

Into the Dark

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/4584027) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/4584027>.

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| Rating: | Mature |
| Archive Warning: | No Archive Warnings Apply |
| Category: | F/M |
| Fandom: | Smallville |
| Relationship: | Oliver Queen/Chloe Sullivan |
| Characters: | Oliver Queen , Chloe Sullivan , Clark Kent , Lois Lane , Victor Stone , Arthur Curry , Dinah Lance , Bart Allen , Carter Hall , AU Oliver Queen , Moirra Sullivan , Gabe Sullivan , Jonathan Kent , Martha Kent , Zatanna Zatara , Original Female Character(s) |
| Additional Tags: | Drama , Family Drama , Angst , Romance , Oliver vs AU Oliver , Protective Oliver |
| Language: | English |
| Series: | Part 2 of Into the Dark Mirrorverse |
| Stats: | Published: 2015-08-16 Updated: 2018-07-07 Words: 33,893 Chapters: 6/10 |

Into the Dark

by [Poetgirl925](#)

Summary

Part 2 of the Into the Dark Mirrorverse. In an AU Metropolis, Oliver is devastated by the loss of his wife Chloe and their unborn child, who were murdered by Zod. Turning his back on Clark and the Justice League and obsessed with the possibility of finding Chloe again, he tasks Garrison Slate and his scientists at S.T.A.R. Labs with reverse engineering a broken mirrorbox he took from Clark.

When an alternate Oliver crosses universes looking for Chloe, Ollie is suspicious. Oliver claims to be there for Chloe's protection, but Ollie senses a darkness in his doppelganger that worries him. As Oliver grows closer to Chloe, it becomes clear to Ollie that the other man is determined to get back what he lost in his own world by any means necessary.

Finding Chloe

“Memories and feelings of nostalgia are nothing more than cruelties; they are the most beautiful lies we will ever convince ourselves to believe. We chase the false hope so fiercely that we nearly push ourselves past the edges of our sanity, longing for that which can never be in our possession again. These edges are blurred by our regrets and desperation all throughout the darkest hours of the night, until finally we are set free from the illusions and the ghosts of our past with the rising of the sun... and we are changed in some small, yet permanent way.”

Margaret E. Rise

Chapter 1 – Finding Chloe

Clark watched grimly as the bodies of Zod and Alia were covered again. “Are you sure about who you saw?” He knew the answer was yes, but he had to ask. He had to be certain because if Oliver was responsible then he had failed him just as much as he’d failed Chloe and her baby.

Faora nodded. “I am sorry, Kal-El. Please understand that we do not want to pursue the matter. We voted against blood for blood, but the council does recognize he was owed a blood debt. What Zod and Alia did to his family, and what they were planning to do to yours, is unforgivable. Perhaps now he may find some peace.”

“He murdered them,” Clark said quietly, heart heavy. His own moral code said that Oliver should be punished for such an offense, but the man was already suffering. There was little he could really do, anyway. The Kandorians were illegal aliens in every sense of the word. Yes, they had social security numbers and papers that allowed them to blend in as citizens, but that wouldn’t hold up under an autopsy or a police investigation. It would only bring negative attention back to the rest of the group.

“He avenged his family.” Faora motioned to two of the men, who removed the bodies. “It is done.”

For all their technological advances, Clark found the Kandorians to be rather primitive in their sense of honor and justice. It was one of the reasons he wasn’t certain he could ever really understand them or join them. He knew that Faora and the others hoped he would find a mate among the Kryptonian women. A mate – that was the word she often used when speaking of love or marriage. They loved, of course, but there was a level of practicality to choosing a mate that made him uncomfortable. Many things that they believed were in direct opposition to what his parents had taught him. Blood aside, he felt he was far more human than Kryptonian.

He would need to talk to Oliver. He considered waiting before deciding against it and racing to the Queen residence. But when he arrived at the penthouse, he fell to the floor in agony, his eyes focused on the man standing calmly across the room.

Noting the green panels lining the lower walls, Clark gasped, “What are you doing?”

“I’m giving you a warning.” Oliver walked over to Clark and knelt down. His eyes were cold as he said, “I finished it, Clark. I’m not sorry, I will not lose any sleep over it, and I really don’t care if you think it was wrong. You just don’t get it – I watched my family die. I couldn’t help them. Chloe struggled to survive for at least ten minutes before I heard her stop breathing. Do you know what that’s like? To watch, helpless, as someone you love dies?”

Clark closed his eyes as pain swept through his body. It wasn’t just the kryptonite; he recalled the scene of the crash and Chloe covered in her own blood. Maybe he hadn’t loved her like Oliver did, but he’d loved her longer, and he knew the agony of that moment would stay with him.

“Then there’s Zoe.” Oliver’s voice broke as he said her name. “She kept kicking at first because she was strong, just like her mother. I talked to her. I hoped she could hear me, and I told her that I was sorry I didn’t protect her. And then I was just alone in that car, Clark. I wanted to die and I think the only reason God let me live was to make sure their killers paid.”

Oliver stood and walked over to a panel on the wall. He punched in a code and the kryptonite panels were hidden behind lead sheeting.

Clark used the wall to pull himself up, still sweating and shaking as nausea rolled through his body. “You said this is a warning.”

Oliver nodded slowly. “I don’t want to see you again. I’m done – with you, with the League, all of it. I don’t want to hear whatever lecture you came here to deliver. I don’t want your *sympathy*. And I’m sure as hell not going to listen to you tell me what you think Chloe would have wanted. Those panels? They’re in my office, too, and I’ll carry stones with me.”

“You’re the one... the one who took all of the meteor rock from the refinery.” Victor had informed them of the break-in just before Chloe’s funeral. All of the meteor rock stored in the refinery owned by Queen Industries had been taken. One person stocking up on kryptonite had raised an alarm within the League. They’d thought Lex might be behind it.

“I’ve got people working overtime on weapons production,” Oliver confirmed. “If the Kandorians ever become a problem, I’ll be ready. If *you* ever become a problem, I’ll be ready.”

This was so much worse than Clark had thought it would be. Oliver didn’t even look like Oliver – he was unshaven and hard eyed, drowning in his own bitterness and sorrow even if he didn’t see it. And there was nothing Clark could do to help him.

“I’ll go,” he finally said. “Oliver... don’t shut everyone out. If you don’t want me around, I’ll respect that. But you need to talk to someone before this eats away at your soul.”

For just a moment, Clark saw an Oliver he recognized. “My soul was buried with my wife and child over a week ago. Talking won’t change that.”

He turned his back, and Clark limped to the elevator.

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Oliver threw himself into his company and the production of the kryptonite weapons, though the Kandorians had been quiet so far. He turned away all visitors other than Chloe's immediate family. While it hurt to see them, he didn't have the heart to tell them to go when he knew how much they had loved Chloe.

Lois' visit four months later was the tipping point. She was still involved with the League through Bruce and she told him that not only did she understand why he killed Zod and Alia, she believed he'd done the right thing. Then she told him about a mirrorbox that had transported her to an alternate reality.

Oliver had heard of the many worlds theory before but he'd never believed in the concept of alternate realities or mirrorverses. But according to Lois, she'd visited a world eerily similar yet drastically different. The Kandorians had gained powers in the other world and had turned the sun red, which stripped Clark of his own power and left everyone defenseless.

The Lois of that world was dead but when she told him about the alternate Chloe, he felt his world tilt. He'd never imagined that there might be another Chloe somewhere and the proof that there was at least one was a shock to him. Of course, there was an Oliver too, but according to Lois they weren't married. They were partners in taking down the Kandorians; that world's Chloe was also murdered by Alia, and Lois watched it happen.

Clearly it affected her because Lois told him that she slept better knowing that Oliver put Alia in the ground in both worlds. She said that Bruce agreed, and if Oliver wanted to come back and work with them then he would find the League understood what he did far better than Clark, especially after her impromptu trip to another universe. When he asked about the mirrorbox, she told him that it was broken after she returned.

Oliver didn't care if it was broken. He wanted that box.

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Oliver stared down at the small, silver box he'd taken from Clark's barn. This was the box that had transported Lois to a world where she'd seen another Chloe. That world's Chloe might be dead, but he now considered the possibility of other worlds – worlds where another Chloe might be alive or might need his help.

He wasn't sure Emil could be trusted with this since he still had ties to the League, so he contacted Garrison Slate at S.T.A.R. Labs. They had worked together to create the kryptonite weapons, and Slate was fascinated with the alien box when Oliver brought it to him.

"I've long believed in the many worlds theory, but to have confirmation is remarkable," Slate commented, turning the box over and over as he examined the markings. "You said this is alien technology?"

Oliver nodded. "I was told that it somehow opened a portal to a mirrorverse – a universe similar to ours but one in which things didn't happen the same way. It was supposed to be a

two-way door – one person goes there while another comes here – but the mirror self of the person transported was already dead.”

“It’s broken, but I know two scientists who have been working on the concept of traveling between worlds. They believe they’re close to a breakthrough, and it’s possible this box could help.”

“I’d like to meet them,” Oliver said. “If they’re close, I’m willing to fund the research as well.”

There was a part of him that recognized what he was doing wasn’t entirely sane, but he didn’t care. Ever since Lois told him about meeting the other Chloe, he couldn’t stop thinking about the possibility of finding *his* Chloe again.

Something of what he was thinking must have shown in his expression because Slate cleared his throat. “I know you lost your wife six months ago, Oliver. I want to make sure you understand that there is no guarantee of finding a particular person in another world, and there would be no way to determine who is in that world before traveling there.”

Oliver looked up at Slate. “Just set the meeting.” If it worked, he’d visit all of them if necessary.

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The research became an obsession for Oliver. Other than his company, it was the only thing he cared about. He often went to the cemetery and talked to Chloe about what they were learning. He made her a promise – that if there was another Chloe in another world who needed help, he would save her.

The scientists, Dr. Howard and Dr. Stein, put their new funding to good use and shared every development with Oliver. Two months after they began, they opened a portal for the first time, though it closed just as quickly as it appeared. Another month passed, and they were able to sustain the portal.

“I believe we can use the box as both a stabilizer and as a safe gateway transportation device for the traveler,” Dr. Stein explained as they watched the lights of the portal shift. “This metal is unlike anything I’ve ever seen before. It seems to store energy, but it’s also a conductor. It’s sensitive to gravitational pulls as well, which is important because choosing a world with a similar energy and gravitational pull is safer.”

“Once a traveler uses the box to move to one world, the box should bring him back when it’s opened again in the same spot,” Dr. Howard added. “It has a sort of memory, if you will. We’ve seen it repeat back energy patterns during our tests.”

Slate was the voice of caution. “Oliver, you realize this is all theoretical. We can speculate but until there is a trial, we have no way of knowing how accurate these theories are.”

“If someone leaves their world, is it possible for them to live in the other world permanently?” Oliver asked, ignoring Slate.

The two doctors exchanged a look. “It should be possible, but Slate is correct. It’s all theoretical until we’ve tested it.”

Oliver stripped off his jacket and removed his tie. “Then let’s test it.”

The first test didn’t work. As soon as Oliver stepped into the light of the portal, it closed, leaving him standing in the same place in the lab. “What just happened?” he asked, frustrated.

“Not enough energy,” Dr. Howard muttered. He started up the machine again, a modified, small scale particle accelerator. “Let the box absorb the energy first.”

When the box was left in the light, they began to see more than just lights. Worlds appeared and disappeared, images shifting rapidly from one to another. Occasionally the images slowed down enough that Oliver could make out familiar landmarks. “It’s only showing us Metropolis.” They had told him that’s how it would work, but he was still surprised to see it with his own eyes.

“Yes, because the portal should open and close in the same place in both worlds, which is why we’ve chosen this building to work from,” Dr. Stein informed him. They had set up a lab in a warehouse on the docks that featured a basement not shown on any city planning documents. It was also part of a group of buildings owned by Queen Industries, though this one was not in use due to flooding concerns. In a similar universe, they hoped this fact would be unchanged, and Oliver had spent a lot of money flood proofing the basement and providing other necessary safety measures.

“Are you ready?” Dr. Howard asked.

Oliver nodded and picked up the box before stepping into the light. The images became sharper; when he felt pulled towards one of them, he opened the box.

Everything was impossibly bright for a moment. When he finally opened his eyes, he was standing in a dank basement. A glance out the window confirmed it was the same basement they were working out of in his world. The sun was yellow – a good sign. He’d feared the box might take him back to the same world Lois visited.

Oliver set up his laptop and after a few password attempts, he managed to log into the Queen Industries satellite. He immediately began searching for Chloe Sullivan.

He found a death certificate on record with the county.

“Damn it!” He punched the window, breaking the glass but oblivious to the pain as he squeezed his eyes shut and fought to push back the despair he’d worked so hard to control since the funeral. After a few minutes and a few deep breaths, he sat and pulled the laptop closer.

Based on her birth and death dates, she died in high school at the age of seventeen. She was scheduled to be a witness in the trial of Lionel Luthor, and he was later prosecuted for her murder. He was still on death row.

Further searches showed that Clark was alive and well and working at *The Daily Planet* along with Lois. A search of Oliver Queen showed he was married – he did a double take when he saw he'd married Dinah Lance. Somehow he doubted that would end well. He and Dinah had flirted with the idea of dating once or twice but had wisely kept their relationship platonic given they each had a fiery nature.

Closing the laptop, Oliver stood up and slipped it back into his bag. There was nothing he could do for Chloe here.

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The first test was a success, but Slate, Howard and Stern all agreed that Oliver should have an extensive physical upon his return. Oliver was frustrated, eager to get back out there and continue his search, but he reluctantly agreed. If he found Chloe, he needed to be sure she would suffer no ill effects from crossing universes.

Over the next few months, he completed the crossing four more times, only to be bitterly disappointed each time. The manner of death varied, but Chloe Sullivan was dead in each world he visited – sometimes while in high school and sometimes later. She was the victim of Smallville's meteor freaks at least twice, as far as he could determine, and she died at Lex's hand once while in her early twenties. The last world was one in which she was killed by a boyfriend who'd apparently been stalking her.

And in every world he visited, Clark Kent was still alive. If he wasn't sure before that Clark's very existence had put Chloe in peril time and again, he was certain of it now. He thought about killing Clark – he knew it would bring the League down on him, but he didn't care. The only thing he cared about was the fact that he knew, beyond a doubt, that Chloe would not want that. As much as he hated the very sight of Clark now, he wouldn't hurt the Sullivans and the Kents that way.

The one year anniversary of Chloe's death came and went. He projected photos and videos of his life with Chloe on the wall of his bedroom and stayed in the dark, ignoring the outside world. This was the only way he could hang onto her – he could remember the way she'd smiled and how she'd laughed. He still sprayed her perfume in their bedroom, and the scent comforted him now as he drank and watched the home videos.

Oliver gave himself that day to grieve before packing his essentials, mostly money and tech, and returning to the basement lab. He wasn't giving up until he found her.

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Oliver gave himself a moment to adjust to the disorientation that accompanied each crossing, blinking rapidly against the little dots floating in his line of vision. He was back in the basement, though this time it was full of boxes and didn't smell damp.

That's different, he thought, taking a cautious look around. The logo on the boxes indicated it was still owned by Queen Industries.

He set up his laptop on one of the boxes and linked to the satellite. He pulled up *The Daily Planet* and frowned when he saw a byline by Lois and Clark. That sense of dread was creeping back up on him, and it grew as he paged through the Planet's website and found no mention of Chloe.

Closing out the page, he took a deep breath before he began searching public records. Ten minutes later, dread turned to hope. He found a marriage license for Chloe Sullivan, followed by a divorce decree that was issued months later. He found a current driver's license; the address listed indicated she lived in a dormitory at Metropolis University. Since the license had been issued three years earlier, he thought that might be out of date. He stared at her photo, running his finger over the image. She looked the same – her hair was a little shorter, but she was the same beautiful Chloe.

He searched for Oliver Queen next and found that he was a Metropolis resident in this world. He lived in the old clocktower, and he was unmarried based on blurbs in the society pages. There was no mention of him in connection with Chloe Sullivan. He did find reports of Green Arrow operating in Metropolis and assumed they might know one another since this Chloe also grew up in Smallville.

Chloe had been living in a small walk-up near the city center when he met her. Deciding to take a chance, he pulled on his non-descript black coat, a hat and a pair of sunglasses. The air was cold outside, a reminder that although it was early fall in his world, it was winter here. This had happened twice before – he'd crossed into the universe at a slightly different time. He'd seen the dates on the Planet's website and knew it was January, approximately a year earlier than his world.

Oliver walked from the warehouse district to the downtown area of Metropolis, making a note of any differences in landmarks. Most were the same, though small things were different – Chloe's favorite bookstore was an Internet café, and their favorite Thai restaurant was a pizza place. But he passed other familiar stores and restaurants, including Chloe's favorite espresso café – the one that served the fresh berry scones she'd scarfed down daily from her second trimester on.

The walk-up was a bust – it wasn't even an apartment building in this world. Tamping down his frustration, he went back to the espresso café, bought a cup of coffee and thought about his next move. Chloe was here – he could feel something different about this world, and Oliver was sure it was because of her. He just had to find her.

Impulsively, he bought a few of the scones and walked to *The Daily Planet*. If Chloe was here, Lois would probably know where she was. He could follow her, maybe even use his cloning technology to check her phone. Choosing a bench in the park across the street, he kept watch. Lois emerged around five-thirty with Clark at her side, and they walked to an Italian restaurant and had dinner before returning to the newspaper office.

That night he followed Lois to an apartment building near the newspaper office. Through the second floor window, he saw her turn on lights and turn on the TV. It was only a one bedroom, so Chloe didn't live there with her. An hour later Clark blurred in.

He'd noticed this – in four of the worlds he'd visited, Lois and Clark were a couple. It didn't look like she'd ever met Bruce Wayne, which made him wonder if there was even a Justice League here. After he checked into a motel, he searched for mentions of other heroes. He found stories on the Batman in Gotham, and Black Canary seemed to move around to different cities in this universe.

Bart seemed to have made Central City his permanent base, and Victor Stone was listed as an employee of Queen Industries. So were Bart, AC and, interestingly, Chloe Sullivan was listed as an IT consultant. That answered the question of whether Oliver and Chloe knew each other in this world. When he finally fell asleep in the early morning hours, he dreamed of her.

Following Lois the next day yielded nothing interesting until she left the office at five and walked further downtown to a Korean fusion restaurant. And there she was – Chloe was standing outside the restaurant checking something on her phone as she waited for her cousin. The two women hugged and went inside.

Oliver knew better than to try and follow them inside – he chose a nearby café and sat at the window so he could see when they left. He realized his hands were shaking, and he squeezed the cup in his hand. He had to calm down. He didn't want to scare her when he saw her.

When they emerged, he followed Chloe. She detoured by an espresso café. It wasn't the same one that sold the scones, but he noticed that she had a bag in her hand when she left, as well as a large cup of coffee. She didn't appear to be in a hurry.

Her destination was an old tower building with a distinctive green roof; located in the heart of Metropolis, it covered an entire block. He recognized it as the tallest building in the city, but as far as he knew no one had ever lived there and it was abandoned in his world. The building was dark except for the lights he could see shining from windows at the very top. He supposed it could be a loft apartment but with no one else coming and going, he had to wonder if she was the only resident.

It was around seven, still relatively early. Oliver had made a plan for when he finally found Chloe. He would do nothing more than observe her at first. He thought it would be helpful to understand her world, the people with whom she associated, and what she did from day to day. It would also provide him with an opportunity to assess any potential threats to her safety.

