Good morning, Starling City. Gossip Girl here – your one and only source into the scandalous lives of Starling’s elite. Top story on my homepage? Oliver Queen. Everybody’s favourite playboy billionaire has just returned from a mysterious five-year absence...

Or, Arrow with a Gossip Girl twist - No island, no superheroes; just straight-up duh-rama.
Notes

Do people still do "fanfic trailers", or am I just that old? Hm. This in un'beta'ed, btw. Will not update regularly, but will finish. Someday. Cross my heart.
Good morning, Starling City. Gossip Girl here – your one and only source into the scandalous lives of Starling’s elite. Top story on my homepage? Oliver Queen. Everybody’s favourite playboy billionaire has just returned from a mysterious five-year absence.

“Laurel, you won’t believe this –“

“Not now, Tommy.”

“Someone saw Oliver getting off the Queen’s Gambit at the harbour!”

Everyone knows Oliver. And everyone is talking.

“Sara! It’s Oliver! He’s here!”

“Oh, my God. Oliver?”

“Who’s Oliver, beloved?”

And Laurel’s sister, Sara? Rumour has it she’s always had a thing for Oliver. Wonder why then she’s been so chummy of late with one Nyssa, daughter of Ra’s al Ghul, Heir to the Demon?

“…Nyssa, please. We’ve talked about this. Here we can’t… You know we can’t.”

“Do you ever plan on coming out to your friends, Sara? To your family, at least?”

Why did Oliver leave? Why did he return?

“Oliver, we really need to talk about your father.”

“Mother, I really–”

“Well, son, it’s been five years. I believe I’ve earned the right to know.”

“Where’s Thea?”

“Staying in Corto Maltese with friends. That’s the official story, anyhow.”
And Oliver’s old friend Tommy won’t let Oliver forget about their friendship, much as Oliver seems to want to pretend it never happened.

“Tommy Merlyn. Champagne and no tie. Glad to see some things never change.”

“Wish I could say the same for you. Whatever happened to you, man? You’re like, all burly and beardy.”

“Working out helped me with some… issues, I had, while I was away.”

“Yeah, that. Where were you?”

“Oh, you know. Around.”

And then there’s Felicity, erstwhile IT girl. Looks like the son of the former CEO is looking to take the reins of Daddy’s company, and everybody knows he can’t possibly do that if he doesn’t know how to send his own emails.

“I need help with my computer.”

“Sure. What’s wrong with it?”

“I spilt a latte on it back at the yacht. And then may have dropped it on the floor and kicked it because it wouldn’t turn on this morning. And last night.”

“Right. Being your EA, does it mean I have to deal with this particular brand of crazy often?”

“Afraid so.”

“Right. I need coffee. …and, by the way, my contract states pretty clearly that I’m not to bring you coffee. Like, ever.”

“Why?”

“Because I went to MIT, and I’m a genius. I refuse to be your coffee girl. As a matter of fact, why don’t you bring me coffee since it looks like I’m the only one doing any work in this office today?”

“…Okay. How do you like your coffee?”

And now that Oliver is back, will Starling City ever be the same? We’re all just dying to see what happens next…

And who am I? That’s a secret I’ll never tell.

You know you love me.

XOXO,
Gossip Girl
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Huh. 30 pages on MS Word. Hope you guys have fun :)

Oliver Queen breathes in the foul-smelling air of the harbour. Starling City looks much the same: the skyline is unaltered; the smells of fish and pollution and traffic fumes still cling to the late afternoon, down the gangway there is John Diggle waiting for him. After five years Oliver only wishes he could believe himself as unchanged as his city.

“Mr. Queen,” Diggle greets him with a small smile. “It’s good to have you back.”

Oliver clasps the hand of his family’s head of security. “Just Oliver, Digg. Mr. Queen is my father.”

“If the rumours I’ve been hearing are true, I’ll have to insist.”

Oliver’s polite smile freezes in place. “Can’t imagine what you’re talking about, John.”

Diggle shrugs and holds the car door open for him. “To the mansion?”

“No,” Oliver says rolling his shoulders back once, as if preparing for a sparring match. “I want to see my mother.”

Diggle seems to laugh at him with his eyes on the rear-view mirror. “Don’t you wanna go home and at least take a shower, Oliver?”

Oliver strains a grin in response. “Is that your way of telling me I stink?”

John lifts his hands from the steering wheel in a peace gesture. “Your mother’s orders. She’d have my job if I let you waltz into Malcolm Merlyn’s cocktail party without a tie.”

Oliver’s smile acquires a cutting edge. “The rumours you’ve been hearing are absolutely true, Mr. Diggle. Now, please, take me to Mr. Merlyn’s estate. I need to have words with my mother.”

Diggle, to his credit, nods and starts the car. “Your funeral, Mr. Queen.”

“Oh, no,” Oliver sighs. “Not mine.”
“Your dad is going to kill me,” Laurel Lance giggles. She feels like a teenager whenever she’s with him, and right now – having stumble-kissed their way to his bedroom – her tainted teenage years are being rewritten into the most wonderful fantasy.

“My dad?” Tommy Merlyn asks as he roughly undoes the buttons of his shirt, likewise amused. Sneaking around with Laurel is indeed likely to anger his father, but it’s also a significant step towards making this evening bearable. Not to mention, “My dad’s not the freaking captain of SCPD, is he?”

Laurel sighs appreciatively as his shirt comes off and he pounces back on her. Unlike her teenage experiences, Tommy knows exactly what he’s doing. “I mean for sneaking out like this. Maybe we should get back to the party…”

To illustrate his opinion of re-joining the party, Tommy’s hands find her garter and begin sliding her panties down while he kisses behind her ear sloppily.

Laurel’s eager encouragement is cut short by her phone chiming.

“Do you want to–“ Tommy begins, only to be cut short by Laurel flipping them over and straddling him.

The phone chimes again; this time, his. Tommy is a tad too busy to even register that, what with Laurel crossing her arms over her head to remove her dress. Just as she begins lifting it both their phones chime again, and such a chime as makes them both freeze.

“Don’t,” Laurel cautions, but Tommy is already reaching for the offending device. She slides off him and begins combing her hair with her fingers, suddenly angry she can’t find her shoes and that Tommy obviously doesn’t keep an emergency makeup kit in his room.

“Laurel, you won’t believe this –“

No. “Not now, Tommy.”

“Someone saw Oliver getting off the Queen’s Gambit at the harbour!”

Laurel, one shoe in one hand and balancing precariously on the very high heel of the other, nearly falls over. “What?”

“Oliver’s back,” Tommy says shrugging his shirt back on and scanning the room for his tie. “And here. As in, at the party.”

Laurel curses and, for good measure, curses Oliver as she yanks the door open and marches back to the party. Tommy, looking as disheveled and feeling queasier in the stomach, follows her.

Oliver Queen is back. Laurel’s ex-boyfriend. Tommy’s best friend. Who disappeared to Asia five years ago without a word to either of them. Who does not know his ex-girlfriend and professed best friend are fucking.

Shit.
Shit. Oliver. Oliver Fucking Queen. Shit-shit-shit-shit-shit…

“Sara?”

Sara Lance shakes her head and switches off her phone. Framed by the roses of Merlyn’s garden, Nyssa al Ghul – in regal black and gold, fierce and fiercely beautiful – looks at her worriedly.

“I’m sorry, Nyssa. I was just distracted.”

“You seemed scared just then, beloved. Is it something to do with your father? Is he all right?”

Sara looks around uncomfortably. She takes in her own bland black dress, the only piece of half-formal clothes she owns, and frowns. The garden is empty; she made sure of that before they had walked out. Still, she can’t help but hate Laurel a little for forcing her to come; she hates herself some more for coaxing Nyssa into joining her. Her lover doesn’t deserve the words she’s about to utter.

“No. Not my dad, it was just something on Gossip Girl. And, Nyssa… please. We’ve talked about this. Here we can’t… You know we can’t.”

Nyssa’s perfect poise slips a fraction of an inch. Her eyebrows draw together as she whispers “Do you ever plan on coming out to your friends, Sara? To your family, at least?”

Sara takes her girlfriend’s hand – but not before making sure once again that they are alone. “I do, Nyssa, I do. I just need… time.”

