Thursday

by Vixx2pointOh

Summary

There is something about the girl next door that Oliver Queen is only now noticing...

Felicity is moving to college just down the road from where Oliver is a senior. He suddenly becomes very protective of the girl next door.

Thursday night dinners might not ever be the same again.

*COMPLETE*

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
I can’t believe we’re living here. This place feels like a hospital or a rest home or somewhere you just go to give up on ever being smart. Mom says I’m been dramatic, takes one to know one.

Felicity scowled at her mother from the backseat of their loaded up Ford Explorer as she folded the pen into her Spice Girls journal and heaved a melodramatic sigh.

They were moving to Starling City and the drive across however many miles it was – she would count them later – had been anything by idyllic. At 10 years old Felicity understood a lot about the workings of things that made senses, zeros and ones, circuit boards, trigonometry – those sorts of things – but she had absolutely no understanding why anyone would want to live in Starling City.

She had done her research. The rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer. There was a great divide in this City and the growing social awareness she was developing from watching an obscene amount of social-activist documentaries meant she didn’t wish to be a part of it.

Or she was sulking because she had to leave most of her collection of computer bits in a Las Vegas storage facility. Either way, she hated Starling already.

The car pulled into the driveway of a gated community, typically letting out a splutter that sounded like it might just die right there and then.

Her mother, primed to the nines after stopping at a rest stop along the way to make sure she had the correct amount of mascara applied – Felicity decided it was 8 coats apparently – fidgeted nervously in the front seat. Felicity wanted to stay mad at her a little longer but when Donna Smoak turned and offered her daughter a 100 watt smile, Felicity couldn’t help but smile back.

After her father gave everything but his social security number to the gate attendant, the polished
brass gates peeled open like the start of some fairy tale movie and Felicity went back to scowling.

The street was lined with trees that stood, not a leaf out of place. The houses were ridiculous and Felicity was sure that their tiny town house in Vegas could fit five times over in even the smaller ones here. Characteristically, she made a mental note to ensure she did the math on that assumption once she found her calculator.

Her parents had told her the bare minimum, her father had been offered a job – a great job – at a leading company, Queen Consolidated (a globally recognised company with its fingers in multiple pies, and a share pricing that was quite impressive – Felicity looked it up) and with the said job came a house; and when the car pulled to a stop in the driveway of number 2551 Verdant Estate Road it became abundantly clear that said job came with a very nice house.

It was huge, to the point where Felicity had to press her forehead to the window pane to see the start of the roofline. *Two stories of stupidly large house.*

“This is it?” Felicity gaped, trying not to sound too impressed but she was 10 and the house was huge.

“This is home, for the time being,” Noah remarked as he opened the door without removing the keys, the annoying ding, ding, ding forcing Felicity to unbuckle and leave the car too.

“The CEO owns the house, says it was sitting here empty so he’s renting it out to us until we can find something a little more permanent.”

“If this,” Felicity spoke as she slammed the car door and pushed her glasses further up her nose “is their investment property, then what the heck does their own house look like?”

Noah cracked a smile as he patted his young daughter’s shoulder.

“A lot like that one,” he winked pointing to the house next door.

It was set a little further back from the road, with a driveway that had its own gate – which seemed overkill to Felicity given they were *in* a gated community. The styles were similar, but the second house was larger and more regal in its architecture. Where their “for now” house had modern and squared features, the other house wore more distinguished Colonial features.

“Actually, exactly like that one,” he corrected with a light chuckle.

Felicity made the random realisation in that moment that she had never actually heard a raucous laugh from her dad and her young ever-challenging mind was trying to decide what that tip over from chuckle to resounding belly laugh might take.

“Where do they live?” Donna asked, the sub plot going over her head completely.

“He means it is that house mom,” Felicity sighed with half an eye roll which Noah halted with a terse lip, “We’re living next door to dad’s boss’ house.”

“In suburban hell,” she added with a flare of snark, her fingers waving lines in the air as she made ghost-like sounds.

“You have got to stop letting her watch those shows with you, what ten year old talks like that?” Donna smiled as she playfully tugged Felicity’s mousey blonde ponytail.

Felicity swatted her hand away as she stared up at the peak of the house pointing ominously, in her opinion, into the cloudless blue sky.

*I can’t believe we’re living here.*
It had been a few days and the house didn’t appear to get any smaller to her young eyes. It still seemed way too much house and with the minimal amount of furniture that had come up from Vegas everything simply seemed to echo. Felicity would start school after the weekend, a fact which – in a social sense, terrified her.

The ‘Boss’ had come by the night they moved in. To Felicity – as far as adults went, they seemed nice enough. They had come with their young daughter Thea, who was all large eyes and expressive stare and very little else, but the small 5 year old latched onto Felicity’s side and made herself at home there. They had another child, a boy, but he was MIA. Felicity had already decided he was probably annoying. In her limited experience, all boys were.

On this late afternoon Felicity found herself outside, her mess of hair piled onto the top of her head as she hunched over a plastic table and scoured over the selection of “I’m not leaving Vegas without these” computer parts.

“What are you doing?” a soft voice with a thread of resonating depth asked from a distance. Felicity looked up and was met with a mop of blonde hair, lighter than her own, and the most brilliantly blue eyes she’d ever come across staring over the fence at her.

She coughed, aware she was awkwardly not blinking, before she found words to say. “My mother says I needed fresh air, so this counts,” she replied, dropping her eyes forcefully back down to the table.

“You’re weird,” Oliver chuckled his shoulder peeking over the fence. “Thank you for remarking on it,” Felicity gritted, she was right, boys were annoying. “You’re the first person to ever say that,” she grimaced with a sarcastic flinch of a smile as she blinked back up at the intruder.

“I didn’t mean it like a bad thing, I happen to think weird is better than boring,” Oliver shrugged as he effortlessly pulled himself over the fence and landed with his Air Jordans on Felicity’s back lawn with a bright smile, his hands brushing down the front of his faded jeans.

Felicity stepped back from the table, her eyes widening at his sudden encroachment. “Sorry, I’m Oliver, I live next door,” he shrugged “my parents said I needed to say hi.”

“They probably meant by ringing the doorbell,” Oliver wandered over to her table of parts, oblivious to Felicity’s discomfort, and picked up a power supply, waving it like it was something completely foreign to him “but I saw you playing with this junk and...”

“It’s not junk,” Felicity retorted as she stepped forward and took the power supply from Oliver’s hand. “Sorry,” he shrugged, his rugged charm making Felicity smile despite that fact she was utterly annoyed by him in every way.

“Lisa is it?” he muttered as he picked up a sound card flipped it back and forth, undeterred by the glare Felicity was launching in his direction. “Felicity,” she snapped, yanking the second component from his hands.

He smiled, a killingly debonair smile that suddenly made every wrong he had done against her melt away like ice in the Florida summer. “Felicity,” she peeped as she placed the sound card back onto the table, “that’s my name.” “It’s very nice to meet you Fe-li-city,” he grinned, his impeccably straight and white teeth ‘singing’
like a chorus of angels.

She almost giggled.
Felicity Smoak never giggled. Life was far too serious for giggling.

“What’s that smell?” he asked, his nose twitching up, pulling taunt his already perfect jawline.
“Ah, meatloaf,” Felicity replied as her hands nervously rolled over one another, “the first Thursday of every month my Mom makes it.”

“What’s meatloaf?” Oliver asked, his eyes tracking down to the little whip of a girl who was carrying herself like a mini adult.
“You’ve never had meatloaf?” she snorted.
Oliver shrugged, in his 14 years he could safely say he never remembered eating anything called meatloaf.

“What time do you eat?”
Felicity met his question with a tugged eyebrow, “About six.”
“Okay, so I’ll come back then,” he smiled as he walked back towards the fence

“I’ll even ring the doorbell this time,” he winked before he lifted himself back over the fence and casually strolled away.

Felicity was left with a weird feeling in the pit of her stomach as she tapped on the arm of her glasses and tried to work out what had just happened.

But all her brain told her was boys were annoying, even ones with amazingly blue eyes and smiles that make you forget why you were mad.

She turned to look at the house, down to the table and over to the fence with her index finger extended into the air, hovering in the hopes it would help her find something to say, but Oliver was already gone and she was just standing there looking back and forth between the house and the fence.

Meatloaf.

So, that’s all you get for now folks.

THE VOTING HAS CLOSED

Thank you xox

If you have any questions/comments/ideas/whatever feel free to pop them in the comments section or look me up on Twitter or Tumblr @someonesaidcake

Don’t worry the runner up will be written (find “Brace for Impact” here)

Mood: light, funny, awkward, I will probably make you cry, what’s the word when two people are
so damn clueless that you just want to hit them in the back of the head and just say OMG KISS FFS..that, angst, fluff, domestic fluff, sexual exploration, childhood.