Oliver should have known he wouldn't be able to wait after he actually saw her, especially after five failed attempts to find her. He was filled with a burning desire to be in the same room with her, to talk to her, to see for himself that she wasn't just a ghost his mind had constructed. He walked into the building and pressed the button for the elevator.

A computerized voice startled him when he stepped inside. "Please state your name."

Shit. Apparently this was more than just an apartment building. "Oliver Queen."

"Confirming identity of Oliver Queen – scan in progress."

Oliver removed his hat and glasses and said a prayer that he was similar enough to the other Oliver to pass a security scan. Moments later, the red light blinked off.

“Scan complete. Welcome to Watchtower.”

He released the breath he was holding as the elevator started moving.

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Chloe heard the elevator start up and smiled when she saw Oliver on the monitor. She hadn't been expecting him that night because he had a business dinner, but she couldn't deny she was happy to see him. In the months since Jimmy's death, he'd been a rock. Her only rock, really. Lois had disappeared and Clark had been completely unavailable while the rest of the League scattered after they dealt with Davis.

She had honestly expected Oliver to follow suit, and he had for a few weeks. She'd eventually tracked him down – easy enough since all she had to do was follow the reports of his boozing, playboy behavior. He hadn't been happy to see her but when she explained that Lois had disappeared and Clark was gone, his demeanor changed. He'd returned to Metropolis with her, albeit reluctantly at first.

They'd worked together to create the Watchtower database, and eventually they talked about Davis and Jimmy. She could see the guilt he was carrying and knew he blamed himself for bringing Jimmy into the situation. She blamed herself, too. Opening up to one another had been a slow and arduous process, but soon Oliver quit wallowing and started being more productive. He took up the reins of his company again, and he stopped the excessive drinking. Eventually he put on the uniform again and went back to patrolling the city as Chloe guided him. From that point forward they'd been full partners in this venture, and they'd become very close friends in the process.

When the elevator doors opened, she said, “Didn't think I'd be seeing you tonight, or at least not this early.” When he didn't answer, she turned her head to look at him.

Oliver was standing a few feet away. He was completely still, as if some force had rooted him to that spot, and he was staring at her. Something in his eyes sent a chill through her.

“It's really you,” he said. It was almost like he was talking to himself.

Chloe turned to face him slowly. Something wasn't right – Oliver didn't look like he'd come from the office, for one thing. He often changed before coming here, so it wasn't unusual to see him wearing jeans and a long-sleeved Henley under his coat. But the coat was not the one he'd been wearing lately and the cheap cut screamed knockoff. Then there was the fact that he hadn't shaved and he had bags under his eyes.

The last time she'd seen him looking this tired and unkempt was when he'd been drinking, and her heart sank. “Oliver, did something happen?” She walked over and reached for his hand, searching his face for clues.

He looked confused as he said, “Your eyes are green. They should be blue.”

“What?” she asked, frowning. “Oliver, what are you talking about?”

“Everything else is the same, though,” he continued, reaching out to touch her hair and then her face. “Almost the same.”

That chill had returned and it was slowly creeping through her body as the hairs rose along her arms. Some instinct told her to back up, to put some distance between her and the man staring at her like he was seeing a ghost. Swallowing hard, she reached behind her and hit a button on the keyboard.

Within seconds, Oliver’s voice came through the speakers. “Hey, I’m just finishing up. I should be there in about an hour.”

The man moved so quickly that Chloe didn’t even have a chance to respond before he disconnected the call. “Who are you?”

“I’m Oliver Queen,” he said slowly. He held up his hands, a gesture she thought was intended to put her at ease. “I’m not this world’s Oliver, but I am Oliver. I came here to find you.”

“Why?” Chloe edged along the desk without taking her eyes off of Oliver’s doppelganger. She could hear her phone ringing now and knew it had to be Oliver, but it was on the other desk.

“I’m sorry,” he said suddenly. “I’m doing this the wrong way. But you can trust me – I just want to take you some place where you’ll be safe.” His words were rushed now.

She had no idea what was going on, but she had no intention of going anywhere with him. She finally reached the far monitor and pressed the panic button that would lock down the tower.

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Oliver frowned when Chloe’s call disconnected. He immediately tried calling her again but she didn’t answer. After his second attempt, he left the table where he’d been wrapping up with his colleagues and called Clark, who also didn’t answer. He was about to try Lois when his phone rang.

Seeing it was Victor, he said, “Look, I’m going to have to call you back...”

“Hey, I’m just following procedure,” Victor said. “You want to tell me why you and Chloe put the tower in lockdown?”

“Wait, what?” Oliver ran his hand through his hair in agitation. “What do you mean it’s in lockdown? Since when?”

“Since a few minutes ago,” Victor said, sounding confused. “You’re there with her. Shouldn’t you know what’s going on?”

“I’m not at Watchtower, Victor. I’m at a business dinner and Chloe called a few minutes ago but it disconnected before she said anything.” He could feel a knot growing in his stomach.

“Then we have a problem because according to the feed from the elevator, you entered the Watchtower about ten minutes ago, and less than five minutes later Chloe put the place on lockdown. So whoever is in there with her? I’m assuming they’re not a friend.”

A/N – This one has been sitting around on my computer for over a year, so I decided to start editing and posting. Hope you enjoyed the first chapter! Basically spoilers through Season 9 Absolute Justice, but you’ll notice I made little changes to canon here and there. More coming soon.

In a Universe Far Away

Chloe didn't even stop to think about it before putting the Watchtower in lockdown. The room filled with the mechanical sounds of the door sealing and the shuttering of the stained glass window. She could tell that the man across from her was startled; he snapped to attention, the lost look in his eyes replaced by alarm.

"What is that?" he demanded.

Now that the tower was locked, she started edging her way towards the far desk where her phone was still ringing. "I've locked down the building, so whoever you are... whatever you want? You're not getting it."

"I told you I'm not here to hurt you. I would *never* hurt you."

Chloe froze when he took a step towards her. "Don't," she said sharply.

Relief swept through her when he stopped again. Judging by his physique, which appeared identical to Oliver's, she had to assume he could fight. While she wasn't exactly the damsel in distress type, she doubted she'd be able to hold her own in a physical confrontation with him. It was imperative that she keep some distance between them.

They eyed each other warily. After a tense moment, the man reached for a chair and pulled it towards him. He never looked away from her as he sat, and Chloe released a shaky breath.

"Chloe, I..." he paused and shook his head. He took a breath and let it out slowly. "I'm sorry about this. I've been so focused on finding you that I didn't think about this moment – the moment when I'd be standing across from you. I didn't mean to scare you."

Chloe bit her lip. He didn't seem threatening. In fact, he looked like he was making an effort to appear as unthreatening as possible. He'd ceded the position of power to her by sitting down, and his arms hung loosely at his sides.

The phone was still ringing, but she ignored it. "You said you're Oliver Queen."

"I am," he stated firmly. "I'm from another world, but I'm Oliver. I used a broken mirror box that belonged to Clark to get here."

"A mirror box," she repeated, puzzled. "It's Kryptonian?"

He nodded. "Lex had it, Clark got it back, and somehow Lois was transported to a darker version of our universe while she and her husband were visiting the Kents. Long story short, the box was broken on our side after they brought Lois back. When my scientists repaired it, we realized it could be used as a gateway device to multiple worlds."

Chloe stared at him, unsure which part to respond to first. "Lois is married?"

"Bruce," he told her. When she raised a brow, he added, "Wayne. Bruce Wayne."

Huh. “I guess Lois likes her billionaires in all worlds,” she said, attempting humor to lighten the mood.

“Or her heroes,” he replied. “It’s not like Clark has money.”

“Have you been watching us?” she asked, picking up on the fact that he knew Lois and Clark were a couple. She wondered if she was imagining the bitter edge to his tone.

He sighed and ran a hand over his hair in a move so like Oliver that she felt a little more of her uneasiness fading.

“I told you that I came here looking for you. In my world you were the Daily Planet’s star reporter but I only found old bylines when I looked at the Planet’s website. Your address is still listed as Met U – I knew that probably wasn’t right. You lived in a walkup downtown when I met you, so I checked there first. Then I followed Lois.”

She tried not to be creeped out by his matter of fact recounting that proved he’d basically stalked her cousin in order to find her and then followed her to Watchtower. “Let’s say I believe that you’re not a threat to me or anyone else here. Why go through all of this? Do you need my help?” She wondered what kind of help he could possibly need from her that would warrant crossing universes to find her.

He stared at her for a moment, his eyes searching hers. “I came because you need mine.”

“With what?”

“You’re in danger, Chloe, and I made a promise to keep you safe.”

That lost look was back, and a chill sweep through her. “I... we’re all in danger, aren’t we? With what we do – I’m not naïve. The Kandorians, Checkmate...”

“The Kandorians are here.” It wasn’t a question, and his posture went rigid, fists clenched. “Alia and Zod – they’re alive?”

Her brows drew together. “Alive and doing their best human impersonations with the forged identities I made for them. Why?”

“Then you’re not safe here,” he said flatly. “In the world Lois traveled to, Alia killed you. In my world...”

Chloe felt her chest tighten as he stopped, clearly struggling to find words. “The Chloe of your world is dead, too.”

He nodded but didn’t elaborate, and she decided not to push for details.

She pulled another chair away from the desk and sat down. She thought about Lois’ trip to the future and what they had learned about Alia and Zod’s plans. It was the reason she’d begun stockpiling kryptonite weapons, something she hadn’t told anyone about yet. She’d brushed aside the knowledge that Alia had killed her in that uncertain future – after all,

forewarned was forearmed. But if she believed this Oliver, she'd died at Alia's hands in two other worlds. She couldn't deny the pit of nerves it opened up in her stomach.

She looked back over at Oliver, who was still watching her closely. "What about the Kandorians in your world? Are they still a threat?"

"No – hell, I don't know," he answered with a shake of his head. "Zod and Alia are dead now. They were the ones planning to hurt the people in Clark's life. They had this idea that if they took away his human connections that he would be more open to joining them as their leader. They tried to kill his parents first and then they planned to go after Chloe and her family – her parents and sister. They staged accidents, but the only attempt that was successful was Chloe. The others condemned their actions but I still don't trust them."

Parents. Sister. The surreal nature of hearing the life details of another version of her felt like information overload, but suddenly she wanted to know more. "She had a sister?"

Oliver motioned to the bag he had carried inside. "I have photos. I brought them with me because I didn't know if you would believe what I was telling you."

Chloe bit her lip before nodding her permission. He unzipped the bag and drew out a small photo album full of candid shots, which he passed over to her.

The Chloe of his world really did look like her – as Oliver had said, almost the same. Her hair was a little longer, a little more golden. The biggest difference was her eyes. She had her mother's eyes; so did her sister – the bright blue eyes of Moira Sullivan. Her sister was taller, with brown hair, and looked like Chloe's grandmother. Photo after photo showed the Sullivan women together, sometimes alone and sometimes with Gabe or with the Kents.

There were photos commemorating the first official meeting of superheroes at the Kent Farm. Some she recognized, like Bart, AC, Victor, Dinah and Zatanna. Others were unfamiliar – a red-haired woman and a tall woman with black hair were in the kitchen with Chloe, Moira and Martha, and she wondered who they were. Bruce Wayne had an arm slung around Lois' shoulders in another photo. Clark was shown with his parents, with the Sullivans, with the team. They all looked happy.

Then there were the photos of Chloe and Oliver. The way he looked at her couldn't be mistaken for friendship or team camaraderie. He'd loved her. A few pages later, her suspicions were confirmed when she saw a wedding photo, followed by shots of their first Christmas as a married couple and a photo of Chloe's Pulitzer, posthumously awarded.

But on the last page there wasn't a photo. It was an ultrasound image. She traced her fingers over the words at the top of the image. Baby Queen.

"The day that it happened... we'd spent most of that day at the Kent Farm. Chloe was eight months pregnant. She tired easily but she never let it slow her down. We were driving back to Metropolis when we were attacked," Oliver said quietly. "Chloe tried to hang on. I know she tried. I was pinned into my seat and I couldn't help her. She stopped breathing and a little while later, Zoe stopped kicking. Zod and Alia left us all for dead."

Chloe flipped back to the beginning of the book and once again paged through the photos slowly. It seemed unreal that so much happiness had ended in such tragedy. A world existed where Chloe Sullivan had a family, a sister, and a career as a star reporter. She'd married Oliver Queen, and she'd been expecting a baby girl named Zoe.

He was right. Without the photographic evidence in front of her, she wasn't sure she would have believed his story.

"I've been looking for you for months. This is the sixth world I've visited; if you count my world and the one Lois traveled to, it's eight, and this is the only one where you're still alive, Chloe. Trust me when I tell you that you're the last person I would ever hurt."

Chloe glanced up from the photo album. His eyes still held an intensity that was a little frightening, but she believed him when he said he wouldn't hurt her. "I believe you, I just... I guess I don't understand. You said you made a promise?"

Oliver leaned forward in his chair. "The world that Lois went to was different from ours. The Kandorians had powers like Clark. The Lois of that world was dead. Maybe Clark was too – she didn't know. But Oliver and Chloe were working together to bring them down. Lois was there when Alia killed Chloe, and it was hard for her to relive that. But Oliver took Alia out in that world. Lois, better than anyone, understood why I took measures against the Kandorians in our world."

Chloe stared at him as she connected the dots between his words and what he left unsaid. "You said that Zod and Alia are dead in your world. You killed them."

He hesitated for a minute, and the silence confirmed she was correct before he even spoke. "I did what I had to do. I've been amassing an arsenal of kryptonite weapons in my world. If the Kandorians ever gain powers or pose a threat, I'll be ready. That was enough until Lois told me about the box. Then I thought – what if I could find you? What if I could save you, just once? That's the promise I made to Chloe."

Chloe bit her lip and carefully set the photo album aside. "You said that in eight worlds, this is the only one where I... where a version of me is still alive. Was it always the Kandorians?"

"No," he said. "But every time it was related to Clark and a willingness on your part to sacrifice yourself for his cause. Tell me I'm wrong, Chloe. I mean, you locked yourself in this tower with someone you thought was a threat to your life."

Cloe opened her mouth to argue but then stopped. She couldn't completely argue that because he wasn't wrong. She'd locked down the tower because she thought he was after the Watchtower data and she wasn't going to let him take it.

Finally she said, "What I'm doing here, what I'm protecting? It's bigger than just me. And unlike the Chloe of your world, I don't have a husband or a family to worry about."

"You're saying no one here would miss you if you were gone?" he challenged her. "Not even Lois?"

“Of course she would but...” she paused and gestured to the photo album. “That life? That’s as foreign to me as the Kandorians. I’ve never had it. I doubt I ever will. What I do have is a mission to protect people from the things they don’t even know they should be afraid of. Surely you understand that since your Chloe was part of a league of superheroes.”

“Fringes,” Oliver clarified. “She used her job as a reporter to shine a light on things that we needed the public to be aware of, and she could investigate in a way some of us couldn’t. But she wasn’t locked away in a tower like this. I mean, what, you’re leading the team? That’s Barbara’s job in my world. She goes by Oracle.”

“Well in my world, I don’t know anyone named Barbara. There’s me, and I just managed to get the team back together a few months ago. Mostly it’s me and Oliver working from Watchtower and Clark speeds by occasionally without warning when he needs something.”

She tried not to sound too bitter but his expression told her she wasn’t successful.

“What about your parents?” he asked quietly.

Chloe shrugged. “My mother left when I was young. I didn’t know it at the time but she was meteor infected.”

“And Gabe?”

“Out of state. He left Kansas when I was in high school and I chose to stay here. He has a new family. I don’t see him or talk to him often. It’s safer for him that way.”

“When I was looking through county records, I found a marriage certificate and a divorce decree,” he said after a moment.

Chloe looked away from him. “Jimmy. He’s dead now, so it doesn’t matter. This life – *my* life – got him killed. It should have been me.”

“If he loved you, even a little, then I doubt he’d agree,” he told her fiercely. “Because I know how much I loved Chloe and if I could somehow go back to that day, I’d give my life a hundred times over to save her and our baby.”

Chloe met his eyes and couldn’t help wondering what kind of woman inspired that sort of devotion. Everyone in her life had left, at one point or another. She no longer expected anyone to stay – or at least, not forever. “I’m not her.”

“I know,” he replied, his voice breaking a little. He stood up slowly, as if waiting to see how she would react.

Chloe sat, quietly watchful as he crossed the small distance between them and knelt before her. She allowed him to take her hands, and a weird sense of déjà vu hit her out of nowhere.

“I know you’re not her,” he continued, “but I think Chloe would want me to keep you safe. If you don’t believe that your life matters to anyone else, believe it matters to me.”

Chloe felt caught in that moment, unable to look away. And then he slowly wrapped his arms around her and hugged her. She tried not to stiffen up, and she wasn't sure what to do with her hands so she put them on his shoulders.

When he pulled away, his eyes were bright with unshed tears, and he released a shaky breath. "You smell like her."

Chloe raised a hand to her throat self-consciously. Oliver had bought her the perfume for Christmas, and she couldn't help wondering if Oliver had given it to Chloe in his world, too. "I'm sorry."

"No, don't be," he told her. He shook his head, like he was trying to shake some memory from his mind.

Chloe glanced at her still ringing phone. "That's Oliver. I need to let him know everything is okay, but first I have to ask – what exactly was your plan when you came here? You said you wanted me to come with you. Come with you where?"

"I hoped I could convince you to come back to my world," he said. "I have measures in place and I could protect you better there."

Chloe stared at him. *Seriously?* "Okay, but Chloe Sullivan was a Pulitzer prize winning journalist and the wife of a famous billionaire in your world. I'm guessing her doppelganger suddenly running around town would attract attention."

"I'm prepared to stay here," he told her. "At least until I'm sure the threat from the Kandorians has been neutralized."

"I'm not sure two Olivers will be any less conspicuous," she pointed out. "How long have you been here?"

"Two days. I stayed in a dive motel last night."

Chloe glanced around the tower. "I mean – I guess you could stay here. I usually sleep in the bed upstairs, but the sofa pulls out."

His brows drew together. "You live here?"

"I have an apartment in Smallville, but it's such a long drive that I end up staying here most of the time," she explained. "Jimmy intended to turn this space into an apartment for us, but I turned it into Watchtower instead."

"The building is empty – you could easily convert one of the floors below to a living space."

She nodded. "I've just had bigger things to worry lately."

"Well, at least you're probably safer here," he said. "But it doesn't seem very healthy."

Chloe looked over at her phone again. "Look, what you told me... about you and Chloe. I'd rather that stayed between us. It's not like that with me and Oliver here, and I don't want him

to feel weird about it.” She thought she probably felt weird enough for the both of them. It’s not that she’d never thought about Oliver that way. She had, a few times, especially in the months since his return. But they had a solid friendship now and she didn’t want anything to jeopardize that.

“If that’s what you want,” he said, nodding.

Chloe waited for him to step away and then stood up. She offered him the photo album, but he shook his head.

“I brought that for you,” he told her. “I have the original that Chloe put together.”

Chloe looked back down at the album, feeling almost relieved that she could keep it. It was a strange little window into what could have been, she supposed; a window into a universe far, far away where different choices led to a happier life, and she wanted to look at the photos again later when she had more time to study them. She crossed to her bag and slipped the album inside before picking up her phone.

Oliver paced in front of the Watchtower as Victor tried to find a weakness in the lockdown procedures.