Something in the blue of Sara’s eyes softens Nyssa’s features into a small smile. “Time shall not change how I feel about you, my canary.”

She wants to kiss Nyssa so badly she nearly misses Laurel’s footsteps rushing towards them. Good thing Nyssa’s a ninja and Laurel has apparently broken a heel or been ravished against a wall; likely both. The girlfriends pull away so it merely looks like they’ve been talking quietly, rather than what they really wished they could be doing.

“Sara!” Her sister huffs. “It’s Oliver! He’s here!”

Sara, against her better judgement, blushes. “Oh, my God. Oliver?”

Laurel makes an exasperated noise, like she wants very much to blame her little sister for something and thinks better of it, and walks back inside. Nyssa turns concerned eyes to her girlfriend.

“Who’s Oliver, beloved?”

Sara sits – or falls – on the nearest bench, hands cold in Nyssa’s. “You remember the day we met? You found me sitting dazed on a sidewalk on campus and bought me cream Danishes?”

Nyssa’s thumb traces warm circles on her wrist, comforting and familiar. “I’d never forget it, beloved. What does it have to do with this Oliver?”

“He’s the guy from the night before. And my sister doesn’t know. Any of it.”

Nyssa’s quiet “Oh” shows she understands enough. She always does, it’s part of why Sara loves her so much – since the first time Nyssa laid eyes on Sara she has always known how to make
Sara feels safe.

Nyssa lets her girlfriend stew in her uncomfortable silence for about a minute before saying “I have always hated these social functions your sister seems to be so fond of. Do you wish to leave?”

Sara’s worried frown blossoms into a grateful grin. “Yes. And, Nyssa?”

“Yes, Sara?”

“I love you.”

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Oliver hasn’t been through the front door yet when the buzzing starts: choruses of questions and wonderings and speculations he’s sure are only half meant to be whispers, none of them too complementary of his person.

According to Starling City’s elite, he’s debauched all of China’s female population – and at least a third of the male population, he hears as he advances through the well-dressed crowd – and drunk all the vodka in Russia; he’s gotten at least three girls in the Philippines pregnant – “More than once!” – and killed not only one, but five or six men in Australia; he’s been lost at an opium den for a year, or in jail for dealing drugs and working for the mob – that last one actually makes him turn around and give Ray Palmer and the blonde on his arm the stink eye –, but everybody seems to agree that he’s back for one reason and one reason only: he’s finally run out of money.

Good.

“Mother,” Oliver calls, voice catching as he sees his mother – blond, beautiful, red dress and diamonds – with her hand on Malcolm Merlyn’s arm.

Moira Queen turns around with a smile as artificial as any politician’s, arms opening wide at the sight of her son. Not a single maternal bone in her body, exactly as he remembers. “Oliver! What a wonderful surprise!”

She reminds him, as he accepts the professed hug, that he ought to have gone home and at least showered before showing up, “but I’m glad to see you. Did you come alone?”

Oliver works his jaw before extending what he hopes is a polite smile to Mr. Merlyn and requesting a minute with his mother. Malcolm’s unerring social grace replies with a friendly clap at his arm and an “Of course, son. And welcome back,” that has him gritting his teeth further.

As soon as Malcolm is out of earshot, to Oliver’s great surprise, his mother turns the kindest, saddest blue eyes on him. “Oliver. I’ve missed you so much, my boy.”

“Mom,” he sighs, allowing her to hold his hands. “You know why I’m here.”

As suddenly as it has dawned, his mother’s loveliness seems to set into steeliness. “Oliver, we really need to talk about your father.”

Not the reason he’s here. “Mother, I really–”
“Well, son, it’s been five years,” Moira says in her best level tone. “I believe I’ve earned the right to know.”

Oliver crosses his arms over his chest and straightens his spine, the most imposing he can manage to look in front of Starling City’s mayor. “Where’s Thea?”

A politician through and through, Moira cocks her head to the side discreetly, making sure nobody’s eavesdropping. “Staying in Corto Maltese with friends. At least that’s the official story.”

“Mom.”

“I can text you the address of the clinic, if that’s what you wish, Oliver,” she says pulling a perfectly coifed strand of hair from her face, keeping up appearances as always. “But let us not do this now. I just want to know, did your father come back with you?”

“No,” Oliver says averting his eyes. “He’s not coming back. He’s retiring, in fact. To Moscow.”

“I… see,” Moira says saddened, though clearly unsurprised. “When will his lawyers be getting in touch?”

“Soon, I expect,” Oliver says with a studied shrug. “I’m sure Mr. Merlyn will be pleased.”

At that, Moira’s eyebrows nearly reach her hairline. “Mr. Merlyn?”

If he grits his teeth any harder, Oliver’s sure he’ll crack them. “I’m not eight anymore, Mother. Come to think of it, even eight-year-old me should have known.”

For a split second, Oliver thinks his mother is going to slap him. “Mr. Merlyn,” Moira says through her own clenched jaw, “is not the man, if you must know. And since you and your father have been away for the past five years, Oliver, you do not get to judge me.”

She turns away from him, eyes suddenly bright, before continuing. “When I asked Mr. Diggle to bring you here, I thought I was being a good mother and letting you see all your friends again; I thought I’d make sure you got a warm welcome back. I certainly did not expect this from my own son.”

Behind her, he sees Laurel run to the garden, looking like the dream of her he remembers and definitely avoiding looking at him. Across the room, coming down the stairs, Tommy catches his eye. Oliver takes a deep breath before leaning in to whisper in his mother’s ear.

“You don’t get to do what you did to my sister and still play the good mother card,” he says with as much venom as his voice can hold before taking a step forward with a plastered-on smile to clasp Tommy Merlyn’s hand.

“Oliver Queen!” Tommy intones, cheerfully raising a glass at him, as if not a day has passed since they’ve seen each other last, and pulls him in for a hug. “I’ve missed you, man!”

“Tommy Merlyn,” Oliver says appreciatively, hoping the tick in his eye goes unnoticed. “Champagne and no tie. Glad to see some things never change.”

“Wish I could say the same for you,” Tommy says looking around uncomfortably, ostensibly in order to get his friend a glass of champagne as well. “Whatever happened to you, man? You’re like, all burly and beardy.”

Oliver’s smile at this observation is his first half-genuine one probably since he saw Tommy last, five years before. “Working out helped me with some… issues, I had, while I was away.”
“Yeah, that,” Tommy says, champagne given up on and cheerfulness ebbing. “Where were you?”

The corners of Oliver’s mouth turn downwards. “Oh, you know. Around. Enjoying my last bout of freedom. Listen,” he says leaning in and looking around, “have you seen Laurel? I really need to talk to her.”

And it’s a good thing he looks around, for it gives Tommy the two seconds he needs to compose his face into a viable smile. “She just left. Wanna go grab some drinks? There’s a new club opening tonight at–“

Oliver pulls back. “Thanks, man, but there’s somewhere I have to be. Maybe we could catch up some other time?”

Tommy, though he ought to be relieved, feels more than just a little insulted. “Yeah. I’m sorry, are you actually giving me the brush off? After what happened between our families? I mean, that’s why you’re back, isn’t it?”

At his phone buzzing in his pocket, what’s left of the mechanical smile leaves Oliver completely. Does Tommy know about Thea? “I’m sorry. I really have to go. Family stuff.”

His best friend stares back at him blankly, clearly not understanding him; okay, so he doesn’t know, at least not all of it. “I promise I’ll explain everything,” he says already turning to leave. “Give my respects to your father.”

And with those words Oliver Queen bails on the party, checks his phone and jumps back into the Bentley, giving Diggle the address his mother had just texted him. Laurel isn’t the only one to silently watch him leave, but it’s for her only that he has eyes as the car pulls out of the driveway.

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The room is cosily bright, the colours muted to dull blues and greys, and Thea Queen – thin, frayed hair, dark circles under her eyes and long sleeves – is playing solitaire on her tablet when Oliver arrives. He stands by the door for a good minute or two before his sister notices him. She looks up with tired eyes, but her face soon breaks into a wide grin.

“Ollie! You’re back!!” she exclaims getting up, tablet tossed aside, and jumps into her brother’s open arms. “I missed you so much, you son of a bitch!”

Oliver bites his tongue. She’s so light, and there’s so little of her left to hug. “Missed you, too, Speedy. How are you feeling?”