**Oliver:** Senior! Oliver blossoms from drunk, womanizing frat boy to don’t-look-at-her-that-way Protective! Oliver, a little clueless, a lot sexy

**Felicity:** will probably be drunk at least once, witty, a little snarky, smart, trying to rebel just enough to make college interesting

**Warnings:** I might ‘ruin’ meatloaf for you, may be a little underage stuff

**Song Inspiration:** Kiss Me ~ Ed Sheeran

*I'm falling for your eyes, but they don't know me yet*
*And with a feeling I'll forget, I'm in love now*

*Kiss me like you wanna be loved*
*You wanna be loved*
*You wanna be loved*
*This feels like falling in love*
*Falling in love*
*We're falling in love*
“Aren’t you worried about all the computers crashing?” Oliver asked casually as he sat with his feet up on the patio table watching Felicity solder a loose connection on a motherboard.

She looked up and him and blatantly rolled her eyes as she sighed heavily.

“Don’t you have friends?” she jested, the way any 10 year old would when they were trying to
ignore that they had a ridiculous crush on the boy next door who had developed a habit of jumping the fence when he was bored.

“Tommy is grounded and the rest of them are boring,” Oliver shrugged before he took a long sip of the hot cocoa Donna Smoak had bought out to him.

Felicity watched as his big hands completely enveloped the blue and white mug and her mind wandered to a place where she wondered what her hand might look like sandwiched between his. Her attention waned as the scorching soldering iron felt like butter in her hand. Before she realised her grip had faltered it dropped from her hand and the tip burned her other hand with a searing pain that caused her to jump back from the table and pull her hand close to her chest.

She couldn’t stop them if she tried – the tears that sprung instantly from her eyes as she squeezed them closed.

“Felicity, are you okay?” Oliver asked as he bound to his feet and ran over to her, the concern written across every facet of his young face. “Just go home Oliver,” Felicity whimpered, desperate to act like a hurt child and get a hug and at least five kisses from her mother – none of which she could stand to do in front of Oliver Queen.

“Let me look,” he urged, his hands on hers trying to pull it down.
Her hand did look small – tiny even, in comparison to his.
She tried to fight him on it, desperate to hold some semblance of control as she furiously swiped at stray tears that sunk paths into her cheeks.

“Please just go home,” she begged – she wanted to cry, sob even, and she couldn’t do that with those mesmeric azure eyes staring through her.
“We’ll put it under the tap,” he announced, discarding her request.
He wrapped an arm around her shoulder and walked her towards the house. She couldn’t believe how heavy his arm felt there and how it almost made her shoulders slump forward. Despite the pain radiating from her hand a small smile formed at the tips of her mouth – for a moment at least, until Oliver opened his mouth again –

“You’ll be alright kiddo.”
Kiddo?
She almost choked on the word and every inference it carried with it. She may have been young, but she was under no illusion about the trappings of that word.

Oliver wasn’t her shining knight in a hockey tee and Air Jordans – he was a surrogate big brother; and she was to him like a sister that was a little more fluent with the English language than his actual sister.

“You okay kiddo?” he asked when her feet became anchored to the wooden patio a few feet from the door.
Kiddo.
There was that word again. She vehemently hated that word.

Her rosy red cheeks became pinker by the second as she opened her mouth to say something – maybe to tell him how much that word sucked; or maybe to once again push him to leave so she could be alone with whatever the tugging in her chest was – but the words never came and she stood there, like a Dutch wooden soldier, just staring at him.

“Felicity? What happened?” Donna asked as she slid open the patio door and stepped out into the crisp winter air.
“I burned my hand,” Felicity peeped as she unfolded the hand from atop Oliver’s and held it out to her mother.
“We’ll run it under the tap,” Donna said as she pulled Felicity into a hug that felt like home.
“I was just going to do that ma’am,” Oliver spoke as he walked a few steps behind them
“Thank you Oliver, that’s very kind.”
“I can stay if you want me to?” Oliver asked, his question directed where his eyes were focused – at Felicity.
“No,” she replied, barely audibly “you can go home now.”

She really needed him to listen to her this time; and after studying her a few moments longer he nodded.
“I’ll see you all tonight then,” he flashed that stupid smile and for a second Felicity let kiddo fall from her mind.

He didn’t wait for an answer before he walked back out into the backyard and hopped the fence without exerting much, if any, effort.

“What’s tonight?” Felicity asked as Donna led her over the brushed steel sink.
“The Queens are having a New Year’s party,”
Felicity sighed as fresh tears sprung forward – she really, really didn’t feel like facing Oliver any more today.

“I don’t want to go,” she spoke, her bottom lip quivering.
“Your hand will feel better soon,” Donna remarked as she gently held Felicity’s hand under the tepid water.
“I don’t feel well, my stomach hurts,” Felicity whimpered, mainly for effect.

Donna smiled, like the world suddenly made sense and everything was as clear as the nose on Felicity’s face – which was currently screwed up.
“Oh hon, the first crush is always the hardest,” she dutifully spoke as she placed a burn cream on Felicity’s damp hand.

“What? I don’t..” Felicity started, her words trailing off.
“I’m not,” she huffed “I don’t.”

She paused to perfect the indignation in her expression before she added quietly, “but if I did?” Donna smiled, that all-knowing smile once again.
“Then it would be perfectly normal and for once I would actually see a little part of myself in you,” she winked, “my first crush was when I was 8, on the soccer coach.”

Felicity shook her head in disgust before a smile crept across her face.
“Run upstairs and read one of those encyclopaedias to calm yourself down.” Donna joked, fully aware that that was what Felicity had every intention of doing.

Felicity nodded slowly as Donna placed a band aid on the burn and smoothed a hand down the side of Felicity’s face.

Felicity turned and headed towards the stairs before she stopped in the doorway, her blue eyes wide with so many questions just waiting to burst forward, but held back by her nature.
“Does it get any better?” she asked simply, deciding that question was the summation of everything bouncing around in her head.
“Of course it does sweetie.”

Felicity sighed, like a heavy weight was lifted from her chest, before she turned and padded up the
[That Night]

Felicity stood behind her father as he rung the door chime on the Queen house, her eyes peeking out just enough to be able to watch the door when it opened. She hadn’t noticed before that this house was much grander than the one next door. Because she had never herself ventured over the fence to visit (as Oliver did to her) she had not realised that where their backyard was, even at the far boundary near the below ground swimming pool, barely stretched passed the Queen’s front yard.

From the driveway it looked not all that different, but at this close scrutiny it became abundantly clear that this was not just a fancy house this was a mansion carefully disguised to blend in with the other white stucco homes.

The door flung open and Oliver’s casual smile was the first thing Felicity’s eyes landed on, which made her stomach twist. She felt the calm hand of her mother gently still her shoulder – she hated that her mother knew about her little crush but in that moment where she felt her feet might float off the ground without her mother’s hand there, she was also eternally grateful.

“Mr Kuttler, Ms Smoak,” he smiled, aware they had different names after Felicity had once abruptly told them that her parents were not married, he’d never asked why she went by her mother’s name and she never really offered a reason.

“My parents are in the heated marquee out the back, drinks are in the conservatory,” he continued, ushering them into the house.

Felicity’s eyes couldn’t help but dance around the foyer, it was exquisite, a deep charcoal grey tile that paired perfectly with the dusted grey brickwork feature that swept around with the curved staircase, lined in rich red wood and decadent chocolate coloured carpet.

It wasn’t made to look ornate or garish, but there was no doubt that this was the house of people with impeccable taste.

“You look like a girl,” Oliver quipped as he tugged on Felicity’s ponytail in jest as she was the last to enter and he closed the heavy black door with a thud. She turned around, her un-glossed lips pouted at him.

Oliver took the hint without a single word needing to be spoken.

“I just mean you’re normally in jeans,” he shrugged.

“There are pandas on your shoes,” he added with a boyish grin that Felicity refused to look at for too long, her hand a reminder of why that wasn’t a good idea.

“Don’t make fun of me,” she spoke with a soft appeal.

“I’m not,” Oliver replied “I like them, they suit you.”

Her parents followed the direction Oliver had pointed them in and had disappeared into a crowd of voices around the corner.

She was about to ask him what he meant, but the time for the question was taken when a girl close to his age appeared at his side, her eyes working between them trying to decide what moment she
had walked in on.

“Oliver, your mom is looking for you,” she said in a pitched voice as she lingered a hand on Oliver’s shoulder.
“Make yourself at home Felicity,” Oliver remarked before he ducked away.
“You’re the little kid from next door?” Laurel asked, her eyes dropping to Felicity’s shoes before they settled back on her face.

