. Losing an ally he never even knew he wanted, creating a rift between the one ally he was sure he had and all because of what, pride, fear, loneliness… all for nothing. As Oliver sat in the foundry contemplating the last week of events. More importantly, the last 72 hrs, he slammed his fist into the desk at the sheer fuck-titude of the downward spiral spanning the last three days. Foresight, every man’s personal reminder of their failures and shortcomings. Three days ago Oliver came up short…

Felicity might have hated the process of waking up but she always enjoyed mornings. That first sip of coffee was always glorious, feeling her home slowly get warmer as the sun beamed through the windows, her morning shower all had been her favorite things. Nowadays she found new days came with responsibilities she didn’t want to face and more often than not, not so pleasant news.

This morning was no different, of course, because she was a masochist she decided to email Cass and ask her for any updates on Merlyn Senior. The more she dealt with Walter and Moira’s situation the more suspicious she was becoming of everyone. So many years taking so many things for granted, the little progress she was making the pockets of safety she created in the Glades and now she was beginning to see that nobody was who she perceived them to be.

As far as she was concerned everyone had an agenda and everyone wore a mask, she chastised herself, should she really be surprised seeing as she was the biggest lie of them all.

Going about her day entailed many things, first, as per usual, her 10 mile run into the Glades to get an update on everything that was going on.

Busy as Oliver Queen had been keeping her, she had to rely on the few informants she trusted to let her know how things were going.
“Morning Jellybear.”

“Seriously, still with that.”

“I see you got my message, so what’s going on?” she continued completely disregarding the irritated voice of her informant.

“You are never going to drop that name, are you?”

She simply chuckles as she remains in the alley leaning against the wall, hood up and giving his eyes only a view of her profile. He remains about 5 feet from her knowing better than to try and get closer to see her face, he’s tried before and he ended with his face to the ground and a knee to the back of his neck, first and last time he tried.

Every time he meets up with her he has a hard time processing these two personas, the playful nature of the woman that stands in front of him with the sharp precision of the fighter he has seen first hand.

“Alright, so there are rumours of some new drug being produced in the Glades, some real nasty stuff as far as I can see. It’s a really small operation right now but has the potential to get real ugly real fast. And well, the usual small time stuff as always, wouldn’t be the Glades either wise.”

“How is your mom?”

“Fine.”

“So, not fine.” she watches him from her peripherals as he shifts his feet and pushes down on his red hoodie with his hands in the pockets.

“Here, I managed to get some more meds for her, and the bed at the rehab is still there. If you can get her to stay then do it.” He simply nods and that’s really all the thanks she needs. She tells him to keep his ear to the ground and keep her updated while she puts some feelers out and communicates with her SCPD contacts. She thanks him and tosses him an envelope with money. He catches it immediately knowing it’s money he raises his head to protest but she is already gone.

“Figures. She is going to have to teach me how the hell she does that.” As he walks home he stops by the local shelter and drops off the envelope with money. He helps because this is his city, his home and he considers the meds to be payment enough. Regardless he can’t help but be thankful, even if he rarely says it, for meeting her.

→ → → → →

“Do you make a habit of getting into fights in alleys when you are outnumbered?”

“Whoa?!! What the hell are you?”

“Thank you so much for saving my ass before it was handed to me.” she mocked in a deeper voice. “Oh no need to thank me just helping a fellow citizen in trouble.” she deadpanned as she leaned arms crossed against the wall. Seeing he was speechless she continued.

“Just in case you missed it that was me helping you, again. Okay, so nothing. Wow! Kids nowadays have no manners.” She dismissed turning to walk away, but not before making one last comment over her shoulder “You’re welcome”.

She had taken two steps when she heard his timid voice carry over the city noise, “sorry, thanks.”
“Uhmm what was that?” she responded putting her hand to her ear.

He rolled his eyes and huffed out an irritated breath.

“Just kidding. So what was all that about.” nodding in the direction that the four guys had run off into. “Why the kamikaze attack, those dudes had at least 50 pounds on you and not to mention there were four of them and one lanky you.”

“All brawn and no brains, I had them.”

“Didn’t look that way to me, from up there.” She said pointing to the roof of the six-story building behind her.

“Who are you? And what are you wearing?”

“My name is none of your business and I think they call these clothes,” she emphasized by tugging on her top.

“Are you always so…”

“Clever” she interrupted.

“I was going to say annoying.”

“Watch it” her tone coming out rougher than intended.

“Snarky?” he winced

“Hmmm, I’ll take it. The answer is yes, and are you always so rude?”

“Yes,” he said raising his chin in defiance, she chuckled and once again surprised him

“You’re a smart ass, arrogant and cocky but smart, I like that”

“Thanks, I guess…”

As she paced around him, he had to admit that he felt uneasy and extremely intimidated. she looked like a caged animal who had just been let out and it was making him jumpy. Plus the get up she had on was not helping. She was wearing all black, almost looked like a jumpsuit yet, there were holsters and pockets everywhere as well as a belt. It was rather form fitting which let him see that she was rather petite, how she managed to take those guys out he was still trying to figure out. Regardless of her size, she looked capable and dangerous and that’s the assumption he was going with.

As he kept inspecting her get-up he saw she was wearing black combat boots which looked like they had slots for knives on the sides. As he worked his way up her body he saw a couple more holsters around her legs which seemed to also carry knives. Her belt had 2 guns, and some other gadgets which he had no idea what they were. She had shoulder holsters with a sword that barely peeked over one shoulder and a couple more slits on her arms. All her knives, gadgets and holsters neatly covered in black leather, he knew it was leather, he could smell it. The rest of her outfit he had no idea what it was made off because when the light caught it a certain way it seemed to blend with the background just perfectly making every move she took look seamless, effortless and almost like she was floating from one spot to another.

The final piece was the black hood over her head it was large and cascaded down to her shoulders shrouding in shadows most of her face. The extra material at her shoulders was wrapped delicately
around her neck. Attached to the hood was a thin layered mesh that covered half her face from right under her eyes all the way to where the hood connected to her shoulders. Only her eyes were technically visible if it wasn’t for the hood that fell at a V over her face. Besides that all he could see where wisps of curly vibrant red hair that fluttered across her face when the breeze hit her just right. When his eyes fell back on her face he realized that he had been staring and she had noticed, so he let his gaze drop.

“What did you learn?”

“Excuse me?”

“Now that you have thoroughly analyzed me what did you learn?”

He hesitated for a bit before he responded, “You carry a shit load of weapons, but you prefer the throwing knives.” at that she cooked her head and nodded for him to continue “You have them placed all over your body. You must be fast and very good with them or else you wouldn’t rely on them. You have a great fighting ability and seems like you are more the type to disarm and neutralize an enemy rather than kill.”

With an up twitch of her lips, she asked: “Why do you say that?”

“That on your hip is a tranq gun, only the other is an actual gun and you don’t have any extra clips on you, which tells me that you almost never use the one gun that you carry. Plus you also have rubber bullets on your belt.”

“Very Nice. What else?”

“You don’t care very much about hiding your identity or else you would wear a mask or something instead of just a hood.”

“Oh so close. Sorry game over.”

At his confused look, she walked right up to him standing only a foot away and raised her head allowing her hood to tip back just enough to meet his eyes. As he regained his breath, because for a second he thought he was a dead man, he met her eyes. There under the black hood with the charcoal green satin lining, he found the most intense green eyes he had ever seen, emeralds for eyes. For a second he became sort of lost in them until her raspy deep voice, with an accent he could not place, snapped him back to attention.

“If an enemy gets close enough to pull down my hood then it doesn’t matter what I wear he will remove it just the same. A mask offers me no more protection than this hood. I never let anyone get close enough and the day someone does, only one of us is walking away from that fight with our identity intact.” with that, she started to walk away from him and towards the fire escape on the side of the building. As she reached up to pull the ladder down he shouted at her.

“I could have pulled down your hood. Well, I could have tried”

“Yeah, and?”

“But you said.”

“I know what I said.”

“Oh” was all he said as he saw her gracefully use the latter to propel herself up and jump
effortlessly and silently from one floor to the next until she reached the roof. He backed-up to the other side of the alley to try and keep eyes on her and found it difficult to distinguish her silhouette from the light play of the city and its shadows. Now he saw how she got around undetected. As he raised his hood on his head and started to walk away he had gotten about 3 buildings down when he felt something hit him on the head. He looked around and then up and there she was crouched down on top of the one story convenience store.

“Hey dumbass, what’s your name?”

“None of…’ she crossed her arms and glared at him as he sheepishly smiled and rubbed the back of his neck.

“Roy, Roy Harper.”

“Nice to meet you, Roy, see you around.”

“When? Hey when will I see you again” he shouted as he hopped up and down trying to see where she had gone. As he jumped he heard a bell ding and looked down to find confused and worried eyes from an older man exiting the convenience store on him. The elderly man had walked out only to be greeted by a young man jumping up and down like a crazy person and shouting up to the sky.

Roy mumbled something as he picked up his hood again stuffed his hands into his pockets and walked away, swearing he heard a feminine laugh in the wind. He really hoped he saw Her again. He would, many more times.

As the sun breaks through the cityscape Helena and Oliver were already in the foundry training, Dig had called in ‘sick’ and Starling goes about its business, blissfully unaware. When the lunch hour rolls around Felicity heads out for an extended lunch, she can feel the tension beginning to grow in her neck, she’d like to blame it on her poor posture but she knows better.

**Having changed identities** she jumps into the Porsche and heads to meet with Bertenelli. The minute she arrives she knows everything is on edge. She presents him with his money, completely clean and ready to be used and then quickly tells him that she’s heard of his recent misfortune and seeing as she does good business with the triad she is a little conflicted on whether to continue her business deal with him. After a long conversation, Frank convinces her to stick around by offering a more established position in the organization and letting her in on some secrets, which is exactly what she wanted.

She needs to be close to him in order to protect him, but only long enough for the FBI to haul him away, alive. They strike a new deal and make plans to meet in two days when a new shipment is set to arrive and he would be meeting with the triad. His hope is that his relationship with, Renee Magritte, and her established relationship with the Triad will dissipate a lot of the animosity and tension between the families.

She makes her way out after making final arrangements, gets in her car and drives away. In the distance over the high walls sits Helena with long-range binoculars. She immediately recognizes Renee and wonders what she is doing there again. She worries that she might be helping her dad get back on his feet after the hit they gave him yesterday, so she decides to follow her. She hasn’t been following her more than 3 blocks before Felicity spots the bike maintaining a distance but not
maneuvering discreetly enough. Or maybe it is just that Felicity always drives evasively precisely to spot out tails.

She decides to change the tables and navigate some streets she knows well spotting the garage she makes a sharp turn straight through and backs out only to turn back around and end up behind the bike she knew belonged to Helena.

The Porsche might be ostentatious but she had routes set up all over the city, her city. She watches Helena and contemplates following her, she can’t help but laughs at herself, she would be spotted almost immediately. Seeing as she only has 40 minutes to change and get back to work she contemplates confronting her now or later and decides she has enough going on, this could wait.

The end of the workday arrives faster than she had hoped, getting lost in programming and codes is one of the few reprieves Felicity still has and some afternoons she wishes she could stay late then mingle with her co-workers and maybe go out to a bar and grab a drink, talk about their day, complain about the executives and who knows meet someone cute and entertaining, like a normal 22 year old. Instead, she has an email from Cass in her inbox letting her know that although Malcolm Merlyn seems squeaky clean there are about 7 years of his life missing from any record. Yet, she might have a lead but needs time to figure it out. Time, what a joke, the last thing Felicity seems to have is time. After 5 long years of an almost routine life, one castaway playboy later and time seems to be flying out of her hands right along with her patience and control.

On her drive home, she realizes that she obviously can’t leave her place looking like Cordelia Todd. So she has her assistant call the best hotel in the city and books her a suite for tonight. She calls the car agency and has them send a town car to the hotel. Lastly, she calls the concierge and has them send a rack of cocktail dresses for her to be ready in her room by the time she arrives at 4:30. Feeling ready she drops everything off in her apartment gathers her identity from her safe and calls a cab.

While in the cab dressed in slacks, a silk blouse, heels, and big sunglasses she expertly wraps her head in a silk scarf. She exits at the hotel and walks in, in full Cordelia mode. Within minutes she is escorted to her suite where everything she asked for is waiting. She tips the bellboy and concierge extra generously so that no one knows she is there and no one disturbs her. She gets ready and in a matter of an hour and a half she is once again Cordelia, long wavy golden brown hair swept to one side, makeup fully done, dressed to impress.

Table Salt is one of the top restaurants in Starling City, getting a table on short notice is nearly impossible unless you have a name that carries weight or a couple of hundred dollar bills to spare. As Tommy walked in with a gorgeous Laurel draped on his arm the place was full to capacity and there didn’t seem to be an empty table in the place. He walked right up and gave his name, when he was told the wait time was over an hour he reached into his pocket ready to pull out some bills and change the wait time when he remembered that he no longer carried an obscene amount of cash in his wallet and that his new job perks came in plastic and he hadn’t quite arranged for that. So he sheepishly smiled at the hostess and stepped back. As they waited for about 10 minutes, they spotted Oliver coming in with a beautiful brunette on his arm. The instant they made eye contact Tommy felt the tension grow thick enough to cut with a knife.

“Well, this is quite the coincidence, Tommy Merlyn, and Laurel Lance” he said as he reached out to shake Helena’s hand.

“This is Helena Bertenelli” answered Oliver.

“So, it seems a bit busy, right?” commented Helena trying to read the people in the room beyond the obvious tension.
“Yes, and I am starving” Laurel commented as they all chuckled uncomfortably.

Cordelia had already been on edge given her week, but she physically came to a halt at the door as she spotted Tommy, not only with Laurel, which she should have guessed, but also accompanied by Oliver and as expected as of late with Helena. For a split second she considered turning back around and making some piss poor excuse for not being able to join them, then she kicked herself for not considering bringing a date, where was Jason Todd when she actually needed him. Lastly, she hated the sudden wave of doubt that overwhelmed her. Was she really this good? Could she spend an entire dinner with Oliver without him realizing that; no she was not Donna the waitress, she wasn’t the mysterious woman with the Porsche, she wasn’t the vigilante that had been taunting him for weeks and most importantly she wasn’t Felicity Smoak-- slightly shy, babbling, nervous IT genius. He could only see her as Cordelia Todd, the british businesswoman who has it all together and shies away from no one.

Catching Tommy’s eye and his smile she raised her chin with new conviction and smiled back, as she walked towards them Tommy stepped forward to meet her before she reached the group.

“Cordy, wow you look stunning.”

“Thanks, Tommy, you look dashing yourself. I had no idea this was a group dinner” she said looking towards the group whose eyes were now intently on the two of them. Her eyes locked onto Oliver for a beat before she returned her gaze to Tommy.

“Oh no, just ran into some friends, come I’ll introduce you.”

As introductions were made she could feel everyone, except Tommy, scrutinizing her and trying to figure her out. The awkward silence quickly settled in around everyone, each waiting for someone else to make the next move, to see who would break away first. What she couldn’t miss was the wince Oliver and Tommy gave each other when Helena suggested they all dine together. Seeing no way out without disclosing too much, they reluctantly agreed. Cordelia knew this was her chance to solidify her role as Cordelia in all their lives and disperse any doubt that might be lingering, so she took this as step one.

Once dinner was settled Oliver walked up to the hostess to pay her, in a manner he had patented over the years, he was left with his hand halfway up as Cordelia walked right up next to him stopping him with a side glance.

“Hello, Cordelia Todd…” the hostess interrupted her before she could even finish.

“Ms. Todd, of course. Will it be your usual table? I can have it ready in one minute.”

“Thank you,” she paused to look at the hostess’ name “Emily. It will be 5 of us tonight, Mr. Queen, Mr. Merlyn and their respective dates will be joining me.”

Without hesitation, the hostess called the owner over who immediately hugged Cordelia telling her it had been too long and was walking them to their table and letting them know he would be taking care of them himself. As they were all seated and the owner walked away Tommy turned curious eyes to Cordelia.

“So, boss you seem quite chummy with the owner” before she could answer Oliver’s brows shot up as he asked,

“Boss?”

“Oh, right you haven’t been updated, big changes man, remember I told you about good changes
happening? Well, Cordy is the source of most of those.” Oliver turned a curious eye towards Cordelia.

“Well, I thought we would all talk and get to know each other over dinner but I see the Q&A portion has begun early. I’ll go first, I guess. I own a PR, media representation firm and to answer Tommy’s question I represented the Smith brother’s when they decided to expand their restaurant business from London into Starling City and Gotham.”

“PR, so you represent celebrities and athletes?” asked Helena.

“Actually, Cordelia focuses more on companies and organizations rather than individuals.”

“Well that is true we do have a couple of celebrity and athlete clients but only under special circumstances or as favors for friends. But, yes, we do focus on mainly corporations and organizations. My specialty is non-profit organizations.”

“Really, I didn’t even know that,” said a surprised Tommy. “I genuinely thought you were the head of the company I didn’t know you had clients as well and maybe as your employee, I shouldn’t have admitted that,” he said with a smile.

“No worries Tommy, I actually don’t include that when I first introduce myself but, sometimes I feel like I must in order to disburse the idea behind the fact that many people think PR firms are just glorified gossip spinners. I’d like to think ninelmuses does something different.”

“Wait, ninelmuses they represent Unicef, the World AIDS Organization, and O.N.E” said a surprised Laurel.

“Yes, we do. We also work with smaller organizations much like CNRI’ added Cordelia pointedly looking at Laurel with a sincere smile.

“They also represent Wayne Enterprises” chimed in a proud Tommy. “Now they are expanding to the West Coast and Cordy needed a Lead for the West Coast Headquarters and she called me.”

“Wow, that’s great Tommy, congratulations.”

“Thanks, man, I am super excited.”

As the conversation progressed, they ate, drank and laughed. They swapped stories and everything seemed to be going pretty well. Just when she was starting to get fully comfortable and falling into the camaraderie of it all Oliver had to go and make an, in her eyes, inappropriate comment about their past, his and Laurel’s. It seemed like she wasn’t the only one getting caught up. She saw the way Helena picked up on the non-subtle subtleties that were Oliver’s behavior and she started to see the change in her immediately, her posture, her breathing and the way she scrutinized Laurel while smiling. She really hoped Oliver could see it too.

She tried to change the subject by talking business with Tommy, letting him know that she would need him in Coast City in 12 days.

“Of course, I will be ready for whenever you need me to go,” said an overeager Tommy ready to earn those perks she had given him.

“That’s the weekend of the fundraiser for CNRI, Tommy.”

“Oh, sorry Laurel but it should be fine, this is my new job and I am really looking forward to this.”
“We could change the date if you prefer?” offered Cordelia.

“I would have preferred something that kept him in Starling which is why I told him to ask Oliver for a job within his new club.” Threw out Laurel looking down at Cordelia, who couldn’t help slightly shaking her head as a humorless small smile reached her lips.

“Laurel” warned Tommy.

“I didn’t know you were actively seeking Tommy, I figured since you mentioned things were changing…”

“Yes, you are right.”

“You never told him. Tommy, I thought you said you would consider talking to him and weigh your options, you knew exactly how I felt about you working for her.” Said an angry Laurel pointing at Cordelia.

“Laurel, enough! We will talk about this at home.”

“No! Tommy…”

“I said ENOUGH, Laurel!” responded Tommy as he stood up and threw down his napkin.

“Hey, Tommy do not talk to her like that, relax.”

“Stay out of this Oliver, it is none…”

“Stop it man…” as Oliver kept talking Tommy had already pulled Laurel’s chair out expectantly waiting for her to get up “Let’s go, Laurel, I am sorry for everything Cordelia, I will call you later.” Cordelia simply gave him a sympathetic smile and a quick nod letting him know he had nothing to worry about, she understood the history.

“Laurel you don’t have to…” Oliver didn’t know how he felt about her leaving when Tommy was so upset, what he didn't realize was that it was not his place.

“Oliver, she is not your girlfriend anymore so stay. out. of. it!” Cordelia couldn’t help but wince knowing that struck a chord with everyone at the table. She tried offering a supportive smile at Helena but one look let her know this was all spiraling out of control, quick.

Laurel, quietly but with everything reflecting in her eyes, got up and walked out her head held high. Tommy knew he had overstepped but now wasn’t the time, he could deal with collateral damage after he talked with Laurel. He gave Cordelia a quick hug and made his exit. Oliver took half a step as if he wanted to follow them but Helena’s hand on his forearm stopped him. Then she rose, saying more in that one action than anything she had said the whole night. The way the chair screeched on the floor, the sound of her bracelets as she grabbed her clutch bag and the sound of her pivoting to face Oliver and shooting daggers with her eyes, said it all. As they had a silent conversation Helena turned and walked out.

Years of upbringing, manners, and decorum fought within Oliver, he wanted to follow after Helena but was very much aware, had been the entire time, of Cordelia sitting unmoved and unphased, he knew a massive bill was waiting he also needed to offer his apologies and thank her for the wonderful service they had received thanks to her. Cordelia could see the fight raging within him. All of her focus was on the fact that an already unstable Helena was on the brink of losing her only anchor the only person she trusted, Oliver. Without a second thought, she turned a charming reassuring smile on him and with a sweep of her hand she said,
“Go ahead, I’ll take care of this you take care of your girlfriend. Don’t worry, this one is on me.”

“I really…”

“Go!” she laughed “Don’t mention it, really it is fine. Now hurry and go beg do whatever you have to do” she smiled brightly at him. His body visibly relaxed as he issued her thanks, assured her he owed her one and she made sure he knew she would hold him to it.

Well, that was definitely not what she had imagined but at least she knew for a fact that her cover was secure. Now all her worries were on Helena. She knew women like Helena they were, insecure, possessive and only saw things in black or white. If Oliver didn’t say all the right things there was no pulling her back. She paid and hoped that this wasn’t telling of what was ahead.

Oliver sits alone in the foundry contemplating how things went wrong so fast he couldn’t help but kick himself for his lack of foresight and tact. Deep in thought is how Dig finds him after getting a text from Oliver telling him to meet in the foundry.

“Didn’t expect to hear from you tonight? Something happens?”

“I think you were right.”

“Ok. About which part?”

“All of it, I should have listened to you.”

“Just me?”

“Both of you” admitting that was a huge step for him.

“Oliver, you said you wanted to help her change. The thing is, she already did change, when her father killed her fiance she changed into something dark and twisted. You see that now, don’t you?”

“It’s not that I couldn’t see it, Diggle. I didn’t-- I didn’t want to. I am living a double life and to do that I am taking all these people that I love and I am putting them at arm's length. I am giving up a lot. So maybe-- maybe I thought the universe owed me one. But, I looked in her eyes tonight and I couldn’t stop her from going over the edge. She-- she’s already past it.

“So, what now? How do we handle this?”

“I handle this. It is my mess so I will clean it up. “ There was a long stretch of silence and Dig could see him contemplating a question at the tip of his tongue. So he waited patiently.

“I know she hasn’t communicated with us and although I haven’t seen her I know she has been there.”

“I don’t know man” Oliver gave him an unamused look and continued

“If, anything I know she has talked to you, she seems to like you.”

“I am the prettier one” he mused.

“Can you ask her to track Helena?” When Dig made no attempt to call he added “Now?”

Dig simply scoffed and took out his cell phone to text her. In less than a minute she called back. All Oliver could hear was his side of the conversation which consisted of a lot of ‘okays’ and ‘yes I
know'. Eventually, Dig hit a button and put the phone down. Oliver was about to say something when her voice cut him off.

“I’m I on speakerphone?”

“Yes”

“Okay, I am only saying this once. I get that you are in a tough situation and ‘I told you so’ is irrelevant at this point but the one thing that still stands is when I told you that I was done. That I meant. Now, I have been keeping tabs, yes, as a favor to Diggle, not you. I don’t backtrack nor am I in the business of cleaning up after others. This is your mess, Oliver, you clean it up.”

“I wasn’t asking you to clean up after me, just to track her.”

“You should have never lost her, to begin with.” At his heavy sigh and a soft ‘please’ from Diggle, she continued.

“I don’t know where your girlfriend is. She fell off the grid last night. I can start tracking her but if she stays hidden there is no way for me to find her, except with boots on the ground. If I hear anything I will let you know”

“Thanks, Nia” supplied Dig after a couple of seconds of silence.

“Answer me one thing Queen, when you offered to change her world and make her see a better future, with you, did you also give her all of you, were you 100% honest?” A deafening silence passed through the foundry as Oliver’s gaze dropped along with all the breath in his lungs. She had almost given up on an answer when she heard him.

“No” a whisper that rang like a bullhorn in the foundry.

“Then you should always have known we would end up here. I’ll send you anything I find Dig.” With that, the call ended and Oliver felt drained one simple truth and the fight almost left him.

Felicity wasn’t lying, after last night’s disaster she had lost Helena. She already had every source seeking her out but so far she had nothing. All she could do was sit and wait and she hated it. Once again she allowed herself to get lost in codes until she heard a knock at her door. Looking up she was surprised to see Walter Steele’s secretary standing at her door telling her that he required her immediate assistance in his office. She offered nothing more before she left.

Looking down she realizes she had two missed calls on her office phone, she did have the habit of turning off the ringer when she was overly stressed. With a deep sigh expecting the worst after their last meet she made her way up that very familiar elevator once again.

“Wanted to see me, Mr. Steele? Did I mention it is almost Christmas, many of the suicides this time of year are due to sudden and unexpected job loss.” She said trying in the worst way to lighten the mood. Without even acknowledging her comment he got right to the point in that grand Walter Steele way.

“I want you to find out all you can about this notebook,” he said handing her the notebook she knew very well. She had seen that notebook before, she knew the man it belonged to. It seemed that Mr.Steele had been doing a little digging of his own and hit the jackpot. “Where it was made, how it was purchased, what it could mean?”

“Yes, sir.”
“Felicity, I asked Josiah Hudson our head of security to look into the same subject matter. He died the next day, under questionable circumstances. What, I may be asking of you, this mystery, are you sure you want to do this?”

“I hate mysteries, they bug me. They need to be solved.” That might have been the most honest thing she ever said to Walter Steele, to anyone. She knew the mystery behind this book, now the question was did she share that knowledge with Walter or with anyone for that matter? She had to be very careful about her next set of moves. With that, she left. As she reached the elevator she realized she didn’t have her cell phone.

The minute she entered her office she could see the red light blinking furiously at her, of course, figures. The minute she swiped her screen and saw the facial recognition of Helena in Triad territory and then again on Folsom Blvd, she checked the day and cursed under her breath. She knew exactly where she was going, Zhishan would be at his weekly card game, she would know she has cleaned them out once or twice before. This was trouble and she knew she was too far away but, maybe Oliver was in his little lair and could get there before this girl brought a war upon them all.

Felicity: She is heading to 4732 Folsom Blvd. in the Glades. Hood up and hurry Zhishan is there.

Within seconds she got a response.

Diggle: On it

Diggle: Thanks

She didn’t respond she simply gathered her things and made a beeline for the exit. She needed to be ready for the worst. On her way, she contacted the SCPD and let them know that they were on the verge of a war and needed to be ready. The minute she made it to her car she received one final text.

Oliver: Will you back me up?

She hesitated for a beat a million things going through her head. She knew this was a big deal, she knew he had to feel on the edge if he was reaching out to her for help. She wanted to say yes and rush there, secret identity be damned and help him yet, she knew that her secrets, her mission was much bigger than just Oliver Queen, he was a small player in a grander scheme.

Plus, she always subscribed to the ideology that once you make threats you always follow through, you go back on your word enough times people will never rely on it again so she compromised and did the one thing she felt was fair.

Felicity: I won’t make it on time.

Felicity: If war comes, I will be there, for the people of Starling.

Oliver knew he shouldn’t expect more and he should thank her, but both options seemed to make something twist in his gut. He would let him clean up his own mess but she wouldn’t let the city burn for his mistakes, he was thankful.

It was too late for either of them. Helena had killed Zhishan and what was worse made sure to let them know that Frank Bertenelli sent his regards. Writing her father’s death warrant wasn’t enough, she was going to take the whole city into a mob war. By the time she got home she was picking up on all the chatter on Zhishan’s death and she knew China White would not wait too long to exact her revenge but when she did it would be precise and ruthless. As she was trying to reign in her emotions her phone dinged.
She couldn’t hold it in anymore and her side table paid the price as she flipped it across the room. She needed to get ahead of this. There had been enough bloodshed and she was going to end it and contain it. One of her phones went off with a shrill shriek the minute she saw Frank Bertenelli’s number it hit her, she might not have enough time to stop it but she could very well contain it to one location, away from the city and the innocent people of Starling. She answered and set her plan into motion.

“Yes, Frank I am positive you want home advantage DO NOT leave your home for any reason whatsoever call in your men and…”

“I will not hide, I will strike them before they strike me and I will take out their entire operation.”

“Frank listen to me you don’t want to do that I know how the Triad works they will be expecting that and they know every nook and cranny of the Glades they will pick your men off one by one, then China White will come for you. You want to stay in your home you want to make them mobilize and plan, give you time to fortify your home and get all your men there.”

“Will you be here, I’ve heard about your skills, I could sure use you by my side.”

“I will be there and the few men I have in the city I will bring with me. I will also try and hold off the Triad as long as I can, they still think I am on their team and Zhishan trusted me so China White will too.”

After a few more arrangements she knew very well that there was nothing she could do to hold off the Triad. The minute Zhishan died his only relative, his nephew, took over and he wanted nothing from her but her head on a platter. She focused on what she could control, Frank, he was desperate and without his right hand, he seemed to be relying on her. She prepared for war the only way a warrior does, cleared her mind, grabbed her gear, gathered her weapons and called in her best men and allies.

She called Oliver, actually called him.

“I need you to listen and not ask any questions and not question anything I say, can you do that?”

“I can try.”

She told him her plan and what she had set-up to contain the inevitable within the Bertenelli compound. She told him that she needed him to handle Helena to keep her at bay and away from the fight because the last thing she needed was for her misguided rage to jeopardize her plan. She asked him to have Diggle guard the perimeter and make sure that no one that wasn’t supposed to be there made their way in. He also needed to track the police action, she didn’t want any more dead cops. Lastly, she needed Oliver to promise to only neutralize unless absolutely inevitable.

He surprisingly agreed only debating that he would be far more useful on the inside, with her. She insisted that she needed him to take care of Helena and even on the inside he would only be worrying about her and she would be worrying about him, okay, she actually said she couldn’t deal with him not being there 100% but in reality, she would worry, a lot. Before she hung up she heard him begin to say something before stopping, so she waited…

“How exactly did you convince Bertenelli, how will I know who....?”

“How am I associated with him? How will you know who I am? Does it matter? You stay on the outside, remember. Look it’s a long story, let me worry about that just trust me, I will be there and
hopefully, this will be over tonight.” Before she hung up she couldn’t help but add “If you shot me, Oliver… just be careful who you shot” with that she hung up, she didn’t kid herself, she knew that if things went for too long or got too out of control Oliver would barrel into the compound agreements be damned, she just hoped she saw him before he saw her she really didn’t need another arrow piercing her body. Oliver simply let a small smirk, she couldn’t see, slip, that was all the confirmation he needed if things got bad he would make his way inside. Although he was pretty sure he would recognize her, you don’t simply miss someone like her.

She sent the foundry computers her tracking system for Helena so that they could know where she was and then she sent some equipment for Dig to better track the SCPD and her own private satellite imaging so he could watch the perimeter.

The sun was beginning to set as she entered riding one of her bikes, a restored fully customized 1937 Harley ULH, Frank was there pacing on the front steps with over 50 men that she could see surrounding the grounds. The minute he saw her she saw a wave of relief pass over his face. They prepared, she re-organized the men to better safeguard the house and then barricaded herself with Frank in the most secure room in the house. With her men wearing ski masks standing guard at the door. Diggle and Oliver were perched at a distance with the best view of everything. Oliver had been trying and failing, to contact Helena.