“I’m fiïne,” she says pulling her sleeves down and showing him her wrists. “See? They didn’t even scar! Please tell Mom I can go home already.”

Oliver flinches. “Your lack of scaring isn’t why Mom’s keeping you here, Thea.”

“Well, it’s why you came back, isn’t it?” She says pulling the sleeves down and crossing her arms over her chest, shoulders suddenly hunched and very small. “Is that also why Robert didn’t come back?”

Oliver pats her shoulder so they’d sit down, choosing his next words carefully. “I did come back for you. As soon as I heard about the accident. Dad… had business to take care of.”
“Your dad, you mean,” she says moodily. “And does his ‘business’ wear seven-inch heels and that horrible vanilla perfume what used to infect his office? God, Isabel Rochev is younger than you! How dare he— But, whatever.” Thea wipes at her eyes, anger bubbling below the surface. “He could have stayed, though—I really don’t care that he was cheating on Mom, she cheated on him, too—hell, I’m living proof of it!”

“The reason Dad left had nothing to do with you, Thea. It had to do with Mom, with their marriage, and, yes, with Rochev, too.”

“Then why did you go with him? Was it to try to change his mind?”

“In part.”

“What was the other part?”

Oliver looks away. “Laurel.”

Thea cocks her head to the side, very much like the twelve-year-old he remembers from before he left. “You followed Robert to China and then to Russia to run away from your girlfriend? There are easier ways to break up with someone, you know.”

“I had to figure some stuff out,” he says. It’s true, too. “But that’s not important,” he says putting on a playful smile, one like he used to wear when they were kids. “What’s important is that I’m back, for good, and that I’m not leaving my baby sister alone ever again.”

Thea snorts. “Aren’t you the best big brother… of the two that I have.”

Oliver bites his tongue again. “Has Tommy been here to see you?”

It’s Thea’s turn to avert her eyes and hug herself tighter. “He doesn’t know. At least I think he doesn’t. That I’m here, that is. Mom and— and Malcolm told everybody I’m backpacking across Europe or something. To ‘digest’ the news.”

“Would you like me to talk to him?”

A weak, shaky laugh escapes Thea. “And tell him what? That the half-sister you two share took Vertigo and drove her car into a wall when she found out Malcolm Merlyn’s her father? But that part he knows. Maybe you should jump straight to how I tried to slit my wrists at the hospital when my first suicide attempt failed; how do you think my new big brother is gonna like that?!”

“Thea,” is all Oliver can say as his baby sister barrels into his chest and begins sobbing.

He lets her cry and tremble and curse at Robert Queen for raising her as his own and not coming back for her when it came out that she isn’t; at Moira, for having been unfaithful to her worthless, cheating husband, but above all for conceiving with Malcolm Fucking Merlyn; at Oliver for leaving with their worthless father and his mistress for what could only be described as deranged, stupid reasons that make no sense at all and…

Thea cries herself to exhaustion before the nurse shows up with her medication. Oliver shakes her gently awake and makes her take the pills, which she has no energy to say no to.

“How long will her treatment take?” Oliver asks.

The nurse smiles sadly at him as she tucks Thea in. “This one, she’ll be here a while. Not only is she a mess, poor thing; she’s also hardly eating and, till this very moment, refusing medication. It’s
a good thing you came to see her.”

“Does my mother come here often?”

“Every other morning,” she shrugs. “Her father’s here every day, though, to make sure she eats lunch; he sometimes manages it, too.”

A muscle twitches in Oliver’s jaw. He thanks the nurse and asks if he can stay longer, only to be told visiting hours are over, but that he’ll be more than welcome in the morning. Resigned, Oliver once again finds himself in front of a faintly amused Diggle.

“Where to now, Mr. Queen?”

“When did you become my driver, Mr. Diggle?”

He shrugs. “Your mother offered me quite the bonus to keep an eye on you personally.”

Oliver makes a show of checking his non-existent watch. “It’s getting late. Don’t you have to report back?”

A dry chuckle. “I’m your bodyguard. ‘Reporting’ is not my job; keeping you safe is.”

“Who were you just texting, then?”

Diggle’s smile grows fixed. “My sister-in-law, if you must know. Now,” he says stepping back and pushing open the car door, “let me drive you to the mansion. As you observed, it’s getting late.”

“Your sister-in-law, huh?” Oliver continues conversationally. “Does she still work at the Big Belly Burger?”

Diggle rolls his eyes. “Let me guess. You’re hungry.”

“Famished.”

“You can’t run from your mother forever, you know.”

“Oh, I’ve done a pretty good job of it for the last five years. I think I can manage it for one more night.”

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Sara shifts from one foot to the other in front of her sister’s door. She can do this, she can totally do this. She’s promised Nyssa, and Laurel’s a safe place to start; Mom may just start wailing about “grandbabies” and telling dad will be awkward as hell; her sister, weird though she may have been acting of late, she knows she can trust. Also, she has come armed with a packet of gluten-free rice cakes and peace lattes. With a steadying breath, Sara raises her hand to knock and–

The door swings open. “…know that’s a lie, sweetheart. I know for a fact that Oliver never–”

Tommy Merlyn, in yesterday’s suit and smelling strongly of her sister’s flowery shampoo, blinks wide blue eyes at her. “Sara,” he says startled, then, almost like an afterthought, adds “Hi.”
Sara grins slowly. Suddenly a lot of Laurel’s recent weirdness makes an equal lot of sense. “Hi, Tommy. Good morning.”

“Yeah, right. Morning,” he says, deer-in-the-headlights look slowly dissolving into his trademark grin. “It’s very nice to see you. Here. At your sister’s. I was just—”

“Leaving,” Laurel, wearing a man’s shirt – not the one Tommy was wearing last night; he’s wearing that; although the one on Laurel does look like a Tommy Merlyn type of shirt – comes to lean on the door frame and indiscreetly pushes Tommy away. “Tommy was just leaving. Weren’t you, Tommy?”

“I was, indeed, I was.” Tommy straightens his non-existent tie. “A good day to you, Miss Lance,” he says with a mock bow to Laurel, and then a second to Sara with another “Miss Lance.”

And thus he hops down the corridor, practically skipping out of sight. Sara turns a raised eyebrow and a barely contained grin to her sister, who is, fittingly, blushing.

“Out with it, Sara,” Laurel says walking back inside and leaving the door open for her. “Just say… whatever you have to say.”

“I actually came here to say… whatever,” Sara shrugs. “Which doesn’t matter now. I really just have one question.” She sighs, then chuckles. “Make that two.”

Laurel is making her bed, both sides rumpled, and avoiding looking at her sister. She’s smiling, though, which Sara did not expect. “And what are those questions?”

“I guess the most obvious one is ‘Really, Laurel?’” She asks settling the lattes and packet of rice cakes on the coffee table, then plopping down on the couch to wait for her sister.

“What?” Laurel asks innocently, giving up on finding her own clothes and simply sliding on a pair of male underwear from her dresser. “It’s just Tommy.”

“Uh-hm,” Sara agrees sliding Laurel the coffee as her sister comes to the couch to join her. “Tommy Merlyn, second hottest Starling City bachelor, leaving your apartment in yesterday’s suit…”

“Like he’s never done that before,” Laurel says nonchalantly. “You know Tommy, he’s a clingy drunk; I just made sure he didn’t end up passed out on some sidewalk where he'd be robbed blind and likely murdered.”

“And you two did disappear yesterday at the party at about the same time,” Sara says with a grin and poke, the first that widens and the second that repeats itself with each following clause. “And he smelled like your shampoo. And you’re wearing his shirt. And his underwear. Which I saw you take from a drawer!”

Laurel is torn between poking her sister back and hiding her face into one of those delicious rice cakes. She settles on the latter. “…Fine. I slept with him. Your point, dear sister?”

Sara steals Laurel’s latte. “My point,” she says with a slurp, “is that, if Tommy has a drawer, there’s no way you just slept with him because Oliver’s back in town. This has to have been going on for months.”

Laurel huffs. Damn little sisters and their perceptiveness. “I don’t know how long ‘this’ has been going on, but yeah, months. First it was just dinner, then it was just sex, and then he started forgetting his stuff here. I swear the drawer was an accident.”
Sara grins. “Yeah. Like the dinner and the sex and the feelings; complete accident.”