“I live next door, yes,” Felicity replied, straightening her shoulders as if that would take the chill off the little kid comment.
“Funny, the way Oliver talked about you, I was half expecting a boy,” Laurel joked, a half smile tipped up on her painted lips.

Felicity had little to no experience with the ways of teenage girls, if she was going to honest girls in general was a more accurate summation, so she was unsure what this moment was supposed to be – friendly banter, stamp of authority, or biting remark under the guise of a harmless jest.

“I’m Laurel,” followed with an extended hand.
“Nice to meet you,” was all Felicity had to offer.
“Oliver’s girlfriend.”

Felicity nodded slowly, wondering if perhaps she had asked the question without even realising, but she was sure she had not. She swallowed down the revelation all the same, Oliver had not once mentioned he had a girlfriend.

“Anyway, the other little kids are in the cinema room, so you can join them,” she added a bright smile, “it’s back that way,” she added with a slight gesture over her shoulder in a direction opposite to the one both her parents and Oliver had gone.

Felicity tugged the pink tweed jacket closer around her body as her eyes bounced from one direction to the other and her tiny panda shoes tapped out a rhythm on the tiles.

“Your shoes have pandas on them,” Laurel commented as she stood a little taller, no doubt silently drawing attention to the difference puberty could make.
“I know, they were a Hanukah present,” Felicity replied with timid reluctance, it wasn’t that Laurel was been directly mean or deliberately insulting, but there was a chilled air about everything from her words to her tone to her stance that just made Felicity feel like nothing more than an annoyance.

“Like I said, the kids are down the hall, second door on the left.”
“I think I’ll just wait for Oliver to come back.”
This comment resulted in a puffed sigh dropping from Laurel’s lips.
“I’ll tell him you were looking for him, but he’s pretty busy with his friends.”

Inference being – not including her.
Felicity nodded, it was stupid to think anything else. Four years was a lifetime apart.
She fidgeted a hand along the hem of her pink skirt and slunk her head down before setting off in the direction Laurel had told her.

[11:55pm, 31 December 1999]

Two hours later had seen Felicity watch the end of Pocahontas and most of The Little Mermaid,
two of Thea Queen’s favourite movies apparently.

Thea had been excited to see her and had dragged her to a large leather recliner next to the one
Thea had made her encampment on, ruthlessly shooing away the previous tenant, a young kid
called Roy whose father worked at Queen Consolidated also.

The room was a noise of kids running and jumping and crying and laughing along with four
nannies that didn’t seem to get a second’s respite.

Felicity was the oldest one there by at least two years and while she had contemplated leaving the
room, Thea had been adamant she stayed; and in all honesty Felicity didn’t feel like being
reminded she was only 10 – again.

She heard the door creek open but paid it no mind, assuming it was once again one of the more
rambunctious toddlers trying to escape the room.

“Here you are,” Oliver remarked as he crouched down beside Felicity’s chair.
She looked over to him and had to stop the sigh from fluttering from her lips – even in the dark
room, the flashing lights of the Ursula’s storm made his blue eyes pop.

“Just with all the kids,” she shrugged, twisting her head back towards the screen.
“You don’t need to be in here, this is for the little kids,” he replied taking her hand.

Felicity froze in her seat, her eyes trapped in the forward position.
“Come on, the countdown will start any minute.”
He tugged her up and she didn’t offer him any resistance. His hand was warm and soft and it
formed perfectly around her own.

“Wheres are yous going?” Thea piped up, her lisp slightly trickled through her words.
“Oohh this is the best part Thea, don’t miss it,” he smiled, distracting her with fluid precision

Thea nestled back down into the chair as her eyes widened at Eric steering the boat straight
towards Ursula.

Oliver didn’t miss the opportunity and ran Felicity from the room.
“I don’t really feel like going out there,” she quipped as she anchored her feet to the carpeted
ground outside the door.

“Come on, don’t you want to see the toaster come alive?”
“That’s not going to happen Oliver,” she laughed.
“Made you laugh,” he winked.
He tugged her a few more steps and she relented until they reached the foyer, where she stopped
again.

“It’s okay, you don’t have to babysit me, you can stay with your friends.”
She hated the words that were coming from her mouth and honestly she wished she would just shut
up.
“You’re my friend,” Oliver commented in response.
“But why?”
Shut up Felicity
“I’m just a stupid little kid,” she added
She winced at her own words.
“You’re a lot more interesting to talk to then some of the kids my own age,” Oliver genuinely
answered.
She looked at him with a face that asked *really?*
“Really. Now come on, I don’t want to miss the countdown,” he remarked as he ran her through the hallway, past the informal dining and day lounge and out into the brisk night air which saw a dusting of snow glaze over them almost instantly.

“Five, Four…” the crowd chanted in the swelling marquee.
Oliver turned and plucked a snowflake from Felicity’s eyelash with a wonderment she hadn’t seen before.
“Three, two…”

Her hand was still in his and despite the blanketing of snow and the frigid night air she didn’t feel anything else but its warmth.

“One… Happy New Year,” the crowd cheered with raucous abandonment as perfectly timed fireworks exploded in the sky above them, hues of pink and orange and green.

It was loud, almost deafeningly so, but when Oliver leaned in and placed a soft kiss to Felicity’s cheek all she could hear was her little heart thumping and Oliver’s soft words, whispered in her ear; “Happy new year Felicity.”

She only got the word “Happy” out in response before his hand released hers and he waved Laurel and Tommy over to join them.

“Happy new year Oliver,” Laurel grinned, as she grasped his head in her hands and planted a kiss directly on his lips.
Felicity shrunk back to a catcall from Tommy at the display.

She wanted to go home.
Her eyes sought out her parents and found them not too far away, chatting idly with adults Felicity didn’t recognise.

Felicity shook the snow from her head and started the journey towards her mom, who she hoped would quickly agree to going home.

“Where are you going?” Oliver asked, grabbing Felicity’s arm.
She shook him off, tired of the toing and froing her young emotions were going through.
“Home.”
“Stay a little longer, they’ll be more fireworks and we all jump into the heated pool fully clothed, it’s a tradition.”
Felicity shook her head adamantly.
“I need to go check that the toaster didn’t come alive.”

Oliver’s smile broke into a laugh before Laurel got his attention again.
“Come on Oliver, let’s go,” Laurel pleaded as she tugged on Oliver’s arm
“Sure you won’t stay kiddo?”

*Kiddo.*
“Good night Oliver, happy new year,” she managed to say as she held back the unmistakable quiver of her lip that meant she would probably start crying any minute.

He waved before he ran off with the other teenagers in bursts of laughter as they headed towards the heated pool.

Felicity turned and found her mother approaching.
“Can we go home now please?” Felicity asked, silently praying that her mother wouldn’t ask questions or object. Felicity wanted to go home and cry into a pillow alone; and soon.

Donna nodded with a soft smile, like she could read everything written on Felicity’s face. “I’ll take you home now, your father can catch up later.”

[August 2006]

There had been other New Years just like that, three of them until Oliver moved away to college. The fourth one he had spent abroad and while his parents still hosted the event, it felt strange to Felicity to even be there. Last year found 21 year old Oliver getting shitfaced and engaging in some lovers quarrel with Laurel in front of virtually every employee at Queen Consolidated.

Felicity had already decided there would be no year six. She wouldn’t return from college to go to the event, no matter how much her mother asked her to.

The years had found the family still living next door the Queen family, but in the house they now owned, buying it from Mr and Mrs Queen some years prior. It was from this house, and Felicity’s vantage point where her bedroom window overlooked the neighbouring driveway, that she saw Oliver much more than he ever saw her.

As he aged, the regularity with which he had once jumped the fence to talk to her diminished. His sixteenth birthday saw him only sporadically stop to chat with her.

Felicity had watched Oliver learn to drive, and subsequently dent his father’s Jag against the mailbox; for which Oliver bought her silence with five promised ice cream dates (only two were ever collected on).

She watched him fight and makeup with Laurel on the driveway more times than she cared to recount; and she saw him cheat on her with a carbon copy blonde every few months.

However, the first Thursday of every month still remained somewhat untouched by time for years and those pit stops in time found Oliver Queen sat at Felicity’s dining room table asking for second and third helpings of the meatloaf he loved.

_Kiddo_ had remained his nickname of choice and those Thursdays remained Felicity’s beacon of hope that one day that dumb boy sat across from her might see her for a little more. Sometimes he noticed she had painted her nails and a few times he had commented on a haircut she had had, but he was still just a clueless to the candle she held for him all these years later.

