The Road Less Traveled

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Summary

When Oliver Queen returns from Lian Yu after five years he has only one plan in mind, to right his father's wrongs. Instead he finds himself trying to help a frightened teenage boy and struggling to stop something known as the Undertaking. Alternate Universe of Season One of Arrow.

Notes

This takes place roughly a year after Turn Left. It will be updated up to the point where it starts to reveal the ending of the aforementioned story (aside from the fact that Dick and Bruce survive the story). I hope you enjoy the ride.
"Make the choice again Donna Noble. And change your mind. Turn right." - The fortune teller from the Doctor Who episode "Turn Left"

"Oliver Queen is alive," a newscaster announced from the television screen, words slipping carefully through the hum that always accompanied the running of the ancient set. "The Starling City resident was found by fishermen in the North China Sea. Formerly presumed dead during the tragic sinking of the yacht, The Queen's Gambit, five years ago Queen is now being returned to his family. Before his presumed death, Queen was a regular tabloid presence and a fixture at the Starling City club scene. Shortly before his disappearance, he was acquitted of assault charges stemming from a highly drunker altercation with the paparazzi. Queen is the son of Starling City billionaire Robert Queen who was also on board but is now officially confirmed as deceased."

One of the men cleaning who had been cleaning an already immaculate gun for something to do with his hands, snorted at the television. "So another rich brat's gonna be around to help wreck the Glades," he drawled. "So what?" The man standing in the doorway, cigar hanging from his lip like he belonged in an old black and white gangster movie, turned a dark gaze on the speaker. The newscaster moved on to the weather without so much as changing his tone and a phone in another room rang.

"Answer it," the man with the cigar snapped. The man cleaning the gun scowled unhappily but obligingly set the gun aside and went to grab the phone before it decided to give up the ghost and stop ringing. From the shadows in a far corner, Roy Harper's eyes fixed on the man in the doorway. The fourteen year old hadn't always had a crappy life. A long time ago he'd had decent parents. Then Dad had been shot on duty, being a cop in Starling had never exactly been safe, and Mom had turned to drugs. That had led to his current predicament, kidnapped and forced to work off his probably dead mother's debt. Officially Roy Harper had been missing for thirteen months, going on fourteen now, and the cops had probably given up hope, if anyone had reported Roy missing at all.

It wasn't as if Roy had ever had many friends. Cynthia Lance, more commonly known as Sin, was the only one who regularly talked to Roy and even then their conversations were often stilted and awkward. The sad truth was that no one in the Glades wanted to willingly associate with a cop's kid. It hadn't helped that once Roy's father had died, bullies had decided to try their luck and Roy had beaten them up. That had earned him a reputation as the "kid most likely to get into fights" and any chance he'd had at being friends with anyone but a very determined Sin had gone up in smoke.

The man who'd answered the phone stomped back in, looking displeased, and the man with the cigar broke eye contact with Roy. "Job?"

"Yeah," the man who answered the phone replied. "Kidnapping gig. Her majesty's askin' us to kidnap Oliver Queen, find out if he knows anythin' 'bout the big plan she's got going."

The man with the cigar considered for a moment before saying, "Get some rest Adam. We'll grab the crew in the morning." Adam nodded, scooping up his gun and leaving the room without a backwards glance. Cigar Man then turned towards Roy. "That goes for you too." Then he stomped out of the room, workboots clomping on the cheap linoleum. Roy didn't move, couldn't force himself to even if he tried. His legs felt like lead. Kidnappings were the worst. Too often they ended in violent, blood deaths that haunted Roy's dreams. The last kidnapping had been a little girl who'd ended up beheaded and left in front of CNRI drenched in her own blood.
The man stomped back in, scowl darker than night and grabbed Roy's arm tight enough to turn just healing bruises purple and black again. "I said move brat," the man snarled, practically dragging Roy to his feet and towards the room that was his cell. The newscaster droned on about Malcolm Merlyn's latest contribution to the city as Roy was thrown into the room, the door slammed shut behind him. A moment later the newscaster's droll voice was cut off midsentence, leaving nothing but silence behind.

Miles away in Gotham City a dark haired man sat in front of the television watching the local news. A steaming mug of strong black coffee was cradled between hands that were surprisingly calloused considering the fact that the man was a billionaire. He took a sip, ignoring how it tried to scald his tongue, and reached for the remote, about the flip off the set and head to his self-proclaimed Night Job when the announcement that Oliver Queen had been found alive flashed on to the screen. Vicki Vale, a nosy reporter who often enough butted into Bruce's social life, gushed over Queen's surprise return. Bruce's considered the screen, hesitating. "You coming B?" The call came from a tiny dark haired boy with the biggest, most expressive blue eyes Bruce had ever seen.

Eleven year old Richard Grayson stood at the bottom of the staircase, those eyes fixed on the man who'd taken him in after his parents had been murdered right in front of him. The boy often joined in on Bruce's Night Job, the pair of them working together to make Gotham a safer place. "I'm coming," Bruce reassured the boy, flipping off the set and walking towards the study, the boy chatting cheerfully to him as he skipped along. The billionaire didn't realize that in several days he would be researching Oliver Queen's return and questioning how he didn't see the signs before.

The last thing Oliver had wanted to deal with on his first day home was a kidnapping. Still it was becoming common for life not to give him what he wanted. He and Tommy had driven through the Glades, Oliver scoping out his father's old abandoned factory as a possible lair from which he could plan to save this city. Then there'd been the visit to Laurel who was, understandably, furious with him. Still it had eased his conscious some to apologize to her for Sara. After Oliver's showdown with Laurel, Tommy had driven almost aimlessly, chatting the entire time as an attempt to ease the pain he obviously saw his friend was in. Oliver appreciated the attempt but he didn't appreciate what happened next.

It started with a teenager accidentally stumbling in front of Tommy's car. Wide eyes focused on the vehicle for a only a moment as the kid scrambled back and Tommy slammed on the breaks, swearing up a storm. Oliver had felt adrenalin rush through him but he'd also noticed had the kid's eyes shot towards the shadows. In the time it took the newly returned to civilization Queen to realize the whole thing was a set up, Tommy's door was already being pulled open. Oliver could only go along with everything in the hope that Tommy wouldn't get hurt.

That was how Oliver had ended up here, zip tied to a chair next to an unconscious Tommy Merlyn while one of the men with a black ski mask over his face came over to interrogate him. "Mr. Queen?" Oliver didn't so much as twitch. He knew how to play this game after the island. "Mr. Queen!" The question changed to a demand. "Did your father survive that accident?" Oliver turned his eyes past the man's shoulder, ignoring him even when he yanked out a taser. The teenager was standing in the shadows, two men flanking him like they were keeping the kid from running. The man tased Oliver. "Listen," came the snap. "I ask the questions and you answer them. That's how this works. Did he make it to the island? Did he tell you anything?"

Oliver turned his gaze away from the kid and towards the man who was already moving the taser. "Yes he did." The man startled a bit, as if surprised Oliver had given up without a fight, and then nodded.
"What did he tell you?"

"He told me I'm going to kill you."

The man tilted his head back and laughed. Out of the corner of his eye, Oliver saw the kid flinch at the laugh. Cold anger settled in the pit of his stomach, making him even more determined to get rid of these thugs. He'd done a lot of things he wasn't proud of while he was away from Starling City but none of them had involved terrorizing teenagers. "You're delusional," the man said. "You're zip cuffed to a chair." It was then that Oliver lifted his unbound hands, showing them to the laughing man.

"Not anymore," he said, voice ice.

It was over for the first couple men before they could even think of more than clumsily fight back. The third one was a little different. He grabbed the kid, using the boy as a shield with a knife pressed underneath the kid's chin. Oliver saw a trickle of blood drip down the kid's bared throat and had to fight not to move. He didn't want to do anything that would get the kid killed. "Put the knife down," Oliver ordered and the man holding the boy hostage laughed.

"You can't order me to do anything," the man sneered. From his position still attached to the chair, Tommy groaned and Oliver realized he was running out of time. Instead of showing anything he was really feeling, Oliver smirked.

"Oh really," he questioned, casually tucking a hand in his pocket. Pocket knives were exactly standard rich kid gifts but Robert Queen hadn't exactly been a man determined to live entirely up to stereotypes. The knife in question had been a gift for Oliver's sixteenth birthday, not that he'd carried it before the Island. Things had changed since then and Oliver had found the knife the night before, determined to have something to protect himself with, even if it only eased his paranoid mind. Now he was glad he had. The blade eased out as the man stared at Oliver in confusion. Then the Queen heir threw the knife.

The man screamed as the blade sunk into his hand, fingers twitching. The knife he'd been clutching toppled to the ground and the kid, in a surprisingly agile move, managed to squirm free. That was all the time Oliver needed to disorient the kidnapper and snap his neck. He turned to look for the kid then only to find the teen had bolted as soon as he'd gotten free. Tommy moaned again and Oliver cursed, knowing he was out of time. He grabbed the knife and cut Tommy's bonds, preparing himself to go back to playing the boy he'd been before the Island.
Chapter 2

"There is a time in every life when paths are chosen, character is forged. I could have chosen a different path. But I didn't." - Libba Bray from The Sweet Far Thing

Roy Harper was terrified. His heart was trying to pound his way out of his chest and he was trying to breathe through an iron band sealing his throat. He stumbled into the slimy back wall of an abandoned building, panting for breath and trembling all over as he tried to make sense of what he'd just seen. Oliver Queen, the playboy billionaire known for his arrogant behavior had just killed the men sent to kidnap him. Roy shuddered and his stomach rolled uncomfortably. He forced his shaking legs to keep moving, knowing from experience that no one in the back alleys of the Glades would look twice at him. They'd long ago learned that it was better to turn a blind eye to crime rather than to risk their lives and the lives of anyone close to them by interfering.

The fourteen year old stumbled his way through back alleys, running on pure animal instinct. He didn't even realize where he'd run to before he found himself standing in front of what appeared to be a broken down apartment complex. Sin's old place. Cynthia's father had been a major jerk and her mother had been away more often than she'd been home. When she'd been pissed off at one, or both, of them she'd come here. Roy had always followed her like a lost little puppy. Sin had never said anything about that fact. Instead she'd stare out the window while Roy sat on a musty smelling armchair she'd dragged up into the apartment.

Now he entered the apartment complex cautiously, uncertain of how stable the building might be after years of neglect. He made his way up the sagging staircase and shoved the swollen door open, revealing the room beyond. It was just as he remembered it, the saggy saffron armchair settled in the center of the empty room. The window Sin would always peer out of was shattered, letting cool air filter through it, and a thick layer of dust covered every available surface. Roy struggled with the door for a moment before forcing it closed and stumbled the last few steps before sinking into the armchair, dust rising around him in a cloud. He coughed for a moment before curling up in the chair, eyes drifting closed as he fell into a fitful slumber.

Oliver sat next to a dazed and confused Tommy Merlyn while Detective Quentin Lance interrogated them. "So that's your story," Lance was saying skeptically. "A guy in a green hood flew in and single-handedly took out three armed kidnappers." Skepticism dripped off every word. It was no secret that Quentin Lance hated Oliver. Oliver had been dating Laurel before he'd gotten on that yacht. He'd also cheated on Laurel with Sara. Sara had been on the yacht when it sank and Lance blamed Oliver for her death. Personally, the Queen heir didn't blame the man. "I mean, who is he?" Lance continued. "Why would he do that?"

"I don't know," Oliver replied as calmly as he could manage, mind focused on the kid who'd bolted from the warehouse. "Find him and you can ask." Lance's partner, Detective Hilton, smirked a little and Lance looked disgusted.

"Yeah." The man then turned to Tommy. "What about you? Did you see the hood guy."

"I saw..." Tommy hesitated for a moment, as if puzzling over what he may or may not have seen. "I don't know. Maybe I saw a blur but I was really out of it."

"Yeah," Quentin said again before turning back to Oliver. "It's kind of odd, isn't it? Only one day back and already people are gunning for you. Aren't you popular?" Oliver shrugged and reminded himself why attacking a police officer wouldn't be a good choice.
"Were you able to identify the men?" His mother's voice was welcome ice from behind where he was sitting. Oliver turned his head to see Moira Queen fix a disapproving glare on the two detectives, as if she held them personally responsible for her son being kidnapped.

"Scrubbed identities, untraceable weapons," Hilton said apologetically. "They were pros."

Yes, Oliver thought darkly. They were. He blocked out of the rest of the conversation, trying not to grind his teeth together when he heard Walter's voice. Oliver's objection to Walter Steele was not what Moira thought. Oliver didn't care that his mother had remarried. Robert was dead. What irritated him was that she'd hidden her marriage from him. Did she not trust him with the truth anymore? The thought hurt more than he cared to admit. Lance left in a storm of barely suppressed fury, Hilton following silently behind him. Oliver excused himself almost immediately afterwards, heading for his room. It was time to figure out who that kid was. And exactly who had kidnapped him.

Clark Kent of the Daily Planet almost choked on his morning coffee. The television announcer continued chattering on Oliver Queen's surprise return. "I guess that means the Queen name will be back on the front page of the Starling News," Lois commented as she walked by. Clark nodded absently but his mind was running a thousand miles a minute. Oliver Queen had been presumed dead for five years and found on a desolate island in the North China Sea. That kind of experience would change a man. Before returning to his work, Superman wondered if he'd find himself fighting against the Queen heir some time soon.

Roy jolted awake when the swollen door squeaked inward. His whole body tensed and he slid over the arm of the chair, placing the ancient object between himself and whoever was coming after him. He should have known the freedom was too good to be true. He'd never manage to get free of them. There was already too much blood on his hands. It wasn't the man with the cigar or one of his lackeys who entered the room though. Instead he caught a glimpse of Sin's short dark hair. The older girl's eyes widened at the sight of her old friend cowering behind the chair. "Roy?"

The breathless question escaped Sin almost of its own accord. The girl stumbled a couple startled steps forward and Roy found himself backing away towards the window even though this was a third floor apartment and he wasn't sure the fire escape would even be attached to the side. "It's okay," Sin soothed, holding out her bare palms towards her old friend.

"You shouldn't be here," Roy managed to get out in response. "It isn't safe."

"Roy, stop," Sin pressed. "Whatever you're into, I can handle it."

"No," Roy denied frantically but Sin wasn't listening. Instead she crossed the room in quick steps to grab Roy's arm. The fourteen year old winced at her harsh grip and Sin's eyes widened. She dropped his arm like it was on fire and Roy backed away from her, cradling his arm close.

"Just don't go anywhere," Sin begged. That was enough to get Roy to stop his retreat. Sin never begged. She had always been so sure of herself, so sure of what path to take, and she had demanded everyone to get in line with her plans. "Please," she added. Roy hesitantly nodded. Sin grinned at him and then rushed out of the apartment, shoving the swollen door shut behind her. Roy cautiously returned to the chair he'd been curled up in before, careful not to put too much pressure on any of the bruises. Against all odds, he managed to fall asleep.

He woke up panting and shaking, a little girl's screams in his ears. He lifted his trembling hands and for a moment all he could see was blood. His skin had been coated with blood by the time
he'd dragged her broken corpse outside and buried it. He gagged a little and stumbled to his feet, heading for the bathroom. There was no running water. Of course there was no running water. The people who ran utilities in the Glades weren't going to let a dime escape them. His hands shook and he scrubbed them on his shirt, teeth clenched so tightly together that they hurt. "There's no blood," he muttered. "It's gone, it's gone, it's gone." The words turned into a whimper and he pressed his (unclean) hands against his head, sucking in a deep breath. "Everything's going to be okay," he whispered but he couldn't bring himself to believe it.

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Oliver found himself sneaking out of the house like he was a teenager again. After two hours of fruitless searching for a boy he didn't even have a name for, he'd realized he would have better luck searching the Glades and asking about the kid than using the police database to search for someone who probably hadn't even been reported missing. Then there was the matter of Adam Hunt. Laurel had admitted to her goal of taking the man down but Oliver intended to act before she managed to get to court. Adam Hunt hadn't met a person he couldn't swindle or threaten into submission. He hadn't met Oliver. Still the Queen heir couldn't threaten Hunt as himself. That would put what was left of his family in danger. Instead Oliver would take on a different persona, one capable of saving the wreck Starling City had become.

Gear in tow, Oliver made his way to the old foundry that had belonged to his father. He managed to get over the fence with ease, breaking into the foundry without breaking a sweat. Setting up the computers took longer than he would have liked but three hours later he was set up and in process of tracking down Adam Hunt. Maybe he would be able to get something useful done after the disaster the day had turned out to be.
Chapter 3

"Fear. It's the oldest tool of power. If you're distracted by the fear of those around you, it keeps you from seeing the actions of those above." - Fox Mulder from The X-Files

Nothing in the Glades was nice. Maybe it had been nice once but Sin had never seen the area as anything short of trash. It seemed to break anyone who stuck around too long as well, teaching them to turn their eyes away from crimes. Children of the Glades learned that there were only three types of people; the bullies who later got involved in drug dealing or gang work, the invisible people who learned to turn away from trouble and pretend they saw nothing, and the dead ones that tried to play hero. It was that very kind of thinking that lead to situations like Roy's.

No one had cared when Roy Harper vanished. Sin had pounded on his mother's door after a month without seeing her friend because a month without human contact was a stretch, even for antisocial Roy. The woman had been dead on the floor, overdosed on the drugs she'd loved so much. Her stick thin body had been sprawled out on the floor, flies buzzing around it. Sin had fetched the cops who, out of respect for Mr. Harper, had searched for Roy. They hadn't found him. Sin had all but given up hope of finding her friend when she'd found him in their old haunt.

Roy's haunted eyes seemed seared in her mind. He'd looked at he'd expected her to attack him. Sin was sure that it was a sight that would haunt her nightmares for the rest of her life. Roy had been almost unnaturally thin. What little bulk he had was muscle, not an ounce of fat on him. He'd gotten taller since she'd last seen him but that height only served to show how very thin he'd gotten. Worry settled in her gut like a dozen dancing butterflies and she was so distracted by her thoughts that she was almost run over by the first police car that came soaring around a corner.

Startled, Sin yelped and jumped back towards the middle of the sidewalk, stumbling slightly as she fought to regain her balance. At last she found herself sitting in the middle of the sidewalk staring in the direction the vehicles had gone.

Adam Hunt had been simple to find and threaten. After five years away, Oliver was vastly different than he had been before and knew much about security. Hunt's security was little more than average and as the hooded vigilante, Oliver had made short work of it. He doubted Hunt would take him seriously, the vigilante had no reputation as of yet, but he had already planned for that end. Now all he had to do was wait. Finished with Hunt for the night, Oliver turned his attention towards trying to find the kid. He was slowly making his way through the missing persons database which was filled with teenagers from the Glades. As of yet he hadn't had any luck and with each page he made his way through, he became less and less confident that he would be able to place a name with the face he'd seen. That was when he got lucky.

Oliver almost dismissed the picture at first because it was a little over a year old. Then he saw those eyes, sparkling with a suppressed kind of humor then instead of wide with fear, and realized he'd found the kid. A simple click gave him more information than he'd hoped for. Roy Harper, age fourteen years and seven months, son of Roy Harper Sr., who'd been a cop, and Melinda Harper, who'd overdosed roughly a year ago on drugs and been found by a girl by the name of Cynthia Lance, no relation to Quentin Lance and his family. Apparently Cynthia was a friend of Roy's and also the one who then reported him missing. A more detailed research brought up nothing more but Oliver did care. He had his first lead, Cynthia Lance.

He set the computer searching for Cynthia's location and exited his new lair. He returned home via the window before the sun rose and undressed before slipping under the covers of his bed for a few hours of sleep. He woke to the sound of someone knocking politely on his door. "Can I come
"Yeah," he called back and Raisa pushed open the door, carrying a tray.

"Your mother sent me up with breakfast for you," the woman said with a soft smile. "She didn't want to disturb you at first but eventually decided that eleven o'clock was late enough for anyone to sleep in." Oliver smiled back at her as she placed the tray down on his bedside table.

"Thank you Raisa." She nodded at him and then turned and left the room. Oliver sat up and lifted the tray over to rest on his lap, picking almost absentmindedly at the food. His now wide awake mind was already plotting of ways to track down Cynthia Lance and find Roy Harper. He also needed to ensure that Adam Hunt had actually deposited the money the guy in the hood had demanded.

"Ollie!" Thea bellowed suddenly from downstairs. "Tommy's here to see you."

"I'll be down in a minute," Oliver yelled back, putting his plans for the day on hold. It was time to play the ordinary Oliver Queen and see what his best friend wanted.

Sin hurried down the uneven sidewalk, a brown paper bag clutched tightly in her hands. She stopped at the coffee house her mother's friend owned and grabbed breakfast before heading to check on Roy. Sin was worried that he'd left despite his promise to stay. With as jumpy as he'd been the evening before part of her was already ready to arrive and find the place empty. She glanced around nervously before quickly crossing the street and entering the dilapidated apartment building. She climbed the sagging stairs and forced open the swollen door in time to see Roy startled in the chair. "It's okay, it's okay," she rushed to reassure him. "It's only me." Roy relaxed minutely and Sin lifted the bag to show him. "I brought breakfast." She tossed the bag to him and he caught it, opening it up cautiously. After a moment he pulled out a bagel and tossed it back, inspecting the food thoroughly before taking a cautious bite.

The two ate in silence as the sun began to warm the small room. Roy sat on the floor in front of the chair and Sin settled across from him, wadding up a napkin and throwing it at his face. He arched and eyebrow at her but didn't comment, wiping his hands after he finished the food. "So what happened?" she questioned and then found herself regretting the question when he instantly tensed. "It's okay. You don't have to tell."

"Mom got into debt," he said after a long moment of silence. That was all he needed to say. For a moment Sin's hear froze inside her chest.

"Oh," she breathed out, reaching out a trembling hand towards her friend. "Oh Roy. I'm so sorry."

"It's not your fault," he told her, looking down at the floor. His hands began systematically shredding the napkin. Sin gently rested her hands on top of his.

"I should have looked for you sooner." His head lifted so green eyes could focus on her own brown ones.

"You looked," he told her, voice soft. "That's all that matters." Sin smiled sadly and slowly drew back her hands. Roy placed down the napkin, some of the tension fading away from his shoulders.

"What do you want me to do?" Sin asked her friend. Personally she wanted to go running to the police department but she had a feeling that Roy wouldn't be comfortable with that. He was
having a hard enough time staying in one spot with just her there. Adding more people to the equation at the moment was not the answer.

"I...I don't know," he told her, eyes darting nervously about the room.

"Okay. What do you need me to do?"

"Keep an eye out for danger," he told her, voice wavering slightly. "If you hear that anyone is looking for me I need you to come and warn me." Then he twitched a little, as if he'd thought of something that bothered him, and added, "And don't get involved."

"But-"

"Promise me," Roy begged, his expressive eyes anguished. "Please."

"Okay," Sin agreed, shaken by the fear she saw in every line of his posture. "I promise."

"Good," he breathed out and the sheer relief in his voice made Sin want to cry. Her phone chirped, startling them both. Roy almost scrambled out of the window while Sin jumped and scrambled for the offending object.

"It's okay, it's okay," she rushed to say. "It's just my phone. I set my alarm so I wouldn't be late for work." She stood, offering the paper bag so that he could dump the soiled napkin in it, removing a bottle of water first and shoving it over to him. "I've got to go. I'll come back tonight okay? After dark." Roy nodded and Sin turned on her heel. She couldn't stop herself from glancing back over her shoulder once before shutting the door, just to reassure herself that he was still there. Then she pulled the swollen door shut and headed for work.

There was a downside Oliver hadn't foreseen to his recent kidnapping. His mother had hired a bodyguard. John Diggle had served two tours in Afghanistan before becoming a bodyguard for people with money. The man was going to be following the Queen heir everywhere for his mother's peace of mind. Diggle was going to be a problem. Oliver had things to do, things that involved dressing up in a hood and righting his father's wrongs as well as tracking down Roy Harper. Diggle could hinder that progress. In the long term Oliver's goal was to convince his mother that he didn't need outside protection but tonight his goal was simpler. He needed to lose John Diggle during Tommy's 'Welcome Back From The Dead' bash tonight because Adam Hunt hadn't fulfilled his end of the deal. It was time to show those in Starling City who had maliciously wronged innocents exactly who they needed to fear.
"Whatever is about to follow, whatever this grand trick is, is really going to amaze. Look closely, because the closer you think you are, the less you'll actually see." - Thaddeus Bradley, Now You See Me

Adam Hunt had been taken care of, forty million dollars removed from his private account and passed out to the people he had wrong, but Oliver Queen's troubles were far from over. Ditching John Diggle had become problematic the night before, forcing him to knock the former soldier out before he could do his job, and he'd barely made it back to his own party on time. Worse yet, he had slipped up around Tommy and come off darker than he'd ever been before. The public, and Malcolm Merlyn, might believe that Thomas Merlyn was a partying idiot but Oliver knew better. His oldest friend knew how to read people in a way Oliver had never really understood. Even after the island, the Queen heir only understood the intent behind body language. Tommy seemed to be able to see into someone's very soul and had an uncanny habit of knowing exactly when someone was lying to him. That Oliver was messing up this early in the game was not promising.

The debacle with Hunt was not his only problem. Thea was angry at him. She had a right to be, Oliver understood this, but he couldn't figure out how to make it right. That did not bother him as much as the knowledge that his baby sister was using drugs, and probably had been for some time. He'd managed to pocket her stash the morning before but he knew that wouldn't be the end of it. He also knew that pushing on his part would likely drive her further away. It was a situation he couldn't win at and it created a sinking feeling in his gut. After a morning of quiet but ultimately fruitless contemplation on the subject he pushed it aside and turned his attention toward a problem he might be more likely to solve; tracking down Roy Harper.

The computer was most likely done with uncovering Cynthia Lance's home address. That meant all Oliver had to do was manage to ditch John Diggle and plan his next steps. Easier said than done. He started the day by going out with Tommy. He did pause at the living room to let his mother know he'd be out and then he, Tommy, and Diggle made their way into the bright morning sunshine. The drive into downtown Starling was taken in comfortable silence and for a while the pair simply wandered the streets, Tommy pointing out some of the minor changes that had happened while Oliver was gone. The Queen heir absorbed them in silence, especially the renovated courthouse where he was to be declared legally alive the next morning. The pair settled in a nice restaurant for lunch, from which Tommy left early when his father called, demanding to know something about a car. Oliver's friend rolled his eyes and mouthed an apology as he walked away, already arguing with the unmoving wall that was Malcolm Merlyn. It was then that Oliver put his plan to ditch Diggle.

The bathroom of this particular restaurant happened to have several windows large enough for someone to fit through. Oliver slid through one easily. He felt a little guilty as he made his way towards the foundry, but only a little. He had work to do. He arrived at the foundry with no trouble and woke the computer from its slumber, eyes settling on Cynthia's address. She lived in the Glades not far from his current position. He could go there tonight and see what he could discover about Harper. The list could wait.

Sin got off work an hour before sunset and swung by her home, changing into more comfortable clothes and making a couple sandwiches. Roy had to be hungry and with as jumpy as he'd been she doubted he'd gone outside. The streets in the Glades were mostly deserted at night but the young woman kept a wary eye out for any sign of danger. She didn't noticed the figure following
her from above as she crossed the street and scanned her surroundings before pushing open the door. The ancient stairs groaned beneath each step she took and the swollen door scraped across the floor. She was pleased to note that Roy had only tensed at her arrival instead of bolting.

"I brought food," she announced cheerfully as she lifted the bag into the air. Roy gave her a thin smile and she tossed the bag at him.

"How was work?" he asked as he peered curiously inside, removing one of the sandwiches and frowning at it.

"I know, I know," she said. "You hate peanut butter but Mom hasn't bothered to go to the store lately. And work was fine. Boring mostly." He nodded and exchanged the bag for a fresh water bottle. They ate silently as the sun dipped below the horizon, bathing them in darkness. "Word on the street is that there's a newcomer in town," she said at last. "He stole forty mil from Adam Hunt last night and its been all over the news this morning." Roy's eye brows arched towards his hairline and Sin grinned, glad that he apparently felt safe enough around her to show emotions other than worry and fear. "I know. Whoever this guy is, he's nuts. There's this rumor that he's going after the rich but he apparently saved Oliver Queen and Thomas Merlyn from a kidnapping so that can't be it. Personally I think the guy's an idiot, but what do I know?"

It was only after she'd finished speaking that she realized Roy had froze, the last bite of his sandwich held a few inches away from his mouth and his eyes darting nervously around the room. Sin listened carefully for any sign of danger but when she heard nothing she began to wonder what she'd said wrong. "Roy?" she asked cautiously and he flinched. "Roy, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," he told her quickly, shoving the rest of the sandwich into his mouth. For a moment Sin considered pressed the subject but she noticed how tense he had become and decided against it.

"There's nothing else exciting going on," she continued, watching him slowly relax into a less ready state. "Melinda dyed her hair purple but that has happened once a month since she turned twelve. Oh, and Judy has a new boyfriend. An David something or other. He won't last long." Sin paused a moment, considering who else she could mention from their school days who hadn't changed drastically. "Luke is on another religion kick. This time he's planning to become a Buddhist monk after graduation." Roy snorted at that and Sin grinned at him. Luke was probably the least committed person they had ever met. No matter what he tried, nothing ever stuck. He had tried around a dozen religions to date and still hadn't found one that "suited him."

"What about my mother?" Roy asked hesitantly and Sin knew her face fell.

"I'm sorry," she apologized immediately and Roy's expression turned worried. "I'm so very sorry. I didn't stop by for a month and by then she'd already been dead for a few days." Roy glanced down at the floor, fingers twisting his his faded shirt for a moment.

"Drug overdose?" he asked at last, glancing up, and Sin nodded. His face was turned grim by the inevitability of it all and Sin found herself wishing that their lives could be different. The darkness was beginning to make it difficult to see and the room was quickly becoming colder. Roy was shivering slightly and Sin struggled out of the large red hoodie she'd thrown on before she left the house, tossing it at him. He lifted it to throw it back and she scowled at him.

"Don't you dare. You need it more than I do. Besides, I need to start heading home before the rent get suspicious." She stood, stretched, and then hesitated a moment. "You'll be okay, right?"

"Yeah," Roy reassured her. "I'll be fine."

"Good." She smiled at him and then used both hands to force the door open. "I'll be back
tomorrow morning." The last thing she saw before she closed the door was Roy giving her a thin, tired smile. She closed her eyes, saving the sight of him in her mind before turning and heading for home.

The silence after Sin had left was almost deafening. Roy carefully pulled on her sweatshirt, ears listening for any sign of movement. Sin's presence had allowed him to relax, if for no other reason than because he knew those who'd taken him wouldn't want to make a scene when they dragged him back into captivity, but now he was alone and worried. The new knowledge trying to burn a hole through his brain didn't help. At first Sin's chatter about the new Starling City vigilante had meant nothing to him. He'd thought the man was fighting a losing battle, though he had to admit whoever was wearing the hood had guts. Then she'd mentioned that the vigilante had saved Oliver Queen from a kidnapping attempt. For a moment Roy had forgotten how to breathe.

Most people probably would have rolled their eyes at the news but Roy had been there. He'd seen what had happened to the men sent to kidnap Oliver Queen. The vigilante hadn't saved the Queen heir from being kidnapped; he'd saved himself. That could only mean one thing. The Starling City vigilante was Oliver Queen. That thought felt like a bucket of ice water dumped over his head. He shuddered and stood, pacing nervously. Part of his mind, the section that was set aside for pure survival instinct, screamed at him to run while he still could. He had no doubt that Queen knew he was still alive and the man was probably tracking him down. After all, having loose ends wandering around was never a good thing.

On the other hand, Sin would start looking for him. If he simply vanished with no explanation again she'd be worried sick. She might even go to the police and having officers searching for him would be like waving a red flag in front of a bull. Either his old captors or Queen would be able to find him easily and neither situation would end well. Roy was well and truly trapped for the moment, stuck between a rock and a hard place. His hands shook and his breathing was becoming harsh and nervous. He turned toward the window and cautiously approached, knowing that he needed to have an escape route available for when the inevitable happened.

To his surprise, the fire escape was still attached to the outside of the building. The surface had been rusted from winter rains and snows but it might hold long enough for someone to get to the ground. From there, Roy would have options. He might not make it far but he could at least have a chance to survive. It was the most he could ask for. It was more of a chance to choose his own fate than he'd had in a long time. It was that thought that allowed him to sink into the chair and drift off into a restless sleep.

Oliver had followed Cynthia Lance when she had exited her home, fully intending to interrogate her about the location of Roy Harper. He'd followed her all the way to an abandoned apartment building, curious about where she was going at this time of night. Was Cynthia involved in something less than legal? Maybe even in Harper's kidnapping? Reporting a childhood best friend missing when you knew who took him would be cold but children in the Glades grew up fast. It was possible that she had been involved in the boy's mysterious vanishing. Those suspicions had fled the instant he'd watched her interact with the person hiding inside of the abandoned building.

Roy Harper was skittish and wary but the entire time Cynthia was gentle, patient, and worried. She even passed him her sweatshirt before she left for the night. Only a minute after she had left, Harper began pacing. He was visibly anxious as he tried to wear a track across the floor. Maybe something in his short conversation with Cynthia had worried him or maybe he just didn't know how to live without fear. The Queen heir considered leaving since he now knew where Harper was but the idea of leaving a frightened child alone and possible in danger didn't sit right with him. He settled into a crouch, taking a moment to judge the distance before firing one of his special
arrows and using his bow to slide across the empty space into the building.
Chapter 5

"The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." - H.P. Lovecraft.

Roy had almost drifting into a peaceful sleep when something thumped on the floor. He flinched, flying out of the chair and placing it between himself and the intruder before he even realized he was moving. He found himself face to face with a man in a green hood, grease paint making it difficult to tell what color his eyes were in the shadows of the hood. Roy didn't have to see them to be able to guess who it was. He found himself scrambling backwards, chest heaving as he struggled to pull in full breaths and hands trembling. "I didn't tell anyone what happened, I promise." The words tumbled from Roy's lips as he accidentally backed himself into a corner. The figure reached up and pulled the hood back, revealing Oliver Queen underneath. Roy watched Queen carefully, eyes darting between the man and the open window as he debated making a break for it.

Queen took a step forward and Roy's muscles bunched as his mind settled on flight. Then he set the bow down. Roy froze, wide eyes fixed on the Queen heir. "It's okay," the man said, voice low and steady. "I'm not here to hurt you." Roy pressed further into the wall when Queen took another step and the man froze, hands held out in a placating gesture. "I'm here to help." A bark of hysterical laughter escaped Roy's throat at that. That's what the men said that had come to drag him away from home. When he'd answered the door they'd said he was here to help. Then they'd pressed the chloroform soaked rag over his mouth and nose. He had no reason to believe that this would be any different.

Queen shifted a little, as if planning on moving forward, and Roy bolted. He launched himself out the window and the fire escape screamed but Roy ignored the sound, scrambling to the steps. That movement was all it took for the entire structure to collapse. There was nothing to grab on to as it toppled to the ground. His feet hit the concrete hard followed by his knees as metal rained down all around him. One piece of the railing smacked hard across his shoulder blades and another one slammed against his head before he could bring up his arms to shield it from harm. Blackness swelled across his vision and he collapsed. He didn't feel the flash of pain as his body crumpled to the ground.

This wasn't how Oliver had hoped this conversation would turn out. He'd thought he would be able to convince the boy to come with him but instead he'd scared Harper half to death. The boy jumped out a window, Oliver shifting his weight obviously triggering Roy's fight or flight instincts, and the already unsteady fire escape had collapsed. Now Oliver made his way quickly down to street level, kneeling next to the boy and feeling for a pulse. After a moment it thrummed steadily under his fingertips. He let out a relieved breath and carefully slid his arms under Roy's knees and shoulders, lifting the boy up. He would have a limited amount of time to get the boy back to the foundry before he woke up and it wasn't going to be easy.

He ended up stealing a van. It looked like it hadn't been driven in several years and hotwiring it was ridiculously easy but it started immediately with a low rumble. Oliver pulled away from the building, only pausing to pull his hood back up over his head so any security camera he happened to drive by would simply catch a picture of a guy in a hood. He pulled around the back of the foundry, temporarily abandoning the still running van to take Harper downstairs before he returned to drop the van off just on the edge of a well lighted street. Chances were good that it would actually be found by the police before it had even been reported missing.
By the time Oliver made it back down the stairs of the foundry, the boy was already stirring, eyelids fluttering. The Queen heir quickly dumped his quiver and bow, pulling back his hood in the vain hope that it would put Roy at ease. A moment later the boy bolted upright, gasping for breath. His eyes darted about the basement of the foundry before settling warily on Oliver. The man considered his next movement for a moment only to notice the blood drying on the back of the boy's head. He didn't notice that he'd moved until Roy stiffened, muscles bunching and the line of his body insisting he was ready to bolt at a moment's notice. "It's okay," Oliver said, holding out his bare hands to show he was unarmed. "I'm not going to hurt you." The blatant distrust in the boy's eyes showed he wasn't convinced. "Your bleeding from where something hit your head when the fire escape collapsed. I just want to make sure that it isn't serious."

Roy lifted a hand cautiously to brush the back of his head and then winced slightly, drawing it away and staring for a moment at the blood smeared across his palm. He didn't respond to Oliver's explanation but he didn't bolt when the man approached. It was as much permission as Oliver was probably going to get. The head wound was little more than a scrape and the bleeding was already slowing. That was a good sign. Roy twitched when his hand brushed the boy's skin, carefully probing around the wound just to make sure. Oliver saw the flinch that followed and wondered exactly how much of the fire escape had fallen on the boy.

"It's just a scratch," he said, stepping back after a moment. "It'll bruise a little but the bleeding should stop soon." He hesitated and then added, "Did you get hit anywhere else?" Roy was still watching him warily and after a moment, seeming to realize that Oliver wasn't going to leave without an answer, he shrugged. The Queen heir didn't miss the wince that followed the movement. "Shoulders?" he questioned and didn't wait for a response he guessed wasn't coming, instead carefully shifting the sleeve of the sweatshirt and the ragged t-shirt underneath to reveal the beginnings of a bruise that probably stretched across both shoulder blades. It was already a dark purple and would probably cause pain for several days. He winced at the thought and Roy twitched a little, obviously catching the motion in his peripheral vision. "You've got some nasty bruising but nothing broken. Anywhere else? Maybe when you landed."

The boy studied him as Oliver backed off a little, as if trying to figure out the man's game plan. Oliver hadn't really considered this part of the rescue, though he probably should have expected it. Whatever had happened to the boy hadn't left him unscathed. It also hadn't given him much trust for strangers and Oliver definitely counted as one. And a very lethal stranger at that. At last Roy shifted a little, one hand tapping lightly against one of his knees. "Both?" That earned Oliver a careful nod, as if Roy was still getting a feel for him. "How bad?" Another painful shrug in response.

Rolling the jeans up so he could get a look was too easy, whatever clothes the boy was wearing were obviously too big for him, and the denim pulled back to reveal blood scrapes and growing bruises covering the surface of both knees. The landing when the fire escape hit the ground obviously hadn't been smooth. "These are going to need cleaned," he told to boy who nodded once at him. Oliver was beginning to become used to the non verbal responses so when he carefully pressed a pad doused in peroxide against one knee he was a little startled by the pained hiss that escaped the boy. He twitched a little and Roy flinched in response. Oliver carefully pulled the gauze away and moved on to the next knee, pretending nothing had happened. Roy was silent this time, his muscles stiff and ready to bolt if necessary. Oliver bandaged both and then backed off, searching around in his med kit only to discover he didn't have any painkillers. Definitely a stupid oversight on his part. He'd have to bring some in the morning.

"There's a cot set up over there," he said, motioning toward the far wall. "In case of long nights." Or injuries, he added silently before shaking his head a little to clear it and continue his earlier thread. "You might as well get some rest." Then he turned and nudged the computer mouse, smiling tightly when one of the security cameras he'd begun monitoring showed Marcus Redman
walking into a large building and heading for the roof. *Perfect.* Oliver grabbed his supplies and spared one last glance at Roy before heading out into the night.

Tucked safely away in her room for the night, her last sanctuary against the hell her life had become, Helena Bertinelli watched in horror as Nick Salvati killed her fiance for having information that would bring her father to justice. Information that was really Helena's. When Marco, who was now dead, had handed her the DVD insisting that what was on it would change her life forever she had never expected this. It was the ultimate betrayal of her trust. Especially considering the fact that her father had promised to avenge her fiance's death. That had been a cruel lie.

Fury washed over her in a comforting wave, covering up the overwhelming pain the knowledge that her father had ordered the love of her life murdered. *It's your fault. You're the one who gave him the laptop for safekeeping,* a small voice whispered in her head but she ignored it, popping the DVD out and considering shattering it. Her hand tightened on it only to relax a moment later. She slipped out of bed and tucked the DVD back into its case. Then she slipped it among her CD collection from her middle school years knowing that her father was not in her room often enough to notice the new object amongst the old ones. Then she sank underneath the covers to begin plotting her revenge.

Oliver took down Redman's guards with ease. This was nothing compared to the island. Redman himself was scrambling away babbling, "Whoa, whoa, easy! Wait, wait! No, please."

"Marcus Redman," Oliver growled. "You have failed this city."

"Please, don't!" Redman begged, holding his hands up in surrender. "Please, don't!" Oliver ignored him, dragging the man across the roof and breaking the cover on the air conditioning unit and leaning Redman's head towards it.

"Cell phone, inside pocket. Call your partner," Oliver ordered. "Tell him to give those pensioner's back his money. Do it now!"

"Okay," Redman agreed, voice weak and wavering. Oliver left him there on the rooftop and headed back for the foundry. It was only an hour until sunrise and he still had to change before he could return home and begin the days activities. And he couldn't be late because today was the day he was officially declared alive again.
Chapter 6

"I do not love the bright sword for its sharpness, nor the arrow for its swiftness, nor the warrior for his glory. I love only that which they defend." -Faramir from J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy

Roy woke up alone. It was the most relieving thing that had happened to him since Sin had accidentally told him the unwelcome news that Oliver Queen was the Starling City vigilante. It had taken him a long time to fall asleep, long enough to hear the Queen heir return and lock things up for the night. When sleep had finally overtaken him, he'd been haunted by nightmares. Dominating them were the two little girls whose bodies he had been forced to dispose of at two separate times during his first captivity. Now, after only a couple days of freedom he was right back where he had started. Or not. At this point he wasn't sure. What he did know was that during a panicky escape from what he had thought was a safe location, the fire escape of an ancient building had collapsed underneath his weight. After that, he'd woken up here.

At that point, Roy had been hurt, disoriented, and frightened. In contrast, Queen had been remarkably careful not to startled him, emotions locked away somewhere out of sight aside from a few winces as he'd looked over Roy's injuries. That there wasn't a logical reason for Oliver Queen's actions was worrisome. The only connection between the two of them was the kidnapping that had ended in death for several men. By all rights, he had been witness to that event, Roy knew he should be dead too. It was the logical decision. If Roy was still alive, there was a chance that he could tell others who had really killed those men. It would put Queen, and possibly his entire family, at risk. That brought up the question of why Roy was still alive.

Better yet, why had he been patched up? There were only two possible answers for that. The first was that Oliver Queen was telling the truth and Roy really was safe. The second was more frightening but, in his mind, more likely. It was possible that Queen wanted whatever information Roy could give him, and probably a lot that he couldn't. That made the chance of torture likely and it could be that the returned Queen simply wanted to make sure his victim wouldn't die before answers were given. The fourteen year old shivered at the thought, wrapping his arms around his chest for comfort despite the fact that the motion made his shoulders ache.

The need to run, to escape this place, was growing, and he slid off the cot, heading for the stairs. As far as he knew, the doorway at the top of the stairs was the only way in or out of this room. Most likely it was locked but it was worth checking. His footsteps echoed across the ceiling as he climbed. Then everything fell silent as he stopped at the top of the stairs. For a moment he stood there, listening for any signs of danger before turning the handle. Locked, just as he'd suspected. For a moment his shoulders slumped and defeat tried to overwhelm him but he shrugged it off. He'd suffered for too long not to lose his freedom again without searching every corner for an escape. He quickly scrambled down the stairs and began a thorough investigation of his surroundings.

Just as he had suspected, there was only one way in or out of the building. Defeated, Roy sank back down on the cot as his stomach gurgled unhappily. During his captivity, he had grown accustomed to only a single meal a day, just enough to keep him going for a little bit longer. Then when he'd escaped during the time when Queen had killed his kidnappers, Roy had gone an entire day without eating, not daring to go out and steal food. Then Sin had discovered him and brought with her first breakfast and then supper. Now, after his ordeal the night before, Roy's body was reminding him that he needed some form of nourishment. He ignored it and wrapped his arms around his aching stomach, curling up on the cot and closing his eyes. Maybe he could get some
more sleep before what was probably going to be his brutal interrogation and painful death.

It was more complicated to get back to Roy the next day than Oliver had anticipated. First there was the declaration of life in the courthouse that led to a string of flashbacks. Then, after that whole mess was finished, his mother decided today was the day he should visit the company. Shaken by the flashbacks he’d just experienced, Oliver waved it off. Now all he had to do was ditch Tommy and Diggle. It should have been easier said than done but the paparazzi assisted him. They were already swarming Martin Somers, another member of the list who was Laurel’s next target via Emily Nocenti, and they quickly transferred their attention to Oliver. While Tommy was caught in the crowd and Diggle was trying to get rid of persistent reporters, Oliver stole the car. Technically speaking, he didn’t actually steal the vehicle since his family owned it but he knew he wasn’t supposed to be driving away from his bodyguard.

He made two stops, one at a restaurant to grab lunch and one at a pharmacy for some painkillers, before dumping the car three streets away from the foundry, locking the keys inside, and jogging the rest the way to his secret lair. He carefully keyed in the correct code to open the door and stepped inside, purposefully making sure his footsteps would echo off the ceiling of the basement so the boy would hear him coming. Roy was perched on the edge of the cot, wide eyes monitoring the Queen heir's every move and body tense. "I brought lunch," Oliver announced, tossing one of the bags he was carrying at the boy. Roy caught it and settled it next to him, eyes still fixed on Oliver. He considered his next move for a moment, then settled in the computer chair, spun around with his own food resting in a bag in his lap, and started to see what he could dig up on Martin Somers.

After five minutes of silence he was rewarded by hearing the soft rustling of a bag. Roy had finally relaxed enough to look inside it then. Oliver finished his lunch, crumpled the wrappers up, and shoved the bag aside. Discovering Martin Somers's habits wasn't as difficult as he had expected. The man was so confident that his transgressions would never be taken to court that he didn't hide his meetings with the Chinese Triad. Furthermore, the security Oliver could uncover from the foundry was pitiful. That meant the Hood was free to terrify him as soon as the sun set.

Plans for the night set, Oliver turned his attention to the next thing on his agenda, Roy Harper. His actions the night before had evidently been poorly thought out and now he would have to work to build up trust. That was going to be difficult. The bag rustled again and Oliver fished around for the pharmacy bag he’d dumped on the floor when he’d settled in for his own lunch. After a moment he came up triumphant with a handful of plastic, removing the fresh bottle of peroxide, a new roll of gauze, and the bottle of painkillers he’d bought, settling them on the same table as the computer. The boy’s cuts and bruises needed to be checked on again and the painkillers would help ease the discomfort the bruises caused. With that in mind Oliver slowly turned the chair around. Instantly Roy's eyes were fixed back on him again, body going tight.