Laurel shoots her a dirty look. “There are no feelings. It’s Tommy, for goodness’ sake.”

“You two are so Chuck and Blair,” Sara laughs. “It’s cute. Speaking of which, why isn’t this all over Gossip Girl?”

Laurel’s smile diminishes as she looks away, picks up another rice cake. “Because of Oliver.”

Sara nods slowly, wishing for a second that Oliver had just up and drowned in the Pacific and never come back. There is one conversation she hopes she never has to have with her sister. “Still. You could have told me.”

Laurel snorts. “Right. Tell my party-crazy little sister that I – the responsible elder sister – have been sleeping with my boyfriend’s best friend.”

The latte seems to curdle in Sara’s stomach at her sister’s words. She swallows back the nausea and forces herself to focus on Laurel, on the now. “So, are we back to calling Ollie your boyfriend?”

What’s left of Laurel’s smile fades. “No. Let’s… Let’s just not go there, okay?”

Sara nods again. That’s a can of worms she’s also glad to keep sealed. “Okay. Can I ask my second question?”

Laurel, though certain she’ll regret it, says “Fire away.”

Sara’s grin is a ten-year-old’s as she pokes her big sister yet again. “Would yours and Tommy’s ship be Lommy or something more like… Merlance? Oh, I know! Laurommy!”

Laurel throws a cushion at her. After much too much strained laughing and the end of the rice cakes, they settle on “Merlance”. Sara leaves without mentioning Nyssa once and with a churning at the pit of her stomach at the thought of the next phone call she knows she has to make. Not of the call itself, or even of the person she’s calling, but of the actual seeing and speaking to said person. It was shit that she missed the bastard, too, and ever shittier that she wants to talk to him.

Oh, to hell with it all.

“Hey,” she says into her phone as she sits on her motorcycle outside. “You owe me breakfast. … Yes, ‘now’. I don’t care that it’s 10 o’clock. … Use my shower? Have you lost your mind? … Yeah, fine. I’ll text you my address. Bring a fresh change of clothes, though. … Ha. I forgot how funny you are. No. … Yeah, see ya in a jiff. Bye.”

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The first thing Sara Lance says to him – once she’s shouted his name for the whole street to hear and called him a filthy son of a bitch, which he may just deserve, as she hugged the air out of him – is that he is filthy and stinks like he’s spent the night at a greasy burger joint.

“Which is why I asked to use your shower,” Oliver says with a grin as he finally manages to untangle himself from her. “I just… haven’t been home yet.”
“Dread the Moira Queen that hasn’t seen her beautiful boy in five years,” Sara laughs as she directs him into her building. “Have you brought clothes?”

Oliver lifts a bag he’s holding, a fancy shopping bag from a fancy menswear shop he used to buy from. He also shows her another, with eggs, cheese, greens and other fancy omelette ingredients. “So, the money rumour isn’t true,” she comments as the elevator doors close behind them.

“I didn’t spend my entire trust fund on booze and hookers and opium, despite what Ray Palmer would have everyone believe."

Sara chuckles. “I don’t know why you hate that guy so much. He’s the only self-proclaimed ‘philanthropist’ I know that actually does any philanthropy’ing. And he’s only behind the ‘he’s murdered people’ rumour, by the way; I think it was that Danforth girl that first said something about opium.”

“Everyone else just assumed the hookers and the booze, then?”

“You are Oliver Queen, after all,” Sara shrugs as she takes her key and lets him into her and Nyssa’s apartment. “And welcome to the al Ghul-Lance household.”

Oliver stops for a moment to take in the place. The pallet of ochres and earthly tones isn’t what he’d usually associate with the younger Lance, and there’s a middle-eastern feel to some of the décor, but there’s also warmth to it that is all Sara.

“This place is very… nice,” Oliver says politely. “Been here long?”

“Since I finished college.”

“Al Ghul?”

Sara stops in the middle of taking the groceries from him. Were it anyone else she might have frozen and babbled some incoherence about roommates that pompously name their shared living quarters while her heart ran a mile a minute and she wished the ground would just swallow her whole – but this is Oliver. And the bastard has that infuriatingly charming smile of his that used to make Sara think she was in love with him. (Which, who knew, is something she’s been vaccinated against after one night of the very best sex of her life; now she sees his adorableness as a dorky quirk that makes her smile and crack up and feel like she can trust him completely – which she can, because Laurel remains blissfully oblivious that the reason her boyfriend abandoned her five years ago is that he slept with her baby sister).

“Yeah,” she says with a blush and a smile she cannot help. “Nyssa al Ghul.”

Oliver blinks twice rapidly, registering, she guesses, that ‘Nyssa’ is a girl’s name, and what Sara’s pinking face implies. He’s great about it, though, arriving at an all-encompassing “Oh.”

“Yes?” That’s all you got?”

He bites the inside of his cheek, smiling too (the bastard; this shouldn’t be funny). “Is she home?”

“No, she’s gone to see her father at his dojo.” Sara crosses her arms, but her smile’s only growing. She’s going to burst out laughing any minute now. “You’re taking this a lot better than I thought you would.”

Oliver is, too. He takes a step back and lifts his hands in mock defeat. “I’m offended, Miss Lance, that you have such a low opinion of me.”
Sara shakes her head and then pushes him towards the bathroom. “I knew I loved you for a reason. Now go shower. Your stink’s infecting my apartment. I’ll have to burn a lot of incense before Nyssa arrives. And you’re still cooking.”

He assures her that he will just before the door closes. Sara flops down on the couch and takes out her phone to text Nyssa.

“I told someone XD,” she types giddily.

You did? :D who?

Nyssa used a smiley face. Awn. “Oliver,” she texts back, then sends “we’re having late breakfast. Come home.”

The next text takes longer than usual to arrive. I’ll be a while. We’ll talk when I get home, beloved.

“You’re not jealous, are you? It’s just breakfast.”

I love you, my canary.

“And just Oliver.”

She waits a minute. Then two. Nothing.

“Nyssa.”

Nothing again. She strains to remember that phrase in Arabic that Nyssa taught her a few nights ago and sends it as a voice text. This time Nyssa replies quickly.

Sara, I am with my father. He heard you.

While Sara isn’t completely clear on the exact meaning of each word that makes up what she just sent her girlfriend, she’s pretty sure it’s not something any father wants to hear said to his daughter.

“Damn. Sorry?”

A voice text pops up. Sara presses play and shivers as the cool, collected voice of Ra’s al Ghul comes through.

“Ta-er Al-Asfer. Your pronunciation is atrocious. There is much you still must learn – keeping certain matters between you and my daughter confined to the four walls of your bedroom being one of them.” In the background she can hear Nyssa’s mortified “Father!” before he continues. “My daughter, too, has much to learn, which is why she is not getting off training early today. Content yourself with seeing her tonight and no sooner. I wish you a pleasant day.”

“Who was that?” Oliver asks coming out of the bathroom in his new clothes – rather fancy-looking, she notices, fancier than he used to dress, anyway. “Are you all right? You look pale.”

Sara tosses her phone on the pile of cushions on the floor. “Nyssa’s father hates me.”

Oliver starts setting the ingredients he’s bought on the kitchen counter, looking around for a frying pan and other utensils. “I don’t think I ever got the father of any girl I dated to like me, either.”

“Yeah, but you were a jerk.”
He’s found his way around the kitchen by the time she’s dragged herself out of the couch to lean on the counter and watch him cook. “True,” he agrees, hands flying over the many spices he brought in and making the kitchen smell like heaven. “And what did you do to make him hate you?”

“He thinks I’ll break his daughter’s heart,” she sighs. “And I may have just sent her a voice text in Arabic telling her I want to eat her out and how I intend to do it – which he overheard.”

Oliver’s brimming amusement as he looks at her makes her want to punch him. “Yeah, you win. Going graphic on parents is something even I haven’t done.”

“Uh-huh,” she says sitting on one of the stools around the counter and doing her best not to drool as Oliver places the mother of all omelettes in front of her – tomatoes, assorted greens, broccoli, cheese and God knows what else that makes it so gorgeous. She takes a bite and lets her eyes roll to the back of her head. “If it’s at all possible, I think you improved your cooking skills while on the run.”