That was until Fall 2003 when she watched him leave for college. He waved her a half goodbye and he never came back for another Thursday night dinner.

Felicity had spent more months than she cared to admit waiting for a Thursday that he might just show up. But when a year passed and she only caught glimpses of him on holiday weekends and he never even looked up at that window anymore; she had decided that was enough of this foolish crush.

_Boys are stupid._

_Oliver is the stupidest one of all_

She had scribbled in her journal

And now, a few more years wiser, she absolutely still thought that was the case.
She had flown through high school, skipping a grade to graduate in June, a month shy of her 17th birthday. Starling Institute of Technology (SIT) had granted her admittance and she started in the Fall on an academic scholarship.

She certainly didn’t need it – her father earned enough to pay most of her tuition, if not all, and her mother had tried her hand at party planning for the stupidly wealthy within Starling, but the fact Felicity earned the Scholarship based on her grades was something she was exceptionally proud of.

As a result, her parents had taken the full amount of the scholarship, pitched in a little more and made a donation to the school to allow someone else a chance at the same.

This Friday night found her sitting curled up on the Queens’ couch sipping a diet Dr Pepper and half watching some Lifetime movie, the plot of which was lost on her at least 30 minutes prior. Robert and Moira Queen were away for the weekend at some swanky event in Central City.

She thought it was kind of adorable that even after all the years together, they still took the chance to have a quiet weekend alone. Felicity, still eager to prove a point and save as much money as she could before the Fall, was babysitting 11 year old Thea who, at this late hour – it being almost midnight – was fast asleep upstairs.

Felicity let her eyes wander around the room, she had spent a lot of nights since turning 16 in their house babysitting Thea. Overtime the photos above the fireplace mantle changed, but nothing much else had.

There were photos of the family, Oliver’s high school graduation, the family in front of the Eiffel Tower and a few of the kids in a variety of different activities. Her eyes stopped on a recent one of Laurel and Oliver she hadn’t seen before.

“Guess you’re still together then,” she muttered to herself as she combed her hand through her hair and tugged out the hair tie holding it back.

She shook out her hair and set the drink on a coaster on the coffee table as she stood, stretched her legs and patted down the cuffs of the denim shorts she was wearing.

“Guess you don’t mind sharing him with half the campus,” she sniggered before she folded her lips closed and thought better of her snide comment.

No matter how obnoxious she decided Oliver Queen had probably become, she couldn’t help but remember his kind blue eyes and the smile that melted ice caps.

The deep popping sound of a bore exhaust shattered her trip down memory lane before she rolled her eyes and imagined it was another stupid well-to-doer spending his parents’ money on stupid cars.

It was a few minutes later when she heard a crash outside the house that sounded distinctly like someone running into one of the potted plants near the front door.

She sunk against the wall, hiding herself from the windows, despite the curtains being drawn. Her imagination ran away with her as she listened for more noises and was rewarded with another crash followed by a muffled “Shit.”

She crept along the wall, careful to walk on the very balls of her feet. The tiles were cold underfoot as she crept closer to the video monitor near the front door. She could hear more clearly the gruffed sounds of someone outside the front door and it sounded suspiciously like they were grovelling on the doorstep.
She tapped the video monitor and the night vision display cracked to life, she flicked through the various camera angles until she found the front door. She pressed her hand to her mouth as she saw the person on all fours waving around blindly on the doorstep, their arms outstretched and their butt in the air. When she looked closer it looked like maybe they were trying to find something.

“Shit,” came the muffled voice again, definitely slurred, definitely male. The figure stood and came in close to the camera as if they knew it was there. Felicity sunk in closer to the wall, but honed her eyes on the monitor and when the visitor tipped their head up a little further she knew instantly who he was.

Oliver Queen was shitfaced on the doorstep of his parents’ house.

She considered ignoring him, but there were a scattering of lights on across the house and she figured it would only be a matter of time before he started knocking anyway.

She sighed and dropped to the flats of her feet as she padded across the foyer and unlocked the front door.

“I live here,” came his garbled introduction.
“I know,” Felicity replied, pulling the door open.

He squinted at the lights that were on in the foyer as though they felt like a stake in his temples. “Thea?” he asked squinting at her.

Felicity closed to door louder than she intended to, but she got an awful kick out of seeing Oliver jumping in response to it.

“No,” she answered him as she walked back towards the day lounge where the movie was still playing and her soda was slowly losing its carbonation.

“Good,” he remarked as he stood up and ran a heavy hand through his tousled hair. She turned to look at him when she reached the couch, her body perched on the arm of the cream settee.

It was then that Felicity noticed he was looking at her. Looking-looking at her, his eyes were walking up here like she was something to be studied.

“Oliver, how drunk are you?” she asked, snapping his attention up to her eyes. “Probably,” he shrugged. She squinted her eyes at him, silently deciding whether she would pull him up on the fact that response didn’t actually answer her question.

“Are my parents home?”
“No, they’re at a charity event in Central City for the weekend,” Felicity retorted, watching as a look of relief fell over Oliver’s face and the smell of alcohol radiated from his pores.

“Thank fuck,” he muttered before he took a few lumbered steps toward her. She decided in that moment that he wasn’t completely drunk yet, he could still somewhat walk upright and he certainly wasn’t a messy drunk.

His hair was longer since the last time she saw him – a few months ago she had been walking back from school just as he had been driving, oblivious, down the road. She had gone to wave, but had thought better of it.

“Did you drive home?” she asked, concerned that he may have gotten behind the wheel of a car
that inebriated.
“No, of course not,” he shook his head more vigorously than required.
“Good, because that would be a whole new level of stupid,” she said under her breath, unsure whether he caught the words or not.

“So you’re the babysitter?” he asked as he took another half step towards her.
“Yes,” she quipped simply, only then realising that she wasn’t sure whether Oliver recognised her.

“Your room is top of the stairs, third on the left in case you’re too drunk to remember,” she added as she shook her head in disbelief and walked over to where she had left her soda can.

“You know where my room is?” he said, his tone as smooth as velvet.
Felicity almost choked on the sip of soda she had taken – *he wasn’t flirting with her?*
“Have we been in there together?” he continued.
She watched him as he navigated around the couch.

“A few times,” she smiled – *this was not happening.*

Oliver smiled, his eyes ridiculously engaging; even drunk he was a sexy son of a bitch – *nothing personal Moira.*

He leaned in close to her, more close than any kind of conversation they were having required.
*Oh my god, he is.*

“Oliver it’s Felicity,” she quipped.
“That’s a pretty name, the little girl next door, that was her name,” he smiled, his hand dancing in front of him like he was waiting for an invitation to touch her.
“No Oliver that’s me,” she replied, putting her drink back on the coaster.

“What? No,” he laughed, almost snorting out the *No.*

“You ate meatloaf at my house the first Thursday of every month for years and the first time we met, you called me weird,” Felicity announced and she dragged her attention from his eyes and firmed a hand against her waist.

Oliver fumbled his footing as he went to step back, his feet twisting over each other. The rest happened in slow motion, he lurched forward, she tried to side-step but seconds too late and somehow they ended up tangled up on the couch, their faces hovering less than an inch from each other and his body sandwiching her to the couch.

“Felicity?” he choked, surprised.
“Yes,” she puffed out, the dead weight of him on her chest squashing air from her lungs.
“Felicity Smoak?”
“Yes,” she huffed again, her small hands trying in vain to push him up.
“From next-“
“Oliver you’re really heavy and you smell like a brewery, can you please get off me,” she coughed with very little breath left in her.

Oliver pushed himself from the couch slower than she would have liked but it did give her and up close view of the sculpted biceps that where stretching out the fabric of his stone grey cotton knit tee, directly in her peripheral line of sight.
“Felicity,” he sighed in disbelief when he finally stepped away from the couch and outstretched his arm for her to take.
“Welcome home Oliver,” she said with a thread of snark as she rejected his hand and pulled herself off the couch.

And what a *homecoming* it would prove to be.

Chapter End Notes

MIT is now SIT.
It's fine....
“What are you doing here?” Oliver asked, fumbling over the words.
“Babysitting,” Felicity sighed, brushing the embarrassment off with an exaggerated shrug “we already established that, didn’t we?”

“But you’re like twelve,” he mumbled, stroking quick lines through his tousled quaff of hair.
“No, Oliver I’m like seventeen” she mocked, picking up a cushion that had fallen to the floor when they fell together onto the couch.

“Fuck,” he hummed under his breath.
“But you have-“ he paused, his eyes unmistakably walking up her legs, “and-“ he stopped again, but this time his eyes stayed a little too long on her breasts.
“It’s called puberty Oliver,” she snapped, crossing her hands over her chest, the sudden reality that her childhood crush finally noticed her, but that he had to be inebriated to do so, not lost on her.