“I could try going in through the vents,” Oliver said, frustrated. Too much time had passed, and he was increasingly anxious, knowing Chloe was trapped inside with some kind of shapeshifter.

“Ollie, I told you man – if there were a simple way in I would have already suggested it. But when Chloe and I designed this, it was intended to keep the enemy out. Unfortunately, we didn’t really think about being trapped inside with the enemy,” Victor muttered as he tried once again to connect to the Watchtower.

“What the hell was she thinking, locking herself inside like that?” Oliver shot back, glaring at him. “Was this something you planned?”

Victor shot him a look of disbelief. “You’re kidding, right? We’re all worried, but try to rein it in buddy.”

Oliver ran a hand through his hair and muttered, “Sorry.”

Moments later Bart arrived with Dinah, who crouched down for a moment in an attempt to regain her equilibrium. “I really hate traveling like that.”

“Sorry,” Bart offered apologetically before turning worried eyes towards Oliver. “I can’t reach AC. Still no Clark?”

Oliver shook his head. “Apparently it’s too much to ask that he keep his damn phone on.”

Dinah shook off her dizziness and stood up. “Bart said Chloe locked down the tower, but she’s inside with someone who looks like you. If she knew she was in danger, why would she trap herself *inside* with the threat?”

“To protect the database,” Oliver said, shaking his head. “It’s reckless as hell, but that’s the only reason I can think of.”

He glanced down at his phone and once again dialed Chloe’s phone. This time she answered.

“Oliver, it’s okay. I’m going to initiate the override now,” Chloe told him.

“It’s okay? What the hell’s been going on in there?” he demanded.

“I’ll explain everything when you get up here, okay? Just give me a few minutes.”

Oliver glared at the phone in his hand as she disconnected the call.

“What’s going on?” Bart asked, confused. “She’s scared enough to lock down the tower but now things are okay?”

“Hell if I know,” Oliver replied.

The next few minutes were tense as they waited for Chloe to override the lockdown procedures. When the doors finally opened, they all rushed inside to the elevator and got in together. After the scans completed, they rode up to the top floor.

Oliver was the first one to push through the double doors. “Chloe, where are you?”

“I’m here,” she called out from upstairs. Seconds later she appeared on the landing and made her way down the stairs, followed by a man who looked exactly like him.

“What the...” Bart said, stopping short beside Oliver. “Dude – he looks exactly like you.”

Oliver kept his eyes on the other man even as he pulled Chloe behind him. “Who are you?”

Chloe moved between them and held out a hand to Oliver. “Ollie, it’s okay. He’s... well, he’s *you*. Oliver Queen from an alternate universe.”

“Really?” Oliver said skeptically without taking his eyes off the man who stood a few feet away. “How do we know he’s not a shapeshifter or something?”

“He’s not a shapeshifter,” a voice said from behind them.

Oliver turned to see J’onn standing with Bart, Dinah and Victor.

“Sorry I didn’t come earlier,” J’onn apologized. “I was out of range.”

Oliver ignored the apology. “How do you know?”

“You know that I can get a sense of people,” J’onn told him. “I can read minds, when I choose to use that ability. I’m polite enough not to tune in around you, the team or my co-

workers.”

“And?” Oliver asked impatiently.

“Chloe’s correct. He is a version of Oliver Queen – not exact, but a close enough match to fool even Watchtower’s security scans.” J’onn stepped forward and held out a hand to the other Oliver. “My name is J’onn J’onzz. Welcome to our Earth.”

The other man shook his hand and nodded. “We’ve met in my world. We – all of you, actually – are part of something we call the Justice League.”

Oliver remained slightly in front of Chloe as the man turned to him and held out his hand.

“I’m only here to help,” his doppelganger assured him as glanced at Chloe, who nodded. “In my world the Kandorians attacked members of the team and... not everyone survived. I thought maybe I could prevent that from happening here.”

The Kandorians. Oliver finally took the hand offered to him and shook it briefly.

“Oliver...” Chloe began, stopping when both men turned to her. “Yeah, okay we’re going to have to do something to differentiate between the two of you.”

“Ollie is Ollie,” Bart suggested. “It’s what we all call him anyway. New Oliver can be Oliver.”

Chloe raised her brows at Ollie, who shrugged. “It’s fine.”

“Maybe we can get back to the part where the Kandorians attacked and not everyone survived?” Dinah crossed her arms and looked expectantly at Oliver.

“Perhaps Kal-El should be here,” J’onn said. “I believe he’s at the Fortress.”

The others looked at each other. “Maybe it’s better if we hear what Oliver has to say before we include Clark,” Victor said cautiously. “It’s kind of a touchy subject with him.”

“Okay,” Oliver said. He shoved his hands in his pockets, a distant look in his eyes as he started speaking. “The Kandorians were brought to my world by Lex, though as far as I know, he didn’t know what he did and still doesn’t know who they are. Zod and Alia were the biggest problem right from the start, always pushing Clark to join them and embrace his alien heritage. They tried to convince him that it was his destiny to rule over Earth, like some kind of god. When he refused, they decided to go after the people in his life. They thought if they could sever his closest ties to humanity that he would join them.”

Ollie felt a sense of foreboding. He could almost feel the rage the other man hid so well, keeping it leashed and hidden from the world around him. If not for the fact that he had once felt that same dark anger, he wasn’t sure he would even have recognized it.

“They started with Clark’s parents – tried to set up a home accident,” Oliver continued. “That attempt failed. Their next target was Chloe, her parents and her sister since they were a second family to Clark growing up. They started with Chloe – drove her car into a ditch

while she was driving from Smallville back to Metropolis. They left her to bleed out there. I... I found her before she died.”

Ollie saw J’onn’s brows draw together, but he didn’t interrupt the other man.

Chloe picked up the story. “The Kandorians passed judgment on Zod and Alia for their crimes. They’re no longer a threat in his world. But Lois accidentally got zapped to another universe where the Kandorians gained powers and she saw Alia kill that world’s Chloe, too.”

Bart spoke up. “That’s like the future our Lois visited. Sounds like Alia’s the same in all realities.”

“Lois visited the future?” Oliver asked. Turning to Chloe he added, “You didn’t tell me that.”

Chloe sighed. “Because it’s not relevant. It hasn’t happened yet and I have my guard up. I’ve got eyes on both Zod and Alia at all times.”

That was news to Ollie. “Wait, when did you do that?”

“When I gave them the IDs,” Chloe replied. “Maybe Clark is naïve enough to think they’re no threat, but I’m not that trusting. The IDs all have trackers and Watchtower monitors their movements at all times. I also got Bart to plant some cameras and listening devices in their homes.”

Ollie turned to Bart, who looked sheepish. “Sorry, Bossman. I had my orders.”

“Smart,” Dinah observed. “I agree with Chloe. They can’t be trusted, especially in light of what Oliver just told us about two other worlds. Combine that information with Lois’ trip to the future, and I think they bear watching. Closely.”

“I’ve amassed a stockpile of kryptonite weapons in my world,” Oliver continued. “I suggest you start developing them here because if they gain powers like they did in that one world, those weapons will be your only defense. I brought copies of the weapon designs.”

“Is that why you came?” Ollie asked. “To warn Chloe and to give us the weapon designs?”

“I came because I made a promise to protect Chloe. In eight worlds that I know of, this is only one where Chloe Sullivan is still alive. I’m here to make sure she stays that way and that you have a way to defend yourselves against the Kandorians.”

“Eight worlds?” Victor said incredulously. “What, you’ve been quantum leaping through the universe looking for Chloe?”

“My world and the one Lois visited – both times she was killed by Alia. When my scientists told me there was a way to visit other worlds, I thought I could find a Chloe who was still alive and help her. The first five worlds I visited were a bust. Chloe was already dead – not the Kandorians but it was Clark’s world that got her killed every time,” Oliver stated flatly.

“And this is the first world where she’s still alive,” Ollie said. “And at least one version of the future would suggest she’s in danger here too.”

“Ollie, we’re all in danger, all the time,” Chloe reminded him. “The future isn’t set in stone. And I have something to tell you.”

The trepidation in her tone got his full attention. “What’s wrong?”

Chloe took a deep breath and then moved across the room to one of the hidden compartments in the wall. When the panel slid aside, he was stunned to see arrows with tips that glowed bright green. Next to the arrows were knives and small throwing stars.

“I started working on the kryptonite weapons months ago,” she told him quietly. “This compartment is lined with lead.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked, moving over to the compartment to get a better look at the weapons. “And how did you... wait. The money you asked me to put in the account for research and development. This is what you used it for?”

Chloe nodded. “I didn’t tell any of you because I hoped we wouldn’t need them and honestly, Clark is probably going to go full self-righteous mode when he finds out. The two of you are on good terms again and I didn’t want to throw another wedge between you.”

“Is this it?” he gestured towards the weapons, his jaw tight.

“No. I have more in a warehouse by the docks,” she admitted. “I’m sorry, Ollie. It’s not that I didn’t trust you. I just wanted to protect all of you.”

“By serving yourself up as the scapegoat?” Oliver hit the button to hide the weapons again and turned towards her angrily. “Like the stunt you pulled earlier, locking yourself in here with someone that, for all you knew, was going to kill you. When did we decide on that course of action, huh? That’s not what the lockdown function was designed for, damn it.”

“That’s exactly what it was designed for,” she shot back. “To protect the database.”

“At the expense of your life?” It took every ounce of his restraint to resist shouting at her. Suddenly, it wasn’t so surprising that Oliver had such a hard time finding a world where she was still alive. It was a damn miracle she was still alive in this one, all things considered, and the very real fear of losing her suddenly reared its head.

They’d grown close in the months since he’d returned to Metropolis. He cared about everyone on the team but his bond with her was different. He’d acknowledged that but hadn’t examined his feelings too closely. Still, the knowledge that she placed a greater value on protecting him and the others than she did on protecting herself scared him, and it was the kind of fear he hadn’t felt for another person in years.

J’onn suddenly spoke up. “I think it’s best if we all take a step back and consider this logically. Chloe saw a potential threat and took steps to protect everyone. She had good intentions, Ollie. And Chloe, Ollie has a point about your alarming willingness to put yourself in harm’s way. We’re a team, and we are able to work best when we come together as a team.”

Ollie swallowed back his anger and tried to relax. “You have a point. It’s also getting late. Maybe we should sleep on this and address it tomorrow in a full team meeting.”

He looked around at the rest of the team, and they all nodded in agreement.

“I’ll track down Fish Stick,” Victor said. “Are we going to include Clark?”

“I think we have to,” Ollie said, “and I’ll talk to Carter, too.” Eyeing Oliver carefully, he asked, “Where are you staying?”

“Here,” Oliver answered. “Unless you have a problem with that?” His tone was benign, but there was the barest hint of something else – a challenge, maybe.

Ollie wanted to say that hell yes, he had a problem with it. He couldn’t put his finger on it exactly, but there was something he didn’t like about Oliver. The only thing that kept him silent was the way his gaze softened when he looked at Chloe. Whatever else he thought about the other man, he did believe he wasn’t going to hurt Chloe.

Finally, he nodded. “Chloe, I’d like a word before I leave.”

The rest of the team took the hint and headed for the elevator, and Oliver went up the stairs to give them some privacy.

When they were alone, Ollie asked, “What aren’t you telling me, Chloe?” She was hiding something; he was sure of it.

She stared at him for a moment. “Just... some things he told me about her life.”

The other Chloe. No matter how well she hid it, he knew Chloe must be affected by hearing that she was dead in at least seven other worlds. He wondered exactly what Oliver had told her about his world’s Chloe that was bothering her so much. “You know you can talk to me, right?” He was still angry, but his concern for her won out.

She smiled. “I know. Give me some time to process it first?”

He nodded reluctantly, and Chloe reached for his hand, squeezing it.

On his way out, he glanced over his shoulder to see Oliver staring at him from the railing. Maybe he wasn’t a threat to Chloe, but there was something about him that just wasn’t right. He was going to bear watching.

A/N – Yay, I finally hit a point in editing where I can update! Sorry it took so long. I’ve been busy and I ended up moving things around, changing some other things, etc. It’ll still be 8-10 chapters, just depending on how I cut the chapters when I’m editing.

Up Next – A team meeting that includes Emil, Lois, Clark, Carter, Courtney, and all the other members, and discussion of how to handle the Kandorian threat. Ollie’s suspicions about Oliver grow, and J’onn confirms some of his concerns. Meanwhile, Chloe has more questions about AU Chloe’s life, and Oliver struggles with where to draw the line between reality and his memories.

Stronger Together

Oliver waited for Victor's signal that the security system was down. Then he slid the window up and eased through the opening to the third floor bedroom of Ronald Gould, one of Metropolis' shadier business leaders who'd made his fortune in imports and exports. Downstairs Gould's wife was hosting her annual holiday party – he could hear the faint sounds of music and conversations that flowed as freely as the French wine.

Gould himself was out of town, taking his top security people with him. Since Oliver was in Metropolis on business, he'd decided it was the perfect time to steal back the Renoir he knew Gould had purchased on the black market a few months ago. He suspected the painting would be in an out-of-the-way location so as not to attract too much notice. His first guess was the bedroom – his second was the home office located on the same floor.

The bedroom held art, all of it expensive and some of which was probably also stolen. Oliver stuck to his agenda though and when he didn't find the Renoir, he slipped down the darkened hallway to the home office. That was where his mission objective took a turn.

The blonde at the computer looked up when the door opened, and they both froze. Oliver recovered first, shutting the door quietly behind him. "You're not supposed to be here."

Rather than looking guilty at being caught red-handed, she raised her brows. "And you are?"

"I only rob the rich when they've stolen from the less fortunate." He took a few steps forward, noting how beautiful she looked in the red strapless gown she wore. Her sleek blonde hair was pulled back into a French twist, her only jewelry a pair of gold earrings. She didn't look like a thief, but it was his best theory at the moment.

"Relax, Robin Hood. I'm not a thief, though you'll probably be interested in that Renoir on the wall." She nodded to the painting that Oliver had been looking for. "As for me, all I want to know is which shipping containers are most likely to contain the women and children he's smuggling in and out of the city."

Oliver was stunned. He'd known Gould was shady as hell, but human trafficking was a low he hadn't even suspected the man would sink to. "He's a trafficker?"

"Ninety-nine point nine percent positive. And now that I have all of his shipping records, I'm going to prove it." She held up a flash drive before slipping it into the bodice of her gown. She motioned for him to come around the desk. Pointing to the screen, she paged quickly through information about his factories near the docks, the evidence of forged work permits, and photos of women. "Some of the women stay here and some move on to other cities. I've barely gotten into his files, but I can already tell you that the photos on two of these canceled work permits match up to Jane Does found beaten to death in Suicide Slums."

She was probably right but her investigation was dangerous. "If Gould suspects you're onto him, he'll come after you. You're not a cop, so you need to think about how you're going to

protect yourself.”

“I can take care of myself,” she stated firmly as she turned off the computer. He noted she was wearing gloves, so she was taking steps to cover her tracks. “I have to get back downstairs. My cousin is covering for me, but I don’t want anyone to notice how long I’ve been gone. I trust you can handle the painting?”

She was already halfway to the door when he nodded. “Wait.”

The woman turned and raised a brow.

There were several questions he wanted to ask her. He wanted to know her name, what her job was since he was positive she wasn’t law enforcement, and how she’d managed to pin down Gould’s activities. More importantly, he wanted to know if she was single.

Rather than ask any of that, he said, “Be careful.”

She smiled as she slipped out the door. Oliver noted the pressure switch that held the painting in place. He disconnected it with ease and slid the painting into a padded bag before exiting the same way he’d entered.

As the weeks passed, Oliver followed Metropolis news carefully from Star City, waiting for the story that exposed Gould. He was surprised that the mysterious blonde woman had the patience to wait and build her case slowly. It showed a sense of perseverance that he admired.

Five weeks after that night, his assistant dropped off copies of the daily newspapers he read from around the country. And there it was on the front page of the Daily Planet – a sting operation conducted by a joint task force that included the FBI, the Metropolis Police Department, and half a dozen state agencies stretching from Kansas to the west coast. Officers raided the shipping yard and Gould’s warehouses simultaneously, and he was arrested. The list of offenses for which he could be indicted promised to keep him off the streets for decades, and it looked like several Intergang leaders were going down with him.

He smiled when he saw that list included stolen artwork found in his private collection. And finally, his mysterious blonde had a name - Chloe A. Sullivan, a recent graduate from Metropolis University who was a new hire at the Planet.

Over the next couple of weeks, he followed her articles on Gould’s arrest and indictment. The series was being lauded as one of the finest pieces of investigative journalism in recent years. He expected to find Chloe riding the wave of that success in a more public manner. Instead she seemed to be keeping her head down and sticking to business, which only made him more curious about her.

Oliver told himself that he was busy, that he didn’t have time to let his attention wander too much when it came to Chloe. He had his hands full with Queen Industries, and he and Bruce Wayne had recently put together a team of heroes they called the Justice League. Still, when it was time for him to check in with the Metropolis branch, he decided to make the move permanent. At least for a while.

He justified the move by telling himself the central location would make League business easier since he'd be closer to Gotham. But he knew the real reason was his desire to see Chloe again.

Ollie followed the others out of the Watchtower. He wasn't surprised when they all stopped and looked back.

"How sure are we that she's safe with this guy?" Dinah asked. "Just because he looks like Ollie and tells us he's here to help doesn't mean it's true, or that he doesn't have another agenda."

"I couldn't read his thoughts, but I could get a sense of him," J'onn said. "I believe he was telling the truth for the most part."

"For the most part." That lined up with what he thought about his lookalike. "But he's not telling us everything."

"No." J'onn looked up at the tower window. "However, I believe he told Chloe the whole story."

"Why would he tell Chloe and not us though? That doesn't make sense," Bart said.

"It does if it's something about his world's Chloe that she's not comfortable telling everyone yet," Ollie told him. "When I asked her about it, that's basically what she said – that he told her some things about that Chloe's life."

"There's something about the accident he's hiding," J'onn continued. "And while I don't believe he means Chloe any harm, there is darkness within him. Whether he has other reasons for coming here remains to be seen."

"So do we all agree that it's safe to leave Chloe with him or not?" Victor asked. "I admit I don't like that idea."

A quick glance around the group showed the others were thinking the same thing. "Until we know more, I think the team should stay here in Metropolis. We can take turns checking in. Dinah, do you think you can be back here for the meeting tomorrow? Around six?"

Dinah nodded. "I'll get Bart to take me back now. I can get things wrapped up in Gotham and fly in tomorrow afternoon. I'll do my broadcasts from here until further notice."

"Good." Ollie looked at Bart. "Find AC and get him here."

"You got it."

After Bart sped off with Dinah, Ollie continued. "Victor, keep an eye on things until I get back. I'm going to go talk to Carter."

“And I’ll find Clark,” J’onn said. “As I said before, I don’t believe he’ll hurt Chloe. I get the sense that he cared for her in his world and still carries the pain of her death.”

Ollie thought about that as he drove to meet Carter. J’onn’s thoughts on Oliver lined up with his own – that he cared for Chloe in his world. If he was the one that found her before she died, it could explain his anger. It must have been awful to find a friend bleeding out in a ditch and be unable to save her. That image was enough to make Ollie angry and he didn’t even know her.

But could the death of a teammate result in the level of darkness and rage he got from Oliver? Yes, he’d be upset and angry if the Kandorians killed anyone on the team, and he’d want them taken down. And if it were Chloe... his mind shied away from that thought as he parked in front of the old Justice Society building.