Another pair of eggs is cracked as Oliver shoots her a dirty look. “I wasn’t ‘on the run’. And thank you.”

“You were so. I don’t believe half the crazy stories that popped up on Gossip Girl about you these last five years, but–“

“I haven’t killed anyone, haven’t had any opium, did not get anyone pregnant,” he enumerates as he makes himself an omelette twice as hardy as hers. “Although I did go to some crazy parties. Had a job. Even tried going to college again, but that didn’t stick.”

Sara knows that tone too well. Also, she remembers that particular GG blast. “The Chinese twins and the Australian dude?”

Oliver laughs. “That blast was accurate. Mostly.”

“No yours, then?”

“No, not mine,” he nods. “Then there was the job with the Yamashiros – Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea; fun times,” he grins. “And then mainland China, which wasn’t nearly as much fun, and then Russia,” the grin lopsides and fades. “Russia was definitely not fun.”

“So, all the vodka drinking rumours…?”

“Not one person can drink all the vodka in Russia, Sara.”

“Saying you didn’t at least try?”

A grand return of the dashing grin. “I did. All I got was landed in hospital. Alcohol poisoning followed by withdrawal. High point of my leave of absence from our lovely city.” He shakes his head and turns off the stove. “I’m never drinking again. Ever.”

“My hero,” she smiles as he sits opposite her. She lets him poke at his omelette once or twice before getting up to look for juice, not wanting to and knowing she has to broach the next subject. “And what about your dad?”

Oliver drops his knife, but his dashing smile barely wavers. “He’s in Russia. Living with Isabel Rochev.”

Sara scrunches up her nose. “That bitchy intern?”
“Yeah. Apparently they’re ‘soulmates’,” here he does grimace. “Dad even broke up the QC Russian branch into a separate company to give it to her. He’s officially retired, by the way. And divorcing my mother. Also, not my little sister’s biological father, as I’m sure the rest of the world already knows.”

Sara grimaces, too. Malcolm Merlyn had very publicly changed his will about a week ago to include none other than Thea Queen as his heir alongside Tommy Merlyn, his only legitimate son. The media, rather than focusing on the fact that Malcolm Merlyn was apparently dying, had decided to dig up Mayor Moira Queen’s past and find irrefutable evidence that her youngest daughter was the product of an illicit affair with the CEO of Merlyn Global. Not satisfied with shaming her parents, the hounds then went after Thea herself, drawing parallels between her behaviour and her newly-discovered half-brother’s.

“I haven’t heard from Thea since the accident,” Sara says more quietly, pouring Oliver a glass of orange juice and coming back to sit across from him. “How is she?”

Not unlike Sara, whose dearest held secret just poured forth in his presence, he, too, just blurts out “It wasn’t an accident.”

Sara reaches for his hand, which he squeezes back gratefully. The blue of his eyes show ten different kinds of pain; she can guess the source of at least nine. “Where is she now, Ollie?”

“The Ostroff Centre,” he says quietly, then takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. Sara squeezes his hand again and the rest of the story slips out of him almost against his volition. To Sara, at least, he doesn’t have to pretend to have it all under control or not to be scared.

“So that’s why you came back,” she concludes once he’s done talking and his omelette has gone cold. “You said your mother’s keeping it quiet? Nobody even knows she’s institutionalised?”

“Yeah. Mom’s been visiting her mornings and Malcolm during lunch, and I plan to be there as much as I can, too.”

“Why not every day?”

The tenth kind of pain – the one she doesn’t yet understand – manifests itself on his next words. “My father appointed me CEO of Queen Consolidated. Starting this afternoon.”

The laughter that has been threatening to overwhelm Sara since she first laid eyes on him that morning finally bubbles up and over. She bursts into the most earnest fit of giggles since Laurel’s first debut on Gossip Girl as “Starling’s new Queen Consort”.

Oliver gives up on his food. “Really, Sara?”

“You,” Sara gasps as she clutches her stomach. “CEO. Oliver Fucking Queen, playboy extraordinaire second only to Tommy Merlyn, most eligible and least responsible bachelor in all of Starling City, fracking CEO of Queen Consolidated!!”

Horribly aware he’s taking a page from his mother’s book, Oliver daintily dabs the corner of his mouth with a paper napkin before getting up to leave. “Thank you for the vote of confidence, Sara.”

She wipes at her eyes, laughter subsiding. “Sorry, Ollie. It’s just… hysterical, when you think about it.”

“I’ve been trying really hard not to think about it, to be honest,” he says scratching the back of his
“Healthy attitude,” she tells him with a friendly punch to his shoulder. “Jump in headfirst, don’t mind the rocks beneath.”

Speaking of which… “Sara,” he says turning around, suddenly serious. “Can I ask you something awkward?”

Sara notices the shift in him and pulls up short. “Yeah.”

“Is Laurel seeing anyone? Seriously, I mean.”

Sara takes a second to truly appreciate his kicked-puppy eyes and the fact that Laurel is going to kill her no matter how she answers that question.

“Laurel hates your guts for pulling a Houdini on her,” she answers instead, crossing her arms. “And in the interest of me maintaining a kinda okay relationship with my sister, she can’t know about…” She makes a vague gesture between them.

Oliver’s lips quirk upwards. “Is that your protective younger sister ‘stay the hell away from my sister’ speech?”

Sara punches him again, not so friendlily anymore. “I’m serious. Laurel hates your guts hard. And you don’t wanna hear my dad’s ‘stay the hell away from my daughter’ speech. He hates your guts even harder.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” he says with a nod as he reaches for the door. “And thank you for letting me use your shower.”

He leaves, apparently calling someone called Diggle who yells a lot at him through the phone, and Sara’s left alone until the evening.

Being alone is one truly unhealthy thing to do, Sara reckons, because she thinks too much when she’s alone. Like how she trusts Oliver because there are no secrets between them – until now, that is, and he’s gonna hate her when he finds out about Tommy and Laurel and that she knew about Tommy and Laurel; Laurel is going to hate her for knowing Oliver apparently wants to get back together – because she knows he won’t tell Laurel about having slept with Sara – and that when (not if, when) she finds out, and if she actually does let Oliver back in…

Sara hates the conclusion she’s reached. Hates it. Because if – when – it comes to choosing between her loyalty to her oldest friend and her loyalty to her sister, it’s really a hateful, hateful no brainer.

She texts Nyssa again.

“I think I should tell Laurel.”

*I thought we already agreed you’d tell her first.*

“About me and Oliver.”

It takes her a while, but Nyssa texts back. *She will not thank you for it.*

“I know. But I don’t think keeping secrets will help either.”

*If you think it’s best, beloved. I’m here for you <3*
Sara sniffs. She didn’t realise she has been wanting to cry since she saw that GG blast saying Oliver was back, but she does now. All the hysterical laughter and the anxiety of hiding and the frustration with herself only boil down to that – she has screwed up, bad, and it’s high time she faced up to it.

And thank heavens for Nyssa.

“I’m going over to the dojo,” she types, already grabbing her jacket and keys. “We’re going into your old room, locking the door and I’m going to cry in your arms and we’ll make out. *Then* I’ll go see Laurel. OK?”

She can almost hear Nyssa laughing. What about my father?

Sara sends a rude emoji and flips off her phone.

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“Oh, fudge.”

Walter Steele, CFO to Queen Consolidated, British inside and out, blinks once, but cannot help the smallest of smiles at the IT girl in front of him. “I’m sorry, Miss Smoak. I did not quite catch that.”

Felicity Smoak, all of twenty-five, blond hair in an unflattering ponytail, and with panda bears in her shoes, blinks several times before saying, “You’re serious. I mean, when Mayor Queen came by my cubicle yesterday with all those weird questions, I just thought she’d figured out I was the one who hacked the city hall server to get the clean-up of the park near my apartment moved up, but no, she was actually—“

“Miss Smoak,” Walter, kindly smiling, interrupts her. “You were my first choice for the position based on your impressive résumé and successful projects developed as part of our IT department. Mayor Queen, however – as you may expect given her interest in what is, after all, her family’s company, and her son – wished to interview you personally before such a responsibility was trust upon you.”

Felicity blinks several times again. “You’re absolutely, one hundred and ten per cent serious?”

“Yes.”