“You, but you,” he was searching for words while his brain unhelpfully repeated how pretty the girl in front of him was, “your hair is lighter."
“I dye it,” she awkwardly replied, although she had decided seconds before that he was owed no more explanation from her.
She knew who she was; she didn’t need to make him believe it.

“I’m sorry, I wouldn’t have done that if I’d known,” Oliver sighed, finally tugging his eyes away from her as he slumped, lopsided, onto the settee.
“Known what? That I was 17 or that I was the little girl from next door?” Felicity smirked, not
quite done dragging this out it seemed.

“The first one, no the second, uh both,” he shook his head and squeezed his eyes closed, the five-too-many-drinks having a very real effect on him now “I need a drink.”
“I think you’ve probably had enough to drink,” she scolded, before her face softened “how about I make you a coffee instead?”

Oliver looked up at her from his seat, his eyes actually landing on her face this time and a thankful smile rose across his mouth.
“That would be really nice,” he nodded in circular sweeps of his head.

“Alright, I’ll be back in a few minutes,” she said and she smacked her hands together, more loudly than she had meant to, causing Oliver to jolt in his seat.
“Sorry,” she mouthed before she walked backwards from the room and padded through the informal dining into the kitchen.

Less than ten minutes later she returned to the lounge with a mug of freshly brewed coffee in each hand. She rounded the couch and found Oliver with his faced smushed into a throw cushion and his legs bent awkwardly to somewhat fit lengthways on the couch. His eyes were closed and his lips were slightly parted, soft snores filling the silence.

“Typical,” Felicity muttered as she placed the two mugs on the table before collecting a throw blanket from the armoire next to the fireplace.
She shook the mint green microfiber blanket open and laid it over Oliver before she picked up the remote from under his heavy arm and switched the TV off.
She took the drinks back to the sink and poured them both down the drain, the whole evening stealing any desire she had to stay awake much longer herself.
She walked quietly through the foyer to the ground floor guest suite and found a towel in the bathroom adjoining it. Despite her desire to bang a pot in front of him just to see his reaction, she walked quietly back into the lounge and lay the towel on the floor down the length of the couch.
“Just in case you throw up in the night,” she said, even though she knew her words were lost on him.
She watched him for a minute, the creases on his face aged him a little more than she remembered, but aside from that he still looked like that boy who hopped the fence and invited himself to dinner.
Regardless of everything that happened after that moment, she couldn’t help but smile at its recollect.
“Goodnight Oliver,” she smiled, imagining for a brief second that he might just say it back.
She lingered a few moments more before she switched off the lights, except for a lamp in the far corner in case he woke up confused, and left the room.

Felicity ran a heavy comb of fingers through her hair as she glanced up the staircase to ensure that Thea hadn’t woken with any of the noise. She checked the front door was locked before she opened the door to the guest bedroom and stepped inside, falling back against the door to close it.
In the quiet of the bedroom she would be staying in she allowed herself a few moments to digest what had just happened. She felt 10 again and the idea of it made her face screw up.
“Snap out of it Felicity,” she berated herself quietly, before she sauntered over to the bathroom.
She brushed her teeth lethargically and changed into her PJs before slipping into the Egyptian
cotton sheets and sighing heavily to herself, hoping sleep would come quickly. Thankfully, it did.

[Next Morning]

Oliver’s head was pounding like there was a drum and bass party being hosted in the vacant space once occupied by his good intentions of never drinking absinthe shots again. There was a distinctive aroma coming from the pillow under his head – vanilla scented candles and ‘clean linen’ carpet powder. He didn’t need to open his eyes to know exactly where he was.

“Shit,” he groaned as he tried and failed to lift his groggy head from the pillow. He was home, he didn’t have any recollection of how he got there, but given his father didn’t seem to be lecturing him about pulling his socks up and achieving something, Oliver assumed they didn’t know he was there.

He tried to recollect if he had driven home, but he hoped even in that state he would have had the common sense to get a cab or a ride home. He wasn’t sure why he had come home, but if his parents didn’t know he was home then perhaps he could slip out without them knowing.

One eye cracked open and surveyed the area. He was in the day lounge and fully clothed. He shrugged supposing that was something. He slipped his feet onto the floor and half noticed the towel on the floor. “That’s a first,” he mumbled, his mouth dry and his voice rasped.

He could smell stale cigarettes and at least three different alcohol types leeching from his pores but as his eyes roved around the room he was pleased to find no extras. At least he hadn’t brought someone home.

He vaguely remembered talking to a cute blonde in denim shorts last night, was that at the bar? He squinted through the foggy feeling in his head, it didn’t feel like the right memory, but this was hardly the first time his memory had been virtually erased.

Oliver sunk his feet into the ground and stood up, wobbly but upright – that was a start. He took a few very shaky steps and stopped at the front door to kick off his shoes. The house was quiet and his eyes wandered up the stairs momentarily. He could go upstairs and wash away the stench of last night but his parents would probably hear his shower and if he could just get a little longer to sober up before the peppering interrogation started, that would be great.

And...if he was been honest he wasn’t entirely sure he could even make it up the stairs.

His eyes walked down the hall and landed on the guest suite, he could probably make it there.

Felicity stepped from the shower with tired eyes and a half yawn. She knew it was reasonably early, before 8, but she wanted to get Oliver either sobered up, or absconded to somewhere other than the couch before Thea woke up.

*Oliver.*

That had been beyond awkward and yet reminiscing about it made her smile. His face had been priceless and she caught her reflection in the mirror laughing over it.

She scolded herself with a stiffened lip and one raised brow. Oliver was *Oliver.* He was in College,
at least in name, and he was showing up on his parents’ doorstep to hit on the babysitter... the kid that plucked a snowflake from her eyelash was not the same person passed out drunk of the couch.

Felicity ran the towel through her hair as she scrutinised her naked body in the nearby mirror. She really hated the idea of looking at herself in this condition – *naked* – but she was determined to follow the advice books about gaining confidence. She had spent much of High School buried behind a book and sensible glasses and while that was well and good, she wasn’t ashamed of that, *that* got her Valedictorian and set her on the path she always saw herself heading. But she was going to college in less than a month and she had decided that she was going to do college right.

She was going to join a sorority, she was going to date and hook up, she was going to party, she was going to live a little – she deserved to loosen the collar a little. *Right?*

But first she needed to scrape some confidence together and if that meant following some guru’s advice to stare at yourself naked for ten minutes a day, *so be it.*

Oliver pulled the t-shirt free from his body and dropped it onto the bedroom floor. He yawned three times in a row as he lumbered to keep his eyes opened and focused. He ran an unsteady hand through the length of his hair and mumbled that it felt like a cement truck had delivered a load in his hair, he really hoped his mother still kept some shampoo in the guestroom bathroom.

His fingers threaded out the button on his fly and he pushed the black-wash jeans to his ankles and stepped out from the pooled fabric. Absently he ran one hand under the waistband of his white briefs and cocked a crooked smile. He had a raging boner, so he assumed the sweet blonde he’d woken up to thoughts of had probably spent most of the night in his dreams too. He would check his phone after a shower, perhaps he’d gotten her number.

He reached for the door handle and pulled in down...

Felicity stared at her breasts, her palms folded underneath them. They weren’t large, but as she lightly bounced them on her hands, she decided they were pretty good looking breasts.

*There* she had paid herself a silent compliment, now she could sheath herself behind a towel and dry her hair.

She didn’t hear the door crack open.

Oliver pushed on the door a little heavier than he meant to and the door into the bathroom swung open.

The shriek that followed sent his eyes slamming forward and he saw her... *all of her.*

Her hair was a twisted curtain of wet blonde glued to her shoulders and floating waved lines down her chest. Her breasts were right there perfectly round and sitting pert on her slender but curved frame. Her nipples were a lush pink, budded like tiny pearls. Her stomach was soft, not thin or concave but tight and sweeping into hips built to hold on to.

He knew he should stop looking but it was like his eyes were locked on her and his feet weren’t budging either.

“Oliver,” she screamed, grabbing for the towel on the floor.
His name from her lips startled him. *Had he brought someone home? But then surely she’d invite him in...*  
“Get out! Oh my God, get out,” Felicity demanded as she fumbled to lace the towel around her body.

It didn’t matter how she tried not to look, his very prominent erection was right there, not to mention his broad and sculpted chest and...  
*He was still there.*  
“Get out!”

The third time worked and Oliver finally found some traction in moving his feet. He spun around to exit through the same door he’d barged through what seemed like a lifetime ago. Only now the door was half closed and his face, specifically his nose, caught the sharp edge of it with an unholy crack before everything went black.