"How's the head?" the Queen heir questioned, keeping his tone light. Roy's eyes narrowed, as if he was trying to decide whether or not it was a trick question. "Is it bleeding anymore?" That earned him a hesitant shake of the head, the boy's eyes never leaving him. Oliver stood slowly and grabbed the supplies, making his way across the room. Roy tensed further the closer her got but didn't bolt and the man set the supplies down before heading to the battered mini fridge he'd shoved in the back and filled with water bottles. He needed to put a couple ice packs in the freezer part, if for no other reason than they would help with the bruising across the boy's shoulders and the back of his head. He settled the plastic bottle next to the container of painkillers for later and then motioned to Roy's knees. "Mind if I check on those?"

The boy hesitated a moment, shifting uncomfortably before shrugging. Oliver caught a brief flash of pain crossing the boy's face at the motion but chose to ignore it for now. Instead he rolled up
the pants legs and undid the gauze he put on them the night before. Some of the bruising there was fading already, from purple to a yellowish color around the edges, and none of the cuts looked infected. Oliver cleaned them both with peroxide just in case and bandaged them. As he worked, he was reminded of when Thea was little and coming to him with skinned knees and elbows. That finished, he stepped back for a moment, saying, "I need to check your head now." He waited for another tentative nod of acknowledgement before carefully tilting the boy's head down.

There was dried blood on the back of Roy's head and Oliver used a little of the water from the bottle to wet a bit of gauze and wash it away. Underneath that, the wound was healing well although the bruising was still ugly. The affected area would be tender for a few days yet but there should be no lasting damage. "That's healing well," he commented aloud, if for no other reason than to try and reassured the boy. "How's your shoulders?" That earned him another shrug. Oliver left it alone for the time being, handing over the water bottle and a couple of pills. "Those should help with the aches." He headed back to the computer, glancing once over his shoulder to watch the boy look over the pills before swallowing them dry and then taking a drink of the water.

After another silent hour his phone chimed with a message from his mother demanding to know whether or not he was safe. That was followed almost immediately by a call by Diggle. Oliver ignored it and began gathering supplies. He had a meeting with Martin Somers to keep. Dinner with family would just have to wait. Cool air brushed his face as he approached the docks, smoothly taking out Somers' men and then knocking out the man himself. After a moment's deliberation he hung the man upside down from a piece of equipment. When Somers came to, Oliver had an arrow aimed directly at him. "Martin Somers, you have failed this city!"
John Diggle was not someone who would normally be called a fool. After three tours in Afghanistan he had returned to the states and become a personal bodyguard for the rich and famous. Despite being in the same line of work that had gotten his brother Andy killed, most of Diggle's previous jobs had been day long bores. This one was different. On the surface Oliver Queen had looked like every other spoiled family heir he had ever worked around. Sure the guy had spent five years on an island but he seemed determined to pick back up where he'd left off five years previously. The former soldier had quickly learned Oliver was only keeping up appearances. There was a much different young man under the shallow surface, one that was adept at ditching his obviously unwanted bodyguard.

"I hired you to protect my son. Now I'm not a professional bodyguard, but it seems to me that the first requirement would be managing to stay next to the man you're hired to protect," Moira Queen said, pacing in front of him. Her fingers were playing nervously with the gleaming bracelets on her wrist, an obvious sign of how truly worried she was. Diggle understood that the worry was not unfounded. First her son, and her husband, had been thought dead and then, immediately after his miraculous return to Starling, Oliver had been kidnapped. Any mother would be worried. He reminded himself of that fact as he gathered his patience and pushed away his own irritation at Oliver's ability to disappear.

"With all due respect ma'am, I've never had a client who didn't want my protection," Diggle pointed out, trying to remind her that Oliver had protested vehemently against having a bodyguard in the first place.

"I hired you," was the Queen matriarch's reply. "That makes me the client." She frowned at him as if he were a recalcitrant child instead of a very capable former soldier. He stared back impassively and after a moment she resumed her restless pacing. "Now where do you think my son is going on these chaperone-less ventures."

"Ma'am, I truly do not know," was the only think Diggle could say in response.

"Then perhaps you'd like to share with me where you run off to," Moira pressed, her voice going sharp as the worry she had been feeling earlier transformed into irritation.

"I've been alone for five years," was the only response she received.

"Mom," Oliver pressed, gaze going meaningful. "Alone." Diggle watched as Oliver allowed his mother to fill in the blanks on her own, placing a cardboard cutout of the old Oliver Queen over top of the real one.

"I see," Moira said after a moment.

"I promise to introduce her if it ever gets to the point of exchanging first names-" Oliver began,
easy smile still in place but his mother quickly interrupted him.

"I would rather you take Mr. Diggle with you on your next rendezvous. It's not safe. You've already been abducted once and there is a maniac out there attacking the wealthy."

"That maniac saved my life once." Diggle's eyes narrowed a little bit as he considered the bit of defensiveness that had slipped into Oliver's tone when Moira mentioned the vigilante. That was interesting. Did Oliver Queen know whoever was running around as a modern day Robin Hood?

"This isn't a game." Moira Queen composed herself and stared her son directly in the eyes. "I lost you once and I am not going through that again."

Oliver was silent for a long moment, expression suddenly sad. "Okay," he said at last, voice soft. "Digg's my guy."

"Thank you," Moira replied, reaching out to place a hand on her son's shoulder before walking out of the room. While Oliver watched his mother leave, Diggle was already buttoning his coat. It had been a long day of searching for his client and he was more than ready to call it a night.

"Sorry to cause you so much grief," Oliver told him, tone almost genuine. Diggle studied him impassively.

"I served three tours in Afghanistan, Mr. Queen. You don't even come close to my definition of grief." The former soldier carefully walked around the couch and paused in front of Oliver, making sure the Queen heir was looking directly at him. "But I tell you what; if you ditch me one more time, no one will have to fire me." He walked calmly out of the room past Oliver's younger sister, Thea, and then out of the house. Driving over to Big Belly Burgers to talk out things to Carly sounded like a very good idea.

The start of Oliver's next day home went about as well as his return to home the night before. This was mostly because his mother insisted that he finally give in and stop by the Queen Consolidated main office. That was when she dropped a bombshell in his lap. Figuratively of course. She and Walter wanted him to take a leadership position in Queen Consolidated which would ruin any and all chances he had of being the vigilante and righting his father's wrongs. Worse yet, they wanted to announce it during a ceremony dedicating a new applied science building to his dead father. His mother had also decided she didn't want to take no for an answer. Diggle had helped some with his little speech about home being a battlefield but he still had no idea how to convince his mother this was a terrible idea.

Sitting in his bedroom, Oliver pushed that problem to the back of his mind for a time and began planning on how he would discretely ditch Diggle for an hour to go check on Roy. The boy's injuries should heal on their own but he needed food. And Oliver needed a better system for this. He also needed to figure out who exactly had kidnapped Roy Harper in the first place, why, and whether or not there were any left looking for him? The list of things that were probably going to increase his level of stress just kept growing and growing like some sort of weed. Oliver considered his options, pressed his hands to his forehead for a moment in the hope that it would ward off his impending headache, and climbed out his own window like a teenager breaking curfew. He had definitely had better days.

Sin was worried. This was the second day in a row that Roy wasn't in their hiding place and that meant something bad had happened. The first day she had thought he'd simply gone out, either in search of news or food, so she'd left the spare blanket she'd brought from her bedroom and the sandwich she'd made for him after fifteen minutes of waiting. Today though everything was
exactly where she'd left it, sitting on that ancient armchair collecting dust. Roy hadn't been back here. She worried her lower lip between her teeth and argued with herself over what to do.

Her first instinct was go to the police. She'd been friends with Roy for years and, through him, had gotten to know many of the good officers on the force. If she told one of them the full story they would definitely help her find him. Then a new thought hit her. What if Roy had been forced to run? If he'd had to find a new hiding spot and Sin set cops loose on this neighborhood then it might flush him out to whoever was hunting him. Sin wanted to help Roy, not get him killed. She found herself stuck between a rock and a hard place with only one answer left. Cynthia Lance was going to have to look for Roy alone. Shoving her hands in her pockets, Sin turned on her heel and walked out of the abandoned apartment building. She wouldn't go back there until she found her friend.
Roy was sitting on the edge of the cot trying not to pace. He felt like a bundle of nervous energy as his mind struggled to figure out what exactly was going on. The answer to that question several days ago had been simple. He'd escaped from captivity by luck alone and found himself running for his life because he'd witnessed something he shouldn't have. He had watched, stunned, as notorious playboy Oliver Queen had killed two of his attackers but had bolted before the man had eliminated the third, knowing that he was next. He'd managed to stay in hiding for roughly two days before Queen had come in through the window. That had resulted in panic and a rusty fire escape collapsing beneath him. He'd woken up in his current location, sure that he was going to die a horribly painful death. It hadn't happened.

The very fact that he was still alive to heal from the collapse of the fire escape had Roy's stomach twisted up in knots. He didn't understand it. He was a loose end to be cut off and found floating in the water at the docks several days later. Instead he was still living, breathing, and frantically trying to get a read on the situation. He was also worried about Sin. Chances were that she had figured out something had happened to him by now, she was too smart not to, which meant she had probably gone for help. Roy was alive at the moment but if Sin had gone to the police it was only a matter of time before he turned up dead. Probably somewhere public.

What remained of Roy's old captors were undoubtedly searching for him. If the police were involved then they could use their contacts in the department to hunt him down officially. Then one of them, or several, would find him "dead" after several days of searching. Worse yet, Sin would show up dead days later, either from a "suicide" or "drug overdose" or just a convenient warning to those outside the organization they did business with. At least with Queen, Roy could be fairly certain Sin would survive the ordeal. After all, she didn't know the Starling City vigilante's secret identity.

To nervous to remain seated any longer, Roy slid off the cot and began to investigate his surroundings. A day or so earlier, time was hard to judge without having windows to track the daylight, he had made a cursory investigation of the place, mostly searching for exits. Otherwise he had mostly remained put aside from occasionally visiting the dimly lit bathroom shoved in the back like an afterthought. Now he carefully wound his way through the few tables the Queen heir had set up, eyes skimming across the objects placed there.

The weaponry was impressive. The arrowheads looked sharp enough to cut skin on contact and, although he didn't know much about archery, Roy had no doubt that every single arrow could be fired with deadly precision at its intended target. Sin had suggested that the targets were the rich based on the vigilante's attack on Adam Hunt but Roy wasn't certain that was accurate. Someone, possibly Queen himself, had attributed the rescue of Tommy Merlyn and Oliver Queen to the vigilante which seemed ridiculous if the man's targets were Starling City's wealthy. Queen would have to target himself if that were the case. It just didn't add up. That brought up the worrisome question of what exactly Oliver Queen was after.

It was obvious to Roy that five years away had changed the man. He'd gone from the "often in newspapers for the latest scandal" to some guy who ran around in a hood terrorizing people like Adam Hunt. Furthermore, Roy had seen exactly how methodical the man was about researching. He sometimes spent hours in first in front of a computer and then marking down things on a series of maps before he even went out for the night. Queen obviously had a goal in mind but Roy
wasn't sure what exactly it was. The fourteen year old buried his hands deeper into the pocket of Sin's sweatshirt and stood for a moment in the center of the set up, eyes fixed on the computer. He knew the Queen heir had been working on something the past couple days. Maybe he could figure out exactly what the man's goal was.

All it took was a shift of the mouse and the computer came to life, revealing a picture of Martin Somers. Roy's eyes narrowed as he scanned some of the articles Queen had pulled up about the other man. Word in the Glades whispered the Somers worked with the Chinese Triad to get drugs into Starling City but no one had ever tried to prosecute him. According to one article, Somers was being accused of the murder of Victor Nocenti, one of his dock workers. Still none of it explained what Oliver wanted from Somers.

The door at the top of the stairs opened and Roy jumped back like a guilty child with his hand caught in a cookie jar. His eyes snapped up and fixed on Oliver Queen's still form. The man looked just as surprised by Roy being up and about as the boy was by his sudden appearance. Then his eyes fell on the lighted computer screen. Roy braced himself for some kind of irritated explosion. Instead the man met his eyes levelly and said, "Nasty piece of work, isn't he?" Roy was startled enough that he shrugged automatically before the twinge of pain it caused reminded him that he needed to be careful. Queen hadn't killed him yet but Roy didn't exactly want to rock the boat. "Know anything about him besides what was on the screen?" Roy quickly shook his head. Whatever was going on, he knew it wasn't safe to get in the middle of it. Queen studied him, blue eyes pinning the boy where he stood, then nodded once. "Okay. I brought lunch. Or supper or whatever." He tossed the bag at Roy who caught it and silently backed away, bumping into the corner of only one table before settled on the cot again. Something was wrong.

The fourteen year old couldn't quite explain what but something was different about Oliver Queen. He set the bag aside and focused his eyes on the man who was currently checking his arrows. There was a restless energy about Queen, a kind of tension that hadn't been there before, and it made Roy nervous. Something had happened outside that had wound the man almost to the breaking point and Roy didn't want to be the one to set him off. He had no doubt that the resulting explosion would be anything but nice. His suspicions were confirmed when Queen didn't stick around. The man paced around the tables for a couple minutes before leaving without another word, the door shutting firmly behind him. It was only when he was sure that Queen was gone, that Roy relaxed enough to eat.

All it took for Oliver's day to be ruined was him turning on the news the next morning. "Attorney for shipping magnate Martin Somers has confirmed his client has no intention of testifying, maintaining his innocence in the wrongful death of Victor Nocenti," a cheerful newscaster announced as Oliver dressed for the day. "Nocenti's body was found four weeks ago. We will keep you updated as more information becomes available." Oliver found himself glaring at the television, hands on the buttons of his shirt. That was how Thea found him, on her way down the stairs for breakfast.

"Gee, what'd the TV ever do to you?" she asked and Oliver's muscles tensed as he whirled around to face her. Her eyes went wide as she stared at him, a little gasp escaping her. For a moment Oliver didn't understand what she was staring at. Then he remembered the scars. "How did you get these?" His little sister stepped forward, reaching out a hand towards one on his chest and then froze, fingers inches from his skin.

"Don't you knock?" he demanded instead of answering her, rushing to cover up the scars and turning his back on her. The last thing he wanted to do was tell Thea exactly what had happened while he was missing for five years, even if she was seventeen.

"No," Thea snapped back, circling around to get another look. "Wait, please. Mom said there
"No," Thea snapped back, circling around to get another look. "Wait, please. Mom said there were scars but-" Thea trailed off, her green eyes wide and worried. She gently pulled the sides of his shirt out of his hands, fingers hesitantly tracing the scars. "Oliver, what happened to you out there?"

"I don't want to talk about it." Oliver snatched his shirt out of her hands and started buttoning it up.

"Of course you don't," Thea retorted, sounding hurt. "You never want to talk to me about anything but my social life." That was, Oliver reflected, actually true. He'd been very close to his sister and now, in an effort to keep her safe he had ended up doing nothing but criticizing her.

"Wait," he called after her. Thea paused, hand on her hip, but didn't come back. "You're right," he told her. "I'm sorry. I need to get better about talking about what happened to me there but-" He paused, taking in a deep breath as memories tried to push up to the surface. "I'm not ready yet." Thea glanced back then, her expression softer and sadder.

"Okay," she said. "Just, I miss my big brother."

"I'm sorry Thea," he told her but she was already gone. Oliver sighed and finished dressing, knowing she was right. He was shutting her, and his mother, out by trying to protect them. It was ruining his family relationships and he didn't know how to fix them without putting his secret identity at risk. It was what seemed like an impossible dilemma and one that he didn't currently have time to deal with. He needed to go check on Roy and figure out what to do about Martin Somers.

Dinah Laurel Lance worked a high stress job. She knew that and yet it felt like in recent days the stress had increased tenfold. Not only was the current case she was working on dangerous enough for her father to insist on police protection for her, Tommy Merlyn was trying to court her, and Oliver Queen was alive. Now, slumped on her sofa in her cozy little apartment, she was at the breaking point. When Oliver had vanished five years ago, the sea swallowing up both he and her little sister Sara who he was cheating on her with, Laurel had been a wreck. Stirring the contents of her TV dinner around in the little compartments, she remembered how she and Tommy had clung together like the sole survivors of a terrible crash. Their closeness had led to sex, something she still wasn't sure whether or not she regretted, and now with her former love back it was, simply put, awkward. It didn't help that Tommy was avidly pursuing some sort of relationship with her.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a knock on her door. Setting the plastic tray down, she stood and made her way cautiously to the door. She was stunned to see Oliver Queen himself standing outside. During the party Tommy had thrown for him, Laurel had tried to reach out to her former boyfriend and he had responded by coldly telling her to stay away from him and walking off. She had expected that to bed the end of it but apparently she had thought wrong. "How am I supposed to stay away from you if you won't stay away from me?" she demanded when she opened the door and Oliver shuffled his feet sheepishly, a plastic bag in hand.

"Yeah, sorry," he said, looking at her with earnest blue eyes. "I was a jerk then. Before the island I was one and now?" He shrugged. "I'm a damaged jerk." Laurel wanted to hit him. It was so much easier not to think about rekindling their old relationship when she was mad at him for something. "Are you okay?" he added before she could fully push the irritation down. "I saw the cop cars outside." That brought up a new flicker of irritation, this time at her father. She knew he was only trying to protect her but she had been taught to defend herself. She shouldn't need a couple of babysitters sitting outside her building.

"I'm fine," she told him with a dismissive wave of her hand. "What do you want Ollie?" Her voice
turned sharp when it reached his old nickname, a little jab at him over their former closeness. He didn't flinch.

"I know I have no right to ask anything of you, but I need your advice," was his earnest reply. "Besides, I brought ice cream." He held up the bag and Laurel rolled her eyes.

"All right, come in." She ushered him into the apartment and watched him look around with fond eyes. His smile, when he turned to look at her, was bittersweet. "So what did you want to ask me?" Laurel asked him, leading the way into the kitchen for bowls and spoons. He didn't answer until they'd divided up the ice cream and were standing on opposite sides of the counter.

"My mother wants me to join the company," he told her as she took a bite. She gave him a skeptical look as if saying "You?" and he nodded in agreement. "Yeah. Take my rightful place or something like that."

"I can't exactly picture you as master of the universe," Laurel told him with a slightly smirk and he smiled at her.

"I know. And after five years I have plans of my own. Things I can't do while I'm stuck in board meetings and offices all day."

"You are an adult," she pointed out in response. "You can say no."

"I did. Didn't take." His expression was rueful, clearly telling Laurel that the conversation hadn't gone well.

She considered that for a moment before saying, "Then don't tell her, show her. Be the person you want her to see you as. Trust me, I have plenty of experience with disapproving parents."

"I have been on the receiving end of your father's disapproval."

Laurel knew that Oliver meant it as a joke but suddenly she found herself thinking of how harsh her father had been to him lately. "He blames himself more than he blames you," she said. "He thinks that maybe if he and Sara were closer she would have told him about the boat trip and he could have stopped her from going with you."

"I am sorry." Oliver's words were heavy, weighted down by a sense of guilt the enormity of which she couldn't quite grasp.

"You've apologized already," Laurel told him and then froze, spoon held halfway to her mouth, when his blue eyes locked on her.

"And it will never be enough."
Chapter 9

"You don't just give up. You don't just let things happen. You make a stand! You say no! You have the guts to do what's right, even when everyone else just runs away." -Rose Tyler in the Doctor Who episode The Parting of Ways

Oliver was slowly beginning to relax in Laurel's presence when he heard the soft scuffle of a footstep on the fire escape. Instantly his muscles went tense and he rose, reaching out to grab Laurel's arm. "Did you hear that?"

"What?" she questioned, looking concerned.

Oliver reached his free hand over to grab the butter knife he'd used to pry open the carton of ice cream earlier and whisper, "There's someone on the fire escape." Another footstep. "Come on." He slid his hand down to grab Laurel's and pulled her to her feet.

"What?" she asked again, still worried, but Oliver ignored her and pulled her towards the door. He would explain everything he could after they survived this. They had just entered Laurel's entryway when an Asian man with an Uzi burst through the door. Oliver pulled his friend down to avoid the spray of bullets and another figure crashed through the window, accompanied by a wave of glass. That was when an Asian woman with white hair entered the room. It took a moment for Oliver to recognize he as China White, a formidable leader of the local branch of the Chinese Triad. At the same time, Diggle burst into the room through the already shattered front door, taking down the first and second shooters.

Momentarily distracted, China White vaulted over Laurel's sofa to attack the former solider. Diggle's gun went flying but so did one of the woman's knives and the two grappled on the floor, Oliver's bodyguard struggling to gain the upper hand. China White loomed over him, knife ready to end his life. That was when Oliver rose and threw the butter knife. China White's knife went spinning out of her hand to embed itself in one of Laurel's formerly pristine wall. The Asian woman's eyes went wide for a moment before the thundering of approaching footsteps sent her racing out of the apartment.

"Are you hurt Mr. Queen?" Diggle demanded.

"No, No," Oliver rushed to reassure the man as Laurel clung to him, trembling. "I'm fine."

"This is why it's a good idea to have a bodyguard," was the other man's reply as he began to clear the rest of the apartment. A minute later Quentin Lance and several other officers arrived. As Laurel flung herself into her father's arms, the officers spread out to check the apartment, a couple of them peering out the window in the hopes of catching a glimpse of China White. They wouldn't get one. Oliver breathed out slowly but the tension did not leave his muscles. The attack on Laurel might be over but his night was only beginning.

Oliver Queen stormed down the stairs as if the armies of Hell were following on his heels. Roy, who had been dozing with his head against the wall, snapped upright. His eyes were wide and his muscles tense as he tracked the man's movements. He didn't dare move, not wanting to attract Queen's attention. Whatever had just happened had the Queen heir wound tighter than he had been before and Roy was afraid that any wrong move would cause him to snap. Moments later the man was gone, bow and arrows with him. Roy shivered, the dark look on Queen's face seared into his mind. Someone was about to be terrified out of their minds.
A sudden thought struck Roy and his stomach rolled. What if Queen couldn't find who he was looking for? What if he came back in a worse state than he had just been in? Who was going to take the fall then? Roy shivered and wrapped his arms around his knees, eyes squeezing closed. It had happened before, nothing permanent but it wasn't the kind of thing someone just forgot. He shuddered again, a sick feeling coiling in his stomach. He sat on the cot and shook, eyes fixed on the door was he waited for Oliver Queen to return.

Oliver Queen had ditched him again. John Diggle felt frustration rush over him as he pounded his hand against the hood of the car. After almost being killed while visiting Laurel Lance, his client had chosen to ditch him and run off on his own. What was Queen thinking? A sudden thought struck the former vigilante, making him freeze on the way to the driver's seat of the car. Did Oliver know the vigilante? That would certainly explain his behavior. Maybe Oliver Queen hadn't been alone on the island as he led everyone to believe. Maybe there had been someone else with him, someone who had come back to Starling City. If that was true, then it was likely that Oliver was assisting the vigilante somehow. The possibilities were churning about in the man's mind as he slipped into the car. To find answers, he was going to have to find Oliver Queen.

Diggle found himself driving towards the Queen family manor before realizing that was the last place Oliver would go. He had saved Diggle's life with a butter knife of all things and there had been a silent fury burning in his eyes at the carnage before him. That meant Oliver had either gone to the Hood or decided to go after the Triad and Martin Somer's directly. Diggle turned the care away and headed towards the docks.

Two police cars flying by him on the way there confirmed his suspicions. The former soldier pulled over long enough to let them by and continued on. The sounds of sirens and chaos stopped him just outside the docks, something had obvious gone down that had attracted a lot of attention. Diggle stepped out of the car and walked forward a few paces, squinting against the flashing lights several yards away. From his position in front of the car he could see at least one dead body. There were probably more. Oliver had been majorly ticked off and if he and the Hood were close friends... That was when the Hood himself came stumbling out of the alley. His shoulder was bleeding.

"Diggle," the other man breathed and the former soldier froze. The Hood reached up and pulled by his signature piece, revealing the rapidly paling face of Oliver Queen. For a moment Diggle was stunned, struggling to understand what was before him. Oliver Queen was the Hood? A moment later everything began to fall together. Oliver wasn't ditching him because he was talking to the Hood. Oliver was ditching him to go terrorize the corrupt rich in Starling City. Diggle wasn't sure he approved but he wasn't going to just let Oliver die.

"You need a hospital man," he said, rushing forward to help support the Queen heir.

"No," Oliver replied, voice harsh. "No hospital. Lance shot me. They'll know-"

Diggle swore under his breath and then demanded, "Where?"

"My father's old iron foundry, in the Glades. The basement."

"Okay, okay," Diggle agreed, helping his wounded client into the back of the car and then scrambling into the driver's seat. Oliver Queen was not going to die. Not on his watch.
Chapter 10

"For every dark night, there's a bright day after that, so no matter how hard it gets keep your head up, stick your chest out, and handle it." - Unknown

Oliver stayed conscious long enough to give Diggle instructions of how to get down into the basement of the foundry. Then the younger man passed out as they crossed the threshold. Diggle shoved the door shut with his foot and then bit down a groan at the sight of the stairs. He heaved Oliver down them and cleared a mostly empty table with one arm, hefting the man up on it. Blood continued to dribble down Oliver Queen's shoulder, increasing Diggle's worry as he scanned his surroundings for medical equipment. Then he froze.

A boy who was maybe in his early teens and skinny enough to be unhealthy was sitting tensed on the edge of what looked like a medical cot, wide green eyes focused on Diggle. For a moment all the former military man could do was stare in silent shock. What was Oliver doing keeping a kid in the basement of an abandoned building? Then Oliver groaned and Diggle shook off the question. He could worry about that later when his client wasn't bleeding out. "Hey kid," he called and the boy flinched sharply, eyes going even wider. Diggle's stomach twisted uncomfortably at that but he pressed on. "Do you know where he keeps the med kit around here?"

The former soldier expected the kid to either shake his head, bolt, or maybe point. Instead the boy slid off the cot and made his way across the floor, footsteps completely silent. He dug around somewhere Diggle couldn't quite see and a moment later emerged with a heavy looking metal box. The boy shoved it across the floor towards Diggle and then made his way cautiously along the wall to settled on the cot again, eyes never leaving the man. Diggle snatched up the box and flipped open the latch, quickly removing what he'd need. It was time to patch up Oliver Queen.

The bullet came out first, blood staining over Diggle's hands. Bandaging up the wound was simple after that, something Diggle had done more than once while in Afghanistan. He didn't think Oliver had lost enough blood for him to be in danger, the man had done a good job staunching the flow after he'd initially be wounded, but Diggle was going to stick around to make sure he survived. Furthermore he was curious about the clearly traumatized child Oliver was keeping hidden in his super secret base. But first thing was first, he needed to clean the blood off his hands. Diggle glanced around in hopes of finding a sink but saw nothing. That left either trying to wipe the blood off on his pants or ask the kid. He hesitated a moment, considering his options.

The boy had answered his question earlier but Oliver Queen had been bleeding out at that point. It had been a matter of life or death and the boy had still been skittish. Now the former soldier wondered if the kid would bolt if he brought up another question. There was only one way to find out. "You don't happen to know if there's a sink around here?" The kid startled, almost shooting off the bed at the question. His muscles were tight and he looked ready to run at the slightest sign of danger. Diggle decided then that he probably wasn't going to get an answer. Any kid that jumpy wasn't going to answer questions from random strangers he had no reason to trust. Then the kid pointed. "Thanks," Diggle said and headed for the door the kid had motioned at, opening to and flipping on the light. He'd have to clean the door handle and light switch but first he needed to clean his hands.

Minutes later, blood washed away so that the only physical traces of Oliver's injuries being the bloodstains on their clothing. He stepped out into the main room only to pause when his eyes fell on the kid. The boy had his eyes fixed on Oliver's still form as if waiting for something. Diggle
Oliver twitched and groaned then, catching the formal soldier's attention. The man was waking slowly and Diggle quickly crossed the room to stand next to the table. He startled a little when the other man jolted upright, eyes suddenly widening and searching the room for any sign of danger. "Hey man, it's okay," the former soldier told his client. "We're in your secret lair or whatever you want to call it." For a moment Oliver stared at him, uncomprehending. Then his expression cleared.

"What time is it?" Oliver demanded, emotions gone from his face.

Diggle fumbled for his phone, not expecting the question, and pulled it out of his pocket. "Just after five in the morning," he said after a moment. Oliver's expression darkened slightly and then returned to being impassive.

"I need to get back home before someone notices I'm missing," the other man said, climbing off the table and then frowning at the mess on the floor. "And I need to hide the bloodstained clothing otherwise I'll be given away." He hesitated a moment and glanced at the boy before grabbing Diggle's arm. "Come on." Diggle didn't protest, knowing he would have to go along with Oliver's plan if he wanted answers.

The pair of them climbed the stairs and exited the foundry silently. It was only when they approached the car that Diggle said, "Okay man, you have to explain to me why you have a kid locked up down there."

Thea lay in bed staring at the ceiling. She was exhausted but she couldn't sleep. Instead she was thinking about her conversation with her brother earlier. While he was gone, when she and Mom had thought he was dead, she'd missed him like a person missed an amputated limb. Now that he was back home safe and sound she spent her entire time wishing he was gone. She had told Oliver that she missed her brother but, in all honesty, she didn't miss the new Oliver. Instead she missed the old Oliver who hadn't cared much about what was going on in her life, not the one who lifted her drugs and tried to stop her from partying. How could she expect Oliver to be honest with her if she couldn't be honest with him?

The younger Queen child rolled over on her side and stared at the curtain drawn over the window, imaging the stars that were probably twinkling outside. She remembered stargazing with Ollie when they had both been very young. Their father had spread out a blanket on the lawn during the summer and pointed out constellations to them. Those memories were bittersweet, pulling a sad smile on to her face. A rap on her door frame startled her and she rolled over to see Oliver standing there awkwardly. "Hey Speedy," he said, a half smile on his face. "Can't sleep?" Thea nodded. "Me either." He hesitated a moment and then added, "Can I, uh, come in?"

"Yeah," Thea said, yawning widely. Her brother settled down on the edge of his bed and sat there, shoulders hunched a little. "I'm sorry about what I said earlier."

"No, you were right," he told her. "I've been distant and I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too, for being so nasty," Thea told him. "Love you."
"Love you too Speedy." He kissed her on the forehead before leaving the room. Thea closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep with a soft smile on her face.
Chapter 11

"Nothing makes us so lonely as our secrets." - Paul Tournier

Sin felt as if her shoes were made out of lead as she trudged her way to work. It was the beginning of the fourth day since she'd last seen Roy but she'd had no luck finding him. It was as if the window had simply blown him away without leaving a trace behind, just the empty space he'd left behind. The only thing worse than not being able to find Roy was the knowledge that she couldn't tell anyone she knew he was alive. To do so was to risk Roy's original captors finding him and killing everyone involved in the search. Her friend would drown in guilt if searching for him caused the deaths of others and the last thing Sin wanted to was allow more misplaced feelings of guilt to rest on his shoulders. Instead she searched alone in as much of her free time as she could manage and felt more and more discouraged. She was beginning to lose hope of ever finding him again.

The young woman pushed open the back door of the thrift store she worked out and stepped inside the break room, hanging her coat on an empty hook. She was dressed in the required uniform, a cream colored polo with Cynthia stitched on it in black thread and a pair of khaki pants, her short dark hair pushed away from her eyes with a couple bobby pins. She had to work for three hours this afternoon before she could go back to her searching. "How are ya Sin?" Candy, one of the other Glades girls that worked at Mary-Ellen's Thrift Store, asked.

"Eh," Sin replied with a listless shrug. Candy stopped twirling a strand of her straight brown hair, with pink streaks through it this week, and studied Sin with worried hazel eyes.

"Have you been sleepin' at all?" That earned the other girl another shrug. "Look Cynthia, you can't work lookin' like that. You'll collapse halfway through. You go home and get some shut eye. I'll cover your shift."

"But I need the money," Sin protested, not bothering to fight as the other girl shoved her coat into her arms.

"Then you can work my five hour shift this weekend," was Candy's reply. "Now shoo. You're no good to anyone lookin' like that. You'll collapse halfway through. You go home and get some shut eye. Maybe tomorrow morning everything would look a little bit brighter. Not overly hopeful, Sin trudged back towards her home, feet still feeling as if they were covered in lead.

Diggle practically ambushed Oliver the moment they stepped outside the mansion. To be honest, the Queen heir had expected this to happen a lot sooner, especially considering the fact that he had waved off the other man's questions last night in favor of returning home to get some rest. He'd slept fitfully, even after talking to Thea, and nightmares of blood and pain still tried to haunt his waking mind. He couldn't quite remember what he'd dreamed about when he'd finally drifted off to sleep but his subconscious was pretty good at supplying answers he didn't need. "You have some explaining to do," Diggle told him, the expression on his face insisting that he wasn't going to leave until he got some answers.

"I know," Oliver replied, glancing down at his watch. It was just after nine in the morning, the sun peeking through increasing amounts of clouds, and he needed to get to the foundry. He also needed a better system of getting food to Roy but he hadn't been able to come up with one yet.
Maybe he could convince Diggle to help once this whole ordeal had been properly explained.
"Can it wait a few more minutes?"

"You ditch me and I'll tell your mother how you really spend your nights," Diggle threatened in response, opening the door of the car for him. Oliver just smiled. The drive to the foundry was short without all the twists and turns Oliver usually took to make sure his bodyguard wasn't following him. Even with the stop at a local bakery to pick up breakfast, Oliver found himself walking down the stairs into the dimly lit foundry in half the time he normally would have.

With Diggle right behind him, the pair had made enough noise that Roy was sitting on the edge of the cot, muscles tensed and ready for flight. Oliver yanked a bagel out of the paper bag along with a napkin and then tossed the bag to Roy. The boy caught it without blinking, eyes darting between Oliver and Diggle. "So what exactly is going on here man?" Diggle demanded, glancing between the kid and Oliver as if looking for some kind of answer hiding in plain sight.

"John Diggle, Roy Harper and vice versa," Oliver replied with a vague wave of his hand in the kid's direction, already heading for the computer and waking it.

"Mr. Queen, that isn't an answer," was Diggle's reply. Oliver ignored him, eyes settling on the article that announced Martin Somers arrest for the murder of Victor Nocenti. That was one more name to cross off the list. James Holder would be next. "Mr. Queen, you promised me answers."

"Yes," Oliver said, teeth grinding together a little before he reminded himself that Diggle had helped him earlier instead of turning him in to the police. "What exactly do you want to know?"

"First of all, why do you have a kid locked in the basement of your father's old foundry?"

"It isn't like that," Oliver protested automatically before actually considering what Diggle had seen. Okay, maybe the man had a point but that wasn't what Oliver was trying to do. He was trying to help. He sighed and then said, "You know how I got kidnapped before my mother hired you to protect me?"

"Yeah," Diggle said and Oliver began searching for Roy's missing person information.

"There was a kid involved as a distraction, just about four foot ten or eleven inches with brown hair, maybe a little red in it, and scared green eyes, so I did a little digging," Oliver continued, motioning Diggle over. "And found this." He watched Diggle mouth Roy's name, read a little of the background, and then glance at the boy before looking back to the Queen heir.

"So..." The former soldier purposefully trailed off, waiting for Oliver to continue.

"He bolted when I killed the rest the kidnappers," Oliver continued in a low voice, eyes flickering towards the boy in question who was still watching them with wary eyes. "So it took some time to track him down and bring him here."

"Bring him?" There was irritation in Diggle's voice now but Oliver didn't waver.

"A fire escape collapsed underneath him and he was injured. I brought him here."

"Mr. Queen," Diggle began before sighing. "Oliver, you just kidnapped the kid for the second time in his life. You can't do stuff like that," Oliver gave him a flat look. "I know you already did but-" Diggle stopped mid sentence and rubbed his temples for a moment. "Look, you probably terrified the poor kid. Have the two of you even talked?"

Oliver didn't blink but he did consider Diggle's words. He and Roy hadn't really talked since he'd brought the boy here, not that he thought Roy would say anything. "Okay," he said at last. "So I
screwed up. That isn't the only thing you wanted to talk about."

"Everything else doesn't matter at this point," Diggle retorted. "You've got a traumatized kid down
here. That's more important than why you're running around the city with a bow and arrow."

"Okay, okay," Oliver said, running a hand through his close cropped hair and giving up any hope
of learning the habits of John Holder before nightfall. Diggle was right. He had a mess to fix.

"Hey Bruce, have you seen this?"

"Seen what?" Bruce questioned, eyes studying the newspaper for anything that might pertain to
either of his jobs. "Did a man in a bear costume steal something again?"

"Probably," Dick replied and Bruce didn't have to look at the boy to know he was rolling his eyes.
"But that's not what I meant. Have you read about what's going on in Starling City?"

"Aside from Oliver Queen's miraculous return from the dead?" Bruce arched an eyebrow but
Dick's blue eyes went wide.

"Wait, wait, wait. Oliver Queen returned from the dead?"

"The yacht he was on sank five years ago," Bruce explained. "He was found on an island called
Lian Yu in the North China sea about a week ago."

"Means Purgatory, right?" Dick questioned absently as he leaned over his laptop. "This makes
perfect sense!"

"What exactly are you talking about?"

"You know that report about a possible vigilante we looked into earlier? The one in Starling?"
Dick was practically bouncing in his seat as he spoke and Bruce devoted part of his attention to
being ready to rescue the laptop when it inevitably toppled towards the floor. "Well he's struck
several times, most recently convincing a man named Martin Somers to confess to having one of
his aboveboard employees, Victor Nocenti, killed. I just did some checking and the vigilante
appeared for the first time a day after Oliver Queen returned."

"And you're suggesting that Oliver Queen is the vigilante?"

"Exactly," Dick practically yelled, leaping to his feet and then yelping and diving for the falling
laptop. Bruce barely managed to keep himself from laughing as the boy caught the expensive
object with his fingertips. "So what do you think?" Dick asked once he was upright again and
cradling the laptop like a baby in his arms.

"I think it's worth keeping an eye on."
Chapter 12

"To be trusted is a greater compliment than being loved." - George MacDonald

Moira Queen stepped outside of Queen Consolidated, Walter by her side. His arm was around her waist, the warmth bringing a soft smile to her face. After she’d learned about Robert and Oliver's death she’d fallen into a deep depression that had only grown worse when she’d discovered the truth of what Malcolm Merlyn had done to protect his secret. She’d thought she would never be happy again but then, unexpectedly, Walter had marched into her house and insisted she come out to lunch. Robert had held her heart, and still held a part of it, but Walter made her happy and she had come to love him. She would be devastated if anything happened to him.

The pair were on their way to eat a nice lunch together when they were ambushed by someone who had enough connections to the mob to make Moira's skin crawl. She knew what Robert had done with the list, she had even become a part of it, but that didn't mean she approved of those kinds of connections. "Mr. Steele," the man said, reaching out to grab Walter's arm. "All I'm asking is for a chance to sit down and discuss my proposal."

"I'm sorry Mr. Copani," Walter replied, gently removing the man's grip from his sleeve. "But we at Queen Consolidated cannot accept business from you."

"I see," Mr. Copani replied. "May I ask why?"

"I suspect you already know the answer," Walter replied as a motorcycle roared towards them. "Now I really must go. I am having lunch with my beautiful wife." Over the traffic, the sound of gunshots was heard and the man speaking to Walter crumpled to the ground. Walter yanked Moira to the ground as people screamed, some calling 911 and some running into the streets in a blind panic. On her motorcycle and already around the corner, Helena Bertinelli zoomed away, a smile on her face.

Roy had just begun to relax when he felt two pairs of eyes settle on him. Ignoring the hunger cramps in his stomach, he focused on the pair watching him, waiting for the other shoe to drop. He had been waiting for it since he'd been brought to Queen's secret lair but that didn't lessen the dread sinking its claws into him. The Queen heir seemed to be hesitating about something and that, more than anything else, made Roy anxious. He'd seen a lot of mood shifts in the past few days but an almost nervous Oliver Queen was not one of them. Adding that to the sudden inclusion of someone new had made it difficult for Roy to get to sleep the night before and when he finally had drifted off he'd dreamed of his own blood staining the concrete floor.

The fourteen year old watched, muscles stiff, as Queen finally stood, murmuring something to his companion before approaching. Roy vaguely noticed the other man leaving but most of his attention was fixed on Oliver Queen. The man hesitated a few feet away from him, running his hand through short blonde hair and then letting out a sigh. Then he met Roy's eyes. The young man froze, all his muscles suddenly locking. "It's been brought to my attention that we may have gotten off on the wrong foot," Oliver Queen said at last, sounding almost...guilty. "I was trying to help you," Queen continued. Roy knew his eyebrows were rising towards his hairline now, disbelief and fear lapping over him like waves on a beach, and Queen let out a sigh that made him flinch. "Look, I just- I don't-"

"Oliver, as much as I hate to interrupt the mess you're making of explaining everything, we have a problem." The other man was back standing at the top of the stairs.
"What?" Queen snapped and Roy felt himself cringe, arms wrapping tight around his stomach.

"Someone almost shot your mother." Oliver Queen turned on his heel and stalked towards the stairs, leaving Roy watching him with wide eyes from the cot. The Queen heir stormed out of the room but the other man hesitated, glancing back at Roy. "We'll get everything figured out kid, I promise," he said before pulling the door shut behind him.

Roy stared in blatant disbelief at the closed door for a moment. "Will you?" he asked the silence, voice rusty from lack of use. That was when he realized the solid click that meant the door was shut and locked had never come. The surprising knowledge pushed him to his feet and sent him stumbling through the mess that was the vigilante's secret lair. He hesitated at the bottom of the stairs, listening for any sign that Queen or his friend were returning to lock him in. Nothing. Chest feeling tight with fear and anticipation, Roy took the steps two at a time and snatched the door handle, turning it smoothly. For the first time since the disaster on the rusty fire escape, he stepped outside.

For a moment Roy hesitated on the the threshold, arguing with himself. He might be telling the truth, a voice in his head whispered. Queen might be actually trying to help. After all, he hasn't hurt you yet, has he? Roy shook the thoughts away. Now was not the time to doubt himself. He needed to get out and find Sin before Queen returned. He needed to go. The rumble of a vehicle outside was enough to push him into action and he scrambled out of the abandoned warehouse, leaving Oliver Queen's safe space far behind.

The first thing Thea did when she saw her brother was to punch him hard in the chest. Logically she knew that it wasn't his fault this was the fastest he could get here, Diggle had answered his phone saying Oliver was in the middle of working on a possible business venture, but she was still upset with him. He had left her alone and pacing the house as she worried over possibly losing another family member. Oliver took the punch without flinch, eyes concerned. "Speedy are you okay?" her brother asked, voice gentle. "Is Mom?"

"Walter just called," Thea told her brother, voice thick with unshed tears. "She's going to be fine. Just bruises." Then she flung herself into Oliver's open arms, sobbing against his chest. She had been so scared when the police had pulled her out of school and told her that her mother had been taken to the hospital as a result of an attempted shooting. The police, as per Walter's request, had taken her home where Thea had paced nervously, even while calling Oliver.

"It's going to be okay Speedy," Oliver soothed, a hand stroking her hair. "I promise. Everyone's safe and we're all going to be fine."

"Promise," he murmured into her hair, holding her close. They were still standing in the entryway clinging to one another when the front door opened.

"Thea? Oliver?" Moira Queen called. They both spun around and Thea launched herself into her mother's arms. She sighed in relief as she felt those arms wrapped around her and for a moment she forgot she was a proud seventeen year old. Instead she was just a scared girl clinging to her mother. "I'm okay dear," she murmured.

"I know," Thea replied but she didn't let go.

"I'm sorry. I should have been there sooner," Oliver apologized and Thea felt her mother lift one hand to wave her off.

"It's okay Oliver. You came. That's all that matters." Thea released her mother and turned in time to catch a glimpse of guilt on Oliver's expression before her brother carefully tucked it away. "So
what was this business venture you were looking into since you were clearly not interested in working at Queen Consolidated." Oliver winced a little and Thea frowned. That had been a bit harsh. Sure Oliver had made a public disgrace of their family but she had heard Walter and Mom talking and had realized Oliver had so no once before. The fact that Mom had ignored Ollie’s opinion made the whole mess afterwards partially her fault.

"I'm opening a nightclub," Oliver told their mother. "In the Glades. I've bought Dad's old iron foundry and I'm going to remodel it."

"In the Glades, sweetheart?" Mom questioned, arching an eyebrow.

"I'm Oliver Queen," he told her with a shark like smile. "People will come."

"I certainly hope so," Mom said.

"We wish you the best of luck," Walter added from their mother's side.

"Thank you," Oliver replied before turning to Thea. "Hey Thea, do you want to help me with some of the design choices. I've been out of the loop for five years and I was hoping you, and maybe Tommy, would give me some help." For a moment Thea was stunned. Her brother, back from that hellish island, was volunteering freely to spend time with her? A wide smile began to spread across her face.

"Definitely," she said and Oliver grinned back at her. For the first time in a long time, Thea's world felt right.

Sin nearly jumped out of her skin when Roy broke into her bedroom. “Roy?” she yelped and he shushed her nervously, eyes darting about the room as if he was waiting for someone attack him. Sin shouldn't have wanted to hug him at that moment but she did, desperately. "Roy where have you been?" she hissed at him, rolling out of bed. "I've been looking for you everywhere."

"Sin, I-" He hesitated, eyes filled with paralyzing fear, and then hissed, "It isn't safe to tell you."

"Roy," Sin said helplessly, feeling tired and strained and scared. "You trust me, right?"

"Yeah, I trust you," he told her. "I just don't want you to get hurt." Sin knew then that nothing she could say was going to change his mind. With a heavy sigh she patted the space on the bed next to her.

"Come on, get some rest. We'll find a safe place for you tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay," Roy mumbled but his friend was already drifting off to sleep, feeling content for the first time since Roy had mysteriously disappeared again.
Chapter 13

"There is always a cause for fear. The cause may change over time, but the fear is always with us." - from State of Fear by Michael Crichton

Sin woke as the sun was sinking below the horizon, staining her bedroom a dull orange. She did not wake because she was no longer tired, after days of restless sleeping and worried searching for her friend her internal sleep clock was insisting that she needed to sleep for a week, but because there was a thumping sound outside. "Coming, I'm coming," Sin heard her mother snap as she thumped and stumbled her way to the door. The pounded started up again and Sin blinked sleepily as her mother cussed at the door. Beside her, Roy had gone stiff and when she managed to force her eyes completely open she realized he was staring with fear at her closed bedroom door.

"What is it?" Sin asked him in a hushed whisper but he shook his hand, uncertainty replacing some of the fear. Sin reached over and squeezed his hand as they listened to her mother fling open the door.

"What do you want?" the woman demanded irritably.

"We're looking for someone," the raspy voice of someone who probably smoked a pack a day replied. Beside Sin, Roy lost all color.

"Are you okay?" she demanded in a soft hiss. "Roy, what's going on?" His hand twitched up to cover her mouth and he shook his head frantically as Sin's mother demanded to know exactly who they were looking for.

"He's a friend of your daughter," the raspy voice continued. "The name's Roy Harper."

"Harper?" Sin's mother snorted. "Good for nothing kid's been missing for months now. Haven't seen 'im since before his druggie mother kicked the bucket." Sin winced at her mother's description and the raspy voiced man laughed. Roy slid smoothly to his feet, pulling his hand free of hers as he backed quickly towards the window.

"Roy," she hissed at him as he forced it open, carefully removing the screen.

"I've got to go," he whispered back. "I shouldn't have come here."

"Roy please don't go," she tried as he scrambled out the window. He ignored her and she scrambled after him, not caring that she was still in her pajamas. The Glades had seen far stranger things than one teenage girl in her pajamas chasing after a weedy boy. "Roy," she called after him as loudly as she dared. He spun around to shush her and that was when things began to go wrong.

A hand reached out and grabbed the loose material of the hoodie she'd given Roy. Sin let out a little squeak as Roy squirmed free, eyes showing far too much white as he scrambled away from the man. Sin watched as the hoodie was discarded like a piece of trash and her friend backed up towards her. "You need to run," Roy hissed, trying to push her back even though, with as malnourished as he still was, she weighed more than he did.