As Frank observed the woman clad in black and blue, with holsters holding varying weapons now, holding her helmet which was covering her long black braids with the darkest brown eyes he had ever seen, he wondered how it was that he had come to rely on her lithe body and unproven skills to protect him against a threat like China White and the Triad. He had to admit that regardless of her size she commanded a room and oozed intimidation.

The Triad had gone radio silent over an hour ago and now they were just sitting and waiting. The minute the Triad hit the compound they hit it hard and they hit it fast. Blowing up the front gates and dropping grenades like a pinata dropping candy, at the worst birthday party, ever.

The first explosion put everyone on alert it took everything for Oliver not to run in at that moment. He could see the flashes of gunfire and more explosions as the Triad tried to get inside the house. Bodies kept dropping and they knew the SCPD wouldn’t be too far behind.

As they use the missile launcher to blow up the front door Oliver is on his bike, helmet on and ready to go, but Dig manages to hold him back with a hard shake of his head. He can feel the frustration and fight building within. He is not a sidelines man he prefers, wants to be in the eye of the storm. The triad has made it inside and the thermal imaging shows that there are at least 10 more bodies inside the house coming in from different angles. Outside the compound the battle rages on, the sound of bullets never seizing.

Oliver can't take it anymore and shouts to Dig through the comms to let him know as soon as he has eyes on Helena. He takes off like a bat out of hell riding up the front steps all the way inside the mansion, coming to a halt to see China White fighting against three men in masks, he is about to go help jumping off his bike when a bullet wisp by him and he turns to see four Triad goons coming his way. He takes two out with arrows to their legs the other two he hits across the face with his bow. He kicks the two men on the floor and leaves all four unconscious.

When he turns his attention back China White and two of her men have knocked the door open, immediately the two men are flung back out the door, one with two knives in his hand which had held a gun just moments before and the other with a knife in each knee. He knows he needs to make his way into that room at all costs, in this moment Triad or Bertenelli men there is no difference. Finally, he reaches the door and barely has time to react when he sees a quick roundhouse kick send
one of the triad men flying right at him almost knocking him back across the doorway with the momentum.

By the time he is steady on his feet and makes his way through the door again China White is engaged in a full-fledged battle with another woman, after that kick he has to assume that it is Her. He aims his bow trying to neutralize China White, when he hears more men coming down the hall, immediately turning his bow towards the hall he neutralizes the men and turns back around ready to fire when he sees someone barreling towards him. He releases on instinct as his eyes go wide when he sees Her catch the arrow as it speeds towards her face and then crashes into his chest, he anchors himself to avoid tumbling over. She yells at him to get Frank out as she uses the impact and his body as a spring and pushes him darting back towards China White arrow in hand.

Oliver sees Frank kneeled by a safe removing a laptop, he grabs him and drags him out of the room heading towards the back wall where Dig tells him the path is all clear, just a litter of bodies awaiting. Just as he reaches the back door he gets caught in the crossfire and tells Frank to run.

Oliver shots arrows in both directions trying to make his way out of the house just then Dig comes over the comms letting him know Helena just rode through the front gates and that although he managed to slow the SCPD with Nia’s computer program they are making headway, he gives them 10 min at most. As he is about to take out the last man he realizes all the commotion has attracted more men and he can see them running towards him across the grounds.

Frank is near the back wall when he sees a silhouette from his peripherals and makes a run for it. Just as he is about to reach the wall Helena shoots an arrow through his leg rendering him immobile.

“What the hell are you doing Helena?” he spits out.

“This is revenge father, revenge for everything, revenge for Michael. I am the one that took everything away from you and there will be no greater pleasure than that look in your eyes. You are going to die knowing your own blood destroyed you.” As she raised her crossbow a knife flew from nowhere and scraped along her hand to jam in the trigger.

The shock caused her to drop the crossbow, she turned to look for the culprit and all she saw was a fist seconds before it made contact with her cheek. Stumbling back she finally saw the woman standing in front of her, confusion took over her face, why was her father’s business partner helping him, defending him? Just then Frank called out to her.

“Renee, here!” he said tossing her the crossbow Helena had dropped. She caught it but tossed it aside.

“I believe this is long overdue Helena” with her right hand she motioned for her to attack and Helena did, without hesitation, delivering kick after punch after kick. Felicity at first was mainly fighting defensively not letting her make too much contact as she waited for her opportunity to neutralize her with minimum injury. But as Helena backed away and took a very particular fighting stance, recognition flooded Felicity’s face and suddenly so much made sense, how she hadn’t seen it before she had no idea. She prepared herself and took her own stance. The minute Helena made her first move she perfectly countered it taking her leg sweep and using it against her sending her tumbling to the side.

She blocked an elbow throw countering it with two hits to her ribs. Helena's head-butted her which earned her another hit to the ribs this time causing some real injury. As they pulled away Felicity kept standing tall not looking the least bit affected while Helena was leaning heavily to one side and was clearly losing her control and it was turning into rage. Helena took a running start as she threw a knife at her to distract her, while she jumped to deliver a fatal kick to the chest, Felicity knew this
move perfectly and anticipated it with precision, she deflected the knife only earning her a small cut and grabbed Helena’s foot mid-air as she spun her whole body back and elbowed her in her lower back sending her to the floor with a heavy thud and searing pain running through her spine.

For seconds that seemed eternal Helena laid there with fear and surprise spread across her face, Felicity saw all the questions she wanted to ask, she could hear the sirens coming and knew Oliver was probably on his way as well. So she got straight to it as she heard steps approaching.

“Colui che non puo vendicarsi e debole, colui che non e spregevole (He who cannot avenge himself is weak, he who will not is contemptible.)” at that Helena audibly gasped.

“I met La Morte Sussurrata once too Helena, though I had no idea they ever trained women” at Helena’s shift she realized it wasn’t women, just her.

“I had a run in with your teacher, Silvio, once in Vienna, he tried that same move, he seems particularly fond of it. The only difference is that when I impacted his spine I made sure he would never be able to kick again.”

Oliver can see them standing in the distance as he makes his way over he sees Frank reach for something and fear crashes over him, he sees the glint of the gun and ice cold dread runs down his spine.

He screams Helena’s name causing both women to turn just then Felicity sees the gun aimed at a now standing Helena, she tackles her down intercepting the shot aimed at Helena’s chest with her own shoulder, the same shoulder Helena had stabbed an arrow through. As Helena dashes for her father Oliver is there already knocking him out, and Helena grabs the gun and points it at her unconscious father.

Felicity gets up with thankfully just a graze and a bit of pain. “Seriously, the same damn shoulder,” she says with irritation. Oliver turns with surprised amusement at her reaction at just being shot.

“You need to get out of here, I will take care of Frank. Go and this time” she says pointedly looking at Helena “make sure you never come back, this was your final warning Helena, now get out of here Oliver.”

Of course, how had Helena not seen it before, the fighting, Oliver’s total lack of reaction to her, how could she have missed it this was Her, the bitch that ruined it all and here she was once again in her way. Without a moment of hesitation, she turns back to her from where she hovered over her father’s body and faster than Oliver could react she fires a shot that pierces right through Felicity’s side, the impact sending her to the floor.

Oliver’s shocked eyes meet the gun and he quickly disarms Helena at the exact moment that a knife pierces her shoulder. He turns to see Her pulling out two more, he’ll never know exactly why he did it if it was the sight of Helena’s body dropping limp to the ground or the scream she let out or if it was life’s f*cked up way of always putting him at an impossible crossroads with no winning choice. He has no idea why but that is a moot point because he did, he reached for his quiver pulled an arrow and even as he drew back the string to fire a warning shot, just close enough to stop her from releasing her knives, he felt the regret begin to creep up his legs.

By the time he released the arrow, it was too late, he almost reached up to try and stop it but knew it was useless as a roar left his lips and a knife left Her hand. The arrow cut through the air and she immediately knew it wouldn’t hit her, it was a warning shot, hers wasn’t.

The arrow wisped by her face the sheer force and speed causing her hair to dance along with her
face, simultaneously her knife pierced his thigh deep and with meaning.

They could see the police flashlights and hear the commotion and here was Oliver once again at a crossroads, Dig yelling in his ear to get the hell out, get out now and two injured women on either side of him. He looked down at Helena trying to see if he could help both of them get out of there. He turned back to Her and she wasn’t there. In the distance through the fog, he saw a shadow scaling the wall, letting out a harsh exhale he picked up Helena and made his retreat. He knew Helena would be fine but he wasn’t so sure about himself.

When Felicity reached her back-up car she knew she didn’t have much time before she started to lose consciousness from the blood loss. She tried to reach her men two of them answered that they were on their way to the car. She took off to meet them. Jumping to the back seat where one of them started to treat her injury controlling the blood loss. She instructed them to the nearest safe location because she was going to need more than just gauze and a band-aid.

Oliver managed to make it out of the compound to where Diggle was waiting with the car. The instant he saw the unconscious Helena and a struggling Oliver he rushed to him and took Helena.

They quickly make their getaway. Diggle keeps asking him what happened but he refuses to answer and tells him to just drive to the foundry. Sending Diggle home he sits by Helena’s side and lets out a long stuttering breath. He knows he has just made a move there is no coming back from.

That warning and the look of betrayal in her dark brown eyes will haunt him and he knows it. What did he expect from her? She had just been shot, had that been him he would have released an arrow into his attacker as well. At least she had the control and forethought to aim for non-fatal targets on their bodies, but just close enough to let them know how serious she was and how much at her mercy they had been.

Helena’s cut is just next to her heart yet, it will barely leave a scar, his is just centimeters from his femoral artery, a more clear message she couldn’t have sent. He finishes stitching himself up and then tends to Helena’s injuries realizing that besides the cut she also took quite a beating. Helena begins to stir and Oliver really doesn’t know where to go from here, he has been sitting in the foundry has seen the sun rise and he still is at a loss, figures since he just might have lost a very formidable ally. He notices Helena try to get up and is quickly at her side.

“Woah slow down, you were very lucky and She has very good aim.”

“I’m I supposed to be grateful? You knew it was her and you didn’t say anything, you and her saved that monster, that criminal.”

“And you shot her, I think you are even, Helena.”

“Unless she is laying dead next to my father on the lawn of his house, we are not even close to even.”

“We didn’t do it to save him, at least I didn’t, I wanted to save you. You think that because you’ve killed you understand what it’s like to have blood on your hands. You don’t understand the toll that it takes on you, especially when it’s your father.”

“I am not going to stop, I managed to shot her once the next time I will make sure she doesn’t get back up. My father and now she will also pay.”

“Helena listen to yourself. The police have him in custody he’s going to prison for a very long time. She made sure that whatever they didn't find on that laptop they found within the house and she
delivered the rest. She managed to stop your father and make him pay, even for Michael and put a huge dent in both organizations. Your father’s business will never recover and the Triad will hide out for a while, they will not come back from this easily. This is justice.”

“I don’t care about any of that Oliver! I guess you were right, I’m interested in revenge. Stay out of my way Oliver or I’ll make sure your secret doesn’t stay secret. As for your girlfriend let her know I am coming for her and I won’t show her any mercy.”

Helena begins to climb the stairs out of the lair just as she reaches the top steps and opens the door the sun beaming in, Oliver knows this is his last chance.

“Helena! What I did. Everything that I’ve done. I’ve done because I care about you.”

“Too bad I can’t say the same.” She answers coldly as she pulls away from him and leaves.

He knows he should go after her, he should stop her, but the fight has left him. That seems to be a theme, things, people, everything leaving him. A week ago he had been so hopeful, one night and one monumental mistake and he felt more lost than when he arrived from the island. He knew he should also call Her, make sure she was okay. Yet, he couldn’t bring himself to do it. One woman walking out of his life making it evident that she was never actually part of it was enough for one day.

This isn’t how it was supposed to turn out. This was not the plan, everything had gone to hell in the blink of an eye and he only had himself to blame. Losing Helena as an ally, a possible partner he never even knew he wanted, was not a loss he was prepared for. He had thoroughly convinced himself that he could fix this and that partnership had just walked out the door with a curse on her lips.

But, creating a rift between the one ally he was sure he had, Her, was a far greater blow. That look in her eyes haunted him every time he closed his own. She was an ally created by her father long before he knew his father’s truths. He knew she was who he spoke of, he just knew it. What had he done with that saving grace, shot an arrow at it. All because of what, pride, stubbornness, fear, loneliness… all for nothing.

Felicity knew she should call out of work, she knew that going to work after being shot twice was stupid and reckless yet, she knew with more certitude that staying home and playing the previous night over and over in her head was even worse. She itched to face Oliver, to set him straight. Her mind told her to push him aside she had tried and it just didn't work and it was time to move on without him, he was never part of the plan and trying to adjust for him had sent her life into disarray. Yet, her heart, her love, and commitment to Robert told her that leaving Oliver behind was like turning her back on Robert himself. If Robert had set Oliver on this path then his intention had been for them to join forces. Her heart told her that now, more than ever he needed her because it was obvious he was confused, conflicted and wracked with guilt.

She couldn't think straight herself so she decided to take the morning off coming into work until after lunch. She had ignored all calls, all morning. Diggle had reached out a few times finally leaving her a message saying that he needed one of the two stubborn vigilantes he worked with to tell him what the hell happened or he was going to pull his own disappearing act. She smiled at that and took pity telling him they would talk later. As she sat on her bed playing with the book Walter gave her between her fingers she contemplated her next move.

She knew very well what that book contained. The fact that Moira had it let her know beyond a doubt that if she wasn’t part of it then at least she knew what Robert was involved in and had kept it
quiet. She feared to give Walter no answers and having him seek them out elsewhere and possibly causing another death like with Mr. Hudson. Yet, she knew that letting him in put him in greater danger. This was a real catch-22, she decided to go to work and by the end of the day, she wishes she would have a more clear head.

Riding the elevator up to Walter’s office her stomach was in knots, her head hurt, and her wounds were killing her, she needed more pain meds, quick. She had made a choice and she really wanted to throw up. She was faced with an impossible and opted for the lesser of two evils, continue to leave Walter in the line of danger but with her by his side and in the know, at least for now. Hopefully, soon enough she could concoct something believable and send him off the trail long enough to solve it herself and find the master puppeteer.

Turning off the lights to his office she makes her way in trying to look, not in pain.

“What are you doing Ms. Smoak?”

“It needs to be dark in here for me to do this” she wince “If I had more time” and was in less pain she says to herself “to think about that sentence it wouldn’t of sounded so dirty. Look” she says handing him the notebook.

“I don’t see anything”

“I got these from applied sciences” or my own personal supply but that doesn’t really matter she thinks “they are able to pick up the subvisible variations in the UV spectrum.” she turns them on and hands them to him.

“Now look at the book again.”

Opening the book again Walter thumbs through the pages and the names appear before him, he quickly feels a cold dread spread over him. He starts to recognize many of the names in the book, some of the worst people of Starling coming front and center, he can’t even begin to imagine what association Moira could have with them. His jaw slacks and his eyes glazed over he looks up at Felicity.

“Mr. Steele I know this is a lot to take in but I really think we should think carefully before making another move. I will leave the book here for you, I already copied everything I needed from it. If you wish to proceed let me know and I will do everything I can to help you. But based on what you have said before and the names on that list I think we should take some time to think this over. I’ll leave you now if you need anything, absolutely anything please contact me.” She smiles at him as she makes her exit but before she reaches the door he calls out to her.

“Miss Smoak” she turns giving him a reassuring smile “Thank you, for everything” she nods and leaves a contemplative Walter gazing over the Starling skyline.

After having talked to Felicity, Dig doesn’t know what to do. he knows sitting in his living room and not reaching out to Oliver is not what she asked him to do but, he can’t help but hesitate, question whether Oliver would have been so quick to turn on him had he stood between him and Helena like Nia did. He knows they are not the same but Oliver’s unexpected reaction really plays with his insecurities and makes his trust falter. While talking with Nia he was overcome with anger and frustration until she reminded him that what he knew about her was far beyond what Oliver did, therefore, he could not judge him on the same scale. He knows she is right, she usually is, yet it still irks him how quickly Oliver released that arrow, warning or not.
Nia clearly told him to not confront Oliver about it that she had also considered it,

“You think I don’t want to turn my back on him Dig, walk away and hope he stays out of my way. But this is a small city and he is still Robert’s only son. Believe me, I am only partly doing this for Oliver.”

“No one would blame you for leaving that idiot to his own devices and to drown in his own guilt.”

“I would blame me and that’s all that really matters.”

“So what now?”

“Now, we start again, we took 10 steps back after having taken two steps forward, and I have a feeling this is how our relationship is usually going to be. I will let him dwell in this, he is after all his own worst enemy and I will not make it easy for him. He wanted to see this through then he will see the consequences through as well. As far as Oliver Queen is concerned he has lost an ally. As far as you and I are concerned I will give him a little hell before I let him see the light again. Who knows this might actually work to my advantage.”

“Does that mean that I…”

“You keep doing what you have been doing Diggle. be his friend, his partner, his confidant, and his conscience. Before I came you had already saved him, Diggle, don’t ever forget that.”

“If I tell him I know everything he might pull away. That man sure does love his secrets.”

“It’s like he thrives on his man pain, I don’t get it.”

“Man pain?”

“It’s a thing. Okay, then do what you think is best, wait for him to tell you, pretend you don’t care or whatever, just stay with him and keep being you Diggle, that seems to be more than enough, not just for him,” she adds pointedly.

A beat of silence passes and although unsaid, so much is actually said.

“Okay, I’ll keep you updated.”

“I’ll appreciate that.”

Diggle knows that he needs a reason to reach out to Oliver. So, when his cell phone rings and Carly lets him know that his spoiled rich boy is sulking in one of her booths and making her customers uncomfortable, first he laughs and then promises to be there soon.

Arriving at Big Belly it is hard to miss the sulking giant toddler, he heads over to him after talking to Carly.

“Chilli Cheese fries with jalapenos, hmmm? That’s a cry for help if I’ve ever seen one.”

“Oh I don’t know what hurts worse, this or getting shot with a curare laced bullet.”

“Been there, done that. Definitely the bullet.” Oliver smiles at that and then lets out a long groan and Diggle knows this is his opportunity.

“You know Oliver I am no expert at this but I think you were holding on to something you hoped was there. You were trying to make something significant and worthwhile out of thin air and nothing
ever works like that. I don’t think love is about forcing anything or changing or even saving a person. I think it’s about finding the person who’s already the right fit. Like everything in life, you have to find the people that fit into your life as it is. If they can do that then you can create a new normal, together.”

“I think I burnt that particular bridge, napalmed it, more than one bridge actually.”

“I like to think that those type of bridges the ones that really matter can’t ever really be destroyed. You can chip away at them but, they will always stand. I know things didn’t work out exactly as you planned. But there is a silver lining, you saved Frank, you helped deliver a major blow to the Triad and you kept Helena’s hands clean from her own father’s blood. Justice wins out.”

“Helena doesn’t see it that way, neither…” he stops himself because he really has no idea how She sees it. Diggle simply shrugs and continues disregarding his almost confession.

“You opened up, took a risk with your heart. The Oliver I met a few months ago would not have been able to do that. And when you meet the right person you’ll be ready for her.” seeing an unasked question he adds “and if you have met her already then you will find your way back to her, when you are ready.”

Oliver appreciated what Diggle was saying even if he doesn’t fully believe it. More than anything he appreciates that he isn’t bombarding him with questions. He assumes that She told him and either she didn’t mention his mistake or she did and either she asked or Diggle decided to overlook it.

Whichever the case he is grateful. He has been emotionally and physically beaten enough to last the rest of the month. They fall into easy conversation and genuine laughter. That alone tells Diggle that she was right and that he made the right choice. Oliver didn’t need a lecture he needed a friend. He was okay with playing the good cop to Nia’s bad cop, plus he had a feeling she played bad a whole lot better than him.

Chapter End Notes

For those of you that don’t know the story about how Helena got trained in Sicily by La Morte Sussurrata, which means whispered death, it is in one of the comics written for the show called “The Huntress: Year One”. I took the story from there and of course added a bit.

Let me know if this turned out how you thought it would, if the beginning talking about Over losing his allies what did you think would happen. Thanks again for everything and Please review!
Do Not Let the Need for a New World Divert You from Saving the Good That is Left of the Old

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of Helena, left Oliver and Felicity on very shaky ground and lost on how to move forward. Yet, the arrival of a greater threat will leave them needing each other more than ever.

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the delay it was my sister's graduation this weekend!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Why did this feel like a breakup. She couldn’t wrap her mind around the fact that the last two weeks had felt like she had dumped someone. Not that she had done much dumping, or any at all. Not because she didn’t have ‘partners’ but because she didn’t have relationships she had ‘liaisons’ okay... not that either, because it sounded sneaky and dirty. The point was this felt like a breakup and she was starting to hate it.

Bad enough that the last two weeks she had to walk around pretending she had not been shot. Especially when Emily from finance clapped her on the shoulder during her coffee break. To say she would have broken the woman’s wrist out of pain is putting it lightly. Now she had to deal with Oliver and his inability to leave her alone. No matter what she did.

Avidly cleaning out and patrolling the streets in the Glades while also crossing off names from the list before Oliver had a chance too, had seemed like a good idea. She knew that, Oliver, if left to his own devices and too much free time, meant time to dwell and guilt trip himself. What she hadn’t counted on was the fact that it would make him more adamant to reach out to her. Even getting creative, she realized, when she saw a message written on the roof of a building she knew he had almost spotted her on a night before, ‘We need to talk’ with an arrow underlining the message.

How cheesy she thought, she really hoped he didn’t end up getting his own ‘signal’ like a certain bat she knew.

One night she had a ‘brilliant’ idea, she tried to slow him down by taking down his entire communications system including his personal cell phone that worked for maybe three days and according to Dig for two whole days had him so furious he could barely see straight, shouting threats at every turn. Especially when he had spent three hours with customer service trying to get his cellphone running again. Only to appear on day three declaring an epiphany, if She was cutting out his communication it was because She was receiving his messages so he was getting through, he declared, proudly as he pointedly added that She had no idea just how persistent he could be.

She realized just how much when she received a picture message of the note she had left in his jacket the day they had ran into each other at Bertenelli’s, for the first time. The text simply said ‘I guess
that was my father’s porsche’, she almost answered him but managed not to. The next day as she watched him arrive at the foundry he began to scan and inspect the entire room.

Quickly she realized that he had found the note because he had swept his entire room at the manor and was now doing the same thing at the foundry, especially considering her tendency to bug them. She watched him intently as he swept every crevice and surface when all of a sudden he stopped in the middle of the room and stood there for minutes. She wasn’t sure what was going on in his head but when he turned towards one of the cameras with a sly smile on his face she felt a knot in her gut. He got close enough that she could clearly see his face. She read his lips as he purposely talked to her,

‘I should have known. I know you are watching. I won’t stop you. We will talk at some point and I will apologize in person. A friend told me, some bridges you can’t ever tear down, I am hoping he is right.’

She sees him turn quickly and as she checks the other cameras she realizes Dig is making his way down the stairs at Oliver’s shrug and answer of ‘No one’ she realizes Dig must of asked him who he was talking to. Damnit, he really is not going to let up. Although, as she closes the windows on her computer it hits her, he knows she hacked into his system and he has basically just given her the ‘ok’ to continue watching them. She asked for trust and it seemed Oliver was finally ready to give it, she couldn't help but smile.

Her final move had been her own epiphany, when it came to Oliver less was always more. So she had fallen off the grid, so to speak. For the next couple of days all her personas were gone and she was only Felicity, a mini vacation of sorts. She had to admit she had never been as productive at QC, managing to finish all her work for the next two weeks. Along with settling some things at ninelmuses and sending a message out to Cass through a secure message board they used, she hoped her follow up work in Asia was paying off. Lastly, she actually managed to upgrade all her systems, clean her weapons and call in a favor on a tip she had recently received on The General and the Gambit’s explosion.

She knew her new method had worked when a confused Oliver realized his texts and calls were not going through due to the number being out of service. He went as far as asking Dig to try through his phone only to find the same result, of course he didn't know that Dig had received a text with a new number just before the old number went dark. Then the email came up as a mail-delivery-error and the restraint he showed was surprising.

He managed to contain himself until he almost got shot crossing a name off the list, as he limped back to the foundry, defeat written all over his face he shook his head at Dig and she saw his shoulders slump. Then he went from sitting still to tossing the med table across the room and breaking the head off his training dummy. There it was, what she had been waiting for, he finally realized she was truly in the wind. He realized she was not his reliable backup, she might eventually forgive but that did not mean she had to forget and give in because he apologized.

As she watched him slump down onto the floor something twisted in her chest, he almost got shot. She would like to say that she was there in case things did get out of hand but truth be told she had actually gotten so caught up in her coding that she didn’t hear about the shooting until it came over the radios. That was a reminder to her that what they did was not to be trifled with or taken lightly.

“You self-righteous arrogant bastard” she shouted at the immovable shadow that loomed over her and Jason Todd’s injured body.
“He knew the consequences. This is on him.”

“This, this is on you. You knew there would be more men, you knew he would be outnumbered and you didn’t back him up, you didn’t tell him.”

“I told him not to do it. I told him I would not be part of this vendetta. He refused to listen to me.”

She laughed bitterly at his inability to see his mistake, his arrogance “So, that’s it then, your way or no way at all? He didn’t listen to the almighty Batman so let him get shot, let him bleed out bit by bit, maybe it will knock some sense into him”.

She was seeing red. She knew he could be stubborn and hold a grudge beyond human comprehension but, she never thought he could be blind beyond his own beliefs and ideas, beyond his wants. Her thoughts were interrupted as his deep monotone voice came across the alley from his retreating form.

“He’ll survive and if we are lucky he’ll be smarter next time.” That was the last straw.

“STOP!” She was beyond angry, too angry to be surprised that he had actually stopped at her command. She barely registered Jason’s hand on her wrist and him calling her name as she stood.

“Cass, get Todd out of here, get him fixed up”, she said through gritted teeth without taking her eyes off of the Bat.

“Felicity”, Cass said in a tone full of caution, fear, and anger. Unflinching she simply commanded, “GO, NOW!” She noticed the Bat’s slight nod and his arrogance simply aggravated her anger further. She heard movement behind her, heard Jason plead with her as he was carried away and then they were alone.

As she continued to watch him she slumped on her couch and let out a bitter laugh, life was complicated, the right choice wasn’t always the best choice and karma truly was a bitch. Her hands ran roughly over her face as she focused once again on Oliver and smiled at the irony of it all. She knew she was not angry at him, her anger probably lasted her until her men patched her and she had taken a hot shower at home.

All she had now was the disappointment and hurt, both to her ego and genuine hurt stemming from feeling betrayed by someone she was beginning to consider an ally. She knew she had to let go of the ego, the ego she once reprimanded in others and now she was wielding, so freely, as a shield to protect herself, her own loneliness, her own fear of hoping that for the first time in six years she might no longer be alone, ever again.

She leaned back and closed her eyes trying to find that center she had spent months of training finding. She needed to focus on moving forward and letting the healing and progress with Oliver happen organically.

Two days of peace and quiet were more than Felicity could handle. So, here she was almost healed sitting in her apartment a bit sore from her self-imposed physical therapy, having a heated discussion with an old friend. A great friend, definitely an ally, but more importantly at the moment a very apologetic and slightly worried mentor of sorts.

“That arrogant, meddling fool. What was he thinking? You could have been seriously injured.
Switching a gun for a shock wave prototype is one thing but the L.I.F.E Kevlar gear is just reckless.”

“Don’t even remind me of that little stunt of his, I swear I still have that twitch in my finger because of that stupid shock gun. The point is, I wasn’t and I know exactly what he was thinking. Payback, for coming into his city after our last encounter. The man loves his parallels.”

“Two years, Lizzie, two years. You would think a man of his position would have let it go by now.”

“The man probably has, the Bat, on the other hand, is a resentful bastard with an overly inflated sense of importance.” They both sighed at the truth behind that statement.

“Anyway dear, I am truly sorry that I didn’t realize he swapped the gear I sent you.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t see this coming or tested the gear beforehand, as I’ve taken to do after the last incident. I’ve just been so busy”, she heard a snort and a muffled ‘big surprise’ that she deliberately ignored and continued “lately and I think a little less aware and on task than usual.”

“Now that definitely does not sound like you. Anything I should worry about Felicity?”

“Not yet, **Lucious**, not yet.”

“But if…”

“You’ll be the first to know, promise.”

“Okay. I will make sure to send you the right gear immediately and Felicity?” he said taking a serious tone that she picked up immediately.

“Yeah?”

“You know that if things do get bad that grudge holding Bat, will help you, Todd, Alfred and I will make sure of it, Okay?”

“I know, thanks Foxy.”

“I hate that name.”

“Which is why I…”

“Love it, yes, I know.”

“Lucious…” he let a beat pass taking in the silence. He could feel her apprehension and knew that if she was struggling with words maybe things were far more serious than he had initially picked up on. So he waited, let her gather herself until she was ready to continue.

“…sometimes - sometimes I feel like - I just… am I becoming more like - I must be going crazy when Wayne starts to make some sense. It used to be so much easier, before, the lines were so clear almost blinding. Now, I just don’t know. “

“Don’t, dear. Don’t do this to yourself. Look, I’ve never told you this before but, not all the tech I develop, the gear we create goes to him, some of it I only share with you. Not because I don’t trust him, but because the darkness he had to let rule within him scares me sometimes, as it should. We all know he means well, but his methods are cold and twisted sometimes. You, Lizzie, are like no one I have ever met. You know the darkness first hand, but you use it to propel you forward, to fortify the positive and instead of accepting or pushing out the dark you manage to turn it to light. That my dear no one can do, except you. Remember that okay.”
“Okay, thanks Foxy” she hears his breathy chuckle and her smile grows a bit wider and more genuine. “so, which tech exactly don’t you…?” at that he outright laughs.

“Good, you’re all better now, you take care of yourself, dear.” He answers completely ignoring her inquiry, she knew he would.

“Always” she answers and hears him snort before the line clicks. She sinks back into her couch letting the amusement that always lingered after she spoke with Lucious ebb out some of the tension of the last months.

She wanted to believe everything he had told her but, it was hard to take at face value when he didn’t know of her recent activities. Yet, she couldn’t really focus on that because he was right about one thing, this wasn’t like her. She had been injured more in the last month than the last year and that definitely was telling of her being distracted and that distractions name was, Oliver Queen. It was time she stopped trying to fight next to him and started fighting with him. She needed to plan this just right, she needed a strategy.

Oliver had spent the last two weeks attempting to make every possible contact with Her. He had exhausted all his resources two days ago when he had almost fallen off the edge when he had almost been shot. He knew he had to resign himself to the fact that She had shut him out, completely.

He laughed at himself for all the things he had done during that time, from following some teen in a red hoodie who came out of the same alley he thought he had spotted her, to allow her to keep spying on him as a sign of good faith, which she seemed to value so much.

During the last two days, while he was out crossing names off the list, he couldn’t help but hope to find her in every shadow he encountered, he looked for recognition in every woman he encountered, anything to stop him from running over the events with Helena and the endless what-ifs that plagued him. More importantly, that damn warning shot. One mistake that could cost him all the answers he sought.

Dig, on the other hand, struggled to pull Oliver back from the edge he was so precariously dangling from two days ago after almost being shot. He understood, hell he almost wished he could have done the same to make Oliver wake up, but being on this end and seeing his genuine struggle with forgiving himself and making amends, he wished this punishment period would end soon.