“Oliver, oh my god,” Felicity gaped as she watched him fall flat on his back. She skidded across the tiles and sunk down next to him.

His nose was already bleeding and she grabbed a hand towel from the nearby railing and pressed it to his nose, the sensation jolting his eyes open.  
“Holy fuck,” he called sitting upright his eyes blown wide.

He saw the concern woven through her stunning blue eyes and everything from the night before came flooding back.  
“Felicity?”  
She smiled, briefly, “You remembered.”  
His eyes dropped to her shoulders and the tightly folded towel across her chest.

He’d spent a lifetime of seconds staring at her perfect shade of pink nipples...  
“Oh god, I’m sorry,” he tried to stand but his vision had gone from hazy to almost a complete blur. Felicity winced as she pulled back the towel.  
“You’re still bleeding,” she gagged.  
“Just, um pinch it,” she continued, pinching the soft part of his nose.  
“Fuck,” he recoiled in pain.  
“Or not.”

She helped him stand and he braced himself against the doorframe.  
“Ice pack, kitchen, come,” she spoke as she threaded his arm around her shoulder and slipped her arm around his waist.

She knew it was an exercise in futility as she realised she wouldn’t be able to hold him steady if he went to fall, but they took a few steps together regardless.  
“Please don’t bleed on the carpet,” Felicity muttered under her breath as she watched Oliver keep the stained hand towel pressed to his face.

They walked, feet in time with each other, out of the bedroom, across the foyer and around the corner into the kitchen, his arm still around her and his head tipped slightly back.  
“Thea,” Felicity yelped as her eyes connected to with the young girl who was sitting at the breakfast bar with a hot pink Motorola flip phone clutched in her nimble fingers.

Felicity swallowed her lips for a second before her eyes travelled down her body, barely covered by a towel and Oliver clothed in only his underwear.  
“This is not what it looks like,” she avowed as she propped Oliver against the kitchen bench.  
“What does it look like?” Thea smirked as she tapped the phone against her temple.
“Hi Thea,” Oliver laughed waving a hand in the air. “Hi big brother,” Thea replied as she folded the phone closed and slipped off the stool.

Felicity huffed at the way Oliver didn’t seem bothered that his impressionable sister had seen them in an easily misinterpreted situation. “Tell me you did not take a photo,” Felicity pleaded as she searched the freezer drawer for an ice pack and came up with a bag of frozen peas.

“I’m going to go get dressed,” Thea grinned before she walked from the kitchen. “Thea, show me your phone,” Felicity called as she started to follow. “Still bleeding,” Oliver quipped, halting Felicity’s steps.

“Right,” she shook her head to focus and wrapped the peas in a dish towel. “Your sister took a photo,” she whispered as she eased the frozen peas onto his nose. “Probably,” he shrugged before he slightly winced at the cold folding around his very tender nose. “Doesn’t that bother you?” she peppered him as she dragged a stool over and gestured for him to sit.

“Should it?” he commented as he pulled away the ruined hand towel, glad the bleeding had finally subsided. “She might, tell people.” “Tell them what?”

She caught the smile on his face and instantly knew he was just trying to drag the words out of her. “Fine,” she asserted, she wasn’t going to play this game “I’m going to get dressed.”

She turned and started to leave. “Felicity, wait,” Oliver sighed, almost apologetically. She stopped and leaned against the fridge, her eyes waiting for more. “I’ll take care of Thea, it won’t be a problem.”

She offered him just the slightest smile, she wasn’t in the mood to give more; after all it was his fault they were even having this conversation.

“Five,” Oliver retorted as Felicity walked in on Thea and him standing either side of the breakfast bar waging a stand off with their eyes. “Deal,” Thea nodded as she slid her phone across the granite top. “Good doing business with you,” Oliver jested as he picked up the phone and thumbed through the camera roll.

“What did I walk in on?” Felicity asked, her thumbs hooked into the pockets of her jeans and her elbows jostling free. “No pictures and I’ve bought her silence,” Oliver replied as he closed the phone and placed it in Thea’s waiting palm.

“Five ice cream trips, two movies including popcorn and he’ll buy me the complete third season of the OC,” Thea said, her face beaming with pride. “You drive a hard bargain,” Oliver grimaced as he pulled the frozen peas away from his very red, very swollen nose.

“How is it?” Felicity enquired as she danced a feather-light touch to the bridge of his nose. “It has been better,” he winced.
“You should go to A&E.”
“It’s fine.”

“I’m not going to be the reason you look awful in your family Christmas photo,” Felicity joked, leaning in to get a closer look. “It’s fine,” he shrugged off her concern. Felicity touched the bridge of his nose and stepped back as he cursed loudly. “You were saying?” she smiled. “Point taken, I’ll get dressed.”

He stood up and Felicity gaped at the reality that he was still almost naked. The erection had subsided, replaced instead with a soft bulge that hung like a tear drop shape in the cup of his briefs. His chest was cut like it was made of glossed marble, each muscle so defined that he looked like a unattainable painting from Greek mythology.

She cleared her throat just to jolt her eyes away from him. She bet to herself that he would have no problem staring at himself naked... she certainly wouldn’t.

“Good news, it’s not broken,” the Doctor spoke as he entered the exam room and closed the door with his foot. “When will it stop looking like he’s been in a bar fight?” Felicity asked, nervously wringing the hem of her grey scoop tee. “It’s okay your boyfriend will be fine in a couple of weeks.”

“Oh no, he’s not, we’re not,” Felicity snapped back while Oliver just sat with a stupid smile plastered on his face and butterfly tape across a cut on his nose. “Apologies,” the Doctor nodded as he scribbled on a prescription form, tore it from the pad and handed it to Oliver, “No alcohol, follow the instructions and no rough play.”

Felicity felt the eyes of the Doctor stay on her for long enough that she opened her mouth to retort before Oliver caught her hand and tugged it gently. She hated the fact that worked.

“You can collect that on your way out and come back if you have any more bleeding or develop headaches.” “Thanks doctor, much appreciated,” Oliver replied as he rose out of the chair and tugged Felicity towards the door.

Part of her still wanted to put the older man straight, he was so wrong about his assumption that it was laughable – and that had been what she planned on saying to him, probably a little louder than required and with her hands very poignantly on her hips.

“You let things get you worked up too easily,” Oliver said as they rounded the corner back into the waiting room where Thea was waiting and thumbing through Oliver’s phone which he had left with her.

Felicity opened her mouth to retort his assumption, but based on the stupid look on his face that was exactly the response he was fishing for and she wasn’t going to give it to him.

“Wallet,” Oliver said as he held his palm out to Thea who quickly slipped his phone into her bag and pulled out the wallet he’d also asked her to hold, “why are you looking at my phone?”

“I was seeing how it feels and the keys,” she shrugged “I want to asked for a Blackberry for
Oliver shrugged off the answer and walked over to the counter alone to settle his fee and then across to the pharmacy to pick up his painkillers.

Shortly after, the three of them left the clinic and sauntered through the carpark back to Felicity’s early 90s Honda Integra.

“Can we talk about your car?” Oliver quizzed with a mocking expression pinned to his face. “What about it?” Felicity quipped as she pulled the key lanyard from her bag. “How much did you annoy your parents to get this bucket of bolts?” he laughed playfully kicking the tire.

Felicity pouted, despite her best effort not to, as her eyes walked over the slightly chipped forest green paint job of the ‘almost as old as she was’ car she had affectionately named Zelena. “Zelena is a fine car, there is nothing wrong with her,” Felicity spoke as she jiggled the key in the door to make the central locking work.

“You named your car Zelena?”
“It means green in Croatian.”
“But seriously, why didn’t they buy you a car made in the last decade?”
“I paid for it myself Oliver, I realise that’s a new concept for you,” Felicity scathed, harsher than she had intended, but it made her point nevertheless.

She watched him slink into the front seat and tipped her attention to Thea climbing in the back before she sighed and softened her tone.

“Don’t you ever just want to earn what you have Oliver?” she spoke softly as she plugged the key into the ignition.

He didn’t answer, there wasn’t much to be said.
“Can we get ice cream, the first of the five you owe me?” Thea spoke up from the backseat, eager to fill the stale air that fell through the car. “I’ll drop you two off, but I can’t stay,” Felicity answered, keeping her eyes locked forward although she could feel Oliver’s eyes watching her.

“Come with us,” Thea pleaded, her foot kicking Oliver’s arm that lay on the centre console. “I don’t think so,” Felicity half-heartedly replied, she had snapped at him – rightly so, but all the same it was making her feel, on top of everything else that morning, a little overwhelmed.