"I'm not leaving you," Sin hissed back, refusing to move as she reached forward to grab his arm. In retrospect, that was a really stupid move. She should have listened to Roy and ran. She could have alerted the police, called for help, anything besides letting out a startled cry as she was jerked away, the warm metal of a recently fired gun pressing against her temple.
"It's too late for any plans little girl," the man with the raspy voice said and Roy, who had whirled around, watched them with terrified eyes. "You're both coming with us."

Oliver entered the foundry, Diggle right behind him, and then froze. Roy Harper was gone. He had come to the foundry to track down whoever had almost shot his mother, after spending an afternoon reassuring himself that his family was safe. Now he'd just discovered he had another problem on his hands. "Did you latch the door?" he asked, voice surprisingly empty considering the circumstances.

"What do you mean?" came the confused reply.

"The door needs to be pulled completely shut until clicks," Oliver explained without inflection, walking down the stairs and rousing the computer. The would-be killer would have to wait; Oliver had a frightened kid to rescue. His fingers flew as he searched for any recent incident reports. If something violent happened in the Glades it would at least make the local newspaper's incident blog. The blog had been created just before Oliver had left on the *Queen's Gambit* in response to the increase in the number of violent attacks in the Glades. He scrolled through incidents, searching for anything that might lead him to Roy.

"I'm sorry man," Diggle said from behind him but Oliver heard it distantly, as if listening through a tunnel. He was staring at a single three sentence report filed at Cynthia Lance's home address. The neighbors had reported a single gunshot, roughly two hours ago, in the Lance home. When the police had stepped in through the open door they had found Cynthia's mother, Angela Lance nee Walker, dead in the entryway with a bullet in her head. Cynthia Lance had been nowhere to be seen. Oliver abandoned the computer and headed for his supplies.

"I'm going out," he told Diggle, grabbing the hood and bow. "See what you can find out about whoever tried to shoot my mother." Uniform pulled on and greasepaint smeared to hide his eyes, Oliver hesitated on the bottom step, turning to look back at his bodyguard. "If you want."

Diggle nodded once at him. Oliver was on the stairs when the man called, "Just try not to get yourself shot again." The vigilante raised his hand in response and then vanished into the main body of the foundry. He took a single moment to pull on his helmet before sending the motorcycle roaring to life and speeding off into the night.

Everything was going according to plan. Helena Bertinelli had slipped into her window after shooting Copani and had just opened a book to a page somewhere in the middle when she had heard a commotion downstairs. The dark haired woman had pretended to read for a few pages before standing with a theatrical sigh and heading for the stairs. "What exactly is going on?" she had demanded as she descended to the entryway and listened carefully as Nick Salvati, the man that had killed her fiance, explained that a mysterious assassin on a motorcycle had killed Copani. She had been reassured by her father that something would be done about the problem and then shooed away as if she were still a small child. Now, sitting at the dinner table and watching how tense her father was as he ate, she felt satisfied.

Ever since discovering that her father had ordered her fiance killed and that Salvati, who she had considered a brother, had carried it out she had begun plotting her revenge. Initially she had planned on killing Salvati but she'd eventually decided that was too simple. Her father and Salvati had taken everything from her so she was going to take everything from them. Once she had decided that, it had been simple to proceed. Helena had created a list of the employees that were vital to her father's business. Because Frank Bertinelli was continually attempting to bring his daughter into what he called "the family business" it was simply to uncover the inner workings. After days of planning she had made her first strike. Then she had sat back and watched the
At first her father had been disbelieving. Who had dared to attack someone under his command? Then, as the attacks continued, he had become more and more tense. As his worry grew, he began pushing Helena away as a warped way to protect her. This suited her needs because it gave more time to plot her attacks. Now she was nearing the end of the line, only a few people between herself and Salvati. The woman cut a delicate piece of steak and lifted it to her mouth, savoring the taste of the juices mixing in her mouth. Soon she would be standing triumphant as her father’s empire crumbled to ashes. Revenge wouldn't bring her love back, but it was the next best thing.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Quick warning for this chapter; there is some child abuse going on in the first half so if you think it might be triggering in any way, please skip the first part and I'll be happy to fill in any important information you need to know!

"Deciding whether or not to trust a person is like deciding whether or not to climb a tree because you might get a wonderful view from the highest branch or you might simply get covered in sap..." - from The Penultimate Peril by Lemony Snicket

Roy's stomach was churning and if there had been anything in it, he would have vomited it back up a long time ago. Beside him, Sin was as pale as he had ever seen her, her fingers clutching tightly to his as they stepped into the shabby and run down house that was part of his nightmares. "Lock the girl up," the cigar man growled. "I want a word with the boy." Roy trembled as Sin was pulled away from him. She turned frightened brown eyes towards him and he found himself looking away, unable to meet his gaze. His stomach clenched painfully as a door slammed shut behind her and the men returned, flanking the fourteen year old.

"You think running off in the middle of a job is a good idea boy?" Cigar Man questioned, voice deceptively gentle. Roy didn't move, kept his gaze fixed on the floor. He was shaking slightly, enough to make the tremor in his hands obvious. "Answer me!" came the sharp demand, making the boy flinch backwards. He shook his head quickly, fighting back the urge to try to run. Things would only get worse for him if he did. "Liar," the man hissed and the smack that followed wasn't unexpected. Roy didn't dare to lift a hand to his cheek, didn't dare to move for fear of drawing another strike. "Do you know all the trouble you've caused?" the man continued. "I suspect you think you're clever, vanishing into thin air like you did. Well let me tell you something boy. You're nothing but a lost little Glades rat. Nobody even cares that you're gone." Roy shuddered and allowed the words to sink in. There was nothing he could say in protest. Sin had been the only one who had cared he was gone and she was locked away just like he was about to be. If he was lucky.

"Now," Cigar Man continued in a soft tone that would have relaxed the boy had he not known better. "Tell me what happened during the kidnapping."

Roy twisted his fingers in his ratty t-shirt and kept his eyes on the ground as he spoke. "Merlyn and Queen were successfully apprehended. Interrogation was initiated when Queen when." He hesitated, shuddering as his eyes closed and he watched the deaths of the kidnappers again.

"Did Queen say if his father had told him anything?"

"No."

"No what? No he didn't say or the answer to the question is no?" Fingers dug tight into Roy's arm, new bruises blooming on the fragile skin.

"The answer," Roy choked out, shaking all over.
"Then what happened?" The hand tightened further, making Roy let out a soft whimper, when the boy didn't answer soon enough. "Answer me!"

Indecision only made Roy's shaking worse and he cried out when a fist smacked hard into his stomach, doubling him over. Panic made it difficult to catch his breath and the room spun around him as he struggled to decide whether or not to tell the truth. "Grab him," Cigar Man ordered and two hands wrapped tight around his biceps, holding him upright. "Answer me boy," the man snarled. "Or things will only get worse for you."

Roy sucked in a deep breath and spat out, "He killed them. All of them." His eyes, which had fallen on Cigar Man's legs, noted that the man had gone almost unnaturally still.

"Queen?"

Roy shuddered, one terror fighting against another, and then cried out as he was hit again. "N-no," he stammered, trembling all over. The men holding his arms were the only things keeping him upright.

"Then who?" Cigar Man demanded.

"I don't know," Roy sobbed out, barely holding in tears. "There was this guy in a hood. He just kind of burst in." Cigar Man snarled and Roy flinched violently.

"Lock him away," he ordered the men after a moment. "I have a report to make."

Roy practically collapsed when he was thrown into the same room as Sin. He felt sick, dizzy, and bruised, his skin soaked in a terrified sweat. When Sin lunged across the room with a relieved cry to hug him, he flinched so violently that they slammed hard into a wall. "It's okay," she was sobbing against his hair, arms clinging to him with desperate strength. "It's gonna be okay." Roy clung to her, sobbing and shaking until he felt empty inside. At last they lay there, huddled on the grimy linoleum floor, too exhausted to move.

Eventually Roy regained the strength to sit up properly and study his surroundings. He knew he didn't have the will or the strength to escape again, not this time, but maybe he could get Sin out before they killed her. The room was fairly solid cinder block despite the shoddy construction that had gone into create this home complex. There was a single window high up on the wall, its opening just big enough that Sin might be able to slip through. Roy stood on legs that shook and pulled Sin to her feet as best he could, clinging to her hand. When she shot him a frightened, questioning look he motioned with his trembling free hand towards the window. Sin's eyes widened and he saw a glimmer of hope there.

The fourteen year old hesitated a moment, listening carefully for any signs of movement, and then led his friend to huddle against the wall furthest away from the door. "I need you to listen to me," he told her in something that was barely a whisper. "Only one of us is gonna get out of here and it has to be you."

"What?" Sin protested in an equally low tone. "No, I won't leave you!"

"You have to," he hissed back. "I won't get very far in this condition and they'll kill you. They want me alive."

"Okay," Sin relented. "But I'm going to tell someone."

Roy hesitated a moment, continuing his options. If the cops got involved then innocent people would die. Maybe even police officers. After losing his father to the harshness of the Glades, the boy had no desire to have anyone face the same heartbreaking situation. That left him only one
other option; the vigilante. Feeling as if he was making a terrible mistake, he leaned closer to Sin. "Don't tell the police," he ordered her, beginning to shake again. "Do you know the old Queen iron foundry?" Sin nodded and he shuddered a little. "Go there. You need to get to the basement. The vigilante should be there. Tell him-" Roy hesitated a moment and then said in a rushed whisper, "Tell him that I sent you."

"Okay, got it," Sin mumbled in a nervous rush before shooting him one last wide eyed glance. "Are you sure you're gonna be okay here?"

"I'll be fine," Roy replied, manage a weak, unconvincing smile. Then he carefully boosted her up. Sin eased the window open, both of them cringing when it squeaked a little. He only felt that he could breathe properly again when she vanished completely through the window, leaving him alone with his tormentors.

Diggle found himself pacing in the basement of the foundry, waiting for Oliver to return. The former soldier had found very little on the shooter that had almost killed Moira Queen but his specialty in Afghanistan hadn't been computers. He had found himself struggling to use Oliver's current systems. It was nothing he had ever seen before and it kept opening strange windows that he hadn't asked for. Eventually he'd discovered a couple camera angles of the incident and decided it was good enough. Oliver could do his own looking when he returned.

A rapping sound at the door to the basement had him tensing and reaching for his gun. There was a long moment of silence as Diggle remained where he was, waiting. Then the knocking sounded again. Holding his weapon at the read, Diggle made his way cautiously up the stairs and unlatched the door, opening it just a crack. There was a girl, maybe high school age, with messy dark hair standing outside. "I need to talk to the vigilante," she said, voice wavering a little. "My name is Cynthia Lance." She hesitated a moment later and then added, "Roy Harper sent me." Diggle pulled open the door to let her in. She studied him warily, as if he wasn't quite who she'd expected, and back up a step but she didn't bolt. "You're not the Hood."

"No," Diggle replied, tucking the gun away and showing her his empty hands. "But I can get you into contact with him." Cynthia Lance nodded warily at him and allowed herself to be ushered in. Diggle led the way down the stairs and grabbed his phone, dialing Oliver's number. With any luck the man would pick up instead of ignoring the call. He found himself pacing like a nervous school boy as he listened to the phone ring in his ear.

"What?" Oliver demanded sharply, answering the phone just before voicemail would have picked up.

"You need to come back now," Diggle told him. "It's about Roy." He wasn't overly surprised when Oliver hung up on him. "He's coming," the former soldier told the girl who nodded nervously. They waited in complete silence until Oliver stormed into his hideout in full vigilante gear, bow in one hand and Roy Harper's red hoodie in the other. Diggle felt his stomach sink towards his shoes. Was the kid dead? The hoodie was red so he couldn't tell whether or not there was blood on it.

"Cynthia Lance," Oliver rumbled and the girl nodded.

"Roy Harper sent me," she said, brown eyes wide and worried. "He broke into my room yesterday, he used to do it all the time when we were younger after his dad died, and we had just woke up and there were these men outside." She let out a hitched little sob and babbled, "I think they might have shot my mom and she was a crappy mom but she was my mom, you know? And they kidnapped us and they knew Roy from before and..." She trailed off, sobbing a little. "They're probably going to kill him," she forced out between sobs.
"Can you tell me where?" Oliver asked and she nodded, rattling off an address despite her tears.

"You have to help him," she added.

"I will," Oliver told her, voice filled with determination. Then he whirled on his heel and was gone, Roy's red hoodie still clutched in one hand.
"It's like everyone tells a story about themselves inside their own head. Always. All the time. The story makes you what you are. We build ourselves out of that story."—from The Name of the Wind by Patrick Rothfuss

Chapter 15

When Roy was little he remember his mother, before tragedy had ripped his family apart, telling him stories of heroes. He had grown up with Hercules and Thor, with Mulan and the huntress Artemis, with those men and women who fought off the monsters. He had loved the stories, had allowed himself to believe in heroes, and then his father had died. That was when Roy Harper had stopped believing in heroes. Now, curled up against a wall waiting for the inevitable, he almost wished he could bring himself to believe. The maybe he would be able to believe what he had said to reassure Sin.

In all honesty, Roy knew he wasn't going to survive this. He had run during the last operation he had been involved which made him a flight risk. Worse yet, he knew the inner workings of his kidnappers' operations. He knew who they worked with and even if he didn't have names he could describe every single one of them. They couldn't risk him getting away again and going to the police. Maybe if he hadn't helped Sin escape, had been able to make himself stand by and watch while they killed her and dumped the body somewhere, he might have stood a chance of living but the instant they discovered she was gone, he was dead. He shuddered and curled up tighter against the far wall, eyes fixed on the door.

As if cued by his negative thoughts, he heard the lock on the door click before opening inward. The man who leaned in scanned the room, expression going dark as his eyes fell on the open window. "You little brat," the man snarled, crossing the room in two large strides, snatching the boy up by the throat. Roy's hands came up, short fingernails scratching against the hand closing off his ability to breathe. His feet were just barely brushing the ground and his heartbeat seemed like it was pounding in his head. The man shook him and Roy's hands fell limply to his sides as he struggled to pull in more air.

The fourteen year old couldn't hear anything over the rushing sound in his ears so he was extremely startled when the man dropped him, a green fletched arrow suddenly protruding out of his shoulder. Roy sucked in a deep breath at the same time the man screamed, reaching up blindly to grab at the arrow. The second arrow seemed to suddenly bloom out of his chest, sending the man crashing to the ground at Roy's feet. The boy tucked his knees up to his heaving chest, wide eyes fixed on the dead man. "Are you okay?" The words seemed to come from the end of a distant tunnel and he realized almost absently that he was shaking. "Roy, are you okay?"

"I'm fine," he managed to croak out, too shocked to flinch when Oliver Queen pulled him to his feet. His legs felt like they were made of water and Queen was the only reason he was standing. The two made their way to the door only for Roy to freeze when he saw the carnage in the next room. Every single one of the men who had kidnapped himself and Sin were dead. Arrows protruded from limbs and chests, pools of blood spreading across the cheap grey carpet. The man with the cigar was pinned to the wall, arrows through his shoulders and one through the throat. Roy shuddered all over, stomach rolling, and one of his hands shot out to press against the door frame. "Hey, it's okay," Queen soothed, grip firming on his shoulder. "You're safe." The boy allowed Queen to guide him out of the room and into the night. Distantly he wondered if he was going into shock. He had witnessed death before, everyone who lived in the Glades had, but not like that and while he didn't object to the people who had destroyed his sense of safety being
killed, witnessing one dying before his eyes had been a little much.

"Are you going to be okay long enough to get back to the foundry?" Queen questioned, still supporting the boy. "Your friend is waiting there for you."

"Yeah," he rasped in response. His throat ached in time with his other bruises and he felt as if he was going to collapse at any moment but he knew Sin well enough to know she was worrying herself sick over him. After everything she had done to help him, he could at least keep from passing out until she could see that he was still alive.

Helena waited until her father had left the house to grab her supplies and sneak out her window. She knew for a fact that Anthony Venza, a man who peddled prescription drugs like they were candy, would be out tonight. The money that came in from the selling of illegal drugs was a large part of the Bertinelli family business and Helena's actions tonight would help cripple that business. After Venza, she would move on to Salvati and her father. She might end up in jail after this whole mess was over but he revenge would be complete. The Bertinelli name wouldn't be striking fear into the hearts of Starling citizens for a long time.

The dark haired woman made her way along the long, sneaking past security and uncovering her motorcycle. She had camouflaged the vehicle earlier with leave and branches, hiding in the edge of the woods at the edge of her family's property. Now she rumbled off into the night, gun loaded and holstered at her side. She stopped once before approaching Venza's usual place of business to tuck her long dark hair under her helmet. It was a preventative measure which was meant to keep her from being recognized by anyone who might know her, just like the Starling City vigilante's hood shielded his identity from view. Then she headed for the warehouse.

Anthony Venza was standing in front of a parked van, a bag of prescription pills in one hand. "Anyone can sell crack," he was saying. "All you need is a street corner and a hoodie. This is pharmaceutical grade Oxycodone. It's caviar, it's champagne, and you sell this at parties to rich kids who have money to burn." He laughed, flashing that million dollar smile Helena had seen so many times at family "business dinners" at the potential buyer. It disgusted her. She didn't bother with dramatics, firing one bullet into the possible buyer and the next three into Venza's chest. Then she roared away, ignoring the startled screams.

She arrived back at home and climbed through her window in time to hear something shatter downstairs. She headed for the door, hesitating long enough to slip into pajamas and ensure that her hair appeared to be sleep mussed. She thumped down the stairs as if she'd been roused by the noise. "What's going on?" she slurred and hid a wince when she realized she sounded more drunk than tired. "Bad scotch?" she added, getting a good whiff of the liquid dripping down the wall.

"Yeah," her father said, standing and crossing the room to take her hand. "I'm sorry sweetheart. I didn't mean to wake you. I just got news of some bad business."

"It's okay," she told him, leaning over to kiss his cheek. "I'm sure everything will work out." Then she turned and headed up the stairs so he couldn't see her satisfied smile.
The first thing Sin did when Roy made his way down the stairs into the basement of the foundry, Oliver Queen right behind him, was to sprint across the room to throw her arms around him. "You're okay," she breathed into his hair, letting out a little sob and clinging tighter to him. "I thought you might be dead." Roy wasn't stupid enough to tell her that he was okay. Instead he wrapped trembling arms around her back and buried his head in her shoulder, leaning his whole weight against her. He was shaking, though she wasn't sure whether it was from exhaustion, pain, or a combination of both. Sin did her best to stabilize the boy, glad for the first time in her life that Roy was light. The two of them made their way silently across the floor, Sin refusing to release he grip on Roy. She was afraid that if she stopped touching him, he would vanish into thin air.

Once the pair were settled on a cot, Sin's arm still wrapped around Roy's shoulders, she glanced up at the Starling City vigilante. "Is it over?" she questioned and felt her friend twitch slightly.

"It's over. They're dead." Oliver Queen's voice was cool and Sin felt a warm flood of satisfaction wash through her.

"Good," she said, her voice viciously happy. Those men had killed her mother, terrorized her friend, and would have killed her had they gotten the chance. Sin did not feel bad about their deaths. Roy nudged her lightly and she turned to meet his eyes. It was nice to see that most of the paralyzing fear was gone, leaving more of her old friend than she'd seen in a long time. She nudged him back lightly and smiled a little, getting the message. What had happened was over and it was time to move forward. Her wrist watch beeped, signalling a new hour. She glanced down at it and her mind began calculating exactly how long she had been missing. "I have to go before they arrest my father on suspicion of murder. Or something of that sort." She slid off the cot and turned, rising up on her tip toes to kiss his cheek. "I'll see you tomorrow?"

Sin hated the pleading in her voice when she asked. A long time ago there would have been no doubt that she would see Roy the next day. When they were children, he had followed her around like an innocent puppy because the other children shunned him. As they had grown older, she had seen her friend less but they'd still kept in communication. Now he had vanished too many times for her to be certain that she would be able to find him again. "I'll be here." Roy's voice was a soft, reassuring rasp. Sin nodded at him once and then hurried up the stairs that would lead her out of the foundry. She hated to leave so soon after getting her friend back but she had too. Her father was the only family she had left.

Cynthia Lance leaving created a vacuum of silence in the basement of the foundry. Oliver shifted his weight uncertainly for a moment and caught a glimpse of Diggle's amused smirk in the corner of his eyes. That was what propelled him forward, bow and quiver set aside as he approached the boy he'd gone to save. He caught a glimpse of the bruises blossoming on Roy Harper's throat and winced a little even as he pulled back his hood. "Are you hurt?" he questioned. He didn't want to push the boy, especially when he might have traumatized Roy by killing someone right in front of him before guiding him through a room filled with dead bodies.

Roy studied him cautiously but didn't flinch away when Oliver approached. In fact, he didn't so much as tense up until Oliver tilted his chin back to get a better glimpse at his throat. The bruises were purple but not extremely dark. The thug had probably only gotten as far as to cutting off Roy's air supply before Oliver had shot him. "Anywhere else?" The Queen heir waited as the boy
considered the question before cautiously lifting the hem of his shirt. Oliver had to hold back a wince so as to avoid startling Roy when he saw the bruising there. Dark purple, almost black, spread across the boy's stomach and lower ribs like some kind of sadistic painted flower. "This is going to hurt," Oliver warned. "But I have to check for broken ribs." The boy nodded hesitantly and Oliver did his best to ignore the small flinches his probing earned him.

"Nothing's broken," he said after a moment, unsure whether he was reassuring himself, Roy, or Diggle. "Hey Digg, there's a couple ice packs in the mini fridge. Do me a favor and grab them."

"Sure," came the casual reply as the Queen heir turned his attention back to Roy.

"Any other injuries?" Roy shook his head. "Okay, I need you to lay down then." He cautiously settled a hand on the boy's shoulder, guiding him back on to the surface of the cot. Diggle handed over the ice packs one at a time and Oliver settled them carefully; one on the boy's throat and two across the dark bruising on his stomach. Roy flinched at the cool touch but didn't tense any further. Oliver glanced over at Diggle who arched his eyebrows and made a 'go on' motion at him. "Look, I wasn't trying to scare you before. I was trying to help but I didn't bother to explain what was going on and I ended up kidnapping you after you'd just gotten away from the others ones. I was just worried that they'd catch up to you again and you'd end up hurt. Or dead." He turned to look at Roy was was surprised to see green eyes fixed on him. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay." Roy's voice was so soft that Oliver almost thought he'd imagined it. It was the first time he had heard the boy speak. He squeezed Roy's shoulder lightly and then left the boy to rest, joining Diggle by the computer.

"Nicely done," his bodyguard murmured before nudging the mouse to wake the machine. "I couldn't find much on the person who almost killed your mother. Just a few camera angles." Oliver nodded absently, already skimming through the security camera footage Diggle had managed to find.

"Do you think we can get a full license plate number from these?"

"It's possible," came the reply. "Just not likely." Oliver was about to resign himself to being unable to discover any good information when he caught a glimpse of the full license plate number. He scrambled to pause the video and move it backwards until he could make out the numbers and letters, if just barely. He scribbled down the number with a triumphant grin, only to realize he couldn't hack the BMV. Still, he had a number. That was at least a start. "So we have the number," Diggle said. "Now what?"

"Now I have to find someone who can find out who the number belongs to," Oliver said with a sigh, running a hand across his face for a moment. He felt as if this night had been twice as long as the others. His worry over Roy's disappearance had exhausted him.

"You need to go home and get some rest Oliver. You can worry about the killer tomorrow," Diggle said, carefully guiding the younger man out of the chair.

"Yeah," Oliver agreed, too tired to form an argument about why he should stay in the foundry. Maybe tomorrow he would be able to think clearly enough to figure out how to track down the mystery killer.
Chapter 17

"Some days you just can't get rid of a bomb." - Batman from the 1966 Batman film

Roy jolted awake to the sound of a door booming shut. It startled him enough that his body left the cot and he almost rolled on to the concrete floor below before he fully realized he was moving. The result was that he ended up perched on the very edge of the cot, startled eyes focused on Oliver Queen's stiff shoulders. The Queen hair was tapping the mouse impatiently, as if that would rouse the computer faster and the boy could tell from where he was sitting that something was wrong. "Morning," John Diggle added, tossing a paper bag at him. "Nothing's wrong. Oliver here is just on a mission." Roy nodded cautiously and settled further back on the cot, pulling out what he suspected was breakfast without looking at it.

"There was another shooting last night," Oliver muttered, not glancing up from the computer as he sank down in a chair and brought up the correct news story. "The motorcycle the shooter was driving was the same style and color as the one the shooter that almost killed my mother was driving."

"You think it's the same person?" Diggle questioned while Roy inspected the bagel and then took a bite of it, not watching what was going on but not tuning out the conversation going on across the room.

"Possibly," was Oliver's reply. "One of the targets seems to be Anthony Venza and according to the police report, the man who was shot near my mother was John Copani."

"So what connects the two?"

"Frank Bertinelli." The name slipped out of Roy's mouth almost unbidden. As a cops kid, as well as being a Glades kid, he knew the ins and outs of who worked for who fairly well, though he couldn't begin to guess who his now dead captors had been working for.

"Bentinelli?" Queen spun the chair around, surprise flashing through his eyes for a moment. "There could be any number of people trying to get revenge on him. He's on the list too."

"The list?" Diggle questioned, eyebrows arching. In answer Oliver pulled out what appeared to be a small notebook, shoving it over to the other man.

"My father didn't die when the Queen's Gambit sank. He and another crewman made it to an escape raft. Before he died, he gave me that notebook and told me to right his wrongs." That said, Queen turned back to the computer, searching for something. "Has Bertinelli ticked off anyone recently?" Roy shrugged when Queen glanced back at him, not remembering anything specific. The last news he had heard about the Bertinelli family had been when Frank's daughter, Helena, had been devastated over the death of her fiance. That had been around a year ago and the family had managed to stay out of the news since then. "Of course. I wouldn't be that lucky. Last question. Any idea how to access the police database to look up a license plate number?"

"Not really." Roy told him, resisting the urge to curl in on himself because of the attention focused on him. Oliver shrugged a little and turned back to the computer. Roy settled in to finish his bagel, keeping an eye on Queen and Diggle while he ate. Just because the Queen heir had killed the men who had kidnapped him didn't mean that Roy trusted the man. It just meant that he trusted Queen not to kill him.
Felicity Smoak was chewing on the end of a pen when Oliver Queen himself made his way into her little office. The footsteps were what caught her attention and she spun her chair, something she never really got tired of doing, only to have the pen slip free of her teeth. She barely managed to catch it with one hand, wincing a little when she realized she’d gotten the slimy end of the pen between her fingers. "Uh, Felicity Smoak?" he asked awkwardly. "Hi. I'm Oliver Queen."

"Of course," she replied, mouth moving without conscious direction. "I know who you are Mr. Queen." Felicity was pretty sure everyone knew who Oliver Queen was but luckily she didn't blurt that out.

"Oliver please," he replied with an easy smile. "Mr. Queen was my father."

"Right, but he's dead." Her cheeks flushed instantly and one hand tightened nervously around her chewed pen. She was such an idiot. "I mean he drowned," she babbled, her nervousness only making her mouth run faster. "But you didn't which means you can come down to the I.T. Department and listen to me babble, which will end-" she turned her chair so she didn't have to face Oliver Queen as her cheeks burned. She was such an idiot. "-in three, two, one..." She took a deep breath, composed herself, and turned back to face him with a professional smile fixed on her still blazing face. "What can I do for you?"

"I accidentally clipped someone's motorcycle yesterday but they left before I could talk to them about it," the Queen heir told her with another easy smile. "I have the license plate number and I was wondering if you could help me track them down."

"Did you write it down?" she asked and he nodded, handing over the torn piece of paper when she held out her hand. Even as Felicity turned towards her computer she asked, "Why not go to the police?"

"After what happened with Sara and Laurel, a lot of the officers don't like me much." He seemed a bit embarrassed by that and Felicity bit back a giggle, buckling down and getting to work. It only took her a couple minutes for her to discover the owner of the motorcycle Queen claimed to have clipped. When she saw the name, she wrinkled her nose and abruptly decided that Oliver Queen was simply trying to figure out what number he needed to call so he could talk to a 'hot girl.' After all, he did have a reputation.

"The motorcycle in question belongs to Helena Bertinelli," she told him, twisting her chair a little to face him. "I bet she'll be pleased to find out another rich kid nicked the paint on her shiny motorcycle."

Felicity flushed the moment the words slipped free from her mouth but Queen grinned at her. "I'm sure she'll just be delighted. Thank you Felicity."

"No problem," she found herself replying as he made his way out of her office. For a moment she stupidly watched him go, enjoying just looking at his model perfect figure. Then she brought her pen back to her mouth and began to chew again, mind already racing through every stupid thing she had said during the entire conversation.

"Why would Helena Bertinelli want to sabotage her father?" Oliver asked as he walked down the steps into the basement of the foundry, Diggle right on his heels.

"You're asking the wrong person," his bodyguard replied, shutting the door behind them. "I haven't kept up with the Starling City gossip since I got home from Afghanistan."

Oliver turned his attention hesitantly towards Roy, unsure about what kind of response he was
going to get. After rescuing the boy, some of the tension between them had eased but Roy obviously still wasn't comfortable around him. As if to prove his point, the boy squirmed almost anxiously for a moment before hesitantly meeting his eyes. "Her fiance was killed under mysterious circumstances about a year ago," he said, glancing away again.

Oliver glanced at Diggle who shrugged and said, "Worth looking into."

"Definitely," Oliver agreed before glancing back at Roy. "Thanks." He didn't get a verbal response but the boy did glance at him again, studying him for a moment before looking away again. The Queen heir settled into the computer chair and woke the computer, hurrying to bring up everything he could about Helena Bertinelli. Roy was right, her fiance's death had been very suspicious, which meant she had a definite motive for trying to bring her father down. He needed to figure out where she was going to strike next.

An hour later he had almost nothing. For all intents and purposes, it appeared that Helena Bertinelli was nothing more than an ordinary rich girl still mourning the loss of her beloved fiance. There was nothing that showed she might be killing people involved in her father's business. Running a hand through his hair, he leaned back in the computer chair, stomach grumbling. *Nothing*. He had nothing. "If you'll promise to stay here I'll pick up lunch for us," Diggle said.

"I promise," Oliver agreed, pressing the heels of his hands against his closed eyelids for a moment as he tried to ward off a headache.

"You'd better not be lying," the other man replied with good humor, already heading for the door. Oliver ignored the good-natured jibe and turned his attention towards trying to discover other people who had been killed in the same manner as Venza and Copani. He ended up with thirty names in the past month, which was natural considering the crime rates in the Glades but not exactly helpful. A sudden inspiration struck him and he spun the chair to face Roy who seemed to be staring absently in the direction Diggle had gone.

"Hey Roy." The boy startled a little at being addressed but Oliver pushed on. "If I give you a list can you cross off all the names that aren't associated with Frank Bertinelli?" Roy considered the question for a moment then nodded, looking surprised when Oliver grinned at him. "Great." He spun the chair around and searched for his pad of paper in the mess the table around the computer had become. If Roy could help him narrow down what kills had probably been Helena, then maybe he could figure out where she would head to tonight and be able to stop her before someone else died and Frank Bertinelli blamed the killings on the Triad, starting an all out war.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait in between chapters. I had trouble figuring out exactly how I wanted this one to go but hopefully this update will be worth the wait! Thank you all for waiting patiently!

"It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him." -From The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien

John Diggle half expected panic and chaos when he opened the door to Oliver's secret lair under the foundry. Instead he found Roy leaning over a notebook, pen held between his teeth as he scanned the list while Oliver was shooting tennis balls. "Did I miss something?" the former soldier questioned as he walked down the stairs. Neither one of them answered him, Oliver nailing another tennis ball to the wall as if it had personally offended him. "Man, what did that tennis ball ever do to you?" A slim smile slid on to Queen's face and he lowered the bow, turning to face Diggle. "I appreciate that you didn't disappear on me but murdering innocent inanimate objects is a bit extreme."

"I need to keep my skills sharp," Oliver replied but Diggle could see the stress written in the tenseness of the younger man's muscles. The events of the past few days had worn on him and the fact that Helena Bertinelli was still running free to killing others was keeping him from relaxing. "Roy's looking over the recent deaths to mark which ones were associated with the Bertinelli family." Diggle nodded and handed over the bag with Oliver's food before making his way carefully over to the boy. He made sure his footsteps echoed slightly off the ceiling so Roy heard him coming. The boy tensed a little but didn't move, watching Diggle out of the corner of his eye until the food had been placed next to him and the man retreated. Then the boy went back to the list.

They settled down silently for lunch, the sound of a pen scribbling out names occasionally interspersed with the sounds of them chewing and paper bags rustling. Carly had asked how the new job was going when he'd stopped at the Big Belly Burger to pick up lunch. He'd done his best to reassure her that everything was okay but he got the feeling she didn't quite believe him. He didn't blame her. Diggle's brother, Andy, had been doing the same job and it had gotten him killed, leaving Carly a widow.

"I'm done, I think." The uncertainty was clear in Roy's voice but he handed the list over to Oliver without flinching. As the Queen heir studied the list, frowning at the names left on it, Diggle watched the boy. There was worry in Roy's eyes and he was shifting a little where he sat as if debating whether or not to speak up. Their eyes met and the soldier nodded once, hoping the boy would take it as encouragement instead of some sort of threat. The boy glanced down at the floor, hands clenching into fists in the fabric of his too large jeans.

Oliver passed the list over to Diggle and asked, "Any idea how far she's gotten through the commanders of the Bertinelli operation?"

"None," Diggle replied, handing the list back without looking at it. "I've been out of the city,
"Right." Oliver turned away quickly but Diggle caught a glimpse of embarrassment in the Queen heir's eyes. "Roy?"

"I'm not sure," the boy mumbled, looking down at his feet and squirming a little. "But I think she's done with everyone but her father." Oliver nodded and headed for his computer. Diggle smiled and nodded at Roy, earning a hesitant nod in response before the boy glanced back down on the floor.

"If I'm lucky I'll be able to track down Frank Bertinelli before Helena kills him," Oliver said, typing quickly. "If I don't catch her this time I might not be able to stop her." Diggle nodded and squeezed his shoulder, trying to silently reassure him that everything would turn out okay. From what he'd seen of Oliver so far, the man wasn't one to give up on a problem. The younger man would figure this out, and maybe then they could all figure out exactly what they were doing.

She was almost finished. Helena's fingers trembled as she removed the gun from its hiding spot. She had made her way down the list, cutting the pillars of support from her father's business out from underneath him. Now all that stood between her and revenge were two men. Nick Salvati would be taken out tonight and her father the next. Then Helena would leave Starling behind and try to start again somewhere far away from the darkness that haunted her here. Still a part of her felt guilty for doing this. She had grown up with Nick, knew his family, and had once counted him as friend. Knowing that people would mourn his death just as Helena had mourned her fiance almost made her rethink her plan. Almost.

The woman steeled herself and carefully tucked her gun out of side, rising smoothly to her feet and crossing to her motorcycle. The sooner she finished this, the sooner the knot in her chest would fade away and she could maybe move on with her life. She slung her leg over the bike and started it off, the purr of the motor soothing her nerves. The sun had set an hour ago and Nick would be out demanding money from people who paid for protection. She would finish him first and then return to the family house to kill her father. She would end all the suffering and pain in one fell swoop and be gone before anyone realized what she had done.

A cold smile crossed Helena's face as she carefully slipped the helmet over her dark hair, hiding her features from the world. She roared out of the forest and on to the main road, almost hitting a car in the process. The driver slammed on the breaks, flung his door open, and jumped out to swear at her but she was already too far away to understand what he was saying. She descended towards downtown Starling, the lights winking invitingly at her, and swerved through the streets towards the Glades, knowing that was where Nick always started his route. The Glades had always been the poor part of Starling City, though conditions continually worsened there, and that meant sometimes Nick had to rough people up to get the payment required for the Bertinelli family protection.

She caught up to him in a run down little deli, two of his thugs standing menacingly a few feet away while Salvati loomed over the owner's daughter, a suggestive leer on his face. Helena ground her teeth together and growled lowly in her throat, kicking down the kickstand and pulling the gun out of its holster. She marched forward smoothly and fired three times through the glass window of the shop. One bullet shattered the glass and the other two went into Salvati's back. He stumbled a little and Helena fired once more, watching with cold satisfaction as he crumpled to the ground.

The thugs that had been with Salvati had dropped to the ground the instant they'd heard the first shot and were only now rising to their feet. Helena whirled on her heel, ignoring the girl at the counter's startled wail as she processed what had just happened, and straddled the bike again,
kicking up the kickstand. She roared down the street, speeding as she headed for home. A single of the dozen bullets fired by Salvati's thugs clipped her arm as it whistled by but she ignored the blaze of pain and the trickle of blood dripping down her arm. She had a job to finish.

The Bertinelli family was not one that had associated with the Queens for as long as Oliver could remember. The family had always been too seeped in the criminal element for Robert to want them around his children so Helena Bertinelli and Oliver Queen had met exactly twice when they were younger, both times during business auctions. They hadn't had much in common then and Oliver doubted they had much in common now. From what he understood of the situation, Helena was killing for revenge. Oliver was trying to right his father's wrongs.

Bypassing the family's security, after all the things he'd faced on and off the island, was simple and Oliver found himself hurrying through the shadows towards the massive mansion, hoping he wasn't too late. Frank Bertinelli was a vile man whose name was on the list but his so called business had been crippled by Helena's actions. Furthermore, he didn't deserve to be killed. Locked away for the rest of his life perhaps but being killed in cold blood by his own daughter was extremely harsh. Especially considering the fact that his murder, and all the others, would be resting on Helena's soul for the rest of her life.

The man who had been guarding the front door was already dead, a bullet through his skull. Oliver didn't pause to admire the accuracy of the shot, instead slipping in through the gap between the already open door and its frame and making his way into the house, bow at the ready. The sound of voices drew him into the kitchen where Frank Bertinelli was sitting on a bar stool, a fresh glass of scotch resting next to his trembling hand. Helena was only a few feet away from him, the gun shaking in her trembling hands. "You had him killed," she was snarling, her voice thick with tears. "I loved him and you murdered him like he was nothing!"

"Helena, sweetheart," Frank said, voice tight and worried. "He was going to take us down. I had to do something."

"He wasn't going to take us down," Helena hissed, tone absolutely venomous. "I was. That laptop was mine and you killed him for it." Neither one of the Bertinellis had noticed Oliver yet, allowing him to silently knock an arrow and carefully aim so he could rid Helena of the gun. "You killed him!" Helena hissed again, sobbing a little. Her father was pale, fingers twitching towards the scotch as if he were considering throwing the glass at his daughter.

"Put the gun down," Oliver growled, arrow aimed perfectly, and Helena's head snapped around so she could stare with wide eyes at him. Her cheeks were stained with tears and her face was flushed as if she'd just run a marathon.

"No," she snapped, frantic. That was all Oliver needed to release the arrow, sending the gun flying across the room. Helena let out a hurt cry and her eyes filled with fury. "You don't understand," she snarled at him, taking an aggressive step forward. "You think you can just walk in and fix all this Hood. Do you even know who I am? Do you even know what he's done?"

"I know exactly what he's done, Helena Bertinelli," Oliver told her calmly. "He is responsible for ordering the deaths of, at the very least, dozens of innocent people. He has failed Starling City but his daughter should not carry the guilt of having killed her father."

For a moment he thought that maybe he'd gotten through to Helena, that maybe should would give up her mission, but then her face twisted with a mixture of guilt, shame, and fury. "Like I shouldn't have to carry to guilt of being responsible for my fiance's death?" she challenged. "It's too late for me." That said she turned and lunged for the gun. Oliver knocked and released another arrow, forcing her to roll away from the gun. Ignoring her for the moment, he lunged forward to
yank Frank Bertinelli off the bar stool, dragging the frightened and confused man out of the room. "Go call the police," Oliver growled at the mob boss. "They'll take you into protective custody." Then he shoved Frank towards the door and headed back towards where Helena had been.

The woman was gone when he entered the room. So was the gun. Oliver bit down a curse and readied another arrow, hurrying into the next room. The only sign of Helena was the open window and a flash of black he could see running towards the front of the house. He launched himself out the window and sprinted after her as police sirens began to wail in the distance. Hearing the sound, Helena changed directions, sprinting almost clumsily towards the woods. Oliver tackled her and they ended up rolling across the damp grass, Helena smacking him over and over on the head and actually managing to knee him in the stomach. She used the moment of breathlessness to squirm free and start sprinting towards the woods again as the police sirens grew louder.

Oliver pushed himself, torn between running after Helena and getting out of the area before the police tried to arrest him. Making a clean get away won the tug of war and he sprinting back towards the entrance to the manor grounds where he’d left his motorcycle. He had managed to slip a tracker on Helena during the struggle. He could access that from the foundry and find out whether Helena had hung around Starling. If she had, he could worry about it then. For now he needed to get as far away from the Bertinelli property as possible.
Sin practically sprinted from her workplace to the old foundry, her heart jumping in her chest. She took the long way there, hoping to deter any possible followers, and was gasping for breath when she hesitated outside the door that led to the secure basement fortress Queen had created. What if Roy wasn't there? He'd vanished on her twice. Maybe he'd gone and done it again. She quickly shook that thought out of her head and rapped twice firmly on the door. Roy had promised. He'd be there.

The man from the night before, not Queen but his friend, opened the door. He looked tense but not entirely unsurprised to see her standing there. He stepped back without a word, letting her in, and Sin grinned hesitantly at him before sliding by and heading for the stairs. Roy was sitting on the edge of the small cot towards the back of the room, feet swinging like he was a much smaller child as his eyes focused on whatever he was drawing on the pad of paper before him. Sin approached him with a skip in her step, pleased when the boy barely tensed at the sound of her footsteps. "What'cha drawing?" she asked, settling down next to him but not leaning over his shoulder.

Roy Harper didn't draw much, at least not around other people. Sin had known him pretty much all her life and had realized a long time ago that he didn't like being observed. She'd never asked why but he'd told her once that his father had taught him the basics. She hadn't needed to wonder after that. Roy's father had been his role model and to have someone so important snatched away from him had forever changed the boy, making him more private and withdrawn. Therefore, Sin fully expected him to flip to a blank page and change the subject. Instead he shrugged at her and tilted the notebook slightly so she could see the twisted patterns of a dragon spreading itself across the paper. "Awesome," she breathed and Roy smiled shyly at her, the warmth actually reaching his eyes. She scooted closer, trying to resist the urge to cradle him close like he was a precious six year old instead of an often capable fourteen year old. He arched his eyebrows at her and she allowed her grin to widen, saying "Don't mind me."

He hesitated for just a moment and then breathed out a soft laugh, turning his attention back towards the mythical creature. Each line was carefully pressed into the paper, creating something that Sin could almost believe was going to fly off the page. The peaceful silence was interrupted by the door to the basement opening and then shutting firmly behind someone, Roy stiffening at Sin's side. The young woman slipped her arm around his slim shoulders as he shoved the notebook and pencil aside so he could focus on Oliver Queen.

"Helena?" Queen's friend questioned immediately as Queen descended, pulling back the hood to reveal his face.

"On the run," came the reply. "She did go after her father but I managed to get there in time to stop it. Bertinelli called the cops so I had to get out of there instead of tracking her down but I did manage to stick a tracker on her. We should be able to figure out from that whether or not she's hanging around Starling." The bow was carefully settled down as Queen's friend went to wake the computer and Sin watched curiously as the heir to the Queen fortune flashed a quick smile at Roy. "Nice call on the list." Roy nodded hesitantly and Queen turned away, joining his friend at the computer. A wide yawn slipped out without Sin's permission and Roy turned serious eyes on her.

"Go to bed." His voice was soft but Sin recognized that look. If she tried to argue she wasn't
going to win. "You probably have to work tomorrow," he added and she couldn't help her gentle smile.

"All right." She hesitated and then said, "Draw me something to hang on my wall, okay?" He nodded and she stood, leaning over to kiss him on the forehead before grabbing the bag she'd brought in with her. "I'll be back tomorrow," she said as a farewell.

"I'll be here," was his quiet reply and Sin couldn't stop herself from beaming at him before practically skipping towards the steps.

"Heading out?" Queen's friend question and she nodded, a sunny smile on her face. "Let me walk you," the man offered. "It's a nasty neighborhood. Especially at this time of night."

Sin hesitated, glancing at Roy who shrugged a little at her. She took in his mostly relaxed body language before turning back to the man. "Don't I know it. Okay." He smiled at her and clapped Queen on the shoulder, ordering the younger man not to stay up too late before following Sin up the stairs. The pair exited the foundry in awkward silence, Sin reminding herself that she had pepper spray in her purse if she needed it, and headed for the street.

"Are you coming back tomorrow?" the man asked, maybe just to break the silence.

"You couldn't keep me away," Sin replied, a little bit of a challenge slipping into her voice.

"Good," came the relieved sounding voice. "He needs a friend right now, someone he can count on, and I'm not sure Oliver's up for the job."

Sin considered that for a moment, remembering Queen's smile when he congratulated Roy and the surprise in her friend's eyes before grinning. "I think he'll do okay. Still doesn't mean I'm going to stop coming."

The man smiled back at her and said, "We haven't been properly introduced. I'm John Diggle, former special forces and now bodyguard to Oliver Queen."

"I hate to tell you this Mr. Diggle, but I think you've been demoted," Sin told her, shaking his hand. "I'm Cynthia Lance."

"Nice to meet you Cynthia."

"Sin," she corrected with a grimace. "I'm only Cynthia when I'm in trouble."

"Do you want me to drive you home Sin?" Mr. Diggle asked her.

"Yeah," Sin decided, allowing him to open the car door for her.

The drive to Sin's home was silent aside from her directing Mr. Diggle through the correct streets. He parked in front of her house and Sin new she should get out of the car but she couldn't bring herself to move. She knew Roy's past, the good and the bad, and was afraid that John Diggle and Oliver Queen were woefully unprepared for the boy's problems. The last thing her friend needed right now was for one of them to unknowingly stumble into one of his traumas. "Sin?" Mr. Diggle asked and she let out a sigh before turning to look at him.

"Look, I just want him happy," she told the man, not sure she was going to be able to get her thoughts across clearly. "And he hasn't been since his dad died and his mom went nuts with the drugs. So don't do anything stupid or I'll make you and Queen regret it, understand?"

"I understand," John Diggle replied solemnly and Sin smiled at him.
"Good. Thanks for the ride," she slid out of the car, shutting the door firmly behind her, pausing to wave at the man before opening the door to her home. Roy was right. She needed a few hours of sleep before she had to wake up and head for work again.

Helena Bertinelli rumbled into Gotham City as the sun rose over the horizon, bathing one of the worst cities in the United States in chilly light. Cold wind whipped around her face and tugged at her dark hair that wasn't pinned down under her helmet. She headed for the Narrows, planning to find a sleazy looking motel she could crash out without anyone asking stupid questions. The events of the evening had left her completely exhausted, both physically and emotionally. The last thing she had expected when she set out to kill her father was the Hood showing up in her home to stop her. After all, the Hood had been weeding out corruption in the city and her father was about as corrupt as they got. Why couldn't the Hood just stay away?

She let out a frustrated growl and parked the bike in front of a run down motel, shutting it off and taking the key with her as she sauntered inside. She pulled off the helmet and smiled seductively at the greasy looking young man behind the counter. He flushed and stammered his way through checking her in and telling her were she could park without being towed. Then she sauntered her way out without a backwards glance. She'd get some sleep and then she'd figure out what she was going to do in the evening.