His words did little to relieve Oliver, but they did help him resign himself to the idea that there was nothing left for him to do but wait. He needed to pull every last bit of patience from wherever he could get it and hold onto it. Taking a deep breath and standing up to clean the mess his frustrations had created he gave Dig a quick nod and did just that, he waited.

Training, that was the ideal way to keep his mind clear. That was until another onslaught of guilt invaded his senses as Dig reminded him that it was almost Christmas and he realized that he had been so caught up that he had probably missed out on Thea’s and his usual holiday celebrations. Encouraged by Dig to take some time and focus on his family he decided that his time was better spent moving forward.

His enthusiasm was short-lived. Seeing the look in Thea’s eyes when he brought up the Holidays made him realize that, maybe, he wasn’t the only one not celebrating all those years he was away. The lack of decorations and Thea’s avoidance of their usual traditions like their candy cane race let him know there was more to her simple excuse of ‘falling behind on decorating’. To his dismay, she quickly turns the conversation away by dragging him into the sitting room and letting him know that their mom and Walter were having a dinner party with some very important people and he,
obviously, was meant to join them.

Walking into the dining room table and the conversation made him quickly regret his choice to stay.

“The fact people always forget is that Robin Hood was a criminal” the police commissioner adamantly pointed out. Not particularly the conversation Oliver wanted to interrupt. Great just his luck.

“You might joke commissioner but you can’t deny the fact that crime is down for the first time in 5 years” comes Merlyn’s response and Oliver is slightly surprised by what seems to be an argument on the Hood’s behalf.

“Malcolm, you and the city should know better that drop is because of the changes my department has implemented” the commissioner proudly pointed out.

“Perhaps it’s because the vigilante’s activities have had a chilling effect on the city’s criminals.” Oliver can’t help but smile and agree. He thinks maybe he was too quick to judge Walter.

“What do you think Oliver?” Merlyn’s question makes him focus and everyone’s skeptical eyes are on him and it reminds him that they expect a response from the unbothered playboy.

“I think this guy needs to get a better hobby not to mention a better codename than ‘The Hood’ or ‘Hood Guy’” they all politely smile at his comment and he allows himself to slightly relax.

“I agree. How about Green Arrow?” Oliver thinks he reads some meaning in Merlyn’s question but quickly dismisses it.

“Lame” he answers as Walter’s cell phone rings and he excuses himself from the table.

Walter walks into the Foyer seeing it is Ms. Smoak.

“I'm in the middle of a dinner party, Ms. Smoak, so I hope this is of some importance.”

“I guess that depends on how you define important. See most people would consider finding a list of names written in subsonic ultraviolet invisible ink, important.”

“Maybe so Ms. Smoak, but I already knew that, didn’t I?” Felicity takes a deep breath before continuing. She had been agonizing for two weeks with how to move forward with the list and Walter’s discovery. She still wasn’t sure she was doing the right thing but she hoped that in keeping Walter, somewhat, in the know it might deter him from asking questions to the wrong people or maybe if they were lucky to deter him from further pursuing this matter. She was never that lucky.

“Right, Mr. Steele but did you know seven of the names on the list are guys the vigilante’s had in his crosshairs? That is if bows had crosshairs, which they don’t?” She grimaced at her inability to have a straightforward filtered conversation with her CEO.

“Well, it is a rather long list, Felicity. So I would expect there to be some overlap.” That is exactly what she didn’t want. She didn’t want him to so easily dismiss the list or for him to feel so detached. She needed him to be realistic and open to what it all meant. In this case, it meant death. It meant real plausible harm and he needed to be cautious. That is why her next move was showing him just how close to home this was.

“Like Doug Miller?” she asked.

“Head of Applied Sciences at QC, Doug Miller?”
“Yes, Mr. Miller might end up getting an arrow in his stocking because he’s on the list. So, important or not?” She asked hoping that this little tidbit on someone she had been keeping a close eye on and even had gone on a date with, would provide him with a wake-up call. Time would tell she figured as their call ended.

Just as Walter makes his way back to the dining room he sees some officers talking to the commissioner whom quickly excuses himself letting them all know that the Vigilante has struck again.

Oliver is already reaching for his cell when the call from Dig comes in.

When he arrives on the scene he has two concerns keeping an eye out for Her and trying to gather as much intel as possible. He hears Lance talking to the Commissioner, telling him he doesn’t think it’s the vigilante because of the black arrows and the simple fact that he had taken down Hunt, leaving him almost penniless, so if he was going to murder him why not do it the first time? Oliver does one final sweep of the building hoping to run into Her. Ultimately, he gives up and leaves.

Felicity had already been there, arriving just as the first uniform secured the building. She listened in, got what she needed which mainly was confirming this had not been Oliver and then left knowing very well that she would have to wait for the official report. Damn that cop for having been so close when the call came in.

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Oliver had made his way to the foundry in order to catch Dig up and ask him to contact Her. As he made his way down the stairs before he even said one word Dig let him know that she hadn’t contacted him nor had she responded to his three texts. Deciding to let Oliver mope on his own time Dig decides to get straight to it.

“So, who would kill Adam Hunt with arrows?”

“I don’t know but this guy is good, legitimate archer, the grouping was tight at center mass”

“How do you know it is a he, I think we’ve been through enough to not make that assumption, ever, again.” At Oliver’s nod, he continued “What are you going to do?”

“What everyone does when they need help, call the cops.”

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Detective Lance is just settling into his morning when he receives a package. Immediately after signing off on it begins to ring. To his surprise, he rips it open and realizes it is a cellphone with a blocked number. Of course, he answers it. Instantly the distorted voice sends his blood boiling.

“I didn’t kill Adam Hunt.”

“YOU!”

“You call me the Hood. It’s not a great nickname. You told Commissioner Nudocerdo that it might be a copycat. Another archer, which makes me your best bet to take him down. But, I need your help, I need one of the arrows.”

“You don’t say, evidence can provide leads an information, the SCPD should really start analyzing evidence rather than just collecting it,” he said sarcastically, “no thanks for the tip, we know how to do our job.”

“Not like I am. I can do things the police can't go places they won't.”
“Like I said- I don’t even... just no.”

“If this archer doesn’t stop with Hunt we both have a problem, think about it then call me.” Before he can answer he hangs up. Lance knows there might be some truth to his words but he isn’t ready to give in just yet.

Felicity is at work running through the parts of the police report that she has available and at the preliminary description of the arrow a sense of dread begins to invade her. She knows it is too soon to tell but, if her fears are true she might have to forgive Oliver a lot sooner than she intended and warn him of what they are facing. Just as she pulls up the report and pictures on the body she catches a glimpse of movement on her computer.

Ever since Walter involved her in his discoveries she had set up a direct link to the cameras on his floor. Her peace of mind came with knowing he was safe. She followed the movement and saw Doug Miller making his way into Walter’s office. Hacking into the intercom system on his phone, thank goodness for their upgrade into digital/wifi phones, she listened into their conversation. She had hoped Walter would take a more hands-off approach and be far more cautious but it seemed they had more in common than she thought. Diving blindly into danger for the sake of answers was one trait she wished they didn’t share. The conversation is short and uneventful but Felicity increases her surveillance of Mr. Miller.

Oliver knew that waiting for Lance to help him didn’t mean he could drop the ballChristmaschristmas thing, he had left pending with his family. So, after talking with Thea over burgers they decided that they had all gone too long without celebrating their father's favorite holiday. A celebration he, personally, never really appreciated after the age of 14 but, after five years of not having it, he had quickly reconsidered.

He announces to the family that they will be celebrating and more importantly, he will be throwing the party himself. They all agree, Moira a bit more hesitant than the rest but, they understand that he hasn’t celebrated and neither have they and that this might be good for them as a family. Walter who over the years tried to bribe them into family vacations and holiday-themed events are relieved that Oliver has taken this initiative and lets him know just how much he appreciates it.

“You are a good man, Oliver”, he says in what Oliver can only regard as the most sincere interchange between the two since he has been back. The sincerity in his eyes remind him of someone he never stops thinking of and his words of someone he doesn’t like to remember but his mind doesn’t seem to care, quickly and almost violently taking him back, face to face with those eyes, the words replaying in his mind in that too distinct accent. It is so real he can almost feel the bite of the cold air, the hunger in the pit of his stomach and the phantom pain from the arrow in his shoulder.

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He is beyond afraid as he walks through the forest with Yao Fei and their prisoner Fryers. How the tables have turned, here next to him is the man that had him tortured. He was sure he would kill him if he ever saw him again and for an instant in the cave that anger had taken hold of him and he had hit the man, but his weakness coupled with the realization that for all his internal threats he was incapable of taking his life had quickly settled his anger and replaced it with disdain. Now as they walked he almost laughed at himself for being so foolish to think he could kill a man. He had failed at killing a bird that meant his survival, what insane notion had him believing that killing a man, even a bad man, would be any easier. Lost in his own thoughts he doesn’t hear when Fryer’s begins to talk to him.
“You are a good man. I know you are good, I knew it the moment you didn’t give up your friend.”

“Shut up, you don’t know me or what I am capable of,” he knows his capabilities for inflicting harm are almost nonexistent, yet he has learned quickly and brutally on this island that, that is one weakness you do not show.

“You’re right, I don’t. My question now is how do you know he is a good man, that he is your friend and more importantly that he deserves such loyalty from you?” At Oliver’s silence, he continues.

“The island is a prison- 8 years ago the Chinese made it a prison. They sent me to get rid of everyone. But two prisoners got away. One you met already, our friend in the mask and the other you call a friend.” Oliver’s eyes quickly cut to Yao Fei. The man in question remains silent and Oliver can feel his own faith wavering but something in his eyes tells him he has to trust him, that he can trust him.

“Yao Fei is a murderer. You better be sure what side you are on, Queen.” At the mention of his name, he turns his head quickly sending his hair across his eyes, unfocused and blurry but the anger has the words coming out quick and sharp.”

“Whoever he is, when it comes to you, you don’t get to address me like a friend, not now not ever.”

He can hear his mother asking him if he is okay and he wants to answer, but he can still feel the cold wet forest around him. He can feel the ache in his body. As he turns his head he raises his arm to brush his hair off his face stopping halfway remembering he no longer has long hair. He makes an awkward gesture to dismiss his mistake and gives his mom a smile before telling her he is fine and walking away. Even as he began to smell the familiar scent of his home and felt the warmth of the room invade his bones, he could still feel the numbness in his extremities from the island’s cold, the scent of trees and the damp earth doesn’t leave him for another hour.

Felicity’s fingers fly across her laptop as she tries to trace the call that Mr. Miller made the minute he left QC. She quickly realizes that he isn’t using his regular cell phone. It is clearly a satellite phone and it is highly encrypted, so much so that she isn’t able to trace the destination of the call or hear what the person on the other line says, at least not from her tablet, no matter how modified it is and especially not when the call took less than two minutes.

She is able to hear Miller and she knows that he has basically just put a target on Walter. Realizing he is just a minor player with probably far less knowledge than her she decides to focus on protecting Walter and resigning herself on the fact that her suspicions are true, she might need to reach out to Oliver, radio silence or not.

Who she must definitely reach out to is Cass because if someone can confirm her suspicions it is her. She decides to send Cass another message right then and there, to put her on alert so that she can begin to reach out to her contacts and see if there is even anything to worry about, she learned a couple of years back that The League of Assassins was always something to worry about especially when they, when the Demon’s Head, believed her to be dead.

Slowly developing a theory about the attack she decides to track all the people on the list Oliver has already crossed off. She knows Hunt being the target cannot be a coincidence, there must be a link and she would find it. She begins to categorize the new updates and Nelson Ravich’s name comes up in the SCPD, she jumps up grabbing her gear when the location comes through and with a loud huff she knows she won’t make it there before the SCPD. She hacks into any cameras she can and as
soon as the first reports come through she knows the maybes are quickly being thrown out the window and the certainty of who they are facing is seeping in.

She hears Detective Lance arrive at the scene so she hacks into his phone in order to listen in, what she doesn’t expect is to hear Commissioner Nudocerdo tell Lance that the official statement of the SCCP will be to blame the hood in front of all of Starling City. They are now facing a serial murderer and they can’t let the public get wind of the idea there are two nutjobs out in the streets. She can clearly hear Lance isn’t happy at all and the man garners more of her affection when she hears him refuse to go through with the statement. Yet, she is not surprised when he ends up getting taken off the case.

She is however flabbergasted, yes, flabbergasted a word she doesn’t use loosely, when she sees him through one of the security cameras taking another cell phone out of his pocket, she tries to use his cell phone to hack into the other cell phone but she immediately determines it is encrypted and she knows that encryption perfectly, the hood. He stares at it for a beat before putting it back in his pocket and getting into his squad car. She tracks him as she heads out, she needs to clone the phone and unfortunately, she needs to be close enough to do it. She sees him pull into Starling Park and she cuts through some alleys and is there in a minute. He is pacing around as she discreetly gets close enough to clone the phone, just in time she might add because just then Lance pulls out the phone from his pocket again and stares at it, intently.

She knows exactly what is happening, what he is struggling with and she can’t blame a ‘by the book guy’ like him. He lets out a resigned breath as he makes the call that she is already fully tapped into. She hears Oliver’s modulated voice come over the line, clear irritation in his voice.

“Don’t bother tracing, you’ll never make it through the encryption.”

She shakes her head in amusement as Lance scoofs picking up a no-nonsense tone, she’s glad she is not the only one not intimidated at all by his little act.

“You win. I will give you two days with the arrow in evidence, that is all I can get you so make it count. I’ll leave it at O’Neill and Adams”

“This better not be a trap Detective because I do not have time for these games.”

“Look this is the only way I have of getting it to you so take it or leave it. Just remember you have until Christmas to figure this out after that copycat or not I am coming after you, understood.”

“Yes.”

She decides to let Oliver pick up the arrow and not intercept, not that curiosity isn’t killing her but, she doesn’t want to disrupt this sudden alliance. She has a feeling this could be a positive relationship, not only for the hood but for Oliver as well.

As soon as Oliver has the arrow he begins to thoroughly examine it, but besides knowing that it is a teflon coated titanium serrated blade to split bone and that the shaft is some type of specialized polymer which is stronger than typical carbon fiber he can’t really tell much more of where it came from. That’s how Dig finds him when he enters the foundry. Like he is trying to extract all the secrets from this one arrow simply by staring at it, intensely.

“I see Lance gave in after the other archer dropped another body. Another guy you crossed of the list, of course. So is the framing you or calling you out?

“Either way I need to find him.”
"Is the arrow the means to that end?"

"In the right hands, it is."

"She won’t answer."

"She’s not the only person with capabilities.” At Dig’s questioning look Oliver tilts his head and simply raises his eyebrow. With a nod Dig simply says,

“A certain blonde unofficial third member of our little club?”

After making sure that Oliver picked up the arrow she was intent on finding out what he discovered, the more she read through the police report the more she knew she would need to talk to Oliver. This was one fight he might have to fight alone, at least physically. As she finished getting ready for work she received a message from Walter that asked her to do all the research she could on the names on the list and their association with the vigilante along with any association they might have had in the past and now with his wife and Robert Queen, as well.

She knew Walter was a smart man but even she was starting to get worried at how close he was getting to seeing the whole picture. She would really have to think about her next move and what exactly she would tell Walter. First priority would have to be to hack into QC and increase security on the entire building, she would have to talk to Diggle about maybe getting a bodyguard for Walter and more security for the manor.

As she settles into her office she calls Walter to let him know she will get right on task, she checks in with her ‘superior’ as she says it, quotations and all, to remind him of the new hardware they are in desperate need of if they hope to stay up to par with the hackers of the world. Then she stops by the offices of some colleagues to check their progress and approve of some projects. Followed by some conference calls to some subsidiaries. Taking her first break of the morning she settles into her chair with her tablet and the list of names, she had long ago memorized.

Oliver’s presence at QC was always a surprise to the employees as evident by their gawking and staring. The hushed whispers and fairly obvious attempts at getting his attention by some of the women were all commonplace by now yet, they did not deter him from his goal, not stopping for more than a polite smile and the occasional wink, he was still the playboy after all. Exiting the elevator into the IT floor he quickly checked with the receptionist that Felicity was in and made his way, particularly aware of the questioning looks from her colleagues who knew very well this was not his first visit. He hoped the technologically impaired role held.

The door was halfway open and he could see her deep in thought staring at her tablet fingers picking at the edge of the tablet while her teeth gnawed at her bottom lip. Whatever she was focusing on it must be intense if the furrow in her brow was any indication.

He quietly began to open her door, at her lack of acknowledgment he made his way further inside then tilted his head in amusement as he could hear the desk slightly rattle an indication that her leg was going a mile a minute underneath. He didn’t realize he had been holding his breath until he exhaled a little louder than usual but yet, barely audible. That was until Felicity shot up off her seat startled yet, he couldn’t help but notice fully aware and on alert.

“Hey.”

“Don’t you knock?” She asked as annoyance flashed on her face and then was quickly pushed back down. At her response, he smiled a little wider.
“Felicity, this is the IT department, not the ladies room.” He said tilting his head, spotting the glimmer off of something he glanced down and his eyes grew a little wider. “Although maybe next time I will knock”, he said slightly raising his hands in surrender and nodding towards her right hand. She followed his eye line and realized she was grasping the letter opener ready to attack. As a look of panic and embarrassment overtook her she placed it in her drawer from where she had pulled it. He slowly lowered his hands as she began to speak a mile a minute.

“I wasn’t going to stab. Oh my god, of course, I wasn’t, I wouldn’t stab anybody purposely...or on accident. What I mean is... I just... You scared me, not that it’s your fault or that it would justify stabbing you. Jesus, I need to stop saying stab. Ok, I will stop” she takes a deep breath relaxing her body and sitting back down before making eye contact again, only to let out a soft gasp. That amused smile, she knew that smile well, it was Robert’s reassuring smile for when she rambled. That simple similarity allowed her body to relax even further as her eyes slightly glazed over at the memory only to remember he had come to her office for a reason and she still didn’t know it. So she smiled and moved on as if nothing had happened.

“Okay, what can I do for you?”

He lets it go and simply moves right along, and she’s thankful.

“My buddy Steve is really into archery. Apparently, it’s all the rage now.” she holds back a smirk as she answers,

“Yeah, I don’t know why? It looks utterly ridiculous to me. Plus, it is a completely archaic weapon with little affectibility.”

“Mmhm...Unlike, a letter opener, per say.” She smiles sheepishly at him as he continues.

“Well, Steve’s birthday is next weekend and I wanted to buy him some arrows. The problem is he gets these custom made arrows and I have no idea where he gets them.” He says pulling the arrow, she clearly recognized, out of the container and holding it up. “I was hoping you could find out where this came from.”

He leans to hand over the arrow only slightly pulling back as she grabs it. “Careful” he adds and this time she can’t help the look of ‘no shit Sherlock’ that she shoots him but settles with simply saying “yeah” and grabbing the arrow. She can see the small upick of his lip as a result of her look but she concentrates on inspecting the arrow rather than him. She quickly sees a serial number etched into the shell.

“The shell’s composite is patented”, she says as her fingers begin to fly across her keyboard “and that patent is registered to a company called Sagittarius”, she adds looking up at him and handing him the arrow. At his slight questioning look, she adds “it’s Latin, for the archer.”

Trying not to be too obvious about how impressed he is that she gathered that information so quickly he thinks maybe there is more information she can find.

“Really, could you find out where and when this was purchased.”

She nods slowly as she thinks that he was doing so well. Up until then, the lie was believable much better than the last time, leaps and bounds really. But, why would he need to know when that particular arrow was purchased, that made no sense. He should have asked ‘Do you know when he ordered them cause, I don’t want to buy him more if he just bought some’. Or simply asked for the address of Sagittarius and then inquired with them. Better lies she need to add that to the list.
She lets him see, once again, her ‘I call bullshit’ face while she gathers the info.

“According to Sagittarius’ company records that particular arrow was part of a bundle shipment of 200 units”, she searched further because she knows already what the next question is ‘shipped where?’

“Sent to this address,” she says as she writes it down 10245 Wharf.

“or your ‘friends’ house, I assume.” She smiles big handing him the post-it. He sighs deeply and nods completely amazed not only at her technical prowess but her forethought and prudence to not question him further. He lets that show in his voice as he genuinely compliments her.

“Felicity,” he says on an exhale widening his smile. She won’t admit it but it makes goosebumps crawl up her neck as a light flush spreads across her chest. Her own name has never had that effect on her and she refuses to dwell too much on it. “you are remarkable!”

“Thank you for remarking on it,” she says kinda cheeky.

He gets up to make his way out only to stop midway and turn back around.

“Merry Christmas,” he says turning back around only to stop dead in his tracks when she responds “I’m Jewish.”

Caught slightly off guard he corrects himself wishing her a Happy Hanukkah before making his way out.

The minute he is out of sight she is searching for everything she can about the order of arrows and the address she just gave him. The arrows were bought through a fake shell corporation and there is no way of tracking where the money came from. The address is a warehouse on the docks, probably not Steve’s house, also owned by the same corporation. She tries searching surveillance dating back to the delivery date but there is nothing. She can track all the cars that came in and out of the docks that day but it will take time to run down all the plates and that is assuming the person went by car. She resigns herself to doing it anyway. She starts shutting down her system and sends Dig a text to gain her some time. She knows Oliver won’t go out until after sunset but after holding the arrow her suspicions are almost completely verified and she won’t let him take that chance, she can’t.

Diggle quickly responds “Foundry 7 pm,” she confirms and makes her way out of QC. She has four hours to confirm everything and convince Oliver that this might be one enemy he doesn’t want to face alone.

One hour after searching for Cass and finally hunting her down the odds did not look good.

“Damn it, Felicity, That sounds like the league. Fuck!” said Cass over a very shitty connection.

“Yeah, you can say that again. I just need to be sure, Cass. Reach out to your contacts in Nanda Parbat I need to know if the league is in Starling City, and why?”

“Oh, is that all? Would you also like to know who is there and where they are staying?” She responded, sarcasm oozing from her voice.

“Yes, that would actually be really helpful, thanks Cass,” says Felicity in a sing-songy voice.

“Shut up. I will see what I can get but, I am telling you right now I am positive that it is the league yet, I don’t think this has anything to do with you.”
“Neither do I, but regardless I just don’t want them here, not again.”

Felicity’s lungs burned from the effort she was exerting as she ran and darted through the docks. She could hear the footsteps getting closer and she really hoped Cass would get there soon. Her training had significantly advanced but was still limited compared to Cass, she could, maybe, fair well against one assassin but two would mean her death.

She knew it and they knew it, which is why they had sent three. Cass would be flattered, she knew it because they were technically there for her, but Felicity couldn’t see the positive at this moment. She was too busy trying to dodge the knives that buzzed by her. As she rounded the corner into an alley she knew that in less than two miles she would have to stop and take a more defensive stance because her legs wouldn’t give for more. She started scanning everything around her looking for the best position to give her the greatest advantage. She just needed to survive long enough for backup.

She spots a high vantage point with slightly narrow walls which could possibly force them to fight her one on one, she hoped. She rushes pulling out the extra beacon she had sewn into her sleeve. She can’t risk it breaking in the battle she tosses it on the roof of the building this will either lead Cass to rescue her or at the very least to her body, she winces at her own thoughts, not knowing when she became so accepting of the inevitability of death, especially her own death.

Her speed gives her a couple of seconds to prep her fight ground laying down some obstacles, finding somewhere to take cover and she has knives at the ready along with the double scythe, Cass had laughed at her when she trained to use it managing to pick it up quite fast, it was light and efficient and she liked it. She takes a high hiding stance on a narrow ledge along the building covered in shadows and the minute they round the corner she runs across the ledge barely making contact on her toes staying as narrow as possible as she flings knife after knife. As one assassin falls she realizes there are just two of them left, quickly surveying her surroundings she catches the movements on the opposite roof and quickly drops to the ground out of sight. She peers and the injured assassin hasn’t moved and the other was now sliding across the opposite wall staying low and moving quick. She hears before she sees the assassin above and doesn’t wait as she releases three knives and hears a grunt.

Knowing this might be her only opportunity she freely swings the scythe blocking the arrows of the other assassin as she comes face to face with, her, yes, definitely a woman, she takes advantage of the length of her weapon and in one fluid quick motion she uses some scaffolding to leap high above the woman as she flips legs high above almost face to face with the woman as she flips above her she wields her weapon. The woman points her bow up aiming to kill her mid-flight. She manages to rip loose and pull away from the assassins quiver as she lands a few feet away from her. Immediately taking off running again but, not before using the head of the scythe to knock out the assassin with three knives in his legs one right in his knee preventing him from standing.

The wind beating at her face and body as she weaves through the streets gives her time to assess her wounds. She can feel the cut on her arm and the slick warm blood making its way to her wrist. Her right thigh is also cut and she can feel the sting of the cut on her chin from an arrow that came inches from ending her. At the thought, she breathes deep and raises her gaze catching some familiar movement. As the body leaps from one building to the other she knows immediately that it is Cass, she makes her way around and in three leaps she is on the roof a couple of meters behind her.

She sees Cass slightly turn and makes sure she is with her before gesturing to split left which she immediately does. As they both leap to adjacent buildings she hears the gunfire. It seems the assassins are done fighting honorably the minute they see Cass. They don’t have much time and
Felicity’s no gun policy, well, she was starting to regret that. Cass signals her and she knows exactly what she wants to do having spotted the same thing a few buildings back. Felicity immediately leaps off the building landing with a roll to absorb the impact and then takes off in the opposite direction shedding layers of clothing and her wig. She halts her pace and then darts from shadow to shadow four buildings back and climbs back up squatting behind a roof access door.

It takes less than a minute before she hears the rapid movement and then the door swings open as Cass darts in, the first assassin right on her heels the second, the woman, comes through after him. Felicity surprises her and takes her feet out from under her and tackles her back onto the roof jamming the door behind her. The fight was now fair, one on one.

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The silence stretches for longer than is necessary as Cass continues subconsciously rubbing at a scar on her neck, a habit of hers when she recalls past fights.

“Hell, nobody wants them anywhere sweetie.”

“Touche” responds Felicity with a snort, thankful that Cass tries to lighten the mood.

They exchange a bit more of information along with Cass telling her that she lost Merlyn’s trial in Madagascar. His time away from Starling does not exist and she has hit one dead end after another but that only lets her know she is right in her suspicions. Felicity asks to be updated constantly and reassures her that she will keep an eye on Tommy and Merlyn senior. Speak of the devil as soon as she hangs up her cell phone rings.

“Tommy, to what do I owe this pleasure”

“Merry Christmas Cordy”

“Merry Christmas Tommy”

“Okay, so you do celebrate, great. There is a party tomorrow at Queen manor and you have been personally invited by Oliver Queen himself and the only answer I am, we are taking today is, yes.”

“Well with an invite like that. I would love to, but I am actually not in Starling…”

“Nope, I said only Yes and I meant it. I can send the Queen jet or you can use your own but you need to be here tomorrow. Hell, I will fly commercial and bring you myself if need be.”

“So, what you are saying is that come hell or high water.”

“Exactly”

“Okay, then it will be my pleasure I’ll meet you there, time?”

“Anytime after 6 pm”

“I’ll see you then.”

“Great!”

As she visibly slumps just thinking of how tired she will be tomorrow she tells herself that now more than ever she needs to stay close to the Merlyn men.

Two hours later she is making her way to the foundry in full disguise. She hasn’t worn a full disguise
in over two years and it takes her a little longer than she would have liked but she knows this time, in this encounter with Oliver and Dig she will need it.

“Come on Vi, concentrate. Adopting a full persona requires dedication, believe and live the character. For the love of whatever you believe in focus. My grandmother could play this character better and she’s dead and I never met her.”

Felicity turns annoyed eyes at him as she walks back to the other side of the room takes a breath and approaches him again. Three months she had been with Tom aka Nemesis learning his craft. She was exhausted and frustrated, she always prided herself in being a great student but this was proving to be beyond her skill set. One month ago he had nicknamed her Viola or Vi, after the Shakespearean character, because of her attempt at disguising herself as a man had been in his words ‘an insult to his abilities as a teacher and just plain embarrassing’. She almost left for Starling that same day but as he came to her side placing a placating hand on her shoulder she knew she couldn’t leave, she needed this and with newfound resolution, she walked into the room and started all over. Now she had the ‘easy part’ down, looking at the character, the hard part was believing it and she was definitely struggling.

“Now move like you own this room like everyone around you is not just less than you, but you are genuinely shocked they have not knelt before you. Believe it Vi, believe it.” Raising her chin and setting her shoulders back she took a deep breath and walked forward as she passed Tom she didn’t even spare him a second glance as she moved forward.

“There you go, that’s it. That time I saw nothing of Felicity, that my dear was a stranger and I loved it.”

“Can I drop character now?” She asked raising a brow and looking at him like she was annoyed to even have to speak to him, at his nod, she relaxed her shoulders and let herself grin wide as she jumped up and down clapping her hands and cheering for herself, Tom couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Okay, let’s try again with all the personas. I need to perfect this, you know life or death and what not.”

“Isn’t it always Vi?”

“Touche. So what is next.”

“Next. This is next, you keep doing this until you can do it in your sleep and at the drop of a hat. This doesn’t have to be second nature, this is your only nature Vi.” She gives him a quick nod and starts all over. A week after that she is hoarse and living off of tea with honey. Voice training comes easier but it still weighs on the body. She spends whole days on end speaking in varying accents, he changes them at a moments notice and she tries her best to transition seamlessly. By the fifth month, she has two perfected personas and has managed to go back to MIT and talk to her old professor and friend without being recognized, only posing as a research specialist in the field of A.I. After interviewing him and having dinner she heads back to Tom’s compound feeling accomplished beyond belief.

The last thing he teaches her is the ‘grunt work’. Making her own prosthetics, makeup, and wigs. He teaches her all the materials she needs to have in order to accomplish whatever look she wants and the essentials to always carry with her in case she needs to disguise herself at any moment. They practice the easiest and fastest way to disguise herself in a pinch. At the end of 6 months, she feels completely prepared and confident in her skills. They put them to the test one last time before she
heads back to Starling.

Tom needs her to pose as his handler, since slipping away from A.R.G.U.S, well mainly one psychotic bitch by the name of Amanda Fuller, he has managed to maintain some contacts in the dark and therefore pick up work here and there. Yet, this time he needs her to create fake paperwork and proof that he is still part of the suicide squad while posing as an A.R.G.U.S agent and his handler. She agrees to help, not out of debt but because she has genuinely developed a relationship with Tom, he is a friend. The mission is simple enough and she passes with flying colors as does the paperwork and the fake identity she hacked and planted into the system.

The mission is almost over when she realizes the true mission and the real reason for all the pep talks and reminders to not ever break character, her true test had just walked through the door and the tight hold Tom has on her wrist tells her that she is on edge and needs to focus. As Drako walks in along with four other men she can feel her heartbeat speed up and sweat bead under her prosthetic nose. She straightens herself to look as imposing as possible, takes a deep breath and rests her hand heavily on her holstered weapon like any agent would at the sight of Drako, known assassin, mercenary and murderer of her, Felicity’s father.

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Tommy hangs up with Cordelia proud of himself that part B of his plan is ready, now came the hard part, part A. Yes, he knows he is going out of order but if there was one thing he was never accused of was being conventional and he liked that just fine. He takes a deep breath as he knocks on Laurel’s door and puts on his most charming smile.

Laurel lets him in, with little to no hesitancy and that has him beaming all smiles and charm, that is until Quentin Lance steps into the room and his entire demeanor changes, instantly.

“Merry Christmas sir, how are you?” he says with a firm handshake.

“Proficient with firearms”, answered Lance with a glint in his eye. Laurel glares at him as he leaves to give them some space.

She turns back to Tommy expectantly to find him grinning, hands in pockets and leaning against the wall, she instantly knows he’s up to no good.