“Me. Executive assistant. To the new CEO. Of Queen Consolidated.”

“Yes.”

“A man who’s failed and/or been expelled from every one of the four colleges he attended? Not to mention who has a reputation for not taking any aspect of his life seriously?”

“…Yes, I’m afraid so.”

“And, since you mentioned my ‘impressive résumé’, I hope you realise this job – more so than my current one – is an insult to it.”

“Miss Smoak—“
“I will not,” she says taking a step forward, perfectly aware she’s getting herself fired from a very secure job with a comfortable salary while in a very terrible market, and that she’ll have to move in with Winn and Barry when all of this blows up in her face because the feminist in her refuses to “be a glorified secretary to some dickhead who’s hopeless at his job!”

Walter’s smile vanishes and he leans back in his chair, arms crossing and considering her carefully. Then, in a measured, calm tone, he says “You’re absolutely right.”

“I want a severance package an– Wait.” Her brain scrambles to halt. Walter’s smiling again, which does not bode well. “I’m right? Of course I’m right. Am I not also fired?”

“As a matter of fact, no,” he says getting up from his chair and retrieving a folder from a drawer. “Think of this job less of being a ‘glorified secretary’ and more of a… shall we say,” he lowers his voice a bit, a note of playfulness accompanying his next words, “business nanny.”

Felicity looks fittingly befuddled. “…Business nanny?”

Walter nods. “You are correct that Mr. Queen is not only new to this company, but also new to adulthood.” He hands her the folder. Felicity thinks she’s beginning to understand Walter’s conspiratorial smile. “He has also been appointed CEO by his father, who is virtually the only person able to out-vote the board of directors. They are not happy with his appointment, which is where you come in.”

She takes the folder but does not open it. She’s still staring at Walter as if she’s never seen anything quite like him before. “…You want me to be CEO in absentia.”

“That is what I hope this will not come to. I have been given to understand Oliver is willing to learn and to involve himself in all the affairs pertaining to his family’s company. It is my hope, and that of the board, that he will prove a more… stable, CEO than his father.”

Yeah, because Robert Queen was a notorious all-or-nothing man that had alternatively led the company to near bankruptcy and to the top of the market – before he up and disappeared, that is, only occasionally showing up on Skype to further mess QC up. Stability is something Queen Consolidated hasn’t known in a long time. A malleable, charismatic boy-toy of a CEO suddenly makes a lot of business sense – so long as he has someone pulling his strings until he learns to dance to the board’s music. And Walter Steele, CFO and board member – and if you believe what’s on Gossip Girl, future Mr. Mayor Queen – seems to have chosen her as their preferred puppeteer.

“No,” Felicity shakes her head. “I truly appreciate the faith you have in me, Mr. Steele, but I can’t—”

“Open the file, Felicity.”

“But I’m saying no, I—”

“Before you throw away a five-figure salary, reduced hours, triple-pay for extra-hours, and the many bonuses listed under that which I frankly cannot recall, plus a very exclusive career advancement plan,” Walter’s smile begins to show some teeth, “please, have a look at the file.”

Five-figure salary. Bonuses. Career advancement plan. All of which the IT department has never even heard. Damn.

Felicity opens the file. And has to sit down on the chair in front of Walter’s desk. And nearly cry. She told Moira Queen the day before that she’d never pick anyone’s dry cleaning or fetch anyone,
no matter how high in the echelons of power, coffee – and that’s in the contract. Also, paid holidays. Health and dental, too. Six-month paid maternity leave. Also, “required to wear proper business attire – dresses, suits and heels recommended.” Lots about non-disclosure… Oh. So that’s what he meant by “career advancement plan”. Nuts. Absolutely nuts. Although…

Walter watches, containing his amusement as best as he can, as she reads the entire contract and almost tears up. When she’s done, she raises her head slowly, swallows her pride and half of her principles, and says “Okay.”

Unprofessional as he feels it is, Walter can’t quite help grinning. “What, that easily? No amendments or alterations or demands?”

“Nope,” Felicity says popping the “p” and with a small shrug. “I suppose the sexual harassment clause is standard – not specific to playboy-billionaire bosses’ employees?”

“No special clause, I assure you. All standard.”

“And…” she hesitates, suddenly not wanting to get fired. “No personal life clauses?”

“I’m afraid I don’t follow.”

“I’m dating Ray Palmer,” she says, and instead of it making her feel more awkward it actually makes her chest fill with air and makes her smile against her will. Yes, she’s dating the amazing guy that is Ray Palmer, and that bit of wonderfulness in her life may just cost her this awesome job which she really shouldn’t want. “You know, of Palmer Tech? Who is technically interested in buying QC should Oliver Queen prove to be the fiasco everyone expects him to be and who may-or-may-not be considering running for mayor against Moira Queen; that Ray Palmer.”

Walter nods philosophically. “I admit,” he says slowly, “that your relationship with Mr. Palmer may clash with the career advancement plan that contract entails, but as you said, it’s your personal life, and therefore not the concern of this company. So long as it does not interfere with your duties at the office, I don’t see why it should matter.”

Felicity hugs the folder to her chest to prevent her from hugging Walter. She thinks, for no good reason, that that may be a step too far. “Okay. I’ll sign it. I’m in.”

“Excellent,” he says producing a pen for her to sign the contract and going to the door to speak with his own EA.

Felicity hears none of what transpires then, though; she’s giddily signing her name in loopy handwriting and then going over the non-disclosure bits to see how much of her brilliant, thirty-second-old plan she can tell Ray later, when Walter comes back followed by a man in a grey suit. A very, very handsome man. Buff. Solid. Tall – not as tall as Ray, but she’s not wearing heels, so she’s treated to a privileged view of the azure pair of eyes that sit on a perfectly sculpted face framed by a buzz cut and the sort of facial hair that was certain to give any woman beard burn.

Judging by the way his smile freezes, Felicity prays really hard she hasn’t said any of what just went through her head out loud.

“Hi,” he says extending his hand to shake hers. “I’m Oliver Queen. The dickhead who’s hopeless at his job.”

Felicity’s hand suddenly goes ice-cold in his. “Y-you heard–? I-I mean, of course you did, the walls are frosted glass, hardly soundproof, I just didn’t know– Crap, I’m really making a mess of this. I’m Felicity Smoak, your new EA. Unless my calling you an incompetent dickhead just got me fired. Did it? Am I fired?”
Oliver Queen is still smiling, and not letting go of her hand. He’s uncannily pretty. Yeah, she can definitely work the charismatic CEO angle. This can work. Yes. It can. It will. So long as keeps her job, that is.

“Pleased to meet you, Miss Smoak,” her new boss tells her instead. It makes her smile back.

Walter clears his throat and the hands drop. “Oliver, maybe you could show Miss Smoak to her new office, upstairs? And I’m sure you’ll want to get settled at yours.”

“It’s not my father’s old office, is it?” He asks with clear distaste. Felicity files that observation for later.

“It is on the same floor, but it’s been completely renovated since your father left,” Walter says, his conversational tone only minimally strained by the next piece of information. “We had a termite problem. Hence all the glass.”

“And I suppose my mother had nothing to do with that decision,” Oliver says looking up at the elevator ceiling.

Walter stutters for a second before commenting that, indeed, Moira had had a hand in the new décor; she had, as he may recall, acted as CEO for a few months before leaving Walter in charge and focusing on her mayoral campaign. Oliver raises an eyebrow at the stutter, but says nothing.

They arrive at the 37th floor and Oliver steps out into the clearest, most transparent office he’s ever been to. Also, the best view of Starling City he’s ever seen. Felicity, however, is focusing on the fact that both what appear to be her desk and his desk are covered in binders – very thick, colour-coordinated binders.

“Why was an entire forest murdered for this?” She asks, tentatively opening one of the binders on her desk. “You could have just emailed all this info into our company tablets; you know that, right?”

“I fear there is much catching up that you’ll have to do,” Walter says by way of apology. “My door is always open, as I hope I’ve made clear to you both, but I also have responsibilities of my own. And,” Walter’s kind smile turns to Oliver, “I remembered you used to prefer a more, hm, analogue approach, rather than a digital one.”

Felicity rolls her eyes. Wonderful; her new boss is digitally illiterate as well as hot and dumb.