Oliver woke to the sound of Thea calling to him through the door. "Come on Ollie," she called. "Wake up! Tommy's here to see you."

"I'm up, I'm up!" Oliver grumbled, rolling out of bed. He'd stayed in the foundry's basement long enough to reassure himself that Helena Bertinelli had left Starling far behind and by the time he'd left the basement Roy had been sound asleep on his cot. That meant the Queen heir had only gotten four hours of sleep before his little sister had decided to wake him.

"Are you actually up?" Thea teased and Oliver pounded a hand on his door in response, making his sister yelp before giggling.

"Tommy's here to talk about my new club," he called after her retreating footsteps. "Join us?"

"For as long as I can before school," Thea called back before he heard her skipping away. Oliver hurried to dress, mind rushing over what he needed to accomplish today. He was planning on trying to convince Tommy to become the manager of his new club. Hopefully Thea would be able to pull out the puppy dog eyes and help him with that. After speaking with Tommy, he was going to head to the basement of the foundry and attempt to bond with Roy. Hopefully Diggle would come along to keep him from making a major social blunder. Yawning widely, still tired from the night before, Oliver pulled on his clothes and headed downstairs.

Tommy was standing in the entryway grinning at something Thea had said to him. Oliver smiled at the scene. He hadn't seen them enjoying each other's company since he'd arrived back home. Before the island, Tommy had been a second big brother to Thea but after the sinking of the Queen's Gambit, it seemed as if their relationship had fallen apart. It was good to see them getting along again. "Ready to talk business?" he asked as he descended to join them.

"Never," was Tommy's blithe reply. "You're lucky I like you Ollie, otherwise I wouldn't be coming near that conversation."

"I'm touched," Oliver teased back and Thea's bright laughter echoed off the ceiling.

"Come on boys," she said, shaking her head and smiling at them both. "Let's get this meeting
started before I have to head off to school and miss the fun stuff."

"You've got it Speedy," Oliver told her, slinging an arm around her shoulder. Today was going to be a good day, he was sure of it.
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Remember, all I'm offering is the truth. Nothing more."—Morpheus from The Matrix

"The Undertaking is coming," a man's voice rasped. "A few more months and this job will be over. Then we'll kill the kid and ditch the city just before the danger hits." Roy shivered, another fever chill racking him, and tried to make sense of what was going on around him.

"You know he can hear you, right?" one of the Cigar Man's lackeys pointed out, voice wary.

"What he hears does not matter," came the dismissive reply. "The information won't leave the room." Nausea twisted Roy's stomach and it wasn't simply because he was ill. He understood the implied threat loud and clear despite the fact that his brain felt fuzzy and unfocused. His eyes felt too heavy to open but he still flinched away from the rough hand that pressed against his forehead for a moment. The raspy voice of the Cigar Man chuckled and then footsteps thumped away, leaving him to descend into his reoccurring nightmares about the blood on his hands.

Roy jolted awake to the sound of footsteps above him still caught somewhere between panic and confusion. His heart thudded in his chest and he pulled in a deep breath, holding it for a moment before releasing the air again as he worked to calm himself. He was safe. The fourteen year old doubted that anyone aside from Queen, Diggle, and Sin knew how to get in to the basement of the foundry and he'd hear signs of that if anyone tried. The footsteps moved away from the door to the basement and Roy relaxed, dropping his head back on the pillow with a relieved sigh. It had been a long time since he'd felt this safe. Before his dad died, Roy hadn't understood what true fear felt like. Watching his mother descend into drug addiction had given him the first real taste of terror and being kidnapped had forced him to live with it. He had forgotten how good it felt to relax somewhere, to be able to trust that he was safe.

He was debating the merits of going back to sleep when the door to the basement opened. Oliver Queen was grinning as he made his way down the stairs, John Diggle right behind him. "Morning Roy," Oliver called and the young man dipped his head slightly in acknowledgement, curious about what had put the Queen heir in such a good mood. Diggle elbowed Queen in the ribs when the blonde man turned toward the computer, which stopped Queen in his tracks. "Oh, and I'm building a nightclub upstairs as a cover for what's down here so don't panic if you hear people up there, okay?"

Queen seemed to be waiting for some kind of response so Roy murmured, "Okay." Queen grinned at him and then headed for the computer as if it had some kind of power over him. Diggle rolled his eyes and headed over to Roy, bag in hand. The young man took it when offered and wrinkled his nose a little when he pulled out a bagel. He was getting really sick and tired of bagels.

"Yeah," Diggle agreed with a wry smile. "We need a new breakfast plan." Roy's lips twitched as someone pounded on the door.

"Open up," Sin hollered through the door and Roy felt a real smile form on his face. Diggle turned and headed for the stairs while Oliver shook his head, abandoning the computer and heading for his bow and arrows.
"Don't you have better things to do than murder innocent tennis balls?" Diggle called as he let Sin in. The dark haired girl arched her eyebrows at Roy who shrugged back at her, not feeling like explaining it. Something was bothering him but every time he tried to address the thought it slipped away from him.

"Is something wrong?" Sin asked as she crossed the room, worry coming into her eyes.

"No," Roy told her, fishing for where he'd dropped the notepad. He'd finished the dragon for her the night before while Queen was ensuring that Helena Bertinelli wasn't hanging around Starling to cause more trouble. He handed the notebook over to her and she arched her eyebrows questioningly at him, waiting for an encouraging nod before flipping it open.

"Wow," she breathed, eyes widening as she stared at the picture. "Roy, this is amazing."

"It's okay," he mumbled, flushing slightly, and he didn't have to look up to know she was rolling her eyes at him.

"This is better than just okay," she retorted, as if they were having an argument. "This is amazing." Roy shrugged, flushing brighter red and she giggled. He elbowed her in the side in retaliation. "If I could draw half as well as you I wouldn't be worrying about a career after high school." Roy just shook his head at her comment, working on willing away the blush on his cheeks. She tried to hand the notepad back but his shook his head at her.

"It's for you," he told her and she smiled at him, pulling him into a hug.

"You're awesome Roy." They smiled at each other, Roy shaking his head slightly, and then Sin's cell trilled. The young woman scowled and fished her phone out of her bag, her frown deepening at the number. "Hello?" she said, answering the call. "Yeah, I guess." A pause while she rolled her eyes at Roy, obviously exasperated by whatever the person on the other end of the line was saying. "You owe me big time Jas. This was supposed to be my day off." With that, Sin hung up and shoved the phone back into her bag. "I have to go to work. Jasmine's mom got caught shooting up again and Jas has to go deal with the problem. I'll see you after work." That said, Sin spun on her heel and headed for the stairs, her irritation written clearly in every step. Roy watched her leave, a slim smile fixed on his face as the door banged shut behind her.

Gotham was dark and full of shadows. It looked the way Helena felt, gutted and angry, just looking for a way to lash out against everyone who had ever done it wrong. For the first time since she had discovered her father's treachery, Helena felt at home somewhere. She wandered the streets, one hand on the butt of her gun and a hood pulled over her dark hair. The men following her did not think she knew they were there. The dark haired young woman was looking forward to proving them wrong. She turned a corner, heading deeper into the slums of Gotham, a cruel smile crossing her face. Another corner and suddenly a man was standing in front of her leering.

"Hey sweetheart. What's a pretty thing like you doing in a place like this?"

"Can't a girl take a walk in peace?" Helena responded with a sly smile that made the man's leer widened. He thought she was flirting with him. He couldn't be more wrong.

"Do you want to know a secret?" Helena asked, beckoning him forward with a single curl of a slim finger. "So am I?" The gun slid smoothly out of its holster and the man jerked back with a startled cry.
"You're a crazy-" Before he could finish the sentence, he was crumpling to the ground with a hole in his skull. Helena then whirled on her heel to grin viciously at the two men behind her.

"Who's next gentlemen?" The both gaped at her, eyes wild and panicked. Then they stumbled over one another trying to get away from her. She lifted the gun and fired, one the men falling dead. The man left standing let out a comically high pitched whimper. Helena smiled nastily at him as he tripped over his own feet and crashed to the ground. "Aw, are you afraid of little old me?" She let out a gleeful giggle and the man began sliding frantically away from her. "Good. You should be."

"P-please," the man stuttered when he hit the wall of a building rising crookedly out of the concrete behind him. "Don't do this."

"Don't do what?" Helena mocked. "Leave you dead like you were going to leave me? Actually..." She trailed off and leaned down a little so she could look him in the eyes. "Better than you were going to leave me. You and your friends were going to rape me and then slit my throat. I'm simply going to kill you. It's better than scum like you deserve."

"I'm sorry," the man wailed, sobbing messy tears, but Helena simply laughed.

"You should have thought of that before you and your friends came after me." Helena straightened and took careful aim at the blubbering man's head. That was when a dark shadow wiped out the sky, taking her down to the ground. Helena caught a brief glimpse of a second smaller shadow landed gracefully in front of her before her head crashed to the ground and the world around her went black.

The evening had started out the same way it normally did when Oliver approached someone on the list. James Holder threatened and stammered his way through a conversation with the Starling City vigilante, just like the people on the list before him. That was when someone decided to change the script a little. Oliver was in the process of threatening Holder into fixing the man's wrongs when a gun spoke and Holder toppled to the ground, red blooming on his chest. Holder sank into the aquamarine waters of his rooftop swimming pool, something so extravagant it would have made even the pre-Island Ollie Queen roll his eyes, staining the water red as Oliver dove towards the ground.

Two more bullets followed the first, one grazing Oliver's arm and the second missing him completely. Oliver pressed himself to the ground, listening carefully, but was greeted with nothing but silence. He rose slowly, ignoring the stinging in his arm to grab another arrow from his quiver. Nothing. Warily Oliver slid the arrow back into his quiver and approached the pool, stumbling slightly. He frowned down at the still body of James Holder for a moment before turning and heading for the edge of the roof. He needed to get back to the foundry so he could get the bullet out of his arm. Then he could try to track down exactly who had wanted James Holder dead enough to hire a sniper.

Chapter End Notes

So, good news, since spring break is next week for me, I should be able to post more regularly on this! Also, feel free to come say hi to me on tumblr (itselliebrown.tumblr.com)!
Diggle had successfully removed the bullet before the trouble really started. Whoever had killed Holder had used poison which had resulted in Oliver gulping down herbs before passing out on the floor of the foundry. He woke up on Roy's cot, soaked in sweat, with the boy in question watching him warily. "How long?" he croaked out, sitting up and taking the bottle of water that Roy offered him.

"All night," was the soft reply. Oliver winced at that and drank. Diggle was nowhere to be seen but Oliver doubted the man had gone far. The former soldier took his job of protecting the Queen heir very seriously.

"Where's Diggle?"

"He went to get breakfast," was Roy's response. The boy was watching Oliver as he swung his legs over the edge of the cot and prepared to stand. His green eyed gaze suggested he didn't think Oliver was being smart but he didn't say anything. Oliver placed his feet firmly on the floor and stood. For a moment the world spun around him. Then it stilled and Oliver managed to find his balance, standing steadily in front of the cot. Roy watched the entire thing, looking both worried and disapproving.

"I take it I was supposed to stay on the cot," Oliver said with a wry smile.

"How am I supposed to keep you there?" was Roy's surprising response. The boy had been silent for most of the time that Oliver had known him, only really chatting when Sin whenever she was around. The fact that he was comfortable enough to hold a short conversation with the Queen heir was both surprising and comforting. It gave Oliver hope that maybe he'd done the right thing by bringing the boy into the foundry.

"Good point," he agreed hesitantly, not wanting to scare the boy but not sure silence between them was the answer to that particular problem. He'd made the mistake of scaring the kid into jumping out a window, kidnapping him for the second time in his life by bringing him to the foundry while he was unconscious, and then not explaining what was going on which had their relationship off to a rocky start. The last thing he wanted to do was bring them back to square one but he also didn't want to avoid Roy or pretend he didn't exist. He caught a glimpse of the slim self depreciating smile on Roy's face and a sudden idea struck him. "We could fix that."

"Yes."

The response was immediate and despite the low tone, Oliver could still hear the vehement acceptance of his offer.
The Queen heir smiled at the strength of the answer, feeling muscles that had tensed up when he had mentioned the island relaxing some. "Good. We'll start tomorrow." Roy nodded once as Diggle opened the door to the basement, what looked like a grocery bag held in one hand. Oliver turned toward the noise and then arched his eyebrows at his bodyguard. "Did you decide to go grocery shopping?"

"I decided we need a little variety in our lives," was Diggle's reply. "Specifically, no more bagels." Oliver snorted at that but didn't protest the assessment. Since Roy's arrival at the foundry he had probably consumed more bagels than he had in his entire life. Quite honestly he agreed with Diggle, they needed some sort of variety in that department.

Thea Queen was worried. Her fingers tapped lightly on her desk as she tried to focus on the Trigonometry she was currently failing to learn. Oliver hadn't come home last night. She knew this because she'd had a nightmare that he'd really drowned the night the Queen's Gambit sank and that his return had been a lie. She gotten up once she was sure she'd be able to walk and stumbled her way to his bedroom only to discover the bed made. She'd hesitate a moment and then, desperate for some sort of comfort, snuggled up on Oliver's bed and drifted off to sleep. Raisa had woken her in time for school without a single hint of judgement but the woman had shaken her head in denial when the girl had asked whether she had seen Oliver.

Thea felt as if Oliver was slipping away for her. It wasn't as if he was doing it on purpose, after all he was including her in his plans to build a nightclub, but the old Oliver, the one before the island, had always been there for her. Sure he'd been a womanizing drinker, never drugs but enough alcohol to sink a ship, but he'd cared about her. She'd never doubted that. The old Oliver had worn his feelings on his sleeve. The new one tucked them away behind false smiles, pulling off a clumsy facade of the old one.

Part of her was absolutely terrified to discover what was behind that mask. What if, when she managed to strip it away, she discovered that her brother hated their entire family? What if he was truly done with them all after years spent away from them? What if every declaration of love was really a cleverly concocted lie until he could manage to extract himself from their lives? Thea didn't think she would be able to survive that. On the other hand, what Oliver was simply afraid to hurt them or maybe be hurt if they pulled away from them once they saw what he had become? She could handle that. She could cling to her brother and do her best to pull the broken pieces back together. She could accept an entirely new Oliver Queen if she could only be sure that he loved her.

"Miss Queen, are you even paying attention?" her teacher demanded, voice shrill and grating on Thea's ears.

"Sorry ," Thea apologized, plastering a fake smile on her face. The brown haired woman frowned disapprovingly but didn't say anything further, moving on with the lesson. To be completely honest, Thea was surprised the woman hadn't give up on her. The younger Queen child had fallen to drugs and partying to deal with the deaths in her life, and then the shock of getting her brother back. The result was that she had been abandoning her school work, her grades slipping. Midterms were coming up and she had to improve her grades or Mom wouldn't allow her to continue helping Oliver with the club. Then any chance she had at breaking through her brother's shields.

Thea forced herself to take extremely detailed notes, struggling to understand what was going on. She had been good at math once, before the Queen's Gambit had sank. Then she'd fallen into depression and eventual bad habits, her grades tanking. Math had managed to remain her best class but her grades still only managed to reach the C range. When Dad had been alive, that grade
in math would have been unacceptable. After twenty grueling minutes of trying to catch up on what she had flat out missed or hadn't been paying attention to, the bell rang, releasing her to lunch. Thea could feel her teacher's eyes fixed on her as she gathered her things, tucking them away in her bag. She wasn't at all surprised when asked to talk to her before she could leave the room. Margo tittered a little and walked off without a backwards glance, leaving Thea fuming.

Truth be told, Margo hadn't been the greatest friend since they'd hit middle school. The older girl was catty, nasty, and over all the wrong sort of person for Thea to be hanging out with but the girl had no one else. She was trapped between a rock and a hard place, forced to either be Margo's friend or stumble clumsily through the process of trying to become friends with people Margo had alienated while Thea stood by and watched.

"Quite frankly, I'm not impressed with your work Miss Queen," began and Thea felt worry sweep over her. Trigonometry was not required to graduate, which meant that could technically drop Thea from the class. It wasn't something the young woman wanted, especially not now that Oliver was back. He'd managed to pass Trig, granted with a C- but it was still passing, and if he could do it then she should be able to as well. "Your having been making a conscious effort lately, which is why I have not dropped you from the class, but that isn't going to be enough to pass." The woman glanced at Thea over the top of her glasses, gaze serious. "I am at school an hour before classes start all week every week. If you want to pass, arrive at my classroom at seven and I will spend fifty minutes helping you catch up and excel in this course. That is all."

"Thank you," Thea breathed, feeling surprisingly grateful towards the woman. None of her other teachers seemed to care that she was trying again. They had decided early on that she was a lost cause and turned their attention towards other students more willing to learn. That she was being given another chance in this classroom, in a subject that she knew she could excel at, was huge. Margo hadn't waited in the hall for her but Thea didn't care. would help her catch up and maybe that meant Thea hadn't completely screwed up her future after all.

When Bruce arrived home from Wayne Enterprises, Dick was waiting for him in the entryway, a foot tapping impatiently while Alfred relieved the man of his coat. "I found the police report for her," the boy said as Alfred vanished down a hallway. Bruce didn't have to ask who Dick was talking about. The two of them had taken down a woman who was tormenting men who'd been stalking her. Bruce had no problem when people defended themselves but the dark haired woman had been taunting her would be attacker, delighted by his fear. He also didn't question why the boy was bringing up the official police report. Dick always checked the reports after his tutor, he'd already been kidnapped twice so Bruce didn't want to send him to public school, had left. This was to make sure no one they had apprehended the night before had escaped before being locked away. If Dick was bringing the report up then either the woman had escaped or there had been something interesting in it.

"Her name is Helena Bertinelli and she's a resident of Starling City," the boy continued. "Here's where it gets really interesting. Helena claims that she has the gun for protection because the Starling City vigilante, who the public is calling the Hood by the way, tried to kill her. I checked with the Starling City police department then and found an official report filed there in which Frank Bertinelli, Helena's father, claims that his daughter attempted to kill him and the Hood saved his life."

"So which one do you think is telling the truth?" Bruce asked, walking towards the study with Dick trailing after him.

"Hard to say," the boy replied with a shrug. "I did some digging and found out the Hood has killed people, but he's also save people or left them alive as well. It seems to be a case by case thing." He bounced a little when Bruce paused to open the study door, eyes bright. "Can we go
check it out?"

Bruce hid his grin at the boy's enthusiasm and asked, "Is there a reason Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson could be in Starling?"

"Unidac Industries," came the immediate response. "It's being auctioned off the night after tomorrow and all kinds of investors are looking into it." Bruce nodded once, absorbing the information. If Dick was correct, which was extremely likely, then there would be all kinds of industry giants present. It would not look unusual if Wayne Enterprises was there as well.

"Pack your bags," Bruce told the boy. "I'll call Lucius and let him know we're going to Starling."

"Yes!" Dick cheered, doing a victory dance before scrambling off down the hall and around a corner towards the stairs. Bruce allowed a smile to cross his face as he watched the boy go, shaking his head before entering the study and heading for the grandfather clock that had become a secret entrance to the Cave. He would need to pack their gear if Batman and Robin were going to make an appearance in Starling City.
"Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass...It's about learning to dance in the rain."-Vivian Greene

"Oliver?" Thea's voice interrupted Oliver as he was preparing to visit the Starling City branch of the Bratva. After breakfast he'd tested the bullet and discovered that it had been laced with Curare, a poison specific to a man named Floyd Lawton, called Deadshot. The rounds had been tracked back to the Bratva, which had been lucky for him. He had contacts inside the Bratva that he could use to track down Lawton and end this whole mess. Oliver wasn't the only one who wanted Lawton tracked down. The man was personally responsible for the death of Diggle's brother Andy. Andy had been protecting a client when Lawton had shot him, leaving Carly a widow and Diggle to take over his brother's position.

"Yeah Speedy?" he questioned, finishing buttoning his shirt and turning to face her with a slim smile. His sister had one of her school books tucked under her arm and her shoes cradled in one hand, her backpack still resting between her shoulder blades. She had obviously just come home from school and it looked as if she was actually planning on doing her homework instead of running off somewhere with Margo to get high.

Thea wrinkled her nose at the nickname and then took note of his appearance. "Going somewhere?" she asked, curiosity flaring in her eyes.

"Just for an hour or so," he replied. "I'm heading out to talk to someone in the Glades about business." Thea tilted her head slightly, eyes telling him that she wasn't sure whether or not she believed him. After a moment she shrugged. "What can I do for you?"

"How much do you remember from Trigonometry?" was Thea's reply. Oliver gave an exaggerated shudder and she laughed at him. "I've been slacking off and I've got to catch up or Mom will probably decide to put her foot down and not let me help with your new club if I don't get my grades up."

"I'll come by your room as soon as I get back and see if I can be any help," he promised her and was rewarded with a bright smile.

"Great. I'm gonna go start on my reading for English," Thea told him, heaving a frustrated sigh. "Getting behind sucks."

"I hear you," he told her and she shot one more grin at him before heading towards her bedroom. Oliver watched her go for a moment before heading for the stairs. It was time to get this meeting with the Bratva over with so he could start the process of tracking down Lawton started and move on to continuing the process of reconnecting with his little sister.

Moira Queen slid closer to Walter on the couch while Detectives Lance and Hilton sat in chairs across from them. "Thank you for agreeing to speak to us," Hilton began, a friendly smile on his face. Moira appreciated Lucas Hilton's presence, knowing that Lance had no love for her family. He blamed Oliver for Sara's death and took it out on he whole family. While Moira didn't blame Quentin for hating her, she had ordered the yacht sabotaged, but she didn't appreciate his senseless anger at the rest of the family. They didn't deserve it. Hilton would act as a barrier between Lance and his hatred, forcing the other detective to focus on the case at hand.
"We are glad to help the police in any way we can," Walter replied amicably, taking her hand in his own. Moira found herself wondering if Walter would still love her if he knew what she had done, regardless of her reason. She forced herself to push the thought away, focusing on the current conversation.

"Have you watched the news in the past hour or so?" Hilton questioned.

Walter glanced at Moira, who shook her head slightly, before turning back to the detectives. "I'm afraid we haven't."

Hilton and Lance exchanged a meaningful glance before Hilton continued. "Carl Rasmussen was shot inside his own home earlier today," Moira let out a surprised gasp and Walter squeezed her hand gently in response.

"That is terrible news," her husband informed the detectives. "Carl was a titan and he will be missed in the business community. Unfortunately I do not understand what this have to do with Moira and myself."

"Carl was looking into buying Unidac Industries," Hilton told them and Moira nodded once, things suddenly falling into place. Carl Rasmussen wasn't the only possible buyer who had been killed recently. That meant Malcolm had likely hired someone to eliminate contenders in order to ensure Queen Consolidated's purchase of the company.

"Well, Industries is a bit of a misnomer," Walter informed the detectives. "UI's recent activity was actually looking into alternative energy."

"I think the point my partner is trying to make is that Carl Rasmussen was the second bidder this week to lose his life," Lance cut in, voice sharp. While Moira didn't appreciate her tone, she could admire his insight. His ability to find connections between victims was part of what made his such an effective detective.

"Are you implying something detective?" Moira questioned, by this point in her life an expert at hiding her emotions. There was no way Lance could know that she might know exactly why people were being killed.

"Well only that your husband is looking into Unidac Industries and the competition seems to be dropping like flies," was Lance's retort, his face coloring slightly with anger.

"And I'm sure your veiled accusation has nothing to do with your hatred of my family," was Moira's response. She watched as Lance's muscles tensed as if he wanted to stand and yell at her.

"Unidac's in receivership detective," Walter cut in, squeezing Moira's hand again as he tried to calm the situation. "Ownership is subject to a liquidation auction, so that means there are many prospective buyers and the auction is tomorrow so if I were taking out the competition, I would have a lot of killing to do in a very short amount of time." His voice was dry, amused even, and Moira felt herself relax at that. Walter suspected nothing, which meant that her family was still safe from Malcolm Merlyn's wrath. If she was going to be involved in something as despicable as the Undertaking, Moira was going to insist that until the time came to set their plan in action that they be as subtle as possible.

"We're just making rounds with interested buyers," Hilton was saying, trying to completely defuse the situation. "We're making sure they're taking extra precautions." Moira was no longer listening as Walter reassured Hilton that they were perfectly safe. Instead she was already planning to call Malcolm and demand why he had chosen such a risky and public way to ensure that Queen Consolidated won the auction.
Bruce's private plane touched down smoothly on the tarmac and Dick turned away from the window to grin at the man. Honestly, it felt good to be out of the oppressive darkness of Gotham. Sometimes Bruce wondered if it would swallow them both whole, eat up everything good about them until they were nothing left than hollow shells. It wasn't something he would have ever wished upon anyone but he would be willing to do that in order to protect his city from men like Crane and the Joker. He would, however, refuse to allow Dick to share his fate. He would do everything possible to help the boy hold on to the happiness he always seemed to cling to.

The pilot came over the intercom after a moment, announcing that it was safe to get off the airplane, and Bruce stood, stretching out his muscles. After a long day sitting in the office, the last thing he had wanted to do was sit again for the flight from Gotham to Starling but it had been necessary. Lucius Fox had made all the necessary arrangements to make the visit to Starling official Wayne Enterprise business so it didn't seem odd that the playboy billionaire Bruce Wayne was in the city. Batman and Robin wouldn't be able to go out tonight, that would give away their true identities quickly, but the night of the auction they would be able to be out and about. They would have to wait until after the auction but that was acceptable.

The pair disembarked in silence, Dick absorbing his surroundings with wide eyes. Bruce sometimes forgot that the boy had grown up in a circus and that, while he'd seen some of the greatest sights that Europe had to offer he hadn't been in most states in the US. Furthermore, Gotham wasn't exactly a good representation of a large American city. Even the rich parts of Gotham looked as if they were ready for war. In contrast, Starling's downtown boasted shiny buildings with large expanses of windows that flashed in the light of the setting sun. It was truly breathtaking the first time a person saw it.

"It's rather overwhelming, isn't it?" Bruce said with a slim smile when Dick turned to look at him.

"Yeah," the boy replied, sounding a little breathless. "Is the whole city like this?"

"Just the downtown area," Bruce told him, placing a hand on the boy's shoulder to guide him towards the waiting car. "Once you move out of downtown you either end up in the residential area for the rich or the Glades. The Glades are closer to the Narrows of Gotham."

"I'm not sure anything could be like the Narrows," was Dick's reply, the boy shivering slightly. Since the Joker's chaotic and brief reign of terror several months ago, more and more crazies had been popping out of the woodwork, giving Dick a much better look at how bad off the Narrows actually were. It wasn't something Bruce had ever wished for the boy to see and he did his best to shield his adopted son from the worst of it, even knowing that Dick had probably already experienced the most traumatic event of his life at eight, watching his parents topple to the ground like broken dolls.

"I said closer," Bruce replied as the driver waiting for them moved to open the door. Dick nodded and slipped into the car, Bruce handing their bags over to the driver before joining them. They had arrived safely in Starling City. They were one step closer to tracking down the Hood and figuring out whether or not Helena Bertinelli was telling the truth.
"No one is so brave that he is not disturbed by something unexpected." - Julius Caesar

"We'll start with the basics," Oliver said, standing across from Roy in the area he'd set aside for training when he'd been setting up the basement of the foundry. Above them, workmen were already starting on the building, making it into the club Tommy, Oliver, and Thea had worked together to envision, and had been told to knock on the basement of the foundry or to call Tommy if they needed anything. Then Oliver had taken breakfast downstairs, Diggle following him, and settled down to look up the location the Bratva had found for him, scanning the area. There'd been a brief debate and then Diggle had gone to scout the area, reasoning that the vigilante couldn't go out in broad daylight. Oliver had reluctantly agreed and then turned his attention towards fulfilling his promise to Roy.

"Move your feet a little further apart," he instructed, doing his best to adjust Roy's stance without actually touching the boy. He watched Roy shift and settle in a better, more balanced stance with an approving nod. "Good." He hesitated a moment, considering where to start, and then said, "There's a few places you want to remember when you're fighting someone, especially if they're stronger than you. The eyes, nose, ears, throat, knee, and groin, got it?" He waited for Roy's nod before he continued. "If you're going for the eyes, try scratching them or gouging them out with your thumbs. At the very least you'll blind them. For the nose, take the heel of the hand and strike from underneath. There are ways you can deafen or disorient someone with at the ears by slapping your cupped palms over them, an elbow or punch to the throat will wind someone. If they have a height advantage, either aim a kick at the shins or at the back of the knee. Otherwise, there's the standard knee to the groin."

Roy looked a little overwhelmed at the rush of information and Oliver smiled sheepishly at him. "Don't worry if you can't remember everything. We'll work through it slowly, okay?" That earned him a hesitant nod in response. "We'll start with how to punch someone without hurting yourself. When you're making a fist, be sure that your thumb is on the outside. If it's inside the fist you'll break your fingers trying to injure someone else." He waited for Roy's nod before settling within arms reach of the boy. "Give it a try, just aim for my hands, okay?" He heard Diggle enter the foundry, shutting the door behind him, but kept his eyes fixed on the boy.

"You want me to hit you?" Roy managed to sound both skeptical and worried at the same time.

"Yes," Oliver confirmed with a grin at boy's skepticism and misplaced worry. Roy studied him for a moment and then swung half-heartedly at Oliver, fist smacking lightly into his hand. "Good," Oliver encouraged. "Now put some force behind it." Roy obeyed, some of the tension leaving him. The punch smacked harder against Oliver's hand but the boy pulled his hand too far, telegraphing his intentions. "Better," the man praised. "Don't pull your arm back so far. You actually lose power when you do that. Again." Another punch, this one once again with more force. "Very good." The praise earned Oliver a shy smile before Roy cleared his face. "Start from closer to your face and tighten up your movements. Again." Roy obeyed and this time the smack echoed off the ceiling, Oliver's hand stinging a little. "Exactly like that," Oliver said grinning, and Roy smiled softly again.

"Sorry to interrupt this training session but your mother is calling," Diggle said, approaching with Oliver's phone.

"Thanks Digg," Oliver told the man, taking the phone and pressing the accept call button. "Hey Mom, what can I do for you?"
"Are you busy right now dear?" his mother asked.

"Not really, just finishing up a few things at the club. Why?"

"Bruce Wayne is in Starling City. You remember him, right?" his mother asked. Oliver's brow furrowed as he tried to remember exactly who she was talking about. "Maybe not. The pair of you were little when you last met. Regardless, I invited him to dinner this evening and was wondering if you could pick him up in an hour to give him a tour of the city before then."

"Sure," Oliver replied, already reshuffling his day. He would be able to spend a little while longer working with Roy before he'd be forced to head back to Queen Manor to change before he picked up Wayne. "I'd be glad to."

"Thank you so much," his mother replied.

"It's no problem Mom," Oliver told her.

"Never the less, thank you," she said again. "I'll see you this evening Oliver." Then she hung up.

Oliver walked over to place the phone down on a table before turning back to his two companions. "I'm going to need to leave soon. Apparently Bruce Wayne of Wayne Enterprises is in town and Mom wants me to show him around before dinner."

"Are you going to need me?" Diggle asked. "Because if not Roy needs to go some place he can shower and change into clean clothes." Oliver nodded and then winced.

"Wait, Mom will be angry with both of us if she finds out I showed Wayne around Starling without protection," he groaned.

"One of the downfalls of not showing the world that you're really the vigilante," Diggle replied with a slight smirk.

"I think I have a solution to your problem," a female voice announced. Sin was standing in the doorway to the basement, her bag slung over one shoulder. "You both already know where I live. Roy can clean up at my place and I think there's still some of his clothes there from last time he spent the night. One of you can pick him up afterwards."

Oliver glanced at Diggle, considering his options. "It's your call man," his bodyguard and friend replied.

"Okay," he told Sin. "But I'm giving you both my number and Diggle's. If something goes wrong you call one of us, understand?"

"Got it," Sin replied, practically skipping down the steps to grab Roy's hand. "Come on, Roy. It'll be just like old times!" Oliver managed to catch a glimpse of Roy's slim smile before the pair of them were gone.

"Ready to go Oliver?" Diggle asked but he too was looking in the direction Sin and Roy had gone, an amused smile on his face.

"I'd better be," was Oliver's wry response. "I need to shower before meeting Wayne, I'm required to make a good impression you know." Diggle laughed and motioned Oliver towards the stairs. "The sooner I get this over with, the better."
Dick tensed when there was a knock on their hotel room door, carefully placing the tablet he was playing around with on the bed, readying himself to roll to the floor. Bruce stood without making a sound and Dick kept an eye on his guardian as the man opened the door a crack. "Bruce Wayne?" an unfamiliar male's voice questioned and the boy tensed even further, heart beginning to pound. "I'm Oliver Queen," the male continued. "My mother spoke to you earlier."

"Of course," Bruce agreed, giving the all clear sign behind his back. Dick relaxed and turned back to his tablet. "How can I help you Mr. Queen?"

"Oliver, please," came the reply. "Mr. Queen was my father. My mother sent me to see if you were interested in being shown around Starling before dinner."

"That's very kind of you to offer but I wouldn't want to waste your time," Bruce replied smoothly and Dick smirked slightly at the tone, skimming articles about local happenings in Starling.

"It's no trouble at all," Oliver Queen returned, still from outside the room. "In fact, I insist."

"Very well then." Bruce sounded resigned to his fate but the boy knew that his guardian would be taking advantage of a native source of information. It was always best to get an insider's perspective on the area before jumping into the middle of something."There's someone I need to introduce you to first though."

Dick recognized his cue and quickly closed the windows he had open for his research, bringing up some mindless game so he'd seem like any other eleven year old kid being dragged on a business trip. He heard the door open wider but didn't look up until two sets of footsteps entered the room. Standing next to his guardian was a man about Bruce's height and build with blonde hair and steely blue eyes. Something about the way he held himself, how in control of his body he was, made the boy want to find a place to hide but he wasn't sure why. "Oliver Queen, this is Richard Grayson, my adopted son," Bruce said and Dick realized he was staring upwards with wide, uncertain eyes.

"Hi," he ventured with a hesitant smile, reminding himself firmly that Bruce wouldn't let anything bad happen to him.

"Nice to meet you," Queen replied with a friendly smile, something about his posture easing enough for Dick to stop feeling as if he was going to back attacked at any moment. "Are you going to come with us?"

"Definitely," Dick replied with a grin, rolling off the bed to his feet and shutting the tablet off, leaving it behind on the bed. "Right?" he turned his grin on Bruce whose lips quirked up in a slight smile. Dick allowed his grin to widen as he bent to grab his shoes, Bruce turning the conversation towards whether or not he'd met Oliver before.

It took five minutes for them to make their way down the stairs to where a sleek black car was waiting, a dark skinned man standing in military rest position in front of it. "This is John Diggle, my bodyguard and driver," Queen said, looking as if he were barely resisting the urge to roll his eyes when he said the word bodyguard. "He'll be with us today, at my mother's assistance."

"Pleased to meet you Mr. Diggle," Bruce said, shaking the man's hand while Dick lurked near his guardian's leg, equal measures curious and wary.

"The pleasure's mine," the man replied and then opened the back door of the car. Oliver slipped in side, followed by Bruce, and Dick slid in last, cuddling up next to his protector. As much as Dick liked meeting new people and seeing new places, after the deaths of his parents he was a bit wary around strange people or situations. Bruce casually slipped his arm over the boy's shoulder and
Dick allowed himself to relax and simply listen as Oliver Queen did his best to play tour guide.

Malcolm Merlyn settled back in the black, high backed chair behind his desk and listen to his cell phone ring in his ear as he waited for Moira to pick up. Anger was burning in his chest but he refused to let it show on his face, fixing a pleasant smile on his face. He had learned many things since his beloved Rebecca had been brutally ripped away from him. He had learned the truth about the people in the Glades who Rebecca had tried so hard to help, learned that they were worthless pieces of trash who deserved nothing more than death. While on Nanda Parbat he had learned the true solution to that problem, as well as learning the art of battle. He had also learned patience.

"Yes?" Moira's voice asked in his ear. "What can I do for you Malcolm?" She sounded mildly irritated. This was the second time today since the pair had spoken. The first time, Moira had been berating him for choosing to have people killed that might be a threat to their bid to buy Unidac Industries during the auction in such a public way. They had argued for an hour before Moira had needed to go to an office meeting and had tabled the argument, though Malcolm knew that she was far from happy with the results.

"Did you know that Bruce Wayne is in Starling?" Malcolm asked her, allowing none of the anger he felt to seep into his voice.

"Of course," was Moira's brisk reply. "Thomas Wayne was a good friend of Robert's before his death and Bruce is having dinner with my family before the auction for old time's sake."

"And you didn't think to tell me he was here?" Malcolm snapped, some of his anger breaking through his carefully crafted control. Wayne Enterprises was powerful enough to ruin their entire plan if Wayne was planning on making a bid for Unidac. The Undertaking could be set back for years, if not permanently, because of this.

"I thought you already knew," was Moira's equally sharp reply. "The local news was raving over his arrival, especially considering the fact that he brought a child with him."

That single, startling piece of information had a cruel smile crossing Malcolm's face. Maybe this whole thing wasn't a disaster after all. Maybe, just maybe, he could make this all work out. "Oh really?" he questioned, turning his chair so he could look out the massive glass window behind him, turning his gaze towards the busy street below.

"Yes," Moira replied impatiently. "Bruce Wayne vanished for several years and came back with an adopted son. The media was going crazy because he chose to bring the boy with him. Is that all, Malcolm?"

"Of course, I'll let you get back to what you were doing Moira," Malcolm said, waiting for her good-bye before hanging up and dialing a new number. This time the person he was calling picked up immediately after the first ring. "Ms. White, is it?" Malcolm said, voice completely unemotional. "I have a job offer for you. One that you cannot refuse."
Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"There are bad days, and then there are legendary bad days. This was shaping up to be one of those." -Richard B. Riddick, Riddick

The so-called tour of Starling City was one of the most agonizing things Oliver had ever done. Bruce Wayne was everything Oliver Queen had been before the island, right down to the smug attitude and the purposeful ignorance of everything around him. It was a wonder the man managed to keep Wayne Enterprises afloat, let alone that he was allowed to be the legal guardian for the tiny boy sitting next to him. Richard Grayson was better behaved than Oliver had ever been at that age, or any age really, and he felt bad that the boy had such a self-centered, narcissistic man for a guardian. Still, everything was going well, aside from Oliver gritting his teeth every time he had to speak to Wayne, until they reached the Glades.

The plan he and Diggle had devised before picking up Wayne involved a brief introduction to the Glades which would allow them to drive by Sin's house. That way Oliver could fulfill his obligation to his mother while reassuring himself that Roy was safe. The results of this venture into the Glades was nothing like Oliver had hoped. They made it past Sin's house without any trouble, no vehicles parked there and no signs of trouble, but when they turned the corner to head out of the Glades things started to go wrong.

A car screeched out from an alley, too close for Diggle to avoid, and despite the fact that the former soldier slammed on the breaks, their vehicle still wasn't driving anywhere any time soon. Several men, by Oliver's best guess members of the Triad, poured out of the shadows, yanking open doors and pulling everyone out of the wrecked vehicle. The Queen heir's guess was proved correct when Chien Na Wei, known to the Starling City underworld at large as China White, stepped into view. She smiled, a thin sharp smile more like a baring of teeth than anything else, as she studied what was happening. "I apologize for the interruption gentlemen," she said in confident, slightly accented English. "But I am afraid you have something I require." Oliver tilted his head slightly, confused. He knew of China White's regular business, she was involved in drug trafficking and as stupid and shallow as Wayne seemed, the Queen heir guessed that he was not quite stupid enough to decide any form of drug trafficking was a good idea.

He saw Wayne stiffen slightly as China White approached, her posture completely relaxed. She paused in front of the boy and Oliver felt his stomach sink to his feet. Of all the options he had considered briefly when this situation started, this had not been one of them. He hadn't thought that this dangerous woman would stoop so low as to take a kidnapping contract. Wayne tried to lung forward only to be stopped by two Triad thugs and China White herself as the woman lifted a thin blade to rest it under the boy's chin. "This is nothing personal Mr. Wayne, just business," she told him, voice light. "You stay out of the bidding for Unidac Industries and the child will be returned to you unharmed." Oliver could only stand by helplessly and watch as Richard managed to turn frightened blue eyes towards his guardian before he was pulled away and the rest of the Triad had vanished into the shadows.

The change in Wayne as the Triad vanished was drastic. Oliver felt a prickle of warning dance down his spine as he observed the subtle shift in posture in Wayne, the ripple of muscles underneath the expensive clothing. Wayne's blue-grey eyes were dark with silent fury and they were fixed upon the shadows as if he had been tracking the vanishing Triad members, searching for any sign of where they were going or how he could apprehend them. The Queen heir was
struck with the sudden realization that what he had seen of the man before had been a front. The lazy playboy that had presented himself from the beginning of the tour was nothing more than a cover for something darker. Absently he wondered whether or not there was a vigilante in Gotham. He hadn't done any looking before becoming Starling City's vigilante to see if anyone else was fighting crime the way he was. There was a chance Wayne was also a vigilante. It was worth checking.

"The police are on their way," Diggle announced in the sudden silence, hanging up his phone. 
"They'll find your son."

"They won't find anything," Wayne replied darkly, a cool and calculating light gleaming in his eyes. "But there are other ways to solve this, aren't there Queen?" There was something like a smile gleaming in those unfathomable eyes and Oliver realized suddenly that this man knew exactly what he did with his nights. It wasn't a pleasant piece of knowledge to swallow.

Sad as it was, Dick was actually getting used to being kidnapped. Since he'd arrived in Gotham it had happened a, at least in his opinion, ridiculous amount of times, starting with Ra's al'Ghul kidnapping the boy to use him as leverage against Bruce. His last kidnapping had ended his brief foray into public school which was a shame because now he didn't get to talk with Babs every day, and had left him mildly exasperated but unharmed. This was different. For one thing, Dick didn't speak a bit of Chinese, something Bruce would probably fix after this mess, and for another, Starling was not Batman's stomping grounds. The easiest way to ensure Dick's safety would be to comply with the demands given but Dick understood this kind of terrorism in a way most children did not. His experience as Robin in the past year had taught him that giving in to demands often had the same results as defying them. That meant for the moment Dick had to hope that Starling's police force was more effective than Gotham's.

As far as set ups went, this could have been far worse. He was zip-tied to a chair but he could still feel all his fingers and he was freezing or sitting in the center of a warehouse that looked like it could collapse at any moment. He wasn't even bleeding or bruised. Definitely a step up from what normally happened in Gotham. The woman who'd grabbed him, long white hair and intense dark eyes, was watching him, a cheap cell phone sitting on the crate next to the one she was using for a chair. She was obvious waiting for some sort of call, and Dick doubted the results would be good for him. Every fifteen minutes like clockwork one of her men approached to give a report in fluid Chinese. Unlike the Arabic the League of Shadows employed or the Spanish slang sometimes thrown around in Gotham, mixed in with the commonly used English, Dick couldn't understand a single word of what was being said and that, more than anything else, worried him. At any given moment his captors could decide to eliminate him and he wouldn't know about it until it was too late.

Dick allowed his eyes to drift closed, working on calming himself as he listened to the regular footsteps of people patrolling the area. Trying to keep his mind occupied, he started the task of estimating exactly how many people were involved in this operation. The closest footsteps were easy to set apart because they were so deliberate, probably to reassure their boss that they were still around. With a vigilante running around Starling City, most people involved in illegal activities would want to know the moment the outer guards were gone. Therefore, Dick could say with certainty that there were four men in pairs circling the area immediately outside the building. The further away from the building the men were, the harder it was to tell exactly how many people there actually were. His final estimation left him with around twenty people and there could be more still lurking outside his hearing range. Bruce could take down that many but he would have to be careful about it.

"What are you thinking about child?" The accented English issued from much closer than Dick
had expected. The boy startled, eyes snapping open as he shrank back against the chair he was sitting on. The woman smiled at his fear, eyes gleaming in the shadows created by the sun setting behind them, light filtering through the slightly open door. The boy warily considered how to answer that and then decided he really didn’t have to. He looked down at the floor and the woman laughed, the sound dark and rich. Dick shuddered and closed his eyes, silently praying that this mess would be over soon.

Bruce smoothly pulled the duffel out from underneath Dick's bed where the boy had stowed it, unzipped it, and frowned at the contents before shoving it back underneath and grabbing the correct one. The one with the Batsuit in it. He had an hour and a half before the auction started, and he didn’t know who wanted Unidac for what but he had the ability to ruin that for them, and he needed to get Dick back as soon as possible. The police were trying but they had nothing, promising to call him the instant they had something. It wouldn’t be in time. That meant Batman was going into Starling City, regardless of whether he knew exactly where he was going.

Queen's tour of the city had helped and soon Bruce found himself in the Glades. He paused on a rooftop, scanning his surroundings and doing his best to calm his mind. Despite his disgust with their ultimate methods, he had learned much during his time with the League of Shadows and tonight, to save Dick, he would put as much of it to use as he had to, short of killing. After seeing the murder of his parents, and seeing first hand what the murder of the Graysons had done to Dick, he refused to be responsible for causing that kind of tragedy in someone's life.

"Wayne," a voice behind him called and he turned smoothly to see a man in a green hood standing on the opposite end of the roof. Oliver Queen. Bruce's first thought was that Dick's suspicions, and Bruce's since he had met the man, had been correct. The Queen scion really was Starling City's vigilante. Bruce didn't like that the man had a habit of killing but he had no doubt that, with a little bit of adjustment, Queen could be very capable. Unfortunately, now was not the time to do so. Dick's life was on the line and Bruce refused to fail the boy.

"Queen," he rumbled back impatiently.

"I need you to come with me," Oliver Queen said, voice borderline sharp.

"Whatever you want, I don't have time for it," Bruce growled.

"I can help you," Queen replied. "I know Starling. You don't. I can help you figure out where the Triad is keeping Richard." Bruce wanted to snarl that he didn't have time for something like that, but that was a foolish response. There was no way he would be able to find Dick in the time he had left without help.

"Fine," he said at last and Queen nodded in response before jumping smoothly off the roof. Bruce followed without hesitation, firmly focused on his goal. He would find his son and then he would make whoever was responsible for hiring someone to kidnap Dick pay dearly for their transgression.

Chapter End Notes

On a side note, I have been waiting to use the quote for this chapter for about four chapters now and it just kept not working out. Also, my muse is distinctly unhappy about the lack of Roy in this chapter which is why it wasn't posted much earlier in the day.
Chapter 25

"Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness." - Desmond Tutu

Bruce felt as if he were facing a clock steadily ticking down the seconds until it was far too late to save one of the few people that truly mattered to him. The sense of impending doom made his muscles tight with tension and his temper shorter than it usually was. Oliver Queen wasn't helping. The slightly younger man was trying to help but his conversation with his bodyguard who was, unsurprisingly considering the circumstances, in the know was wasting precious time. Logically he knew that a couple minutes wouldn't change the end result of a situation this early in the game but it wasn't logic that was driving him. Impatiently he turned towards the computer, waking it. He began skimming through the information stored on it, eyes narrowing as he moved quickly through the criminals Queen was looking into. Deadshot had quite a reputation in the professional underworld, though he hadn't come to Gotham since Bruce and Dick had begun patrolling. Bruce forced himself to move on, searching for any sign of the Triad.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Queen demanded and Bruce glanced over to see the other vigilante approach him, anger flashing in his eyes. "Leave my information alone." Diggle had just left, the door shutting firmly behind him, and Queen's hands were curling into fists. This didn't bode well for their working relationship but Bruce didn't care. Time was running out, and faster than Bruce would have liked. "I said I'd help you but stay out of my files," Queen growled at him.

"You don't understand, do you Queen?" Bruce snapped back. "This isn't some kind of game you can pause and then pick up again whenever. My son's life is at stake here!"