Carter was waiting for him at the door. “This couldn’t wait until tomorrow?”

Ollie ignored his grumpy greeting. “Nice to see you too, Angry Bird. And no, it can’t wait because we’ve got a problem. A potential problem, or... hell, I don’t know. Problem doesn’t seem to cover it. What do you know about alternate universes?”

“I’ve been alive for a long time and haven’t ever seen proof they exist. Why?”

“Because proof walked into Watchtower a little over an hour ago. My doppelganger from Earth whatever arrived bearing doom and gloom warnings about the Kandorians coming after Clark’s friends and family.”

Carter’s gaze sharpened. “*Your* doppelganger?”

“Close enough match to fool the Watchtower scanners. He took Chloe by surprise but she figured it out and locked down the tower. They had a talk – about what, we don’t exactly know. Then she unlocked the tower and we had a brief meeting. He told us he’s been hopping universes looking for Chloe for months.” Ollie could see he had Carter’s full attention now.

“Why? Because he needs our help?” Carter finally asked.

“Not so much. I get the idea that he thinks we need his help, and in particular, he seems interested in Chloe. She was killed by the Kandorians in both his world and another one that Lois accidentally visited by using some kind of Kryptonian artifact.” Ollie shoved his hands in his pockets and looked up at the painting on the wall that featured the JSA members.

“Long story short, he wanted to warn Chloe and give her designs for kryptonite weapons that could be used against the Kandorians if they gain powers.”

“Sounds the same as the trip Lois took to the future.”

“Yeah, that’s not going to happen,” Ollie said grimly. “Clark may trust his Kryptonian family, but I have my doubts, especially after what I’ve heard about Zod and Alia.”

“We can’t blame them for something that happened in another place and time,” Carter replied. “We could start a war.”

“You know, usually I can appreciate someone playing devil’s advocate, but we already knew about one potential future. Now we have confirmation that they killed Chloe in two other worlds. I don’t want to start a war with them, but if they’re secretly making plans, we need to know about it. Zod has never struck me as the kind of guy who’s going to be happy playing Joe Normal for the rest of his life.” Ollie walked over to stand in front of Carter. “If there’s even a chance that they’re going to start attacking the people in Clark’s life, we need to be prepared.”

Carter was silent, but Ollie could see he was thinking it through from a tactical perspective. He rubbed his jaw and then nodded. “How sure are you that this twin of yours can be trusted?”

“J’onn was there. He seems to think he’s telling the truth.”

The older man raised his brows. “But?”

“But he’s leaving something out,” Ollie admitted. “I think he told Chloe more than he told us. Something about that Chloe’s life or the way she died, maybe. Whatever it is, it’s bothering her and she doesn’t want to talk about it.”

“If someone came and told you about your death in several other worlds, I’m sure it would bother you too,” Carter pointed out. “I have some experience with that.”

“Well, you know Chloe. She jumped straight to business and told us about the trackers she put in the Kandorian ID cards and the bugs she had Bart plant in their homes. Her Big Sister routine extends further than I realized. And she already has kryptonite weapons – something else she didn’t tell me about.” It also bothered him a lot more than he wanted to admit. He’d thought their partnership was on track, and finding out that she might not trust him as much as he trusted her had him more than a little upset.

“I’m guessing Clark doesn’t know about any of that.”

Ollie shook his head. “No, but if this guy is sticking around for a while, which he seems to be determined to do, then we have to tell Clark what’s going on. I’m calling a meeting at Watchtower tomorrow so we can all get on the same page and decide just how much of a threat Zod and Alia might be, and how we can prevent things from escalating.”

“You said Chloe has been developing kryptonite weapons,” Carter said. “If the Kandorians find out about that, it could make her a target.”

He’d already had the same thought. “If I think they’re a danger to her, or anyone else on the team, I’m going to act accordingly. But they don’t know, and I don’t think Clark would tell them because as mad as he’s probably going to be, I don’t think he’d ever put her at risk. Not on purpose.”

“Where is this guy now?”

“He’s staying at Watchtower. Victor is keeping an eye out until I can head back over there.”

Carter gave an approving nod. "I'll take the morning shift. I'd like to get an idea of who he is before the meeting."

Ollie left Carter and went back to the clocktower. He changed clothes and grabbed a garment bag for his suit, shirts and ties. He then packed a small duffel bag with toiletries, shoes, and extra clothes. It was all he'd need since he'd begun keeping uniforms and equipment at Watchtower months ago.

Chloe felt ill at ease after everyone left and she was alone with Oliver again. It was disconcerting to be with someone who looked so much like Ollie, even moved like Ollie, but not to have the same sense of familiarity and camaraderie she and Ollie had developed since last summer. It didn't help that she knew he saw his dead wife every time he looked at her. It made her wonder if she and the other woman shared similar characteristics beyond the obvious physical ones.

"Are you hungry?" she asked. "The kitchen mostly has coffee for me and snacks for Bart, but I have takeout menus."

"I could eat," he said. When she pulled a few menus from a drawer, he walked over to take a look at them. "You don't cook?"

"Not really. I'm not as bad as Lois, but it's not something I have time for."

When he chose Italian, she placed their order – a chicken pasta dish for him and dessert for her since she'd eaten with Lois earlier. She'd completely forgotten about her coffee when Oliver showed up, and it was ice cold now, so she started a fresh pot brewing.

"Chloe – my Chloe – was the same. She said she never had the patience for it, but her sister Allie is planning to go to culinary school after she finishes her business degree." He paused, frowning. "That was her plan a year ago anyway."

"How long ago did she die?"

"One week ago was a year."

Chloe felt like she was toeing a weirdly morbid line with her questions, but she couldn't seem to stop herself. And while she could tell it was a difficult topic for him, he seemed open to talking about it with her. "Do you still see her family?"

He nodded. "Sometimes. I haven't been to Smallville since it happened. I just... I can't drive down that road again. But Allie is at Metropolis University. She stops by and her parents come up at least once a month. The first few months I didn't want to see anyone but I couldn't keep turning them away. Not when they loved her as much as I did."

There was a lot more that she wanted to know. The idea of the many worlds theory had always fascinated her, along with aliens and other unexplained phenomena. Now she had proof that other worlds existed. That other Chloe Sullivans existed. Did they all look like her, or sound like her? How many small changes had to occur before they weren't exactly alike anymore? Her eyes were different, but she was otherwise a near perfect match for the woman who shared her name.

She was probably more curious about her sister than anything. As they waited for their food, she learned that Allie was three years younger than Chloe, and Chloe's birthday was only a few days off from her own.

Chloe nibbled her bottom lip as she thought about that timeline. "Do you know if Moira was caught in the meteor shower in Smallville in your world?"

"I doubt it," he said. "They weren't even living in Metropolis when that happened. Chloe was twelve when Gabe took the job as plant manager at one of Luthor's fertilizer plants. They picked Smallville because they wanted to get out of the city. Chloe was born in Metropolis, and Allie was born in Wichita before they moved back to Metropolis."

She thought about all of the people who'd died during the meteor shower. It was weird to think that if her mom had stayed home that day, she might have had a sister.

"Why?"

"My mother and I were caught in the meteor shower when I was two," Chloe told him. "Mom was driving out to the farmer's market. I just wonder if that explains why I don't have any siblings. I guess Chloe and Moira weren't meteor infected in your world either?"

"No. Are you?"

"I used to be. I still have traces of meteor rock in my heart, but the healing power that I had seems to be dormant now. Mom was afraid of her power to control minds – afraid she would hurt me. She had herself committed to a mental institution for treatment. By the time I found out where she was, she was in a catatonic state." Chloe didn't often talk about this, and she wasn't sure why she was doing it now except that she wanted Oliver to understand that her life here had followed an entirely different path than the one Chloe had tread in his world.

Oliver was silent, but his expression was one of understanding. She supposed that if anyone could comprehend loss of family, he could. It was something he had in common with Ollie.

"Later she ended up in one of Lex's labs where he experimented on metahumans. He used some kind of serum that brought her out of her catatonia because he wanted to use her powers, and he used me as leverage to try and make her cooperate. Clark rescued us but the serum wore off a few hours later. Ollie helped me get her transferred to a secure facility in Star City. He has doctors working on research into what's caused her catatonia and potential treatments, but..."

"But no luck yet," he finished for her.

“No.”

“Does your father know?”

She shook her head as she busied herself putting away the menus. “There’s such a fine line between what I can and can’t tell him. I messed up his life enough when I was in high school. I think witness protection and the Luthor trial was the last straw, really. Lionel had blackballed him, so he couldn’t get another job here anyway. Our relationship was strained and we just... drifted apart after that.”

When she looked up, he was staring at her. She supposed he was trying to line up her life with his Chloe’s life the same way she’d been doing ever since she saw the photos.

Their food arrived and Oliver showed her the weapon designs he’d brought with him as they ate. She had similar designs and prototypes, but there were a few that gave her new ideas, such as the panels he’d installed in his office and home. “I guess Clark doesn’t come around often?”

“Clark isn’t welcome anymore. He disagreed with how I handled the situation, and I don’t give a shit what he thinks since he’s the reason she’s dead,” Oliver said. He balled up one of his napkins, squeezing it as he spoke, before tossing it back down beside his plate.

His sudden mood swing back to anger startled her. “He couldn’t have known what they were going to do.”

“Maybe not but he should have realized they were dangerous. Zod was always in his ear about how his human ties made him weak. Chloe was one of his strongest ties to our world, and somehow they knew that. It’s why she was their next target after they failed to kill his parents. They wanted him to choose a Kandorian bride.”

Chloe nearly dropped her fork. “Wait, are you saying Clark was in love with her?”

“I always thought so, and something Allie said after he returned all but confirmed it. But by the time he came back from his training, Chloe and I were engaged. He seemed happy for us. Chloe never said or did anything to indicate she knew he had feelings for her. Either she didn’t know or she thought it would be easier on him if she didn’t acknowledge it.”

She was trying and utterly failing at wrapping her head around such a weird twist in the Clark and Chloe saga. “What about Lana?”

“Who?”

“Lana Lang?” His expression confirmed he didn’t know who she was talking about.

The world he described was so bizarre. No Lana, Lois married to Bruce Wayne, and Chloe married to Oliver while Clark harbored unrequited feelings for Chloe. “Since Bruce is part of your league of heroes, I’m guessing he’s the Batman?”

He nodded. “You’ve never met?”

“No, but given what I know about Ollie, and what I’ve been able to find out about Batman’s use of technology and gadgets, I had a pretty good idea that he and Bruce were one and the same. I’ve been thinking of ways to approach him about joining our team.” She opened her bag and found the photo album. Flipping pages, she pointed to the two unfamiliar women with Chloe, Moira and Martha. “And these two?”

Oliver pointed to the woman with black hair. “Diana Prince, also known as Wonder Woman. She’s not a metahuman but she is very powerful. When we met, she was working in Washington D.C. The woman with red hair is Barbara Gordon. She used to help Bruce in the field but because of her skill set, she was more valuable as their information broker and team leader.”

“And you left the team.” He hadn’t said it, but she was almost certain she was right.

“I trusted Clark to handle the situation with Kandorians. I wanted them dead, and he and the others decided on the Phantom Zone. It’s funny, but the Kandorians understood why I did it – said they knew I was owed a blood debt. I think they let Clark influence them when it came to dealing with Zod and Alia. Chloe was his best friend, and he couldn’t even be bothered to avenge her death – a death that wouldn’t have happened in the first place if he’d kept a better eye on the situation. I left the team because I couldn’t stand to be in the same room with him anymore.”

Chloe set aside her half-eaten dessert. Oliver hated Clark in his world. It was another one of his unspoken sentiments, but any mention of Clark was accompanied by anger and resentment. If she hadn’t seen some of those same emotions in Ollie before, she might not have been able to read him so well, but she was sure she was right. And tomorrow they had a meeting with Clark who would most likely be angry, too.

She decided to be direct. “Tomorrow I’m going to have to tell Clark about how I’ve been monitoring the Kandorians and about the weapons I’ve been developing. He’s probably going to be upset with me. I need to know that you can control this anger you feel towards Clark in your world. I can’t have you both reacting badly.”

Oliver began gathering up containers and putting them back into the paper delivery bag. “I’ll try.”

It wasn’t a promise, but she suspected it was the best she was going to get.

Oliver followed her into the kitchen. “The fact that they all left you here with a stranger makes me think you’d be better off coming back to my world, at least until they deal with the Kandorians here.”

Chloe poured a second cup of coffee and turned back to him. “First of all, I don’t need a babysitter. Second – do you hear that little beeping noise? Right... now.” She walked over to a monitor and waved. “Say hello to Victor.”

“They’re spying on us?” He didn’t sound pleased. “Is he listening?”

Chloe shook her head. “He’s plugged into the video, not the audio. Clark and I may not be besties anymore, but all of us are trying to work together as a team. It’s just going to take a while because there’s no going back to the beginning. We have to figure out how to move forward.” She jumped when she felt his hands on her shoulders.

He backed up. “Sorry. It’s habit, I guess.”

“It’s fine.” That awkward tension was back. She began pulling up information feeds. “I should get back to work. It was Bart’s night to patrol, but since he’s probably busy looking for AC, I guess Ollie will be out there.”

“I brought a uniform,” Oliver said. “I can help with that while I’m here. I have a few things I need to take care of, but I’ll be back later.”

Chloe turned to look at him, guessing that he needed to get his things from wherever he’d left them. “Okay.”

Oliver had been gone for about half an hour when the security system activated and she saw Ollie headed up to the tower. A few minutes later he strode through the doors.

“Break time for Victor?” she asked, raising a brow.

“Victor followed Oliver but lost him somehow. Any idea where he went?” Ollie asked.

“No. He said he had some things to take care of, which I assumed meant he needed to check out of his motel or maybe pick up his things.” She watched as Ollie began pacing around the room. “Obviously something about him bothers you.”

Ollie shoved his hands in his pockets as he joined her at the monitor where she was tracking 911 calls. “Yes something bothers me. One, he’s not telling us everything and two, you’re not telling us everything. Consider me officially bothered by being left out of the information loop you two have going on.”

“He only left out the things I asked him to,” she told him quietly. She felt his hands on her arms, and she didn’t resist when he turned her to face him.

“See, that’s what I don’t understand Chloe. I thought you and I were done with secrets, and yet here we are.” He looked hurt.

“Ollie...” she hesitated and then sighed. She went to her bag and pulled out the family photo she’d removed from the album. “This has nothing to do with you. It’s me. I don’t know about the other six worlds, but this was Chloe’s life in his world.”

Ollie studied the photo of Moira, Gabe, Chloe and Allie. “I guess this is the sister he mentioned.”

“He said her name is Allie. I don’t want to be weird about this, but the truth is, I feel weird about it. It’s really hard for me to think of that Chloe as a stranger when my own face stares back at me, and she had the same parents that I did. The only difference is that where my life spun off the tracks, hers didn’t. So why her and not me? Why the others and not me?”

“Hey.” Ollie set the photo aside and tilted her chin up until their eyes met. “I sympathize with Oliver and with this woman’s family, but she’s not you and frankly, I’m pretty damn happy about that. We know there’s a potential threat from Zod and Alia, and I promise we’ll handle it together. I don’t care how many worlds lost a Chloe Sullivan. This isn’t going to be one of them.”

She tried to smile but failed, and she leaned into him when he put his arm around her. It was a mistake to get used to this kind of support from him. Realistically, she knew that. But every so often she needed it enough to ignore the inherent dangers of relying on Ollie when she knew, some day, that he’d likely head back to Star City.

“Is that all of it? You don’t want the team to know about that Chloe’s life?”

“I just don’t think it serves any purpose to talk about it. We looked alike and she was a journalist for the Daily Planet, but from what he’s said, that’s where our similarities ended.”

Ollie gave her another squeeze before releasing her. “I noticed she had blue eyes. Personally, I prefer green.” He tapped a finger on her nose in a playful manner, and she smiled.

“You would,” she told him as she turned back to the monitor. From the corner of her eye she saw him pick up the photo and put it back in her bag. When he paused, she realized he had seen the photo album, but he didn’t say anything.

“J’onn said Oliver has darkness within him – enough that it concerns him. Can we trust him?” Ollie asked her.

She glanced over at him. “What did J’onn say?”

“I’m asking you, Chloe. J’onn and I are both smart enough to realize he skimmed over some details, but J’onn said he thinks you know the whole story. Is that true?”

“Yes,” she admitted. She expected him to demand answers but he just nodded.

“So can we trust him?”

Chloe thought about how much to say. “Oliver is very angry about what happened in his world. An attack on the team... it was personal to him and to the others, but I think it was harder for him because he had to watch her die and couldn’t get help in time. When I said that the Kandorians passed judgment on Zod and Alia that was true but...” she paused when she saw that he understood.

“He killed them, didn’t he?”

“Yes. It caused problems between him and Clark, obviously.” She was wary about telling Ollie the details because in a way, it mirrored his handling of Lex and Davis. “You know better than anyone that vengeance doesn’t make the anger go away, Ollie, and it doesn’t make things better. Oliver is still dealing with it in his own way, but I’m positive he didn’t come here to hurt anyone. He only wanted to warn me about what could happen.”

“Okay. I trust your judgment,” he said. “But maybe we don’t lead with that tomorrow.”

Chloe felt her earlier anxiety returning. “I doubt it’s going to be a fun meeting.”

“Trust me, no one’s looking forward to that meeting. The list of things Clark gets pissy about these days is longer than a Tolstoy novel,” Ollie said with a grimace. “If he’s still wearing that ridiculous black costume this summer, I’m staging an intervention. I mean seriously, I never thought I’d miss his endless supply of primary colors and bad shoe choices, but that was before he started dressing like a Matrix character and burning his Kryptonian symbols into signs and buildings all over the city. I realize Metropolis has been encouraging street art, but I don’t think that was what the mayor had in mind.”

She couldn’t help laughing. “I donated money to a cleanup project and left the invoice on Clark’s desk at work. I’m hoping he takes the subtle hint there.” He didn’t mention it the last time she saw him, but she hadn’t heard about any new symbols popping up since then so she figured her message was understood.

“Look, don’t worry about Clark. Yes, he’s going to be mad about you spying on the Kandorians behind his back and he’s really not going to love your stockpile of kryptonite weapons, but the rest of us understand why you did it. Remember what you told me when you convinced me to come back?”

She’d told him that they were stronger together, and she still believed that. “I remember.”

He walked over to the door and for the first time, she noticed he’d brought in more than just his usual change of clothes. He had a garment bag and a duffel bag.

When he noticed her looking at his bags, he shrugged. “I’m not okay with leaving you alone here with him. Not yet. I’ll use one of the cots upstairs tonight.”

Those cots were uncomfortable but he already knew that, so she didn’t say anything. “I don’t think it’s necessary, but I’m not going to argue with you. It’s on you when you’re falling asleep at your desk tomorrow though.”

“Fair enough.” He ruffled her hair as he passed her.

Ten minutes later, he was dressed for patrolling. Chloe handed him his comm device and turned back to her monitors. “Traffic cameras have caught some drug activity going on near the community center. The dealers are probably recruiting.”

“On it.” He flipped up his hood and grinned at her. “See you soon, Watchtower.”