“I still owe you three ice cream dates,” Oliver finally spoke, his voice soft and reassuring, not cocky like he had been most of the morning, “this is me making good on one of them.”

Felicity swallowed down the realisation that he remembered the deal he had made with her all those years ago – buying her silence over the dented car. Her teeth had the inside of her bottom lip snagged tightly to stop herself from smiling because of it.

“I suppose I could,” she shrugged offhandedly.
To be honest her mind was a fog of conflicting emotions. He was still Oliver, the nice kid who spoke to her where other kids just ignored her. But he was also Oliver, the multiple college dropout who cheated on his girlfriend and stopped giving a fuck years ago.

But somehow the side of Felicity that wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt – to believe that he could still be a genuinely nice guy – won over.
Both Oliver and Felicity watched as Thea strode over to the self-serve ice cream machine and filled up her second cardboard cup of the soft white treat, taking her time to evaluate what toppings to use this time around.

The first round had been eaten in near silence, awkward was an understatement. But when it was just Felicity and Oliver left at the table her dislike of silence got the better of her and she finally spoke up.

“So about this morning...” Felicity started, her words trailing off at the end.
“I’m sorry Felicity,” Oliver remarked, his cheeks just glowing the slightest shade of embarrassed as he plugged the spoon into the ice cream sundae, refusing to look at her in case his next words were seen for the lie they were, “honestly, I didn’t see anything, I was so hungover, it was just a blur.”

“You didn’t?” she asked, trying to hold back the ludicrous thread of disappointment that she was nursing.
“Scouts honour.”
“Oliver you were never a scout.”
“How do you know?” he joked, slipping a spoon full of chocolate into his mouth.

She was going to reply something witty and charming but instead all she could fashion was a drawn out shrug.

“Did she tell you about college yet?” Thea asked as she slipped into her chair and plunged her spoon into the heaped sundae.
“You’re thinking about colleges already?” Oliver asked, surprised.
“Actually, I start in September,” Felicity shrugged in response.
“This September?” Oliver choked “aren’t you too young?”
“I’m seventeen, we’ve been over this.”
“She graduated early,” Thea piped up, her eyes still focused on the sundae she was slowly chipping away at.
“Thank you Thea,” Felicity sighed, she was proud of her accomplishments but always a little embarrassed when people brought them up.
“Valedictorian,” Thea added as she smacked her lips together.

Felicity’s cheeks blushed as her eyes dropped to study a fleck on the table.
“Really?” Oliver marvelled.
“It’s nothing, just high school,” Felicity said flippantly.
“That’s incredible, you should be proud.”
“I am,” Felicity replied quietly “It just doesn’t define me.”

It was the honest truth as she saw it and part of her decision to get an overall college experience. She had spent her whole life so far being a cut above the rest, having the highest grades and tipping the scale; but for once she wanted something a little less weird.

“So, where are you going?”
“SIT right near you,” Thea answered.
Oliver looked quizzically at Felicity. It felt like he’d missed so much of her life, he wasn’t sure why it bothered him, they had lost touch ... or rather he had... she never owed him updates on her life; and yet he wished she’d given them all the same.

“That’s a great school,” he lamented, still fixated on the years that had gone by.
“I didn’t know you were still at Starling U, it’s hard to keep track.”
“Ouch,” he jested “but I suppose I deserved that.”
“I’m going to get a soda,” Thea abruptly announced as she stood and took Oliver’s wallet from the table.

“You didn’t,” Felicity apologised, shaking her head at the bipolar emotions she had been going through today.

“I kind of did,” Oliver smiled, he had been to two different universities, but his stint at Starling U had been his last ditch effort to finally do something, at least that’s what he’d had tried to convince himself.

“It’s just so many people would kill for the opportunities you have Oliver and you squander them,” she left her eyes soften and her lips stayed parted when she finished her sentence. She had always believed Oliver sold himself short. Even as children he’d always preferred to let people believe that he was spoiled and shallow – she had never believed that, and a part of her still didn’t want to.

“You’re not any different, your parents are paying your way too,” he replied, half serious, half because he felt the truth in her words.

“No they’re not, I got a scholarship, based on merits. They donated my tuition costs. I babysit your sister for your parents to earn money and I spent most of the holidays for the past two years working a fast food joints in the Mall. And what did you do? Spent money you didn’t earn on things you didn’t need to prove what?”

She hated how all that had come out but the moment she had started down that path she was unable to stop it. And while her words had the truth on their side, her delivery was blunt and his expression showed genuine hurt.

“Are we done here? I have things to do at home,” she said, her tone threaded with regret.

Thea stood at the side of the table a fresh soda in one hand, Oliver’s wallet in the other. Even she could sense the palpable tension between them.

“Yea, I’m finished,” Oliver replied as he pushed his half-finished sundae into the middle of the table, took the wallet from Thea’s hand and stood up.

The drive home was silent. Even Thea had opted out of talking and as the car pulled into the driveway of her parent’s home, Felicity almost forgot to put the car in park, being that desperate to escape.

“Oliver Queen, is that you?” Donna announced as she seemed to appear out of thin air beside the car.

“Hi Ms Smoak, it’s been a while,” Oliver replied, his once vibrant tone now muted.

“What on earth happened to your nose?” she gaped as she hovered a finger an inch from the tape there.

“I ran into a door,” Oliver answered simply

“Are you home to see your folks? Because they’ll be back tomorrow.”

“Just passing through really, Felicity was nice enough to let me in last night when I lost my keys.”

“Because you were drunk,” Felicity muttered under her breath as she slammed the door and padded up the front stairs – she wasn’t mad at him, but rather this rashness effect he was having on her. It was unsettling and she didn’t like it.

“Pardon hon?” Donna called up after her
“Nothing.”

“Thea, I won’t be too long, just packing up a few things and then I’ll take you next door,” Felicity added as Thea followed her up the front stairs.
“I can go back with Oliver, you’re staying today aren’t you?” Thea asked as she signalled for Oliver to follow, but belligerently he stood his ground near the car.

“I think it’s best I head back to campus soon.”
“You don’t have your car,” Thea remarked, “and you need to take some pain killers for your nose, you shouldn’t be driving.”

“I don’t want to impose,” Oliver spoke as he looked up to Felicity who was lingering in the front doorway.
“It’s your house Oliver; and Thea’s right, you probably shouldn’t be driving,” Felicity sighed.

Felicity could tell her mother was eager to say something but she remained silent as she patted Oliver’s shoulder and slinked past Felicity into the house.

“I’m going to use your bathroom,” Thea exclaimed as she waved the large, almost-empty soda cup and followed Donna inside.

“I’m sorry Oliver, I didn’t have any right to speak to you like that,” Felicity apologised as she sat down on the stop step.
“What you said wasn’t wrong,” Oliver replied as she leaned against the white wooden balustrade, his left foot lifted onto the first step.
“It still wasn’t my place to say it,” she sighed as she folded her arms and balanced them on her bent knees.

“I’m sorry Felicity,” Oliver remarked kindly as he scuffed his sneakers on the stone path.
“For what?”
“For not keeping up with you, or my own family honestly.”
Felicity dropped her eyes and studied her painted nails for longer than she needed.
“You don’t need to apologise to me, I was just a stupid kid.”
“Felicity,” her name was like velvet on his lips “you were never stupid.”

She looked up and caught his eyes. He didn’t blink away, holding her stare with the same amount of intensity. She wanted to blink, to look away, to sever it, but she couldn’t. It was Oliver that did that, when Thea reappeared on the doorstep.

“Come on Thea, let’s give Felicity sometime to herself, we have some catching up to do.”
Felicity smiled thankfully, her mind slipping to the stuff she still had to pack for college.

“Are you sure you’re allowed to watch this?” Oliver remarked as Thea sat beside him with a large bowl of popcorn propped on her legs.

“Yes Oliver, now shush, this is one of my favourite episodes,” she snipped, rolling her eyes up at him as she turned up the volume on the season 1 episode of her favourite show, The O.C.

“When did you start rolling your eyes?” he laughed before she sternly shushed him
“Who are these people?” Oliver asked, sneaking a handful of popcorn.
“That’s Ryan and that’s Marissa,” Thea explained.
“Do we like them?”
“They’re problematic,” she shrugged.
“What 11 year old says problematic?”
“It was in the book Felicity gave me.”

Oliver couldn’t help but smile at the mention of her name, he didn’t know why, but he couldn’t help it.
“You spend a lot of time with her?”

Thea nodded, her eyes never leaving off the screen.
“She’s really smart and she doesn’t treat me like I’m just a kid,” she said before pausing to tip her head onto Oliver’s shoulder.