"I understand that but this isn't Gotham," was Queen's snarled reply. "This is my city, regardless of whether I've been gone for five years or not, which means you play by my rules. If you want to get your son back before the Triad decides to execute him because you're obviously not listening to their demands, you'll follow my rules." Bruce glared darkly at Queen from beneath the cowl but didn't bother with a retort. He and Queen could hash this out later when Dick's life was not on the line. He motioned for Queen to proceed, stepping aside to allow the man to approach the computer. Queen's shoulders were stiff as he tapped a few keys, bringing up a variety of information within a few moments. "The Chinese Triad mostly deals in the drug trade in Starling. Kidnapping isn't exactly their forte but they control several warehouses in good condition on the far side of the Glades. They're probably keeping Richard there."

"Are there cameras in the area?" Bruce questioned.

"Possibly," was Queen's reply. "But I'm not a hacker." Bruce wasn't either, at least not to the level that Dick was, but he'd observed and worked with his adopted son enough to know how to get into a security camera system. He nudged Queen out of the way without a word and went to work on the cameras. The motion earned him a low, irritated growl but Queen didn't protest when he realized what Bruce was doing. Within ten minutes Bruce was scanning camera angles, carefully accounting for each person patrolling the surrounding area.

"Twenty-two," Bruce said after double-checking his counting. Simple. He and Dick could have taken them down easily in Gotham. Alone, Bruce could still take them down but it would be with effort.

"I guess we know where our target is then," Queen said. Bruce nodded once, a sharp motion.

"Be sure to keep up." He didn't stay still long enough to listen to Queen's protest.
A rap on the front door had both Roy and Sin tensing. Sin had been in the middle of teasing the boy, telling him that he seriously needed a haircut, when the sound had interrupted them. Both remembered what had happened last time someone had unexpectedly knocked on Sin's front door. It wasn't a pleasant memory. Cautiously Sin stood, motioning for Roy to head back towards her bedroom as she approached the door. She carefully unlocked the door but didn't remove the chain as she turned the handle to pull the door open a little. When she saw who was on the other side of the door she gave Roy and thumbs up behind her back and then shut the door to remove the chain.

"Sorry about that," she apologized to a patiently waiting John Diggle when she opened the door again.

"Better safe than sorry," he replied easily. Behind her, Roy finally allowed himself to relax. He trusted Sin's judgement completely but some part of him had still been frightened until he heard the voice. "We have a slight situation," Diggle informed the boy. "Richard Grayson's been kidnapped. Oliver went after the boy but we have some extra company in the basement."

"Okay," Roy said softly and Sin tilted her head right so that she could give him a reassuring smile.

"I'll pack up the rest of your stuff that you left here in an overnight back," she told him, crossing the room to kiss him on the forehead before vanishing into her bedroom.

"Any problems?" the man asked and Roy shook his head. They both stood in silence, listening to Sin rustle around in her bedroom until she returned with an old canvas backpack. On and off Roy had forgotten clothing at Sin's house. Some of it had never made it back to his house. The result was that Sin had two changes of clothes for him to take, along with a ratty grey sweatshirt he had dragged everywhere when he was younger.

"Here," she said, handing him the bag. "I'll visit you as soon as I can." She hesitated after Roy took the bag and then pulled him into a tight hug. "Stay safe."

"I promise," he whispered against her shoulder, clinging to her tightly for a moment. Sin had been his rock in the middle of his mess and it was hard to convince himself to let her go.

Oliver and his temporary partner took out the Triad members circling the warehouse like hungry vultures easily. The Queen heir took a moment to admire Wayne's form and swift, silent movements before heading for the open warehouse door, taking out the nearest gunman with an arrow to the shoulder. The second one was attacked by Wayne and Oliver turned his attention to China White who was standing in front of the small form of Richard Grayson. The boy's blue eyes were bright and eager, and almost smile fixed on his impish face. Oliver could only guess that the boy knew what Wayne did at night but his attention was soon caught by the vicious and capable Chinese woman attacking him. China White was, by no means, an easy woman to fight against. She had a lifetime of experience defending herself and personally eliminating threats which meant she was more than a match for Oliver Queen. She was not, however, prepared to deal with the wrath of Bruce Wayne.

The man seemed to drop from above, landed almost completely silently behind the leader of this particular branch of the Triad. The woman whipped around, obviously judging the darkly clad man to be the more dangerous of the pair, and Wayne growled, "Get him out of here" complete with a head jerk towards the boy. Oliver nodded, leaving the irate parent to it, and crossed the room to cut the zip-ties. The boy grinned up at him, blue eyes dancing, and flexed his fingers a little, bouncing lightly on his feet. He didn't appear to be at all afraid of what would happen in the battle between Wayne and China White.
Oliver guided the boy out of the warehouse as a black jeep thundered into view, screech to a stop a few feet away as several Triad goons jumped out. The Queen heir knocked an arrow in a single move and dropped the first man, moving on to the second. This arrow sank into a shoulder instead of somewhere more lethal because he was startled by the feeling of fingers at his belt. To his complete shock, one of his flechettes was launched across empty space to knock a gun free of the three man's hands. The man swore and Richard Grayson cackled at Oliver's side. The last man changed his aim so it rested on the boy only to have Oliver put an arrow through the thug's arm and another of his flechettes sent the gun spinning away. The boy was surprisingly accurate with those things. Was Wayne training his son to eventually take up a mantle?

"Nice shot," Oliver told the boy, guiding him toward the jeep. His best guess was that the Triad armored their vehicles, at least to a certain extent, to make it difficult for anyone to assassinate anyone instead. The boy slipped inside obediently at Oliver's gesture and remained silent as the Queen heir slipped inside as well, pulling the door mostly shut. He reached down to grab a flechette and then frowned when he realized they were all gone. He glanced over his shoulder, reaching a hand back, and the boy handed the remaining three over with an unashamed grin. A quick glance at the clock as he turned back to the door told Oliver that there was only a half an hour until people began arriving at the auction. Oliver Queen could afford to be late to such an event, it would almost be expected, but Bruce Wayne could not.

As if called by the very thought of his name, Wayne emerged from the building. He wasn't so much as limping, through Oliver thought he saw a thin stream of blood dripping down the other man's arm. Wayne scanned the surrounding area quickly, frown growing darker at the sight of the dead men, and then headed for the jeep. He slid into the driver's seat as Oliver pulled his own door firmly shut and the vehicle sped out of the area, following the same route the pair had used to arrive at the warehouse. The other man's silence didn't seem to bother the boy, who was watching the neighborhood fly by them with moderate interest.

"Your son has pretty good aim with projectiles," Oliver said to break the silence and the boy beside him cackled a little.

"He'd better be," was Wayne's reply and Oliver thought he saw a flash of a smile in the rearview mirror. Oliver frowned but before he could comment, the other man said, "Listen, Bruce Wayne cannot show up with his son before the police even know what happened. In Gotham we could write it off as Batman's doing but the Hood isn't nearly as established in doing things like that in Starling."

"What are you talking about?" Oliver demanded, mind spinning.

"He means that we need to make this a public affair," Richard explained. "After the auction tonight the Starling City vigilante can be seen returning me to Bruce. Then you'll be a hero and no one will think to question how I ended up back where I belong." When Oliver arched his eyebrows at the boy he got another quick grin. "We've done stuff like this a ton."

"Fine," Oliver agreed. "But when this is all over I want answers." Then, studying the neighborhood, he added "We need to stop here so no one can connect the stolen Triad vehicle with the foundry."

Wayne parked the car, shut it off, and stepped out, exchanging a meaningful glance with the boy. Oliver wasn't sure what exactly passed between them with the cowl hiding Wayne's eyes but at last the other man said, "I suspect we will be able to work something out." Then he was gone. Oliver swore. Richard Grayson glanced over at him and flat out laughed.

"Come on kid," he said, motioning towards the foundry. He had to get changed and get to the auction before his lateness became suspicious.
"You're entirely bonkers. But I'll tell you a secret. All the best people are." - Alice Kingsley, Alice in Wonderland

Chapter 26

Roy almost jumped out of his own skin when someone clattered down the stairs that led into the basement of the foundry, following behind Oliver Queen like an overeager puppy. The boy was smaller than Roy, maybe coming up to Roy's shoulder but no taller than that, with messy dark hair and bright blue eyes that were taking everything in like he was afraid he might miss something. Those eyes settled on Roy and the smaller boy grinned at him, waving cheerfully. "Hi," he chirped brightly, crossing the room, faster than Roy would have suspected possible for someone that small, to stand in front of the other boy. "I'm Richard Grayson." Instead of offering his name, Roy glanced between Oliver and Richard Grayson, utterly confused.

"Digg and I have to head to the auction," Oliver said by way of explanation, already stowing his gear. "Richard is going to be staying here with you until the end of the auction. I'll come and pick him back up then." Roy nodded, not sure he really wanted to know more than that, and turned his attention back to the boy. Richard Grayson's smile hadn't wavered but the hand he'd stretched out between them had already dropped.

"Roy Harper," he offered at last and Richard's smile widened a little.

"Nice to meet you Roy." The boy hesitated a moment and then added, "You can call me Dick." Roy snorted at that, he'd grown up in the Glades and understood all the connotations of having that for a nickname, and the smaller boy rolled his eyes. Oliver headed back up the stairs, dressed in a suit that probably cost more than the apartment Roy had lived in before he'd been ripped away from the only family he had left, Diggle right on his heels. Roy watched them go and then flinched, startled when the boy hopped up to sit on the edge of the cot next to him. "So do you live here?" Dick asked, voice curious. Roy shrugged one shoulder in response, not sure what to make of the cheerful figure beside him or how to even approach answering that particular questioned. "Cool," the smaller boy said, kicking his feet back and forth in the air as he looked around the room. "So does that mean you go out and fight crime and stuff?" Roy's head snapped around so he could stare at the boy in shock. Of all the questions he could have anticipated that was not one of them. What kind of person let a kid go out to fight crime? "What?" Dick asked, tilting his head like a confused puppy.

"Are you crazy?" The words burst out of Roy's mouth like bullets out of a gun, sharp and louder than he'd spoken in a long time. He felt bad when the smaller boy flinched a little. Then Dick Grayson turned that wide, cheerful grin on him.

"Maybe a little bit, although my friend Babs tells me I'm perfectly normal. 'Course she doesn't know about my night job." The flow of words almost overwhelmed Roy. This kid talked more than Sin ever had, barely even pausing for breath. "So what do you do for fun around here?" Roy shrugged again, still trying to process everything Dick had told him. "Okay, I'm just going to look around a little then," the boy said, tone almost what Roy would call disappointed. He watched as the boy jumped off the edge of the cot, doing a front handspring and landing lightly on his feet before beginning to survey the basement.

While he kept an eye on the kid invading his safe space, Roy tried to organize his suddenly chaotic thoughts and feelings. The boy before him was everything Roy could have been and something inside him wanted to hate Dick Grayson. The rest of him was too busy trying to make sense of the sudden explosion that had burst into his life. Something in the way the smile didn't
always seem the reach Dick's eyes and the little flinch when Roy had snapped at him was insisting that all was not necessarily bright in Richard Grayson's little world. That bothered Roy. How could someone have a dark past and still manage to be as happy as the smaller boy was? Roy didn't think it was possible.

Oliver stepped into the crowd, eyes automatically scanning it for danger. It worried him that he still didn't know Deadshot's goal but there was nothing he could do about it now. Oliver Queen had to make some sort of appearance, even if it was a brief one, or people would get suspicious. That was the last thing he needed to add on top of what was already going on. He spotted Wayne across the room smiling charmingly at a blonde reporter who was here to cover the event. Wayne lifted the glass of champagne towards Oliver with a smile so false it almost made the other vigilante feel sick before turning back to the reporter. Oliver shook his head and made his way through the crowd towards where he saw Walter standing near a series of large windows.

"Oliver," his stepfather said, greeting him with a handshake. "It's good of you to come."

"I'm glad to support my family," Oliver replied with a smile. "All of my family." Walter had taken Oliver's return, and his hostility, very well despite the shock. He had even gone as far as to support Oliver's decision to not become part of Queen Consolidated after Oliver had explained clearly why he didn't want to be involved, or at least the reasons that didn't involve what he did at night. It was more than Oliver could have ever asked from the man and yet Walter gave it anyway.

"Thank you," Walter said with a warm smile. Then his eyes fell on someone behind Oliver and his smile widened. "Ah, the loveliest ladies in the world have arrived."

"You flatter me," Moira said, stepping around Oliver to kiss her husband. Thea made a gagging noise at the display of affection and Oliver snorted.

"Be nice Speedy," he told her, teasing just a little.

"I am," she shot back with a grin. "I'm not making sarcastic comments about bleaching my brain or anything."

"Yeah, yeah," Oliver said, ruffling her hair so that she scowled at him and lifted her hands to fix it. "You look beautiful tonight Thea." Despite the fact that he was worried something would happen to the family he had left, especially knowing that Deadshot was going after people interested in purchasing Unidac Industries, but he was beginning to realize he couldn't push them away.

"Thanks," she said, flushing tomato red and looking down at her heels. Then she glanced up at him with a wicked smile. "You don't clean up so bad yourself Ollie."

"I try," he told her with a light laugh. That was when his eyes locked on the red dot that had appeared on Walter's black jacket and Detective Quentin Lance tackled the man to the floor.

Dick hated to admit it, but he was lonely. Despite his early attempts at friendly conversation, he knew that Roy Harper didn't want him around. The older boy made it obvious in small ways that he didn't want Dick in his space and there was only so much snooping the small vigilante could do. That meant that in a few hours he would be wandering around the same loop of the basement he had been slowly making since he'd given up conversation, trying to pretend he wasn't bored out of his mind and didn't desperately want to go home. At least at home he could call Babs and the two of them could chat the time away up until the point where she had to go to bed and he had to get ready for patrol.
The smaller boy spared a glance over his shoulder at Harper. The older boy was watching his every move, something that made Dick want to hunch his shoulders defensively and glare so that Harper would stop looking at him as if he were some kind of monster. *I'm not a bad person,* he wanted to insist. *I promise you, I'm not. I just want a friend I can talk to about what I do at night!* Babs was great, and not at all fazed by his traumatic past, but she didn't know he was Robin. Before today the only people who had known were Bruce and Alfred. Both were amazing people but neither one was anywhere close to his age. Sometimes there were things Dick wanted to talk about to people his own age but Babs wasn't an option. He'd hoped, when he'd first laid eyes on Harper, that he'd finally found someone to talk to about things like that. Apparently he had been wrong.

"Hey...Dick, isn't it?" Roy's voice startled the smaller boy. Dick flinched a little, muscles going tight, and took a moment to compose his face, and then turned around.

"Yeah?" he questioned warily, not sure he wanted to attempt another conversation with Roy Harper. It had been a long day, even without the kidnapping, and the last thing he wanted to do was to invest himself in another conversation that would end in nothing.

"Did you say something about a night job?" Roy's eyes said the older boy knew exactly what Dick had been referring to when he mentioned a night job but wasn't certain he'd heard right.

"It isn't important," Dick replied, turning back to look towards the door. They lingered in awkward silence and then the younger boy sighed, shoulders slumping. "Yes, I have a night job. The same one as Bruce and Oliver actually."

"Why would you want to do something like that?" Roy asked, his voice making it clear that the older boy didn't understand what would drive someone to put on a mask and fight crime as a vigilante. It wasn't the kind of question Dick could bring himself to shrug off.

"Because my parents are dead, killed by a terrorist cell for reasons I still don't know and will probably never understand so I can't just sit around and let someone else suffer the same fate if I'm able to stop it." Dick's voice was rising in volume towards the end, the boy almost shouting at the unfairness of it all. "I have to do something," he said in a softer voice, forcing his hands to unclench. They were trembling slightly, and Dick realized with shock that his whole body was shaking, tears trickling down his cheeks. He hadn't cried over the deaths of his parents since the Joker but right now he just felt so alone. He wanted someone, anyone to hold him close and tell him that everything was going to be alright. He wasn't going to get that.

"Dick?" Roy questioned from behind him.

"I'm okay," Dick replied, lifting up a hand to wipe tears off his cheeks. It was one of the biggest lies he'd ever told.
As Diggle pulled Thea and Moira out, Lance hurrying Walter out of the room as well, Oliver sprinted for the stairs. As he ran he scanned for any sign of Wayne but the other vigilante was already gone, the blonde he had been talking to practically tripping over her own shoes to get out of the room. Oliver shook his head and that and made sure to look deliberately at the camera when grabbing the bag that contained his uniform. He'd brought it just in case Deadshot happened to show at the auction. He wasn't regretting the decision now. He rushed out at the top level and scrambled to change, pulling out his bow and a special arrow so he could zip line into the building from which Deadshot was sniping.

Oliver didn't crash through the window alone. "Drop your guns," Oliver yelled as Wayne landed almost completely silently beside him.

"I admire your work, though I'm a little surprised to see someone in our line of work teaming up with Gotham's Bat," Lawton replied smoothly from where he was tucked away behind a column.

"We're not in the same line of work," Oliver growled. "Your profession was murder." Oliver would freely admit that he killed but only when necessary. Lawton did it for money, not to save anyone. That the man was trying to compare himself to Oliver made the vigilante feel sick.

"You've taken lives," Lawton retorted. Oliver opened his mouth to respond and then froze as Lawton made a choking sound. Wayne had somehow made his way across the room without either of them noticing to pick up Deadshot with the throat.

"I have not," Wayne growled in a low tone, holding Lawton up high enough so that the gunman's feet just barely brushed the ground. "Who hired you?"

Despite choking, Lawton grinned at Wayne. "Wouldn't you like to know?" Wayne calmly lowered Lawton to the ground, changing his grip to the man's shirt collar, and dragged him to the broken window, hanging him out of it. "Are you crazy?" Lawton demanded, voice going surprisingly high. Oliver had to second the notion. What kind of guy hung someone out a window just to get answers.

"Answer the question," Wayne growled.

"You're out of luck Bat," Lawton replied with a nervous laugh. "I don't know a thing."

"I don't believe you," was the reply.

"What are you doing?" Oliver hissed at the other vigilante while Lawton let out another hysterical laugh.

"Getting answers," Wayne rumbled at him before turning back to Lawton and letting him slip a little.

Oliver knocked an arrow and aimed it at Wayne, mouth set in a grim line. "Bring him back in," he demanded. "Now." Wayne scowled at him but didn't obey. Oliver drew the string back as far as it would go, feeling it brush against his cheek as he let out a soft breath. "Now," he ordered again. Very slowly Wayne drew Lawton back inside the building, allowing the man's feet to brush the ground. That was when Lawton whipped out a hand gun. Wayne dropped the man and lunged
backwards, trying to get out of the way. The gun fired, bullet smacking into the stomach of Wayne's costume, and Oliver quickly adjusted his aim before releasing the arrow. He didn't bother to see if Lawton was still alive, scrambling over to where Wayne was slowly sitting up.

"Kevlar," the vigilante rumbled at him, standing slowly. "I'm not hurt this time, but you and I need to have a serious talk." Then he headed for the window, not looking back as he added, "Later. First you have to bring Richard back to me." He hesitated with one foot out and window and added, "Don't mess this up." Then he was gone, leaving an irritated and slightly guilty feeling Oliver Queen behind.

Roy grabbed the smaller boy by instinct, carefully pulling him into an awkward hug. The trembling figure tensed up immediately, letting out a choked sound. Roy flinched a little, sure he'd just terrified Dick, and moved to release him only to have the boy spinning around and cling to him, sobbing into his shirt. This time Roy was the one who froze, staring down at the tiny figure crying as if his world was ending. Then he carefully wrapped his arms around Dick, holding the boy close. Dick clung tighter too but his sobs began to peter off into sniffles and little whimpers. Roy didn't try to tell the small boy that everything would be okay. He was sure Dick had heard that far too many times by now to believe it and Roy didn't want to lie to him.

He didn't know how long they stood like that but eventually Dick pulled away, wiping tears off his cheeks and looking down at the floor as he sniffled a little, small chest heaving. "Sorry," the smaller boy apologized, looking down at the floor.

"S okay," Roy replied, looking down at the floor too. They both glanced up at the same moment and then smiled awkwardly at each other, shuffling their feet.

"So," Dick said after a moment, sounding extremely subdued.

"Yeah," Roy said, flushing slightly. Dick giggled then and Roy couldn't help his grin at the sound. They both tensed when the door to the foundry opened and then Roy relaxed when he saw Oliver dressed in his vigilante garb.

"Is it time?" Dick asked, wide smile flashing across his face. After seeing the boy's earlier breakdown, Roy found himself wondering how many of those smiles were false.

"Yes," Oliver said, voice a little sharper than normal. Roy tensed a little at that but Dick nodded, smile never faltering.

"Right, Let's go then," the small boy said, hurrying across the room to join Oliver at the door. "What are we waiting for?"

"Nothing," Oliver told Dick, voice lightening slightly. "I'll be back in a bit," the man added to Roy, who nodded in acknowledgement, watching them go out the door and wondering if he'd get to see Dick again. He was surprised to realize he hoped the answer was yes.

In the chaos that followed the almost assassination of Walter Steele, the last thing Quentin Lance expected to see was the Hood bringing back Bruce Wayne's adopted child. The vigilante dropped out of thin air and before the police on scene could even thing to shoot, the man revealed the perfectly safe form of Richard Grayson standing in front of them. The small boy waved at them, expression bright despite the tear stains on his cheeks, and his eyes lit up when they fell on Wayne. The boy was launching himself across the empty space towards the billionaire even as Wayne pushed through the crowd to pull the boy into a tight hug, saying an emphatic thank you to the man in the hood.
"You may not like the vigilante much," Hilton said from Lance's side. "But you have to admit, he has style."

"He has something," Lance growled back irritably. The detective's personal philosophy was that a person didn't need to go outside the law to find justice and having the vigilante throw that motto in his face, even if he was doing some good, irked the man in a way that few things did. Thoughts of the vigilante kept him up at night, though not at the level of obsession as the Dollmaker case had caused, and he dreamed of taking the man down. Starling City didn't need a vigilante, and Quentin Lance was going to prove it by taking the man down.

As if to encourage his negative thoughts, Lance's eyes fell on Oliver Queen pressing through the crowd to join his family. The Queen scion had stolen Lance's little girl, his darling Sara from him, as well as breaking his wonderful Laurel's heart, and for those reasons Quentin couldn't quite bring himself to forgive the man. Oliver Queen had made his decisions and other people had gotten hurt from them. Quentin now wanted Queen to know the consequences of his actions. "Ease up on the glare," Hilton commented, clapping a hand on his partner's shoulder and smiling at him. "You'll burn a hole into somebody's head and it won't be the person you want it to be." Lance nodded in agreement, giving Hilton a rueful smile and allowing his partner to steer him back towards their squad car. They had work to do, like bringing down the vigilante.
"All philosophies, if you ride them home, are nonsense, but some are greater nonsense than others." - Samuel Butler

Dick didn't really want to let Bruce go after his breakdown earlier but he forced himself to pull away with a cheery smile that was just on the weak side, babbling something about vigilantes and awesome rescues. It was the kind of thing that would be expected from an eleven year old boy and the cops he had to talk to mostly rolled their eyes at what he said, quickly moving through the questions they needed to ask him. For the most part, Dick answered on autopilot, using only the part of his brain that was an ordinary eleven year old. The real him was more focused on Bruce's arm constantly wrapped around his shoulder and the silent reassurance that provided. At last the cops filtered away and Bruce guided the boy through the rapidly thinning crowd towards a waiting taxi. They were stopped only but a woman in a business suit who murmured something to Bruce and passed him a crisp cream colored business card before moving away.

The taxi ride to the hotel was taken in complete silence, neither one feeling safe enough to talk about what had happened. If they had been in Gotham, Alfred would have driven them and they could have discussed vigilante business, or Bat business if Dick was in a teasing mood, but there was no way they were risking speaking about it when they were around someone who might go to the cops, or the mob, with that information. The last thing Dick needed was to be kidnapped as Dick Grayson because someone knew he was Robin. He got kidnapped enough already.

The instant the door to their hotel room shut, Dick turned to his guardian and asked, "Unidac?"

"The auction is being rescheduled for tomorrow afternoon," Bruce replied, holding up the cream colored card the woman had handed him. "That is what this is for. They aren't publicizing the event because of what happened tonight. Instead they're personally letting interested buyers know when and where." Dick nodded and launched himself on to the nearest bed, letting out a relieved sigh as he body sank into the comfortable mattress. "Sorry chum but you aren't going to get to rest yet. We have to head back to Queen's lair. He and I have to have a talk about his habit of killing people."

"Do I have to come?" Dick whined, not bothering to open his eyes. He just felt so comfortable laying there and after the day he'd had he wanted nothing more than to go to sleep.

"Yes," was Bruce's immediate response. "You've already been kidnapped once here. I don't want to risk you being snatched again while I'm going." Dick groaned but didn't protest any further, realizing this wasn't an argument he could win. Bruce tended to get extremely protective whenever Dick had gotten kidnapped, which was another reason why the boy didn't want to be kidnapped any more often than he already was. The boy rolled off the bed and wobbled on his feet for a moment before steadying himself.

"Are we going as Batman and Robin or Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson?" he asked, glancing up at his guardian and then letting out a wide yawn. Bruce smirked and Dick couldn't stop a grin from springing free. Oh this was going to be fun.

Oliver descended into the basement of the foundry for what felt like the hundredth time that night and found both Diggle and Roy waiting for him. "The boy is back with Wayne," the Queen heir reported. In response to that statement a paper bag from Big Belly Burger came flying at his head. Oliver caught it with a rather bemused smirk on his face and headed for the computer, waking it.
"The cops have already found Lawton’s body," Diggle said as Roy turned back to his french fries. "They found him with an arrow through the eye." When Oliver didn't reply the older man added, "What happened?"

Instead of replying Oliver asked, "Do you know anything about a vigilante in Gotham City?"

"I've told you before, I haven't kept up with United States news," Diggle replied, sounding exasperated and amused.

"Batman," Roy spoke up before going back to his fries. He didn't so much as flinch when both men focused on him, which was a promising sign about the boy's state of mind.

"Huh?" Oliver asked intelligently after a moment and caught a glimpse of a quick smile on Roy's face.

"Batman," Roy explained patiently. "In Gotham." When Oliver arched an eyebrow at the boy, Roy squirmed a little and looked away. "Just search the name." Oliver obligingly turned back to the computer and typed the name into a search engine. A moment later he was skimming a series of articles about a vigilante called Batman who seemed to be the bane of most criminals in Gotham City.

"What kind of guy willingly dresses up as a giant Bat?" Oliver muttered, a little disgruntled.

"You run around in the equivalent of a green hoodie with greasepaint around your eyes man," Diggle spoke up.

"A bat, Digg," Oliver returned, exasperated. Roy snickered a little and Digg gave the Queen heir a pointed look.

"It's supposed to scare people," a voice chimed in and Oliver's head snapped around so he could see a young boy dressed in traffic light colors beaming at him from the top of the stairs. "Sometimes it works." Oliver's eyes narrowed and the boy's grin widened. "Hi again," Richard Grayson chirped, bouncing down the stairs. Behind him was the looming figure of Wayne, dressed in the same vigilante garb as before. Oliver didn't care. He was more focused on the small, brightly colored boy sliding around him to go stand in front of Roy.

"You let a child do this kind of work?" Oliver demanded, his voice a low growl. He glared into Wayne's eyes as best he could with the white lenses of the cowl in the way.

"For the record, I wanted to do this," Grayson said, still grinning.

"Probably because you think it's cool, right?" Oliver said, voice sharp, and the Bat growled lowly.

"Leave him alone Queen," Wayne snapped. "We're not here for you to interrogate us. We're here to talk about your habit of killing people for their crimes."

"A police officer would have shot Lawton when he tried to kill them," Oliver snapped back. "I was just doing the same."

"You are not an officer of the law." Batman's voice was cold and Oliver felt his spine straighten. 

"No, but I'm doing the same job."

"You are working outside the law," Batman replied. "You cannot justify yourself then in the same
"Why? Because that's the way you do things?" Oliver demanded. "I didn't know you were king of the world." So maybe that comment wasn't the most mature but Oliver was tired and reaching the end of his patience. How dare Wayne come in and question Oliver's methods? Especially after those methods had helped get Richard Grayson out of the clutches of the Triad.

"Do I have to call Superman to make the two of you get along?" Grayson demanded, hands on his hips as he turned away from whatever conversation he had been having with Roy.

"Leave the blue boy scout out of this," Batman rumbled and Grayson cackled wickedly before yawning widely.

"Then stop arguing and finish up this conversation before I die of old age," the boy retorted before turning back to Roy.

For a moment the two men stood in silence, watching Roy and Richard interact while Diggle kept an eye on them. Both boys looked happy and Roy was more animated than Oliver had seen him with anyone but Sin. "Why are you so upset about me killing?" Oliver asked, trying to keep his tone cordial. He didn't know anything about Superman but he didn't want anyone else involved in this discussion. He wasn't five anymore. He didn't need a mediator.

"We are considered to be criminals," Wayne replied, voice quiet. "We have to be better than the men and women we take down or we deserve to be locked away just as they do." Looking at the man, Oliver wasn't certain whether or not he was being told the truth but he could at least accept that answer. They turned back to the boys in time to see Richard yawn again, this one wide enough that it looked like his jaw was going to crack. "Robin," Wayne called and the boy turned his head, smiling sleepily at Wayne.

"Yeah?" Richard questioned, swaying a little and then snickering when Roy steadied him.

"We're leaving."

"'M'kay," the boy mumbled, waving at Roy over his shoulder before following Batman up the stairs and out of the basement of the foundry. Oliver watched them go and then turned to arch his eyebrows at Diggle.

"What do you think about all this?" the Queen heir asked the former soldier, not entirely sure what he personally thought about Batman. The man was gruff and grouchy, though the cheerful presence of Richard suggested that Wayne wasn't all darkness. Furthermore, Wayne had proved himself to be infuriatingly competent in a fight, perhaps more so than Oliver.

"I think he may have a point about the whole killing business," Diggle said. "But mostly I'm glad Lawton is dead." There was something about his tone of voice that made Oliver's eyebrows rise towards his hairline. "Deadshot killed my brother Andy," Digg told him. "I feel like my brother can finally rest in peace now that his killer is dead." Oliver nodded, understanding that feeling, and then found himself yawning. "Head home man," Diggle told him. "You need some rest after a day like today."

"You too," Oliver said, not bothering to argue with that assessment. He felt like he was back on the island training wide Slade and running mostly on adrenaline. Diggle nodded and stood, pausing a moment to rest a hand on Roy's shoulder. "Are you going to be good for the night Roy?"

"Yeah," the boy told them, something that was almost a smile crossing his face. "I'm good."

"Good," Oliver replied, smiling at the boy. "See you tomorrow then." Then he turned and headed
up the stairs, too tired to even think about tomorrow.
Dick opened his eyes to an empty hotel room. The boy yawned and stretched, emerging from his cocoon of blankets to peer around the room. Sunlight was pouring in despite the curtains pulled shut over the windows and Bruce's bed was neatly made, a white sheet of paper sitting on top. Dick grumbled under his breath but slid out of bed and padded across the floor to pick up the note. *Gone to the Unidac auction. Call me if you need anything.* B.

Dick rolled his eyes at the brusqueness of the note and headed to the bedside table where he'd left his tablet the night before. It was the weekend, which meant he'd be able to Skype Babs. The very thought of getting to talk to his best friend brightened up his entire demeanor. He jumped on to the bed with a little giggle and turned on the tablet, bringing the correct app up with a single flick.

Getting Babs to answer a call took a couple minutes but at last his red headed friend came into view, beaming. "Morning," he chirped at her cheerfully.

"Good morning to you too," Babs replied primly, giving him a smile that brought to mind the CPS people with their overly concerned gazes that had come to Wayne manor in the beginning to make sure Bruce really was taking care of Dick. The red head held her serious expression for a moment before they both started snickering. "Seriously," she said when they stopped laughing. "How's Starling?" Dick looked at her with wide eyes and she startled giggling again. "That impressive, huh?"

"There are windows everywhere," he told her. "So many windows. And downtown everything gleams and flashes in the light. It's insane." He hesitated a moment and then added, "Oh before you hear from the news, I kind of got kidnapped."

Barbara appeared to be struggling with a mixture of worry and exasperation as she asked, "Again?"

"Again," Dick confirmed with a roll of his eyes. "I don't even have bruises to show for this one, which is good."

"Did Batman come from Gotham to rescue you or the cops?" Babs might not have known that Bruce was Batman but she was aware of the fact that the Gotham City vigilante tended to rescue Dick Grayson from kidnappings.

"How would Batman even get from Gotham to the west coast to save me? Fly in a commercial airplane? Can you picture Batman sitting in economy?" Dick asked and Babs flushed a little, giggling.

"Okay, so the cops got you then," the red head said, soldiering on.

"Actually no," Dick told her with a conspiratorial grin. "Apparently there's a vigilante in Starling City and he rescued me."

"For real?"

"For real," Dick confirmed.

"Awesome," Babs breathed. Dick nodded in agreement because he couldn't tell her that he saw
"stuff like every night, that he was part of the vigilante crowd. It would put her in too much danger. "So when are you and Bruce coming back?"

"Some time this evening I think," he told her. "The auction was kind of interrupted so Bruce had to go to a private one this morning. He should be back soon though."

Babs nodded and there was a moment of comfortable silence before she said, "I bet his has his own jet."

"Huh?" Dick questioned, thoroughly confused. "Who are you talking about?"

"Batman, silly," was the easy response. "I bet he has his own plane."

"Probably," Dick agreed even though he knew for a fact that Batman did not have a plane. Bruce Wayne might but Batman would be stuck flying commercial if he ever flew anywhere in a costume. "Otherwise getting through airport security would be a pain." Babs giggled again and Dick couldn't help laughing along with her. His laughter petered off and he turned his head to look at the door only to relax again as Bruce entered.

"Morning Bruce," Dick called cheerfully and Babs echoed his greeting.

"Good morning Dick, Barbara," Bruce replied with a smile. Dick grinned back before turning back to Babs.

"I can tell you're dying to talk to him so I'm gonna go," Babs told him. "Skype me when you get back to Gotham, okay?"

"Got it Babs," Dick said before terminating the call. "So how'd it go?"

"Wayne Enterprises officially owns Unidac Industries," Bruce told the boy. "I'm not sure who wanted me out of the auction by kidnapping you, but whatever plan they've put in place that requires Unidac has certainly been set back."

"Good," Dick said with a slightly smug smile. "Are we leaving then?"

"Are you really so eager to be out of here?" Bruce teased and Dick scowled at him.

"I spent last night being kidnapped and then in Oliver Queen's secret lair. I'm ready to go home," the boy told him, pouting.

"Alright," Bruce replied, ruffling his hair. "Pack up and we'll head back to Gotham."

Moira was not at all surprised to hear from Malcolm almost immediately after the end of the auction. Queen Consolidated had been outbid by Wayne Enterprises which meant that Unidac Industries was now out of Malcolm's reach. "I trust you with one simple thing Moira, and somehow you mess it up," Malcolm hissed over the phone. There was nothing in his voice of the man she had once fallen for, the man she had comforted after Rebecca's funeral, or the man she had secretly fathered a child with. Instead he was wrath that made Moira's stomach churn. It was at times like these that she was terribly glad she had the Queen's Gambit locked away in a warehouse for leverage.

"There was nothing I could do Malcolm," she replied reasonably. "Wayne Enterprises has more capital to spend right now than Queen Consolidated. We were out bid."

"The Undertaking might be ruined now," Malcolm told her, voice leveling out.
"Nonsense," Moira replied briskly, putting more confidence in her voice than she felt. "Wayne Enterprises will be glad to work with Queen Consolidated. Our business have worked together before for extremely profitable business projects. This will be no different. The Undertaking will proceed as planned."

"I will hold you to that," Malcolm said before hanging up on her. For a moment Moira stared at the phone, slightly shaken, before slipping it back in her purse and descended into the foyer to kiss Walter on the cheek.

"Have a good day at work," she told him with a soft smile.

"Thank you dear," Walter told her, before leaving with a smile. Walter had put her heart back together after Robert's death. She wouldn't let Malcolm hurt him, just as she wouldn't let him harm either of her children. She would do whatever was necessary to protect her family.

The fever was making his whole world spin. Despite the fuzziness of his head and the near constant twisting of his stomach Roy could still feel the terror that almost constantly surrounded him. What if his captors decided to eliminate him since he was useless at the moment? The terror kept him awake despite the exhaustion his illness had brought on so he lay there, sweating and weak and terrified. "What was that all about?" one of the men grumbled when their leader returned from speaking on the phone. "Another mission from the head honcho?"

"It better not be," another man cut in. "Cause our distraction here's a worthless wreck at the moment."

"I don't understand why we don't just off him now. The debts been settled and its not like we can't do this without him," a third voice chimed in. Roy's shudders increased in violence and his stomach clenched so tightly for a moment that it sent a sharp ache through him. Was this it? Was he really going to die now? The rumbled of agreement from the other men did not bode well for his continued survival.

"Patience," the Cigar Man chided, sounding amused. "The Undertaking is coming. A few more months and this job will be over. Then we'll kill the kid and ditch this city just before the storm hits."

Roy jolted awake with a panicked gasp and flinched violently when he felt a hand on his shoulder. The contact vanished almost immediately and a man's voice said, "Easy there, you're safe." The fourteen year old found himself staring up Oliver Queen and gasping for breath. "You're okay," Queen said, voice warm and reassuring as Roy shook off the last of his nightmare, shivering slightly. "Are you back?" the man asked after a moment and Roy gave him a jerky nod, still trying to force away the lingering sense of terror. It wasn't easy.

Most of Roy's nightmares since he'd been dragged away from the only family he'd had left were based on actual events. Sometimes those events were warped and twisted by his sleeping mind but mostly they were just terrible memories played over and over again. This particular dream was a fairly recent one, probably taking place about four months before the news stations had announced that Oliver Queen was alive. As the fear seeped away, Roy found himself wondering what exactly The Undertaking was. The way the Cigar Man had said it made the capital letters extremely obvious and marked it as something important but the details of the event were elusive.

"Is everything okay?" Queen asked and Roy nodded, shaking the thought out of his head. Whatever The Undertaking was, it had probably already happened. There was no sense in worrying about something that was already over. Oliver studied him for a moment, not looking entirely convinced, before nodding once and heading over to the computer.
Roy sat up and scanned the room, eyes settling on Diggle who smiled at him and tossed him a bag. "And it's not a bagel," the former soldier told him. Roy couldn't help the slim, amused smile that crossed his face at that.

"We haven't had that many bagels," Oliver commented and Diggle snorted.

"Who are you trying to fool?"

"Okay, okay," Oliver said, holding his hands up as something loaded behind him. "So maybe there were a lot of bagels. It's not like it hurt anyone."

"The sentence for Peter Declan, who was convicted for the murder of his wife Camille, is going to be carried out, at midnight in two days time. Camille Declan's former employer, Jason Broduer, released a statement early this morning saying that 'I hope this gives Camille the peace she deserves.' Declan has also released a statement while in prison, still insisting that he did not murder his wife," the news anchor reported. The Queen heir whirled around to look at the screen while Diggle and Roy exchanged confused glances. There was the click of keys and they watched as Queen leaned further over the computer.

"What exactly is your interest in Peter Declan?" Diggle asked after a moment. "The Hood isn't going to go after him, is he?"

"First off," Oliver said, looking up from the computer screen. "The Hood is a horrible name for a vigilante. And second of all-"

"What are you going to call yourself then," Roy interrupted, stuttering a little when he realized what he'd done and looking down at the ground but soldiering on. "Robin Hood?"

"And second of all," Oliver pressed on, a roll of his eyes the only acknowledgement of the interruption. "Declan's wife worked for Jason Broduer. And Broduer is on the list."

"So you're thinking that the police might have arrested the wrong man?" Diggle questioned and Oliver nodded.

"Exactly."

"And how are you going to prove that? Declan is on the chopping block and he's going to be put down in two days."

"Well first of all, Declan is going to need a good attorney."
Laurel finished up her work for the day, humming slightly under her breath. Tommy Merlyn, a man who she had believed was a no good womanizing heir to the Merlyn fortune, had been working earnestly to woo her. His efforts were endearing, at the very least, and had put Laurel in an excellent mood. Now she carefully organized her files so she wouldn't have to hunt for them when she started work at CNRI tomorrow morning. "Got a hot date tonight?" Joanna, Laurel's friend and co-worker, asked with a smile. "I don't think I've seen you this happy since we were in school."

"Tommy asked me to go out to dinner with him tonight," Laurel said, flushing a little.

"I thought you were done with billionaire's kids?" Joanna said, arching her eyebrows pointedly.

"I did too," Laurel admitted. "But Tommy's seriously trying here and I think it's sweet."

"If he hurts you like Queen did I'll break his face, heir to billions or not," Joanna said, hands on her hips. A moment later the other woman's serious facial expression melted away into a smile. "It's good to see you happy though."

"It's good to be happy," Laurel admitted and Joanna's smile widened.

"I'll go and let you finish up here so you're not late," Joanna said before turning and heading towards the door. Laurel shook her head and turned back to sorting as the door clicked closed. A moment later she went stiff as all the lights in CNRI went out.

Laurel went tense, crouching down to search for the pepper spray. When she came up, she found herself face to face with the Starling City vigilante. "Hello Laurel," a gruff voice said. Something inside the lawyer insisted that she should recognize the voice, despite the fact that no one she knew had a voice like that. She ignored it.

"Don't move," Laurel snapped, grip tight on the pepper spray. She fought down a hysterical giggle as she realized the absurdity of the entire situation. She was about to attempt pepper spraying a guy with a bow. This was the kind of stuff out of those corny actions movies she, Dad, Sara, and Mom used to watch.

"I'm not going to hurt you," the vigilante said, switching which hand was holding the bow and taking a step forward.

"Stay back," Laurel all but yelled, stretching out the arm with the pepper spray. "My father's a cop. You're making a huge mistake."

The vigilante stopped moving obediently and said, "I'm not the person you think and I need your help. Peter Declan is going to be executed in forty-eight hours. I believe he is innocent. Declan's wife was going to blow the whistle on Jason Brodeur. I think Brodeur had her murdered."

"There are a thousand lawyers in Starling City," Laurel snapped, intrigued despite her anxiety. "Why me?"

"We're both trying to help," was the reply. Laurel hesitated for a moment and then lowered the
pepper spray. In that moment, the Hood was gone, leaving Laurel standing alone in CNRI, mind buzzing. She was staring off into the distance, mind racing over possible angles, when her phone hummed, startling her. She knelt and fished it out of her purse and then smiled at the message from Tommy. She had a date tonight. She'd start working on the Brodeur case tomorrow.

Roy woke abruptly to the sounds of construction workers thumping about above him and stretched out stiff muscles. His sleep had wrapped him in sinister whispers about things he didn't understand, whispers that surrounded someone referred to as Her Majesty and an event known only as The Undertaking. Yesterday he had dismissed The Undertaking as something that had probably already happened but now he was wondering if that wasn't necessarily true. Both times he had dreamed about the main mention of The Undertaking, the Cigar Man had mentioned that they were planning to kill Roy and then cut and run before The Undertaking. That meant that The Undertaking hadn't happened yet.

With that thought in mind, the fourteen year old reached for his pad of paper and began listing everything he remembered from his dreams and his time as a captive. Four pages later he was still scribbling when Sin stumbled her way down the stairs, yawning widely. "Did you know there's an entire construction crew upstairs?" she asked, blinking at him sleepily. "I had to go through an entire interrogation before they were convinced I was allowed to be here."

"Have you slept recently?"

"Maybe," Sin said with a shrug, settling on the edge of the cot next to him. "Things have been a little nuts at home since Mom died. On the plus side, Dad's straightened up and started working overtime to get enough money to pay the bills but that means I'm doing all the cleaning and cooking along with working part time and going to school. My sleep schedule has been seriously destroyed."

"I can tell," Roy commented dryly and then let out a startled squeak as Sin began to lean on him heavily. "Sin, what are you doing?"

"Gravity is increasing on me," Sin said, giggling as Roy tried to shove her away.

"No it isn't," he protested, unable to stop his own laughter as he finally gave in and allowed her to practically crush him with her body weight. "Are you seriously gonna sleep on me?"

"Yeah," Sin muttered sleepily against his shoulder. "You make a good pillow." Then her eyes drifted closed and moments later her breathing evened out. Roy shook his head at her but a few minutes of scribbling later, he found himself drifting back to sleep as well.

Laurel was finding herself more and more intrigued by Peter Declan's case. What her father unwittingly told her about the whole situation seemed shifty and the fact that Camille Declan's superior insisted she had never come to talk to him. Laurel had done a little digging with Camille's co-workers then and had discovered that several of them had seen her talking with their supervisor. They'd also said that Camille and Peter had been in a happy marriage, despite their occasional arguments. That was suspicious, very suspicious. That was when she'd decided to visit Declan. That visit had made up her mind. Peter Declan did not come across as a psychopath who had killed his wife in cold blood inside their daughter's bedroom. Instead he seemed to be an innocent man desperate to save his life and be there for his daughter. That meant Laurel was going to do everything she could to ensure his survival.

"You're really serious about this, aren't you?" Tommy asked her as the pair of them walked back to CNRI after her lunch break. She'd explained everything to him then, including the mysterious
visit from the Hood the evening before.

"Peter Declan shouldn't suffer for the crimes of Jason Brodeur," Laurel replied. "And if he's really innocent I intend to do everything I can to free him."

"Okay," Tommy said after a moment's hesitation, smiling at her. "What can I do for you then?"

"The Hood tucked a number away in the file about Declan he gave me with a note to call it when I'd made a decision about the case," Laurel told him. "I need you to call in my stead since I don't have time right now. I can give you a write up of everything I've learned so far as well as what I information I need to free Declan."

"Okay," Tommy agreed immediately.

"Really?" Laurel asked. She had been expecting more resistance from her sort of boyfriend. Both Joanna and her own father had been irritated about her involvement with the vigilante but Tommy had taken it in stride.

"Really," he confirmed. "Anything for you."


"It's no problem Laurel. After all, I've got nothing but time since the club is still under construction," Tommy told her, flushing a little himself. "May I pick you up after work?"

"You most certainly may," Laurel said with a smile, waving at him over her shoulder as she ducked into CNRI.

"Have a good lunch?" Joanna asked with a wide smirk when Laurel almost ran into her.

"Oh shut up," Laurel replied cheerfully and Joanna rolled her eyes.

"Get to your station lover girl. We have work to do."

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Oliver was in the middle of sparring with Diggle when the burnout cell he had bought to keep in contact with Laurel during the Declan case rang. The sound startled Sin and Roy, who were sleeping tangled together like puppies, Roy's notepad falling to the ground with a clatter. Sin blinked blearily in Oliver's direction and Roy stared at him from under mostly closed eyelids.

"Everything's okay. Go back to sleep," he told them with a slim grin before picking up the phone. He'd modified it so it would automatically change his voice when he spoke into it, making him sound like he had with the voice modulator the night before. "Yes?"

"I know I'm not Laurel but please don't hang up," Tommy said in a rush. Oliver leaned back against one of the tables in surprise. Laurel had told Tommy about her conversation with the vigilante? Oliver had known ever since he had seen them interact when he had returned from the island that there was some kind of chemistry between them but he hadn't realized until now that it ran this deep. Things between Tommy and Laurel were more serious than he had expected. Oliver might have been uncertain about his own emotions on the subject, part of him still loved Laurel, but he was happy for both of them.

"I'm listening," Oliver told his friend.

"Laurel did some checking on Peter Declan and she agrees with you. She needs some information
to keep Declan off death row though."

"What kind of information?"

