

“Have you ever been to the Glades, Ms. Smoke?” That’s what he had said that morning when this all began. She hadn’t been to the Glades, of course. Who would spend even five minutes in that greasy part of town unless they had no other choice? Felicity had mentioned this at the time, but Mr. Queen assured her that, quote, “**This city** will surprise you. Also,” he added. “be sure to bring the new prototype.”

That evening she went to the address he had scratched onto the back of a business card and met him and his bodyguard, Diggle, at Queen Consolidated’s annex warehouse. She wasn’t even aware such a place existed. Mr. Queen immediately sent the other man off to go fetch coffees, then ushered her through the rolling garage-door, flipped the switches on the wall, and the lights all came on one at a time, each blazing bulb accompanied by a loud electric *THUD!*

It was, for all intents and purposes, a ninja training ground and it had it all. Mr. Queen tried and failed to mask his excitement as he threw off his shirt and began demonstrating everything. That monkey-bar thing from American Ninja Warrior where you have to throw your whole body and the bar itself from one precarious shelf to the next? Check. A climbing wall that curved upside-down over a pool of hungry crocodiles? Check. A ridiculously low limbo bar that you could only pass under by lying on your front and slithering along on the ground using your individual ab muscles like tiny caterpillar feet? Check and check.

He had never explained to her why the place existed, but Felicity wasn’t an idiot. The steady stream of secret assignments he had pushed her way in the last several weeks, all relating to new and creatively-deadly designs for high-tech bows and arrows, had more or less given it away.

“You’re the Hood. Admit it,” she said after he had finished showcasing the man-sized hamster wheel. To his credit, he hadn’t tried to hide the truth.

“That’s just the name **this city** chose to call my brand of justice,” he had said as he wiped the sweat from his face with one of several clean t-shirts that hung from pegs on the wall. “But now you know my secret,” he continued, a roguish smile playing on his face. “You might as well see everything.”

It was a half hour later when Mr. Queen realized that Diggle had never come back with their coffees.

He immediately put on the trademark hood, continued to refrain from putting on a shirt, grabbed the bow and quiver, and was out on the roof with a speed that reiterated to Felicity the fact of the man’s incredible stamina. She felt that it was implied that she should remain in the relative safety of the warehouse, but what would be the science in that?

After winding her way around the elaborate obstacle course, avoiding the crocodiles and just barely skirting past the machine that spits darts for reflex training or whatever, she hit the button that raised the front door and found Diggle standing there, hand thrust forward as if about to knock. He held a coffee carrier, the kind with a handle that suspends two drinks below, and a panicked look on his face.

“Diggle?” Felicity said, the chipper smile sliding off her lips as she read the man’s expression.

“I saw him. Had to go around the long way. Didn’t want him to follow me back here,” he puffed, clearly out of breath.

“Saw who?” she asked, reaching out a steadying hand, but as she did so she saw him on the street behind. Short, round, completely hairless, and shining in the midday sun as if he had just been through a rock tumbler. A polished boulder roughly the shape of a human being, and he looked smug.

“Alabaster Stone,” whispered Diggle.

Felicity knew the name, of course. Stone Industries was Queen Consolidated’s main competition in the tech field, and it was rumoured that they had set up shop right next door to QCHQ just to skim industrial secrets from them. There were other rumors as well. Everybody wondered where all of the super-criminals that had infected the city were getting their tech, and Mr. Queen had said, “it all leads back to Stone. He’s a plague on **this city**.”

“I think he caught the trail, Digs,” she breathed, not taking her eyes off the human cue-ball. Diggle spun and swore to himself as two thugs in suits stepped in front of Stone and hefted huge weapons, pointing them directly at Felicity and Diggle. The design of the weapons were very interesting, with oversized barrels that rested on the thugs’ shoulders, and Felicity was just in the middle of trying to decide if they were some kind of sonic-disruption devices similar to the ones they were working on at Queen or merely a set of run-of-the-mill grenade launchers, when Stone spoke.

“Where is he?!” the man shouted in a surprisingly high-pitched voice. “I know you two work with the Hood!”