“I know that Look, Tommy.”

“What look?"

“What do you want?"

“A date? With you.”

“Did I miss something? I could have sworn we covered this last time after the Table Salt debacle.”

“We did, you are my girlfriend” he grins, “and now I would like my girlfriend to accompany me as a gorgeous plus one to the Queen Family Christmas Party.”

“Tommy…”

“Now, before you say anything you were the one that said that if we were going to do this, we were going to do this all the way. Well, this constitutes all the way. I am going to my best friend’s Christmas party and I would love for my girlfriend to come with me.” She lets out a long sigh before relenting.
“Okay, you are right. I would love to go with you.”

“Great. Now that you have said yes, and you are a lawyer so your word is your bond you can’t back out…”

“Tommy”, she says with a warning in her tone.

“Oliver has also invited Cordelia and I agreed it was a good idea in order for us to make up for the Table Salt Debacle. Now, before you get mad remember that regardless of how you personally feel about her, she is my boss and we did put her in a horrible situation and we were extremely rude to her at what was supposed to be her thank you dinner. I want to try and set things right before she leaves for Gotham. I need your help and your support, please.” She contemplates him for a bit and then turns apologetic eyes at him.

“Once again you are right. I feel horrible about what happened. I can see this is what makes you happy and therefore that is all I need. I am with you 100%. Plus, after the way, Cordelia behaved that day the least I could do is apologize.” He smiles big and wide and then leans in and gives her a kiss. As he pulls back he gives her a present. She opens it to find a framed picture of Lance, Sara and herself and she can already feel the tears well up in her eyes. If she wasn’t fully committed to this party before along with being apologetic, now she was, because Tommy deserves this and more.

Tommy leaves fully satisfied with the outcome and feeling far happier than before. Not only are things looking up but the one aspect of his life that was always a mess, relationships, are also at an important turning point. What Laurel and he have feels more real than anything and his excitement far outweighs his fear of the future and that is entirely new to him, but he likes it.

Riding her bike into the Glades Felicity can’t help but wiggle her nose under the prosthetic and fully concentrate on not scratching her face. It had been a while since she used prosthetics, the tech she now used was not only a time saver but allowed far better options. Yet, sometimes nothing was more ‘genuine’ than prosthetics at least that’s what Tom said and he was the best.

The beauty of makeup is that her almond-shaped eyes were now round and big, she softly rounded thin nose was now replaced by one a bit rougher a bit wider yet still fitting on her new features. Her full lips had a much more pronounced and rigid cupid’s bow. Her skin tone was far more sun-kissed than her ivory tone. Not one single trace of Felicity remained.

She wore her usual outfit and definitely brought her weapons, not as many as she usually carried, just the essentials. Leaving her bike in one of her secure sites she makes her way to the foundry opting to not take the roofs, this time. Standing by the side door she takes a deep breath and hacks the code on the door and makes her way inside, for the first time not cautious of being seen or using subtle steps. She lets the door shut heavy and loudly. She walks down the stairs with sure confident steps immediately making eye contact with both men as they quickly turn to look at her. She stops at the bottom of the steps under the first light she sees as if telling them with that one simple action, no more shadows, no more hiding.

Oliver feels the tension run freely throughout his body as he watches her come down the steps. Diggle is far more comfortable with her being there almost as if it is a common occurrence he is simply smiling and nodding at her. When she stops, purposely he guesses, under the overhead lights and looks at them directly he allows himself to unabashedly let his eyes take her fully in. Trying to memorize every last bit about her. Not realizing until this very moment that he had really never seen her at all. She has big round green eyes and red hair. Her skin is a soft caramel color, perfectly sun-kissed, he can see at least five weapons and wonders how many more she is carrying. The rest of her features are covered by the cloth across her face and he wonders if he will ever see her, truly, he
guesses probably not.

The silence extends a little longer than Diggle is comfortable with so he clears his throat before speaking.

“Hello seems a bit small for this occasion, but always a good place to start”, he can't see her mouth but he would put money that she is smiling at his comment. Oliver is thankful that Diggle broke the silence because he really had no idea even where to begin.

“Hello boys”, she responds in her very distant accent. Oliver simply nods, he really doesn't have the capability to do more he is too busy taking in every detail.

“The strong silent type, that might actually be useful in this conversation. Shall we sit?” At their uneasy looks, she raises her hands as if in surrender and cocks her head.

“Friendly conversation, right? We all look ready to attack just figured sitting might ease the tension in the room.”

“That’s a lot of weapons for friendly?” Oliver counters.

“A girl needs protection, this is a dangerous city” at that she sees the slightest quirk from Oliver’s lip and she almost pats herself on the back. They settle for compromise as both Diggle and himself lean against the med table and she crosses the room and leans against the computer desk.

“As cliche as it sounds, I guess we should start at the beginning.”

“That would be my preference”, says Oliver with a raised eyebrow.

“My preference would be names, can we start with names, please”, chimed in Diggle, genuinely tired of referring to her as Her. At that, she lets out a small laugh.

“Fair enough. The problem is that I really don’t have a name yet, I’ve been called many things. I just never took an official name.”

“Does that mean your actual name is out of the question?” Asked Oliver.

“No. It’s just irrelevant and useless. I know lies and secrets is the reason we are here now but, as I am sure you of all people understand some truths are our own to keep, my name is one.”

“Fair enough” he mirrors her response.

“Nia” she says after a few beats of silence.

“What?”

“Diggle, he calls me Nia.” Oliver turns questioning eyes to his partner, he merely shrugs as he says, “It suited her and I needed something to call her.” At his still confused look, he further explains “It is the name of a warrior in a Swahili folktale.”

“And I like it, better than some of the other names I’ve been called. Recently I’ve got a lot of, Bitch.” at that Oliver visibly winced knowing she is referring to Helena and her favorite choice word when referring to her. She simply waves off his attempt at responding and continues.

“I meant it when I told you I liked it, so if you don’t mind we can go with Nia.” They both nod agreeing that it is simple enough and truly suits her.
“Now that, that is settled can we continue?” asked Oliver looking slightly amused at Diggle who is proudly wearing a grin. Felicity was surprised with the ease that Oliver was taking this entire situation. She knew he was nervous but he didn’t seem wary of her if anything he seemed anxious to listen to her. There was an obvious difference to their previous encounters and she knew it had a lot to do with the past weeks and she hoped that this would mean that he would be accepting of what she was willing to give this time around.

“Well, the start of our story is what truly matters and that started six years ago with your father, my friend Robert Queen…” She tells them as much as she can without revealing who she truly is. She sticks to the facts only ever letting a few anecdotes slip. She makes sure to keep it all about the list and Robert, never once mentioning her own personal trials or who she was when Robert first came to her. She spares them the sad story of a 15-year-old in way over her head that began it all leading to the 22-year-old now standing in front of them still in many ways in over her head. She tells them about the work they did, how Robert would send her information and how they would work together to set things right in Starling.

“Then he left on the Gambit, and everything changed. All I had were bits and pieces of information and no direction. Then four months after the Gambit went down I received a package and a letter from Robert. It seems he had set up contingencies in case… I think he knew his time was limited and that is why he reached out for help, and I guess I was the only one that answered that call.”

“But then you were alone” added Diggle, sympathy coating every one of his words

“Yes. I had no idea what to do. Especially when part of those contingencies was a letter where he begged me not to pursue the matter any further. To move on. He was worried I might get hurt or worse, get killed. But, I’ve never been good at leaving mysteries alone, they bother me.”

“He cared about you”, Oliver stated more than asked.

“I’d like to think so, yes, and I cared about him.”

“Were you two…” he didn’t want to ask but he knew his father’s reputation and he just couldn’t help but see the fondness in her eyes when she spoke about his father. At her confused look, he elaborated.

“Personally involved?”

“WHAT? No! Absolutely not. Why would you even…? I was a kid, he was like a fath… No. Okay, we were not. Any other inappropriate, unfounded questions?”

“You were a kid? How old?” Diggle asked the concern in his tone was more than evident. Neither of them had ever stopped to consider how old she could be. Sure she looked somewhat young but with all the disguises they couldn't be sure and she acted confident and so sure of everything that they never associated her with being a kid.

“That isn’t important.”

“But...”

“Dig, it doesn’t matter, really” at his nod she continues

“Look, Oliver, I know your father had a reputation. I was not blind to his flaws but, rest assured that our relationship was never like that.”

“I believe you. Please continue.”
“Well, I guess the real story starts after he disappeared. I was lost for a while, and then my life revolved around one purpose finding the Gambit, finding Robert. I put all my efforts into that and continuing the work we started, as best I could. I lost and gained a lot in the next five years. Then it happened, I found…”

“Me. You found me. It was you wasn’t it, you were the one that sent that team and rescued me from the island.”

“I found a Queen, just not the one I was expecting”, She says with words tinged with a bit of sadness. “That is why I didn't say anything. I wasn’t sure what to do next, I didn’t know if you knew anything. The little information I had on you from Robert, wasn’t too promising, to be honest. At least not about this part of his life. He always did everything in his power to keep you and Thea completely away from all of this. Going as far as having me set up contingencies in case of anything.”

“Contingencies?”

“A protocol to erase your identities completely, every last trace and set up new identities. New lives, in case things went south. There are many things I never knew about your father as I am sure there a many more you have discovered but, there is one thing I knew for a fact, he never wanted you to be a part of this. He didn’t want you to know this side of him. Which is why when I realized you knew quite a bit I was more than surprised.”

He takes in everything she is saying. He never doubted his father’s love but then he never knew just how much his father protected him from, everything. He finally understood why he was so closed off about certain parts of his life. Why he was so protective and at times would get angry at his questions. So many things were making sense and his heart clenched thinking that he couldn’t talk to his father and apologize for all the contempt and judgment he held against him during his more rebellious years. She could see the struggle in his eyes and knew exactly what he was struggling with. She had been there a few times and witnessed their arguments. Robert had shared his concerns with his son’s lifestyle and she had offered advice on more than one occasion.

“He knew Oliver. He knew that his reservations and secrets made it hard for both of you to have the relationship he would have wanted. he struggled every day with the sacrifices he was making to keep you safe, but he knew that you loved him and he never held anything against you. I guarantee you that much.” at his almost imperceptible nod she decided to leave that matter for another time and continue with her story.

“Not being sure about what exactly he told you I retreated, I waited. I knew five years on a not so deserted island could change a person into many things and I was worried about who was coming back. I was afraid of what Robert’s confession would have done to you. Then the Hood happened and well you know the rest.”

“I have a feeling I really don’t,” he says with narrowed eyes.

“Excuse me?”

“You skipped over 5 years of information and gave no personal details of who you are. Is that you trusting me? Lying to me by omission.”

“Not omission just personal. I don’t see you scurrying to tell me about your island adventure” she countered with a raised eyebrow.

“ Some truths…”
“Are our own to keep” she smiled at him.

“My father talked about you.” At her surprised look and rigid stance, he clarified.

“When we were on the lifeboat he mentioned a woman that would help me. An ally. He said you would find me and that I should trust you. I guess he was right, on all accounts.”

She chuckled, “I guess somehow he always knew I would never let go of this, I guess he knew me better than I thought. That was Robert, always so perceptive and ahead of everyone. Yet, somehow I doubt this is what he had in mind. A vigilante” she says pointing at him “a soldier” she says pointing at Diggle “and a woman that doesn’t exist. Teaming up to finish his work.”

“To right his wrongs” adds Oliver.

“To save this city” finishes Diggle.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this and I know I promised payback and suffering for Oliver and he will get SOME of that but, as everything between them it doesn’t always work out the way they intend. Let me know what you all think.
Chapter Summary

Having come to a truce of sort’s Felicity and Oliver now must face the Dark Archer and the Holidays.

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy the second part of this chapter.
I will not be posting for 3 weeks, because of life. But I will come back with a nice long chapter. Thank you and let me know what you think!

previously...

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Felicity liked this, the comfortable back and forth. The way it seemed like this partnership might work even when there were still many secrets and untold truths between them. She knew in time those would reveal themselves, yet, for now, this was good, this was better than good, these were partners.

“Are we good, at least for now?” she asked with a smirk she knew they couldn’t see as she walked up to them and extended her hand. Both Oliver and Diggle stood straight and contemplated her for a bit before Oliver took her hand and shook it, slightly squeezing as he said “Yes, we are good” and then letting go of her hand.

Felicity nodded and let out a small sigh as she turned her back to them and reached up to remove the face cover and hair cover. Then as she turned she reached up with both hands grabbing her hood and pulling it down as she looked at them with a genuine smile. Oliver and Dig’s eyes both widened in shock not expecting her to reveal so much of herself so quickly. At their genuine surprise, she let out a soft chuckle and then winked at them.

“Well, boys I would love to just stand here and stare, the view is quite nice”, she internally winced at her comment and took a deep stabling breath, she was getting too comfortable. Her ‘Felicity’ was showing if Oliver’s slight tilt of the head and twitch of his lip was anything to go by. Diggle much like she expected from him was full on grinning. She continued completely ignoring her previous comment.

“But, there is a reason I asked to meet with you both and end my radio silence. The new player in town. I think I know what we are dealing with and it is not good.”

“You know who the new archer is?” asked Diggle.

“No, but I know who sent him or at least who trained him. Have you ever heard of the League of Assassins?”

“In Starling?” asked Oliver. At his reaction and the way Diggle had gone rigid, she guessed they both knew who they were.

“Wouldn’t be the first time” at their questioning look she brushed past gesturing with her hand that it was not important. Oliver made sure to remember to ask about it later.

“This archer, I am almost certain is from the league. So either he is here on a mission sent by the league or his mission here is personal and that makes him far more dangerous and unpredictable.”

“I think the fact that he is hitting all my old targets points a pretty clear picture as to whom he is after.”

“Not necessarily, the league is also a business and there are some pretty heavy hitters here in Starling so we can’t make any assumptions.”

“So then, what do we do?” asked Diggle agreeing with her that a plan was necessary. Oliver decided it was time to share his intel with her.

“I think I know where he is or at least where he is working out of…”
“10245 Wharf” interrupted Nia, at both of their surprised looks she smirks as she says,

“I am everywhere boys”, she punctuates with a wink. “Although, that blonde of yours”, she lets out a long low whistle “she’s good.” Instantly, Oliver feels the need to make it clear that Felicity is not a part of this, that she is not like them.

“She doesn’t know anything, she is just…”

“I know. Ms. Smoak is safe, don’t worry. Just a useful resource”, she sees the almost imperceptible wince he gives at her statement. She’s not sure if it’s because of her dismissal or the accuracy in her description. She doesn’t linger on it too much, bigger fish, after all, so she continues.

“You think he is here for you, right?” Oliver nods, heavily.

“Okay, then how do you want to play this?”

By the time they are done strategizing they have a plan set for not only investigating the warehouse but also drawing out the archer and figuring out his motives. She tells them that she already has pieces in motion trying to gather more intel from the source itself, the league, and that as soon as she knows more she will let them know.

They set up a meet time for five the next day, Oliver will go in while she searches the surrounding areas and asks around about the warehouse, meanwhile Dig follows another lead with some of his contacts. It takes a bit of convincing on Oliver’s part and a whole lot of compromising, seeing as his hero complex kept getting in the way. Coming to an agreement they set a rendezvous point for 8 pm. She tells them she has comms they can all use to stay in contact plus some other toys she thinks they might like. She makes sure that he understands that if they are to work as a team, there is no room for solo heroics.

She wants to tell him he is not on an island anymore but knows that type of conversation is too much too soon. She settles for simple directness and he seems to appreciate it, although he is not too thrilled about putting Dig or her in danger and alone out in the field. She knows given time he will come to learn that more than likely she will be saving his ass more often than not. They shake hands and she places her face cover and hood back on gives them a nod and starts to walk up the stairs. Oliver calling out her name “Nia” stops her in her tracks only slightly turning her head over her shoulder.

“That goes for you too. Don’t you go out on your own either. Like you said we are a team now and by the way, thank you.” she smiles even though she knows he can’t see it, nods once and walks out of the foundry. He truly is so much like his father.

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“What were you thinking Felicity? You could have been seriously hurt, you could have been killed.”

“You would have been killed”, she shouts back. “Had I not gotten there when I did, we wouldn’t be having this conversation or any conversation for that matter.” She says in a much softer tone.

“That is not the point, Felicity. I told you to not come. I told you not to get involved. Maybe this partnership wasn’t such a good idea”.

“Don’t. Don’t you dare, Robert Jonas Queen. I am invested, 100%. Have been for almost a year. This was one incident, this was one exception. You don’t scrap the whole thing over one incident. I mean who does that, crazy people that’s who. Come on, you have to admit my plan worked. No one got hurt and we put some very bad people away. This is a win. Can you just take the win, please.” She can see she is breaching his defenses as he tries to fight the uptick of his lip, the amusement and
what she thinks is pride in his eyes.

“Felicity. You got lucky. We all got lucky. Besides who knows who could have seen, they might be able to connect you to me and then what? You will never be safe, anywhere.”

“Well, damn, you certainly know how to talk a girl out of a victory”, at that he smirks.

“It’s a gift, Felicity”.

“Can you give it back, or is that bad etiquette?” He simply shakes his head in amusement and continues walking, well limping, into his penthouse in the city where they had taken to meeting every time she was in the city. Figuring that the Manor and QC were too close to home. She asked once why he had a penthouse when he had such a big house. The look he gave her told her all she needed and she knew never to bring that up again. The look some neighbors gave her after her third time there told her more than she needed to know about what they thought of her and that was enough to have her sneaking in at odd hours in the future, avoiding everyone.

Once they were in the penthouse she dropped herself into the armchair, finally feeling the exhaustion of the last 48 hours. Robert dropped onto the couch with a heavy sigh and a glass of scotch. They sat in silence for a bit until Felicity couldn’t take it anymore and her energy bursts through in a plethora of questions.

“So what did they want you to do? Is QC’s applied sciences department in jeopardy? Do you need me to upgrade security? Do you think they will try again? Do you really think someone could identify me? Oh my god, should I change my identity? I could start all over, go into WITSEC? Maybe I should change my appearance? You know to throw them off. I could be blonde, don’t you think? I could rock the blonde look?”

“Felicity… breathe”, she gulps a big breath of air which causes him to laugh at her theatrics. He was incredibly worried when he heard her as she made her presence known in the warehouse not more than 3 hours ago. This immense heaviness took over his chest at the thought that his mistakes, his mission could cost her, her life. When he saw half the guns in the room turn to point in her general direction he felt all his blood drain and a scream get caught in his throat. He wanted to tell her to run, to get away, and disappear. He couldn’t. All he could do was watch, wide-eyed, panic coursing through his body as she walked closer, hands raised with a stack of files and a duffle bag. He silently pleaded with her and all she did was raise her chin and nod at him trying to reassure him. Yet, he could see she was scared beyond belief. Her hands were shaking, her steps were unsteady and when she spoke he could hear the tremor, the break. She was scared. She should be terrified because he was.

“I think we are in the clear. I don’t think they will come after QC anytime soon and if anyone did get away I doubt the story they will tell their bosses is that a petite teenage girl with bright red hair outsmarted them all, took out the base and rescued Robert Queen.”

“That would be pretty ridiculous, wouldn’t it?”

“Yes, yes it would be. I can’t even imagine what they thought when they saw you walk in, dressed like that.”

“I was going with ‘lost teen in the scary city, please don’t hurt me’ I think it worked. I think it threw them off.”

“Yeah, I think it really threw them off. The trench coat was a nice touch”, he adds obviously
mocking her.

“It is the most ominous thing I own.” They both laugh letting a bit of lightness and humor take them over. They were safe. They had made it and they were thankful. They sat in comfortable silence as Felicity’s laughter died out. Taking a deep breath, Robert turns a more serious face at her.

“You know you can’t ever take a risk like that again. You get that, don’t you Felicity?”

“I do. But do you get that I had to make an executive decision, you weren’t there so, I made my choice”.

“You told me the last time I tried to end our partnership that we were a team, if that is true then you can’t go out alone and put your life in danger like that.”

“My life wasn’t ever really in danger. I had planned everything out.”

“Felicity…” he calls with a much harsher tone than before. A tone she imagines her father would have adapted if, she quickly sakes out of that train of thought.

“Yes, I get it. Sorry.”

“No more solo reckless missions, Felicity. Now rest, stay here. I have to go home and see the rest of my family.” He said as he got up and kissed the top of her head. She smiled up at him, something else her father might have adopted, given time.

As he made his way out he stopped and called her name “Felicity” she turned over her shoulder as she stood in the bathroom doorway.

“Thank you”, she smiled and nodded as he walked out and she made her way into a long hot shower, her favorite place to contemplate.

She knows her choice to go into the lion’s den alone and ridiculously outnumbered, out skilled and scared shitless hadn’t been her best idea. Yet, she wasn’t wrong, she had no choice, she couldn’t leave him there to die. Because that is exactly what would have happened. Robert would have never given them what they wanted and they would have killed him and although he was okay with that, what he didn’t know and she refused to tell him even now was that they had gone after his family too. They had been following his children and had she not intervened they would have taken Thea.

When she saw the same car the cameras had spotted outside of the manor and then again at the restaurant where Moira and her children were having dinner, she knew something was wrong and she knew it had everything to do with Robert and his sudden disappearance two days ago. No one had questioned anything because emails and phone calls had been made that he had to leave on a sudden business trip. What his kidnappers didn’t know was that she had been meeting with him every day since she had arrived for spring break in Starling. They had no way of knowing that she would notice he was missing. They also had no way of knowing that she wouldn’t stop until she found him.

So when she saw the familiar car outside Thea’s school she was thankful for her more than impressive memory. She thought about calling the police, the school with an urgent message from Moira but then there was young Thea just a couple of years younger than her walking out of school and two men were exiting the car and heading towards her. Felicity did the only thing she could think of, she took a bike from the rails and darted straight for them she made a show of crashing into them and Thea, calling all the attention to her disruption and more importantly to the men. Thea immediately dropped her bag and tried to help her as she yelped and moaned in pain. Soon the
school’s security was approaching along with the Queen’s chauffeur. The men noticing the unwanted attention quickly retreated. When she saw the car leave she quickly stood up, brushed her pants off and thanked Thea.

Seemingly still shocked little Thea dotted over her and even offered to have her driver take her home. Felicity re-assured her that she was fine and helped her pick up her things that she had dropped. Living up to every story Robert had told her about his boisterous princess, Thea complimented her shoes, her hair and gawked over her piercings all in the time it took her to pick up her bike. Making a split decision Felicity engaged and at the end of the whole situation they had exchanged names, phone numbers, and emails.

Felicity walked away smiling and already formulating a plan. As she walked away she opened her palm and her fist shot up in excitement, she had managed to swipe one of their cell phones and that was all she needed to find out everything. To find Robert.

It took her a couple of hours to gather everything she needed. She had a location and now she needed a flawless plan. She broke into QC’s applied sciences department and took some of their prototypes. Including some delayed explosives, a little nifty gadget that took out the entire power grid and lastly a little gift from LexCorp, an unmanned air assault ship, with the manual. She was proud to say she learned to program and fly it in just under an hour, okay maybe an hour and a half but only because the manual was poorly written.

She was ready and those men in the warehouse never saw her coming and they never saw that airship that blew up their shipments and kept them all inside while the cops arrived and as the pièce de résistance, she blew up the entire warehouse once everyone was out.

That should have told Robert all he needed to know. Felicity was a force to be reckoned with and if he ever thought he could turn her away from this mission if the price grew to be too much, he was wrong. He tried nonetheless. He didn’t allow her to return to Starling City, with a sorry excuse she saw right through. He kept her as busy as he could so she would stop asking questions and he contacted her less. The day after the incident, he set up contingencies to deal with Felicity, he tried to cover all his bases to assure she wouldn’t be able to finish his work if he was ever not around. Eight months later those contingencies went into effect. They never deterred her, not once. He should have known.

The next day Felicity itches to go and investigate the warehouse she had held out for two days already, but she can’t help but feel that she should have been tracing this lead long ago, old habits after all. She knows she has to stick to the plan and she will do just that. As her day comes to an end at QC she receives a text from Tommy reminding her that they have a party to attend. She curses having forgotten and lets him know that she will be there just a little late. He warns her that he and Oliver will take personal offense if she does not show and she promises it won’t happen. She heads out from QC to get ready and meet up with Oliver and Dig.

Diggle and Oliver almost don’t recognize her when she shows up in another disguise as a “civilian”. She gives them a look “If I am going around asking questions I very well can’t do it wearing a hood and 20 plus weapons, now can I? To anyone paying attention I am just a girl out for a run.”

As they both stare at her still a little perplexed she tilts her head and places her hands on her hips “What?”
“How do you do that? If it wasn’t for your voice I would have never recognized you”.

“Thanks”, she eyed them both “eyes up here Queen”, she says with great amusement. He gives her an exasperated look which she simply just laughs at along with Diggle.

“So are we ready?”

They each head out in different directions. She quickly takes off running to talk to some locals. Oliver eyes her up and down one more time and then heads up to the rooftops.

He approaches the warehouse carefully letting them know that he will be in radio silence while he investigates.

Approaching the door he opens it carefully bow armed and ready taking small guided steps and every precaution he can. He enters the room and finds a single black arrow pierced through the floor in the center of the room. He rounds the room to get a better view, as he reaches the center of the room the door slams shut and he instantly hears Nia ask “What was that?”

He gives a faint response which she acknowledges. She has managed to speak to a few of the dock workers and they have only been able to provide very vague if not useless information. The minute she hears the noise come over Oliver’s comm she stops dead in her tracks and is ready to head back to him. Even though he reassures her that everything is okay, well he actually just grunted which she took to mean he was okay, she decides to start making her way back towards the warehouse as she listens to every last noise coming over the comms.

Oliver pulls the arrow out as he spots a machine across the room and starts making his way towards it. As if sensing his presence the machine begins to work lighting up as some chemicals begin to mix. Nia hears the distinct sound of machinery and liquids and then she hears the sharp intake of breath from Oliver as a single lit spark comes to life. Nia’s voice comes through a little louder and more strained since she is now running full speed, both realizing it is a bomb.

Coming around the corner she can see the warehouse in the distance and she hears Oliver whisper “bomb” she shouts for him to “get out now”. He turns and shoots an exploding arrow at the door, just as Nia reaches the building the door flies open and Oliver jumps out, straight into her. As they both go rolling into the ground they feel the heat of the explosion on their backs, they hit the ground hard just in time to only get slightly hurt.

Oliver takes the bigger brunt of the impact as he made sure to soften her fall with his body only realizing after that she was trying to do the same thing for him as her hands end up bound behind his head preventing it from making a direct impact with the concrete. They regain a little composure yet, still, on the ground, they finally register Dig’s frantic voice coming over the comms.

“What happened? Oliver, Nia are you okay?”

“We are fine Dig, just a minor hiccup”, at Oliver’s disbelieving look at her word choice, she merely shrugs and tells Dig that she is going to pick up some samples from the explosion and they will meet at the rendezvous point, like planned, in 10 minutes. She clicks her link and then looks down at Oliver before raising an eyebrow and simply saying,

“Do you mind?”

He stares at her a bit confused for half a second before he quickly pulls his arm back from around her waist, and to his side averting his eyes which were eye level, with not her face. He feels a bit foolish not really sure when that started to happen and even less sure when intimidation came into the
picture. But here he was trying to keep his composure as she braced her arms beside him and jumped to her feet seemingly unbothered by anything including the explosion. He wondered for a bit just what she had seen in her life that brought about this lack of reaction and quickly realized that they had far more in common than he first thought.

She quickly picks up some samples as he looks around for anything and everything, when she is done she whistles to call his attention and nods in the direction of Dig with a simple nod they both begin to climb the nearby building. Nia smirking as she beat him to the top. They both take off running leaping until they reach their destination every so often looking through their peripherals at the other yet, giving nothing away.

They meet up with Dig and before they can say anything she tells them she will take care of the samples but she needs to leave because she has somewhere to be. At Digs questioning look she reassures him that she is fine and that Oliver will give him the details. She promises to check in the next day and let them know what their samples turn up. She takes off running as Dig reminds Oliver that he also has somewhere to be. He curses under his breath as he hears before he sees a motorcycle take off at full speed.

It isn’t until she is getting ready that she realizes her hands are scrapped and her knuckles are slightly bruised, she figures her hands are better than Oliver’s head and decides to disregard the bruises. She finishes getting ready in record time and heads out as soon as the concierge calls her to let her know her car has arrived.

She had made sure to get a room at her usual Hotel and leave everything ready for her to become Cordelia Todd. She uses the drive down to Queen Manor to use her makeup and try as best she can to cover the damage to her hands. She fidgets in her seat, feeling exhausted and struggling to get into character.

The gown itches, the shoes pinch, and the makeup prevents her from rubbing her hands together like she desperately wants to. She resorts to adjusting the lace holster holding her gun to her inner thigh. She decides to focus on the cool metal rather than everything else as the car pulls up to the front door of the manor and a valet opens the door for her. As she walks into the party she quickly scans the room and notes that neither Oliver or Tommy are there yet, she worries a bit but then sees Oliver make his way to the top of the stairs. Not ready quite yet to be Cordelia Todd she makes her way into the crowd and gathers a drink from a passing tray.

By the time Oliver makes it out of his room he is aching and the party, his party is in full swing. Dig is waiting for him and immediately notices his discomfort.

“Are you okay?”

“I will manage. At least it seems everyone is having fun.”

“Sure you want to do this, maybe this isn’t the best time to be Martha Stewart’s elf.” joked Diggle

“My family needs this, I need it.” Dig nods towards the door as Thea approaches he can’t help the knot in his throat at seeing his baby sister look so grown up sweeping in to take him away. Managing to greet a few people with her and avoid her scrutinizing gaze, he breaks away spotting the photographer for the night.

He makes his way into the main room and seeing his family together he’s inspired to have them document this moment by taking a family picture. They all agree and Oliver feels that this might end up working out, he figures something has too, tonight. Yet, he can’t help but notice that something
isn’t quite right. Thea seems to sense or know something as they see Walter talking to Moira and it seems to be serious.

Turning questioning eyes at Thea she simply rolls her eyes and makes her way towards some of her friends. He approaches Walter and asks him if everything is okay and he reassures him that things will work themselves out. Yet, he can’t seem but doubt that. Just then he sees Thea following their mother with her gaze, completely disregarding the boy who was fruitlessly flirting with her, as she makes her way upstairs, alone, he really hopes that whatever it is Thea has been privy too she will share with him, eventually. He contemplates his family so intently that he doesn’t notice the woman in the long green dress approach him at least not until he hears the unmistakable British accent.

“Little sisters will be the bloody death of you.” She says with a wide smile following his line of sight, She knows that his worries are with his mother and Walter, another truth she hasn’t shared, but she can’t give away just how much she was paying attention this whole time. So she goes for the more obvious observation.

“You speak from experience, Ms. Todd?”

“Cordelia, please and something like that. As a woman who was once a ‘boy crazed’ teen can I offer a bit of advice?”

“Please, at this point anything helps”, it seems he decided to play along.

“The more you negate and put your foot down the more she will rebel. Not because she doesn’t think or know that you are right or have a valid point but, simply because she wants you to trust that she will make the right choices and that even when she doesn’t that you will understand they are her mistakes to make. If you want her to confide in you then you need to initiate that trust. Plus it’s always much more fun when the big brother does not approve.” She decided a little truth couldn’t hurt.

At his raised eyebrow and the surprised look she simply smiles and says “I never said my opinion would make you feel better.” He couldn’t help but laugh at her comment. They continue in friendly conversation when Tommy and Laurel finally arrive.

“If it isn’t two of my favorite people” greets Tommy with his usual charming smile and with a more than visibly uncomfortable Laurel in tow. “Getting a head start on the apologies, Ollie”.