"Declan claims that his wife blew the whistle on Jason Brodeur the day she was murdered. The problem is that Camille's supervisor, Matt Istook, claims that she never spoke to him. To get Declan off death row, Laurel would need evidence that Istook is lying or a confession from the man himself."

"Done," Oliver told Tommy and hung up on his friend before Tommy could protest.

"So who are we going after?" Diggle asked the instant Oliver put down the phone.

"Matt Istook, Camille's former supervisor. He's claiming that Camille never came to visit him. We need to make him confess."

"Want to run through intimidation techniques before then?" Diggle asked, smirking slightly.

"I don't think I need the help," Oliver replied dryly. "But thanks for the offer."

"Any time man," was Diggle's laughing reply. Oliver shook his head and crossed the room to pick up Roy's fallen notebook, carefully smoothening the wrinkled page and then frowning when he noticed what Roy had been scribbling on it.

"Diggle, does the phrase The Undertaking mean anything to you?"

"Well it looks like someone forgot a lunch date with his wife," Moira teased as she stepped into her husband's office.

"What do you mean?" Walter asked, looking up from his papers. "Lunch isn't for another-" he glanced at his watch and then blanched a little. "I'm so sorry," he apologized, taking off his glasses.

"It's all right," Moira replied with a laugh. "The restaurant is holding our table." She watched as Walter quickly began organizing the papers on his desk, a furrow between his eyebrows. She knew her second husband well enough to realize that something was bothering Walter. "Is something wrong?"

"Our accounting department tagged something, a $2.6 million withdrawal from one of our Vancouver subsidiaries."

Moira felt an immediate flash of panic, realizing what the money had been used to do, but quickly pushed it away. "Are you saying that someone embezzled $2.6 million from the company?"

"Well it's probably a bookkeeping error but accounting is understandably worried about an IRS audit," Walter said, before standing and grabbing his jacket. "But don't worry, I'm sure it's nothing." He offered her a reassuring smile and his arm. "Come on, we're going to be late. I mean later." Moira found herself smiling as she slipped her arm through his, walking with him out of the office. Later she would have to think up a lie to explain the $2.6 million in order to keep Walter from digging too deep. For now she was just going to enjoy a late lunch with her husband.
"Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don’t resist them; that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like." - Lao Tzu

"I have one question," Felicity Smoak said, stepping into Walter's office. "Why am I being fired?"

"Miss Smoak, isn't it?" Walter asked for clarification, wanting to make sure he was talking to the right person. He didn't want to bring up the subject he wanted to talk about to more people than necessary. Moira had told him the discrepancy in the books was an investment in a friend's start up company that she had forgotten to write off but that just sounded wrong. Moira was not the kind of person to forget writing off something like that. His wife was meticulous in her record keeping. She had never forgotten to write something down for accounting before.

"Yes," the blonde told him. "And I am, without a doubt, the single most valuable member of your technical division. That's including my so called supervisor. Letting me go would be a major error for this company."

"I agree," Walter said, amused. "Which is why you aren't being fired."

Felicity stopped short, cheeks flushing pink. "Oh," she said, looking down at the floor for a moment before looking back at him. "I, uh, I assumed when you brought me up here it was because..." she trailed off and drew her thumb across her throat, miming it being slit.

"It's because I wanted you to look into something for me," Walter told her, pretending not to notice her embarrassment. "A variance of $2.6 million on a failed investment from three years ago. It was authorized by my wife. I was hoping you could uncover some of the details of the transaction for me." He held out a folder and the blonde took it skimming the contents before looking back at Walter.

"Find out as in..."

"Dig up discretely," Walter told her with a meaningful look.

"I'm your girl," Felicity said with a smile. "I mean, I'm not your girl. I wasn't making a pass at you." She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and then opened them again. "Thank you for not firing me." Then she turned and rushed out, presumably before she babbled out something more. What an odd girl, Walter thought as he watched her go, a confused half smile on his face.

Diggle and Oliver worked together to take down Matt Istook, tranquilizing him just while he was getting into his shiny new Porsche. The man slumped to the ground and the pair moved him into the van, driving towards the train tracks. "He's all yours," Diggle said once they secured Istook to one of the set of the train tracks. "Have fun."

"Whatever you say dad," Oliver replied dryly and ignored the eye roll that earned him, pulling his hood up and readying his bow. Time to frighten an agreement out of a crook. The van pulled away and moments later Istook woke, the tranquilizer wearing off. "Matt Istook," Oliver growled, lowly and the man's head snapped up to look at him.

"You're him, that hood guy," Istook babbled, face pale. "You're the guy that's been terrorizing this city."
"Peter Declan," Oliver continued, ignoring Istook's chattering. "Your lies helped put him on death row. Now either its time to tell the truth or catch the 10:15 to Bludhaven." Right on cue, a train whistled in the distance.

"O-okay," Istook stammered, eyes widening. "Brodeur paid me to...to say that Camille never spoke to me but I didn't have anything to do with her death." The train whistled as it rumbled closer and Istook jerked on the handcuffs attaching him to the rail. "Oh god, please. I'll do anything!"

"Even confess?" Oliver demanded. Istook hesitated but when the train whistle howled nearby and he flinched, nodding rapidly in agreement.

"I'll confess, I promise," the man whimpered.

"Good," Oliver said. Then he allowed himself to fade back into the shadows, smirking when Istook let out a frightened wail as the train thundered by the man on the other track. While the train was still thundering by, Oliver's phone vibrated in his pocket. He pulled it out and then frowned at the text from Diggle. Iron Heights in lock down. Laurel in trouble, the message said. Without bothering to free Istook, Oliver turned on his heel and rushed towards where he and Diggle had hid his motorcycle earlier in the day. He needed to get to Laurel, fast.

Laurel clicked her way into the prison, intent of seeing Declan again. The guard leading her kept glancing back at her over his shoulder as if questioning why Laurel Lance of all people was visiting convicted murderer Peter Declan again. She didn't care. She had a job to do, and right now that was reassuring Declan that everything was going according to plan. Once Istook testified that Camille had come to him, Declan's pending execution would be stalled. The evidence would have to be reviewed and Istook's original testimony would be thrown out. That would mean Laurel would have time to gather evidence to prove that Declan was innocent.

The guard opened a door to a room for her, allowing her to step in before following and closing the door behind him. "You have fifteen minutes," he said and Laurel nodded professionally at him before clicking across the room to sit in a chair across the metal table from Declan.

"Hello," she said with a gentle smile. "I'm here to update on my progress."

"Have you found anything?" Declan asked, looking as if he wasn't daring to hope.

"Yes, we still have a shot," Laurel reassured him. "Remember the friend I told you about, the one who convinced me to talk to you? He's working on something right now that could lead to a retrial. I promise you that we're going to get you the justice you deserve."

"I don't know," Declan replied, looking down at his hands. "Brodeur is powerful and I've been here before, with lawyers holding out nuggets of hope." Laurel was just opening her mouth to insist that she was telling the truth, that everything was going to work out this time, when the lights went out. Seconds later alarms began blaring everything, causing Laurel and Declan to cast nervous glances at the guard in the room. The man in question has his radio lifted up closely to his head and was listening intently to whatever was being said.

"Secure all corners in cell block 'C', copy that," he said and then turned to look at both of them. "The warden's setting up a secure perimeter in 'C' block. Stay here Ms. Lance." Then he turned and rushed out of the room, shutting the door firmly behind him.

"Wait!" Laurel called after him, rushing to the door and peering outside the room. There were prisoners swarming the halls, jumping over unconscious or dead guards.
"There's Lance!" one of them yelled and several men rushed at her. Laurel scrambled backwards as they stormed into the room. Declan was cowering near the floor, no help at all, and one of the men had a gun. He pointed it squarely at her chest, finger rapping around the trigger, and Laurel did the only thing she could. She screamed. For a moment the world around her blurred and Laurel wavered on her feet as the men toppled backwards, the gun flying out of the man's hand. By the time she crashed to the ground unconscious, any glass had broken and the man were also unconscious. Moments later the Hood burst into the room only to stare in stunned silence at the scene around him.

Felicity clicked her way into Walter Steele's office, the file with her findings clutched close to her chest. "Good evening Felicity," he greeted her, removing his glasses and placing them carefully on his desk. "Have you found something?"

"I have," she told him with a quick grin before becoming professional. "The company Mrs. Queen, or Steele, Mrs. Queen-Steele...Does she hyphenate? She seems like a woman who would hyphenate." Walter cleared his throat and she flushed, quickly moving on. "Right. The company she invested in doesn't exist."

"I don't understand," Walter told her, looking confused.

"There was no investment," Felicity elaborated. "The money was used to set up an offshore LLC called Tempest."

"I don't recall that name being under a Queen Consolidated banner."

"Cause it's not. There's nothing registered with the Secretary of State, no federal tax records, no patent applications filed. But in 2009 Tempest purchased a warehouse in Starling City." Felicity handed over the file, watching as Walter leafed through it.

"Thank you Felicity," he told her. "That will be all."

"You're welcome. And have a good evening Mr. Steele," she replied awkwardly before clicking out of the office. Something strange was going on in the Queen family, she just knew it. *I'm not going to look into it. I'm not going to look into it*, she silently tried to convince herself as she headed to the elevator, planning on returning to her office to grab her coat before leaving. By the time she was leaving Queen Consolidated she had already given up on that train of thought. She was definitely looking into it. What she didn't know was that in the CEO's office far above her, Walter Steele was looking at the address for the warehouse she had scribbled down for him, planning on paying a visit to it before he went home for the night.
Chapter 32

"I no doubt deserved my enemies, but I don't believe I deserved my friends." - Walt Whitman

Oliver groaned when someone pounded on his door, wanting nothing more than to snuggle deeper under the covers and go back to sleep. Between threatening Istook, running to Laurel's rescue and discovering the strange scene there, and trying to figure out what the Undertaking was and who exactly "her majesty" refers to, he hadn't managed to creep into bed until five in the morning. "Oliver this is important," Thea's voice yelled from outside his room. That was enough to wake him up completely. He wasn't sure exactly what day it was but he did know that Thea had school today and he doubted that she would normally still be home at, he glanced blearily over at the digital clock on the bedside table, a quarter til ten. Sudden worry rushing over him, Oliver rolled out of bed and rushed to the door on silent feet. He yanked the door open to see a teary eyed Thea standing on the other side. His sister flung herself at his chest, sobbing as she wrapped her arms around him. He automatically hugged her back, completely confused.

"Speedy, what's wrong?" he asked softly, scanning for any kind of danger. From what he could tell, nothing was wrecked and everything seemed to be peaceful.

"It's Walter," she sniffed against the shirt he'd been sleeping in, skinny arms tightening somehow. "He was on his way home from work last night and someone kidnapped him." Oliver froze, arms tightening protectively around his little sister. Footsteps approached and his head snapped in that direction. His gaze fell on their mother who looked poised but exhausted.

"Are you okay?" he asked her. If Walter was killed by his kidnappers, this would be the second husband his mother would lose. Something like that could have serious setbacks for a person's mental health.

"Don't worry about me," Moira replied with a weak smile. "I'll be fine."

"M-mom," Thea protested, not releasing Oliver.

"I promise Thea," their mother said, expression firm. "I'm not going to fall apart this time. I'm going to stay strong, for both of you, and believe that the police will find Walter."

Approaching footsteps had Oliver tensing while both his mother and sister startled, spinning to face the approaching form of John Diggle. The former soldier's face was blank as he approached, phone in hand. "I know this is a bad time for you Mr. Queen, but Mr. Merlyn is on the line. He needs to speak to you about the construction of the club," Diggle said. Oliver nodded and took the phone from him, still keeping one arm wrapped around Thea.

"What can I do for you Tommy?" he asked.

"One of the contractors had a question about the floor plans we drew up and I couldn't remember that you, Thea, and I decided on," Tommy told him.

"Okay. I'll be over in ten minutes," Oliver told him before hanging up. He then turned his attention to his mother and sister. "I'll get everything cleared up with Tommy and then I'll be back here, okay?"

"Do whatever you need to do," his mother told him with a gentle smile. "The world doesn't stop just because of a tragedy."
"C-can I...Can I come with you?" Thea mumbled against his shirt.

"Sure Speedy," he told her, petting a hand through her hair. "Go get your jacket and shoes. I'll meet you in the foyer."

"Okay," Thea sniffed and hugged him tightly before heading for her room.

"I'll fetch the car," Diggle said and Oliver nodded at him before turning to his mother.

"Are you going to be okay?" he asked her, concerned. His mother had already lost one husband and had just gotten her son back. Now she might have lost another husband. It was a lot for someone to deal with in a relatively short period of time.

"Don't worry about me," Moira replied with a weak smile. "I have some calls to make to the company and I'm going to look into hiring protection for Thea as a precaution. That will keep me busy until you and Thea return."

"Alright," Oliver agreed because he wasn't sure what else to say. "I have my phone on me. Call if you need anything."

"I promise," Moira told him, rising up on her toes slightly to kiss his cheek before heading back towards her bedroom. Oliver headed back to his room to quickly dress so he could meet Thea downstairs, mind whirring. Who would want to take Walter? And why? He didn't have the answers, but once he was sure his family was going to be okay if he was gone for a couple hours, he was going to find out.

Laurel forced her heavy eyelids to open, feeling confused and a little bit panicky. Her mind was a blur and the almost blindingly white ceiling above her wasn't helping matters. There was a reason she had painted all the ceilings in her apartment cream. Pure white hurt her eyes first thing in the morning. She blinked a couple times, trying to figure out where she was as memory slowly returned. She remembered going to visit Peter Declan, the men coming after her, and then nothing.

"Laurel, sweetie?" she heard her father ask cautiously. She managed to lift her head and turn it a little to take a look at her father.

Quentin Lance looked exhausted but incredibly relieved when his daughter met his gaze. There were dark circles under his eyes but he was smiling at her as if it was Christmas. "Daddy?" she managed to get out, her tongue feeling thick and unwieldy in her mouth.

"Hey baby," he told her, voice gentle. "How are you feeling?"

"Fuzzy," she mumbled back.

"That's probably because of the medication they have you on sweetheart," her dad told her with a little laugh. Laurel smiled at him blearily, hoping her head cleared soon. She hadn't felt this off since she'd had her wisdom teeth taken out when she was eighteen. "Do you-" He cut himself off and then started again, expression determined. "Do you remember anything?"

"I remember..." Laurel closed her eyes, trying to focus, and then continued. "I remember going to see Peter Declan. We were talking about the plan for his case when something went wrong in the cell block. The officer with us ran out. I...I opened the door I think, to check and see what was going on, and these men stopped me. I remember screaming and then, nothing." She opened her eyes and turned to her father. "What happened?"

"We're not sure," her father replied. "Declan is the only witness and he was hiding under the table for most of it. He said when you screamed things started shattering and people went flying."
"But that's...that's not possible," Laurel protested. "I mean, I know if you can hit a high enough pitch you can break glass but people can't throw other people with their voices." Her own voice rose in panic and she didn't notice the window shaking a little as it did.

"I know baby, I know," her father said. "Declan saw the Hood guy come in after the men who came after you were down."

"Then maybe he had something to do with it," Laurel cut in, voice hopeful.

"Maybe," Quentin agreed. He didn't have the heart to tell her that Declan had said the Hood had looked just as confused as everyone else was over the scene they had discovered when they had reached Laurel. There was no real explanation for what had happened, and that terrified the Detective more than he would have liked to admit.

"What about Peter Declan?" Laurel asked after a moment of silence, her eyes closed again. She was tired but not tired enough to sleep. Instead, she was trying to focus.

"Matt Istook admitted to lying when he said Camille Declan never visited him. A judge determined that Istook recanting his original statement was enough to warrant reopening Declan's case. Peter Declan is off the chopping block until all evidence has been re-examined."

"That's good," Laurel replied, a slim smile crossing her face. Then another thought hit her and her eyes snapped open. "What about Tommy? Does he know what happened?"

"He does," her father confirmed. "The only reason he's not still here is there was an issue with the new club he and Queen are putting together in the Glades. He'll be here any minute."

As if on cue Tommy stuck his head in and asked, "Laurel? Are you awake?"

"I'm awake," she told Tommy, smiling.

"I'll let you two lovebirds catch up," Quentin said. "I'm going to get some coffee." He leaned over and kissed Laurel on the cheek, paused by the door to clap Tommy on the shoulder, and then left the two alone.

"How are you? Are you okay?" Tommy rushed to ask, hurrying to take her father's place in the chair next to her bed and reaching out to cradle one of her hands between both of his.

"I'm fine, just a little groggy," Laurel reassured him. "Not even a scratch."

"Okay," Tommy said with a weak smile. "Good. Awesome actually." Laurel couldn't help but giggle at his awkwardness and Tommy laughed a little but his eyes didn't lighten completely.

"Tommy, is something wrong?"

Tommy swallowed hard and then met her eyes. "Laurel, Walter Steele has been kidnapped.

In the shadows of the Glades, a man was working. Always before he had been in the shadows while working in the drug business but this would set him apart from all the others that peddled cocaine and heroin on the streets and back alleys. He had studied drugs from all the greats, the evil masterminds who had made cities tremble in fear before them, and had been inspired to create his own concoction. This was something that would have the masses of Starling City bowing to him. It would make him the king of Starling's drug market. A man who would soon be known to the Starling underground at large as The Count smiled as he lifted the vial before him. "Bring in the
next test subject," he said with a wide, maniacal smile. It was time to see if this batch was the one that made the cut.

Bruce Wayne might not have approved of Oliver Queen's methods but he did understand what it was like to have a member of your family taken from you. He would not wish that on another living soul, no matter how twisted or demented they were. It was part of the reason Batman had a strict no kill policy. It was also why he'd nudged Dick into searching for any sign of the missing Walter Steele in his free time. "I think I might have found something," Dick said, the boy bent over his computer. "But I'm not sure."

"What is it?"

"There was a sum of money transferred to a man named Harold Backman who works for Cayman Fidelity. Two million dollars to be exact."

"Can you back trace the money and figure out who might be involved?"

"Yeah, I think so," Dick replied, brow furrowed in concentration. "Give me a minute." There was typing, clicking, and then a triumphant yelp as Dick got what he wanted. "Bingo! The money traces back to a man named Dominic Alonzo." There was a moment of silence and then the boy asked, "What exactly are you going to do with that information?"
Chapter 33

"The real man smiles in trouble, gathers strength from distress, and grows brave by reflection." - Thomas Paine

Despite the intervention of the Hood, the Glades were still going down hill. Sin knew this but she couldn't bring herself to care. Roy was safe and sound, personally under the Starling City vigilante's protection, and her father was actually working instead of being a good for nothing layabout. Sin's life was, in all honesty, actually pretty good. She was humming as she made her way towards the foundry after work. School had been long and full of theories over why Thea Queen hadn't been in attendance, the younger Queen child had actually been an excellent student lately, and work had been full of whispers about a new drug being peddled in select back alleys of the Glades. Sin didn't particularly care about that and had tuned it out, focusing on seeing Roy almost as soon as she was finished with work. Since her dad worked overtime a lot of evenings, he wasn't actually aware of when she came home or went out, either already asleep or already at work.

The construction workers were already gone and the sun was setting when she made her way into the foundry, marveling at how the club was shaping up before tapping in the code Queen had given her and slipping through the door, shutting it firmly behind her. Diggle was already running mission control at the computer, arguing with Oliver Queen over a phone, and Roy was stretched out on his stomach drawing something on what was becoming an ever present pad of paper. Sin waved at Diggle as she practically skipped past him to sit down next to Roy. "Evening," he mumbled absently, not looking up, and Sin felt a wide grin cross her face. It'd been a long time since she'd seen Roy so comfortably absorbed in drawing. Actually, the last time she'd seen him draw this much, his dad had still been alive and Sin had spent more time at Roy's house than her own.

"Evening," she replied. "What'cha drawing?"

"You'll see," was the semi frustrated response as Roy leaned further over his picture, guarding it protectively by angling his arms so she couldn't see what he was drawing. Sin giggled a little and leaned back so her head was resting in the middle of Roy's back. The boy let out a put upon sigh but didn't protest, just shifting a little to get comfortable before going back to drawing. At last Diggle either won the argument or gave up and hung up on Oliver before turning back his chair and focusing on the two kids sprawled across the concrete floor.

"How are the two of you comfortable?" he asked and Sin giggled while Roy made a disgruntled sounding noise.

"We've had lots of practice," she told the former soldier, grinning easily. She felt genuinely happy as she stared up towards the ceiling and listened to the scratch of Roy's pencil on the paper. She allowed her eyes to drift closed, an smile fixed on her face, and hummed a cartoon theme under her breath.

Roy snickered when he realized what she was humming and asked, "Are you seriously humming the Spongebob Squarepants theme, Cinderella?"

"Don't judge me," Sin retorted, playfully slapping his shoulder. "And don't call me that either. I'm not a Disney princess." Roy just snorted in response and ignored her just like he always did when she told him not to call her Cinderella. It had started when Sin had made the mistake of telling a sassy little Roy Harper that she didn't really like the name Cynthia. He'd promptly started calling
her Cinderella and she'd never quite managed to get him to stop. Secretly, she didn't really mind
the nickname.

Sin went back to humming the Spongebob theme and Roy went back to sketching. After a
moment Sin caught a glimpse of Diggle shaking his head at them before turning back to the
computer, presumably looking through the breaking news. Both Sin and Roy startled a little when
they heard the former soldier swear under his breath and scramble for the phone, dialing. The two
exchanged confused glances before Roy shrugged a little and turned back to his drawing,
obviously determined to finish it. "Oliver, we have a seriously problem. I need you back at the
foundry, now."

He'd asked her to look into the missing $2.6 million missing from the accounts and then, after
she'd given him the information she'd discovered, Walter Steele had gone missing. Felicity didn't
believe in coincidences like this. Someone had taken Walter because of what he'd discovered
about Tempest and Felicity Smoak could be next. That was why she was standing awkwardly a
few feet from the police station trying to decide what to do. Walter had asked her to do digging off
the record so for all she knew, she could report what she knew and be arrested under suspicion of
kidnapping Walter. The worry was enough to make her hesitated. Maybe she was wrong. Maybe
Tempest wasn't the reason why Walter had gone missing. Walter Steele was the CEO of an
extremely profitable company. Someone could have kidnapped him for that reason.

Mind made up, Felicity headed for her apartment, determined to do some more digging. She was
going to find out more about Tempest before she decided whether or not she should tell the police.
After all, she didn't want to be arrested for doing some hacking under the table because the police
knew that some extremist group had kidnapped Walter. Twenty minutes later Felicity was sitting
in her apartment noting that Tempest was created only a few months after the sinking of the
Queen's Gambit. Interesting. Felicity chewed on the end of her pen and debated the merits of
visiting the Tempest warehouse for herself.

Clark was in the middle of his weekly conversation with his mother on the landline for his
apartment when his cell phone began to ring. A single B identified the caller, letting the last living
Kryptonian know that this wasn't going to wait. The only time Bruce Wayne, known by night as
Batman, would be calling him would be for something extremely important. "Sorry Ma," he told
his mother ruefully. "But I've got to take the call on my cell. It's important."

"It's no problem dear," Martha Kent replied on the other end of the line and Clark could picture
her shuffling around the house making sure everything was settled for the evening like she had
always had when Clark was young and still trying to figure out why he wasn't just like everybody
else he knew. "Stay safe and I'll talk to you next week."

"I will. Love you Ma," Clark told her.

"Your father and I love you too Clark," she replied before terminated the conversation. Clark
placed down the phone and picked up his cell, answering it just before it went to voicemail with a
smile on his face.

"How can I help you?" he asked right off the bat, knowing that Bruce didn't appreciate beating
around the bush.

"What do you know about what's going on in Starling?" the Bat demanded gruffly.

"You mean the fact that Oliver Queen is alive?" Clark questioned. "That's old news."
"Oliver Queen is a vigilante," Bruce replied gruffly.

"What?" the Kryptonian questioned but Bruce continued talking as if he hadn't even registered Clark's interruption.

"But that isn't the point. Queen's step-father, Walter Steele, has been kidnapped." The last remaining Wayne fell silent as if expecting some kind of response.

Clark stared at the white wall of his apartment for a moment before forcing himself to say, "Okay?"

Batman let out a heavy sigh, as if Clark not being able to read minds seriously hindered whatever he had planned for the evening, and said, "The money traces back to a man named Dominic Alonzo and despite how much I would like to go have a word with the accountant, I believe Batman would not be welcome int Starling."

After a moment Clark asked, "Did you manage to annoy Queen already?" He knew very well how abrasive Batman could be so the alien wasn't exactly surprised but he was slightly amused by the situation.

"That is not the point Kent," Bruce snapped. "I need you to go to Starling and find out what Alonzo has to do with Walter Steele's disappearance."

"Okay," Clark agreed easily. "I'll bring you the information when I'm finished." Then he hung up before Bruce could argue about his impending presence in Gotham City.

Oliver abandoned his current task for the night, another person on the list, after Diggle's call and headed back to the foundry, wondering what could have gone wrong now. After taking care of the issue the construction workers had found, Tommy had headed back to visit Laurel in the hospital while Thea and Oliver had gone back home. Moira had still been on the phone talking to someone about guarding Thea when they'd gotten back so the siblings had ended up curled up on the couch under a blanket watching *Mulan*. Their mother had come to join them eventually and they'd spent half the day watching Disney movies. He'd managed to leave after lunch for a short period to smuggle food to Roy, and he seriously needed to figure out a long term solution to ensure the boy's safety because this was definitely not working, before going back home.

He'd finally managed to leave after supper, claiming he had work to do and promising he'd be around tomorrow. Roy and Diggle had eaten supper in the foundry while Oliver had searched the internet and local news for any sign of what had happened to Walter. After almost an hour with no luck he'd hit the streets, planning on taking out another person on the list. That was before the interruption.

Oliver typed in the correct code and entered the basement of the foundry, a tired smile slipping on to his face when he saw Sin flopped on top of Roy trying to see whatever the boy had been drawing. Despite being smaller than the girl, Roy was doing a pretty good job of keeping the pad away from her. "We have a serious problem," Diggle said, beckoning Oliver over. "Remember Adam Hunt?"

"Yes," Oliver replied, puzzled. "Why?"

"He was killed by an archer in a seedy hotel in the Glades. Three black arrows to the chest. The police just found him an hour and a half ago." Diggle paused a moment and then added, "They think it was you."
"This is not good," Oliver muttered.

"Not," Diggle agreed. "It's not. The police are going to be hunting you after this." Oliver ran a hand through his hair and let his breath out in a huff, realizing how much more complicated his job was about to become.

"We have to find the other archer before he causes any more trouble."

"You mean along with tracking down Walter Steele and figuring out what the Undertaking is?" Diggle asked and Oliver sighed.

"Exactly."

"You could always ask the Bat to come help."

Oliver snorted at that suggestion. "Not likely." Bruce Wayne had only been around for a day but Oliver wasn't sure they could stand to be around each other any longer. Dick and Roy might have gotten along but Batman and the Starling City vigilante definitely didn't.

"Okay then," Diggle said, obviously recognizing that this wasn't a fight worth having. "Where do we start?"
"Nothing matters but the facts. Without them, the science of criminal investigation is nothing more than a guessing game." - Blake Edwards

Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait for this chapter! School got a little crazy there for a while!

Calling Detective Lance might not have been the brightest idea but if he could convince Lance to give him an arrow, Oliver could be well on his way to discovering who was killing people he'd already visited. The number Oliver was calling was a prepaid cell phone that he'd learned to encrypt a certain way to protect himself while everyone still thought he was dead. The vigilante waited impatiently while it rang and rang, more than ready to get this mess straightened out so he could focus on finding Walter. "Lance," the captain answered after two rings.

"I didn't kill Adam Hunt," Oliver growled, hoping that the voice distorter was working properly. If not, Quentin Lance was going to show up and arrest him some time soon.

"You," Lance hissed in reply and Oliver winced, casting a glance over to where Sin and Roy were playfully arguing over some detail of a television show they had watched together when they were younger. The tension between his shoulders faded away some and he reminded himself that it didn't matter what Lance thought of him. Other, more important people knew the truth.

"You call me The Hood," Oliver replied. "It's not a great nickname. I know you told Commissioner Nudocerdo that you might be dealing with a copycat archer which makes me your best bet to take him down. If I'm going to do that though, I'm going to need one of the arrows from the murder."

"Yeah, thanks but no thanks," Lance replied, tone dismissive. "We're pretty good at pulling information off evidence ourselves."

"Not as good as I am," Oliver returned, fighting to keep the frustration he was feeling out of his voice.

"Like I said," Lance said. "Thanks but no thanks."

"Whatever you say Detective," Oliver replied, gritting his teeth. "But when the archer kills again and you decide you need my help, my number's already programmed in." Then he hung up before he said something else he regretted. A moment later a phone chimed and Sin groaned.

"Sometimes I hate work," the girl mumbled, shoving herself up off the floor and grabbing her bag. Roy snorted and grinned up at her, which earned him an exasperated eye roll. "See you later Roy," she told him, leaning down to ruffle his hair before heading for the door.

Roy grabbed whatever book Sin had dropped off today for him, still laying on his stomach on the chilly concrete, and flipped it open as the door shut behind Sin. Diggle was out grabbing lunch, as was becoming habit for them, so it was just the boy and Oliver in the Foundry for the moment. Oliver settled into the computer chair after a moment, watching Roy read. The atmosphere was
surprisingly relaxed considering the fact that Oliver had intended the foundry to be the base for his one man mission.

The peaceful silence was broken by the computer chiming. Oliver's brow furrowed as he tried to remember whether or not he'd set the computer to search for anything. He spun around to see that his screen was black with a white box in the center. *Dominic Alonzo was paid to kidnap Walter Steele*, the text in the white box informed him. *Alonzo believes Steele is dead*. Oliver's eyes widened as he stared at the screen in stunned silence. The door to the foundry swung open and then closed but the Queen scion didn't look up. Walter was dead? It felt like a nightmare.

"Oliver?" Diggle questioned, hesitating by his shoulder. Oliver gestured wordlessly towards the screen and waited while his bodyguard read. "Who is this?"

"No idea," Oliver replied.

"Think you can respond?"

"Only one way to find out." Oliver hesitated a moment and then typed *Who is this?* 

*Guess* was the flat reply, complete with a period at the end. Oliver scowled at the screen.

A moment later a new font, more Comic Sans than the serious print that he'd been seeing before, added, *P.S. You need better security-Robin*. Oliver placed his head in his hands with a groan. Great. His foundry computer had just been hacked by Batman.

"What's going on?" Roy asked, abandoning the book to join them near the computer. Oliver scooted his computer chair over so that Roy could see. The boy read quickly and then snickered.

"Yeah, yeah," Oliver said with a roll of his eyes, ruffling the boy's hair. "Very funny. Come on kid, let's spar a bit before we eat." Diggle snorted, amused, and Roy shrugged.

"Retaliation Oliver?" The former soldier asked, amused.

"Just a little," Oliver replied with a sly grin before joining Roy on the training mats. The boy really did need the practice and fifteen or twenty minutes before lunch shouldn't hurt anyone.

Felicity found herself standing indecisively outside the Tempest warehouse, a frown on her face. Somewhere behind her, a street lamp flickered and threatened to go out. She'd told herself that she wasn't going to check the warehouse that had possibly gotten Walter kidnapped but her curiosity had eaten her up inside. That was how she had ended up here. She stared at the keypad, trying to decide whether or not she actually wanted to try to go inside. If whatever was contained in the warehouse was a big enough secret to really get Walter kidnapped, then she probably didn't want to be involved. On the other hand, if it was just an innocent warehouse then there was no reason she shouldn't look inside.

That last thought made up her mind. Felicity lifted her hand to the keypad, considering possible passwords. If the warehouse truly belonged to Moira Queen then there were several obvious options she could try. She hesitated and then typed in *Robert*. There was a click and the blonde's eye widened in surprise. Could it really be this easy? She cautiously pushed open the door and stepped inside, groping about in the darkness for a light switch. After a moment she found it, shoving it upwards and lifting a hand to shield her eyes from the sudden light.

After a moment, she dropped her hand and gaped at the sight before her. The remains of the *Queen's Gambit* were locked away within the warehouse, remarkably still mostly in one piece. Felicity frowned and walked down the concrete steps to floor of the warehouse, slowly circling
the yacht. What she saw made her stomach twist. While she wasn't an expert on boats in general, she was fairly certain that this one had been sabotaged. That meant someone had killed Robert Queen, and tried to kill Oliver Queen, on purpose. That was enough to make her turn on her heel and scramble towards the door.

Heart pounding, Felicity shut the door and headed for her car, slipping inside. Her hands were sweaty as she reached for the clutch and the steering wheel. She pulled away from the warehouse, willing her pounding heart to slow. She needed to head the police office right now. They needed to know what she did in order to help Walter. Oh god, what if she was too late? What if Walter was already dead? She was so busy panicking that she didn't notice the rusty red van following her closely.

The van made every turn she did, the man inside speaking softly on his cell phone. After a moment, he hung up. Felicity stopped at a stoplight, trying to calm her nerves. The van behind her turned off on an alley, circled around, and drove through the intersection directly at her. The blonde glanced up at the sound of a revving engine and let out a shriek of fright, scrambling for her seatbelt. She managed to unbuckle it and throw herself backwards into the backseat as the van barreled into her car.

Quentin Lance was reaching the end of his rope. The new archer had killed again, just as the Hood had said. Nelson Ravich had an arrow through the heart and the police were no closer to finding who was doing this. The offer the vigilante had given him was quickly sounding tempting, especially considering how determined the commissioner was to pin this whole mess on the Hood. Normally Lance would have been all for that but the evidence didn't fit the theory. The arrows were wrong, not the same type as the ones that had come from previous Hood killings. Furthermore, it didn't make any sense that the vigilante would be going after people he'd already terrified into submission. This was not how he wanted to spend the week before Christmas.

Pointing this out got Lance taken off the case and he drove back to the station in seething silence. Sitting in front of his desk, he debated his options. He could either apologize to Nudocerdo and respectfully request to be put back on the case or he could go behind the man's back. The idea of apologizing to the commissioner disgusted him. Nudocerdo was in the pocket of anyone who was willing to pay him under the table and even working for the man made his skin crawl. That left option two. He picked up the cell sitting on the corner of his desk and dialed the saved number, walking out to the hallway.

"Don't bother trying to trace this number back to me," the Hood growled when he answered the phone. "You'll never make it through the encryption."

"There's a heating vent on the corner of O'Neil and Adams," Lance replied. "You'll find what you're after there."

"It would be a mistake to set a trap for me, Detective," the vigilante warned.

"I'm trading away just about everything I believe because it's the only chance I have of catching this bastard," Lance snapped back at him. "You have until Christmas and then, copycat or not, I'm coming after you." Just as he hung up the phone a younger officer went running by him. Two more followed moments later. Lance reached out and grabbed one of the men asking, "What's going on?"

"Car crash," the officer told him. "Some van just deliberately plowed into a car." Then he pulled free and scrambled for the office. Lance watched him go, feeling bad for whoever was involved in the crashing but knowing that now was his chance to plant the arrow for the vigilante to find.
"Do you really think Walter Steele is dead?" Dick asked, eyes fixed on the picture of the missing man on one corner of the computer screen.

"Doubtful," Bruce replied, setting the parameters for a series of searches. "Alonzo was only a lackey. It's unlikely that he would know what happened to Steele."

"Does that mean Superman's going to come back by to help again," the boy asked with an eager grin. To Bruce's irritation and the embarrassment of the Kryptonian in question, Dick had quickly declared the alien, Uncle Clark. The boy's attachment to Clark Kent wasn't exactly surprising, Dick made friends easily despite being home schooled to lower the risk of kidnapping, but it did worry his guardian. If something happened and the alien went dark, Dick could very easily be caught in the crossfire.

"Perhaps," Bruce admitted grudgingly and Dick gave him a knowing smile. "Get changed Robin. We'll go patrol while the computer searches for any sign of Walter Steele."

"Awesome," Dick cheered and cartwheeled towards the changing area, Bruce watching him go with a fond smile on his face.
We're getting close to the end of this story. Only a few more chapters left until we reach the next one!

"Perhaps one day you'll see that this is what nature intended all along. Mankind is a temporary weed in the garden of life. A weed which can be removed." - Undergrowth from the Danny Phantom episode Urban Jungle

Felicity Smoak sat underneath the shock blanket, shivering. Her eyes were wide behind the lenses of her glasses, staring blankly at the wreckage of her car. Someone had just tried to kill her. It wasn't something she was used to. She felt battered and bruised but the paramedics had informed her that there were no serious injuries. Somehow, the worst thing the crash had done was to give her a bruise on her leg. One of the cops photographing the scene approached her, a cell phone in hand. "I know your cell phone was busted during the wreck," the woman told her. "But I thought if you wanted to call someone, you could use mine."

"Thanks," Felicity said with a weak smile, taking the offered phone and dialed her mother's number by heart. Donna Smoak had done her best to raise Felicity after her father had simply packed up and left, working long hours as a cocktail waitress in various bars in the Las Vegas area. Despite the arguments they sometimes got into, Felicity loved her mother dearly.

She listened, trembling a little, as the phone rang and rang in her ear. At last a familiar, warm voice said, "Hello?" on the other end of the line.

"Hi mom," Felicity replied, voice wavering a little.

"Lissy?" Donna Smoak asked, sounding confused and worried. "Are you okay?"

"Y-yeah," Felicity stammered. "Just a little bruised."

"Felicity, what happened?" The worry in her mother's voice was overtaking the confusion and Felicity realized that Donna was probably minutes from packing up and heading to Starling.

"I was involved in a car crash," she managed to force out, voice still shaking. The hand holding the cell up to her ear was trembling so Felicity did her best to steady it.

"Oh Lissy," Donna said, voice oh so gentle and slipping into concern. "Are you hurt?"

"No mom," Felicity told her. "The paramedics said I was fine, just a little bruised, but my car's totaled."

"You've got insurance, right sweetie?"

"Yes mom. I'll call them soon."

"Well that's good. I'm really glad you're okay."
"Me too," Felicity choked out in a small voice, suddenly feeling much younger than she really was. Hearing Donna Smoak's voice on the other end of the line was very reassuring, and Felicity's shaking was beginning to subside.

"Do you want me to keep talking, Lissy?" her mother asked.

"Please," Felicity choked out and her mother instantly launched into an anecdote about another woman at work. Felicity found herself letting out a little watery giggle as Donna cited a disaster that had involved extremely flammable alcohol all over a counter and several candles. The shaking faded away completely while Felicity listened to her mom's voice and the young woman began to plan. The accident had made it clear that whoever was trying to protect this secret was willing to kill. That meant getting the largely ineffective Starling City PD involved would not only be unhelpful, but would also get people killed. That meant she needed another option. Luckily, she had one. The Hood.

Oliver turned the arrow over in his hands, looking for any identifying marks. If he could figure out where the arrow was coming from, it might give him an idea of who the mysterious archer was. Knowing who the archer was would then help him discover the motive of the killer. Behind him, stretching out on top of the cot, Roy was scribbling again, a frustrated look on his face. The Queen heir wondered whether or not it had to deal with the Undertaking that he'd scribbled about earlier but he didn't want to accidentally startle the boy by asking.

"So Lance did get you a Christmas present," Diggle said, heading down the Foundry stairs. "Any luck with it?"

Oliver shrugged at him. "Teflon-coated titanium blade serrated to split bone," he said, still examining it. "The shaft is some type of specialized polymer, which is stronger than a typical carbon fiber. This..." He paused to turn the arrow around in his hand. "This is a custom job."

"So Lance gave in after the other archer dropped another body."

"Nelson Ravich," Oliver confirmed, carefully placing down the arrow on a nearby table.

"Which is another name you've already crossed off your dad's list. So is this guy trying to frame you or call you out?"

"No idea," Oliver shrugged. "But either way, I need to find him."

"He's probably trying to frame you," Roy spoke up, glancing away from the paper he'd been scribbling on. Both Diggle and Oliver turned to look at him but he didn't flinch from their gazes. "If someone wants to call you out, all they have to do is commit a crime or go looking for you at night. Killing somebody isn't necessary."

"Fair enough," Oliver agreed. "But if the guy's trying to frame me, that means someone wants me out of the way of something."

"I think..." Roy trailed off and chewed nervously on his lower lip for a moment before continuing. "I mean I thought it was already done but the more I consider it, the more I don't believe that."

"What?" Oliver pressed as gently as he could, wondering if this had to do with all the scribbling.

"The Undertaking," Roy said, glancing down at the floor and confirming Oliver's suspicion. "I don't remember hearing what exactly it is, other than it had to do with the Glades, but it sounded like something big. He paused, squirming a little, and then added, "I thought it might have already been over with but there hasn't been anything big enough."
"So we do some digging into whatever the Undertaking is as well as trying to figure out who's killing people you've already visited," Diggle said with a shrug as if it was no big deal.

"Can you write down everything you remember?" Oliver asked the boy and Roy nodded, flipping to a fresh page.

"Where are you going?" Diggle asked as the Queen heir headed for the uniform case.

"Out," he replied. "Maybe if I'm lucky I'll catch sight of our mysterious archer."

Malcolm Merlyn stood in one of the back alleys of the Glades, waiting patiently. A black car, almost identical to the one behind him, pulled to a stop a few feet away from him. Moira Queen stepped out, as beautiful as always, her dark hair pinned back and her coat wrapped tightly around her frame. "Malcolm," she said as she stepped forward, fixing her intense gaze on him. "You said you needed to speak to me."

"Douglas Miller came to see me today," he told her. "Quite concerned. He said your husband interrogated him and his questions suggested a knowledge he shouldn't have of the list."

"Let me talk to him," Moira replied immediately but Malcolm was already shaking his head.

"I think we're past the point of conversation Moira," he told her. "A month ago you told me to stay away from your family and I did, but now I discover that your family has not been staying away from me. Furthermore, the Undertaking is only a week away. We cannot afford any trouble. Something needs to be done about this. Don't you agree?" It was a barbed question, designed to test whether or not she was still loyal to his cause. If she wasn't, well despite how much he enjoyed her company, he would have to eliminate her.

"Yes I do," she said, voice wavering just a little. "And I'll handle it."

"I know you'll try," Malcolm replied. "But what I'm wondering is if it's time for our associate to handle it."

"I'm certain that won't be necessary," Moira informed him. Neither one noticed the hooded figure hidden in the shadows, listening to their conversation with a sense of horrified realization. He might not know what the Undertaking was, but he now knew two of the people who were involved.

Dick almost threw the laptop in pure frustration. He'd been searching for hours, even giving up patrolling in an attempt to discover what had happened to Walter Steele. Bruce didn't quite believe that someone as low on the command chain as Dominic Alonzo would known what had really been done to Steele. Unfortunately all of Dick's skill hadn't, as of yet, been enough to discover the truth. The rumble of the Batmobile caught his attention and Dick spun the computer chair to look towards the outside entrance to the cave. Batman stepped out of the vehicle and pushed back the cowl, transitioning flawlessly to Bruce Wayne. That meant it'd been a good night. No Joker causing chaos, no Scarecrow causing the Narrows to ring with screams, and no Catwoman. "Any luck?" Bruce asked and Dick scowled at his guardian. "I'm guessing that's a no."

"What gave it away?" Dick retorted sourly before turning back to the computer. Bruce crossed the room to place a comforting hand on the boy's shoulder and Dick sighed before relaxing.

"Don't worry," Bruce told him. "You'll find out what happened."
"I'm not sure," Dick replied, turning back to the laptop. "There's not any sign of Steele anywhere in Starling."

"Maybe Steele isn't in Starling anymore," Bruce suggested. "If whoever took him is trying to hide him from Queen, then they wouldn't leave him in the city."

"Yeah," Dick snorted. "Because that really limits the options."

"Trace where Alonzo's payments are going to," Bruce said, voice still calm and even as his hand squeezed Dick's shoulder. "That should give you some idea of where to look."

"Yeah," Dick agreed, slumping and typing again on the computer, bringing up Alonzo's hacked accounts. Maybe he would find something this time. He hoped so, because otherwise there was a good chance he would actually throw the stupid laptop into a wall.

"I'm giving you an hour to finish up," Bruce warned before heading for the changing area. "Then you're going to bed whether you're finished or not."

"Mmhmm," Dick hummed back, already completely absorbed in his work.
Oliver sat in the computer chair in the Foundry, staring blankly at the computer screen. He felt numb. His mother and Malcolm Merlyn were involved in the Undertaking, possibly orchestrating it. The emotional pain he felt from the betrayal was overwhelming. "Oliver, what happened?" Diggle asked for the third time since he'd returned early from his patrol, but the Queen scion felt as if all words had abandoned him. Roy was sitting on the edge of his cot watching Oliver, as if searching for some sort of answer. Diggle was sitting perched on the edge of a table, brown eyes worried. "Oliver?" the former soldier pressed and the Queen heir licked his lips to wet them, trying to find the words to explain what had happened.

"I found a couple sources of information about the Undertaking," he said at last, voice hollow.

Diggle waited for a couple minutes, obviously expecting Oliver to continue. He couldn't. The silence dragged on until Diggle asked, "Who?"

"Malcolm Merlyn," Oliver replied, looking down at the ground. "And my mother."

There was a moment of stunned silence as his audience absorbed that information. Then Diggle said, "I'm sorry man." A moment later He startled a bit when Roy crossed the floor to curl up next to him, leaning against his leg. Oliver dropped a hand down to absently stroke a hand through the boy's hair, ignoring the concerned gaze fixed on him. After a moment, he took in a deep breath and let it back out again.

"The Hood is going to have to interrogate Moira Queen," he said, voice becoming firm.

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"I'm not seeing any other choice," Oliver snapped and felt Roy tense a little.

"I could dress up as the Hood and do it," Diggle offered. "That would leave you free to go after Merlyn."

Oliver considered that. He didn't know if Diggle had any skills with a bow but the man wouldn't necessarily need to fire an arrow to interrogate his mother. Still, the idea of sending someone else didn't quite sit right with him. "Thanks for the offer," he said at last. "But I think this is something I need to do myself."

"Okay," the former soldier said. "Tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow night," Oliver confirmed, ruffling Roy's hair and then standing. "I think we're all going to need some sleep before that happens."

"Probably a good idea," Diggle agreed and Roy yawned before clambering to his feet.

The boy fixed Oliver with an intense, almost searching, look before reaching into his pocket, pulling out several folded pieces of places. "Here," he said, handing it over. The Queen scion reached out to take it but Roy didn't let go, giving the man a very serious look. "You're not going to do anything stupid with this, are you?"

"I promise not to," Oliver said while Diggle tried to disguise a laugh as a cough, obviously
amused that the boy had picked up Oliver's habit of doing dumb things on his own already. Roy nodded and released the paper. Oliver tucked the notes away in his pocket, planning on looking at it later. He wasn't sure he could take any more bombshells tonight.

"Coming, Mr. Queen?" Diggle asked, amusement at the interaction with Roy still clear in his voice.

"Yeah," Oliver replied, reaching over to ruffle Roy's hair one more time. "Get some rest," he told the boy, waiting for Roy's nod of agreement before following Diggle up the steps and out of the basement door.

Felicity’s fingers clattered across the keys as she worked to locate a problem on the laptop before her. Despite her car accident the night before, the blonde had come to work. She'd taken a taxi, which had been a nerve wracking experience in and of itself, to get to Queen Consolidated. Her bruises sent twinges of pain through her at every sudden movement, but she'd known when she'd woken up four hours after finally drifting off into a restless dreamland that she wouldn't be able to just sit around in her apartment and recover. She'd decided that she might as well go to work. Unfortunately, work wasn't distracting her from what had happened the night before as well as she had hoped.