Oliver and Walter shake hands. “Thank you, Walter. I guess Miss Smoak and I have our work cut out for us.”

“Of course. It was no bother at all.”

Walter leaves, and Oliver’s strained cheeks finally take a break from the enforced politeness. Felicity almost feels a pang of pity for her poor, lost billionaire playboy of a boss. Only, you know, not.

“So!” she begins cheerfully striding to her new desk. “Do you want to start with this year’s quarterly reports, or do you wanna go back to the reports of five years ago and work our way to the present?”

“Actually,” he says scratching the back of his head. “I need help with my computer.”

“Sure,” she shrugs a bit disappointed. You can take an IT girl out of IT, but you can’t… Nah,
forget it. “What’s wrong with it?”

He produces a laptop that’s at least six years out of date and dented in several places. It looks, if she’s honest, like a piece of junk. “I spilt a latte on it back at the yacht. And then may have dropped it on the floor and kicked it because it wouldn’t turn on this morning. And last night.”

“Right,” she mumbles as she takes the offensive piece of tech from him and settles it on top of the blue binders. Man, the binders. She looks back up at him. “Being your EA, does it mean I have to deal with this particular brand of crazy often?”

Oliver picks up a random binder and shrugs. “Afraid so.”

“Right,” she says again, tapping a finger on the little bit of desk that’s not covered by papers. Her boss is looking at the graphs upside down. And this computer is dead. And it’s her job to fix it, fix her boss, and get through this impossible amount of celluloid; ergo, “I need coffee. And parts. Several. How opposed are you to getting a new computer?”

Oliver looks up from the upside down report. “Not much. There’s just some files and pictures there I wanted to save, if possible.”

“That’s much easier,” she says getting up. “I’ll just go by the IT department and get some of my stuff, and have a decent computer moved up here. Oh, and, by the way,” she says from the door, “my contract states pretty clearly that I’m not to bring you coffee. Like, ever.”

Which seems to leave him genuinely confused. “Why?”

“Because I went to MIT, and I’m a genius,” she crosses her arms. “I refuse to be your coffee girl. As a matter of fact,” she says, changing her mind and walking back in with the sauciest grin she hopes she can pull off, “why don’t you bring me coffee since it looks like I’m the only one doing any work in this office today? I’ll call the IT department for the parts and the computer.”

And because he looks even more confused, she takes the binder he’s holding, turns it, and returns it to him, right side up.

Oliver finally gets the hint. “…Okay,” he says slowly, putting the binder down. “How do you like your coffee?”

Felicity will forever remember this as the moment she crowned herself the Queen in Queen Consolidated.

“A caramel cappuccino with an extra shot of expresso,” she tells him with a triumphant smile. “And you should get one yourself. It’s delicious, and, considering the amount of reading you’ll be doing until the clock strikes six, you’re gonna need a lot of sugar and caffeine, too.”

Oliver answers her with a smile quite unlike any he’s worn since getting off the Gambit. “Whatever you say, boss.”

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By the time the clock mercifully strikes six, the reports are blurring together in his mind and before his eyes. He’s gotten through perhaps half a binder, only, but the situation seems straight-forward enough.
“The company’s dying, isn’t it?” he asks Felicity as she puts her tablet away in her purse.

She hums a bit. “Depends on what you call ‘dying’. It has been downsized, and is still losing a lot of money, and in quite some debt, so…” She gives up. “Yeah. Dying just about covers it. But!” she chirps before handing him what looks like a flat, black box. “I managed to save your hard drive, and we both did some reading,” she says pointing to the three binders she’s read and flagged for him. “The day wasn’t a complete disaster.”

Oliver looks at the binders and then at the piece of tech and resists the urge to hug her. “Thank you, Miss Smoak.”

The smile she offers him is almost bashful. “After all the coffee you fetched me today, and considering all the long hours I’m sure we’ll be clocking before we save this company,” she stops to take a breath, “I think you may call me Felicity.”

He smiles in return and offers her his hand. “So long as you call me Oliver.”

“Done,” she shakes back vigorously. “But now I really have to go.”

“Got plans for the evening, Felicity?” he asks conversationally, and gets a wide grin in return.

“Yes. Me and my boyfriend have a date with Netflix and takeout,” she nods, thankfully keeping “followed by intense make out and sex” to herself. Out loud, she asks “What about you? No welcome back parties?”

There’s a tiny pull to his smile, like he has to make an effort to keep it in place. “My return is nothing to celebrate, according to most people.”

“So maybe you should go spend some time with those other people,” she says softly. “Who think you coming back is something to celebrate, that is.”

He thinks of Thea, and even has an errant thought of his mother, but he doesn’t want to see either of them. He feels for the small box in his pocket, the one he’s taken from his family’s Starling City Bank vault after talking to Sara that morning – and shakes his head.

“There’s only one person I’ve been longing to spend time with,” he says thoughtfully, more to himself than to anyone else, certainly not to Felicity.

His EA looks at him almost sympathetically. “Then maybe you should go see her.”

Oliver is struck by the simplicity of her logic. He loves Laurel; he wants to see her; he wants to spend every second of the rest of his life with her; it’s that simple.

“Thank you, Felicity,” he says releasing air he didn’t know had been clotting in his chest.

She nods. “See you tomorrow, Oliver.”

He mumbles something in acknowledgement and calls Digg.

“So, I’m curious,” Oliver says placing his phone between his shoulder and his ear, grabbing his things in a hurry. “What would it take to get you off my back tonight?”

There’s a heavy, tired sigh on the other end of the line. “Why? Planning on spending the night at a sushi place before you ditch me again?”

“I got an ice cream craving, actually.”
“You’re outta luck. There aren’t any 24h ice cream places in Starling City.”

Oliver sighs equally heavily. “Digg, I’m leaving QC now and I’m going to buy ice cream. Then I’m going to Laurel’s. I’d really appreciate it if you took the night off.”

Silence. Oliver can picture Diggle working his jaw. “As your bodyguard,” he says slowly, “as well as someone whose head hasn’t been inside his colon for the last five years, I deeply discourage you from doing that.”

“Consider your discouragement duly noted,” he says ending the call and switching off his phone. Hopefully that neat little place they used to go to Sunday mornings is still open. He can catch a bus to Laurel’s from there and – fingers crossed – not go back to the Queen mansion ever again.

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Laurel Lance has never thought – even when her boyfriend disappeared on her, or when her sister pulled away from her for no apparent reason, or when her parents got messily divorced – that it sucks to be her. No, she’s always been beautiful, intelligent and had life quite together: become a lawyer, help those in the city whom the law had failed, marry well, start a family, maybe look into getting a country or beach house – she has always liked the beach, but the calm of the mountains would be a soothing prospect when facing the bustle of the city every day.

It was a wonderful plan; pity it’s never to be. She fancies she can see shards of it – her plan, her dream life – scattered around the floor. That’s when the doorbell rings and, upon opening the door an inch, Laurel concludes that yes – it sucks so bad to be her.

“Hi,” Oliver says in a small voice, with a likewise small smile, handsome as he’s never been before, and Laurel has to clench her fists to stop herself from slapping him. “How are you?”

Instead of stepping aside, she exits her apartment and closes the door behind her, glaring daggers at him, gracefully as only Laurel Lance can. “Look who’s come back from the dead. To haunt me, no less. What are you doing here, Ollie?”

“I’m a jerk,” he says unceremoniously, but he’s smiling, so she keeps her guard up. “But I brought ice cream,” he lifts a pint of ice cream, his smile as sweet as the last time he lied to her. “Rocky Road. Your favourite.”

Laurel does not move. She isn’t sure how to, anymore. She cannot put the pieces together – Oliver. On her doorstep. With ice cream. As if the last five years never happened. As if it was all a lie – which it is – which is why none of the pieces fit.

He begins, like a teenager, to say he’s missed her and that he thought of her every single day. She hears maybe a third of it before interrupting with “Is it true?”

“Of course it is,” he says reaching to touch her, but she pulls back. “Laurel, leaving you was the biggest mistake I-“

“Spare me the teen movie grovelling,” she says raising a hand. “If you have something to say, just say it and leave.”