“Apologies?” asked Cordelia

“Cordy, don’t play coy you know very well that our”, he says pointing at all of them “last encounter was less than cordial, especially towards you.”

“Wait, Thomas. Were you serious before? I am sorry, I had no idea. I genuinely thought you were being humorous. This is quite awkward now. I really don’t see the need for apologies from any of you. It was quite evident that tensions were high and they had very little to do with me. I just happen to be there. I completely understand and believe me when I say apologies are completely unnecessary.”

“I would personally beg to differ Cordelia. I accept that I was terribly rude and unfair to you. But as you know we do have some history and I think our past encounters have all been a series of miscommunications and for that, I apologize. Now, I realize that you are helping Tommy and that my behavior was unfounded.”

“Well, sorry to interrupted you Laurel but I think I hold some responsibility in that as well so I also
apologize and reaffirm that all’s forgotten and forgiven.”

“On that note, once again Cordelia a million apologies for the outburst and then sticking you with the check?” added a sheepish Oliver. He truly had been embarrassed by that little detail but his mind had been heavily clouded by Helena at the time.

“What?” interrupted a more than shocked Tommy.

“Really, Thomas, it was nothing. I offered so that Oliver could follow after his girlfriend whom was very upset and should not be left alone. It was no trouble at all, it was my pleasure and I really hope things worked out for you Oliver.”

“Cordy, I had no idea. I will absolutely pay you back for that.”

“Definitely”, added Oliver.

“Please, you insult me, both of you. It was just a meal and like I told Oliver you can make it up to me next time.” Noticing that Tommy wasn’t ready to drop the subject she decided to put an end to it.

“I will not discuss this any further Thomas. It is done and forgotten. No more apologies, this is a Christmas party so let us join in the festivities and forgive and forget, agreed?” she said looking at all of them. Laurel was the first to smile and raise her glass as they all followed.

“Now if you'll excuse me I need to freshen up”, added Cordelia as she walked away from the group. They, as had become a habit lately, fall straight into an uncomfortable silence realizing that Cordelia was acting as a very effective buffer up until that point. Trying to break the tension, Tommy was the first to speak.

“So how long until it's not weird- the three of us?”

“It’s not weird...at all.” Added Oliver with a knowing smile causing them all to fall into a comfortable laughter. Oliver realized just then how much he had missed his two best friends. He knew he had to make an effort to reintegrate them into his life.

Having left Laurel and Tommy with mutual friends Oliver goes about mingling and looking for his family.

Unbeknownst to him, having detected the tension between Walter and Moira, Cordelia had done the same thing. Which is how she was now pressed against the hall in the east wing of the manor eavesdropping on their conversation. A conversation that earns her more knowledge than she was ready to learn. She realizes that everything Walter and her had been investigating, Moira was fully aware of and much like her she was also worried about the risk this posed to Walter’s life. Yet, Walter seemed undeterred and determined to know the truth.

“Do you take me for a man that wouldn’t avenge his best friend’s murder- I can’t- you lied too much, Moira. Why?” Yes, why Felicity asked herself as well.

“For leverage”.

“Against who?”

“People that are angry”.

“Who, Moira? What people? We can fight them”.
“I am them, you were my salvation.”

“Whatever you have done, tell me. The time for lies is over”, she wants to believe him, but time and Malcolm Merlyn have taught her better than to be fooled by false hope.

“After the party”, she lies to him with a kiss.

Felicity makes her way back unseen and finds Laurel alone with some one percenter she recognizes. She does a quick sweep to find Oliver and Tommy and soon spots Diggle which tells her they can’t be too far away. She contemplates making her way over but settles that they might have a lot to talk about given the past couple of weeks.

She isn’t mistaken, just in the other room, clearly roped off to guests Tommy and Oliver settle into catching up.

“So I take it from your reaction and lack of a tall brunette at the party that things with Helena didn’t end well.”

“We had a falling out but I have a feeling that I will be seeing her again.”

“That would be new for us, staying in touch with an ex.” They both laugh before Oliver ask something he had caught from the previous conversation as well.

“Tommy, what did Laurel mean when she said Cordelia was helping you?”

“Once again I was being stupid. I haven’t been entirely honest with you, my dad cut me off. He froze all my funds. I am living on fumes.”

“Really? Why didn’t you say anything?” asked a surprised Oliver.

“Embarrassment, shame, jealousy, probably fear and other emotions I’m not used to the feeling.”

“Tommy, you know my trust fund is your trust fund.”

“No! That is the easy answer and believe me I have loved the easy answers. I am trying to change not sure into what, yet. But I do know I don’t want to be what I was, anymore. That is where Cordy came in. What I needed was a job and like a godsend, Cordelia came right when I needed her.”

“So that is why you are working for Cordelia, but not why Laurel was so upset about it. What history do her and Cordelia have?”

“Man, that is a long story but yes, Laurel wanted me to ask you for a job at your club so she was upset when I took the job with Cordelia. I couldn’t pass up a job that I earned by my own merits. Cordelia saw something in me, I don’t even know what it was, but she saw it and came to me directly with this job.”

“That’s great, man. Well, if you do decide you need something local or more I do need a general manager, and no one knows clubs as you do. I actually thought of you but I never thought you would actually want or need the job. I know you are working with Cordelia but, I could really use someone I trust, maybe even just part-time”

“Hmmm, would I still get dental? This smile wasn’t cheap.”

“We can come to some agreement”.

“Do you really need help or are you just...”
“I need the help man. I need a friend and no one better than you.”

“Okay, I’ll talk to Cordelia about working something out. Luckily the work I do with her allows me to work at my own time and mainly make contacts and I guess being your manager, even part-time could help with that. Not to mention with Laurel.”

“Great, well just let me know”.

“Thank you, brother”.

“No, thank you, you’re saving my ass”.

“Okay, now moving on. I don’t mean to sound insensitive but seeing as you are single, again, I don’t know if you might have noticed that my new boss is incredibly attractive and single if I am not mistaken”.

“Thank you, Tommy. I had no idea you found me incredibly attractive.”

“My other boss, dumbass.”

“I will neither confirm nor deny what I have noticed.”

“You don’t have to, I know you have noticed and I know she is just your type like she was handmade just for you, tall, smart, gorgeous, brunette. So I thought maybe we could try that whole dinner thing again. Who knows could be good.”

“You can take the trust fund from the playboy but you can't take the playboy from the life”.

“Ouch, that hurts”.

“What too soon?”

“Shut up. But seriously think about it. When I first met Cordelia the first thing I thought was damn Ollie would have loved her.”

“The first?” he questioned a smirk on his lips and a knowing look in his eyes.

“Okay maybe the second... or third thing but, I still thought of you. And no more of that kind of talk, she is my boss after all”.

“Never stopped us before”.

“More like never had a boss before”.

“That too”, they both laugh as they make their way back to the party both feeling much better and in a better holiday mood that is until Laurel approaches them.

“Tommy do you mind if I talk to Oliver a minute.” He looks between them gives her a kiss on her temple and goes to get some drinks.

“Oliver, I know it might not be easy to see us together”.

“Hey Laurel, the invitation said plus one, not minus Laurel”.

“Yes, I know. It is just that I want to move forward but something’s been holding me back, I keep making excuses and then realized it was you. I have been emotionally off since your death and now
he has made me feel…” Oliver interrupts her not sure he is ready or wants to hear the rest of what she has to say.

“Above everything Laurel, be certain of one thing, I am happy for both you”, he says with great conviction and surprisingly, honesty.

“Thank you,” she says with a hug that leaves him feeling a bit off kilter, he really thought this was one relationship he would never be able to mend.

He is a bit struck by it all but as he walks away nodding towards Tommy with a smile. He can’t help and sweep the room with his eyes and catches something that has him stopping in his tracks. He sees Thea, glass in her hand being pulled towards the stairs by that boy from earlier. She seems hesitant but not making much of an effort to stop either. He takes three long strides in her direction when he catches the flash of green. Instantly Cordelia is there and gushing over Thea, she sees something click in her eyes and she lets go of the boy’s hand, who now looks affronted.

Completely disregarding his irritation Cordelia stands with her back to him and continues talking to Thea, the boy huffs and makes for the exit, when Oliver returns is eyes to Thea he catches the smirk and wink from Cordelia to Thea as she pats her on the shoulder, conspiratorially whispers something that has Thea full belly laughing and walking back to her friends.

Approaching Cordelia he can’t help but ask, “What was that?”

“Funny I was going to ask you the same thing because there’s a party right over there, were you just going to mortify your sister by embarrassing her in front of everyone?”

At his perplexed look she chuckles, “I noticed Thea and that boy and then the glass in her hand and realized whatever was happening probably not a great idea, I didn't notice you stomping your way over until I was already walking towards Thea.”

“I wasn’t stomping and I was obviously going to be discreet.”

“It’s been my experience with big brothers that when it comes to their sisters and boys nothing is ever discreet. If you noticed your sister seems to already be having a hard time, probably don’t want to surmount public humiliation to that list.” she lightly pats his forearm as she walks away leaving him to contemplate his sister.

“Hey, Thea can I talk to you, please?”

“What’s up?” She goes to take a sip but Oliver pulls the glass from her hands. “Hey!”

“What’s wrong, why are you drinking. I threw this party for you and you seem to not want to be here.”

“For me? Why would I want a party? Why would you when you don’t really care. I am supposed to be miss holiday cheer just because you came down with the holiday blues. I’ve been trying to get you to open up for months. All this party is doing is bringing back memories I’ve been trying to forget.”

“Thea! Why would you want to forget?”

“No matter how fancy the party. Things will never be the way they used to be in our family, ever again. Dad is gone, you’re not really here and mom and Walter, just...” just then Diggle appears calling after him. He sees Thea roll her eyes as she mutters, “just forget it”.
She takes off just then. As Oliver goes to follow her, Diggle calls his name again, he might not have stopped had it not been for the tone he immediately picked up on.

“Oliver.”

“What is it now?”

“The other archer moved to the next level. He has taken hostages.” He tells him as they walk into one of the studies and he turns on the TV to show him the live news report. There is a frightened crying woman on the screen reading what are obviously, instructions.

“I will kill one hostage every hour until the vigilante turns himself over to the archer.” States the woman.

“Oliver, the police are there, let them handle it.”

“Those people are there because of me. I have to end this, once and for all Dig.”

“We should call Nia?”

“I am sure she already knows. We will call her once we are ready to go.”

Cordelia had already seen the report and had quickly made her exit from the party. Standing outside talking to her driver she sees a tear-stained Thea come rushing out. She contemplates what to do for about 2 seconds before she speaks.

“Looks like you need to get away” a confused Thea turns in her direction tilting her head and not quite understanding what is happening.

She points to the car with a soft smile “ I was about to send my driver home, I am sure he would be more than happy to drop you off somewhere or simply drive you around and bring you back. I find that a quiet car ride can really clear one’s head”

A thankful smile pulls at Thea’s lips as she approaches the opened door, hesitating only for a second she giver Felicity a hug and jumps in the car. Felicity gives the driver a generous tip and instructs him to take Ms. Queen wherever she wanted and then report back to her, he nods and heads out.

Felicity had already called a taxi, as her driver left the yellow cab pulled in. She pays him more than enough to drive her to an abandoned lot about a mile and a half away and not to ask any questions. The driver gladly obliges and drops her off. She waits until the tail lights are gone and she walks a couple of feet, then pops out her phone punches in a series of numbers and letters and presses her thumbprint which gives a command causing a small hatch to open up from the seemingly innocuous ground.

She quickly makes her way in, lights turning on as she jogs down the long hallway shoes in hand. She maneuvers shedding layers of clothing as she walks into a room that is full of clothes and weapons. She emerges through a larger hatch only 15 minutes later on her motorcycle in her full Nia gear and heads straight for the foundry.

She is standing outside for less than two minutes when she hears the clear sounds of the secret side entrance opening. Her phone begins to ring, as she looks down she sees it is Oliver and she smiles at the phone as the secret door opens and he and Diggle emerge.

“Oliver, this guy is very dangerous. You heard what Nia said”.
“Diggle there wasn’t anything on the island that wasn’t twice as dangerous as this pretender and I survived there for five years.”

They both simultaneously react to her too loud too cheery voice as she begins to speak.

“But backup is always good, not to belittle your whole five years speech. By the way boys, I am touched truly, that you called.” She says with a hand over her heart as she holds up her phone. “Here I was worried you were about to have fun without me. Especially after our whole bonding moment.”

“I said no more solo missions and I meant it, Nia. But, this is my fight, ultimately. He is here because of me and wants me, and I will give him what he wants. Yet, I will need the backup to help with the hostages. I won’t have anyone get hurt because of me, not anymore. I will face the archer. Nia, you will get the hostages and Dig, you will secure the perimeter”.

“You are a stubborn, prideful one, aren’t you? Got it all figured out, huh?” At his smirk she continues “don’t be so impressed with yourself, you’re not as unique as you think.”

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“Be careful little girl. You are a bit out of your league here. This is your one opportunity to turn around and leave this be and preferably leave my city.”

“Well, the all-powerful Batman has spoken I should really be shaking in my boots and following his every command. Unfortunately, for him, I might be a genius and all, but I am not always all that smart.”

“Looks like I will be teaching more than one lesson today”, he sneered.

“I can’t wait to hear what you sound like.”

“What sound?”

“The sound of you choking on your own words.” He lets out a dark chuckle as he extends his hand towards her.

“Ladies first”.

“Aw such a gentleman”, she says as she releases three throwing knives in quick succession. He looks back at her and smirks at the fact that not a single one touched him. She stands up straight and tilts her head. He takes a step forward and his utility belt falls to his feet. He quickly looks down and then at her as he releases two batarangs, she diverts one but the other curves and manages to slice her forearm. She gives nothing away. But she can tell that he knows he got her. She pulls out her bo staff which had become her weapon of choice after she had severely injured someone with her sword while only trying to subdue them.

Batman extends his arm and calls her over with a curl of his fingers. She takes her fighting stance and leaps forward with an overhead attack landing a strong blow across his back and left side. He manages to wrap his arm around the staff as it impacts his side and uses it to pull her forward and land a knee in her right side as his elbow slams down hard on her shoulder blade.

Dropping to her knees she takes advantage of her new position and uses her body weight to take his legs out from under him as she donkey kicks up into his chest and sends him flying back, his ass hitting the concrete hard. She quickly backflips and throws four more knives pinning his cape to the ground as he is trying to get up and regain his breath. She is pretty sure she heard something crack and from his faltering breaths she bets, it was a rib or three. That was a weakness she could exploit.
She immediately attacks again taking advantage that he is pinned she manages to land one hard blow to the side of his knee before his rage takes over and he growls so loud it’s almost thunder as he wraps his arms around her and slams her to the floor using his full body to cause as much damage as possible. All the air flees from her lungs and her back arches off the hard floor in pain. She hears him tear the cape as the knives go flying across the alley. Before she knows it he is on top of her and pinning her down talking through gritted teeth.

“Enough. I don’t want to hurt you but I will, to make a point. I will make it so you never fight again, do you hear me. Go back home, little girl.”

Felicity takes advantage of his proximity and slams her forehead into his mouth sending him reeling back sputtering blood. She can feel the cut on her forehead but she doesn’t care because all she wants to see is the Bat on his back. She kicks-up and unleashes one attack after another. Her knee comes up to finish the job her forehead started. She steps on his cape to keep him in position as she lands a right hook followed by a left uppercut to his face. He goes back but takes her with him managing to grab onto her holster. He flips her and locks his arms around her neck. She can feel the blood from his mouth sputtering on the side of her face and she can hear the gurgling. A sure sign that he is having a hard time breathing while on his back. She decides to make it a bit harder by slamming her elbow repeatedly into his ribs hoping to aggravate the previous damage. That earns her a few quick jabs to her ribs and she knows she won’t be standing up straight for a couple of weeks.

He flips them so that he is on top of her smashing her face into the ground and pulls her arm back while placing his forearm on the back of her neck.

“Stop fighting” he shouts, his voice low and menacing.

“Sorry can’t hear you through all the blood in your mouth”, she grunts out as best she can in her position. She knows she only has one choice at this point and for the first time ever she is glad for this one particular injury Dragon had inflicted on her.

Maneuvering her body she dislocates her shoulder allowing her to buck her hips up enough to turn her lower body and throw him off balance. She manages to release one of her legs and wraps it around his body slamming him back onto the ground as the move lifts her up to a sitting position in an almost seesaw motion. With her new advantage, she takes her now free hand and slams it against his sternum hard and precise. His hold goes slack and she swears she sees his eyes roll to the back of his head.

Knowing she has seconds, she gets to her feet with a knife in her hand ready to straddle him and place the knife to his carotid. She is standing over him when she hears the clear sound of a bullet exiting a chamber. She manages to dodge the bullet, which was probably just a warning shot and then registers the clear sign of a police car followed by the voice of Batman calling for his friend to stop.

“Gordon” he shouts, as the man stops in his tracks. She realizes just then, the Bat wasn’t as unconscious as she thought but she can clearly see he is injured and hurting and so is she. Just then she hears Cass call her name from a nearby roof while in her peripherals she sees Batman reaching for his batarang. She takes a running start and leaps to the nearby fire escape grabbing on and barely lifting herself with one arm. She lets out an agonizing moan as she makes it to top of the roof and falls into Cass’ arms. She takes a second to right herself and then they are off and fleeing.

“You know I had him right” she grunts as they make their way to the next roof.

“That’s not the story he will tell”.
“Regardless, a girl half his size kicked his ass and that is undeniable. Bruce Wayne won’t be showing his pretty, all bruised up face, anywhere, any time soon.” They both laugh as they make their way back to her safe house.

“So, was that a girl that just kicked your ass?” asked Gordon. Batman simply glared at him as he struggled to make his way out of the alley.

“Better hurry. Backup is on its way. Don’t go down Jackson St, you might run into a gang of girl scouts”, he chuckled. All he got in response was a low irritated growl. The minute he arrives at Wayne Manor he makes his way into his room walking past Alfred and stops before entering his bathroom.

“Alfred, please cancel my meeting with the board tomorrow.”

“Sir?” asked a confused Alfred, Bruce had been adamant about this meeting for days. Bruce simply turned to look at him and upon seeing his face, immediately, Alfred understood.

“Will do sir?” he hesitated a beat before continuing “Bruce, I told you not to underestimate that young lady.” Bruce glared at him before walking into the bathroom muttering under his breath, “It won’t ever happen again”, he knew you only turn your back once on a worthy opponent and Felicity had proven herself, and Batman had a long memory.

Oliver, Digg and Nia finish prepping their plan as they stand on a rooftop across the way. Oliver reminds them that he must go in alone because if the archer detects that he did not come alone it might cause him to actually start killing the hostages. Nia is about to begin to argue and then remembers that she needs to trust him, so she simply nods her approval even though she doesn’t think it is smart or safe and neither does Diggle. Yet, they both understand that sometimes, especially when you are being called out, you need to face certain battles alone.

Lance arrives at almost the one hour mark, immediately falling into an argument with the commissioner about how they should handle the situation. Oliver and Nia are waiting for Diggle’s cue as he goes around the set up the police has outside the building. Giving them the thumbs up but warning them that the commissioner is out for blood and he doesn’t care which archer it comes from.

Oliver zip lines in crashing through the window. While Nia climbs to the roof to wait for the hostages. Oliver makes his way, quickly finding the hostages and freeing them. He gathers them all and tells them that everything will be okay to stick close to him and stay quiet. He guides them to a staircase and tells them to make their way to the roof. There they will find a woman waiting for them and she will help them. Just before he turns to leave one of the hostages stops him with a hand on his arm.

“Thank you, whoever you are thank you, for everything”, he doesn’t say anything and simply nods for her to follow the others and continues on his way. Meanwhile, Nia is trying to stay out of sight while keeping an eye out in case Oliver needs back up. Being the practiced multitasker that she is, she is also communicating with Diggle as he tells her about the best escape route which he has made sure is clear.

Oliver turns down the corridor carefully looking for the archer when he suddenly appears behind him
at the opposite end of the corridor.

“Thank you for coming. After the warehouse, I knew I’d have to do something dramatic to get your attention, I must say I am surprised you came alone” his words tinged with humor.

“What do you want with me?”

“What any archer wants. To see who’s better”, and just like that, the fight begins.

They shot at each other both missing and diving straight into combat. Oliver leaps around a corner and manages to get up in the rafters. With calculated steps, he tries to sneak up and get a better vantage point on the other archer.

He doesn’t move quickly enough and the archer spots his reflection in some broken glass. As he turns to face him he is already releasing an arrow. It hits its target, Oliver’s bow, which tumbles out of his hand. Oliver leaps using the light fixtures propelling from one to another to get across the room. The archer follows and anticipates his movements and releases an arrow straight into his leg, the pain causes him to release his grip on the fixture and he falls landing hard but not before he releases two arrows.

Nia is on the rooftop having already secured the hostages and helped those that needed it. Just then her phone vibrates and she knows only four people have this number so it must be important, she pulls it out to see a text from Cass all she gives her is a name and that is enough, *Arthur King*, she knows the name well, a little too well.

During their time together Cass had told her the stories of her training with her father in the league. Her stories were especially cruel when she spoke of her father’s friend Arthur King, whose method of training was far more ruthless than the rest. He was also the first enemy she helped Cass fight and the first time she almost died. The memories send a shiver up her spine as she whispers “The Dark Archer” and she knows Oliver is terribly out skilled.

She ties a note to a dagger and sends it flying across the commotion on the street landing with force onto the wooden table in front of Detective Lance. He looks around surprised and immediately takes the note.

The hostages are safe and making their way down the east fire escape.

She makes sure to underline it with an arrow.

She calls for Dig and tells him to prep their escape route and warns him that there will be radio silence until she and Oliver are out, at which point he is to go ahead of them and get the foundry ready because they will need it, Oliver will need it.

He doesn’t question her, simply tells her to be safe. She makes her way down the stairs practically flying down, her feet hardly making an impact with the ground. She wants to call out to him but knows her only advantage at this point is the element of surprise. Gun in hand she makes her way room by room as quickly as she can.

The Dark Archer revels in what he assumes is already his victory. He watches Oliver struggle to get to his feet never letting his guard down. He appears behind him and without hesitation, he shoots 3 arrows into his back in a tight cluster and then kicks him so he drops flat on the ground. Making sure to kick him hard and mercilessly every time, Oliver’s attempts to get up are futile.

As he moves closer, Oliver is struggling to find any form of purchase. Just as he is about to reach for his comm to turn it on the Dark Archer grabs his wrist and twist it behind his back before punching
him and then repeatedly kicking him in the ribs, taking pleasure in the unnatural cracking sound they make.

With pure unadulterated hatred, he tells him that he is going to kill him. The instant he speaks, Nia, hears him and pinpoints exactly where they are, she makes her way to the other side of the warehouse hoping she gets there in time.

The Dark Archer stomps on Oliver’s right hand and tells him. “I know about the list...” The surprise on Oliver’s face lets him know he has gotten the desired effect. Oliver knows he has made a grave mistake as the Archer continues to reveal and poison Oliver’s mind with questions he never thought to ask himself, “and the man who authored it wants you dead. They call you the hood, let’s see what you look like without it.”

Just as the archer is reaching down for the hood Oliver uses one of his small throwing arrows and punctures it through his leg and punches him hard, sending him to the ground unconscious. Oliver stumbles up to get out of the warehouse. He knows he has a limited amount of time before the archer reacts and finishes the job.

Just as Nia turns to the corridor that leads to the room they are in, she sees the Dark Archer getting up as Oliver attempts to retreat to what she assumes is a back exit, his movements are slow and measured and it doesn’t look like he is going to make it. She doesn't hesitate as she fires three shots straight for the Archer. The first one hitting her target the last two he manages to avoid by diving back into the room behind some bins. Oliver hears the shots and turns just in time to see Nia run into the room, sword extended, tackling the archer down but not before slicing open a bit of his arm. Immediately, they both get to their feet and begin to circle each other.

“Well, well seems like you went and found yourself a little friend.” he says side eyeing Oliver who is standing still and carefully watching their movements. “You might want to leave this to the experts and go home little girl”, Nia simply smirks, she loves it when people underestimate her. She hears Oliver even though she still can’t see him.

“Get out. RUN!”

“I would listen to him if I was you”.

“The bullet and cut in your arm say otherwise”.

He throws a crate at her as she dodges it he nocks an arrow and releases it, she catches it right before it hits her and instantly releases three knives embedding one into the front of his shoulder. She leaps forward landing a high kick right on the knife and embedding it deeper with little concern. Just then she hears Oliver’s groan of pain and fights the urge to turn towards him. As the Dark Archer stumbles she takes advantage to back away and look to Oliver, her breath catches at the sight of him, he looks about ready to pass out and she knows she needs to get him out of there, immediately.

She backs away and kicks Oliver’s bow along with her, with some distance between them she picks it up along with the arrow she had caught earlier. She sees the Archer’s eyes slide towards Oliver and he knocks another arrow and points it towards Oliver. She dives to stop the arrow cutting her hand on it as she only manages to grasp it from the head. She turns and releases the black arrow from Oliver’s bow at the retreating form of the Dark Archer landing it dead center on his back. He turns the corner and is gone in an instant. Everything tells her to follow him but she knows Oliver is staying conscious with the last bit of his willpower.

She quickly makes her way to Oliver’s slumped over form and she knows he is in dire need of help. She can already hear the swat team infiltrating the building. She kneels down, stains one of her
knives with the blood on the floor left behind by the Archer and then goes to get Oliver who is already leaning up against a wall and about to break the arrows on his back along the edge. She stops him and removes the arrows herself. She holds him around his waist as she pulls his arm over her shoulders. She turns on her comm and tells Dig to bring the car closer because Oliver is not going to make it, just as she says that she feels his entire weight slump against her and she knows he is out.

She painstakingly makes it outside into the alley, mustering every last bit of her strength to carry him into the area Diggle had cleared earlier. Oliver is slumped over her back, legs dragging as her hands shake with the sheer effort of holding on to his arms over her shoulders. She keeps putting one foot in front of the other when Dig’s voice comes over the comms.

“There is no way I can get the car in there. The swat team has moved in and there is too much commotion outside for me to sneak the car in.”

“Damn it. Okay, Dig standby I am going to try and get to you. Keep a lookout for anything.”

She leans against a building further down the alley to help slide Oliver to the ground, having to slide down with him until they both are sitting against the building. She makes sure he won’t slump over and then gets up, unwinds her climbing rope bracelet and ties it to Oliver under his arms and around his torso. She begins to drag him deeper into the alley where they won’t be spotted. As she drags him trying to be careful of his injuries Dig calls her name.

“Nia, Nia, we have trouble. The commissioner has ordered a full-blown search for the hood. They are surrounding a two-mile radius. There is no way I can get to you now. How is Oliver?”

“Unconscious,” she says with a grunt and that is all he needs to hear to know that they are in serious trouble. She reaches the building where she stashed her bike, only leaving one unconscious officer in her path and immediately rushes to get some supplies in order to stop some of the bleeding on Oliver’s back and her hand. She takes out a sweater and then removes his hood and puts the sweater on him. She can hear the SCPD getting closer and she knows that without Dig they are done for unless she comes up with something quick.

She moves the bike behind a dumpster and then breaks open a gate on the side and drags Oliver further into the abandoned property. She hears the thundering of footsteps and knows she has very little time. She manages to slump him over a corner and gather some cardboard and paper along with an old dirty tarp. She cleans his face and removes all the green paint making sure the bleeding is controlled, at least for now, then she hides him as best she can. If anybody found him it would just look like Oliver Queen was assaulted and left for dead, something she was already praying wouldn't come true.

She knows it is time for a hail mary. She puts on his hood and quiver and grabs his bow. She tells Dig exactly where she left him and leaves her cell phone hidden near him so that Diggle can track him with the GPS locator she sent him. Then, she sneaks back outside hood up jacket ridiculously big on her body and mounts the bike, taking off like a bat out of hell through the alley and right by a whole squadron of Police, saluting them as she drives by them. Within seconds they are chasing her down the Glades. Diggle hears the commotion and takes advantage of all the confusion to make his way towards the alley, by the time he arrives the alley is clear and Oliver is just where she left him.

The SCPD is going crazy chasing after her, the commissioner has called in all cars, the helicopter’s spotlight is right on her tail and traffic as always is congested. As she weaves in and out she hears Dig tell her that he has Oliver and is on his way to the hospital. She breathes a sigh of relief and knows it is time to end this chase.

Leading the few cars that still remain towards the docks she kicks the bike at full speed and flies it off
the docks into the water. She and the bike hit the water hard causing a huge splash. The instant she hits the icy cold winter water her body wants to go into shock. She doesn’t fight the water, instead, she lets herself sink for a bit avoiding the helicopter’s light before she swims under the docks.

She pushes off one of the beams propelling her further down about 20 feet where she has scuba gear stored. She puts it on, sheds all her layers and is about to let the green hooded jacket sink too, but decides to take it with her. She rolls it up tight and puts it in her pack as she straps the bow over her torso. It isn’t convenient but, she suspects these items are important to Oliver. The least she could do is return them.

She swims out about two miles to a buoy and then three more miles to her safe house which is conveniently near the lighthouse, whose attendant is a friend. Making her way into the shed she gets rid of the gear, strips, and changes into dry clothes. It takes a couple of minutes before her body stops shaking. Making sure to cover all her tracks she makes her way to the bike she has parked out back and heads towards the Glades.

More than six hours have passed and Diggle hasn’t heard anything from Nia. The reports are all over the news about the hood driving off into the bay, how they have recovered the motorcycle but nothing else, how they have the coast guard searching high and low. He is definitely worried yet, at the same time thankful because she just gave Oliver another instance to prove he is not the hood and another day to live.

Two hours later Oliver wakes startled and with a loud groan as he jolts or at least tries to jolt out of the bed. Immediately finding Dig at his side with a somber face that tells him something went wrong. Dig quickly reads the conclusion in his eyes and goes to reassure him

“Relax you are safe, she managed to save you.”

“Where is she? What happened?”

“Nia managed to stop the bleeding and clean you up as well, before she took off and led the entirety of the SCPD on a high-speed pursuit through the outskirts of the city and then dove into the bay, wearing your hood and bow.” At Oliver’s panicked look he continued, “I haven’t heard anything from her because she left her cell phone with you so I could find you.”

“Why aren’t I at the foundry and why aren’t you out looking for her?”

“You have a pneumothorax, three broken ribs, and a concussion. You needed a hospital. She made me promise I would bring you to the hospital. I took care of the doctor, he wrote in your file that it was a motorcycle accident and he says you will be fine. Now, some people are here to see you.”

Even though he tells him it is fine for his family to come in, he knows that much like Dig his thoughts are only in one place right now, Nia.

Moira, Thea, and Walter come into the room worried sick. Dig already having informed them that he was in a motorcycle accident and that everything would be fine.

The first to speak is Thea, “You bailed on your party” she accuses.

“Seemed like the right move. I mean like you said it just brought back bad memories.”

“Okay, but when I was saying that, that was me being a bitch and in my own head and yes I was mad at you but you didn’t deserve that.”
“Oh, the truth is none of us were at our best.” interrupts Moira. They all apologize and Walter points out that if anything at least now they are all together as a family. As everyone makes their exit except Thea she pulls out two candy canes and challenges him to a candy cane eating race, no biting. Oliver can’t help but smile and think maybe something good did come from this party. His father would approve.

Felicity manages to make it back into the Glades completely unnoticed. She doesn't want to call Oliver because she no longer has the phone she uses to contact him and now is not the time to let her security protocols down. She opts for calling Walter.

“Thank you, Felicity, it was good of you to call but Oliver is going to be fine. He’s already on the mend.”

“Good. I am glad to hear it, sir.”