The thing was, Felicity Smoak was smart. She'd skipped two grades in middle schooled and hacked her way into the Pentagon once by accident, just before her freshman year of college. She'd caused her poor mother more stress than any mom ever needed to go through and all these trivial computer problems at QC were only taking part of her focus. That meant she had plenty of time to consider the remains of the *Queen's Gambit* locked away in a warehouse owned by the shell corporation Tempest, the attempt to kill her, and the kidnapping of Walter Steele. The result was that by this point her stomach was churning and there was the beginnings of an anxiety induced headache building right in the center of her forehead.

"Miss Smoak?" A soft rap on the door accompanied her name made her glance up from the computer.

"Oliver," she said, startled. "I mean Mr. Queen..." She flushed bright red as she remembered what he'd told her last time. "I mean Oliver," she babbled. "Shutting up in three...two...one." She took a deep breath, ignored the burning in her cheeks, and asked, "What can I do for you?"

"My buddy Steve is really into archery," he told her. "Apparently it's all the rage now."

"I don't know why. It looks ridiculous to me," Felicity said, mouth getting away from her again. She was already flustered by her screw up with his name and it didn't help that Oliver Queen was nice to look at.

"Mm-hmm," he hummed with an awkward smile. "Anyway, it's Steve's birthday next weekend and I wanted to buy him some arrows." He pulled a tube from underneath his arm, the kind that held posters and stuff like that, and opened it, removing a black arrow. Felicity's eyes narrowed suspiciously as she took it in. It looked like it was designed to kill someone, not for some billionaire's kid to screw around with. "I was hoping you could find out where this came from."

He held out the arrow and, after a moment of hesitation, Felicity carefully took it from him. She turned it about in her hands, mind completely taken off of the incidents from the night before. She thought she saw a maker's stamp and when she leaned close, she could barely make it out. Someone hadn't wanted anyone to be able to figure out where this arrow had come from. "The shaft's composite is patented," she said, waking her tablet and typing with one hand. A triumphant grin crossed her face as she came up with an answer a minute later. "And that patent belongs to a
company called Sagittarius." She handed him back the arrow, adding, "That's Latin for the archer."

"Really?" Queen asked but the gleam in his eyes told Felicity that he'd already known that. *Interesting.* The blonde was now fully invested in this mystery, including why Oliver Queen had this particular arrow. "Could you find out when this was purchased?" he continued, seeming blissfully unaware of Felicity's buzzing mind.

A couple more clicks and a moment of typing later, the blonde had her answer. "According to Sagittarius company records, that particular arrow was part of a bundle shipment." She paused and scribbled down the address on a spare piece of paper before waving it at him. "Sent to this address."

"Felicity, you're remarkable," he told her and she struggled to control her pleased blush.

"Thank you for remarking on it," she replied, smiling at him. He smiled back and stood, pausing in mid step by the door.

"Merry Christmas," he said, turning back.

"I'm Jewish," Felicity replied automatically. That statement had become a reflexive response practically since she'd started elementary school.

"Happy Hanukkah," he amended and her smile returned as she watched him leave, more than a little curious about what was going on. Absently she began chewing on the cap of her pen as she turned her attention back towards the tablet screen that was still showing the information from Sagittarius. *Fixing the glitch on the laptop won't take that long,* she reasoned silently. *And I'll just take a look. Nothing serious. Nothing that will have people trying to run me over again.*

Roy found himself pacing the basement of the Foundry restlessly. Sin wasn't coming in today. She'd told him yesterday that she had to work the long shift and wouldn't make it in. That wasn't what bothered him. What bothered him was the information on that handful of papers stuck in Oliver Queen's pocket. That was everything he remembered hearing about the Undertaking but it didn't feel like enough. Or rather, it felt like just enough to get them all killed. The boy paused in mid stride and sucked his lower lip into his mouth, gnawing on it nervously. He'd lost a lot since Dad had died. First his mother to drugs, then his freedom, and sometime between them, his mother to death's embrace. There were other things he'd lost too, including his ability to be the child he'd once been. After all that, he wasn't sure he'd be able to stand losing more.

Somehow, in between getting kidnapped for the second time in his life, getting to see Sin again, and the whole mess that his existence had become, Oliver Queen had managed to become a vital part of Roy's world. If something went wrong with the Undertaking, like he suspected it would, Oliver Queen and John Diggle would both be gone. Worse yet, if the Undertaking really did center around the Glades like Roy suspected, Sin would probably be gone as well. That would leave him alone. *Again.* The very thought made his stomach sink towards the vicinity of his shoes. He'd be stuck then, with nowhere to run and no one to help him.

Roy wanted the thoughts to stop there but they refused to. He'd be alone in the Glades, probably with someone after him to make sure he didn't spill what he knew to the police. If he wasn't captured, tortured, and then killed, he'd slowly starve to death. Of course, someone on the streets could always kill him for some stupid reason. At least that would be a quick way to go. He glanced down and realized his hands were trembling slightly. He tried to will them to stop, tried to calm himself, but it wasn't working. He pulled in a shuddering breath and a sudden tight feeling in his throat warned him that something was wrong. He sucked in another, barely there breath, chest
feeling tight, and panic washed over him. His heartbeat pounding rapidly in his ears and he wobbled on his feet before sinking down to a crumpled heap on the floor.

Each breath was harder to pull in than the last. Desperate for some way to ground himself, Roy tried to focus on the stairs, vision blurred by frightened tears. He sucked in another breath, feeling as if an invisible hand was slowly squeezing the life out of him. He gasped frantically for air, heartbeat speeding up further as if trying to hurry up his impending death. His chest ached as if his lungs were being compressed by his own ribs. He managed one more gasp that did nothing to help him and then toppled to rest the way to the floor, world going black.

After two days of searching, Dick thought he'd finally found what he was looking for. His obsession had paid off. The boy was turning cartwheels in the entryway when Bruce got home from work, expression bright and delighted. The strain from the previous night had been washed away by success and, judging by the amused twinkle in Alfred's eyes, the boy had been like this for a while. "Did you find what you were looking for?" Bruce asked, despite the fact that he already knew the answer.

"Yup," Dick replied, grin stretching wide across his face. "Walter Steele is, in fact, _not dead_. He's been kidnapped and is being held hostage in a well protected house in Bludhaven."

"Security cameras?"

"Hacked them ages ago," the boy replied with a little smirk. "Somebody spent a lot of money to prevent that, but it just wasn't quite good enough."

"Most people have problems preventing you from hacking things," Bruce pointed out and Dick let out a little cackle, practically skipping as he lead the way towards the study.

"Too bad for them," he practically sang as he opened the door and grabbed the laptop, waking it before handing it over to Bruce. The man studied the information, narrowing his eyes at the number of guards he saw. "Well?" Dick demanded impatiently, folding his arms over his chest.

"It looks like we have some planning to do," the man said, handing over the laptop. Dick's response was to beam at him.
"Why would you want to save the galaxy?"

"Because I'm one of the idiots who lives in it!"-Rocket and Peter Quill from Guardians of the Galaxy

Getting out of the hospital was both incredibly relieving and extremely anxiety inducing. If it had been a few months ago, Laurel would have been demanding to be released as soon as possible, ready to go back to work no matter how injured she was. That was before the nightmares. The hospital had wanted to keep her overnight for observation after she'd woken and Dad had insisted she behave. She'd agreed, reluctantly of course, and drifted off to sleep, anticipating checking out the next day. She'd woken up to a disaster.

The draft coming through the window was what had pulled her out of a restless sleep. She'd opened her eyes only to see shattered glass everywhere and a nurse cowering against the wall near the door. "W-what happened?" she'd croaked but the nurse had just shook her head before practically sprinting out the door. Ten minutes later a doctor had arrived to shakily inform her that her scream had shattered every piece of glass in the hallway. Laurel had laughed shakily but it hadn't been a joke. Things had only gotten stranger from there.

The hospital had called her father, uncertain of what else to do, and he'd come with a laptop and a flash drive containing video from the night at the prison. Laurel had watched, stunned, as her shriek destroyed all the glass nearby and threw a guy out of the doorway. After that had been the brain scans, the results showing continually that there was nothing wrong with her. That didn't stop her screaming while she was asleep from shattering anything and everything glass around her. It did keep her from sleeping when Dad or Tommy were around in the evening though. The last thing she wanted to do was accidentally hurt her father or boyfriend while she was sleeping.

Now, today, she was getting out of the hospital and that made her stomach twist uncomfortably. She still hadn't managed to get control of her screaming at night and getting out of the hospital just meant she was putting people in danger. "Ready to go back to work, sweetheart," Dad asked as she signed the last piece of paperwork with a remarkably steady hand. Laurel made a noncommittal sound and handed the paperwork over to the nurse. The stern looking woman skimmed everything before nodded at Laurel.

"You're free to go Miss Lance."

"Thank you," Laurel said quietly, standing and heading for the door.

"Laurel is something wrong?" Dad asked as they walked together through the front doors of the hospital and on to the sidewalk. Laurel squinted at the sunlight and then shot her father a flat look, informing him without words that he had just asked a particularly stupid question. "Do you want to talk about it?"

She wanted to say no. This wasn't something Laurel wanted to face in her own mind, let alone say out loud. Still, she knew from Sara's death that it wasn't good to bottle things up. They just ended up hurting worse in the end. "Every time I scream glass gets destroyed," she said softly. "What happens when it escalates to people?"

"Oh Laurel," he replied, voice soft, and pulled her into a tight hug in the middle of the sidewalk. "We'll figure this out baby," he told her. "I promise."
"Roy? Roy are you okay?" a distant voice asked, the words trying to filter through his fuzzy brain. His whole body felt cold and sluggish, as if ice had slipped into his veins and frozen him where he was. "Roy?" the voice called urgently and it took him a moment to place it as Sin's. He fought against his own exhaustion and confusion to force his eyes open and found himself staring at a table leg. Sin let out a little sound of relief at that and suddenly she was lifting his head gently and cradling it in her lap. She ran gentle fingers through his hair, murmuring, "I thought you were dead when I came in here and saw you lying on the floor." He heard the lingering horror in her voice at the thought and forced a weak arm to reach up so he could slip his fingers around her arm. A moment later he was forced to drop his shaking hand, no strength left. Whatever it was that he'd experienced right before he'd passed out had drained him. The cold concrete floor wasn't helping him get his strength back either.

"You're shivering," Sin said and he realized it was true. His body was shaking, both from the chill of the floor and the aftermath of what he'd gone through. "Can you stand?"

"D-don't know," he stammered. He watched her lean over him with a slight frown but didn't protest when she slipped her arms under his, carefully helping him sit up. The world spun around him and he leaned heavily against Sin for a moment, stomach churning. She read the tension in his frame correctly and stillled until the spinning stopped before easing herself into a standing position.

"Ready?" He nodded and then regretted it as the world spun a little again. Sin gave him a moment to brace himself before slipping her arms under his armpits again and pulling him to his feet. He wobbled, shaky legs struggling to support his weight, and Sin quickly wrapped her arms around his chest, holding him upright. "Okay," she said, panting a little. "Just a few steps over to the cot. Think you can manage that?"

"Y-yeah," he forced out still shivering and feeling as if his limbs were made of water.

"That's good." Sin sounded relieved that she wouldn't have to carry him. Together they stumbled drunkenly over towards the cot at an agonizingly slow pace. Roy was trembling not only from the cold but also from exhaustion by the time he could finally sink down on his cot and Sin was sweating. He closed his eyes, too tired to keep them open any longer, and leaned back against his friend. Sin slipped her arm around his shoulders and sighed.

A sudden thought reached him and he mumbled, "A-aren't you supposed to be w-working?"

"It was a slow day so I got off early," she told him. "I figured I'd come by to see you before I went home. Turns out that was a good idea." Roy hummed in agreement and they sat in silence for a minute before she asked, "What happened?"

The words were somewhere in his sluggish brain but it took him a moment to find them. "I think," he said at last. "I think I had a panic attack." Sin silently pulled him into a tight hug. He hugged her back as tightly as his trembling limbs could manage, the heat from her body slowly easing his shivers.

"Everything’s going to be okay," she whispered into his hair and he nodded against her shoulder. He couldn’t completely believe that, not yet, but with Sin's arms around him he felt safe enough to think that everything would probably end up okay. Footsteps drew their attention towards the door and they were both staring at it when Diggle walked in, followed by Oliver Queen. The two were talking quietly and Sin took advantage of that to lean over and whisper into his ear, "You need to talk to them about what happened."

"Not right now," Roy replied in a soft voice.
"Why not?" Despite her voice still being low, Sin sounded irritated with him.

"Because tonight Oliver's going after his mother," Roy told her. "As the Hood."

"Oh."

"Yeah, oh," Roy replied, nudging her lightly. She nudged him back and pulled him closer for a moment. Roy allowed himself to relax against her and she rested her chin on his head, both of them watching as Oliver grabbed his supplies for the night.

Moira Queen was still in the office, despite the late hour. She had been arguing with the Board of Directors, insisting that Walter was still alive and that being CEO was only temporary for her. She refused to believe that Malcolm would kill Walter. She had just hung up the phone and placed it back on its charging dock when a hooded figure crashed through the window. An arrow fired through the lightbulb sent the room into darkness and, even as she dove towards the floor, Moira had to admit to herself that she should have seen this coming. The hooded vigilante had obviously been going after people on The List and, despite not being one of them, Moira had taken part on the creation of it.

"Moira Queen," the Hood growled, voice sounding vaguely mechanical. "You have failed this city." The woman hesitated a moment before forcing herself to her feet. There was no escaping this and that was as it should be. Moira felt the need, deep within herself, to face what she was doing. "Do you know anything about your husband's death?" the figure demanded.

"What?" Moira blurted out, startled and panicked. Out of all the questions the vigilante might ask, that had never been an option. No one, not even people within the circle that was orchestrating the Undertaking, had connected Robert's death to the conspiracy.

The Hood was unfazed by her shock, adding, "Is Walter Steele alive?" The question made her chest ache but at least it made sense. If the vigilante had connected Robert's murder to the Undertaking then it wasn't surprising that he might be suspicious of Walter suddenly vanishing.

"I don't know where my husband is," she told him, voice wavering a little. "I swear."

"Do you know anything about the Undertaking?" This was the question she'd been waiting for, but now that it had arrived she wasn't sure how to answer it. The simple yes slid out of her mouth without any conscious decision made on her part, legs trembling a little. "Tell me what you know," the vigilante demanded. When she didn't respond, he knocked another arrow, aiming towards her. "Hundreds of people are going to die in this Undertaking," he snarled. "So tell me what you know."

Fear began to overtake Moira's mind and she stumbled backwards, reaching out a shaking hand to clutch a photograph of her children to her chest. She wanted the Undertaking to be over, but she didn't trust the vigilante to end it. He'd been doing good work on the list, but the Undertaking was beyond him. "Please," she babbled, clutching the photograph tightly. "I'm a mother. I have a son, Oliver, and a daughter-her name is Thea. They've lost their father. They can't lose me too."

Panic was beginning to wash over her as the vigilante showed no signs of sympathy, no signs of relenting. "Please," she begged, tears beginning to trickle down her cheeks. "Whoever you are, please." The vigilante hesitated a moment and then relaxed the tension on his bow.

"Okay," he said, lowering it slowly. "I'm not going to hurt you." Moira felt the panic recede and with the sudden rush of relief came the knowledge that she had a gun. For a moment she hesitated, not really wanting to shoot someone. Especially not someone that seemed to be trying to accomplish the same goals as her. Still, she knew she couldn't risk it. Even giving someone else...
information about how to stop the Undertaking could put Walter, Oliver, and Thea's lives at risk. She couldn't do that.

It was that thought that sent her lunging towards the gun, yanking it out, taking out the safety, and firing. "I'm sorry," she apologized compulsively, not sure the vigilante could hear her over the sound of the gun firing. The vigilante crumpled to the floor, blood already dripping from one shoulder, but Moira kept firing until the clip was empty. Only then did she stumble on shaky legs towards her purse, grabbing out her cell phone and dialing security. "This is Moira Queen," she said, sounding a little breathless and a lot shaken. "I'm on the thirty-ninth floor and I need help. There's an intruder."

"Help is on the way Mrs. Queen," was the immediate response. Moira hung up and cautiously leaned over the desk. She expected to see a pain wracked frame on her floor but instead there was simply a bloodstain. The Hood was gone.

"Mrs. Queen?" a male voice asked and she turned towards the doorway to see four security people standing there. "Are you okay Mrs. Queen?"

"I'm fine," she reassured them, turning back to stare pensively at the bloodstain.

"Do you want us to call the police?" a second voice asked but Moira was already shaking her head.

"No," she said. "I think my visitor learned his lesson. Please just send maintenance in to clean up the bloodstain." The security personnel exchanged dubious looks. Moira drew herself up then and turned to face them fully. "That will be all."

Thea paced impatiently outside Queen Consolidated. Mom had said she'd meet her here twenty minutes ago, though meetings often ran late, and the young woman was getting irritated. There wasn't even anything exciting to see around here at this time of night. Traffic was sparse, most the business people already home for the evening, and nothing to see that she hadn't seen before. Of course, that was before the vigilante practically fell out of the sky a few feet to her left.

The hissing sound of someone sliding down a wire was what caught her attention, head snapping to her left to see the Hood slide down before dropping the last foot to the ground. He wasn't moving aside from breathing and there was a large bloodstain forming on his shoulder. Thea hesitated a moment and then cautiously made her way over to crouch next to the vigilante. It was dark, and with the grease paint around his eyes it was hard to be sure, but she was pretty certain she recognized him. Then his eyes opened and she knew she did.

"Ollie?" Thea gasped, feeling if all the breath had been knocked out of her. Her brother was the vigilante? Her brother, Oliver party boy Queen, was the vigilante? It did explain the odd absences though and, in a strange sort of way, it made sense. She'd known that something about Oliver had changed since the Island. This, apparently, was it.

"Speedy?" her brother croaked out, sounding confused.

"Oh my god!" The words escaped her in a panicked rush, heart beginning to pound. "You need a hospital."

"No hospital," he replied, tone vehement. "Mom probably already...called police."

"Mom shot you?" Thea squeaked, voice going ridiculously high with shock. She probably hadn't sounding this squeaky since elementary school but it had also been a long time since she'd been
"No time to explain," Oliver forced out but she saw a brief hint of amusement in his eyes before it was washed out by pain. "Need to call Diggle...Get to Foundry." Each word sounded as if it cost him a ridiculous amount of effort and that, almost more than the growing bloodstain, made Thea shake with panic.

"Okay, okay, got it," she babbled, digging through her purse and scrambling for her phone. "Okay, everything's going to be okay," she said, even as she dialed. "Everything's going to be okay Ollie. I promise."
Chapter 38

"If I owned this place and Hell, I'd rent this place out and live in Hell" - Toombs from the Chronicles of Riddick

Bludhaven was perhaps the only city in the United States that was worse off than the Narrows of Gotham. A brief search had revealed to Dick a mess of crime and corruption that even Batman would struggle to make heads or tails of it. Just trying to find a starting point could take a person days. Luckily there was only one piece of this mess they were interested in tonight. The building Walter Steele was being kept in was in a richer part of town, which meant that whoever had wanted Steele kidnapped had money to spare. Robin crouched on a rooftop, a pair of binoculars in one hand as he studied the guards. He and Bruce had put together a working plan after observing the movements of the guards. Now Dick was simply waiting for his signal.

A brief shifting in the black before a guard suddenly vanished made him grin. One down, only two more before he could head in. Bruce's job was to take down the guards outside. Dick's was to find Steele and get him out. The boy waited until the nearby guards were gone before moving forward. He shot a grapple and allowed it to lift him over the wall, landing softly on the other side and moving swiftly into a patch of shadows. He pressed his back against a wall, breathing slow and even as he could make it with excitement rushing through him. A moment later he was moving forward again, slipping around a corner and testing a door. Locked. A slow grin crossed his face and he scanned his surroundings before crouching and picking the lock.

The door swung open silently and the boy stepped inside. The hall was empty, save for a guard pacing away from the door. Perfect. Dick made his way stealthily across the hall and downed the guard in two swift movements. Lowering the man to the ground as gently as he possibly could, muscles strained by the weight. Then he moved cautiously forward. Video cameras on the inside of the building had been few and far between. That meant Dick didn't have any idea how many guards were inside nor did he know the exactly location of Walter Steele.

Bruce had been reluctant to send Dick inside. The boy was under strict orders to proceed with caution and radio the moment he required help. He'd promised to do exactly that and not take unnecessary risks. "Saving Walter Steele is not worth your life," the man had said, tone stern and uncompromising. "He's being kept alive for some reason, quite possibly blackmail, and that means if we fail today we will be able to try again." Though Dick didn't like it, he had agreed. That meant he was being especially cautious tonight. The last thing he wanted was to leave Steele trapped for longer while whatever plan that his captors had played out.

The going was slow. The number of guards steadily increased the further down the halls he traveled. Dick was frustrated but reassured that he was traveling in the right direction. There was no way someone would pay this many grunts to patrol an empty hall. He pressed his back against a wall as two guards patrolled in front of a door, turning his options over in his head. The easiest thing to do would be to dive into the hall and take both the guards down but there was always a chance one of them would call for help. He couldn't risk that.

He waited until one of the guards had reached his end of the hall before tapping lightly on the wall. The man stuck his head around and Dick ducked into an alcove, just allowing the guard to catch a glimpse of one glove. Fingers crossed, he waited as quietly as possible to see what would happen. There were two options now. The first was that the guard would call for reinforcements and go back to his patrol. The second, and the option he was hoping for, was that the guard would get curious and come see who was down the hall.
He got lucky. The man was a curious sort and came wandering over to discover what exactly he'd seen. Dick took him down quickly and quietly before approaching the other guard. It was a little trickier to take him down silently but when all was said and done, Robin had two unconscious guards and a locked door. Not a problem. He resisted the urge to turn an excited cartwheel as he approached the door. It took him a minute to pick the lock, not one of his better efforts, but he was too excited to care. Logically he knew that he couldn't be sure of whether or not Walter Steele would be behind this particular door but that thought did nothing to tamper his excitement. Recently Batman and Robin duty had been put on hold, Gotham being unusually quiet for this time of year, so he hadn't gotten to do much. He could use some more adventure in his life.

The lock clicked open and Dick turned the handle. He opened the door with caution and found himself face to face with the missing Walter Steele. The man appeared to be only slightly worse for wear because of his captivity and roused almost instantly from his light slumber when the boy stepped into the room. His face was veiled with wariness and Dick responded to it with a bright smile. "Mr. Steele?" He waited for the man's nod before continuing. "Your rescue has arrived."

John Diggle was having a very long night. He'd known it was going to be a long night from the moment Oliver had announced that he was going to interrogate Moira Queen, but the former soldier hadn't imagined it would turn out quite like this. An hour ago he'd gotten a call from Thea Queen's cell phone. That had been a little unusual, but after Moira had almost been shot leaving Queen Consolidated, Oliver had made sure his little sister had his bodyguard's cell number in case she was trying to contact Oliver but couldn't get an answer. He'd answered and Thea had babbled something out about her mother shooting Oliver. Twenty minutes later, Diggle was stabilizing Oliver in the basement of the Foundry while an in shock Thea and a wary, worried Roy sized each other up. Now the pair were sitting on the edge of a table, shoulders barely touching. Their eyes were fixed on Oliver's still unconscious form.

The former soldier leaned against a wall and studied them. He'd expected a storm of questions from the younger Queen child or an investigation of some sort, or worse, for her to simply pass out while he was trying to stabilize the Queen scion. Instead she'd studied the room and then cautiously settled down by Roy. Neither one had spoken a word, but the boy didn't seem uncomfortable about having Thea this close to him. In fact, he seemed content to sit shoulder to shoulder with her as they all waited for Oliver to wake up.

"What was the Hood doing in Mom's office?" Thea asked, finally breaking the silence. Her voice sounded rusty and disused but her gaze was focused and intense when it settled on him. Diggle hesitated, uncertain of how to answer. During the moment of hesitation, Roy made the decision for him.

"There's something called the Undertaking," he said, voice just as raspy as hers. She turned to look him square in the eye and he twitched a little but didn't look away. 'Your brother found out your mother is somehow involved in it. He went to see if he could get her to tell him more." Thea nodded after a moment and glanced back towards her brother. Oliver was still aside from the steady rise and fall of his chest.

The silence lingered for a moment longer before Thea glanced between Diggle and Roy, asking, "How long have you two been involved in this?" Roy squirmed a little where he was sitting and glanced down at the floor, obviously uncomfortable with the question.

"Roy got involved before I did," Diggle admitted when Thea glanced expectantly between the two of them. "Oliver uh," he rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly before continuing. "Rescued him by kidnapping him for the second time in his life." He looked up from the ground to study her cautiously and she smiled at him. "I only got involved the first time your brother got shot."
"Who shot him the first time around?" Thea questioned, wrinkling her nose as if she was disgusted with herself just for asking the question.

"Detective Lance," Diggle told her and she rolled her eyes.

"Of course Ollie gets shot both times by people he actually knows," she said, turning her gaze towards the ceiling. That was when Oliver groaned. Thea was off the table in an instant and scrambling over to stand next to her brother. "Ollie are you okay?" she babbled, body humming with an almost frantic energy.

"Speedy?" Oliver managed to get out, sounding almost confused.

"Yeah, it's me stupid," she told him, trembling a little as she reached out a hand to rest it on his shoulder. "You fell off the end of your rope outside QC and told me that Mom had shot you and you needed Diggle, not a hospital." Diggle stepped close enough to see Oliver focus on his sister. "Are you okay?"

"Never better," he croaked back, giving her a crooked smile. He tried to sit up and the former soldier hurried to help him, Thea stepping out of his way and smiling over her shoulder at Roy. "So..." Oliver said after he'd sat up, shooting a reassuring smile at Roy.

"You need to stop doing that," the boy said, voice serious and gaze just a little bit dark.

"Getting hurt?" Oliver asked while Thea watched the exchange with interest. "I'll try." Roy nodded solemnly and Diggle forced down a sad grin at the boy's serious attitude. It was telling of how much Roy had already lost that he could be so serious about something out of Oliver's control.

"Okay," Thea said, leaning back against the wall and folding her arms over her chest with an excited grin. "I've gotten the big reveal. Now tell me everything."

Malcolm Merlyn had woken in a good mood but that had quickly faded when his contact from Bludhaven had called. Walter Steele had been rescued during the previous night by a colorful boy and a man in black that appeared to look like a giant bat. Steele was now in Starling City General being checked over by doctors and the Queen family had been called. His leverage over Moira was gone. This day was turning into a disaster. He could almost feel the foundations of the Undertaking crumbling underneath him.

In the beginning, the members of the Undertaking had been dedicated. Maybe they hadn't been thrilled with his plan but they were committed to seeing it through to the end. Malcolm had felt that vengeance for Rebecca's death was finally within his reach. Now it was slipping away from him, making him desperate. He was a man living with one goal, and that goal was not to raise his son up right. That goal was to avenge the wife he'd let bleed out in the Glades she'd tried so hard to save. That meant destroying what was left of her life's work, but he didn't care. Now, with Robert dead, not by his own hand but certain by his orders, Moira faltering in his place, and the new vigilante of Starling working his way through the list, Malcolm knew he needed to push the time table up. There was only one problem.

The earthquake machines Malcolm needed for his plans were a part of Tempest. Queen Consolidated was meant to have bought up Tempest at auction but instead Bruce Wayne from Wayne Enterprises had interfered. Wayne, from what he had read, was a part time playboy with a surprising amount of business sense and an adopted son, which he'd already known since he'd had the boy kidnapped last time he'd encountered Wayne. Getting the machines would be difficult, but
not impossible. Merlyn didn't believe in anything being impossible. He hadn't since Nanda Parbat where he'd watched the dying body of Ra's al Ghul be lowered into a Lazarus Pit only to rise again, healthy and whole and at the peak of his life. He had work to do.
"Feel that? It's the gravitational pull of your average sun. Makes flying through space very dangerous. The bigger you are, the faster you burn. Gravity's a b**ch." -Kilowog from the Green Lantern movie

Standing in her second husband's hospital room, knowing the Walter was now safe from Malcolm, made Moira's urge to confess everything unbearable. The Hood had had a point when he'd said that keeping her secret would get people killed. Lately, it seemed that this particular secret would kill her family. She needed to tell the truth. She glanced at Walter's bed, where Thea was curled up on the mattress next to her stepfather and Oliver was perched on Walter's other side talking to him softly. Then she turned and shut the door with a soft click.

Oliver noticed first, glancing over at her and asking, "Mom?" The uncertainty in his face made his heart ache.

"I have something to tell you," she told her family, stepping closer to them. Three sets of eyes focused on her and she found herself looking at the floor in shame and worry. She wasn't sure how to even begin to explain what she had become a part of. It was something that would surely horrify the remainder of her family.

"Mom?" Thea asked, sliding off the bed and crossing the room to press her hand to Moira's shoulder. It was a comfort she did not deserve. "What is it?"

"Before Robert's death," she said. "He and I had become a part of a vile scheme. You may recall that when Rebecca Merlyn was killed, Malcolm vanished for a time. When he returned, he was much different than he had been. Rebecca's death changed him, and not in a good way. During his time away, Malcolm created a plan to restore the Glades." She hesitated a deep, steeling herself for what came next. "We titans of industry agreed to help him, thinking it would be good for Starling if the Glades could be restored. Unfortunately, the original scheme failed. That was when Malcolm revealed the true depths of his change. He decided that if we could not save the Glades, we would destroy them."

"What?" Thea gasped while Walter stared at her in shock and Oliver studied her with worry and something like disappointment in his eyes.

"Before Robert voiced his disapproval," Moira continued, pushing onwards. She knew if she stopped now, she would never be able to finish the tale. "Malcolm ensured that the Queen's Gambit was sabotaged. I lost Robert that day, and I thought I had lost you, Oliver." She glanced at her son before turning her gaze back to the floor. "I knew then that I would be forced to follow Malcolm's plan or see what remained of my family destroyed." She waited to feel Thea's hand lift away from her shoulder but it did not, whether from shock or because her daughter understood, she wasn't sure.

"Moira," Walter said at last. "What makes now different?"

"Malcolm took you," she admitted, forcing herself to meet his eyes and whatever judgement might lurk there. "You were coming too close to the truth and I was wavering in my resolve to help him. Malcolm used your kidnapping both to keep you from discovering what was really happening and to keep me in line." She took a deep breath and added, "Before you were rescued, the Hood came to visit me. He pointed out that if I continued to keep something like this a secret, it would get people killed. He was right. If I continued to keep this secret, it would put you in more danger.
"I'm glad you told us," Walter said at last. "Even if it was for selfish reasons." Thea lifted had yet to lift her hand and step away like Moira had expected. That would change in a moment. She had one more thing to admit to before she lost her nerve.

"I have one last thing to tell you." She turned and forced herself to look Thea in the eyes. "You may not like to hear it, but neither Robert nor I were completely faithful to one another at one point in time. After Oliver's birth, our marriage crumbled. Robert began taking other women to bed." Thea looked to be a mixture of horrified and disbelieving, Walter sympathetic, and Oliver sad but understanding. "Eventually, Malcolm returned from his soul searching journey after Rebecca was killed, old feelings reignited between us." She hesitated for a moment and her uncertainty must of showed because Thea, despite the lingering disbelief, squeezed her shoulder. "Malcolm and I knew each other when we were younger and, before he met Rebecca, I had quite a crush on him. I do not claim that I made a good choice, but I slept with him. Nine months later, I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl."

For a moment Thea stared at her blankly while Oliver and Walter's gazes were full of shock. "You're joking," her daughter said, voice wavering. She seemed to be waiting for Moira to smile and laugh and say it was all a joke. She didn't. "You're serious," Thea breathed, betrayal clearly written on her face. "Did Dad know? Does Malcolm know that I'm really his daughter?"

"Malcolm does not," Moira said, keeping her voice level despite Thea's tone. Her daughter had every right to be angry with her. "Robert did but he loved you as his daughter regardless."

"I can't believe this," Thea snapped, angry tears filling her eyes. "You lied to me for seventeen years! How could you?" Then she turned and ran out of the hospital room. Moira stared helplessly after her daughter, her own eyes welling with tears.

"I'll go talk to her," Oliver said, standing. "She'll come around." He crossed the room and gently kissed her on the cheek. "I love you," he told her, voice wavering just a little, and she gave him a watery smile in response.

"I love you too," she said and watched as he left the room. She turned then and looked at Walter, seeing his own brand of betrayal in his eyes. Moira breathed out and glanced down at the floor murmuring, "What have I done?"

Thea had done a lot of stupid things in recent years but running out of a hospital and straight for the Glades was one of the worst. The seventeen year old quickly found herself hopelessly lost. She'd hadn't paid attention to how Diggle had gotten them to Dad's-no, Robert's-old iron foundry last night. She'd been too busy worrying over her brother. Now she glanced around almost desperately, searching for a familiar looking landmark. It was as she was spinning that someone whistled at her. She whirled around, almost expecting to see Oliver standing there with a ridiculous smile and a wave for her. Instead it was a greasy looking guy smirking at her. "Hey baby," he called and Thea scowled in disgust.

She turned away but he whistled again. This time a couple of his friends whooped and began calling out lewd comments. Thea hurried away from them, determined to get somewhere with more people, and heard the thump of footsteps behind her. Her heart began to race as if it was trying to escape her chest. "Come on doll," one of them called. "Be sweet to us. We don't mean no harm." Thea thought of the looks they'd given her and lifted a trembling hand to flip them off. The laughter she got in response made her heart sink into her boots.

"Don't be like that," another one spoke up and Thea dropped her hand, clenching it into a weak
fist. She stared at the ground and picked up her pace.

"Hey!" a female voice bellowed and Thea's head snapped up. She found herself looking at a girl a year or so younger than her with short black hair. "Leave her alone."

"Aww Cindy, we was just having some fun," one of them whined.

"Yeah, right," the other girl said with a derisive snort, grabbing Thea's arm and pulling her defensively closer. "Back off." Then she quickly tugged Thea around the corner.

"Thank you," the youngest Queen said, sounding breathless.

"No problem," the other girl said, looking Thea over. "What's your brother doing letting you run around this place alone?"

"You know Oliver?" Thea asked and then felt stupid. Her brother was *Oliver Queen*. Everyone knew him, at least in the sense that they'd seen him on television at least once.

"Sort of," the girl replied and then stuck out her hand. "I'm Sin."

"Thea," she replied, shaking Sin's hand and flushing a little. "But you probably already knew that."

"Yeah," Sin said with a grin. "Come on. I'll take you to the Foundry. Mr. Diggle's there. He'll know where your brother is."

"Okay," Thea agreed, feeling relieved.

Sin led her down several streets and around a couple corners to the Foundry. It was the first time Thea had climbed a fence, and the other girl gave surprisingly good advice about how to do it the easiest. Together the pair arrived at the door to Oliver's lair at the same time her worried brother did. "Thea?" Oliver asked as Sin slipped by him into the basement.

"Oliver," she croaked out, voice breaking as tears slid down her cheeks. That was all it took for her brother to pull her into a tight hug.

At least one thing was going according to plan. Merlyn's associates in the Triad had been most helpful in procuring the earthquake machines from what had once been Unidac Industries. While he wasn't pleased that he'd been forced to move the timetable ahead but with the correct machinery, he was confident that he would not fail. Despite Moira's possible defection, everything was falling into place. The Undertaking would happen according to plan. Now he just needed to deal with the Hood.

Once his secretary left for the evening, Malcolm stood and headed for the secret room set in the back of his office. He had several locations just like this where he kept his gear from the League of Assassins. It was in this garb that he went out as his own enforcer. It was in this garb that he was eliminating people on the List that the Hood had dealt with but not killed. Tonight, he was wearing it to track down the Hood tonight and kill him. With his plans struggling already, the last thing he needed was an archer messing up his plans.

Merlyn dressed swiftly and marched back into his office, carefully opening a window. He had done this numerous times in recent weeks since the Hood had appeared in his city. The night air hit him in the face and he breathed in, letting some of the tension from a long day in the office fade away. He stepped cautiously out on to the thin ledge and slid the window shut. The wind was stronger out here but it didn't bother him. He made his way along the side to the fire escape. From
here he could make his way down into the shadows and to the Glades. Tonight, the Hood was going to rue the day he ever thought of becoming a vigilante.

Around the corner and across the street at Queen Consolidated Felicity Smoak headed for the elevator in her practical shoes. She had turned all her options around in her head before deciding that the best way to contact Starling City’s vigilante was to go out looking for him, preferably somewhere dangerous. That was why she’d dressed as practically as she could today, planning to head into the Glades. All the research she had done, which included hacking into the local police database, showed that the Hood had done most of his work in the poor district of Starling City. That made the Glades her best bet to track down the archer and tell him everything she knew.
"When it comes to luck, you make your own." - Bruce Springsteen

Once he'd gotten Thea calmed down, Oliver had headed out for patrol. He'd left his sister chatting with a hesitant Roy and a sleepy looking Sin, Diggle keeping watch over them. He had a lot to think about, what with his mother's revelations, and he was hoping patrol would help him clear his head. All the inner turmoil he felt would hinder anything he attempted to do. That was why he was standing on a rooftop breathing in the cool evening air. Where Starling was located in California meant it didn't often snow during the winter but that didn't mean the temperature didn't fall low enough that he would see his breath in the air in front of him. For once, the city around him seemed fairly peaceful. No police sirens howling in the Glades, no gunfire, no cries for help. Oliver felt the tension in his shoulders begin to melt away.

That was when he caught a glimpse of a moving shadow. Eyes narrowing, the Queen Heir turned and tried to see what had moved. To his surprise and worry, there was nothing there. He backed up a little and took a running start before jumping to the next rooftop, hoping to get a better look. Still nothing. He frowned and scanned his surroundings. The only person around was Felicity Smoak and he doubted she was jumping across rooftops, despite the fact that she was wearing a blouse and khaki pants rather than one of the dresses he'd seen her in.

Unable to find the source of the movement and curious about what the blonde was doing wandering around the Glades at night, Oliver carefully made his way down towards street level. Felicity heard the sound of his feet landing firmly on the ground and turned her head, only to startle when she saw him. "Oh," she said, eyes going wide. "I was looking for you?"

"Why?" Oliver rasped in an effort to make his voice lower. Felicity Smoak had met Oliver Queen before and the last thing he needed was for her to make a connection between the Queen heir and the Hood, regardless of whether or not it was true.

"I know why Walter Steele was kidnapped. There's this shell company called Tempest, Moira Queen owns it, and it isn't even really a real company. There's no tax records or official records or anything but it owns this warehouse in Starling," she babbled. "I went to check it out, and the remains of The Queen's Gambit are inside."

For a moment, Oliver felt like someone had dropped a chunk of lead into his stomach. He sucked in a quiet breath and ordered, "Show me." Felicity's head nodded up and down rapidly, almost like a bobblehead doll, and she turned on her heel, leading the way to a modest looking used car. They drove in silence to one of the numerous warehouses in Starling, Felicity parking the car but making no move to get out.

"There's a lock on the door," she said, voice wavering a bit. "The passcode's Robert." Oliver nodded and stepped out of the car, approaching the door with caution. He tested it to make sure it was indeed locked and Felicity wasn't leading him into a trap. His time away had taught him
much, including that you couldn't just blindly give someone your trust. It amounted to a death wish.

He typed in the password and the lock clicked open, allowing him to carefully open the door. The light was already turned on inside the warehouse and Oliver took in the sight of the yacht from his nightmares, his stomach churning. *The Queen's Gambit* was mostly intact and he made his way carefully down the stairs to the floor of the warehouse to examine it. Why would his mother spend the money to secretly have *The Queen's Gambit* brought up and hidden away in a warehouse in Starling City? A moment later he had his answer, and the reality it revealed almost made him sick on the cement flooring. *The Queen's Gambit* had been sabotaged. When his mother had given her little speech he had heard that fact but now, standing face to face with the evidence, the full impact of what he'd been told sunk it. Malcolm Merlyn had brought about his father's death, though not in the way the man had hoped since Robert hadn't gone down with the ship, and his mother had preserved the evidence.

Oliver only had a moment to wonder why before he was automatically twisting away from an arrow. The fletching barely brushed his cheek and he found himself face to face with another archer. The newcomer was dressed completely in black, his face hidden by a hood and a scarf hiding his nose and mouth. Dark eyes gleamed in the shadows and, judging by the black fletching on the next arrow he knocked, this was the man that had been killing people Oliver had left alive. He wanted desperately to reach for an arrow of his own but knew he probably wouldn't reach it before the other archer could release his.

"I had been wondering how I was going to find you," the archer said, voice modulated with some hidden electronic device. "It was so considerate of you to make it easy for me."

"You've been killing people I've already visited but left alive," Oliver replied, tone dark. "Why?"

"To find you," came the smooth reply. "You are not an easy person to track down and I had something I wanted to find out."

"What?" the Queen heir grated out, wary.

"What any archer wants," came the calm reply. "To find out who's better." Then the other man lifted the bow, drew the string back, and fired.

Oliver barely twisted away from the arrow, snatching one of his own and firing at his opponent. The other archer returned fire. The Queen scion used the remains of yacht to dodge and knocked another arrow, back held close to the hull of the yacht. He breathed softly, listening for the quiet whisper of footsteps, and then whirled around the corner, firing another arrow. The dark archer barely dodged but already had another arrow knocked. This time, Oliver didn't twist away quiet fast enough and the arrow sank through his shoulder. Hissing in pain and using the yacht as a shield again, his snapped off the barbed tip of the arrow and then carefully removed the shaft, dropping them both to the floor with a soft clatter. Then he was grabbing another arrow, ignoring the way his shoulder throbbed in pain, and spinning back around to fire again.

The shot was not his best but it was enough to make the other archer shift out of the way. Oliver knocked another one and fired off as well, knowing he needed to end this fight soon. He was loosing blood and fighting against an opponent that was likely capable of taking him down. He couldn't let this drag on or he would eventually slip into unconsciousness and be left at the mercy of the dark archer. He reached for yet another arrow and pulled the string back at full draw, ignoring the scream of pain in his shoulder, and released. Between the blood dripping down his shoulder and the near silent scream of panic in his mind, he missed. The fletching of the arrow brushed against the dark archer's face and the other man responded by punching Oliver in the face. The followed it up with a hit to Oliver's injured shoulder and a knee towards the stomach.
that he just barely managed to block.

Oliver aimed a strike at the dark archer only to have the other man sweep his feet out from underneath him, sending him toppling to the floor. Oliver crashed to the ground and a kick to the ribs sent pain screaming through him. "They call you the Hood," the man snarled above him, leaning down. "Let's see what you look like without it."

"I've called the police," a new voice practically shrieked from the doorway, sounding panicky. The other archer's head snapped up and Oliver took advantage of the distraction to dig a fletchette into the other man's leg. The dark archer let out a grunt of pain and stumbled a bit, allowing Oliver to rise up and punch him hard in the face. He followed that up with another punch to the stomach, sending the other archer crashing to the ground. Oliver rose up then and hurriedly kicked him in the head, knowing he'd hit the right spot when the man went limp.

He didn't waste time trying to figure out who the other archer was. If Felicity really had called the police then he didn't have much time to get away from the area. "Oh my gosh," the blonde babbled, hooking an arm around him after he stumbled up the stairs. "You need a hospital."

"No hospital," Oliver rasped, allowing her to help him outside.

"Secret identities don't matter if you're dying," Felicity replied, sounding even more panicked than before.

"The old Queen Foundry, in the Glades," he told her, feeling a sense of Deja Vu about the whole conversation.

"You want to go there?" Felicity questioned, helping him into the passenger seat. "Why?"

"Just drive," he rasped out, voice weak, and she nodded, scrambling over to slip in the driver's seat and stepping on the gas.

Thea woke from a peaceful slumber at the sound of her cell phone ringing. She fumbled for it with her eyes closed and finally cracked them open to accept the call. "Yeah?" she slurred sleepily.

"Miss Queen," Diggle's voice said and suddenly she felt wide awake.

"Yeah," she repeated, tone a little frantic. "What happened? Is Oliver okay?"

"He will be," her brother's bodyguard said. "But he's been shot again."

"Again?" Thea repeated, feeling a small bit of exasperation and a large wave of frustration. "In the same spot?"

"Close."

"Okay," she said, closing her eyes and reaching up a hand to pinch the bridge of her nose for a moment. "Okay. I'm getting dressed and heading over there."

She half expected Diggle to try to persuade her to stay put but instead he said, "Drive safely" and terminated the connection. Thea rolled out of bed and headed for her dressing, getting dressed without turning on her light. The last thing she wanted to do was to wake up her restlessly sleeping mother. Thea didn't have an excuse ready to explain why she was leaving the house at just after one in the morning. Extremely glad that Walter had taken the time to teach her how to drive and had actually gone with her to get her driver's license, Thea took one of the cheaper cars and headed for the Glades. She'd paid attention when Diggle had taken her home an hour after
Oliver had gone on patrol, finally admitting that she needed to face her mother. Now she drove confidently into the Glades and parked the car a few feet from the Foundry, climbing over the fence the same way Sin had showed her.

Inside her brother's super secret lair, Diggle was leaning over her brother's almost completely out of it form. A blonde woman a little younger than Ollie in professional dress, her glasses perched on her nose, was chewing nervously on her fingernails and Roy was hunched in on himself where he was sitting in the computer chair. "Thea Queen," the blonde said, sounding a little surprised. "I guess that makes sense, considering..." She trailed off with an almost hysterical sounding giggle and motioned towards Oliver. "I'm Felicity Smoak, from the IT Department at Queen Consolidated, and I guess I know where your brother got that black arrow he wanted to know the origins of from." Thea absorbed the babble with slightly wide eyes and then nodded, unsure what to say. Felicity let out another little, nervous sounding giggle and then went back to chewing on her fingernails while Diggle worked.

Thea covered the space between herself and the computer chair, crouching down so she could look in Roy's wide, green eyes. He looked scared and lost all at once and she surged upright, wrapping her arms tightly around him. For a moment he stayed stiff in her embrace, but just when she was about to awkwardly pull away, he crumpled and let out a little sob. "It's okay," she murmured into his hair and he let out another one, hands clinging tightly to her shirt. She held him close and whispered little reassuring things to him as he cried softly, shoulders shaking and slim frame pressed close to her. She wasn't sure how, but even while pulling away from his family and close friends, her brother had somehow managed to get more people to care for him. Now he just had to stop being so badly injured so that he wouldn't freak all of them out.

When Roy finally ran out of tears, she let go of him to nudge him over, the pair of them curling together on the computer chair. Thea slipped an arm around the boy's shoulder's and Roy's head settled against her neck and shoulder, breathing still wavering and the occasionally tears still slipping free of his control. Fifteen minutes after that, his body was limp and relaxed as he slept. She watched Diggle work, never moving from her position, and felt her own eyelids grow heavy. At last they drifted closed and stayed there, Thea drifting off once again into a peaceful sleep.
Chapter 41

"'She would of been a good woman,' The Misfit said, 'if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life.'" -from A Good Man Is Hard to Find by Flannery O'Connor

Once Diggle got him patched up, Oliver had drifted off to sleep, head feeling fuzzy. He woke up with his shoulder aching but felt much more alert than he had the night before. He sat up slowly, blanket sliding off his chest, and glanced around at his surroundings. The basement of the Foundry was uncharacteristically full. Diggle was slumped against a wall, looking as if he'd fallen asleep on his feet. Felicity Smoak was curled up on top of a cleared table wrapped in a blanket like a human burrito. Roy and Thea were the last two his eyes fell on, cuddle up together in a tangle of limbs in the computer chair. Roy had his head tucked between Thea's shoulder and chin. Her arm was wrapped around his shoulders, holding him close, and her breathing ruffled his hair.

Oliver carefully slung his feet over the side of the cot, biting down a groan of pain at the movement. The soft sound of his feet touching the floor jolted Diggle awake, the man's eyes quickly scanning the room for any sign of danger before relaxing. "How are you, man?" the former soldier asked.