He looks hurt, impossibly hurt, when she pulls away a second time from his touch. “That is what I came to say. I’ve missed you.”
She looks away, because she can’t help hating the way his adoring blue gaze makes her feel. Oliver continues relentlessly. “Laurel… You always saw the best in me. You stuck by me even when… even when I gave you no reason to. What I’m trying to say is—“

But she’s not looking at him. His words have sent her back six years, right into the night she found out she indeed had no reason to stick by him – and she suddenly looks as horrified now as she did then.

“Do you know what your mother told me,” she interrupts him, the memory striking her with such force it’s like she’s hearing Moira’s tired, fond tones all over again, “the first time I found out you cheated on me? God knows it wasn’t the first time you cheated, just the first I saw it.”

Oliver takes a small step back. The night with Samantha Clayton; he’d never forget it – and cannot seem now to make an answer to Laurel. She’s right, too; it was far from the first, or the last time.

“She said great men like you and your father may have ‘commitment issues’, but that when you love, it’s for life, it’s true.”

An echo of Isabel Rochev telling him she and Robert Queen were soulmates rings through his mind like someone scratching a blackboard. Oliver shakes his head.

“I did love you, Laurel,” he says quietly, because she’s still right. “I do. Truly.”

Which seems only to fan the cold flame behind Laurel’s eyes. “Tell me, then, Ollie,” she says taking a step forward as if taking back the space for herself, “what part of loving me truly entails you disappearing, without a word, for five years, and then showing up on my doorstep with un-ironic Rocky Road?”

“Laurel… I…” he flounders, then goes back to the one thing he knows is true and minimally justifies his coming here. “I missed you. A lot.”

Laurel has apparently been inoculated against his kicked puppy eyes. All she sees is the absurdity that is Oliver Queen, and the absurdity that he’s made of her life. “And truth is, you didn’t even come back for me, did you?”

“No. I think it’s best if you don’t.”

“There’s something…” he begins, feeling foolish and nearly desperate. This isn’t how he pictured this conversation going at all. “I’d rather not do this in the hall.”

She crosses her arms. “Too bad.”

But it’s what he needs. It’s what he’s been alternatively dreaming and having nightmares about – her. It’s also what she wanted, what she told him five years ago that she wanted more than anything, and he screwed it up. But he sees it now. This is how he fixes things, how he begins to make them right – because his sun has always risen and set on Laurel Lance, and there’s no hope for him if there’s no hope for them. This is how it has to be.

Oliver takes the ring box out of his pocket.

Laurel freezes, her heart on her throat going a mile per second – she thinks she might die, throw
up, or perhaps actually murder him.

She does none of those things. Instead, she stops him with an emphatic “No. Don’t even–” she breathes, in and out, once. “The answer is no.”

Oliver looks confused, even hurt; vulnerable for the first time since he last looked into her eyes and saw acceptance – even she doesn’t know how long ago that was. It occurs to Laurel that he looks like a child, one who doesn’t understand why he’s being denied his favourite food, maybe his favourite toy. Which is, she figures, what she’s always been to him – a pretty, darling toy he could love and torture and put away as he pleased.

“But, Laurel, I lov–“

Laurel explodes. “What did you think?! That you could disappear off the face of the Earth without so much as a ‘see you later, Laurel’ and I’d, what? Wait for you? Choose the flowers and look at apartments in the hope you were going to outgrow your playboy-hood if you ever came back? Oliver, you do not get to come back to Starling, after what you’ve done, and insult me that way.”

There is a horrible pause then, because she’s right, so right, and because Oliver really should leave and yet can’t seem to be able to. Slowly, and because he can still hear Laurel’s irregular intake of air, he pockets the ring, and with it hopes he didn’t even know he had.

Laurel breaks the silence with a tired question. “Why did you come back, Ollie?”

He looks down. He owes her the truth, but only the half that is his to tell. No wonder she hates him. “My father’s commitment issues,” he says looking away. “He’s left my mother to marry his intern. In Russia. He’s not coming back.”

Despite how much she has wished him dead these last five years, the hurt in his voice strikes an unwanted chord with her. For a second, Laurel forgets herself and makes to touch his arm – but stops before she can.

He sees the gesture, though, which only solidifies his resolve not to tell her about Thea. He’ll take her displeasure, her anger and even her hatred of him, but the last thing he wants is her pity.

“You’re right,” he says, because it’s something he can’t say enough. “I didn’t come back for you. I came to take the reins at Queen Consolidated so that my family’s legacy doesn’t crumble because of my father and what he did. But, Laurel…” one cold hand leaves the ice cream and finally holds hers. “The thought of you was the only thing that made coming back bearable. There wasn’t a day in those five years that I didn’t think–“

“If you father had decided to come back…” her voice is shaking as she looks up at him from scared eyes. Irrationally, she desperately wants this to be uncomplicatedly okay and to just throw herself into him – because it’s Ollie, her Ollie, and she’s damned if she hasn’t missed him with every fiber of her being, too. But she needs to know. “If you father had decided to come back… Or even if he had decided to run the company remotely… would you still have come back?”

He knows what she’s asking: “Would you still have come back for me?” He sighs, and it’s as if all the air has left his body, leaving him hollow. The truth; it’s everything he owes her, and it’s what’s about to destroy everything for him.

“No.”

The angry tears Laurel has so valiantly held back are blinked away then. “Because of Sara?”

It takes him a second to process her words, and another till the shock runs through him. “…Sara?”
She knows. Laurel knows.

Behind Laurel, the door to the apartment drifts open. Sara’s there, her face streaked with running mascara.

“I told her, Ollie,” the younger Lance sobs. “I’m sorry.”

Oliver looks between the sisters, lost and again unable to move. Sara mumbles to Laurel that she’s so sorry and runs away, down the corridor and through to the stairs, not looking back.

Laurel waits for her sister to disappear before she looks at Oliver with as much hatred as she has ever felt towards another human being, any signs of the cutting tenderness she’d felt before long gone.

“I’m curious,” she says coldly, anger boiling so close to surface it sears him. “Were you planning on telling me you slept with my sister before or after you had fucked me in celebration of me accepting your proposal? As a matter of fact, what was it you thought was going to happen, that I’d never find out?”

“Laurel–“

“Don’t. Sara may be as much to blame for this as you, but she at least had the decency to tell me. You, on the other hand–“

Laurel stops, biting her lower lip. She could go on, possibly all night, but if she says another word there’s a fair chance she’ll whip out the gun she has concealed in her apartment and shoot him in the nuts. And she wouldn’t even feel guilty, though it’d likely get her disbarred, if not arrested. So much for her plan, anyways.

Instead, she takes a step back, slams the door in his face and goes in search of a bottle of wine. And of her phone. She needs to text Gossip Girl and let her know firsthand that Laurel Lance and Tommy Merlyn were the newest, hottest official couple in Starling. Once the blast is out, she’ll call Tommy, and they’ll have self-congratulatory sex. And by then – a bottle of wine, a scandal and many orgasms later – she hopefully won’t be feeling this burn-down-the-world rage that only Oliver Queen could stir within her.

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Good morning, Starling City. Gossip Girl here – your one and only source into the scandalous lives of Starling’s elite. Top story on my homepage? Oliver Queen can’t seem to go 24 hours without wreaking havoc.

Little S. was spotted welcoming a scruffy looking O. into her apartment yesterday morning – and letting him go an hour later with a fresh shave. Will there finally be a Lance shedding her last name for the right of a crown? Wonder what big sis thinks of this.

Speaking of whom, what a disappointment you’ve become, L. Our favourite Queen Consort may no longer be our Queen Bee, but she’s still quite the B*. Fucking your ex-boyfriend’s best friend, L.? We thought you’d have learned your lesson by now. There’s only so much class a true Starling beauty can maintain while sleeping her way up the social ladder – and sending the tip in yourself is just plain tactless. I’ll be requiring photographic proof next time – though not of the
naked kind. My guess is just about every woman in Starling has seen enough of Tommy Merlyn’s ass to last their lifetimes.

There you go, my minions. Boy cheats on girl with her sister; girl sleeps with boy’s best friend. Oh, and boy and best friend share a sister, who’s also been conspicuously absent from my blasts.

In the interest of coming full circle, I wonder if Tiny T. and Little S. wouldn’t consent to making out; goodness knows this is all too heteronormative for my liking.

You know you love me.

XOXO

Gossip Girl

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