“I’m stepping into an elevator so I’ll probably lose you. I’ll call you straight back.”

He hangs up and enters the elevator smiling at the man who was already in the back of the elevator. As soon as he stands in front of him the man takes out a syringe injects it into his neck and he loses consciousness almost instantly. He lets Walter lay on the floor as he guides the elevator all the way to the basement level floor. He then makes a call to Malcolm Merlyn informing him that the job is done.

Merlyn hangs up and turns to Moira and simply nods. At her gasp he goes to reassure her, a sentiment that is lost in the grand scheme, seeing as he is the one that just kidnapped her husband.

“Walter will never know that we planned his kidnapping and he will be safe, I promise. He was asking too many questions, Moira and you know it. Didn’t you do the same to your son when he first arrived, have him kidnapped and tortured?”

“Only to prove to you that he knew nothing.”

“Well, now this is to keep Walter safe. It is almost over and your family will be just fine. Just six more months.”

“And you won’t feel a thing by killing thousands of innocents, will you?”

“I will feel a sense of accomplishment.” She looks at him in disgust as she gets back in her car and leaves. The minute she drives away Merlyn limps back to his car and heads home as well, feeling triumphant.

Felicity knows that she needs to let Oliver and Dig know that she is okay. She preps everything she needs and heads out to the hospital.

Diggle is standing by the doorway shaking his head at Oliver as he is walking with a cane, after insisting and almost threatening the doctor when he refused to let him get out of bed.

“You know Dig, when I confront somebody on the list I tell them that they have failed the city, but tonight it was me who failed.”

“Oliver, five hostages are home with their families enjoying the holidays because of you. This guy the other archer he’ll get his and you’ll make sure of it.”

“We might have a bigger problem. The other archer told me that somebody compiled the list. I
always assumed it was my father. But what if it wasn’t?”

“What do you mean?”

“I think there is someone else out there someone who’s more of a danger than the archer and I am going to take him down.”

“We will take him down” at that Oliver nods.

“Nia might have the answers we seek and she might know more about this, maybe it is time we start a full disclosure policy when it comes to Robert Queen.”

“But first we have to find her and make sure that she is okay.” Oliver turns from the window to face Dig, the concern evident in both men’s eyes.

“We have no way of contacting her and there is no trace of her in the river. She saved me Dig and she might have the answers I seek and might be the only one willing to share.”

“I don’t think we need to worry. She is quite resilient and I have a growing suspicion that she is not that easy to kill.”

“How can you be so sure?” A smile spreads over Dig’s face as he nods towards the window. Oliver narrows his eyes at Diggle’s insistence and change in mood and turns to look out the window. He tries to find what it is he wants him to focus on when he spots it on the building across the way. He sees her standing there all in black as the full moon allows him to see the wisps of red hair as they flap freely. He can’t help it as a slight smile spreads across his face and he nods acknowledging her and saying so much in a simple gesture- thank you for saving my life, thank you for being there, thank you, simply thank you.

She sees them both turn quickly towards the door and with what she can imagine are confused faces they assess the young man standing at the door holding an oversized package. Diggle takes it and tips the boy as he takes the package and turns to Oliver. They both stand there for a beat before Oliver reaches for it and opens it only to find his hood and bow inside. He looks up at Diggle who peeks inside and grins wide as he shakes his head. She smiles and with one last glance, she makes her way home. As Oliver turns all he manages to see is a dark shadow as it disappears into the night, he runs his hand along the bow and feels a little of the tension begin to ebb away.

Finally getting home, letting the feeling of safety wash over her, Felicity stands in front of her mirror removing all her layers, beyond exhausted, in pain and anxious she can’t help but still dwell on how close of a call today had been. She knew being alone for so many years had been hard but now she was realizing that having partners was far more dangerous and would require sacrifices she never thought she would have to make. Allies she had, partners never.

Cass at some point had been the closest thing to a partner she ever had, but she was so highly trained that they knew better than to sacrifice a mission for each other. Now, she had two partners and damn her if she didn’t already care deeply for them, well above her own well-being. She knows letting Arthur King go would come back to bite her in the ass, along with Cass who was probably already making her way to Starling hoping Felicity had captured him, knowing she was fully capable, and would be willing to hand him over to her. Worst of all was that if he recognized her he made no show of it but she knew that was nothing to rely on.

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“Move, move” shouted Cass as they ran down one flight after another of stairs.
Felicity was trying as hard as she could to keep up and ignore the flares of pain coming from her thigh. They had already descended ten flights and had seven more to go before they could make a clean break.

“Cassy you can run but you can’t hide. Not from your father’s shame or your mother’s disappointment and the same will be for my arrows”, King shouted from behind her as he gained ground.

When they went to attack him, after a month of tracking him and when intel finally came in telling them he was in Chicago, they thought they had the upper hand. Almost immediately they knew they had made a grave mistake and he was more than ready for them, they had never prepared for him. Their only option was to retreat, Felicity was still not skilled enough to face off against Arthur King and Cass had let her emotions get the best of her. They were both young and foolish and they were paying for it now.

Cass noticed that Felicity was slowing down as she turned to look at her she could see that she was losing blood fast.

“Stay with me, you hear. We are almost out of here just a few more steps.”

“Go ahead, I am right behind you”, they kept running making it to the emergency exit and flying right out as two arrows pierced the door. The cold Chicago air seemed to give Felicity new energy as she picked up her pace. Yet, she was still not keeping up. Just as Cass turned the corner she heard Felicity’s piercing scream, the sight that greeted her drained all the color out of her face. An arrow had pierced straight through her back and out her chest right by her heart. The loud crack of her knees hitting the concrete was a sound they would never forget.

Felicity tried to get up only managing to fall back on her knees.

“Run Cass, just run.” She called back to her already coughing blood. Cass was torn, she knew that carrying Felicity and managing to get away was inconceivable but, she couldn't bring herself to leave her. She could see King standing on the other end of the alley bow ready and aimed at her. She knew he was about to release the arrow and she was ready, so when he lowered his bow the shock and mistrust that ran through her were stronger than any relief she could have felt.

“I promised your father that I wouldn’t kill you”, he said as he turned around, then he looked over his shoulder “That is a pleasure he’d like to have for himself and I won’t take it from him.”

He walks away and laughs as he adds “good luck saving your little friend”, and just like that he was gone. By the time Cass got Felicity to the hospital she was soaked in blood and she was sure she was no longer breathing. She coded twice before they managed to stabilize her. Recovery had been a bitch, explaining her injury had been hilarious.

Felicity couldn’t help but rub at her scar right over her heart. The arrow had missed by mere centimeters and she always wondered if King had done it to spare her or to make her death as painful as possible. She could still feel the ache as if the arrow was still there. She shivered as she dispelled any more memory of that night. She might not be looking forward to explaining to Cass just how he got away but at least she knew that with Cass in Starling they would be sure to find him and stop him.

As The Dark Archer stands above the Merlyn building looking out into the city he can’t help but
reminisce. He has been many men in his life, but as all, he has come out on top and he doesn’t have any plans of changing that anytime soon. His only immediate plans were concerning a certain little girl.

“She might be older and far more skilled but I recognize that fighting style anywhere. If Cassy’s little protégé wants to play in the big leagues she is in for a rude awakening.” He knew this complicated his plans especially because he was certain Cassy would be making an appearance very soon. That only meant he had to take her out, take them all out and speed up his timeline. They might know the archer and the assassin Arthur King, but none of them knew Malcolm Merlyn CEO and philanthropist and that was what he was counting on.
The Grave Soul Keeps its own Secrets

Chapter Summary

Cass comes to Starling and secrets from the past come tumbling out. People are seen under new light and one of Felicity’s identifies gets too close for comfort.

Chapter Notes

Had to REPOST, I realized the chapter was incomplete and actually an older unfinished version. I tried to update the chapter without deleting it but it kept glitching and ot updating so I had to delete the post. Hope you enjoy!

Hi guys so I am back after a bit of a break I should be able to post as scheduled for the next 2 weeks, but then I start grad school and I might have to change to every two weeks. Not sure yet but I will keep you updated. Thank you all and setting up the Gala may take a bit but I hope you bare with me. Enjoy!

Cass hates flying unless it’s her behind the pilot’s gear, she hates flying. She hates it more when it is long and tedious and she is itching to start a fight. When she is on the hunt, flying is almost unbearable.

It had been 11 days since she received Felicity's message about King. She had been in the middle of nowhere somewhere in Asia following a lead on a contact that she hoped could give her some insight into Malcolm Merlyn. She had instantly dropped everything and cursed her timing, she had been on this wilderness trek for five days. Her air support wasn't expecting her for another six days. She was royally fucked. She began the trek back at a punishing pace determined to take this once in a lifetime opportunity for revenge on a man everyone had told her was dead.

When the plane’s wheels hit the tarmac she couldn't help but think it was about damn time. She contemplates bypassing all the nonsense of protocol but knows the last thing she needs is to get arrested and call attention to herself, especially before she officially steps foot into Starling City.

When she picks up her duty-free luggage she is not surprised at all to see Felicity waiting for her, arms crossed and all worried eyes. She immediately knows that something went wrong and frankly she doesn't care to hear the details or how he got the upper hand on her. She wants to know what intel she has and follow-up on all her leads.

"What do you mean you have nothing? How is that possible Felicity?"

"Look Cass, no leads is also important", at Cass' confused look she continues, "the fact that he disappeared so easily in a city where I have my thumb on the pulse of just about everything, tells me one very important fact. He's been here a while, he has an established identity here. That is why I can't trace him, or find anything on whom hired him. No one made him do this, it was all him and you know what that means?"
"It's personal! Which means he has set up roots. Good, let's find them and rip them from under him."
She said through gritted teeth. Felicity couldn’t help but feel a little fear creep up her spine at the
thought of what Cass might do once they found King.

Once they are in her home base they start to plan on just how they are going to rouse him. Not
wanting to underestimate him, again, they plan with the assertion that he did recognize Felicity and
that he is anticipating she will call Cass. They quickly realize they will need more boots on the
ground.

"I should call Jason."

"No! No, Jason. He is known here and that could bring us more trouble. The Wayne name carries a
lot of baggage."

"Okay, well is your hooded friend willing to help us, maybe if you ask nicely..."

"He can't."

"He can't or he won't?" glared Cass. Felicity knew Cass had expressed not only trepidation but flat
out mistrust of the Hood. It didn’t bother her before but now it seemed to fire something up in her
that she really didn’t have time to analyze, not right now.

"He can't! He's on the mend. King really did a number on him, nearly killed him when he was trying
to save the city.” She couldn’t help but point out.

"He can't physically help us but, he has contacts, and friends in high places, he might be of help to
us"

"Good! But we still need more manpower. Felicity, we have to use all our resources. We don’t have
time for..."

"Fine! Call Jason, but you make it clear this is you asking, and not me."

"Sure."

"Cass! I am serious."

"I know, but if he hesitates, I can't afford to waste time."

"Just try Cass. Anything, before that!"

Five hours later they have a plan and Jason Todd is in Starling City, he sends them his hotel name
and room number and they let him know that they start setting the plan into effect, tomorrow. Felicity
excuses herself and calls Dig knowing very well that asking Oliver for help could be asking of him
more than he could give right now. He was after all only nine days out of the hospital. She also knew
that she couldn’t just bring Cass to the foundry, she needed to talk to them and explain what was
happening, in person.

It had taken some convincing but Cass finally agreed that if she wanted the Hood's help she would
have to be willing to let her tell them why they needed him and she would have to work on his terms,
no excuses.

“No, Nia. NO! You both barely escaped with your lives the last time you faced this archer and you
want to go looking for him, again, alone?” said Dig with more gravity and worry in his voice than
she was expecting.
“I won’t be alone. That’s why I am here.”

“I am not going to like this, am I?”, spat out Oliver whom until now had been eerily quiet yet, visibly in pain as he couldn’t even sit straight and his cane lay beside him.

She smiled with that hint of shyness and mischievousness that he still didn’t know how she managed to pull off. “Probably not, but let me explain everything before you get all Grrr”, he let out a breathy chuckle that she had only really seen once before but somehow it made telling him the “bad news” a bit easier.

Oliver was ready for this, he wasn’t happy about it but they had agreed to meet at a neutral site and he would wear his full Hood gear. She also had assured him that unlike her, her partners would reveal themselves as their plan was dependent on using their real identities so there was no use in hiding them from him. Of course what he didn’t know was that although Jason had no idea that Oliver was the vigilante, Cass was well aware of more than he would be comfortable with.

As Cass and Jason shook hands with the Hood in all his green leather glory and distorted voice, he was reassured and terrified at the fact that he had been right, he definitely didn’t like this.

He knew exactly whom Cassandra Cain was, she was trouble.

Jason Todd, on the other hand, had thrown him for a loop. Even more so when he realized he knew all about what Nia was doing and probably far more about his own father than even he knew, and something about that really bothered him, it made him downright irate.

Much as was customary in their relationship they got off on the wrong foot as both he and Cass were on the defensive almost within seconds of meeting each other.

“This ruthless revenge you are determined to inflict on the dark archer…”

“King, his name is King”, spat Cass as if the name turned bitter on her tongue and the memories clouded her senses.

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The loud crack of the whip was deafening, the echo invaded the stone hallways yet no one even blinked at the sound. The cracks had become commonplace in this dark palace prison, the blood coloring the floors almost seemed deliberate. These walls carried the memories of all the past warriors and their sacrifices.

Where their training had been honorable a willing sacrifice, she knew, she felt it in her bones as she wiped the blood from her mouth that this was not honorable this was the face of cruelty, sadism in its truest form.

She knew she had to stand up soon or the whip would tear through her skin once again.

“Get up Cassandra, your weakness disgusts me. Stop wasting my time and stand up.”

Drawing his arm back the whip cracked mid-air only a second before it tore through her already stripped bareback.

The whimper escaped through her lips before she could stop and she knew the whip would cut deep again, she tasted the blood in her mouth before she felt the sting as the tip of the whip cut her lip and chin.
She missed her parents, she missed her home and freedom but most of all she missed the absence of pain. She knew she was broken, she knew this is what he wanted and it was that knowledge that motivates her to keep going. She would become a warrior and never again suffer at the hands of men like Arthur King.

“You are not worthy of being here, your father’s name may have earned you a place here but I will break you and you will never be one of us. Now go clean yourself up, you’re getting blood on the floor”

The minute she walked into the shower the tears flowed freely, she allowed herself these moments because soon enough she would not have time for these sentiments, she had lives to destroy.

“This revenge is dangerous and I have a feeling you are willing to take anyone down that stands in your way, collateral damage be damned.”

“And your little crusade doesn’t? Spare me the lecture Hood, you and I, are cut from the same steel I can see it in you, it’s in your bones. The darkness resides in you and guides you, and you let it, freely, wield as it may. So don’t get on your high horse now and try…”

“This Is. Still. My. City! You would do right to remember that Ms. Cain!”

“Alright, everyone just calm down. We are not going out blind and taking down one and all. We have a plan and we have to be precise. King, as you have found out the hard way, Hood, is a dangerous and downright lethal man. So, take my word when I say this isn’t blind rage bound on revenge. You said you trusted me, so trust me on this.”

He couldn’t argue with that. He did trust her, he was starting to learn that he trusted her more than he did himself sometimes. She had saved him and now he realized she had sacrificed capturing a long time enemy in order to do so. He trusted her, but he feared that Cassandra and Jason might corrupt and override that innate goodness in her, that willingness to do things the right way even when the cost was so high.

Whether he liked it or not the plan was now in motion, Cassandra had made her presence known in Starling, just a week and a half later, as arm candy on Jason Todd’s very important playboy arm at a nine|muses event, a fundraiser.

Tommy had received a call from Cordelia 12 days earlier, apparently, her event planner had fallen through and she needed a fundraiser planned and delivered in two weeks and she was counting on her favorite guy to get it done. He had obviously complied, still feeling like he had a lot to prove and glad that this time around he was planning a party with a cause. He had quickly enlisted the biggest names in Starling to join in the cause. The fundraiser to help rebuild the family shelters in the Glades had become the place to be at and the party that no one could miss, especially if the rumors that you might catch the future Wayne heir himself there, were true.

Felicity had initially hesitated to go this route knowing very well that being Felicity and Nia at once was difficult enough, but was she really going to bring Cordelia into the mix. She knew she could do it but she also knew that would leave way too many breadcrumbs for Oliver to follow and she wasn’t quite ready to reveal all her secrets. Cass had immediately disagreed, Jason had been far more reluctant knowing very well that with the image Cordelia had created for herself it would be odd if she wasn’t at her own fundraiser. Plus, as they both added that her being at the Gala gave them an extra pair of eyes on the ground. After much debate they agreed with Felicity that she would be
better utilized in the shadows, well she had basically told them and left no room for argument.

An overseas event was the perfect excuse for her to not be there plus, it allowed her to utilize Tommy fully as he had mentioned just a few weeks ago, “Cordelia I really feel like you are paying me to just be here and not really do much”. Well did she ever have a task for him.

Tommy had quickly regretted ever calling Cordelia to complain about his lack of work as he was now swamped with this new fundraiser and only had 5 more days left to make it happen. Luckily, Jason had been more than willing to help while he was in Starling and he couldn’t be more grateful than if Bruce Wayne himself showed up. Now, he just needed to get a little more buzz going and he knew the perfect way to do that, a night out on the town. Yet, not being a bachelor really limited what he could do. So, when he hinted at maybe bringing Laurel he was surprised that Jason jumped right on board saying he also had company for this trip and that worked perfectly for him. When they turned to look at Oliver he sighed heavily and shrugged.

“You got two days to get a date buddy, not that, that has ever been a problem for you. Although in your current state the sympathy vote will make up for the fucked up face” laughed Jason. At Oliver’s glare, Tommy chuckled and excused himself as his phone buzzed.

“What do you mean we didn’t get the liquor license? Are you kidding me, I can’t have a gala without… I don’t care who you have to talk to, wake up, or bribe, make it happen by tomorrow.” Tommy hung up with a huff and tension filling his body. As he walked back they knew exactly what had happened and Jason saw an opportunity that he couldn’t pass up.

“You know who could get you that license in no time, right?”

“Who?”

“Cordy!”

“Oh no, I am not calling her, she trusted me with this. Plus, she is in Japan, I am not bothering her over this.”

“All I am saying is that that woman has more tricks up her sleeve than Houdini and she can make anything happen. Plus, she would much rather have you call her now just for the heads up than to have you call her last minute when things are still unresolved. If I know one thing it is that that woman, is a chess player, always a couple of moves ahead.”

Oliver looked at the two confused, his curiosity getting the best of him “Jason, I didn’t know you knew Cordelia?”

“Come on man, a beautiful woman like that, of course, I know her. Maybe not as intimately as I’d like but, there is always time”, he laughed and Tommy just shook his head as a smirk appeared on his face.

“Hey, watch out Jason, Oliver might have his eye on her already”, that quickly earned him a glare from Oliver.

“Oh, really? Well, brunettes were always your type. Sorry to disappoint, but I highly doubt that will happen. That woman is an unbreakable force, the ultimate dead end.” Something about the conviction with which Jason said that stirred the dormant playboy within Oliver and relying on the fact he had a part too, still, play to the outside world he went with it.

“Well, I haven’t tried so let’s not shut that door just yet. We all know my track record is much better than yours Jason.”
“One time Queen, one time and I am still standing firm on the fact that you cheated.” They all laughed just as Tommy’s phone buzzed again, he excused himself and this time when he returned from his call they knew it really wasn’t any good news.

“Apparently, my assistant just got himself arrested.”

“What?” They both said in unison.

“Yeah he took my bribe solution a little too literal and tried to bribe the city hall clerk who finalizes the liquor licenses and he is now at the police station.”

With a resounding laugh Jason took a sip from his drink as he said in all seriousness “Call Cordy, he will be out by morning and you will have a license plus an apology from the mayor himself. Call Cordy!”

Oliver felt like Jason’s faith in Miss Todd was a bit exaggerated but Tommy seemed at the edge of his rope and with a slump in his shoulders he got up as he swiped over Cordelia’s name. Jason smirked when he heard her answer the phone, knowing very well that things had just gotten truly interesting and that he would probably want to sleep with one eye open for the remainder of his stay.

True to his prediction by the next morning, 10:27 am to be precise he was opening his door to a **grinning Cordelia** who had an envelope with papers in one hand and his assistant standing behind her.

“You know I was told this would come with an apology directly from…” at that her phone rang and without missing a beat she picked it up and after a couple of affirmations and a simple statement “he’s standing right in front of me as we speak, give me a second” she handed him the phone walking towards the living room to sit as she casually said over her shoulder, “It’s the mayor”

A two-minute conversation and an RSVP to his event and he was finally a full believer, damn she was good!

She had no idea how she had gotten to this point how in the hell did she end up **standing in front of this full-length mirror getting ready to have dinner** with Tommy, Laurel, Jason, Cass, and Oliver. She knew exactly what this was and she hated every last bit of it. She knew very well that she would be getting Ollie tonight at dinner, he himself had told her, well not her, he told Nia that he had to give into this dinner, even though it was the last thing he wanted to do. Adding, that she really needed to get Jason under control. He then proceeded to reassure her that he would put on his best playboy act and get out of the evening as early as possible so that they could continue their final preparations.

She wanted to laugh but she was too angry, anger that she promptly took out on Jason when she punched him in the gut smirking when he dropped to his knees all the air leaving his lungs in a rush. Cass simply smacked him over his head as she eloquently called him a “dumbass”.

Felicity really thought she would be far more upset at him throwing a wrench into their plans but Cass had simply told her that “It really is the perfect way for you to be there at the gala without having to sneak around and this dinner gives us a reason to talk while at the gala. Having been formally introduced and all.” Immediately followed by an empty threat about not breathing a word to Jason about her supporting his little antics, although Felicity noted that she had agreed with him initially.

So here she was slipping yet, again, into another Cordelia-esque dress and getting ready for not only Jason’s insufferable, no longer cute, flirting but she was about to meet Ollie Queen, playboy...
extraordinaire. She had a feeling that any headway she had made in winning Laurel over she would lose tonight. Not to mention that staying true to Cordelia she was about to put some boys in their place. The latter thought alone took her out the door with a smile.

She made sure to check with Cass before she arrived, she wanted to give them time to settle for Cass to scope out the place and for her to make sure that no one had taken notice to Cass’ arrival in Starling. Using the excuse of being at a meeting just before and Cass’ confirmation that they were all there and ready to go she made her way into the, surprisingly, low key restaurant 30 min after everyone else.

They were all drinking and Tommy had been kind enough to place her order anticipating her late arrival. Jason saw her first and without saying a word got up and made a beeline for her. Wrapping an arm too low on her back for comfort and making a show of kissing her on the cheek as he helped her out of her coat she couldn’t help but roll her eyes and make sure her heel dug into his shoe. As they walked towards the awaiting table she only said one word to him “Simmer”.

Introductions were quick and painless and she immediately knew what was coming when she saw Oliver sitting too low in his chair arm haphazardly draped behind her chair and smirk firmly planted on his face. Laurel had noticed it as well if her confused look was anything to go by.

She knew how she had to play it always the polite brit she sat straight not leaning in order to avoid contact with his hand and decided to shift the attention to someone she knew was on her side, Cass.

“Am afraid that with my tardiness I missed introductions. Did you already explain how it is you ended up here with Jason, Cassandra? Please blink twice if you are here against your will.” Well, polite didn’t mean humorless or dull it simply meant she wouldn’t punch someone in the face, not that she made a point of hitting anyone, not always at least.

“You know Cordelia, I keep asking myself the same question. How did I end up here? And in a table of three billionaires how did I end up with Jason?” At that, they all laughed and some of the tension quickly eased, just as she had hoped. The conversation after that flowed easily and to her surprise, Oliver had remained quite quiet through it all. As the waiter brought their meals the edge of his foot slightly catching on Oliver’s chair, she realized why. She could see the pain etched in his eyes when his chair jerked, she internally sighed knowing very well that he was still refusing to take his medication. She decided she would ease some of his pain on his right side seeing as he seemed to be favoring his left side at the moment.

She excused herself to wash her hands, as she stood she made as if she stumbled causing Oliver to react, she quickly stretched out her hands as if seeking purchase when in reality she applied calculated pressure on certain points in his body easing his pain. She knew it worked when he let out an audible grunt and then a relieved sigh as he sat straight for the first time tonight. The surprise in his eyes was instantaneous and quickly covered up with false amusement as she made a show of apologizing for hurting him, blushing and excusing herself, Cass following suit stating “A lady always needs company”.

As they walked away, Cass hissed at her having noticed her ploy.

“So what was that?”

“He was in pain, I was just helping.”

“You know if he notices?”

“He won't, for as perceptive as he is he really has a tendency to underestimate people. He is way too
easily surprised, I guess some things you don’t always overcome”.

“Meaning?”

“Being entitled and thinking it’s all about you. Oliver still thinks he’s the only enigma”.

“Just be careful, now update me, what do we have so far?”

“Well someone knows you are in town. I found traces of a hack for your flight manifest and an attempted hack into the cell we purchased for you”.

“So he knows I am here, which means he is going to be looking to seek you out as well. We have to be careful if he pieces together who you really are…”

“He won’t, we will never be seen outside of me being ‘Nia’ or now Cordelia”.

“Why the air quotes”.

“Cause I am still getting used to the name”.

“You used to have a name...”

“And I don’t anymore” she pointedly interrupts. The mistakes of the past belonged in the shadows of the past.

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Gotham nightly news was on the scene as the events on the midtown bridge developed, we are live with an update from detective Renee Montoya.

Hello Detective what can you tell us about the victims of last week's incident?

We don’t know much about the victims at this moment we are still investigating. We have been releasing names as the investigation has progressed and as we know more we will inform the public. We understand that people are worried about their loved ones but rest assured we have our best out there in search and rescue. For now, we just ask that everyone stay away from the midtown bridge and allow our first responders to do their jobs.

Detective what about the involvement of Batman’s known associates in the tragic incident and more importantly the lack of Gotham’s own cape crusader? Should the public be worried or weary of these obviously less experienced associates?

At this time all we can confirm is that there were some unidentified players involved but we do not have any further details. I would like to remind the citizens of Gotham that vigilantism is still a crime and justice will be served.

Detective, are you stating that the Gotham PD is unaware of the eyewitnesses who spotted the city’s own, Robin, Batgirl, and a recent new player, who goes by the name Axiom Cypher, might the growing number of vigilantes be more trouble for Gotham PD than help? Will Gotham PD be seeking them out for questioning? Hold on a second detective we have just received a report from an anonymous witness in reference to Axiom Cypher, if the witness is to be believed, then Axion may be a greater liability than we believed. The witness claims that she killed 2 of Gotham’s finest while the passengers they were trying to save sunk along with their car to the bottom of the river.
What are your thoughts on these new developments Detective Montoya?

As I already said, at this point this is still an active investigation and any witnesses should report to the Gotham PD and officially lend their testimony and turn over any evidence they may have. When we feel confident in making definitive statements we will let the public know. For now, we simply ask that the fine citizens of Gotham let us do our job.

Thank you, detective. There you have it, folks, the events that have rocked the city were an absolute tragedy that even a city like Gotham will not forget, yet, as the detective confirmed we should wait and hold judgment. As she assured us we will know more when they do. We just hope Commissioner Gordon lights up that bat signal soon because as time has shown us when the citizens want justice there is only one man who provides it. That is all from Midtown Bridge back to you at the station.

The click of the TV startled her back to the present. It had been one week since the events of that night and the guilt still kept her up at night and the bounty on her head kept her in hiding with her demons.

“You need to stop torturing yourself with those reports Lizzie. Those coops were corrupt and Cass and I are working on proving that and clearing your name”.

“Those people still died, corrupt or not I…” a sob escaped her throat as she bit down the rest of the tears “I could have saved them, saved them all”

“At the cost of your own life and that’s not counting how many more lives those bastards would have taken had they lived. You did what you could in that moment and in my book it was the right thing because it kept you alive and there is no way I can’t agree with any decision that keeps you here, with me”

“Jason, please don’t, I just…”

“You need a friend and right now that’s me.”

They stood in a silence that never grew uncomfortable if anything every second Felicity felt the weight of Jason’s eyes trying to will her guilt away, she could have sworn it was working. She had never killed before, it had never been an option.

As much as she wanted to blame this wretched city that seemed to bring the shadows forward not to share in the light but to smoother it, she knew better. She knew in her lifestyle it was an inevitable moment but that didn’t detract from how monumental and life-altering of a moment it would be. She had taken a life, in self-defense, but a life nonetheless.

Every time she closed her eyes she heard the body drop to the ground, saw those lifeless eyes and her heart constricted while her stomach revolted against the memories.

“...zzie...Lizzie, hey look at me”, her eyes focused and connected with the quiet desperate ones of Jason, she could tell by his relief that he had been calling her name to no avail. As he cradled her face in both of his hands she couldn’t help but lean in with an urgent need for comfort. She didn’t know who moved first but she distinctly remembered the burning sensation of desperate lips crashing and mixing with the saltiness of tears.

Three days later her name was cleared but by then it hadn’t mattered because it wasn’t her name anymore, Axiom had died that night along with those people and a piece of the playful innocence
Felicity didn’t even know she had, let alone could loose and mourn so deeply.

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“Okay…” silence passed for a beat before Felicity was compelled to fill it.

“Let’s just finish this dinner I’ll excuse myself with an early meeting and we will get back to the plan.”

“Well judging by the way Queen is acting I don’t think he has any intentions of letting you leave early”

“Believe me he is the number one reason I need to be out of here before he makes his exit” with that she exited the ladies room knowing they had already taken too long.

As they walked back the men stood to allow them to sit, Jason making a big show of how long they were gone, “Ladies I was beginning to worry you had run off with each other.”

Cordelia let out a soft chuckle while letting a mischievous spark enter her eyes as she brought her glass to her lips and said “Jason, if I wanted to steal your date I wouldn’t sneak away, I’d take her right in front of you. A woman always deserves to be wooed and not stolen.” she took a sip as she smiled “Plus, it would hardly be competition, who better to know what a woman wants than another woman.” She clearly heard Oliver and Tommy cough/choke but she didn’t dare move her eyes from where they were piercing into Jason, only deliberately looking away when she made direct eye contact with Cass and tipped her glass, licked her lips and took a sip as Cass smirked and tipped her head.

Laurel couldn’t help but let out an amused chuckle as she raised her glass to Cordelia whom simply winked. Oliver and Tommy looked around the table not knowing exactly when things had shifted so drastically. Tommy’s mouth slowly grew into a grin when he saw the discomfort in Jason. Oliver, on the other hand, couldn’t stop running his eyes searching for who knows what within Cordelia. He realized he had unbelievably miscalculated her and now wasn’t so keen on playing the playboy but more interested in actually getting to know her.

Jason knew he had that coming but he couldn’t help the heat that crept up his spine at seeing the old Felicity, the young and reckless one that at some point in their lives he almost considered kindred. Even though behind the spark he could still see the warning and seriousness that now surrounded her after too many losses and too much pain he couldn’t help himself if just to see more of that spark.

“Cordy if you were looking to experiment, all you had to do was ask and all I ask is to be invited”, he said reaching out with the intention to run his fingers through one of her brown locks. Before he could reach his destined goal her hand flashed out and wrapped around his wrist digging into a very precise pressure point that had him flinching before he schooled his face with a smirk. She used her free hand and swayed her index finger in a motion of ‘no’ while she ‘tisked’ to emphasize her objection, then she simply said “an unwelcome touch can earn you a warranted one… Mr.Todd”

“Point taken… Ms. Todd” she slowly opened her hand from around his wrist as Cass let out a boisterous laugh, very unlike her. The tension seemed to dissipate rather quickly as they all laughed and mocked Jason who took it in good spirits.