"Never better," Oliver rasped, throat feeling dry and sandy. The corner of Diggle's mouth hooked up in a smirk as he crossed the room to grab a water bottle. Oliver took the bottle, working it open and taking a drink.

"You need to stop getting shot," a familiar sleepy voice slurred. He glanced over to see Thea blinking blearily at him. Roy mumbled an agreement that was mostly muffled when his head dropped down to rest on her shoulder.

"I'm trying," he said, unsuccessfully attempting to fight down a grin.

Thea's answering snort startled Felicity awake, the blonde flailing her arms a little when she almost fell off the table she'd been sleeping on. "What? How did I..?" she babbled, head whipping around so she could scan the room. "Oh." Thea let a little, sleepy laugh as the blonde dangled her feet off the table, slipping back into a none too awake state. "He made it then?"

"Yeah, he made it," Diggle said with a light laugh.

"Thanks for taking me back here," Oliver added and she smiled at him, blushing a little.

"No problem. Especially since it was kinda my fault you got into that mess in the first place."

"You were trying to help," he countered and she nodded, still a little flushed. Thea snickered then and Oliver realized his own cheeks were a little warm.

"C'mon Roy," his little sister murmured, nudging him. "Up and at 'em." Roy let out a little, unhappy sounding noise but obligingly sat up, letting Thea shift into a more comfortable position. "We probably need to head home," Thea said, slipping out of the chair. "Mom will be worried sick."

"Actually, I don't think you want to go home quite yet," Felicity said, eyes wide and a tablet in her lap. "You all need to come see this."

Oliver was just standing upright when Thea reached the blonde and gasped, "Mom?"
Moira Queen took in a deep breath and then stepped out from beneath Walter's comforting hand. She walked to the podium and faced the waiting press. They would publicly humiliate her for her choices, but doing this could save hundreds of lives. For a moment she couldn't find the words she had prepared failed her. She glanced down at her trembling hands and then looked back towards the camera. "My name is Moira Dearden Queen," she began, the words coming out loud and clear. "I am the former acting CEO of Queen Consolidated and, God forgive me, I have failed this city. For the past five years, under a threat to my life and the lives of my remaining family, I have been complicit in an undertaking with one horrible purpose-to destroy the Glades and everyone in it. I realize now that my family's safety will mean nothing if I let this dreadful act occur."

She took a deep breath and glanced at Walter for support. He nodded once at her and she turned back towards the waiting cameras. "All of you need to know that the architect of this nightmare is Malcolm Merlyn." There were a few gasps and people began whispering. "Yes," she said over the sounds of the crowd. "And I have proof that he has killed dozens in pursuit of this madness. If you reside in the Glades, you need to get out now. Your lives and the lives of your children depend on it." She hesitated for a moment before adding, "Please."

The uproar after she stepped off the podium was instantaneous. Under the sound of shouted questions, Moira leaned close to Walter, his hand coming to rest at the small of her back. "No word from Oliver or Thea yet," her second husband said, his tone sympathetic. They both knew, despite Thea talking awkwardly to her the night before, that her children were, at the very least, upset. Moira doubted that she would be hearing from either of them any time soon. As if to contradict her, Moira's phone buzzed. She pulled it out and was surprised to see the message was from Thea. R u okay?

"Fine sweetie," Moira texted back quickly, tucking the phone away. She guessed Thea had seen the broadcast where ever she was. The phone vibrated again and she pulled it out to see Malcolm calling. For a moment, she considered answering the call. Then she thought of all the trouble Malcolm had caused her family and how angry he likely was that she had ruined his plan. She very deliberately denied the call and placed the phone back in her pocket. "Trouble?" Walter asked and she gave him a weak smile.

"Malcolm. But I don't feel like talking to him." Walter nodded and slipped his arm around her waist. A moment later, Detective Lance entered the room with his partner.

"Ma'am," he said politely. "I am sorry about this but you are under arrest."

"I completely understand," Moira responded with nod. Being locked away was a small price to pay in order to stop Malcolm.

Tommy found himself running through the Merlyn Global building, heading for his father's office. He'd just seen Moira Queen's admission on television and his head was swimming. Was it really true? Was his father really planning to destroy the Glades? He paused outside the correct office, gasping for breath. Then he reached out a hand and rapped on the door frame. "Come in," his father called. Tommy steeled himself and then stepped inside. His father glanced up from the computer screen in front of him and said, "Ah. I was wondering when you were going to show up."

"Is it true?" Tommy demanded. "Are you planning to destroy the Glades?" When Malcolm didn't answer he let out a little, nervous laugh. "It's crazy, right?"

"No," his father said steadily. "It's true. It's the reason I recently closed your mother's clinic. I
didn't want to see it leveled."

"What?" Tommy asked, voice barely above a whisper.

"I have something I'd like you to listen to," Malcolm replied. "The night your mother died, she called me. I awoke to a voicemail from her."

"Dad-" Tommy mumbled unsteadily.

"Her final gift to me," his father continued, talking over him. Then he carefully pressed play.

"Malcolm, I'm in trouble," Rebecca Merlyn said and Tommy leaned heavily against the wall, almost falling over when he heard his mother's voice for the first time in years. She sounded so scared. "I told-I told him to take everything. My money, my ring."

"Turn it off," Tommy blurted out, heart pounding with panic. He didn't want to hear this. He knew, logically, that his mother must have been terrified when she died but hearing it was horrible.

"They shot me," his mother's voice continued. "I screamed for help, but no one would come." There was a pause and then she added, "Malcolm, I don't want to die alone."

"She bled out into the pavement," his father said when the recording stopped and Tommy's eyes prickled with tears. He understood the anger his father must have felt, knowing how he would feel if this happened to Laurel, but it didn't justify what Malcolm was doing. "Your mother built her clinic in the Glades because she wanted to save the city. It can't be saved." His father's voice was full of conviction that made his son feel sick to his stomach. Mom wouldn't have wanted this to happen. "The people don't want to be saved."

"So you'll kill them all?" Tommy asked, truly horrified. He'd known for a long time that Malcolm Merlyn was not a good person. After all, what kind of father abandoned his son immediately after burying the boy's mother, but he hadn't realized Malcolm would go to this kind of extremes.

"Yes, they deserve to die," Malcolm snarled. "All of them! The way she died."

"The actions of one person shouldn't condemn hundreds," Tommy snapped. "Oh my god. Laurel!" She had gone into CNRI today. She would still be in the Glades when they were destroyed.

"Shut up," he hissed in a furious voice. "Just shut up. I don't even know you anymore." Tommy turned then and stormed out of the office, determined to reach Laurel in time. If he couldn't save her, then at the very least he would die with her.

"Have you figured out what was stolen?" Bruce asked Lucius Fox but the man was already shaking his head.

"They didn't erase the security footage but whoever stole from us encrypted it far beyond my abilities," Fox replied. "I did manage to transfer a copy of the encrypted files on this flash drive for a mutual friend of ours to take a look at."
"Thank you," Bruce said, taking the flash drive.

"Any time," came the calm reply.

Bruce headed home then, done for the day, and was greeted by a nervous looking Dick waiting beside Alfred. "Is something wrong?" he asked, worry washing over him. Neither one of them appeared to be hurt but his adopted son was visibly nervous.

"We received an unexpected visitor today, Master Bruce," Alfred informed him, calmly taking his jacket.

"Who?" Bruce asked, worry only increasing. Had Ra's come into his home again? Last he had heard, the leader of the League of Shadows was away in Tibet rebuilding his strength.

"She introduced herself as Nyssa Raatko," Alfred answered.

"Talia's older sister?" Dick bobbed his head in answer, bouncing a little in the balls of his feet. "What did she want?"

"I'm certain I don't know Master Bruce," the butler said. "She insisted on speaking alone with Master Dick and he reassured me that it would be fine."

"He did?" Bruce arched an eyebrow and Dick squirmed a little, looking down guiltily.

"She's okay," he mumbled. "And she hasn't tried to kill us yet."

Bruce sighed, knowing they would have to discuss this further later. Dick shouldn't have been talking to a member of the League alone. It was dangerous. "What did she want?"

"She said a member of the League has an operation that involves Unidac Industries earthquake machine," Dick told him, still looking at the floor. "She called him Al Sa-Her."

"The Magician."

"Yeah. Anyhow, she said he went by another name. Malcolm Merlyn."
"Never was anything great achieved without danger." - Niccolo Machiavelli

Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

Sorry for taking an incredibly long time to update! For some reason, this chapter just didn't want to be written!

Felicity took over the computer almost immediately after Moira's announcement, trying to figure out what Malcolm's plan was. Oliver had shown her his father's notebook, hoping it might hold a clue to unraveling the mystery of the Undertaking. So far, it hadn't helped. "I don't get it," Felicity was muttering as she started yet another search. "This symbol isn't anywhere. Do you understand how unprecedented that is in this day and age?"

"I'm sure I don't," Oliver replied dryly before turning his attention back to the training he was doing with Roy. The boy had advanced quickly and Oliver was fairly certain Roy could defend himself against most average thugs if necessary. Sin had joined them in the Foundry basement twenty minutes ago, looking barely awake, and now was chatting curiously with Thea who looked, despite the situation, genuinely happy. Oliver found himself wondering when exactly his secret base had turned into the newest hangout for kids. That certainly hadn't been the original intention.

"What symbol?" Thea asked and Felicity beckoned her over. Sin followed the older girl over, the two of them leaning over Felicity's shoulder. "What is that?" Thea muttered but Sin let out a gasp.

"I've seen this before," she said. "Roy, get over here." The boy headed over to look and she murmured something in his ear. After a moment, he nodded. "That's what I thought." Sin turned to look at Felicity. "At one point they tried to put a subway in Starling. It fell through eventually but some of the lines are still there."

"What does that have to do with the symbol?"

"Rail lines," Roy replied, as if those two words explained everything. Apparently, to Felicity, they did because the blonde was quickly typing again.

"Got it!" she exclaimed after a moment of typing. "The symbol in your Dad's notebook is part of a map of the rails."

"Whatever Merlyn is planning, that's probably where its going to happen," Diggle commented and Oliver nodded. They had a location. Now all they needed to know was what exactly was planned.

"There's one answer at least," he muttered, running a hand through his hair. "Only half a dozen to go." Like Who was the Dark Archer? and What exactly was Malcolm planning? His phone rang, shaking him out of his dark thoughts, and he pulled it out, surprised to see that the caller was Tommy. Since his arrival in Starling City, he hadn't spent all that much time with the man who was practically his brother, other things taking priority, and now he felt his chest pang with guilt. "Tommy?" he said by way of answering the phone. "What can I do for you?"
"My Dad's a psychopath," came the immediate, panicked reply. "I always knew he was a crappy person but this? This is beyond anything I would have imagine. He flat out admitted he's going to destroy the Glades. He thinks the people deserve it, just 'cause Mom died there." Tommy let out a little, hysterical laugh and then continued. "I mean, what gives him the right to be judge, jury, and executioner? Especially when he's just destroying people because of a stupid grudge."

"I know Tommy," Oliver told him, keeping his voice calm and even. "Mom explained as much as she knew."

"Okay, good," Tommy was practically babbling. "I'm going to get Laurel. She went into CNRI today so hopefully I'll be able to convince her to leave before whatever Dad is planning hits. If not..." He trailed off and pulled in a shuddering breath. "If not I'm going to stay with her. I won't let Laurel risk her life alone."

Oliver absorbed that for a moment and then blurted compulsively, "Tommy, I have something I need to tell you."

"What?" Tommy asked warily, sounding as if he wasn't sure he could take any more bombshells today. For a moment, Oliver hesitated, wondering if he was making the right decision. Still, he didn't want to chance his best friend dying without knowing the truth.

"You know the Starling City vigilante?"

"Yeah?"

Oliver took a deep breath and then said, "That's me."

For a moment, there was complete silence. Then Tommy let out a wavering laugh. "You're kidding, right?" There was an awkward pause and then Tommy said, "Oh god, you're not kidding."

"No, I'm not. My father left a notebook in his possession with a list of names connected to the plan your father orchestrated. If I can figure out what he's planning, I may be able to stop it."

"Okay," Tommy said breathlessly. "Okay. If he happens to tell me anything, I'll let you know."

"Thanks Tommy," he told his friend. "And good luck."

He had just hung up the phone when Felicity let out a startled squeak. He turned around to see, in startling red script on a completely black screen, the words Earthquake machine stolen from what was Tempest. Possibly in connection with Merlyn. "I can't believe it. Someone just hacked me," Felicity was muttering but Oliver ignored her in favor of absorbing what he'd been told. A moment later an addition, in the same brilliant red color, added Your security is much, much better this time! :D! "This has happened to you before?" Felicity demanded, spinning her chair around to face him.

"Yeah," Oliver admitted, eyes still fixed on the screen. "This is the preferred method of contact of an acquaintance of mine."

"Oh," the blonde said, before spinning around and quickly beginning to type. "I guess we should thank them then."
Demon, because of one person; Richard Grayson. She had first encountered the boy on a chilly night in Moscow. The League had been seeking Bruce Wayne since he had taken the youngest Grayson and stormed away from them. They had searched for three months but they had not found him, however, one of Nyssa's contacts in Russia had mentioned spotting someone who looked like Wayne roaming the streets of Moscow. She had traveled there alone, without telling anyone where she was going, unwilling to risk spreading news about her information for fear that it might be wrong.

She had been roaming the rooftops, scanning the steadily darkening streets below, when she had come across a small boy wrapped in a thick blanket and sitting on the balcony of a hotel room. It had been early winter, so the air had a distinct bite to it, and no one else had been out. Nyssa had hesitated, something about the boy seeming familiar. It had been the haunted, vacant look in his big blue eyes that had given him away.

Richard Grayson had startled when she landed on the balcony in front of him. Then he'd given her an uncertain smile and asked, voice a little hollow, "Are you here to kill me?"

Nyssa had known what the right answer had been. The League wanted Richard Grayson dead and buried in the ground because of his bloodline, because of what his heritage was, but there had been something in that smile and the hollow voice that she'd recognized. It had been the same emotion she'd felt when her mother had died and members of her father's league had come to fetch her. "No," she'd told him and he'd nodded once before patting the ground next to her. She'd found herself sitting down and staring upwards towards the stars above them. "I am sorry for what happened," she had told him.

"Sorry that it happened or sorry that I lived?" the boy had retorted and she had found herself smiling for the first time in several years.

"You are angry," she had told him. "It is understandable, but it will result in your death if now used correctly." To be honest, he had reminded her of herself at that age. Her mother had been left to die and her father had simply wanted to swoop in and collect his heir, for Talia had not yet been conceived. She had been so confused and hurt and angry that she had locked herself away. It had almost gotten her killed. Knowing this, she had reached over, ruffled the boy's hair, and left the way she had come. She'd departed from Moscow the next morning and had not informed anyone of what had transpired.

She had kept an eye on Grayson. She had done her best to secretly monitor the boy's progress and had visited him several more times before delivering the rumor that had ultimately led Wayne to return to Gotham. Despite all this, she knew that Bruce Wayne did not trust her. The two had encountered each other more than once during Wayne's time in the League but their views and methods had vastly differed. Nyssa had preferred to use deception instead of fear to accomplish her goals, and during one eventful mission her lies had shattered any trust Wayne had held for her. He would not be happy to know that she had, once again, visited his adopted son while he was out. Still, she had no intention of drawing Grayson over to work for the League or of killing him. He was one of the only friends she had, and she treasured that friendship.

Rising from her position lying flat on the rooftop to a low crouch, she lifted binoculars so she could see through one of the wide, large windows of Wayne Manor. She was on a storage shed on the grounds with decent cover but she was unsurprised to find Wayne looking directly at her. After a moment, her motioned for her to come over. Curious, Nyssa stood and then smoothly dropped to the ground. Wayne met her just outside the house, expression grim. "Dick said you told him that Malcolm Merlyn is who is planning to destroy Starling," he said. It was not a question, at least not in a way an ordinary person would understand it.

"Only the Glades," she replied smoothly. "My father disapproves of this plan but he also refuses
to interfere. If Merlyn succeeds, only then will he be punished."

"That is very reactionary of him," came the response.

"He is ill," Nyssa replied bluntly. "He will descend into the Pit soon and he does not trust Talia to handle matters after the disaster in Gotham. I am currently away, so he assumes I do not know. I believe I will allow him to keep that assumption."

"Are you traveling to Starling?" Wayne's eyes were sharp. Nyssa believed he already knew the answer.

"Give my best to Richard," she said instead before turning and walking away. She was certain that Wayne kept an eye on her until she was out of sight.

Quentin Lance had experienced several stressful days so the last thing he wanted to do was talk to the vigilante over the phone. Sure the guy had been coming to help Laurel, and he had done some good, but with current police attitudes being as they were in the police department it was probably best that the man stay away. Still, in the chaos of Moira Queen's televised statement, he found himself answering his phone to hear the Hood's voice on the other end. "I know what Malcolm Merlyn is planning but I need your help." The vigilante's voice was tight with something Quentin might qualify as worry.

"What?" he demanded under the din of voices. "How?"

"I have my sources," came the illusive reply and Quentin scowled fiercely at the back wall, hoping to be give something more. He wasn't.

"Fine," he snapped. "I'll bite. What do you need me to do?"
Laurel was a whirlwind, struggling to grab all the files of open cases they'd need to get out of CNRI before it might be decimated by Malcolm Merlyn. Joanna and several others were spread across the room, struggling to do the same. Dad had been called in not long before Merlyn's announcement had been made, and had been on hand to arrest Moira, but Laurel had already been rushing around her apartment, searching for her keys. Her problem, that she could shatter glass with her voice, wasn't as important as getting out evidence that might lead to justice to hundreds of people who had been wronged.

She didn't dare to order people about, not with the fear of the damage her voice might do lingering inside her chest, but Joanna was already in the thick of things and barking orders so Laurel was free to work in silence. Quickly and carefully she sifted through files, searching out the most important information to the cases and shredding the rest. There might be trouble coming, but that was no reason to leave important documents lying around where anyone might pick up and use as blackmail. The Glades already wasn't full of nicest, most honest people to live with and she had no doubt that what was coming would only make it worse.

"Laurel did you grab those files on the Kozlowskis?" Joanna called from across the room and Laurel, still not willing to trust her voice, nodded and gave her friend a thumbs up. Joanna accepted that without questioning why her friend wasn't talking, and Laurel loved her a little bit more for that. Joanna had always been a good friend but since Oliver had been presumed dead in the wreck of the Queen's Gambit, Laurel's friend had gone above and beyond the call of duty. When all this was over with and she could talk without fear of harming people, she needed to do something extra nice for Joanna.

"Laurel!" a voice yelled from the street and she snapped upright automatically, mind registering the panic in that familiar tone. People on the streets of the Glades were staring as Tommy Merlyn raced through them, hair ruffled by the wind and neat jacket wrinkled in a way that would have made his father cringe. "Laurel!" he yelled again and she scrambled for the door, waving her arm outside in an effort to calm him down. "Oh thank God," he gasped out when he saw her, pulling her into a hug so tight that she thought her ribs would crack. "I thought I wasn't going to be able to find you."

Laurel hugged him back tightly, pushing away her confusion as she felt how he was shaking as he buried his face in her hair. She carefully rubbed his shoulder with one hand, clinging to him with the other in hopes that it would soothe whatever panic had overtaken him. Doubtless part of it was due to finding out that his father was a psychopath, but Tommy was far from stupid and the revelation couldn't have shaken him that much. Furthermore, he was still on good terms with Oliver so if the problem was his father, Tommy would be with his best friend, not worried about his girlfriend. Deciding she needed to brave speaking, if for no other reason than to figure out what was going on, she said, "Tommy?" Her voice was soft and light and none of the glass around her shivered, which was enough to push her voice out again when her boyfriend only hugged her tighter. "What's wrong?" Tommy said something that was muffled in her hair and she sighed, pulling back as best she could so she could lift his head up. "Try that again, without telling it to my hair."

"My dad's going to destroy the Glades," Tommy told her, eyes wild with growing panic. "And I knew you were going to be here and I thought I would get here in time to die and I've lost
everything else. I can't lose you too!" With that last anguished cry he buried his head in her hair again. Laurel could feel his shoulders shake with sobs and she clung tighter to him, knowing it was all she could do to anchor him.

He calmed after a few minutes, his grip loosening marginally, and Laurel guessed it was the best she was going to get. Moving back a step, she smiled reassuringly up at his reddened, tear streaked face, before gently taking his hand in her own. "Help me pack up the rest of the files?" she asked, careful to keep her voice soft in the hope that it wouldn't start shattering things. Tommy nodded, managing a marginally steady smile. That was enough for Laurel to smile back and pull him into CNRI.

Roy found himself nervously gnawing on his lower lip as he peered around Felicity to watch what was going on. Oliver had left twenty minutes ago, intending to meet up with Detective Lance in order to scour the incomplete subway system. Felicity had found an old fault line beneath what had been intended to be the Tenth Street subway line, theorizing that it would make the most sense to place the stolen earthquake machine there. It was there that Oliver intended to take Lance to start their search, but Roy had a sinking feeling in his stomach that said something was going to go wrong. Something always did.

"You okay?" Thea asked, sidling up to him and wrapping an arm hesitantly around his shoulder. Roy pressed closer and her hold tightened protectively, seeming to understand that he wasn't but didn't want to talk about it. Felicity was bringing up the schematics of the earthquake machine for when Lance and Oliver uncovered it while security cameras on other screens kept track of their movements. Diggle had left a couple minutes ago to pick up Sin since the Glades were in chaos, the streets unsafe to walk alone. Thea and Roy watched the security cameras while Felicity let out a little, triumphant noise, bringing up the blueprints.

"Got 'em!" she reported cheerfully over the comms. "I'm ready whenever you guys get there."

"Thanks Felicity," Oliver replied, sounding as if he were standing right next to them instead of running across buildings with Lance following from the street. They could tell that the detective was muttering under his breath when the camera angle was correct. Roy smiled slightly but the expression froze on his face when he saw a flash of darkness in the corner of one camera. It seemed to be following Oliver, not far behind him.

He sucked in a little, startled breath and Thea asked, "What is it?"

"Did you see that?" he whispered, glancing up in time to shake her head. When he turned back to the screen he saw another, bigger flash of black and what he thought was fletching on an arrow.

"That?" Thea asked, voice going high with surprise.

"Yeah."

"What?" Felicity asked, turning to the camera images and then letting out a startled squeak when a figure dressed entirely in black tackled Oliver, sending them rolling across the rooftop. Thea stiffened next to Roy, her arm tightening almost to the point of pain around him, but he barely noticed. Sound faded away as he focused Oliver, the world narrowing to a single point. Distantly he was aware of Felicity shouting into the comms as his breath caught in his throat.

"Roy?" he heard Thea question but he couldn't answer, could barely breathe, as he watched someone he cared about fighting for his life.
He could not go to Starling City. With Moira Queen's announcement that Malcolm Merlyn intended to destroy the Glades, the city had been locked down. Bruce would have to do what he could from Gotham while Dick was still in school. The chill of the cave wrapped around him as he settled into his chair and activated the computer. He opened the correct program, searching first for Nyssa. She and Dick had a strange relationship and the fact that she was in Gotham made him uneasy. Dick's protection was of the utmost importance to him and, were he to find that his son was not safe, Starling's problem would be set aside. He would leave Oliver to deal with it on his own.

The search for Nyssa drew up blank so he turned his attention towards Starling. Malcolm Merlyn was a member of the League but he did not have the experience in planning that Ra's did. His plans would be stored somewhere. There was a chance that the plans were stored somewhere in Merlyn Global's cyberspace. Fingers resting on the keyboard, Bruce began to type. With the program in the cave, Bruce should be able to find the exact location of the planted earthquake machine. It was all he could do.
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

What is this? *gasp* Another chapter?

I finally got into the swing of writing this again. The plan is to have the action tied up in the next chapter and then finish it off with an epilogue before moving on to the next story (and hopefully finishing The Last Laugh sometime around then...)

"We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender."-Winston Churchill

Felicity felt like she didn't have enough eyes. On one screen, Oliver Queen was fighting for his life against what appeared to me a very angry Malcolm Merlyn. Arrows had spilled out of Oliver's quiver after Merlyn had tackled him, not that the other archer's quiver had faired much better, which left them grappled across the rooftop in the hopes that one person could get the upper hand and fire one of the few arrows they had left into their opponent. On the other screen, when Felicity could tear her eyes away from the fight between someone she cared about and a man that was absolute scum, was Detective Lance making his way through the chaos that was the Glades on his way to an entrance to the incomplete subway tunnels.

Behind the blonde, Thea was pacing a track in the floor, unable to watch the fight any longer. She'd spent the first five minutes twitching anxiously next to Felicity before lunging away and beginning her pacing route. Roy had remained to watch, whole body tense whenever she happened to glance over at him. Diggle had left a couple minutes ago to fetch someone named Sin, and possibly Tommy Merlyn and Laurel Lance, leaving the blonde alone with two children she barely knew, hoping the Quentin Lance happened to stumble upon the earthquake machine before it was too late.

"I've found an entrance," the detective told her. "I'm heading down."

"That's good," Felicity said, practically vibrating with nervous energy. "I'm sending a picture of the device to your phone now, so you'll know what you're looking..." Felicity trailed off with a startled sound when the screens in front of her went black.

"Ms. Smoak?" Detective Lance questioned. "Is everything okay."

"No," Felicity moaned, putting her extensive computer knowledge to work even as she babbled. "No, no, no! This cannot be happening."

"What is it?" Thea asked, scrambling over to stare at the black screens. "What's going on?"

"The system just died on me," Felicity babbled. "Please, please, please don't do this to me. I know Oliver didn't buy junky computers. And if he did, I might kill him once this is all over with. And make him replace whatever pieces of crap he thought it was a good idea to buy with something with a-" Felicity was cut off mid babble when stark white text spilled over the screen.
There is a fault line located beneath Starling City, the text read. One of the earthquake machines Malcolm Merlyn stole is directly on the fault line, which is underneath the Tenth Street subway line, which was never completed. The second is a mile and a half down the line from the first. Unfortunately there is no remote switch to turn them off, so each one will have to be deactivated remotely.

"Somebody get me a pen," Felicity stammered out after a moment. "And call Diggle. We're going to need him out there."

"You need me where?" John Diggle questioned, leading a visible shaken dark haired young woman down the stairs.

Felicity ignored him, scribbling away and just managing to get the message down before it dissolved into a cloud of bats that left her screens almost exactly where they'd been before. The blonde wanted terribly to check on Oliver, but she didn't have time. "Detective Lance, the device is in the Tenth Street subway line, just above the natural fault line which runs through Starling," she informed him as Diggle approached her chair.

"There's a second device," Thea told Oliver's bodyguard in a hushed voice. "About a mile and a half out from the first one, if our sources can be trusted. Felicity needs you to take a comm and take care of that one."

"I'll get there as soon as I can," Diggle said, pausing brief to squeeze Roy's shoulder before grabbing a comm and heading back out towards the Glades.

"Thanks, Thea," Felicity murmured as she watched Quentin Lance's progress on the screen before her but the brunette didn't reply. She was too fixated on watching her brother fight for his life, arm wrapped around Roy's shoulder and holding him tightly.

"Do you have everything?" Tommy asked when Laurel hurried out of CNRI with another box clutched in her arms.

"We've got everything," Joanna called, following after Laurel and shoving yet another box of files into her black sedan. Tommy's own car was already stuffed full of boxes that they absolutely couldn't leave behind. Tommy, Laurel, and Joanna were the last people left on the premises. Joanna, who had taken charge of the entire process, had sent the rest of the workers away once their vehicles had been packed with a few boxes, not wanting anyone to stick around and risk their lives any longer than they had to. Laurel had refused to leave early, and Tommy had stayed with her as they packed their vehicles.

"Then let's get out of here," he said. "There's no telling how long it will be before my dad manages to level the place." Joanna nodded, giving him a sympathetic smile before climbing into her car and slamming the door.

"Meet you at my apartment?" Laurel questioned, voice little more than a whisper, but Tommy shook his head.

"I'll drop off the files, but I have to come back to the Glades," he replied. "I need to talk to Ollie."

"Why would Ollie be in the Glades?" Laurel asked, frowning. She didn't look happy about what he'd just told her, and Tommy doubted she was going to be any happier when he dumped the next revelation on her lap, but he couldn't keep this secret from her. It was far too important, and Tommy was pretty sure that Oliver would understand.
"Because he's the vigilante," he told her, and Laurel froze mid-breath. For a moment she stared at him, eyes wide. Then she blew out a shuddering breath, shaking her head.

"Oliver is the vigilante? But how? And why?"

"I think the island changed him more than we understand Laurel," Tommy replied. "As for the rest, I've got to make sure he comes back so he can answer those questions."

Laurel's expression wavered as she fought with herself, and after a moment she lunged forward to hug him. "Okay," she whispered against his shoulder. "Drop off those files and then bring Ollie back safely." She pulled back and gave him a weak, watery smile. "I know you can." Then she rose up on her toes to kiss him firmly on the mouth. Tommy's arms wrapped firmly around her after his initial shock and he kissed her back, slightly stunned that she was actually kissing him. He'd known that what he and Laurel had was something real, but he hadn't quite realized that his relationship with her wasn't a dream until this moment. When Laurel pulled back, her smile was stronger. "You come back too," she ordered, voice louder than it had been since the incident while she was in the hospital.

"I promise," he replied and she gave him a nod before turning and heading for her car. Tommy headed for his own, the little voice of worry in the back of his head reminding him that Oliver was likely going to have to go after his father to stop the Glades from being destroyed, and that he'd need some kind of reassurance from Tommy that he was doing the right thing.

"Have you heard the latest news, Smallville?" Lois Lane asked, leaning against Clark's desk as he struggled with the correct wording on his article over Lex Luther's latest charity campaign. Clark had taken the article out of personal curiosity. He wanted to know whether or not Superman was going to have another fight on his hands. After a dozen interviews he'd discovered that Luther's latest charity brainchild was exactly what it appeared to be. The man might be plotting against Superman, but it wouldn't have anything to do with the charity over which his article was covering.

"What news?" Clark asked the pretty, dark haired woman, not turning away from what he was writing.

"Moira Queen just went on public television an hour ago to announce that Malcolm Merlyn had blackmailed her into helping create a plan that intends to destroy the entire poor district of Starling City," Lois said, her tone implying that things like this happened every day. "The entire city is on lock down."

"It is?" Clark asked, turning his chair to give Lois his full attention.

"It is," she confirmed with a sly smile. "Sounds like a job for Superman, doesn't it?"

"I don't know," Clark replied cautiously, trying to decide had to discretely leave the Daily Planet. "Starling City has a vigilante of their own."

"So I've heard," was Lois's easy reply. "But he's no Superman, and in a time like this, I think he'd welcome help." Then she turned and sauntered away, a smug grin on her face.
Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

Only the epilogue left for this story! *does little victory dance* Honestly, I never thought it would take this long to get to the end of this story. Or that I'd run into writer's block not far from the finish line, but we're gonna make it!

"Friends show their love in times of trouble, not in happiness."-Euripides

Tommy Merlyn put the pedal of the cherry red Maserati to the floor, not caring if he scraped it while twisting through the narrow back alleys of the Glades. The car was his father's, and if Malcolm survived the day then he would have more problems than some missing paint on one of the expensive cars that spent most the year in the back of the garage. Tommy had picked up the vehicle after sprinting the few blocks from Laurel's nice apartment to a main intersection where he could catch a cab to take him to the Merlyn home. The expensive townhouse was nothing like the opulence of the older Queen home, but Tommy had never really cared about that. Oliver had always been his friend, and money hadn't mattered between them, so long as they had enough to enjoy themselves. He suspected they'd grown up quite a bit since then.

He'd left his own vehicle parked sloppily outside Laurel's building, not caring if some police officer ticketed him. In fact, if they did he might just protest. The officers of the law had more important things to deal with than ticketing badly parked cars at the moment. Unpacking the boxes in the back of his car would hopefully keep Laurel busy and safe while he tracked down his best friend since kindergarten. Tommy might not have known about Oliver been the Hood until today, he had a pretty good guess where his friend might be hidden.

Most of the discussions Tommy and Oliver had been having lately had dealt with opening a club inside what had been one of the old Queen factories inside the Glades. Thea had been helping with design elements when she could and had insisted on Oliver bringing in pictures of both the inside and the outside of the building. Thanks to her, he knew exactly which building and was and how to get there. And if Tommy were going to be a vigilante then nothing would make a better cover than an active club. Of course the club wasn't beyond the planning stage, but once it was fully operational then no one would be able to track Oliver's movements with any kind of accuracy without a great deal of difficulty.

The car roared down another alley and screeched to a stop in front of the fence guarding the warehouse from trespassers. Tommy ignored the no trespassing notice, trying to push the fence open. The chain locked around it rattled, but did not give. The chain was far newer than the fence. Likely Oliver had bought it to keep unwanted visitors out. Almost absently he wondered why he didn't have a key, and then decided Oliver had probably forgotten about making extra copies for his business partners during the past few weeks. He'd likely had a lot going on during the past few days. Unfortunately, that left Tommy with the trouble of trying to figure out how to get in.

He paced down the side, hoping to find some kind of entrance, but there was just more fence. Going the other direction led to the same result. Letting out a frustrated huff, Tommy resigned himself to climbing the fence. It wasn't the kind of thing he did daily, but he remembered enough from his years of sneaking out of his house, and escaping the trouble that he and Oliver inevitably
got into trouble, to manage it. As soon as his feet touched the ground his was running, sprinting towards the entrance to the warehouse. He had a bad feeling that Oliver was going to do something stupid and it was Tommy's job, as the best friend, to stop him.

The inside looked just like every other warehouse that Tommy had ever seen. It was completely empty, for the time being, and almost everything appeared to be old and worn. The exception was some new looking electrical boxes on the far end. Tommy headed for them with swift steps, hoping that it would yield some kind of mystery that would lead him to Oliver. If it didn't, he was stumped. He supposed he could wander around the warehouse yelling Oliver's name until someone came to check and see what was going on, but somehow that struck him as a terrible idea.

The first box opened to reveal nothing more than an ordinary fuse box. In terms of starting a club here, that was good. It meant Oliver had made sure the wiring in the warehouse wasn't going to light them on fire when they started putting everything together. It was bad though, for the fact that Tommy's idea was looking like a dead end. He shut the fuse box and opened the panel on the second one, taking a look inside and saying, "Oh thank God!" Instead of a fuse box inside, there was what looked like a digital security panel. Now all Tommy had to do was figure out the code and he'd be able to stop Oliver from getting himself killed, hopefully.

Tommy stared blankly at the panel, trying to figure out exactly what number combination Oliver would use. Before the island, it would have been easy. If Oliver needed a series of numbers, he always used Thea's birth date. He might exude the aura of an uncaring big brother around other people, but he and Thea had always been incredibly close. If the Queen's Gambit hadn't gone under, stranding Oliver on Lian Yu, Thea's first boyfriend would have been sent running for cover before the first date. Now Tommy wasn't sure. Finding out that Oliver was the vigilante had thrown him. The new knowledge made him hesitate, but any other option he considered seemed either incredibly morose or a little bit morbid. Taking a deep breath, he lifted his hand and tapped in Thea's birth date, hitting enter.

For a moment, nothing happened. Then a light flashed red in the corner and the entire panel shut down. Tommy stared blankly at it for a minute, stunned. "Are you kidding me?" he said at last, turning his gaze towards the ceiling. "This isn't how these things work in movies!"

"Uh, Tommy?" Thea's voice asked from somewhere to his right. "Why are you talking to the ceiling?"

This wasn't how Oliver had wanted his return from the island to go. He hadn't wanted to find himself faced with the choice of actively trying to kill Tommy's father and losing a friendship he depended on or just attempting to knock Malcolm out and hoping he wasn't killed and the city he cared for wasn't destroyed. His stomach twisted with anxiety as he considered his options, aiming another blow at Malcolm's head. It felt like they had been fighting for hours, even though Oliver knew logically it had only been a few minutes.

Part of the strain from this fight came from the knowledge that, if he put a little too much force behind each blow, he would be killing a friend's parent. He knew the pain that came from a parent's death, and he wouldn't want to place that upon anyone's shoulders. The rest of the strain, and what was causing his muscles to ache, was the fact that Malcolm Merlyn was a far better fighter than anyone else Oliver had faced in recent months. Tommy's father obviously trained, and trained hard, every day, though Oliver wasn't certain when the older man found the time to do so. He'd been run ragged at times between his ordinary activities and his vigilante ones. He couldn't fathom how he would be able to handle those responsibilities along with running a successful company.
Oliver's breath came in ragged gasps as he lunged at Malcolm, flipping the man on to the rooftop and landing on top of him. Malcolm twisted to reverse their positions but Olivier managed to avoid being pinned. Muscles screaming in protest, he aimed a kick at the other man, which missed, and scrambled to put some distance between them. He could tell that Malcolm was breathing hard as well, but the strain didn't show on his face. He stood, perfectly at ease above a city, his back to the part he was planning to destroy. The two studied each other, and suddenly a wide smile spread across Malcolm's face. "I know who you are," he said, posture relaxing further.

"Do you?" Oliver asked, forcing his voice into a lower, gruffer register than he normally used since he'd left the voice modulator behind in his haste to stop what Malcolm was planning.

Instead of answering, Malcolm rocked back on his heels and asked, "Does Tommy know what you do at night, or have you just been leaving him with weak excuses?" Oliver felt his cheeks burn with shame and Malcolm's smile widened. "No wonder you're so desperate to stop me. You think that if you end this, you'll be able to tell your friends and family the truth. Maybe go back to how life was before Lian Yu. Let me tell you a secret." He leaned forward, beckoning Oliver closer with a single finger. Oliver didn't move, blush receding as he pushed his embarrassment away to watch his opponent's every move. "You can't tell those you care about this secret. They'll hate you, for the rest of your life."

Blind rage slammed to the forefront of Oliver's mind and he lunged forward, determined to end this fight. Malcolm slid casually aside and the younger man realized his mistake a moment too late. Malcolm's arm came down over Oliver's throat, cutting off his much needed air supply. Oliver's fingers scrabbled at Malcolm's arm and shoved back his hood, trying to find some way to get free, but Tommy's father held on stubbornly. "Don't struggle. It's over," Malcolm said calmly, sinking the two of them down to their knees as Oliver's gave out from the lack of air. "There was never any doubt in the outcome, but don't worry. Your mother and sister will be joining you soon in death."

Oliver thrashed, knowing he had to get free, and his eyes fell on a single black fletched arrow that had fallen from Malcolm's quiver as the pair had fought. He wrapped strangely numb feeling fingers around it, lifting it up. He turned it towards Malcolm's chest and then hesitated. He didn't want to die, but he didn't want to take Tommy's father away from him. He struggled to lift it a little further, intending to drive it into Malcolm's arm, when Tommy's voice over the comm system Felicity had shoved on him earlier yelled, "Damnit Ollie, don't you dare die on me! I don't care what you have to do! Just finish this and get out alive!"

Oliver couldn't nod, couldn't speak, couldn't really acknowledge the message in any way as he drove the arrow back and into Malcolm Merlyn's chest. The older man gasped in shock and then toppled sideways to the ground, arm slipping free of Oliver's throat. The vigilante gasped, cool night air entering burning lungs, and toppled the other direction, exhausted. The last thing he heard was someone frantically yelling his name as the world around him turned black.

Oliver's secret lair was almost completely silent as Felicity rapidly walked Quentin Lance through disarming the first earthquake device. On a second set of cameras the blonde was tracking John Diggle's progress, foot tapping rapidly as she silently prayed that he'd make it to the second device on time. "Come on," they could hear Detective Lance say in frustration as he twisted two wires together before grabbing a third and pulling. The wire snapped out of a connector and the machine flickered for a moment before dying.

"One down," Thea breathed and Felicity could see Roy nod once from the corner of her eyes. The boy wasn't even watching Lance and Diggle's progress. Instead his gaze was fixed on Oliver's unconscious form on a distant rooftop. Tommy Merlyn had gone almost as soon as he'd arrived, leaving to collect his best friend after witnessing his own father's death. His face had been a little
pale as he'd witnessed something that Oliver had probably never wanted to do, but he'd been calm and collective as he'd hurried out, promising Thea that he'd bring her brother back safe and sound.

"Felicity, I found it!" Diggle yelled and Felicity spun her chair, tapping keys until the correct camera showed her what she needed to see.

"Okay," she said. "Do you remember what I told the detective or do you need me to repeat it?"

"I think I've got it," Oliver's bodyguard replied, opening a piece of paneling and getting to work. Felicity watched, absently lifting a stray pen off the desk and sticking it in her mouth to chew on. Each of Diggle's movements had her complete attention as he removed wires, trying to shut the device off from memory. It felt like the entire room was holding its breath, just waiting for something to go wrong. "Which wire did Lance pull?" Diggle questioned, hesitating, and Felicity tapped a couple keys to zoom in.

"I'm...I'm not sure," she said after a moment, a worried frown crossing her face. "I think this one is wired differently."

"Take your best guess," Diggle pressed. "Because we're running out of time here."

"Okay, okay, okay," Felicity babbled. "Pull the orange one."

Diggle pulled the orange wire and then hissed a curse under his breath as the timer set on the device began to count down faster. "Felicity?" he questioned, tone just sharp enough to have Roy's head snapping around as Felicity spun her chair and began searching for another schematic.

"I know, I know," she replied, fingers practically flying across the keys. "I'm looking. Give me a minute."

"I don't think we have a minute. We need to get this thing shut down or the Glades are going to be destroyed."

"I'm trying!" Felicity practically wailed back, the stress getting to her. "Just, I need more time."

"I'm sorry Felicity, but we don't have more time."

"Excuse me. I don't mean to interrupt but I might be able to disable your problem," a new voice interjected politely. Felicity's head snapped up and she caught sight of a man in blue and red with a brilliant red cape fluttering slightly behind him, as if propelled by an invisible wind.

"Who-" Felicity started to say and then cut herself off. "Never mind. Just do it!"
Laurel's tea kettle began whistling just as someone knocked on her front door. "I'll get it!" Tommy called from the living room, and Laurel turned her attention for searching out one of her oven mitts in the mess of half packed boxes on the counter so she could remove the kettle from its place on the stove. Two days ago, Malcolm Merlyn had attempted to destroy Starling City. Now he was dead and the Glades were still in one piece, thanks to the timely arrival of Metropolis's resident vigilante, Superman. The caped crusader had taken Malcolm's second second device into the air, destroying it before it could harm anyone, which meant that the Glades were still standing. Laurel removed the kettle from the heat, humming lightly under her breath and setting it on another oven mitt, searching for tea cups.

"Do you need any help?" a voice rasped out behind her and Laurel turned to smile at Oliver. There was still a light ring of bruises around his neck from his fight with Malcolm that he was somehow hiding from the general public.

"I've got it," she told him, keeping her voice low. "But thank you." He nodded at her and headed out towards the couch to join Tommy and Thea, who were bickering loudly over some asinine subject. The two had found out they were siblings just yesterday, but they'd spent all their lives acting like they were, so they had plenty of practice.

Laurel poured the tea and settled them on her own tray, the plastic top of a TV tray that Joanna had bought at a garage sale and painted for her. She carried it carefully out and settled it on her coffee table before curling up on the couch next to Tommy. "Are you moving, Laurel?" Thea asked from where she was perched on the far edge of the couch.

"Just for a bit," Laurel replied, leaning her head against her boyfriend's shoulder. "I have to get my voice under control, make sure I won't hurt anyone unless I intend to. Dad found this guy in New York, Theodore Grant, who might be able to help. I leave in the next month."

"Oh." Thea turned a wicked grin towards Laurel's boyfriend. "How's Tommy going to manage without you?"

"I'm coming with her," Tommy said and then blushed when Thea cooed at him. Oliver laughed and, although the noise sounded rough, it was happy. Laurel smiled, glad that one of her oldest friend's was able to smile again after everything he'd been through.

"You said you had something to ask me Ollie," Laurel said after taking a sip of her tea. "Ask away."

Oliver flushed and lifted a hand to rub the back of his neck, making her grin. "I, uh, I want to adopt Roy," he told her. "And I was wondering if you would be my attorney for that process."

"Of course," Laurel replied with a grin. She'd only met Roy once, when Tommy had sent her to pick up Oliver, who had been passed out on a rooftop after his struggle with Malcolm. The boy had half hidden behind Thea the entire time Laurel had been there, but his eyes had been wide with concern as Diggle had checked over the Queen scion. From what she'd been told, he was a
sweet kid that had been dealt a crappy hand in life and he deserved some kind of happiness. Part of her wasn't sold on the idea that Oliver was the best man for the job, but that didn't mean she wouldn't let him try. "Provided that it's before Tommy and I go to New York. What about your mother's trial?"

"Her attorney, Jean Loring, is on the case," Oliver reassured her, slipping an arm around a worried looking Thea's shoulders. "And Walter is running Queen Consolidated until Mom can do so again. We've got things covered on that end."

"Good," Laurel replied before tilting her head to look back at Tommy. "What about Merlyn Global?"

"I don't know," Tommy said. "The company is probably going to be hit hard after what Dad did. If it still exists after the dust settles, I'll be placed in charge, but I'm not sure I'm ready for that."

"Don't worry, Tommy. Whatever happens, we're here for you," Oliver told him.

"Same to you, moron," Tommy replied affectionately. "Don't go doing any more of that caped crusader stuff alone, even if your backup is just Felicity with her computers." Oliver gave Tommy a mocking salute that had Thea giggling and Laurel muffling her own laughter with a hand, half afraid the sound would break something.

"So, Smallville, how did your little emergency turn out?" Lois asked, perching on the edge of his desk with a knowing grin.

"My arrival happened to be very timely," Clark replied casually, not glancing up from his typing to acknowledge the dark haired woman's smug look.

"See, this is why you should always take my advice."

"Of course," was Clark's casual response. "Does this mean we're still on for dinner tonight?"

"So long as I don't get a better offer," Lois told him, and this time Clark looked up to catch her smile. "Remember, pick me up at five, Smallville. And I won't accept crappy excuses." Then she turned and sauntered off towards her own desk, no doubt researching possible sources for her next big story. He watched her go until Jimmy Olsen stepped into his sight line, chattering excitedly about a possibility for his next undercover investigative assignment to a hassled looking sports reporter who'd just started with the Daily Planet. Then Clark turned back to his article, determined to get it done long before five so he could be ready for his date with Lois.

Beneath the Glades, a slight, lean man with a head of wild, brown hair leaned over a vat of poisonous looking green chemicals. The liquid seemed to glow, illuminating the man's small frame and throwing shadows out behind him. A wide, insane smile spread across his face and he spun around gleefully to face the hired muscle behind him. The Glades were full of men like these, unemployed former factory workers who had resorted to working for anyone who would pay in order to keep food on the tables of their homes or high school dropouts who had excelled at sports, but not much else. All the Count needed to do was promise them employment which would earn them a living wage, and they had flocked to him.

"It's ready," he told the men gleefully. "Soon all of Starling City will come crawling to me, begging for their next fix." A little burst of uncontrollable laughter escaped the Count and it took him a moment to clamp down on the sound. "Keep watch," he ordered and then hurried out of the warehouse into the cool night air.
It had taken months, but finally he was successful. The Count had created a new designer drug, one that would be horribly addictive and would make him a fortune. Ever since he'd been a young child running drugs for the powerful of the Glades, he'd dreamed of the day when he would run his own empire. Soon his dream would be fully realized, partially in thanks to the study of the toxins used by infamous villains who did their work in Gotham City. His studies of those chemicals and their affects had helped him to create an even better drug. One he was going to call Vertigo.

Chapter End Notes

So we've reached the end of this story. Next up, Slow Poison, in which Oliver fights for custody of Roy and the Hood struggles to bring down Count Vertigo.

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