A/N: I’m picturing Alexandra Daddario as AltChloe’s sister, Allie. She has blue eyes similar to Lynda Carter, who played Chloe’s mother, and I don’t know – she just reminded me a bit of both of them. I had initially written some short stories about AltChloe and AltOliver but it got depressing, so I’m including important scenes as flashbacks so that you can see how their story evolved. Some of those will come up in conversations between Chloe and AltOliver.

Every time I write a Smallville story, I’m reminded of the serious lack of story logic and continuity in the series. For example, I don’t think we ever found out what happened to

Gabe. I always assumed that he and Chloe had drifted apart and were estranged until her wedding episode in Season 8, when I got the impression maybe he was dead? Only that didn't make much sense because surely it would have been mentioned since the death of a parent is a big thing. So, I just usually go with estranged in my stories and say he moved out of state to find work and maybe even remarried and has a new family because then it makes sense that Chloe wouldn't want to put him/them in danger. If I missed something somewhere, let me know.

I'll probably post Under the Mistletoe next. I'm traveling right now but the update is ready. As soon as I have a few minutes to read over it and a good wi-fi signal, I'll get on that. I'll be back home in a couple of days and then I'll have more uninterrupted time to post chapters I've finished editing. Thanks for reading!

Remembrance of Things Past

Six Months Earlier

Oliver tipped the waitress who brought over the next round of shots. Ashley leaned into him – or was it Fiona? He wasn't sure and if he was being honest, he didn't care because their faces blurred together anyway. The brunette on his left passed the shots around. He tipped one back before replacing the empty shot glass on the tray and grabbing another one.

He glanced idly around the casino, already bored by the environment. He'd played every high stakes game in the place; he wasn't even sure how much money he'd lost, though he did remember losing the keys to his Ferrari.

When he saw her standing a few feet away watching him, he thought he was imagining her presence there. He shook his head and reached for another shot – clearly he needed it if he was seeing her face again.

“Oliver, I need to talk to you.”

Oliver looked up to see Chloe had moved closer and if she was speaking, he wasn't imagining her being there in a Vegas casino when she should have been in Kansas. Her blonde hair was wavier than it had been the last time he saw her and he found himself looking for other telltale signs of change before he shut down that line of thought.

“If Clark sent you, you can tell him I'm doing just fine.” He waved a hand at the tray of shots. “But have a drink if you like. You look like you could stand to loosen up a little.”

She ignored the shots and the other people who were now watching them. “Clark didn't send me.”

“Lois then.” He grabbed his glass of scotch and drained it before shaking the ice to get the attention of a passing waitress.

“Lois is gone, Oliver. So is Clark.”

Oliver looked at her again, frowning. “What do you mean gone?”

“I'll explain everything. But I'm here to ask you to come back.”

He studied her for a moment, taking in the tense lines of her body and the way she gripped the strap of her bag. She was clearly bracing herself for an argument with him. “If you need access to accounts, call Emil or Vic. I'm exactly where I want to be.”

“I'm surprised you haven't burned through your accounts.”

Ah, there was the disapproval he'd been expecting. He held up his hand to flag down the floor manager, fully intending to have security escort her out, when a man suddenly stopped in front of Chloe and reached for her arm.

“There you are. I told you I wanted to buy you a drink.” The man leaned over Chloe as he spoke, ignoring her attempts to pull back as he maintained his tight grip.

Oliver stood so quickly he bumped the table, spilling the tray of shots. Both the man and Chloe looked at him in surprise, and the man let go of her immediately as Oliver moved between them.

“Don’t touch her again.” He kept his tone low and even, but there was no disguising his anger.

The other man backed up. “Sorry, man.”

Oliver kept his eyes on the man as he hurried away. When he turned to look at Chloe, she was rubbing her arm. “Did he hurt you?”

She shrugged, green eyes considering as she studied him. He hated the way she sometimes looked at him – like she saw things he didn’t want anyone to see. It was the way she was looking at him now and it made him feel exposed. He still wanted to tell her to leave but this casino was in the seedier part of Vegas and he wasn’t sure how safe it was for her to be walking around alone.

Chloe seemed to read the indecision on his face because she reached out her hand. “Oliver, please.”

Please. He should tell her no. Instead he stared at her for another minute and then took her hand. By the time they got back to his suite at the MGM Grand, he was already second guessing his decision. He went straight for the bar but stopped short when she stepped in front of him.

“Ollie, please don’t do this to yourself.”

“Do what? Have a little fun?” Rather than sidestep her, he turned back to the kitchen and pulled out a bottle of beer.

“The drinking, the women, the cage fights...”

He took a swallow of beer but had to force it down. He didn’t realize she knew about the cage fights. He thought about all of his activities over the last month – the fighting, the random women he’d slept with, the gambling. Suddenly he felt ashamed, which made him angry because the whole point was to stop feeling at all.

“It’s obvious that you’re punishing yourself,” she continued softly. “We’re all doing it in our own ways, I guess. The team scattered, you know. I haven’t spoken to any of them since Jimmy’s funeral. And Clark...”

The way her voice broke made him forget his anger. “You said Clark is gone. Gone where?”

Her gaze slid away from his. “He’s embracing his Kryptonian training. He’s made it clear he doesn’t need my help.”

There was obviously more to that story. “And Lois?”

“Lois disappeared during the Doomsday chaos. I’ve been looking for her but I haven’t found any leads.”

She was alone. She hadn’t come out and said it but she was also scared. And she had to be desperate if she was coming to him because he was no one’s idea of reliable at the moment.

“I can’t come back.” He didn’t sound as decisive as he would have liked, and Chloe picked up on it now just as she had at the casino.

“Oliver, I know you’ve made mistakes. So have I. We can’t take them back, but they don’t have to define us.”

There was something in her face – something like hope and if he was her last hope, they were both in a hell of a lot of trouble. He realized then he should never have left the casino with her.

She kept her eyes on him as she said, “I can’t do this on my own, and neither can you. But together? We’re stronger. I’m not asking you to be Green Arrow if that’s not what you want. I’m just asking you to come back to Metropolis with me and take it one day at a time.”

He set his beer on the counter and rubbed his hands over his face. He didn’t like the idea that she’d been alone since the funeral and on top of that, she was searching for Lois on her own. Looking at her standing across from him, her small hand gripping the strap of her bag again, he could see that it cost her something to admit she needed anyone.

“I can’t promise you anything, Chloe,” he finally said.

She swallowed hard, her relief evident. “I’m not asking for promises. I’m just asking you to come home with me and let me help you.”

Ollie shifted on the uncomfortable cot as he thought about the night that Chloe had found him in Vegas. As much as he didn’t want to come back to Metropolis at the time, he would forever be grateful to her for coming after him. For not writing him off the way he’d written himself off. He’d kept up the drinking for a couple of weeks after returning with her, even as he began helping her run down leads on Lois, each of which led to a dead end.

He’d surprised her at Watchtower one night. He’d told her he was going for a drink and she didn’t try to stop him. But the disappointment on her face stayed with him, and he left the bar sober for once. When he returned it was to find her curled into the corner of the sofa beneath rose window, silent, tears streaming down her face. She’d held herself together so well that he didn’t realize she was falling apart as much as he was.

That was when they’d finally talked – they sat together for the rest of the night and at dawn, when the sun began to stream through the stained glass, he’d felt some peace for the first time

in months. He'd had a few setbacks along the way to recovery, but Chloe was always there with a steady hand to help him back up.

Aside from her continued estrangement from Clark, things were back to normal. Lois had returned, the team was together, Ollie was at the helm of Queen Industries, which was doing well, and he and Chloe had formed a strong bond of friendship and partnership. He relied on her, and she'd eventually begun to rely on him.

Oliver's arrival had upset the balance he'd found with Chloe. It wasn't that he didn't appreciate the fact the other man was trying to warn them about a possible future – he did. But there had to be more to it because he'd devoted his entire life to finding Chloe in another universe. In world after world, he found he was too late and still he didn't stop looking for her. He'd been at it for months and after talking to him, Ollie got the impression that he would have continued his search indefinitely.

Ollie dozed fitfully until dawn. When the weak, winter sunlight broke through the shadows, he got up and peeked in on Chloe to find her still sleeping. The room was more of a storage closet than a bedroom, but she'd managed to fit a full size bed into it, along with a night stand and a portable rack where she hung her clothes.

He'd tried to talk her into getting an apartment in the city since she only made twice weekly trips to the Talon apartment to do laundry and get clean clothes, but she'd been resistant to the idea. Frankly, her attachment to the tower was beginning to worry him because she so rarely ventured outside, preferring to rely on delivery services for most of her meals unless Lois or Ollie managed to talk her into joining them somewhere. It wasn't any healthier than his downward spiral had been, but she scoffed when he made the comparison.

After a quick shower, he dressed in jeans and a long sleeved Henley. When he left the bathroom, he saw the door of Chloe's room was open and Oliver was there beside her bed, watching her sleep. Ollie stopped outside the door, a chill sliding down his spine. Before he could say anything, Oliver noticed his presence and joined him outside, shutting the door behind him.

Ollie tried not to sound suspicious as he asked, "What were you doing in there?"

"I was just checking on her," Oliver answered. "It's cold in here, and I had an extra blanket I wasn't using."

"You were checking on her." Ollie ran his hand over his jaw as he eyed the other man warily.

"I guess..." Oliver hesitated. "It's hard to believe I finally found her. I woke up this morning thinking maybe it wasn't real. Like I said – I was just checking on her."

"Yeah well, in this universe a woman waking up to a strange man standing over her bed is cause for alarm," Ollie said. "I was just going out to pick up breakfast. Why don't you join me?" His tone made it clear that it wasn't a suggestion.

Downstairs Ollie found his black wool coat and pulled it on, and then waited as Oliver put on his cheap coat, a hat and sunglasses. They rode the elevator down in silence.

“Is it really a good idea to be seen together?” Oliver asked. He shoved his hands in pockets as they began to walk down the sidewalk. “I can assure you I didn’t go to all of this trouble, and come all this way, just to hurt Chloe. You don’t need to worry about leaving her alone with me.”

“Since you brought it up, why did you go to all of this trouble and come all this way? I get that you wanted to warn Chloe but that won’t bring her back in your world,” Ollie pointed out. “So why spend months looking for her?”

Oliver said nothing as they walked, and Ollie thought maybe he had no intention of answering him. They had reached the main street now, and Ollie stopped at Chloe’s favorite café to pick up her coffee, a couple of breakfast bagels with eggs, orange juice and muffins. When he emerged from the café he looked around, finally spotting Oliver coming out of another café that had recently opened across the street.

As they walked back to the Watchtower, Oliver asked, “How do you think you would feel if the Kandorians killed a member of your team?”

Ollie looked over at him. “I’d be angry.”

“You’d be angry,” Oliver repeated. There was a hard edge to his words. “Let me set the scene for you, then. Zod and Alia distracted Clark – sent him off on a rescue mission in Wichita. Then they waited for Chloe to drive down that little country road. The investigators said the car must have flipped over a few times before it went through the guard rail and down the embankment because of the way it had caved in and trapped her. Broken arm, both legs broken, half her ribs broken, too many cuts and contusions to even count – that’s how I found her. Broken and bleeding out in a ditch. Every time she tried to breathe there was this rattling sound; I can still hear it sometimes. I’ve never felt that helpless. I couldn’t do anything for her, so I held her hand and hoped she knew she wasn’t alone as she was dying. It wasn’t quick, if that’s what you’re thinking. She wasn’t conscious, but she was still a fighter.”

Ollie’s steps slowed as he listened to Oliver. He’d heard the story last night, but not like this. Suddenly he pictured that scene with *his* Chloe and felt his stomach lurch. They had reached the Watchtower and neither of them said anything as they walked inside.

At the elevator Oliver turned to him, removing his hat and sunglasses. His dark eyes reflected the same anger Ollie had heard in his voice, as well as something else harder to read.

“Zod thought Clark’s human ties made him weak. It was a repetitive subject for him and I knew it. I feel like I should have known how dangerous he was. I should have been able to do something to prevent it even if Clark didn’t. When Lois told me about her trip to another universe and how that Chloe died, I decided to fund the research necessary to see how feasible interdimensional travel really was. I promised Chloe that if I found another world with another Chloe who needed help, I’d save her. So you don’t need to worry that I’m going to hurt Chloe in this world because she’s the last person I’d ever hurt in *any* world.”

There was still something Oliver was leaving out. Ollie stared at the other man, searching for clues to those missing puzzle pieces as he considered what he’d said. “And then what?”

Oliver frowned. "I don't understand."

"You've found Chloe. You've warned all of us about the risks, and you've learned that she was a step ahead of you with the kryptonite weapon designs. So now what?"

"I'm not leaving," Oliver replied evenly. "Not while Zod and Alia are breathing the same air she is."

"Okay, so what's your plan? Are you going to take them out here like you did in your world?" At the surprise on Oliver's face, Ollie shrugged. "Chloe didn't tell me, if that's what you're thinking. I guessed. You and I aren't the same, but we've traveled some of the same dirt roads."

"Then you understand."

"I understand we're going to have a problem if your plan is to go all renegade assassin on the Kandorians," Ollie said. "We don't need a war with these people if there's a way to avoid it."

"And the alternative?" Oliver asked, his voice rising. "Do you really think they can be reasoned with if they're searching for the same power Clark has? Because it seems to me that the only person taking this threat seriously is Chloe, and I'm not taking any chances with her life."

His unspoken implication that Ollie didn't care enough to take the threat seriously pissed him off.

"First of all, you don't know Chloe, or me, or Clark," Ollie replied. He could feel his jaw twitching and tried to get his temper back under control. "Chloe may look like the woman you knew, and you and I may look alike, but we're not the same people. Chloe has saved my life more than once, and I care what happens to her. I don't know where you got the idea that you're the only one capable of helping her, but she has a team of people behind her."

"Yeah well, for a woman with a whole team behind her, she seems pretty damn lonely trapped in her tower," Oliver said. He signaled the end of the conversation by turning and walking into the elevator.

His last words stuck with Ollie as he went to the kitchen and got plates for their breakfast. He didn't like that Oliver had picked up on that so quickly because the truth was, he didn't know how far Chloe trusted the team to have her back. The fact that she'd been playing on her own chess board these last few months told him that she still wasn't willing to place her faith in him or the others, or at least not the same way she had before.

He suspected nothing would fix that except time and patience because one thing he knew about Chloe was that she couldn't be pushed to do things before she was ready. He'd learned to read her pretty well in the months since he'd returned. He knew when he could toe over the lines she'd drawn and when he needed to back off. Ollie had been content to play the long game where she was concerned but he was reconsidering that now. Between Oliver showing up and newly raised concerns about Zod and Alia, he needed Chloe to let him in if he was going to help her.

Ollie plated Chloe's muffin and set a fruit cup beside it. He could hear Oliver talking to Chloe as he grabbed her coffee and joined them in the main room. He stopped when he saw Oliver offering Chloe a piece of the berry scone he was holding.

Chloe popped it into her mouth. "Wow, these are really good. I didn't know the café down the street sold scones." She reached out for the rest of the scone.

"There's a new café a few blocks down," Oliver told her as he handed over small containers of cream and jam. "It was Chloe's favorite, so I took a chance. You should try it with the cream and jam."

Chloe turned toward the kitchen and paused when she saw Ollie standing there. "Hey. I don't suppose that coffee is for me?"

He smiled and offered her the cup he was holding before passing her the plate. "Almond mocha, double shot, extra whip."

"Careful – a girl could get used to this," she replied. "We need to check out this new café because I think I'm in love with these scones."

Ollie knew it was irrational to be so irritated by baked goods. Just because Oliver made an educated guess about something he thought Chloe might like didn't mean he knew her better than Ollie did. And no matter what the other man thought, Chloe had people here who could support her.

He ate his breakfast in silence as he observed the way Oliver interacted with Chloe. He relaxed around her, but he was also watchful of everything she did, like he was committing her routines and habits to memory. Or maybe he was comparing them to the Chloe he had known. For the first time, Ollie wondered how close Oliver and Chloe were in his world. Had Chloe helped rein Oliver in and set him back on the good path? If so, it might explain why he felt he owed her something even after death.

"It looks like Lois is going to miss our meeting," Chloe said. "But we're having one of our twice weekly lunches tomorrow so I can fill her in."

Ollie nodded. Lois knew everything now, and it made life easier for Chloe since she spent most of her time at Watchtower. "Carter will be over some time this morning to look over the intel you've gathered from monitoring the Kandorians."

That was the excuse he and Carter had settled on the night before, but Chloe's raised brows hinted that she was onto him and didn't appreciate the babysitting detail. However, she didn't argue with him about it.

After he was dressed for the office, Ollie stopped at Chloe's workstation. "I have a late meeting, so I'll call when I'm leaving the office. I told Clark I'd call him when we're all here and ready to start."

She nodded. "Ollie, are you okay? You seem... not yourself."

He rolled his shoulders, stretching his neck as he said, “We need better cots.”

“Or you could just go home and sleep in the comfort to which you’re accustomed,” Chloe said, shaking her head. She glanced over her shoulder where Oliver was setting up a board for target practice. “If I thought I was in any danger from him, I would tell you. I also wouldn’t let him stay here.”

Ollie ducked his head to meet her eyes. “I guess I don’t understand how you seem so sure about him. We don’t know him Chloe.”

She stared back at him for a moment. Finally she said, “You told me that you trusted my judgment, right? I have... reasons for believing what he’s told me. And I know that you’d feel better if you knew what my reasons were, but I don’t want to get into it right now.”

It went back to whatever they’d talked about while Chloe had Watchtower in lockdown mode. That and the photo album he recalled seeing in her bag that he guessed came from Oliver. She’d shown him one photo, and he suddenly wondered about the other photos in that album. Chloe wasn’t naïve so he believed her when she said she had valid reasons for the faith she was placing in a virtual stranger.

“Okay,” he said. “But we need to talk later, Chloe. Really talk.”

She nodded and reached up to straighten his tie. “I know. Have fun at the office. I saw your schedule and your eleven o’clock meeting with accounting will probably put you to sleep.”

He laughed. “You have no idea. I’ll send Bart over with Thai food around noon.” He squeezed her shoulder and then grabbed his briefcase and laptop bag from her desk on his way out.

Chloe tried to concentrate on the reports she was compiling for Carter, but she found herself distracted by Oliver’s target practice. Unlike Ollie, who usually used the Watchtower target as a method of winding down at the end of the day, Oliver was treating it like an actual training session. He moved around the room, lining up difficult shots and then hitting the target dead center every time.

She gave up on the reports when he moved up the stairs to make a downward shot. If it had been anyone else she probably would have been concerned about being hit, but it was clear that he knew his way around a bow every bit as well as Ollie did. As she watched him, she realized that this wasn’t just target practice. He was learning the angles of the room and determining the best areas for defense and offense.

Oliver lowered the bow when he noticed her watching him. “Am I bothering you? I can stop.”

She shook her head. “No, it’s okay. I was just wondering if Ollie has also figured out all the tactical ins and outs of the tower.”

“I’m sure he has. He probably did it when he was here alone.” Oliver walked down the stairs to join her at her workstation. Nodding at her coffee cup, he asked, “Refill? I could use a cup myself.”

“Thanks,” she said, handing him her mug.

He returned minutes later and handed one of the mugs to her. “Cream, no sugar.”

Chloe took a sip of her coffee. Her eyes strayed to her bag on the workstation – it was open and she could see the family photo on top of the album. She reached for it and held it up for a closer look. It was still disconcerting to see a stranger with her face, and she wondered how Ollie felt being confronted with Oliver in the flesh.