The conversation flowed easily and she quickly noticed that Oliver’s interest in knowing more about Cordelia was actually genuine and she knew she needed to make her exit before he started to look too closely. She made a point to look at her watch every couple of minutes. When Tommy ordered another bottle she knew that was her cue. When Oliver made no show of excusing himself even after
she discreetly texted him under the table as Nia, she knew she had played with fire long enough tonight and she had no desire to be burned.
The Evil We Create During the Wars to Save Us, Can End Us When the War is Over

Chapter Summary

Team Arrow, Cass, and Jason continue to work together to capture the Dark Archer as their plan gets more complicated. Oliver’s newfound curiosity towards Cordelia has Felicity scrambling and having to prove just how good she is. Meanwhile, memories of a failed mission haunt Felicity but soon both her and Oliver may be getting some answers.

Chapter Notes

If you have not read the NEW previous chapter (16) please do so as I reposted the correct version as the previous was incomplete. Hope you enjoy the progression of this story as work towards the Gala. Thanks!

He rushed down the foundry steps throwing his bow across the med table causing an irritated Dig to make his contempt known. A few steps behind him came Nia calm as ever, yet, limping down the steps letting out a low groan at coming off the last step a little too enthusiastically. She covered it with a humorous long whistle as she admired the mess Oliver had made in the few seconds he had been there ahead of her.

“I don’t want that reckless woman down here, ever” he turned sharp eyes at Dig, “You need to check her, she got hit pretty bad.”

Dig made to move and she gave him a subtle but definitive shake of her head, stopping him in his tracks.

“She wasn’t the problem, Oliver.”

“STOP! Do not defend her. This is over, everything, DONE. She needs to leave my city now…”

“No.” She said calmly crossing her arms and nodding to Dig who had outstretched an arm at her wince and pain induced furrow, she signaled that everything was handled, which was enough for him to sit back down waiting to see things unfold. He figured he would insist to check her wounds after when they both calmed down a bit.

“Excuse me?” Oliver’s raised voice had him standing again not knowing where this was going.

“It is not over, she will not leave and that is final. When you have gotten your head out of your ass we will continue this discussion.” She started to walk up the stairs being completely done with him and this day all together. She needed ice packs and possibly some stitches if the stickiness she felt on her left hip was any indication.

“Do not walk away from me Nia!” he shouted through gritted teeth as the pain in his side came to
“Figure out whatever has you rattled and tamp it down, the plan continues, Queen. Get on board, quick.” She turned her eyes to Dig as she made to leave the foundry, “Dig, have him call me but, only when he has calmed down, please.” She added with a wink to a simultaneously worried and amused Diggle.

2 Days Earlier

Cordelia had managed to make it to her hotel by 11:40 pm after the overly awkward unwanted dinner with everyone. She had texted Oliver as soon as she had left the restaurant letting him know they would meet in 30 minutes. To her surprise, he texted back almost immediately, a brief and worrisome message.

Oliver: 1 am Foundry

It took her a minute to register what he had said. She wanted to ask questions, she didn’t know what the hell was going on. Yet, she knew better so she settled with simply texting “Okay” and decided to relax a bit and figure out how to bring up his postponement once they met.

She had just exited the bathroom in her robe after setting everything up to start removing her layers of disguise in a calm manner, something she had not been allowed recently when going from one persona to another. She really needed to visit Lucius in Gotham, soon. He had promised some new upgrades to the disguise veil she used that involved nanobytes that would make this process so much easier and would help disguise more than just her face. He had momentarily explained that there were some issues with the software but the technology was done. After this whole Arthur King fiasco, she would have to make time to visit Lucius and get her hands on his latest tech.

That thought made her chuckle, the question of what her life had become haunted her more in recent months than ever before. Speedy dress changes had never been a necessity, then again dealing with a multi-persona billionaire hadn’t been either.

A knock at her door brought her out of her thoughts. An uneasiness settled into her as she double checked in the mirror that her wig, now in a messy bun was still holding up, she picked up the veil she had already removed and placed it back making sure it looked just right, it glitched once and she panicked that now would be the moment it would decide to stop working. Seconds later the glitch was gone and she was Cordelia, again. She tightened her robe making sure her gun underneath was secure. She took one quick look through the peephole and cursed under her breath.

Of all the people she could have expected, he, didn’t even make the list. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes before allowing an easy smile to settle on her lips while opening the door halfway, lazily leaning against it one arm over her head. He was met by the trademark Ollie the playboy smile she was beginning to hate, she could see the tension that the rest of his body housed. He was anything but comfortable.

“Mr. Queen, this is quite a surprise”, she said in that polite demeanor that was all Cordelia.

“Cordy, please it’s Oliver, Mr. Queen was my father”, he smirked and she could see the annoyance with himself in his eyes.

Completely ignoring his request she continued, “I must say this is unexpected, did I forget something or did something happen?”
“Nothing like that. You know Cordy, I was never known for my tact, charm, sure, but not tact. So I’ll just come out and say it. Why is an attractive, successful person like yourself so invested in helping Starling City and more importantly, Tommy?”

“I’m not quite sure what you mean?”

“I mean, it’s rather convenient that you are here out of nowhere and at the right moment helping Tommy with all the right connections. You know, Laurel had mentioned…”

“Ahh. I understand now, I can see how it seems convenient to the recently resurrected” she was done holding the polite brit facade too, “but I have been friends with Thomas for quite some time despite others disapproval. Please, be sure that what seems ‘convenient’ to you is just the simple fact that you are looking at this under the pretense of what you have heard about me and on the Thomas, you once knew. You can’t look at this superficially-- although I assume you do that quite often. I foolishly would be inclined to say you do pretty much everything superficially, but I know better.”

“Have me all figured out, do you? You see, what I still can’t figure out is what exactly your ‘friendship’ with Tommy means. What your interest are.”

“You were gone 5 years Mr.Queen, people moved on with their lives, people changed, the question is are you willing to let others see how much you have changed? More importantly what is your interest in our friendship? Are you worried that I might come between Thomas and Laurel? Or, are you hoping I do?

A chuckle laced with contempt and a bit of anger escaped his lips “ Tommy had mentioned you were honest, never thought you were also crass”.

It was her turn to laugh, her growing impatience with him evident “ Only when merited. For example,” she could feel the sarcasm begin to take over her voice “when an acquaintance I barely know shows up at my hotel room, uninvited, as I never told him where I was staying,” she looks up at the watch on her wrist that has remained above her head the entire time on the door frame “at 12:13am, to accuse me of malicious motives for befriending someone and then proceeds to further insult me in that particular manner that only those born with a silver spoon and a well-cushioned trust fund are capable of--”

“Hey, I never said it bothered me, Cordy come on” he smirked, she knew he was proud that he had riled her up.

“Mr. Queen..”

“Oliver, Cordy please,” he said in an almost childish way as he took a step forward and leaned against the same side of the door frame, completely invading her space, an act of intimidation she knew well.

She finally straightened her stance placing one hand wrapped on the door extending across the doorway and the other on the wall in front of her right at shoulder height, her chin held high, she knew a little about intimidating poses as well. “ Mr. Queen” she repeated, more force behind his name this time, “ perhaps this is a conversation better suited for another time and place. Your concern and suspicions are noted. A man of your means should be able to get the answers he needs. I am sure your family’s money leaves you well equipped to look into my past, figure out what my exact ‘sinister’ plan is, without having to bother or stalk me. I would gladly help, maybe provide you some references, perhaps an updated CV. Just, not tonight.”

“Witty, hmm, he mentioned that as well. You are right Cordy, this is not the time, I apologize for the
intrusion. I might have had too much to drink tonight, I am sure, I will regret this in the morning. Have a good night Cordy”, he said a contrite smile now on his lips as he pushed with his shoulder off the door frame.

“I don’t think you will regret it. I think you got out of this exactly what you wanted, so I am glad to have been of service. Have a good night, Mr. Queen.”

He dipped his head and she could see that his embarrassment was a bit more sincere now. She knew that she should have let him get away with that half-assed apology, he was counting on it, after all, it was the polite thing to do. She just couldn’t let it go, she was pissed on more than one level.

He started to walk away when she called after him one more time “Oh and Mr. Queen…” determined to set him straight and set them, Oliver and Cordelia, back on path she left courtesy aside. He turned at her voice, eyebrows slightly raised, when their eyes met she continued,

“My friends call me Cordy, to you, it’s Cordelia, please” his eyes widened the slightest bit as he nodded and a genuine breathy laugh escaped as she closed the door to her room. Heart beating fast and already feeling the heat of a call too close for comfort.

She pushed off the door and walked into her bedroom to find Cass with a look she knew too well before she could say anything she shut her down immediately, tired of everyone’s shit by now, “Not. One. Word. Cass.”

As she changed and snuck out of the hotel she mumbled to herself “so much for calmly changing this time”.

She rode her bike pushing it faster and faster as she hit the empty streets of the Glades. A million thoughts racing through her head. The most prevalent being, what had she given away at the dinner? What and when had Laurel talked to Oliver about? Why was he so suspicious all of a sudden?

As her bike skidded to a stop in the alley she shook those thoughts punching in the code and walking down the steps. Her foot hadn’t hit the last step when she heard Oliver’s voice strong and something lurking underneath it

“I need you to look into someone, Cordelia Todd.”

“Excuse me? Your date tonight? Isn’t that a bit drastic, I mean if you like the girl just tell her.” Damn her and the need to use humor to cover up nerves. Seeing the way his eyes narrowed she made the choice at that moment to not give in this time. They had more pressing issues at the moment and if that argument bought her some time she would definitely use it.

“I am not sure I can trust her. She’s too close to Tommy, Laurel has apprehensions about her and to be honest there is something that just doesn’t sit well with me.”

“Oliver, we don’t have time to go Hardy Boys on this woman simply for a gut feeling. We have actual enemies to worry about.” At his hard glare, she took a deep breath and decided to try a different tactic.

“Okay, fine I will ask a favor from a very reliable friend of mine. Don’t look at me like that. We have more pressing issues and I trust this person. You have to compromise with me, on this one.”

“Fine. If you trust this person then I do. Keep me updated”

“Yes, sir!” she saluted.
“Funny. Now, about Cass and Todd.” she audibly groaned at that as she made her way to the chair and flopped down.

The conversation had been long and tedious. If she thought Oliver had reservations before, now, he was downright questioning everything they had planned so far. Too many liabilities at the Gala. He wasn’t on board with her not being there to cover them. Even after she reassured him that even when she wasn’t there, she was there. Yet, nothing bothered him more than Cass and Todd’s presence in Starling. He didn't trust them and he couldn’t control them. His two least favorite things. She reassured him as much as she could, eventually simply stating that he was going to have to get on board or bail out now because they didn’t have time to question and vet everyone with a fine tooth comb. He resigned for now but she knew better, this was not over.

Nothing would prove this better than when two days later Cass went off script during what was supposed to be recon and ended up getting Felicity hurt. That had been the final straw for Oliver.

When he went off on Cass and Nia defended her stating that it wasn’t a big deal and that even he had been the cause of a few bruises, she, for probably one of the first times, saw him go so red with anger that he went speechless. The only reason she had gone after him when he had walked out without uttering a single word was that regardless of the current mission, her mission was still the same, Robert and his family, and Oliver was essential and slowly becoming her main mission.

Present Day

Diggle sat waiting for Oliver to come off the Salmon Ladder. He had been going at it for the past hour and Dig was almost out of patience.

“Are you going to talk about your feelings like a big boy or are you going to continue to punish your body and hit things?”

Oliver jumped off the top rung on the ladder placing a hard stare on Dig as he ignored him and headed to the restroom. Oliver knew Dig would be waiting outside and he would have questions. The problem was, Oliver had no answers. He felt like his world was coming down on him and there were enemies everywhere and very few allies. He couldn’t afford to trust more people and be wrong. He was beginning to question the influence Nia was having on him, on the mission and he realized that his issue was that he knew so little. He had been okay with that when he thought no one knew anything about her, that she was a mystery to all. Yet, meeting Cass and Todd and their familiarity, he knew better now and that bothered him, a lot.

If all her secrets surrounded him and his family why was he the one in the dark? Why did he feel like in order to continue he needed more answers and less mystery? If he was to move forward working with Nia they would need to have a conversation, a very lengthy conversation. With a deep sigh, he pushed off the bathroom sink and reached for the door. Maybe Dig could offer some insight now that he knew what he, personally, needed.

As Felicity made it to her lair she could feel the blood dripping down her pant leg. Looking down she could see the blood stain on her boot. Obviously, the cut was deeper than she thought and probably the bike ride over had not helped. Removing her jacket as she walked in she heard Cass gasp, she looked down to find the angry red stain on her shirt, jacket, and pants. She Felt Cass move and instinctively raised her hand to stop her. Just because she had defended Cass did not mean she was not angry at her and the fact that her over eagerness had gotten them all in trouble. She would not admit that to Oliver but her glare made it very evident to Cass whom simply sat back down a flash of worry and regret crossing her face before she could school her features back to impassive.
Felicity continued removing her clothes low hisses and groans leaving her throat without her permission. She grabbed the med supplies she would need and began to clean herself up. She could feel Cass’ hard stare yet, ignored her and the sharp sting of the needle, God she hated needles she could feel the bile rise up but her pride was bigger than her fear.

Six stitches later, wrapped ribs and some strong pain meds she was sitting in her apartment all pretense left aside. Blonde curls a mess on top of her head, her favorite pajamas in place and slumped carefully on her right side to alleviate her left hip and ribs she drank her tea and purposely ignored Cass. The meds rousing her memories and dismissing her inhibitions. This pain seemed all too familiar.

She could feel a tingle in her left foot toes running all the way to her shoulder, apparently, hope was not lost, although the pool of blood she was currently laying in begged to differ. She was bleeding from her left hip and ribs and she was almost sure her foot was broken. The only silver lining in this entire fucked up situation was that she knew the bullets had gone through all the way and the freezing temperatures in Tula were numbing the pain but, also slowly killing her.

All she could hear was the low roar of engines, and the breaking of ice. She knew they were searching for her in the Upa River. Had she still been in the river she would be dead but she was flattered that they believed her to be so otherworldly that she would be able to survive over 10 min in the frozen river. A breath intended to be a chuckle left her throat and she knew she had to move, somehow.

She was about 200 km from Moscow and survival, and that’s all she allowed herself to think of, that was all she could manage at the moment, well, that and breathing. She gave herself to the count of 10 and then she had to move before the 5 to 8 men a few meters away gave up on the river and came looking.

She had taken out about 9 men, she couldn’t be really sure because when the second bullet hit her, she emptied her clips giving her time to get away and losing count in the process. As she counted to 10 she began to think back on how quickly things had gone bad.

1,2,3…

Tula was supposed to bring answers she was searching for after three other cities had led her here. Contrary to her current situation this was just a recon trip. She had taken sick days from QC and would probably not make it back in time, or at all.

After finding that the QC subsidiaries in Russia had experienced some questionable monetary shifting, all stemming from a log-in using Robert Queen’s name. Once she started on the discovery path she found a money trail that lead here, to Russia, more than three years after the disappearance of the Queen men, she knew something was up and she had to get to the bottom of it.

St.Petersburg and Moscow had been a bust. Sochi had been much more eventful and at that moment she believed her visit had gone off without a hitch. Her last visit was Tula and just her luck this was where she met her current roadblock. These were trained enforcers and assassins and she was lucky all she had was two bullet holes, a possibly broken foot, probably a concussion and definitely a bruised ego.

4, 5,6…

In Sochi, she had found that the money trail ended at the headquarters for the Solntsevskaya Bratva.
A little over $2 million total pulled from all 4 companies, all authorized withdrawals with all the right signatures. Yet, no one at Moscow or St. Petersburg had any idea or even noticed. The CFO at Sochi had, and made it his job to cover it all up for fear of being fired for overlooking the withdrawal. He was her way in and once she had exposed all the right nerves he sang like a canary and gave up everything he had, mainly that the last withdrawal had come out of Tula, precisely the National Bank in Tula, withdrawn in person. Apparently, he had also gave her up after the fact, that asshole. She guessed he wasn’t as innocent as he pleaded, damn him and the plea he made on behalf of his family. Although, knowing what she knew now she figures he gave her up because he feared the Bratva more than he feared her, fair enough.

The minute she checked into the hotel she knew she was being followed. Man, was she glad she had opted for a disguise for this trip, she had definitely learned over the years. Apparently, a French tourist wasn’t as inconspicuous as she thought. When she noted the tail she decided the best way to handle it was to keep being a tourist and the first chance she got to head back to Moscow and get on the first plane to Starling. Last thing she wanted was to blow her cover or end up getting dead.. It seemed to be working until she made a move for the bank under the pretense of withdrawing money. It seems she might of stayed in there a few minutes too long. Damn her and her inability to just let this go, even if just for now. The minute she exited she felt the men get bolder in their pursuit of her and as she turned the corner she was in a full on sprint.

She wasn’t sure whom they were or what they wanted but she knew bad guys when she saw them. She made her way into a small coffee shop and out the back door finding a one story building she could climb. She reached the roof in record time, enough to see the men exit the shop and look everywhere cursing at losing her. As they took one last futile look around, one of the men grabbed his cell and placed a call. Her Russian was rusty at best but even she knew what “Pakhan” meant. She was in a world of trouble and nobody knew where she was or what she was doing, she really needed to get a sidekick.

7, 8…

She stealthily moved through the ancient rooftops, trying to come up with a plan to get the hell out of mother Russia. She spotted the train station and knew that was her only exit and a perfect opportunity to find a new disguise, well steal from someone’s bags, and get lost in a crowd. She waited for a train to deboard and took advantage of the crowd to jump down. She ‘found’ some clothes and purchased a boarding ticket straight to Munich. She made a quick stop to the bathroom, she cursed out loud once she was alone, she couldn’t believe the Bratva Pakhan himself held an interest in her. Man had she really done it this time.

She had no idea how Robert was connected to the Bratva worst how she had missed that connection in all her research. As she pinned her hair up and removed her makeup she took a deep breath and made her way out. The minute she opened the door the silence was almost deafening in the station. She instantly knew she was screwed.

“Little girl little girl, what a mess you have made.”

It took all her control not to react to the voice or even look up. She kept her eye down and wondered how long before they started shooting. She could already see three options for cover from whatever hail of bullets awaited her. A food cart was her best option as it would only require her taking out two guys, it was also the closest to an exit, although she had to assume they had all the outside covered, and it gave her access to some knives on top of the cart.

The instant she heard a gun click she let two shots free from her 9mm and sprinted behind the cart as bullets rained down on her. She picked up the three knives and weighed them in her hand as she
made a plan to get out of this damn death trap. She heard the train coming and knew this was her chance, she emptied a clip the instant she felt the rumble signaling the train would be there in seconds, and made a run for it.

The train didn't even stop but she managed to grab on as she felt two bullets pierce her body. The force of her jump and speed of the train slammed her against the cart and flopped her like a rag doll as she felt her foot twist and bend in an unnatural way and a sharp pain radiate up her leg. She cursed but didn’t let go as the train speed away and the men became blurry in the distance.

She started to take a breath of relief when the train began to slow and the emergency brakes squeaked. She cursed under her breath as she waited for it to stop right next to the river. She jumped off making sure to not put weight on her foot. The river was an option, a stupid one she thought as she began to cross it. Halfway there she realized she almost had no options and she was in no condition to make any kind of escape. She could hear the men shouting in the distance, their voices carried by the below freezing wind.

Without thought she used the butt of her gun to bash the ice once, she found a thin enough patch and it cracked and started to give. She walked to the bank and picked up a rock, gave herself distance and then tossed it at the cracked ice causing a satisfying shattering of the ice. She figured this would keep them busy for some time.

9, 10…

It had kept them busy but it was time to move. With more effort than she was willing to admit she got up and began an even trot. Making sure to stay as hidden as possible. She spotted a farmhouse in the distance and made that her next goal, if her luck turned around there would be a car she could “borrow”. She ignored the desperate plea from her body to stop and stayed alert as the farmhouse got closer and closer.

The minute she spotted the small european car on the opposite side of the house an extra burst of adrenaline kicked in and she picked up her pace and allowed herself to be a bit more careless. The minute her right hand landed on the door of the car she spotted three men in the distance and she ducked down as she picked the door lock. The minute she sat in that driver’s seat she was sure she would be okay.

She obviously never stepped foot in Russia again after that. Hell, when she took up her Russian identity she struggled with the idea for almost six months before she caved. The Bratva was a true evil to fear and they almost had her and she was damned if she ever let them get that close again. She would eventually figure out the money trail and put to rest her time in Russia but it would take another year and a half.

As the memories faded her fingers ghosted over the bullet wound that now lay only millimeters from her new stitches. She rotated her sore left foot as it cracked multiple times, fuck it still hurt sometimes when it was cold outside. A stark reminder that her life and Oliver’s had been tangled long before either even knew the other.

The Gala approached faster than any of them were ready for and tensions were running high. Felicity was trying to heal while pretending that everything was fine. Cass had made herself scarce and had not returned to the foundry since that day. It had only taken Oliver a couple of hours to send Dig to contact her. She was sure Oliver had asked him to set up a meeting but Dig proving once again why he was her favorite had also taken the opportunity to have a long conversation with her about Oliver’s “sensibilities” as she called them much to his amusement.
She made light of the conversation but she knew just how important and serious it really was. She knew Oliver wouldn’t allow her to keep him in the dark for too long and she was prepared to reveal as much as she could at this moment. Yet, she knew that in doing so it would distract them all from their current goal. With a promise that the sooner they dealt with this the sooner Cass would be gone from his city he gave in but not before he made her basically promise that the minute this was over they would have a long honest conversation, no more lies or omissions. She had scoffed at his comment only responding to his glare with a shrug and smirk as she responded: “Hi Mr. Pot am Ms.Kettle”. He had nearly smiled at that and she considered that a win.

Before she left to run some recon with Cass she snapped her fingers as if remembering something and pulled a folder from inside her jacket. She handed it to him, at his questioning look, she pulled out a picture of Cordelia Todd “Everything checks out. Your date has no criminal record, no family, some friends in high places and a great credit score.” At his look she shrugged, “what can I say my guy is thorough. Look, whatever you expected to find it just isn't there. He dug deep, 3rd grade teacher deep and nothing. She’s clean. Besides dealing with some disgustingly rich people with no moral compass, due to her job as an event planner, she has no skeletons. Not unless you count that one time in prep school when she got suspended for cheating on an exam. Like I said my guy, super thorough.”

As if she had said nothing he pushed through, “Any of those dealings with 1%s lead to any shady business deals? Any offshore bank accounts? Anything?”

“Nothing Oliver. She actually has turned down jobs when the more obviously corrupt 1% have tried to hire her. As for money, given that her businesses makes millions she actually donates a large part of that and let me just say her employees are some of the best paid in the nation. Nobody makes under $75K in that company and am talking from the janitorial staff up. She has some parking tickets if that helps. Although she did pay them, on time.”

At his grunt of consent, she internally relaxed “So, can we let this go now? Can I move on from creepily stalking your date?”

He gave a firm head nod but took the folder with him. Man was she glad she had taken the time to develop a credible story for Cordelia back when she first created her. The story was so well cemented that any digging he did would only lead to the information she had so meticulously embedded.

As she stepped outside into the cold night her left foot tingled with a recognizable ache, she rotated it as she usually did hearing the three consecutive cracks she had become accustomed to in the passing years. Her mind wandered to her pending conversation with Oliver and a smile tugged at her lips. If they would have an honest conversation maybe it was time she herself got some answers about the Bratva Kapitan. Yet, first, there was the Gala and Arthur King, easy peasy she mused as a shiver ran up her spine, she blamed the chill in the night but knew better.
In this Life, When You Deny Someone an Apology, You Will Remember It at Time You Beg Forgiveness

Chapter Summary

The Gala is finally here, Cass hopes to finally be face to face with the man she came to Starling to confront. But as is usual with our heroes, nothing goes as planned and Tommy becomes a more integral part of everything.

Chapter Notes

I hope you all enjoy this chapter and the clear developments for all our characters. Also in case, you are wondering Tommy’s development just kind of happened and I regret nothing.

Now on a personal note, apologies for the delay I started Grad school and am working full time so my life has been a mess trying to organize my time.

Moving forward, I will be posting once a month not sure at what point in the month but I will make sure to post at least once in a month.

Thank you all for your patience, especially those of you that have been on this journey from the beginning.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The gala was finally here, Felicity was still far more injured than she showed and Oliver was still angry and disapproved of Cass. She would consider that the norm at this point, but, she really had no time for anyone’s shit. She had spent the whole day back and forth with Tommy making final arrangements for the gala. Her feet were tired, her boss at QC had been emailing her non-stop, because of course one of the servers would pick today to malfunction, and Oliver kept texting Nia making sure she was ready and in fighting shape. She detected worry in his words but she couldn’t dwell, literally on anything at this moment.

She had never wanted to get away more than she did today. Yet, here she was on her knees in a $2300 outfit, her panda flats, and braided hair. When she had walked in, security gave her an odd look before she scanned her badge and got in the elevator. She knew she looked a mess but, she challenged anyone to try switching identifies while in your car, in the 4th sublevel of the garage with zero to no lighting. Sure the tech veil helped but there was a lot more that went into creating one of her personas and a preferred requirement when changing, was light, seeing as she was already visually impaired.

She was almost to her bosses floor when the doors opened and one Tommy Merlyn walked in talking on his phone. No, not talking leaving a voicemail, for her, well not her, her, but Cordelia her, dammit she thought, this is too fracking complicated. She tried to shrink into the corner as much as possible, she had three floors to go and she was home free. He hadn’t even glanced at her, yet, so
maybe she could make it through this. Invisibility was lesson number one and she didn’t plan on getting caught like an amateur.

As the elevator came to a stop she took a deep breath and with measured steps made her way out, keeping her eyes on the ground. She was there, home free but because the universe hates her, especially as of late, her badge got caught on a piece of loose rubber from the door, why couldn’t she just get as far away from Tommy as possible? Before she could catch it the badge hit the ground. She was about to kick it out into the hall to grab once the doors closed when she saw Tommy’s hand pick it up arm stretched directly at her, eyes bright and alert.

She was done, she would have 2.8 minutes before QC security got there, 6.4 minutes for the cops. She could run down the two flights of stairs to her floor in under one minute and reach her office on the far end. Grabbing the repelling equipment, securing the anchor and getting the window open she could be out the far side of the building in 3 min and out of the country by nightfall. Seconds that seemed like hours passed when she chanced a glance at Tommy and noticed the amused slash confused look on his face rather than the anger she expected. She ducked her head further, she figured he had to be used to women being shy around his cocky billionaire playboy image, took the badge with a hurried thank you and turned around just in time to see a flash of curiosity and something else cross Tommy’s face.

She wanted to make herself believe that the aloof playboy persona ran deep in Tommy but she knew better. She was hard-pressed to admit it but she had seen the tiniest flicker of recognition in his eyes. How could he not, she had been with him all morning, as Cordelia, and in her hurry, she had opted for just taking the jacket and wig off and not changing anything but her shoes. He had complimented her on her skirt, earlier, which meant he noticed and now here she had been scurrying away wearing the exact outfit, she was fucked.

She hurried to take care of the server as she called Cass, quickly informing her of what happened and that she would have to be Cordelia’s alibi if needed. She was almost done screwing the back panel back on the server when her phone rang and Thomas Merlyn was flashing back at her in all his glory. She took a deep breath made sure no one was around and Cordelia picked up.

He seemed calm, just following up on some things they had been working on earlier. She used her own programs to simultaneously call Cass while on the line with Tommy. If she could make him believe she was with Cass hopefully that would be enough for Tommy. As she got some updates and he let her know he had gone to QC to pick up some donations for the auction directly from Moira, she could hear the uncertainty in his voice. Cass must have heard it too because she quickly called out her name, asking her to hurry. At the sound of Cass’ voice, Tommy finally asked what it seemed he had been wanting to ask since he called her.

“Where are you?” he asked.

“Meeting with Cass, I took her up on her offer and she is helping me with some last minute things. Are you heading back? I can meet you at the Ballroom in 30 min to make the final arrangements.”

“Are you in the business district?” He still didn’t believe her.

“No, actually we are in the fashion district, did you need something from downtown?”

“No, just thought I… nevermind, 30 minutes sounds good I will see you there, tell Cass I said hi.”

“Will do see you soon,” she hung up and sighed, Cass quickly hung up and she hoped she was able to dispel any doubts he had. Obviously, she was too tired to even acknowledge her own denial.
From that point on she moved fast and in 15 min was on her way out, her boss trailing behind her, thanking her for coming in on her day off, she got dressed and made her way to the ballroom. Not before leaving a voicemail for one Lucius Fox, she needed a better way to hide her identity than the current one, she had put it off too long, or really never had a need for it until now.

Tommy was there already and, surprisingly, so was Oliver. She knew he was probably scoping out the place but, she really didn't want to deal with him right now. She made a show of being on the phone and pulled Tommy aside as Oliver followed them with his gaze.

It took her all of 20 min to go over the final details and leave everything in Tommy’s hands excusing herself for other business and promising to see him later tonight. As she was leaving, Oliver, caught her elbow, making her turn unexpectedly and she winced before she could stop herself, she was still healing and still in a world of pain. His brow furrowed and she dismissed it with a story of the impracticality of stilettos, he smiled that sideways insincere smile of his and moved on with the reason he had stopped her in the first place.

“I can pick you up at 7:30 seeing as I am escorting you,” he almost smirked and then seemed to remember that didn’t work very well with her.

“No need Mr.Queen, I will meet you here, as I will more than likely be running a bit late, business and all, you understand.” Sounding far more polite in her British accent than she intended.

He hesitated at first, “Look, Cordelia about the other night…” he paused looking uncharacteristically sheepish.

“Let me stop you there before you have an anxiety attack. No excuse needed, I think you showed your hand as did I and there is no reason for pretense. I will attend with you as planned but, we do not have to pretend to like each other when we obviously cannot stand one another.”

“I don’t dislike you, Cordelia, on the contrary, that is why I am apologizing,” heck she swore he almost sounded sincere.

“In that case apology accepted, I will hear no more on the matter and we can continue to be civil. I will see you here,” with a nod she left not allowing him to say anymore, it did not go unnoticed by Oliver that she had also failed to clarify that she did not dislike him either. That, he did smirk at.

He frowned as he turned and saw Tommy smirking followed by a low whistle, of mockery. Oliver shook it off and figured it was well enough as it would allow him to scope the place out and touch base with Nia before the Gala. He pushed his guilt at how he treated Cordelia aside and explored the place further and secured where they had stashed the weapons.

They were in for a long night and Cordelia needed to promptly drop to the bottom of his list of worries.

The minute she stepped into her room she was on alert, there was someone there and she was not about to give away anything.

She removed her shoes and began to shed her clothes hoping to let her intruder think he had the element of surprise and if she was being honest she learned early on that simply being female offered her a certain level of distraction over some of her male counterparts.

The minute she started to unbutton her shirt she heard the undeniable chuckle of Jason Todd, that asshole. Seeing as he was brazen enough to sneak into her room she saw no sense for modesty and finished taking off her clothes. She was about to turn around and either hear him out or kick his ass,
she hadn’t decided yet when her doorbell rang. She wasn’t expecting anyone and Jason seemed to pick up on that as he flanked her once she put on a robe and reached the door.

She was confused by the delivery guy standing outside her door with a box but as her shoulders relaxed a bit Jason also took a more relaxed stance as well. Signing off and tipping the guy she passed the package through her security measures before she opened the attached letter as she walked to her couch. A smile spreading over her face as she read the familiar handwriting. Opening the box and pulling out the multi encryption security FOB she reached for her laptop. Immediately she knew what she was looking at and she almost couldn’t believe it. She clearly remembered this conversation one year ago in that terrace cafe in Beirut, fingers flying over the keyboard she swore she would kiss Lucius Fox straight on the mouth the next time she saw him.