“What is he talking about?” Diggle asked Felicity. She kept her mouth shut. Suddenly a loud growl of a voice directed their attention to the warehouse roof to their right.

“I’m here, Stone!” It was Mr. Queen, standing tall on an overhang of the roof that jutted out partially over the street. He was standing casually with his right foot up on the edge of the wall, his bow slung over his naked shoulder, eyes shaded by the dark green hood. He held a small black book in his hand, opened as if reading. He continued. “And it looks like your name is in my book. How convenient.”

Stone smiled at this and said in a barely audible whisper, “Blow it up.”

Before Felicity could react, the giant cannons went off with a deafening roar. Felicity’s heart seemed to stop and she felt a heat radiating from her chest. Time slowed, and in the span of a blink, two huge grenades erupted from the barrels of the guns and sped straight for her quicker than she would normally be able to perceive. She instinctively raised her arms to protect her face, briefly mused her disappointment that the guns were boring old grenade launchers, and just before her eyes squeezed shut in anticipation of the blast, three things happened.

First, an arrow screamed down from above and struck the right-most grenade in mid-flight, which sent it careening to the left, directly into the path of the second grenade. The two struck each other and exploded simultaneously, which threw Felicity and Diggle off their feet and back through the open door and into the warehouse.

Second, another arrow came flashing past her face and struck the handle of Diggle’s coffee carrier, thus ripping it out of the man’s hand and pinning the coffees perfectly against the cement wall to their left.

Third, a final arrow struck the pavement near her feet, bounced off the smooth concrete, ricocheted off of the crocodile-climbing-wall, sending it back towards the door, and striking true on the heavy chain that held the garage door open. The chain snapped and the door slammed

to the ground just as their feet cleared the threshold. They landed heavily on their backsides, but were otherwise completely unscathed.

The door now stood between them and the enemies outside. Felicity sat up with a gasp and looked to the wall on the left, noticing that the coffees had survived the ordeal without a single drop spilled. They swung back and forth like a pendulum suspended from the arrow.

Another set of explosions shook the warehouse, and Diggle helped Felicity to her feet. They both ran to the other end of the training ground and took off through the fire exit, setting off a blaring alarm. They ran around the building back to the front, and discovered that the two thugs with grenade-launchers were now dead, the feathered shafts of arrows planted deeply in their skulls. Mr. Queen was now on the opposite side of the street, but it appeared he was completely out of arrows. He crouched for cover behind a pickup truck as Stone himself grabbed a grenade launcher from the body of his fallen subordinate.

“You’ve been disrupting business, vigilante!” the fat man screamed as he struggled with the weapon. “I will not abide you killing my comrades!”

“And I will not abide what you’ve done to **this city!**” shouted Mr. Queen in return.

The cannon fired and Mr. Queen dove. The truck exploded in a giant fireball as he rolled across the street and collided roughly with the wall of the warehouse, only a few feet from where Diggle and Felicity stood.

“Mr. Queen?” asked Diggle apprehensively. “Is that you?” The hood had fallen to reveal his face. He made momentary eye contact with Diggle before standing and facing Stone, who was preparing to fire again. In that moment, however, recognition danced in Stone’s eyes as he studied Mr. Queen’s face.

“Oliver Queen!” he exclaimed. “Talk about a twofer!” He laughed as he squeezed the trigger.

In that moment, Mr. Queen nodded to Felicity. It was time to test out the new prototype. She quickly dug into her pocket and pulled out a small metallic cylinder, like a bullet, and tossed it to him. He snatched it out of the air without even looking and affixed the bullet to the string of his bow. Suddenly, the cylinder expanded with a puff of compressed air, telescoping into a full-sized arrow. As soon as it happened, Mr. Queen released, sending the arrow sailing through the air and directly into the barrel of the grenade-launcher. The impact shook Stone for a moment as his eyes widened in fear.

“Alabaster Stone,” said Mr. Queen with a cool flame in his voice. “You have failed **this city.**”

And with that, the grenade launcher exploded.

THE END.