“That was one of her favorite photos,” Oliver suddenly said. “Family was really important to her.”

“They look happy. How are they now? It couldn’t have been easy for them to lose her that way.”

“They were devastated,” Oliver said softly. “Martha handled most of the funeral arrangements – she and Jonathan were a big support to Moira, Gabe and Allie. I probably should have done more, but I couldn’t seem to pull myself together, you know? It was like a nightmare, only I never woke up.”

“I’m sure that they understood you needed time,” Chloe said.

He reached out and traced Chloe’s face in the photo. “People always say that time heals all wounds but it’s not always true. Sometimes you hit rock bottom just to find another layer of pain sucking you further down into the pit, and there’s no amount of psychology or sympathy that can help you. I thought I understood the worst of it when my parents died, but I survived that. Sometimes I don’t think I’ll survive losing Chloe and our baby because she was every good thing I had in my life.”

Chloe understood grief. She’d lost her mother in a different way, and she’d lost Jimmy. She’d also seen what Jonathan’s death did to Martha and Clark. But Oliver’s pain was still fresh despite the fact that a year had passed since his wife’s death.

His wife and their baby, she reminded herself. She suddenly felt guilty for bringing it up again. “I’m sorry. I’m asking too many questions.” She was curious, but she didn’t want to upset him.

Oliver smiled as he looked over at her. “Gabe used to say that the reason Chloe became a reporter was because it gave her a reason to ask questions and if it’s your job to ask questions...”

“People can’t call you nosy,” Chloe finished, laughing. “My dad used to say the same thing about me.”

“Yeah, well, Allie argued she was mostly just nosy,” he said, shaking his head. “But she’d give anything to have her sister back, nosiness and all.”

“After Jonathan’s funeral, I helped Martha sort through family photos. She said you don’t realize the true value of a moment until it becomes a memory that you’d give anything to live just once more.”

“I knew her value the moment I met her,” Oliver said quietly. “But I understand the sentiment because I’d give anything to have one more perfect day with her. Martha delivered the eulogy at Chloe’s funeral. She asked me for my best memory of Chloe and I couldn’t give her one specific memory because they were all the best. Every day I had with her was the best day of my life.”

Chloe swallowed hard past the lump in her throat. “I’m sorry if I upset you by bringing it up.” She shouldn’t be surprised that like Ollie, it was his ability to care that made him most vulnerable. She didn’t doubt how much he’d loved her because it was written all over his face every time he talked about her. When he reached for her hand, she didn’t pull away.

“It’s hard to talk about her with most people,” he admitted. “I don’t mind talking about her with you though. It helps me keep her alive.”

“You should talk to her family,” she suggested. “I’m sure that keeping that connection alive is just as important to them.”

“I wish you could meet them,” he said. “With your mom’s condition, and Gabe being gone – I’m sorry you don’t have a sister like Allie. You deserve more, Chloe. And I think her family would like you.”

Chloe looked at the photo again. She had Lois, who had always been like a sister to her, but she’d never had the life she saw in the picture. It stirred a longing she thought she’d let go of a long time ago. “Tell me about a happy memory with her family.”

Carter stood silently outside the double doors, listening to Oliver talk to Chloe. They seemed to be discussing the other Chloe’s childhood growing up in Smallville. He made it sound damn idyllic – happy parents, happy sister, and there was even a dog mixed into the tale of picket fences and apple pies. Carter didn’t know Chloe very well, but he’d read Sylvester’s research on the woman and what Oliver was describing was a far cry from the life Chloe had known. It made him wonder what Oliver’s angle was.

He pushed open the doors, stopping Oliver mid-sentence.

Chloe looked startled as she stood up. “I didn’t even hear the elevator.” She shook her head and hurried over to her workstation. “I should be finished with this soon if you want to have a seat.”

Carter nodded. “Take your time.” He studied the man in front of him. He was definitely Oliver Queen, down to the last detail. He held out his hand. “Carter Hall.”

Oliver shook his hand. “Oliver. I’m familiar with the other team members, but you’re new.”

He watched as Oliver turned back to a few photos scattered across the desk. He gathered them up and began sliding them back into sleeves in an open photo album.

Carter reached for a family shot – Chloe stood smiling with her parents and a woman who must be the sister he’d heard Oliver talking about. When Oliver held out his hand, Carter passed it to him without comment, taking note of the fact that Oliver dropped the album into Chloe’s bag on the workstation.

Oliver had taken the time to bring the dead woman’s family photos with him. It made tactical sense in case Chloe didn’t believe he was who he said he was. But where one or two would have done the job, he’d brought an album, and it looked like he’d given them to her since he didn’t place them in his own bag just a few feet away.

Filing this away for later, he joined Chloe at her workstation and got down to business.

Up Next: Team meeting and Lois and Clark meet Oliver, Clark and Chloe have a discussion, and Oliver joins the team on patrols as we get more people’s thoughts on Ollie’s doppelganger. I’ll probably finish Under the Mistletoe next and then edit the next part of this. Thanks for reading!

Whatever It Takes

Oliver glanced up from the stack of papers requiring his signature as he and his executive assistant finished up for the day. “I think that’s it for today. Thanks for staying late.”

Mary nodded and gathered the papers. “One more thing, Mr. Queen. Perry White called again requesting an interview.”

He wasn’t surprised. In the two weeks since he’d relocated to Metropolis, several publications had requested an interview. Perry White with The Daily Planet had the slight edge when it came to persistence, promising his top features writer, Cat Grant, for the interview.

He’d met Cat before and felt reasonably certain he would get a favorable slant from her. She just wasn’t the reporter on his mind lately.

“Tell him he can have his interview on one condition – I want Chloe Sullivan to do it.”

Oliver half expected Chloe not to live up to the woman he remembered from that night. After all, adrenaline was a high that tended to put a more colorful spin on almost everything. He should have known better.

She was just as beautiful, and just as confident, as he remembered. He’d been sitting across from her for a half hour, and so far it seemed she was as unimpressed by Oliver Queen as she had been by coming face to face with the Green Arrow. He was beginning to wonder if anything fazed the young woman.

“Mr. Queen...”

“Oliver,” he reminded her for at least the tenth time. He grinned when she glanced up from her notepad with a raised brow. He’d been trying to keep it mostly professional, but he found himself distracted by the way she bit her lip when she was writing something down, and the way her small foot, clad in a very saucy pair of leopard print heels, tapped along with the rhythm of her pen.

“Mr. Queen,” she repeated in a firm tone. “You’ve said that you’ll be in Metropolis indefinitely. Do you have any plans to make the move permanent?”

If anyone had asked him that question half an hour ago, the answer would have been an unequivocal no. Now, as crazy as it sounded, he couldn’t imagine leaving this woman behind.

“The truth is that even though I can conduct business equally well from a number of cities, I’ve always preferred Star City because it’s home. It’s where my father started his business, where my parents married, and where a number of their charitable endeavors continue to make an impact.”

He was being much more forthcoming than usual. His relationship with the press had always been tumultuous, and he tended to approach interviews with a circumspect attitude and a healthy dose of skepticism with regard to their motives. He could tell she had noticed this unguarded moment.

“You must have a lot of good memories of your parents in Star City. I can understand why that would be difficult – both to live with and to leave behind,” she replied. There was a softer look in her blue eyes when she looked up from her notebook.

“I do have a lot of good memories,” he said. His lips lifted in a half smile as he shrugged. “For a while those memories were something I tried to outrun by living a little too fast. To be honest, it hurt to remember them.”

“And yet you’ve always kept up with their charity work,” she said.

“You’ve done your homework.” Oliver stood up and rounded his desk to sit in the chair beside her. “It took some time for me to figure out a balance to my life. Two years surviving on an island gave me the kick in the pants I needed to finish my education, the way they would have wanted me to, and to take up the reins of the company. My parents cared about making the world a better place, and I like to think they passed that sense of civic responsibility on to me.”

For the first time since the interview had begun, Chloe favored him with a real smile. “I think it’s pretty obvious that they did. I’m surprised that you would consider a permanent move to Metropolis, all things considered. Is there any particular reason?”

He studied her for a moment. “Let’s just say my reasons are personal.”

She tilted her head, a curious expression on her face. “I’m sure you know that I don’t do features. Is there a reason that you asked for me?”

“I was intrigued by your investigation into Gould,” he admitted. He sat back in his chair and smiled at her. “It must have led you into some dangerous situations.”

Chloe stared back at him for a moment before capping her pen with a decisive click and turning off her recorder. “Thank you for the interview, Mr. Queen. I think I have what I need.”

He stood up and waited as she put away her notebook and recorder. “Have dinner with me.”

She looked up at him. “You must realize that would be a conflict of interest, Mr. Queen. Besides, I have an article to write.”

“After the article is published, it’s no longer a conflict of interest,” he pointed out. He followed her to the door of his office.

“Well, you’re free to ask again after the article is published in Sunday’s edition.”

“And if I do, will your answer be yes?”

Chloe turned to look at him, amused. “I don’t know.”

He could work with that, he thought with a grin. “Well, I look forward to talking to you after Sunday then.”

Ollie looked around at the group assembled in the Watchtower. The full team was there, including Carter and Courtney. He glanced over at Oliver who, as usual, was sticking close to Chloe and keeping a wary eye on the door as they waited for Clark.

Everyone was on edge; aside from the sounds of Bart crunching his way through a bag of Doritos and the steady tap as Chloe worked on the computer, the room was silent. Then a whoosh of air ruffling papers on Chloe’s work table announced Clark’s arrival.

When Ollie looked at Oliver, he was surprised to see that the other man looked more confused than angry.

“What the hell is he wearing?” Oliver asked in a low voice.

Ollie assumed the all black ensemble was not a thing in Oliver’s world. “No one knows, but we’re calling it an emo phase.”

Clark had stopped to speak with J’onn first. Ollie could tell the moment he noticed Oliver because he stopped and stared at them both.

Ollie waved. “It’s me, in case you’re wondering.”

Clark’s dark brows drew together as he turned to Chloe. “What’s going on?”

Gesturing to Oliver, Chloe said, “We have a visitor from an alternate Earth. Meet Oliver Queen.”

Clark looked between Ollie and Oliver before finally extending a hand to Oliver, whose expression was carefully blank as he stared back at Clark. But he accepted the brief handshake before resuming his position near Chloe.

“Since the whole team is here, I assume there’s a problem,” Clark said.

“Oliver came here because members of the team and their families were attacked in his world,” Chloe explained.

“Attacked by whom?”

“By the Kandorians,” Oliver told him. “Specifically, Zod and Alia planned a series of attacks meant to separate Clark from the people he cares about. They thought if they removed his human connections that he would embrace his Kryptonian heritage.”

Ollie could tell that Clark was thinking of Lois, and apparently Chloe could as well because she shook her head when Clark looked at her for confirmation.

“It was Clark’s parents,” she explained. “They tried to set up a gas explosion at the farm, but Jonathan discovered the leak.”

The news that Jonathan Kent was still alive in Oliver’s world was an obvious shock to Clark. “My... his parents are okay?”

“The Kents are fine,” Oliver said. “Their next target wasn’t so lucky.”

Oliver had shifted from neutral to cold and abrupt, and Ollie could sense his anger threatening to surface. He decided to step in.

“They went after Chloe,” Ollie explained. “She didn’t make it.”

Everyone was looking at Chloe, who appeared uncomfortable with the attention.

“How?” Clark asked.

“They staged a car accident while she was driving from Smallville to Metropolis,” Ollie told him.

Clark looked at Chloe again, and Ollie recognized what he was doing – reassuring himself that Chloe was there. It was the same thing Ollie had done when hearing the story for the first time.

“A gas leak and a car accident,” Clark finally said. “Is it possible that they were just accidents?”

“Don’t,” Oliver bit out. “Don’t try and rewrite my history because I damn well know what happened. They murdered her.” His cold anger was unmistakable.

“That’s not what he’s doing,” Chloe said, a sharp tone of warning in her voice. She placed a hand on his arm and waited for him to look at her. “He’s just asking questions.”

Oliver took a deep breath and let it out slowly before looking at Clark. “I found her before she died. Zod and Alia were there, and they admitted their crimes when Clark took them to the Fortress. So no, they weren’t *accidents*.”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” Clark said quietly.

Oliver nodded but didn’t say anything. Ollie suspected he didn’t trust himself to speak.

J'onn picked up the story. "Oliver wanted to warn Chloe about what could happen. He's been searching for her for months, but in each world he visited Chloe was already dead. Until now."

"Lois had a run-in with some kind of Kryptonian artifact in Oliver's world," Ollie said. "She crossed over to another universe where the Kandorians had powers, and she saw Alia kill Chloe there. Counting that one, we're talking about seven universes where Chloe is dead, Clark. I think we need to hear him out."

"Especially since Lois' trip to the future, we do know it's a possibility," J'onn added.

Clark crossed his arms. "J'onn, you were the one who told me I couldn't take sides. You said I had to bridge the gap, and that's what I've been trying to do. I can't accuse the Kandorians here of crimes committed in another world, or in the future."

"We're not asking you to accuse anyone," Chloe said. "Right now we're just keeping an eye on them."

"Keeping an eye on them? Through Watchtower, you mean." Clark's expression was wary. "Exactly how far does your reach extend, Chloe?"

She raised her brows. "Far enough that I'll be forewarned if they try something. All things considered, you can't exactly blame me for that. I barely escaped Checkmate unscathed. I'm not really eager to try my luck with Zod and Alia."

"I wouldn't let them hurt you. You know that."

"Sometimes even the fastest man alive isn't fast enough," she replied, "which is why I've been designing a last resort defense system." She stood aside to let Clark see her computer screen.

A tense silence fell over the room as Clark studied the weapon designs. "You're manufacturing kryptonite weapons."

"Like I said – they're a last resort because we can't be defenseless if the future Lois saw comes to pass."

"Except that I already destroyed the solar tower, Chloe. I did that to protect everyone, including the Kandorians." Clark turned to Chloe, hurt and anger in his expression. "You're not just creating something that could destroy them. These weapons could destroy me."

"I realize that your opinion of me is pretty low these days, but I've sacrificed a lot to protect you over the years, Clark. You can't possibly believe that I created these weapons to use against you."

Clark's voice rose as he asked, "And what if they fall into the wrong hands? You're trying to control everything, and you know that's not possible!"

Oliver took a step toward Clark. "You have no right to talk to her like that. Not after everything she's lost because of you."

“Oliver, stop.” Chloe reached for his arm but he ignored her as he took a few steps closer to Clark.

“Do you want to know what every universe I visited had in common? Chloe was dead because of things you brought into her life. She died and you lived. Every time.”

Clark stared back at him but didn’t say anything.

“Chloe didn’t lead the team in my world,” Oliver continued, his tone grim. “She had very little to do with the League. She was recently married, and she was expecting her first child. The *only reason* Zod and Alia killed her was because she was your closest friend. She was only a few weeks from her due date, and they had no qualms about killing her and her baby. Don’t you fucking stand there and tell me that it’s not possible for them to turn on everyone because we both know that’s bullshit.”

The shock that ripped through the room was palpable. Ollie looked at Chloe. She met his eyes for a moment before looking at Oliver. “That’s enough, Oliver.”

Oliver shook his head. “I need some air.”

After he left, everyone’s attention settled back on Chloe. This was what Chloe hadn’t wanted them to know. Ollie had never considered that it was something like this – a world where Jimmy lived and Chloe got her happily ever after. And then it was ripped away from her. He imagined the scene Oliver had described to him, only now it was a pregnant Chloe in the car. His stomach turned.

“You can all stop looking at me like that,” Chloe finally said. “What happened to her was tragic, but it has nothing to do with me.”

Ollie knew Chloe well enough to know when she was putting up a front. She might not want to admit that she was affected by the other Chloe’s story, but he could see that it bothered her. He wasn’t even surprised that she was attempting to brush it off because she’d done the same thing after hearing that she died in the future, and again after her near death experience at Checkmate headquarters.

“Did all of you know about the weapons?” Clark looked around the room at everyone.

“I did that on my own, Clark,” Chloe told him. “Oliver developed similar weapons in his world. When he told us about them yesterday, I showed the team what I’ve been working on.”

“We didn’t know before yesterday but to be clear, I support Chloe’s decision,” Ollie said as he moved to stand beside her. “Knowing what we know, I think we need to be prepared for the worst.”

A muscle twitched in Clark’s jaw. “And everyone else?”

“I think we all support her decision, Clark,” Carter said. “It can’t hurt to be prepared. That said, I understand why you need to maintain a neutral position. No one here wants a war if it

can be avoided.”

J’onn said, “And your relationship with them is the best chance we have of avoiding that particular outcome.”

Clark nodded and looked at Chloe. “I want to talk to you before I go. Alone.”

“Fine.” When no one moved, she said, “I’ve made up a patrol schedule, which I sent to Victor. Maybe you guys can discuss that over dinner? A new pizza place just opened up around the corner.”

The others dutifully headed for the door, but Ollie hesitated. Clark was angry and even though she’d built up walls that rivaled Clark’s Fortress, he knew that Chloe was still dealing with the fallout of their strained relationship and could still be hurt by it.

As much as he wanted to, he knew he couldn’t protect her from everything. She and Clark had a lot of history to their relationship, and though they were no doubt about to exchange some harsh words, he also knew they had to be the ones to work through their issues.

“I’ll wait outside,” Ollie said, giving her shoulder an encouraging squeeze before nodding at Clark and following the others out.

Chloe was tired – so tired that she was almost tempted to ask Ollie to stay and act as a barrier to Clark’s anger. Instead she watched him walk through the double doors before squaring her shoulders and turning back to Clark.

“Just say it, Clark.”

“Say what?”

“Whatever it is I can see you just dying to say,” she said wearily. “I’m sorry if you see the weapons as a betrayal because that’s not what I intended, but I’m also not going to apologize for trying to protect us all. That includes you in case you were wondering.”

“It’s the way you’re doing it, Chloe. You sneak around and spy on everyone. You hide things, and you lie to people. You lie to me.”

“Or maybe I’ve finally learned the art of self-preservation. After nine years of blind trust, I’m learning to look both ways before wading into the fray. You should be happy about that.”

Clark looked incredulous. “Happy about you being in the middle of all this? You’re taking risks whether you recognize it or not, and Oliver shouldn’t be enabling you by funding your eye in the sky.”

“What would you have me do, Clark?” Chloe waved a hand at the computers. “At least this way I have some control over my own life.”

“No. You have control over everyone else’s lives, while the person I thought I knew disappears a little more every day.”

His blunt words hurt, but Chloe pushed that feeling down and lifted her chin. “You know, I thought about leaving after Jimmy’s funeral. I even had a new city picked out.” She could tell she’d surprised him. “Do you know what stopped me? Knowing that the monsters under the bed don’t disappear just because you pretend they don’t exist.”

“Maybe not,” he said. “It doesn’t mean you have to put yourself on the front line of every battle.”

“I don’t see you pushing Lois away,” she replied. She walked over to her bag and pulled out the photo of the other Chloe with her parents and sister. Holding it up to Clark, she said, “And staying off the front lines like she did is no guarantee of safety either.”

Clark took the photo and stared at it. “She looks like you, but somehow she doesn’t.”

“It’s the eyes, I guess. She had the perfect life, Clark. She had parents that stayed together, a sister named Allie who wanted to go to culinary school, a husband, and a baby on the way. She was a star reporter with a Pulitzer under her belt, lots of friends... and she still ended up dead.”