Beirut had been easy, well as easy as things got when she worked with certain winged brutes.

“You know we had it covered, Alfred should have never called you, we didn’t…”

“Says the man who has a bullet wound in his arm and not his head because of my perfect timing and killer aim. Well, not really killer, you know what I mean.”

“I also rather appreciate not having been shot thanks to the aforementioned skillset” added Babs as she clinked glasses with Felicity.

“Admit it, Bruce, Alfred made an executive decision and it saved your ass, now would be when you thank me and possibly stop the argh growly thing. I get it, it’s your thing but can you just not, please. I am still jet lag and I just can’t right now will at that.”

“Sir, Miss Felicity makes a valid point, manners above all sir.”

“We would have been fine had Barbara not been recognized, I told you to stay behind.”

“Wait, you were supposed to be in disguise? Oh, Babs, I have so much to teach you, I mean that wig was not fooling anyone,” teased Felicity.

“Well excuse me master of disguise. Can I just point out that this is the first time I have been made.”

“The only thing that matters is that you were made Barbara, it does not matter that it was your first. What I care is that it needs to be your last,” grunted Bruce as he stood up already growing tired of the conversation and idle time.

“You know Mr. Wayne there may be merit in investing some of Wayne Enterprises applied sciences budget to a better form of disguise, Felicity already has some impressive tech she uses but it has limitations. Maybe we can team up for all your benefits” chimed in Lucius, always willing to tinker with a new project especially if he could rope his new favorite tech, Felicity.

“Oh, now this is my sh…”

“Miss Felicity, language.”

“Sorry Alfred, but this is my niche.” She winked causing the usually stoic butler to smile “What did you have in mind Lucius? Because I have been thinking about this for some time and before you say anything, one word biological, self-learning nanites, I guess that was 4 words.”

“Nanites, Miss Smoak?”
“Don’t disappoint now Lucius, I know your R&D team has been working on this tech, and well, I just so happen to have a prototype I use along with some equations and software that with the right resources…”

“I’m listening…”

“Yeah, you are!”

“You two do realize that is my money and resources you are talking about.”

“I saved your life bat boy, let me play with your toys... Uhmm by toys I mean, well you know what I...It sounded worst… ugh, am just gonna shut up now.”

“Yes, please do so,” Bruce snickered, causing Felicity to glare at him “ keep me updated on any progress Lucius,” he smirked as he walked back out.

“Yay, it’s playtime kids” she fist pumped.

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She knew she looked like a crazy person running around pulling out machines and tech that Jason couldn’t even begin to understand. Yet, 45 min later he was starting to worry that she had lost track of time as she often did when she got in her head space. Just as he was about to interrupt her, he heard her gleeful yelp which was usually accompanied by a fist pump. The smile happened without his permission, she had that effect on him.

He was about to ask what the hell was going on when Felicity turned around with the biggest grin he had ever seen, except she didn't look like Felicity, she looked exactly like...Cassandra, what in the hell?

“Before your head explodes, self-learning identity camouflaging nanites or SLIC Nites..yeah? No? Maybe? I'll work on it”

“What the…”

“Oh yeah, voice modification through a patterned algorithm. Basically a flawless, undetectable, disguise”

“Okay I am officially impressed and equally creeped out. Now can you stop being Cass” he paused then smirked “Who else you got?

“How about the Bat?” smirked Cassandra from the door as she took in her twin with a smirk. Not being able to help it they all laughed.

“She will strike tonight sir, we have it on good authority that the woman in black will be assisting her.”

“Well, it is about time I give Cassandra a proper welcome to my city. As for that bothersome woman in black, do we know her identity, or are your men still failing.”

“Sir, we have men working on it but it seems that she has joined forces with the hooded vigilante.”

“Then it is expected that they will all be there tonight. Not one of them leaves alive, yet, you leave Cassandra Cain to me, understood?”
“Yes, sir.”

“Be assured that if any of them get away, your life will be the price.”

“Sir, I will personally put the bullet in their heads.”

The man disappeared from view just in time as footsteps were heard coming down the hallway, the door opened without any preamble as Tommy walked in he heard his father take a deep sigh, a sound he was all too familiar with.

“Dad I just wanted to let you know I am on my way to the benefit I gave your assistant all the information. I know you are not interested in any of this, but Merlyn Global is hosting…”

“Thomas, I don’t need your reminders, unlike you I know what matters and where I need to be. If that was all?”

“Yes, father”

“As always a waste of time” spat Malcolm as he made his way out of the room.

As the limousine arrived to pick up Cassandra, as planned, Felicity could hear the anxiousness in her breathing.

“Cass whatever it is, where ever he is we are going to find him and make him pay, I promise you.”

“My father used to say ‘Forget what hurt you but never forget what it taught you’ I can’t forget, I’ve tried Felicity. I’ll forget when he is dead or I am.”

“Him, Cass, always him!”

As she stood alone in the apartment finishing the settings on the nanites that would turn her into Cordelia and Nia she felt that with this start the night could only, hopefully, go in their favor. Looking back she might have counted her eggs too soon, as her mother used to say.

Everything was going according to plan. She had only arrived about 15 min late and although she had immediately noticed Oliver’s laser focus on her she managed to mingle on her own and only spend about 10 min total with Oliver, she was his date after all. She had purposely dismissed Tommy’s raised eyebrows and his thumbs up directed at Oliver. She really hoped this obsession with them hooking up would pass soon.

She had checked in with Dig, as Nia, as soon as she had arrived and they had agreed to remain radio silent with the exception of checking into their posts.

Jason had done a perimeter check earlier and confirmed that they were clear to go and all check and lookout points were clear.

“Tommy, where the hell is Cordelia? She has been gone for over 20 min”

“I don’t know and, man, Cassandra and Jason were getting a bit antsy as well, Cass went to the powder room 10 min ago and I have no idea where Jason’s at and neither has returned. Something is off, I can feel it in my bones”

Oliver was genuinely worried about Cordelia and her disappearing act, yet, he knew that a lot of the frustration and the edge of panic in his voice was due to the fact that Nia had missed her post check
10 min ago and even Diggle agreed something was not right with everything tonight.

He approached Diggle once again but before he even reached him, Digg gave him a hard nod confirming that they still had no idea where Nia was at. The growl that escaped him drew a few eyes mainly Cass’ as she exited the powder room, he made a beeline for her disregarding the hard stare she shot his way.

“Where is she?”

“I don’t know, she’s your date, sweetheart.”

“Nia!”

“Who?”

“Stop acting coy, Cassandra it doesn’t suit you, Where is she?”

“Look, Oliver, I know you think I know what you are talking about, but I don’t know any Nia.”

“You would be a fool to think for one second that I believe you. You’d be an even bigger fool to think I was stupid enough to not know that Nia pretending not to expose my identity wasn’t more for my benefit than anything. I know the way she works and she covers all bases and would have told you everything she thought would be crucial for this plan to work. So I won’t ask again, where is she?”

Dropping all pretense and letting her full contempt with him show she answered, “You think you know her, but you don’t so just worry about your party and your date, we will handle -- Nia” she spat the name making it obvious that even the name he used was not right. “Jason is already on it, now if you don’t mind I…”

“I do mind, this is my city and I let your little plan come this far because Nia asked, not you Cass, so don’t think for one second that I will hesitate to take you down. You Tell Jason to check in with me as soon as he knows anything, got it?”

Cass laughed, sincerely laughed, “I’d like to see you try, Oliver Queen”, she chuckled as she walked away knowing he would not follow as Laurel approached him.

The minute she was out of sight her face turned grim and she tapped into her comm “Jason, tell me you have an update. Tell me that foolish girl has checked in or has a fucken reason for disappearing on us?”

Jason could see there had been a struggle. Some of the contents from Felicity’s purse were scattered on the ground including her comm. As he picked up the items he realized that the smaller set of footprints lead the opposite way which meant that she either got away or purposely left. He followed the trail to skid marks that were obviously from her bike.

“She got away, goddammit Lizzie you scared me half to death, now where the hell are you?” taping his comm he spoke, “ Cass there was a struggle but she got away on her bike, I have no idea where…”

“Felicity?”

“Yes, Cass am talking…”
“No, shut up Jason, Felicity is here at the gala as Felicity, what the hell?”

“What?”

“Get back in here now, something is happening”

“Be there in two and she better have some answers.”

Cass made her way towards the entrance with every intention of pulling Felicity aside and getting some answers but before she could get close enough Felicity had made her way to a circle of people and Jason was pulling her away.

“What the hell is she doing here?”

“More importantly why is she talking to Malcolm Merlyn. You know her, she would have never disappeared just because, she has new information and I bet anything it involves Malcolm Merlyn, that cannot be a coincidence. You need to keep Oliver distracted while I try and talk to Felicity. ”

“Cass if something has changed I can’t be on babysitting duty.”

“The Queen boy is already losing it, he knows that we know he is the hood. He is asking about Nia and soon enough he will be looking for Cordelia. So all I need from you is to keep him contained while I pass a comm to Felicity and get her to call him and tell me what the fuck she is thinking.”

“Jason Todd, glorified babysitter.”

“Yeah, yeah.” She dismissed.

Everything seemed to be going to plan she had met her check-ins and juggling Cordelia and Nia was seamlessly happening. She knew that they had planned everything, anticipated worst-case scenarios and set up contingencies. Making such a public statement might have put them in the most vulnerable position but they were counting on being underestimated and all being publicly seen before making their move.

Experience should have taught Felicity, all that could go wrong would go wrong.

She was on her way to the restroom to check in with Oliver as Nia when she received a notice on one of many programs she had running on her servers. Usually, these notifications came a few per day and were either meaningless, dead ends or things she already knew. Today, of course, would be the exception.

She opened the notice out of habit and realized that the digital trace she had placed on the Dark Archer had met a cross-section with the data compiling she had been doing on Malcolm Merlyn per Cass’ hunch.

The cross section as it always seemed to happen had to do with money. A subsidiary LLC that could be traced back to Merlyn Global and more specifically Malcolm Merlyn himself had been used in association with the Dark Archer for some of his more devious ventures. As the saying went always follow the money trail and this one seemed to point to either the Dark Archer being involved in some way with Merlyn Global or being hired by their exemplary CEO.

Further following the trail of that LLC it had also led her to Dr. Markov a name she knew too well as she had worked with him as a consultant in the past. Knowing that time was of the essence if she was to do something about this she did a mass info search and dump in hopes of finding something,
Focusing and scrolling through the massive data file that was being filtered to her tablet she made her way out of the venue and turned the corner to her bike, halting instantly when she noted two massive men standing a few feet away in the way of her exit strategy. Turning around she saw a third man standing in the way of her retreat.

Knowing she had no option she played one last card, the damsel in distress, quickly offering her purse to the men along with her jewelry and pleading that they take it and not hurt her.

The two men in front quickly took the things and ineffectively threatened her, with the gun they held, to stay quiet and say nothing and then moved past her; she was ready to wait until they disappeared when a hand came to her waist and another to her arm. Instinctually she threw her head back hearing the crunch of a nose and used her free hand and dug her elbow into the idiot's ribcage, she was sure something had broke.

The instant he let out an agonizing cry the other men came her way, she had little time to react and waste, she kicked off her shoes and made quick work of the other men giving her time to run, which she did. In seconds she was on the bike and blazing out of the alley where she spotted the remains of her purse on the floor, quite a bit of blood and further down two of the men carrying the third as they hobbled away into the shadows. She cursed when she realized not only was her phone and tablet now lost but she had dropped her comm in the commotion. She would have to make sure to kill her devices once she got to her base.

Within 10 min she was in the base and removing all aspects of Cordelia, thankful that she had fully stocked her base for all instances, including a ball gown and all its accessories.

After killing her devices she picked up a new cell and contemplated informing the team but knew that there was no excuse she could use with Oliver and Diggle that they would accept and Cass and Jason would not approve of her plan but she knew it was their only hope given the circumstances.

She quickly got into one of the spare cars, added herself to the invite list and headed back to the Gala.

“Dr. Markov always spoke wonders about you, Ms. Smoak, going as far as convincing Kord himself to offer you a job, a job which I heard you turned down to stay at Queen Consolidated.”

Felicity chuckled shyly "A gesture I greatly appreciated from Dr.Markov, unfortunately, I had made a commitment to Mr.Steele and Queen Consolidated that I would not turn my back on. But believe me, it was an extremely difficult decision and one I will always be grateful for.”

"A woman of ethics and principle, I can definitely respect that Ms. Smoak. I am also glad that your loyalty still allowed for your consultation in Dr.Markov’s last venture, your input was invaluable."

"Please, call me Felicity and thank you both for the opportunity, it was a great opportunity and as always a pleasure to work with Dr. Markov."

"You are always welcomed at Merlyn Global, Felicity."

"Thank you Mr.Merlyn."

"Malcolm, please. Any new ventures you are working on Felicity? Merlyn Global is always looking to invest in young talent."
“Nothing I would feel comfortable bringing to you at this stage, Mr. Merlyn, but I will definitely keep your offer in mind, thank you for the confidence. Although, I did hear that Dr. Markov is working on a big project with Merlyn Global and intellectual property from Unidac Industries that they recently acquired. You know I was always fascinated by everything happening at Unidac and one of my biggest regrets was not getting access to their lab before they were sold off. Some of their viable projects would shift the entire course of tech. It really is incredible and I would love the opportunity to pick Dr. Markov’s brain and to see the many projects you have inherited.”

One of the talents Felicity had mastered over time was using her own “character flaws” to her benefit. Her tendency to babble had been a childhood burden, now it was an opportunity to read her marks and test their reactions while seemingly unaware and uncomfortably awkward.

In this instance she immediately saw the shift in Malcolm Merlyn at the mention of Unidac Industries, she knew that information wasn’t public and no one should really know any of the details but the way she presented it, so matter of fact, would hopefully discourage him from openly questioning her. Quickly she realized there was nothing to read in Malcolm Merlyn. His lack of reaction was surprising and frankly scared Felicity. In that whole babble, there was more than one instance where even the most prepared person would have given something away. Yet, Malcolm Merlyn had no reaction, zero microexpressions. She had revealed too much for such a reaction which meant it was a choice. Malcolm Merlyn had developed an ability that few had mastered, that fact shook something in her core.

She was certain, at that moment she knew that Merlyn senior and the Dark Archer were involved, she also knew that Malcolm Merlyn was hiding so much more and she would be a fool not to exploit the ground she had just gained as Felicity Smoak, she went on instinct and walked head first into the lion’s den, it was now or never.

“As a matter of fact I have been working on…”

“Dad, you made it thank you for coming.”

Malcolm’s demeanor changed once again but Felicity could still see he was trying to decipher her. “Yes, well I have some business to take care of and you were quite annoying in your insistence I attend this mediocre evening.”

Tommy’s smile was full of disdain as he gritted out “Glad to see that Merlyn judgment is intact and I see you still know how to find the youngest pretty face in a room, like a true predator.”

“Please, Tommy spare me your melodramatic tantrum. It’s really quite tiresome.”

“Why don’t you take your little girlfriend and just…”

“What? Oh no, I’m not… there is nothing going on. Not that… just no! Am sorry this seems really personal and I should have probably walked away from the beginning, I am so sorry, excuse me.”

Taking her exit her eyes cut to Cass across the room as she makes her way to the second-floor balcony leaving behind the harsh tones between father and son.

The minute she hits the balcony she is face to face with John Diggle, she sees the recognition in his eyes almost immediately and she knows it is too late to do anything but acknowledge him, as she sees Cass walk by and smirk out of the corner of her eye.

“Oh, hi Mr. Diggle surprising seeing you here,” she laughed nervously. “Well, not really surprising its a function for the Starling elite, you are a bodyguard to the 1 %, specifically one Oliver Queen, who would obviously be here and as his bodyguard well tada.” She sings songs, well, only half
committing to sweeping her arm up and down the extent of his looming form.

“Felicity.” He nods with amusement.

When he says nothing else she takes that as her opportunity, “oh, sorry you are here on business which means you probably shouldn't be socializing and here I am still talking, so I will take my leave, nice seeing you Mr. Diggle have a fun night,” she starts to walk away when she adds as an afterthought to a completely amused John Diggle, “well probably not fun as your job is serious just good, yes, have a good and safe night, bye.”

She barely makes it around the corridor when she hears the no-nonsense tone of Cass “Explain, now Smoak.”

“Man, I am telling you I feel horrible for that girl but my dad just makes me so upset sometimes and I see red. I tried looking for her but I haven’t found her.”

“Tommy, relax am sure it wasn’t as bad as you think.”

“No, man you didn't see her face she was genuinely upset and am pretty sure I insulted her. Please, just help me find her. If it gets out that I, the host of the night, made a scene like that I don't care what it says about me but that’s not fair to Cordelia and her brand.”

“Okay, look Tommy I will have Diggle help you, I need to look…”

“For Cordelia? Seriously, where did she go? Have you talked to her?”

“Yes, she texted and said she had a work call she needed to take so she left but if she can she will be back. Said she would call you later.”

“Great, she had me worried for a bit. Now about this girl,” just then Diggle approached them, Nia had just reached out and the news was not good and Oliver needed to know, immediately.

“Just the man we were looking for, Mr. Diggle, I need help finding someone.” Diggle gave a pointed look in Oliver’s direction and with just one look he asked him to please humor his friend.

“By someone, I assume you mean a woman. Not really in my job description Merlyn.”

“For once Mr. Diggle you'd be pleased to know that although I am looking for a woman it is to apologize and not for what you think. So can you please help me.”

“Who is this mystery woman?”

“Thanks, Mr. Diggle, she was speaking with my father about 10minutes ago. Very young maybe 21 or 22, blonde hair, glasses, strapless baby blue dress with some shiny stuff she…”

“About yay high” he motioned to about his shoulders “petite, blue eyes a tendency to babble?”

“What, uhm yeah, you saw her, do you know her.”

Oliver’s face clearly showed that he knew there was only one blonde they knew that fit that description and he was hard-pressed to believe she would be here. Picking up on that Tommy addressed him directly “Do you know her, Ollie?”

“I believe you are looking for one Ms. Felicity Smoak, QC employee. Just ran into her in the balcony you could probably find her there.”
“Perfect, thanks, Mr. Diggle.” He started to make his way to the stairs as he said: “Ollie, man don’t think we won’t talk about how you know the pretty blonde.”

As soon as he was out of earshot Diggle didn’t miss a beat “Got news on Nia. She texted me said that she received new intel that changes everything and that we need to abort the plan and regroup. There is a new player.”

“Diggle what the hell is going on, She disappears and now she calls off everything. I need to talk to her, in person, now”.

“There is more man, but I think we all need to go to ground and talk, we should also check in on Felicity and Tommy.”

“What? Why?”

“Because the new player Nia is talking about, it’s Malcolm Merlyn”.

“Malcolm Merlyn, you’re sure? The father of fun-loving everyone is my best friend Tommy?”

“Yes, Cass I am positive and with this new intel, we need to infiltrate and not attack… no wait before you fight me on this Cass listen when it was just King we thought it was money or vengeance driven but he was just a hired assassin, think on that Cass, Arthur King the man that answered to no one a hired gun, that scares me. Add to that, Malcolm Merlyn, head of one of the most powerful and wealthy families in the city, staple of the community, with everything to lose and well, that changes everything. He must have actual stakes in the death of these people, there is no other reason he would follow orders. He must have a lot to gain and my instincts tell me this means something bad for the city, like catastrophic bad. You are the one who always said my instincts were my strongest defense so trust me, please.”

“Yes, trust her Cassandra Cain, although it will do you no good when you are both dead.”

Simultaneously, turning to the voice coming from the dark, Cass already had her 9MM point blank at the figure and Felicity was holding three knives in her hands. Felicity knew that any movement from the Dark Archer would have Cass emptying her entire clip into his body, but they were still at the Gala, with dozens of innocent people downstairs. They had to get him outside.

“What’s the matter ladies not so talkative anymore, no more theories?”

“You son of a bitch, am going to kill you”, growled Cass.

“No, little girl you will die trying.”

She saw Cass twitch and that was all Felicity needed to react and take off running full force towards the Archer, pushing him through the nearest door into an office that was obviously off limits for the night and thankfully empty. Elbowing her in the ribs he rolled back up and took a fighting stance. Cass followed immediately after as Felicity took deep breaths and stood up flanking him and pinning him with no escape but to go through them.

One deep breath and Cass was attacking full force, forcing Felicity to follow in the fight. They moved like the fight had been choreographed, a sequence of hits designed to disable and neutralize the enemy.

Cass used the length of her legs and the distraction of Felicity sweeping the Archer’s legs from under him to land a hard kick to his nape sending his body rebounding like a rag doll. She took satisfaction
in seeing his body start to fall back as Felicity made contact with his calves only to sweep forward with force from the brutality of her kick, hitting the floor with his face first. The satisfaction was short lived as he quickly got up. Felicity was ready to attack again when she heard a gasp from her right.

At the door stood Tommy eyes wide and a shout at the tip of his tongue, with no other choice Felicity dropped to the ground and took a defensive position as she clumsily tried to crawl away from the fight. She had to act as if she was nothing more than an innocent bystander.

Cass’ confusion lasted half a second before Tommy let out a loud shout, “Cassandra…” seeing no reaction from the woman he thought he knew he turned his attention to the poor young woman, he recognized, scrambling to get out of the warpath. Approaching her quickly, Tommy tried to help Felicity but she knew she couldn’t leave Cass alone, she yelped when he touched her and took off running into a closet where Tommy couldn’t get to her, not unless he decided to join the fight he was sure Cassandra is winning.

He doesn’t know how much longer she can hold off the attacker but he knows there is only one person who can help, he rushes out to find John Diggle, human wall, knowing that the police would only be a disaster and a sure-fire end to the gala they all worked so hard to accomplish.

As soon as his back is turned Felicity climbs out the closet and heads for the window to the roof. She knows the only way she can help now is as Nia and no one else. She grabs the duffle bag she had left tucked in a balcony and alerts Jason, she knows this is no time to try and do this alone.

When John, Oliver, and Tommy, against Oliver’s wishes, come bursting through the door Cass and Jason are in a full blown out fight. As soon as John takes out his gun, a mechanical cable comes through window shooting out five mechanical claws that wrap around the Archer’s limbs and pull him out the window faster than any of them can react.

Without thinking, Oliver and Cass jump out the window, Jason knowing Felicity’s plan stays behind with a shocked Tommy, while John takes position to cover them from above.

Tommy is confused and amazed at what he is watching, the woman in costume is deeply engaged seemingly getting the best of the other man in a costume. Just then she hears Tommy yell for Oliver and that split second acknowledgment is enough for the Archer to cut open across her arm, in outrage, Oliver rushes forward full force tackling the Archer exercising his full strength in hitting him, all hands and elbows in succinct patterns.

He tosses him over and Cass is there aiming for the kill, Nia steps in stopping her before she gets the deadly blow, using her escrima to administer a series of moves, to the knee, the ribs going out with a crack, the nose and then in beautiful precision the back of the neck followed by his gut.

Oliver, Cass, and Nia all stand in wonder as the Dark Archer lays unconscious at their feet. Hearing commotion and voices coming closer, Nia quickly turns to Oliver, “Leave, now.”

“Nia?”

“You’re exposed, leave, go!”

Hesitating he gets up and heads back only as Diggle makes his way around having heard the approaching voices as well.

“You, okay man?”

“Yeah, I have to…’
“Get clear, go.” Oliver starts to walk away only to turn as a nagging feeling in the back of his head comes forward, full force.

“Dig” at his questioning face he continues, “Felicity, she was…” with a quick nod he answers “I got her, you, go!”

Nia hears everything and quickly turns to Cass who simply nods for her to leave, but not before explicitly telling her to retrieve the Archer and head back to base, “nothing more, Cass, promise.” Reluctantly she agrees signaling Jason to come and help. Felicity tosses them her cape so they can wrap the body and make sure he sees nothing if he gains consciousness at any time.

Wanting to earn Felicity sometime Jason holds Dig until he sees Nia make her way back into the 2nd floor.

Felicity makes quick work of her disguise sending thanks to Lucious Fox and his impeccable timing. She makes her way back into the closet as she hears Tommy’s voice outside the room questioning Oliver, who now has a lot of explaining to do.

She sends a quick text to Oliver knowing already that he’s not going to like it but, the turn of events has left them with very little choice.

She doesn’t hear the footsteps but his deep breath alerts her to John Diggle’s presence as she cowards into the corner of the closet. When John opens the door she dashes out making sure her movements are uncoordinated and desperate. He catches her by the arm and spins her around while he lowers his voice and reassuringly lets her know everything will be okay.

“I just want to go home, please, I just want to go.”

“Of course, of course, Felicity I just want to make sure you are okay?” He softly says as he bends to be at her eye level.

“I am, I promise.”

“Okay, good. Let’s get you home.”

“I can…”

“No, I won’t take no for an answer let me make sure you get home safe.”

“No Oliver, you answer me right now, what the hell is going on?”

“I can’t talk right now Tommy, I’m sorry I have to go”, he says as he starts to walk out of the ballroom.

“Oliver! Oliver? This isn’t over”. Tommy knows he can’t leave, this is his event and his job, yet, he can’t let this go, can’t let it simmer. He takes out his phone to call Cordelia only to find he already has a text from her. It seems she had to leave unexpectedly, he curses under his breath, hating the fact that he had to stay. Just then he spots one John Diggle walking down the steps, a man with answers he needs and this one was not going to get away.

Felicity notices him approach before Diggle does and she knows that if she plays this right this may be her only opportunity to get away from Diggle’s protective side, which she appreciates but doesn’t have time for. She can see the determination and confusion in Tommy’s eyes and really hopes he’s far more emotional than he looks.
Diggle spots him and based on how quickly his demeanor changes she knows he’s realized there is no avoiding this confrontation.

“John.”

“Mr. Merlyn, if you…”

“Don’t, am not an idiot John, whatever Oliver is in you know about it and you are going to tell me, now.”

“I am sorry Mr. Merlyn, but I don’t discuss the business of my clients and I actually have a personal matter to attend to”, he states very matter of fact as he inclines his head towards Felicity.

“Apologies miss, but I need to talk to John and it will only…”

“You’ll have to excuse me Mr. Merlyn but I must go. Ms. Smoak is not well and must get home.”

“Felicity Smoak?” just then truly taking in the woman accompanying John Diggle.

“I don’t...How do you…?” she spouts. “I can just go, really there is no need Mr. Diggle. I have a car…”

“Felicity, please. Oliver would never…”

“Oh, so this is business. Perfect. You go get Oliver and I will gladly escort Ms. Smoak where ever she needs to go. It is the least I can do, for earlier”, he says with clear embarrassment and guilt in his eyes. Damn, she hated this so much, hated that Tommy had to get pulled into this mess they had made, she had made.

“ I … No...no.”

“Please, Ms. Smoak, I will gladly be your escort”, he says with a genuine smile as he takes her arm and starts to walk towards the exit leaving a dumbfounded Diggle unable to do anything lest he calls more attention to the pair.

She could easily subdue him, or slip away, but not as Felicity. Glancing up to look at him she can see the fear and hurt in his eyes and realizes that even if she wasn’t Felicity, at this moment, she wouldn’t be able to leave him, it seemed he had enough people walking out on him to last a lifetime.

As Diggle walked down the foundry stairs, he could feel the tension taking over the room and even if he wasn’t perceptive Oliver’s pacing form and the trail of blood on the ground would have told him everything. He was quickly brought up to speed by the only person in the room who wasn’t ready to ring the first neck they saw, Jason.

“Nia isn’t here yet, it seems she had something to take care of with the cameras at the venue and to pick up at her place. Obviously, Oliver isn’t taking well to her delay. If that wasn’t enough Cass lost her cool, well as cool as she can get, and did quite a number on our guy. Hence the blood, the tension, and the mess,” at the confusion on Diggle’s face he pointed towards the turned over med table. “She had her reasons, believe me, even if Oliver doesn’t agree.”

“I guess now we are waiting on Nia to set everything right?”

“As usual, the beast whisperer.” Jason knew what was happening was serious but he knew if he dwelled too much he would be in just as much of a foul mood as Cass.
“Mr. Merlyn, really it’s not necessary for you to walk me to my door. I feel much better. You’ve done enough already.”

“Please, Felicity, call me Tommy, and it’s the least I could do after my behavior earlier. My father and I...well it’s complicated.”

“There is no need to explain, really, I understand. That is why I can say with confidence that you have done more than enough. If it’s any consolation in my experience I have found that our parents don’t define us, they can set us on a path but eventually we make our own way, we decide who we are”, she smiled kindly.

“I sense you speak from personal experience. Difficult mom or dad?” he smirked.

“Neither, I don’t...my parents are not” she stopped abruptly not sure how to continue. Sensing where the conversation was going Tommy’s face changed, she was glad not to see pity just kind empathy.

“Oh sorry Felicity, it seems I can’t get one right with you. I’m really sorry.”

“No harm, I still meant what I said. You are a good person Tommy, of that I am sure and I am an excellent judge of character.”

“When a pretty girl compliments me I always believe her.”

They both laughed, glad the tension had dissipated. A lull of silence was enough for Tommy to make his exit, but not before making her agree to a get together with her and Oliver because he was sure there was a story there. She insisted that she barely knew him, “I am a lowly IT girl and he is my boss, sort of, that’s it. I mean I fixed his laptop once.” at Tommy’s teasing smile, she realized he hadn’t been serious and allowed herself a chuckle.

Of course, Tommy being Tommy he didn’t leave before assuring her he would drop by QC when she least expected it and make her spill all her secrets.

She smiled at his retreating form if he only knew her life was basically one carefully placed lie atop another into an endless tower where she could no longer see the top. His kind smile was so tempting, it always had been, she had hoped he and Felicity would never cross paths because a friendship would be inevitable and here she was against her better judgment, kinda happy they had.

She knew that this was under the worst circumstances, he was on the verge of a fallout with Oliver if the returned playboy didn’t play this right. The relationship with Tommy was one of the few things keeping Oliver sane and grounded and she would make it part of her mission to ensure he stayed in his life, even if that meant sacrificing another identity.

She made quick work of changing her clothes and identity, Nia’s phone had been blowing up this whole time and she hoped she found everyone in one piece when she got to the foundry.

If she wasn’t already worried the last text from Jason telling her “Please hurry Felicity, everything has gone to shit, we need you”, well, that was enough to get her to speed like a bat out of hell as she cut through the city with her heart in her throat.

Her footfalls on the metal steps echoed through the foundry and all eyes turned to her, instantly she took in everything and knew that whatever it was it was bad, worse than she could have thought as she ran scenario after scenario on the drive there.

Noticing the only calm face in the room was Jason’s she approached him first, at his hard nod
towards Cass, she walked deeper into the dark foundry, the first thing she saw was the slumped over body of a man she didn't recognize tied to one of the beams, he had been badly beat. Next, she saw Cass’ distraught face, a hurt she had never seen on the always stoic beauty. She was holding the hood of the Dark Archer and just then she realized what had happened, her eyes connecting to Cass she displayed all the pain she felt for her friend.

The man they had captured, was not Arthur King, the man they had captured was a mercenary, a pawn, a taunt from the Dark Archer. A confirmation of his hubris in thinking that they would never catch up, they would always trail behind, like puppets on strings.

But they had their own string to pull now, everyone answered to someone even, Arthur King, and something told Felicity that someone was Malcolm Merlyn.

Chapter End Notes

Posting schedule has changed to once a month. Thank you all!

End Notes

Please let me know what you think. This story is updated when ever possible since Grad school became a thing.
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Thank you all :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!