She didn’t add that it was the same in six other universes, though she could tell that Clark was thinking it when he met her eyes. Maybe this was just her fate. If it was, she planned to go down fighting.

“None of that means the same thing will happen to you, Chloe.”

“I guess there is one thing different about this world. They went after Chloe because she was Clark Kent’s best friend and confidant.” She took the photo from him and put it back in her bag. “You should warn your mother and Lois. Don’t worry about me.” She kept her back turned, pretending to search through a pile of papers on the desk. She was wound so tightly that she knew she’d break if Clark continued to pick at the cracks in her armor.

The whoosh of air signaled Clark’s departure. Chloe leaned against the desk, hands covering her face, until she felt in control again. She was back at her computer when she heard Ollie come in. She felt the tension creep back into her shoulders. The rest of the team had tiptoed around her after Jimmy’s death, which was only one reason she hadn’t wanted them to know the details of the other Chloe’s life. The way they were all looking at her lately, like her days were numbered, was unnerving.

She expected Ollie to say something, but he didn’t. Instead he called Bart and asked him to bring dinner to them when they were finished eating. Then he took his bow from its compartment and began his usual maintenance routine.

“Oliver brought his uniform with him,” Chloe said. “Since you and Carter are up tonight, I thought you could take Oliver with you.”

Ollie made a face. “You have me patrolling with Big Bird?”

She glanced over her shoulder at him. “You two like each other more than you’ll admit, and you work pretty well together despite the sarcasm.”

“Am I the only one who remembers that he threw me through a window? This one, if I recall correctly.”

“You survived,” she said, patting his cheek in mock sympathy as she passed the table where he sat.

When Bart arrived with their dinner, they took a break to eat. Oliver came back as they were finishing up, and he and Ollie both went to change while Chloe began scanning for potential hotspots.

Ollie returned first and joined her at the computer. “So how are you and Clark? I didn’t hear as much yelling as I thought I would.”

“There was no yelling, really.” She shrugged. “It is what it is. We all have bigger things to worry about right now.”

“Hey, come here.” Ollie pulled her into a hug.

Chloe pushed against him and looked up to meet his eyes. “I don’t need to be comforted. I’m fine.”

“Did you ever think maybe I need comfort? I’m about to go out there and risk my life against the forces of evil,” he said. He smiled down at her when she rolled her eyes at his overly dramatic tone.

She relaxed into him, allowing the hug against her better judgment. The reassuring beat of his heart under her ear steadied her until she felt her earlier tension melting away.

“It’ll be okay, Chloe,” he said, his voice soft. “I promise.”

There was a time when she might have believed that. Now she was past the point of putting her trust in promises she knew others couldn’t keep, no matter how much they might want to.

Oliver watched Chloe and Ollie from the top of the stairs. It was obvious that Ollie cared about her, though to what extent he wasn’t sure. Seeing them together like this, he suspected Ollie’s feelings ran deeper than he realized. Chloe was much harder to read. Unlike the woman he’d known, she was closed off and wary of almost everyone around her.

Chloe had told him that the team only recently came back together. The rest he’d learned from the Internet. As far as he could tell, they’d all left her alone in Metropolis last year. She’d been grieving and searching for Lois and not one of them stuck around to help. Eventually she brought them all back together.

They didn't deserve her. His Chloe had been loved, and here she spent her days shut away in a tower with minimal human contact. His hands tightened around the railing for a moment before he pushed away and made his way down the stairs.

They pulled apart, and Ollie's eyes widened when he saw him. "You've got to be kidding me. What are you, the Black Arrow?"

Oliver looked down at the black leather of his uniform. It used to be green – darker than Ollie's, he'd chosen forest green as homage to the island that had sharpened his skills. He'd made the switch to black after Chloe died, limiting his patrols to Star City after he left the team. "The guy wearing neon green in an urban setting doesn't really have a lot of room to talk about color choices."

Chloe passed a communication device to Ollie and then walked over to Oliver with another one. "Carter is already out there and probably wondering where his backup is. Be safe."

Ollie flipped up his hood and slipped on his night vision glasses. "Hopefully Birdman doesn't decide to haze you like he did me."

Oliver raised his brows. "Sounds interesting."

"My advice? Stay away from windows."

A/N: I'm not sure how many of these little AU Chloe/Oliver scenes I'll include in the story. I have a few more written, but they may not appear in every chapter. I held off on posting because I was working on the ending of the story and editing various parts in between. I want to get this one finished up this month. Thanks for reading!

Up Next: Lois visits the Watchtower to get the scoop on Oliver, whom she doesn't really trust. Chloe and Oliver continue to spend time together, blurring the lines for both of them. Carter spends more time at the Watchtower as well as patrolling with Ollie and Oliver, and he and Ollie have a conversation that leads Ollie to some new realizations about his feelings for Chloe.

Revelations

Into the Dark – Chapter 6

Oliver crept into his bedroom, hoping that his hasty exit and return had gone unnoticed by Chloe. She'd been fast asleep when he got the call to meet the team at a warehouse that Lex Luthor had been using to experiment on people with meteor powers.

He relaxed when he saw her curled up facing his side of the bed. He undressed and slid in beside her, carefully gathering her close. She sighed and burrowed into him for warmth, pressing her face into his shoulder.

It had been three months since their first date, and a month since they'd become intimate. He wasn't sure what he'd expected from her in the beginning. She'd captured his interest, she'd challenged him, and frankly, he'd had to work harder for her attention than he ever had with any other woman. While he wasn't necessarily proud of it, the three-month mark was where most of his relationships ended, if they made it that far at all.

It was the nature of his work, both as the CEO of Queen Industries and as the Green Arrow and leader of the Justice League. Eventually he had to decide if he could risk his secret, and the answer was always no. And yet that secret had been on the tip of his tongue for weeks. It scared the hell out of him.

The path he'd chosen would undoubtedly put her and everyone she cared about at risk. It was something he should have thought about more carefully before he got in this deep with her. He'd have to tell her soon or end things. The latter would hurt her, something he wasn't sure he could bear to do. The terrifying part was the growing certainty that losing her was something he'd never get over.

Oliver let himself into his apartment, smiling when the scents and sounds of dinner preparation drifted from the kitchen. "Chloe?"

"In here," she called back.

When he walked into the kitchen, she was pulling a pie out of the oven, which she carefully set on the counter. A large pot of savory stew bubbled on the stovetop.

He raised his brows. "Allie was here, huh?"

Chloe smiled. "Yes. For the record, this beef stew is my grandmother's recipe and one of the few things I can cook well. The pie though – that's all Allie."

Reaching out for her hand, he pulled her close and kissed her. "I missed you." He'd been gone for two weeks on both QI and League business, and he'd done nothing but think of her

whenever he had down time.

"I missed you too." Chloe reached up to trace the still swollen bruise on his temple. "I know you said it was just a little car accident, but are you sure you're okay?"

As it always did when he lied to her about his extracurricular activities, guilt swelled within him. "I'm okay. I actually want to talk to you about something."

"We can talk while we eat. I was just getting ready to warm up the fresh bread Allie brought over."

That distracted him for a minute. "Her yeast rolls?" He stuck to a low carb diet most of the time, but Allie's buttery yeast rolls were worth adding more time to his workout.

"She knew you were coming back tonight and came over to help me make the stew and the pie, and she brought them with her."

He watched her bustling around the kitchen, feeling nervous about the conversation he knew he had to have with her. He'd been thinking about whether or not to tell Chloe his secret for a couple of months, and this recent mission had tipped the scales in favor of telling her. It was either that or walk away – there was no door number three, and he was pretty sure he couldn't walk away from her now if he tried.

Oliver felt like he knew Chloe well enough to be sure she could handle his double life. The question was how angry she was going to be about all the months he'd lied to her. He didn't think she wanted to throw away what they had any more than he did, but he couldn't fault her for being upset over the lies. After all, this wasn't the first random injury he'd had to explain away, and there'd been a few extended trips he'd had to lie about as well.

He distracted himself from his nerves by searching out a bottle of red wine that would pair well with the stew, finally settling on a bottle he'd picked up in Bordeaux a few months ago. Pouring a couple of glasses, he handed one to her after she slid the rolls into the oven.

Chloe looked concerned as she watched him. "Ollie, is everything okay? You seem nervous."

"There's something that I need to tell you. Something I probably should have told you a long time ago," he admitted. "It's just... what I'm about to tell you affects more than just me, and I had to be sure. And even after I was sure of you and me, I had to think about how it would affect your life, and potentially your family and...."

"Hey." Chloe reached out and took his hand with a smile. "Ollie, if you're trying to tell me that you didn't get that bruise in a car accident, I already know. I've known for a long time. I was just waiting for you to be comfortable enough to tell me."

Oliver stared at her, stunned. "Wait. You know what exactly?"

She raised a brow. "I know you're the Green Arrow. The truth is, I suspected it when I interviewed you that first time. Something about the way you brought up Gould and how my investigation must have been dangerous combined with you requesting me, specifically, for

that features article. And even though I told myself I was probably crazy, the more I got to know you? The more certain I was that I was right."

He thought back over the times he'd had to spin a tale to cover minor injuries or spur-of-the-moment trips with the team. "Why not just tell me that you knew?"

Chloe sipped her wine before setting it on the counter. "Because I felt like it was important that you be the one to tell me. If you couldn't do that, we wouldn't have much of a future together. I wanted that truth to come out on your terms, not mine."

Oliver wondered what he'd ever done to deserve her. She was the best thing in his life, and suddenly those words he'd been holding in couldn't be contained any longer. "I love you."

Her eyes widened in surprise. Then she smiled and hugged him fiercely. "I love you too."

The oven timer buzzed, startling both of them. Chloe laughed and pulled away to take the rolls out of the oven.

Oliver followed her over to the counter. "If you love me then marry me."

The pan clattered against the counter. Chloe turned, blue eyes wide as she stared at him. "What?"

"Marry me, Chloe." He was rushing things, but he knew with a bone deep certainty that she was it for him. There would never be anyone else like her. "I know it's a half-assed proposal since I don't have a ring, but I'll fix that tomorrow if you just say yes."

For once, she looked lost for words. But then she said the only word that mattered. "Yes."

Chloe didn't realize how accustomed she'd become to solitude until her privacy in the Watchtower was completely invaded. Both Oliver and Ollie were there when she went to sleep and when she woke up. When Ollie left for the office, someone arrived to keep an eye on things in the morning hours. Ollie usually returned to have lunch with them and if he couldn't leave the office, Bart dropped by with takeout. Then he proceeded to hang around and generally drive her crazy since his inability to sit still meant he was right on her heels wherever she was in the tower.

The rest of the League followed suit, coming and going throughout the day and evening hours as they traded up patrol shifts. While AC, J'onn and Carter made no excuses for their presence and simply treated Watchtower as their new home base, the others were less subtle. Victor asked for her help with coding projects, most of which she knew he could handle alone. Even Courtney began hanging out more often, which Chloe wouldn't have minded if it weren't abundantly clear that the younger woman wanted to keep an eye on Oliver. And when Dinah suggested an afternoon shopping trip, complete with happy hour drinks and a little girl talk, Chloe began wondering if she'd fallen into an alternate reality in her sleep.

Oliver took their blatant distrust in stride, though he didn't allow it to affect his desire to remain close to Chloe. Regardless of who else was there, he stayed with her, eyes following her around the room. She found herself torn by the situation – on the one hand, she wished for some time alone so that she could talk to him about the other Chloe's family. On the other, she knew that might not be so healthy for either of them and in those moments, she was glad to have the team there to act as a buffer.

Lois had canceled their lunch plans earlier in the week when she'd been sent on assignment to Gotham. So, when she returned, Chloe wasted no time packing her overnight bag and driving to Smallville for a little peace and quiet.

"I can't believe you have two Oliver Queens at your beck and call and you're here," Lois said, watching as Chloe unpacked her computer equipment and began setting it up on the table.

"At this point, the entire League should be called the beck and call boys.... and girls," Chloe grumbled. "I can't get anything done because someone is always there, following me around or watching Oliver like they expect him to suddenly sprout devil horns."

Lois raised her brows at that. "Is there a specific reason why they don't trust him?"

Chloe sighed. "He's got some rough edges. He's angry about what happened in his world, and he's angry that the Kandorians are here. He feels like we should be doing more."

"I suppose you can't blame him for feeling that way," Lois admitted, "but Clark is definitely not a fan of Ollie's dark twin. How much do you know about the world he came from, anyway?"

"Not much."

"Clark told me that this other Chloe had a different life – that her parents were still married and living in Smallville. That she had a sister, a husband and a baby on the way. That sounds like a lot."

"None of that has anything to do with me, so...."

"Really?" Lois rolled her eyes. "Chloe, don't kid a kidder. I know you better than that."

"What do you want me to say?" Chloe asked impatiently. "I don't know those people at all. Is it weird to hear the details of her life? Yes, of course it is."

"And the details of her death. And not just hers, either." Lois crossed her arms. "No matter how badly Clark reacted to everything at the meeting, he is taking this seriously, Chloe."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it." Chloe tried to keep her bitterness to a minimum, especially when she was with Lois since she didn't want her cousin to feel like she was caught in the middle. The problem was that it was increasingly difficult to hide just how fractured her relationship with Clark had become.

And as curious as she was about the other Chloe and her world, she felt defensive when others asked her about it. The whole situation had her feeling unsettled lately because she was once again facing the idea of her own mortality.

It wasn't new. After growing up in Smallville, she was practically a pro. She was just tired.

"So where's this family photo that Clark mentioned?"

Chloe looked up with a frown. "Clark told you about that?"

"Just that Oliver had brought a photo of her family. It's weird to think of you having a sister."

Chloe sighed and opened her bag to find the photo, which was stuck in the front cover of the album. She passed it over to Lois without comment.

"Wow," Lois said, her expression thoughtful. "She looks like your Grandma Sullivan, except she has Aunt Moira's eyes. Do you know her name?"

"Allie," Chloe replied. She bit her lip and then added, "Oliver said she was three years younger than Chloe. Apparently, she's enrolled at Met U and had plans to go to culinary school at one point."

"You know it's an alternate universe when a Sullivan-Lane girl is going to culinary school. What about me?"

She smiled. "I don't think Lois Lane is enrolled in culinary school in any universe, Lo."

"Obviously not, but what is she like over there?"

"He hasn't said much, but it sounds like she's more or less Lois Lane. She's a reporter – first for the Planet, and now she works in Gotham. Oh, and she's married," Chloe said with a raised brow. "And it's not to your super powered alien boyfriend."

"Married? To who?" Lois demanded.

"Believe it or not, Bruce Wayne," Chloe replied with a laugh. "I wonder if the sparks flew after she got dragged out of Wayne Enterprises for trespassing? Or maybe they met after...." She stopped talking abruptly as she realized what she'd been about to say – that it was more likely that Lois met Bruce after Chloe and Oliver were engaged, or even at their wedding.

"After what?" Lois asked.

Chloe shrugged. "When she interviewed him or something."

She could tell that Lois realized she'd changed what she was going to say. She had that look in her eyes that she got when she was assessing a situation and deciding just how far she could push to obtain her objective.

Finally, she said, "Huh – Bruce Wayne. I'm pretty sure he doesn't like me that much in this world."

Chloe was pretty sure her cousin was right about that considering he'd threatened to have Lois arrested and prosecuted the next time he found her trespassing. "Strange world over there, I guess."

Lois looked down at the photo she was holding and nodded. "Different, anyway."

Lois decided to work from home the next day, despite Chloe's protests.

"If you're playing babysitter...."

"I know you don't need a babysitter, Chloe. I need a break – a pajama and junk food day that I can spend fleshing out a few story ideas while I watch crap TV."

"Don't you have an article due today?" Chloe shot her a suspicious glance.

"Tess isn't in the office this week, so she's not going to care as long as I meet my deadlines," Lois told her. "Geez, you'd think you don't want to spend time with me. It's a good thing I'm not the sensitive type or my feelings would be hurt."

Lois recalled what Ollie had said the last time she saw him. Chloe had canceled lunch plans for the third time in a row, and it dawned on her that she hadn't actually laid eyes on her cousin in two weeks. She'd dropped in on him at the office, unannounced, and ready to read him the riot act about how much time Chloe spent working.

That was when Ollie pulled out his phone and showed her countless messages he'd sent Chloe in recent months – largely unsuccessful attempts to get her out of the tower and back into the real world.

"If she won't come out then I go to her so she'll at least have some company. I do what I can, Lois, but it would be nice to have some help," he'd said with barely suppressed sarcasm.

His jab hit home, making her realize how inaccessible she'd been since her time jump, and especially since she'd learned Clark's secret. She'd told herself that she would be a better support system to her little cousin, who was struggling whether she wanted to admit it or not.

Lois went downstairs and got coffee, muffins and croissants from the Talon, and she and Chloe sat on the sofa while they had breakfast and watched the morning news. Lois flipped stations, finally settling on a Metropolis based morning show featuring Bethany Snow and Ron Troupe.

"And in local crime news, it seems we have two vigilante archers in Metropolis," Bethany was saying.

Chloe set her plate aside, and Lois increased the volume with interest.

"We've heard the stories about the Green Arrow, Black Canary, the Blur, and another local vigilante often referred to as Hawkman," Ron replied. "But multiple sources report seeing

two archers last night, one of whom was dressed in black.”

“His uniform is black?” Lois asked. She glanced over at her cousin to see her tapping out a message on her phone. “What are you doing?”

“Making sure Ollie knows about this,” Chloe said, frowning. “With them patrolling together, I suppose someone was bound to notice there are two of them.”

“Does it matter? Metropolis is home to several heroes. Recently, a few people have figured out that there might be two speedsters in town.”

“I suppose not,” Chloe replied. “But to be on the safe side, I’m going to monitor chatter online and with the police department. People noticing two archers is one thing, but if they notice two Olivers? That’s a big problem.”

They each settled into their separate routines that morning. Chloe had linked two computers together and appeared to be running a search on one while she reviewed satellite images on the other. Lois flipped channels again, finally settling on a 90s action movie to watch as she went through her story notes. But her mind kept going back to the details she’d learned about the alternate Lois.

Married. To Bruce Wayne, of all people. She couldn’t help wondering how different that world must be to result in such an unlikely and, frankly, unholy union.

“Do you think they have sheep in Oliver’s world?” Lois asked thoughtfully.

“What?” Chloe glanced over at her in confusion. “Why wouldn’t they have sheep?”

“Well, I married Bruce Wayne. Who knows what kind of world he came from?” Lois pointed out. “No sheep or rainbows, coffee rations. I mean, maybe they have day trips to the moon but if I couldn’t afford coffee? I’d probably go looking for an alternate universe, too.”

“Lois, that’s a TV show,” Chloe pointed out. “And a far-fetched one at that.”

“Well, less far-fetched than before another Oliver Queen showed up in your tower,” Lois replied. “Maybe I should interview the producer.”

“Just try to remember that you’re not working for The Inquisitor now, Lois.”

Lois snorted. “I’m dating an alien, Chloe. Anything is possible.”

They took turns restarting the coffee pot and ordered in pizza for lunch. When her pen ran out of ink, Lois got up to look for another one. After an unsuccessful search of the kitchen drawers, the bedroom and her own bag, she grabbed Chloe’s bag off the end table.

The photo Chloe had shown Lois was on top, and she paused when she saw the photo album beneath it. She glanced up to see that Chloe was still deep in her research, so she pulled out the album to take a look. She expected to see more family photos, or maybe even team photos, but she was shocked when she got to the wedding photos.

“Oh my God.” She stared at the images of alternate Chloe and Oliver, who looked deliriously happy together.

“What are you doing?”

Chloe’s sharp tone startled her.

“What am I doing? Seriously?” Lois marched across the room and waved the album in front of her cousin. “What are you doing?” She noted her cousin’s defensive posture – arms crossed and practically wrapped around herself.

“You had no business snooping, Lois.”

“For your information, I was looking for a pen. It never occurred to me that you were hiding something this big. They were married, Chloe! That means the baby that died with her was his daughter.” It explained his anger and more importantly, it explained why he’d come so far to warn Chloe. “Does Ollie know about this?”

“No.” The finality in Chloe’s tone was obvious.

Lois stared at her cousin. “Don’t you think this is something he should know?” As far as Lois was concerned, this information changed things. It was one thing to know that Oliver had traveled across the universe, literally, in order to warn them about losing a friend. It was another thing altogether to realize he’d been hunting for his wife’s doppelganger.

“No, I don’t, and you’re not going to tell him either. It would make things uncomfortable for both of us.”

“Chloe, this man spent months searching for you across multiple universes because his wife and child were murdered, and his wife? She’s basically you with a few plot twists in the story. I think we’re way past worrying whether this will make anyone uncomfortable.”

“Lois, you have to swear to me that you’re not going to tell him. Or anyone, for that matter.”

“Chloe...”

“I’m serious.” Chloe paused and took a breath, her knuckles white against the edge of the desk she gripped, as if steadying herself. “I can’t deal with that on top of everything else right now. I need to focus on the Kandorians and keeping the team on task. The last thing I need is Ollie tiptoeing around me because he thinks I’m looking at him as my future husband.”

Lois resisted the urge to continue arguing and took a moment to study her. She could tell Chloe was upset; she tried to hide it, but Lois wasn’t fooled. She knew her little cousin wasn’t nearly as in control as she seemed to be, which wasn’t a surprise when Lois stopped to think about everything she’d been through in the last eighteen months – kidnapped, possessed by alien technology, married, divorced, and witness to Jimmy’s murder.

No, she wasn’t surprised to see Chloe clinging so fiercely to the status quo when even she must realize that Oliver’s arrival was a huge ripple in her otherwise orderly world. It was what Chloe did – she could put up a front and pretend she was fine while the world was

crumbling around her. Then, when some people might fall apart in the aftermath, Chloe became a control freak to hold herself together.

“Promise me, Lois.”

“Fine.” Lois switched off the TV and began throwing her notes in her bag.

“Where are you going?” Chloe asked.

“To the Watchtower.”

Chloe looked startled. “What? Why?”

“Because I’d like to meet Oliver,” Lois replied. And see for myself exactly why he’s here, she added silently.

Back at her workstation, Chloe expected to fall into her usual routine. It was blissfully silent for a change; even Oliver was out, though he’d left a note on her monitor letting her know he’d be back later that afternoon. But having Lois there was a huge distraction, especially since she knew her cousin was waiting to ambush Oliver with who knew what kind of questions.

Lois sat on the sofa, flipping through the photo album she’d refused to relinquish. Chloe wanted to ask her what she was thinking since she’d been unusually quiet for the past two hours. However, she wasn’t ready for more of her cousin’s relentless nagging, so she turned her attention back to her crime reports.

Between the caffeine she’d been steadily consuming and her nerves, she jumped when she heard the beep that announced Oliver’s arrival. She looked at Lois, who stood with a determined gleam in her eyes as she returned the photo album to Chloe’s bag.

Oliver pushed through the double doors and paused when he saw Lois. “Hi.”

Lois strode forward and held out her hand. “Lois Lane. But I guess you know that, right? I’m sure you’ve done your homework since your arrival in our little corner of the newly discovered multiverse.”

Oliver raised a brow as he shook her hand. “As direct as ever, I see.”

But not as direct as Chloe had feared. She regarded her cousin warily, hoping she wouldn’t start grilling Oliver the way she was no doubt dying to do.

Oliver looked over at Chloe, and she smiled. “Nice afternoon walk?”

He smiled back. “Don’t worry, I’m keeping a low profile. I spent the morning sitting down at the docks, watching the boats. And I was wearing this.” He held up a fisherman’s hat that had

a dark and scruffy men's wig attached to it. "Between this and the sunglasses, no one pays any attention to me."

"Don't you have boats in your universe?" Lois asked.

"Of course. Sitting near the water helps me clear my head."

"Hmm. What about sheep?"

Oliver looked amused. "Do you think I've come here to steal your sheep?"

"Sheep, my cousin – I'm just trying to figure you out," Lois said.

Chloe was going to kill Lois. "Ignore her, Oliver. She watches way too much television and used to work for a tabloid."

"Let me guess. Fringe?" When Lois looked surprised, he shrugged. "The scientists who were working on my multiverse theory were big fans of that show, too. For the record, our worlds are pretty similar, although our money looks different." He pulled out his wallet, removed a bill and passed it over to Lois.

Lois looked at it for a moment, turning it over. "While I applaud the lack of Andrew Jackson on your twenty-dollar bills, I have no idea who this is."

"That's President John F. Kennedy."

"Uh, no it's not. History wasn't my favorite subject, but I know John F. Kennedy was hot, and this guy must be ninety years old."

Chloe took the bill from Lois and studied it. "Lois is right. JFK was assassinated two years into his presidency. He was only in his forties."

"It's him. He wasn't assassinated in my world," Oliver explained. "He served two terms as president and then started a humanitarian aid fund to benefit underprivileged youth, another one to help Cuban families seeking asylum, and too many scholarship programs to count. This photo was taken to celebrate his seventy-fifth birthday – it was put on the twenty a few years after he died, in honor of his public service."

Chloe passed the bill back to him. "It's interesting to think of all the little changes that have to happen in order to result in bigger changes. And yet some things don't change."

"Like my parents, the island and fighting the good fight?" Oliver nodded. "Some things never changed from universe to universe – like my parents, for example. Maybe some things are just..." he broke off abruptly and shook his head.

"Inevitable?" Lois asked. She glanced over at Chloe.

"I don't believe in inevitable," Chloe said. She hoped she sounded more certain than she felt as she turned back to her computers.

Neither Lois nor Oliver spoke for a few moments. Lois finally broke the silence, continuing with her questions. “I suppose with the Kandorian threat neutralized in your world, it must be pretty safe now.”

“I’ve taken precautions,” Oliver answered.

“I suppose Chloe told you about my little trip to the future. I saw the destruction first hand, so I can understand taking precautions. Especially after what happened to Chloe and the baby.”

Chloe turned to look at her cousin, whose eyes were locked with Oliver’s. She could tell by his expression that he knew Lois was onto their secret.

“The Kandorians are no longer a threat in my world. Here though – I believe it’s just a matter of time and if that’s true, Chloe isn’t safe here.”

“But you think she would be in your world, right? How would that work, exactly?”

“I’d say that’s between me and Chloe.”

Chloe recognized the look on her cousin’s face – the one that said her temper was rising. “Lois, stop it. We talked about this.”

“Oh no, we didn’t. We’re going to, though.” Lois shot her a pointed look as she sat down at one of the workstations and pulled out her notes. “I have a deadline but after that? I have questions.”

Chloe sighed and rubbed her temple. She frowned at Oliver when he joined her at her workstation. “Baiting her will only make this worse. If you’ve met any version of Lois, you have to know that.”

“I wasn’t baiting her, Chloe. I was being honest. And I think Lois would agree that you’re safer in our world if I had told her what I was doing.”

“So she doesn’t know?”

He shook his head. “No one knows except the scientists I was working with. I’m a little surprised that you told Lois about me and Chloe.”

“I didn’t,” Chloe said. “She found the photo album.”

“Ah. Will she tell Clark and the others?”

“No. She might want to tell them, but she won’t go behind my back.”

“You and Lois seem a lot closer here.”

“We weren’t in your world?”

He shrugged. “You were, but it was different. Maybe because your parents were alive, and you had Allie. She was family, but there was less of the mama bear vibe I get from your

cousin.”

“I guess it makes sense,” Chloe said. “She doesn’t deal well with loss, or even the suggestion of it. It’s why I wish I could have kept this from her, but Clark has no filter.”

“That’s still weird. The only people Clark is really close to back home is his family and yours. As far as I know, he hasn’t had any girlfriends since he returned from his training.”

Chloe’s fingers slowed on the keyboard as she remembered what he suspected – that Clark had been in love with Chloe. If that was true, she wondered if he was still as much in mourning as Oliver was. It was one of the reasons that Oliver’s plan to take her back to his world was a bad one. Her presence there, even temporarily, would probably be painful for everyone.

When she glanced up at Oliver, he was staring at the way her fingers were tapping the edges of the keyboard. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. It’s just....” He shook his head. “Chloe used to do that too – when she was thinking about something, you know? She used to get so lost in her head when she was working on a story.”

Chloe stared down at her fingers. She wondered how many such mannerisms she shared with the other Chloe, and how they affected Oliver. She stilled when he covered her hands with his.

“I’m sorry,” he said, keeping his voice low. “I didn’t mean to make you feel self-conscious.”

“You didn’t. I just don’t want to bring up painful memories for you,” she explained. She studied him, looking for signs that she’d upset him, but she didn’t notice anything more than the usual sadness that clung to him like a well-worn glove.

“Being with you isn’t painful, Chloe. It’s like being given a second chance.”

Chloe met his eyes again and suppressed a shiver at the almost reverential intensity they reflected.

The moment was broken when Lois cleared her throat loudly. When Chloe looked at her cousin, her eyes were on Oliver. For once, she couldn’t read her cousin’s expression.

Ollie surveyed the city from a rooftop near Suicide Slums. The low-income neighborhood bordering the Slums was crowded with cheaply built apartment buildings, and it was often a hotbed of criminal activity.

He, Oliver and Carter were operating in separate quadrants, keeping in contact with the Bluetooth earpieces Chloe insisted they all use. For the first time in a while, she wasn’t in his ear talking him through his patrol. When he’d arrived at Watchtower earlier it was to find

Oliver helping Chloe go through crime stats for that night's patrol. Lois was also there, chin in hand as she watched them.

Lois had insisted that Chloe join her for dinner and a movie but otherwise, she'd been uncharacteristically quiet. It was enough to make Ollie concerned, and he'd asked her if something was bothering her.

"I'm just thinking," she'd told him. "But do me a favor? Keep Chloe close, Ollie."

He was still turning that over in his mind. It had felt like a warning. He supposed that was to be expected if Clark had told her about the meeting, but her usual brashness had been absent. She was worried, and that worried Ollie.

It was getting late, and activity had slowed in the last hour or so. He tapped his earpiece, ready to tell the others to pack it in for the night, when he heard a scream.

It was coming from Oliver's quadrant, about two blocks away. Through the earpiece he could hear Oliver moving.

Ollie leapt from one rooftop to another. He heard another scream, and then the sounds of a scuffle reached him. He peered over the roof to a back-alley parking lot, where a heavily pregnant young woman cowered against the building. Oliver had her would be mugger in hand, shaking him. Then he punched the man, who slid to the ground without resistance.

Ollie expected him to release the man and place the call to MPD. Instead, Oliver pulled the man up and punched him again, and then again.

"Hey!" Ollie dropped down and grabbed Oliver's arm to pull him back. Oliver rounded on him, catching him by surprise, and he landed a solid punch that knocked Ollie to the ground.

Ollie reacted instantly, sweeping Oliver's legs out from under him. Oliver rolled sideways and they both regained their feet at the same, circling one another warily. From the corner of his eye, Ollie saw an older couple at the mouth of the alley, and the young woman ran towards them.

"Don't ever interfere like that again," Oliver said.

"The perp was down," Ollie shot back. "If you keep hitting him, you could do some serious damage."

"He deserves that and more, preying on a pregnant woman!"

"And the cops will deal with him. We start beating the hell out of people and they'll be looking to drag us in to the station, too."

A sudden rush of air announced Carter's arrival. Ollie felt his feet leave the ground. His stomach heaved as the air whistled past, and then he was falling. He rolled onto the rooftop of the Daily Planet, noticing that Oliver fell right next to him.

Carter landed between them. "J'onn is picking up the mugger."

Oliver swore as he stood up and pushed his hood back. He stared at Carter, his jaw twitching with the rage he was barely holding in check.

Carter crossed his arms and stared back at him. “Go cool off, Oliver. Don’t take that anger back to the Watchtower.”

Oliver didn’t move, and for a moment Ollie thought he might attack Carter, too. Then he turned, fired an arrow and dove off the rooftop, his dark uniform blending into the shadows within seconds.

Ollie removed his dark glasses and pushed his hood back. “Thanks, but I could have handled him.”

“From where I was standing, I’m not so sure about that. What set him off?”

“The mugging victim was pregnant – blonde, early twenties. I think it triggered him.”

“There’s a hell of a lot that triggers him,” Carter replied gruffly. “I don’t like him.”

Ollie snorted. “Well, color me shocked. You don’t like me either.”

“Maybe I don’t always like you, mostly because you’re a smartass. But I do respect you. You’re not the complete jackass I thought you were.”

“It seems like there was a compliment there, but it’s buried beneath words like smartass and jackass, so it’s hard to say.”

Carter walked over to the ledge and leaned against it, not bothering to respond.

Ollie glanced over at Carter as he joined him. “What is it about him that bothers you?”

Carter was silent for a long moment. “He seems wrong somehow. He hides it well; he’s like you in some ways, but he’s darker and a hell of a lot more violent. You can’t tell me you haven’t noticed that on our patrols.”

“I’ve noticed.” They both stared out at the Metropolis skyline. “His interest in Chloe bothers me,” Ollie admitted. It was the first time he’d voiced his concern, and it lifted a weight he hadn’t realized he’d been carrying.

“What has he told you about his world?” Carter asked.

“Not much. If I had to guess, I’d say he has a serious problem with Boy Scout in his world. The way he looked at Clark... I don’t know. There’s a lot of anger there that he can’t completely hide – at least, not from me. Other than that, just what he told us about Chloe’s family, and how she was murdered.” Ollie had to force those words out because the idea of Chloe dying made his palms sweat and his pulse spike up. His fingers flexed against the ledge. He took a breath, letting it out slowly in order to calm down.

“We won’t let that happen.”

“I’ve been wondering about his relationship with his world’s Chloe. If she pulled him out of the weeds like Chloe did with me, and he felt indebted to her, it would explain the anger.” Ollie knew losing Chloe had the potential to send him into a tailspin, so it made sense that Oliver might have lost perspective in seeking justice.

“Do you think he has some motive for being here that he’s not telling us?”

“I don’t know. I asked him about that, but the only thing I got out of him was that he doesn’t plan to leave while he believes the Kandorians are a threat to Chloe.”

“What if he asked her to go back with him?” Carter looked at Oliver closely.

“What the hell are you talking about? Has he said something to you?” Ollie demanded, scowling.

Carter shook his head. “I heard him talking to Chloe about her mother, and it seemed to me like he was tempting her with the idea. She has a family there – parents who are still married, a sister. And if he’s been filling her head with stories of happily ever after, it’s a powerful temptation for someone who’s lost as much as Chloe has.”

“She has a family *here*. We’re her family, and she wouldn’t do that.” Ollie’s heart started pounding as anxiety shot through him. Was she considering making the jump to the other world? He told himself that was crazy. She probably hadn’t said anything because there was nothing to tell. Then again, if she was considering it then she might not say anything because she had to know he’d never let her go. Didn’t she?

“Look, I’m going to be blunt. You have feelings for Chloe, but you haven’t told her. I think I even understand why.”

Carter’s words surprised him. “I care about Chloe, but it’s not like that.”

“Life is short, Queen. It’s not my place to interfere or give you a wakeup call, but people are here and gone in the time it takes to blink. While you’re dragging your feet, telling yourself you’re just her friend, I think he’s going there. If I’m right, he’s going to do something about it. He can’t stay here because he knows this world isn’t big enough for the two of you. But he could easily take her with him.”

“Over my dead body,” Ollie bit out.

“He might not have a problem with that. I’ve seen the way Oliver looks at you lately, like you’re some kind of obstacle. Why the hell do you think I’ve been patrolling with you? It’s damn sure not because I enjoy double the snark and endless yapping.”

“So what are you saying, that you think he’s going to do something to me? What would that even accomplish?” Chloe would never forgive Oliver if he hurt anyone here. Despite what had happened earlier, he wasn’t sure he believed that Oliver meant to harm anyone connected to the team.

“I’m saying I don’t know what he’ll try to do. I’ve been on this Earth a lot longer than you. I’ve learned to listen to my gut, and my gut tells me that he can’t be trusted when it comes to Chloe. It occurred to me that maybe he was the father of her baby.”

Ollie stared at Carter, incredulous. “Chloe was married to Jimmy.”

“Here, yes. But he never said who her husband was over there, did he?”

Ollie felt the rough stone ledge digging into his palms as he gripped it. “She wouldn’t hide something like that from me.” But even as he said it, he wasn’t so sure. Chloe hadn’t told him everything that she’d discussed with Oliver that first night in the tower, and she’d been so sure that she could trust him.

“The photos,” Ollie finally said.

“When I walked in that first morning, they were looking at that photo album together. I only saw family photos, but I wondered why he would bring so many when one or two would have proved what he was telling her. It seemed like a very personal thing to do.”

It fit. It all fit, and it would complete the puzzle that Oliver had presented with his arrival – why he came so far for Chloe, and why he refused to leave even though he’d done what he said he came to do.

“I have to go,” Ollie said. He pulled his hood up and put his glasses back on.

Carter nodded. “Talk to her - and be honest with yourself before it’s too late.”

Ollie made it back to the Watchtower in record time. When he pushed open the double doors, Chloe was there at her workstation. She’d kicked off her shoes, and despite the late hour, she was sipping a cup of coffee from the café down the street.

“You’re back early,” she commented without taking her eyes off the screen. When he didn’t respond, she turned to look at him. “Ollie, are you okay?”

Ollie pushed his hood back and removed his glasses. He stared at her for a moment, noticing several things at once – the way the lights picked up the palest blonde strands in her hair, how her eyes reflected the exact shade of green in her sweater, and how small she looked standing there, barefoot.

And he felt it - the exact moment that something shifted inside him.

“Show me the photo album, Chloe.” He knew Carter was right, but he needed to see it. He needed her to tell him why she’d been hiding it.

Chloe visibly started. “Ollie...”

“I need to see it. Please.”

Her bag was on the table to his left. He could get to it before she did, but that wasn’t how he wanted this to go down. He didn’t want to force her to the truth, which would only put her on

the defensive. He needed her to make the choice to stop hiding.

The silence grew between them, stretching out until it seemed to fill the room. The soft sounds of her computers took up the space, a cacophonous presence.

Chloe pressed her lips together and walked over to her bag. She removed the album and walked over to give it to him. He noticed her fingers were trembling as she handed it over.

Ollie opened it, flipping through the pages of photos until he saw the first ones of Chloe and Oliver. They were a confirmation even before he reached the photos of their engagement party, and then their wedding.

He knew then that Carter was right about one more thing. Oliver had come here to take Chloe back with him.

A/N: I'm back! I've been struggling with editing these chapters for a couple of weeks now. I ended up rewriting the last 2,000 or so words this evening, so please let me know if you see any mistakes.

Up Next: Chloe and Ollie deal with fallout of Chloe's secrets, and Ollie confronts Oliver. Meanwhile, the Kandorians step up their plans, dividing the team on how to deal with them.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!