He smiled again, he’d seen her only a few months ago during a trip to the beach house, but he realised he hadn’t bothered to spend much time with her, absconding with Tommy as soon as he could.

“She’s really pretty too,” Thea added with a blatant smile.
“I hadn’t noticed,” Oliver said as he shifted uncomfortably.

“Yea right,” Thea replied, smirking.
“Who are these people?” Oliver asked, feeling strongly it was time to change the subject.

“Summer and Seth.”
“Do we like them?”

She looked up at him like he’d just asked what colour the ocean was.
“Yes, they’re the cutest couple.”

Oliver was going to comment on the fact his 11 year old sister should not know anything about couples but before he could get a word out she continued.

“He has had a crush on her for years but she never noticed, but she knows now and they’re together and in love,” Thea swooned, watching the two kiss onscreen.

“Are you sure you’re allowed to watch this?” Oliver joked as he placed a palm across her eyes.

Thea tugged down his arm in a huff before elbowing him in the ribs with a laugh.
“You’re like Summer,” she grinned.

“What is that supposed to mean?”
“Kind of stuck up and oblivious at first.”
“Can you even spell oblivious?”
“O-B-L-I-V-I-O-U-S.”
She rolled her eyes for a second time.
“So who’s Seth to my Summer?”

Thea shrugged, that kind of shrug that meant she knew exactly what the answer was but she was in no mind to share it with him.

They had watched seven back to back episodes on a marathon of the first season when Felicity appeared in the archway of the day lounge, her blond hair now pulled back into a messy bun and a lightweight cardigan thrown over her tee.
“You guys having fun?” she smiled as they were so engrossed in the show neither of them had noticed her appearance.
“What time is it?” Oliver yawned realising his both his butt cheeks were now numb.
“It’s just after half five and dinner is ready.”

Thea perched up at the revelation.
“Pot roast?” she asked, her eyes dancing with excitement.
“Just like you requested,” Felicity nodded.

“You cooked?” Oliver asked.
Both the girls cracked up laughing, Thea more hysterically.
“God no” Felicity replied, stemming her laugh.
“She can’t cook, like she is the worst. If she offers to make you an omelette, don’t accept it,” Thea said as she pretended to gag.
“Alright, thanks Thea,” Felicity sighed “Go get your shoes.”

Thea promptly stood up and hurried from the room.

“You’re really good with her,” Oliver smiled as he slowly rose from the couch, stretching his long legs.
“She’s a good kid.”

Felicity paused over the next words that were hanging from her tongue, unsure whether she should say them or not.
“You can come if you want,” too late, her mouth decided for her

“Are you sure that’s okay?” Oliver asked as he combed his hand through his hair.
“Needing an invitation didn’t stop you the first time,” she smiled.

Oliver opened his mouth to retort it but, realising there wasn’t any falsehood in her words, closed it back up and bobbed his head in agreement.
“That’s very true.”

Dinner was a welcomed respite from awkward conversations as the two Queen children sat with Felicity and her parents around the dinner table and kept all topics up for discussions mundane and light. No one spoke a word about this morning, much to Felicity’s gratefulness and there wasn’t a difficult question all night.

Felicity had walked back with Oliver and Thea at around 9pm when Thea she put her to bed. It hadn’t been a usual request, Thea was quite capable of getting herself ready for, and into, bed, however for whatever reason Felicity decided to relent.

“You can read for ten minutes and then lights out,” Felicity smiled as she tucked Thea in at Thea’s request.

“Do you think he’ll stay tomorrow?” Thea asked innocently as she pulled the blankets up under her chin.
“Your brother probably has a lot to get back to, but I’m sure he’d love to spend some time with you.”
“Just ask him to stay.”
Felicity took a sharp breath inwards – how was it an eleven year old could be that blunt.
“Thea, I don’t have any say over what Oliver does, we barely even know each other,” she had no idea why she was explaining this to Thea, but she couldn’t stop the words if she stapled her mouth shut, “it has been years since we’ve even spoken and we have nothing in common anymore and,” she screwed up her face looking for anything to add to the list while she was at it, “and he has a girlfriend.”

She even balked at that one, it seemed a little too much like she cared.

“They broke up,” Thea replied nonchalantly

But the picture...

“About a week ago, my parents don’t know,” she added, as though she read Felicity’s expression (and mind) perfectly.

“How do you know?” Felicity instantly regretted asking – this wasn’t a conversation she should be having.

“I read his text messages while I was waiting for you guys this morning.”

She should have given her a dressing down, but Felicity could barely contain the smile over the way Thea so didn’t care about the invasion of Oliver’s privacy.

“You shouldn’t do that,” Felicity managed.

“He should change his pin number once in a while.”

“All the same,” Felicity sighed, deciding she needed to leave this conversation before it got worse.

“Don’t you want to know why?” Thea asked as Felicity reached the door.

“No, and you shouldn’t either.”

Thea shrugged non-apologetically

“I don’t know why he just doesn’t tell mom, she never liked Laurel so she’d probably throw a party.”

“Thea!”

“It’s true.”

Felicity bit back another smile.

“Goodnight Thea.”

She made a speedy retreat from Thea’s room and closed the door with an audible sigh. She didn’t want to think too much over it, but perhaps a recent break up could explain Oliver showing up shitfaced last night. Perhaps she had judged him too harshly assuming it was the norm rather than the exception. Perhaps.

She walked down the stairs slowly collecting her thoughts. There was no way she was going to outright ask him, they had already had way too many awkward conversations today without adding that one; and really, it was none of her business.

Felicity found Oliver with his legs propped up on the coffee table and the blanket from last night spread over them, more than enough overhang for her if she wanted, and his eyes focused on the TV screen in front of him.

“What are you watching?” she asked casually and she swanned into the room, trying not to let what she had just learned spill from her mouth.

“The OC, I just needed to know what happened,” he laughed, unashamed.

“Without Thea?”

“I’m sure she’ll forgive me, she’s seen it a lot as far as I can tell,” he paused to look up at her before he tapped the couch cushion beside him, “want to watch with me?”

She should have probably declined, but honestly she didn’t have anything better to do. She stepped
over his legs and sat down on the couch beside him, a little rigid and on top of the blanket he’d carefully laid there.

Without a word he pulled the blanket out from underneath her and flicked it over her legs. She found herself on the precipice of gulping, but she managed to hold it at bay.

“What is with your hair?” she cracked a smile as she pointed up at his quaffed sandy blonde do.
“What about it?”
“You insulted my car for looking old, but I have to tell you Oliver that hairstyle is reminiscent of nineties version of Nick Carter and that’s not the good version.”
“You don’t like my hair?” he pouted, pretending to be cut by her remark.
“Serial killer meets boyband chic is not really my thing,” she laughed, ruffling her hand through his hair “kiddo,” she added with a smirk.

She watched for the realisation of her chosen word to come to him and within seconds it did. He never said a word, but the smile that flickered on his face said he knew exactly what she was referencing.

He caught himself staring at her again, watching the way her eyes searched through him as though she was trying to read his thoughts. Of course he caught the name she used, he had stopped himself twice that day from calling her that out of sheer habit. Her lips were tipped into a perfect smile, a little lopsided and her bottom lip was slightly frayed out, but it looked so perfectly inviting that, for just a moment, he wondered if she would mind him kissing it, if only to experience it.

When she blinked away from him he thought about asking her eyes to come back, but he didn’t.

“Did you take you pain pills?” Felicity asked, changing the subject when she felt the pull of his eyes more than she was willing to fall into.
“I took two just after we got back,” he nodded like an obedient parent.

“I should stay over then, just in case you have a reaction.”
He almost objected, rightly saying that this wasn’t the first time he’d been on the exact same type of pain mediation and that he was perfectly fine to look after Thea for the night, but he stopped himself when he realised that he wanted her to stay, and maybe she wanted to stay too. Maybe.

“Thank you,” was what he offered, afraid anything more would seem a little enthusiastic.
He really wasn’t sure what he was doing, what he was thinking about, and he knew if he let himself think on it much longer it would become messy and complicated; and he couldn’t do either of those things right now, so he tried to plug his mind from going any further.

She was 17.
She was his next door neighbour.
She was his sister’s babysitter.
She was 17.

With perfectly pink nipples
He shook the last thought from his mind as he felt her shifting next to him, a sweet perfume brushing from her hair as she ran an idle hand through it and pulled the hairband free from her hair.

“You’ll be heading back to college tomorrow?” she asked, keeping her eyes trained forward.
“Actually, the campus will be mostly dead,” Oliver said and he tried to dissect the thoughts going through his brain “I thought I might spend some time at home.”
“Oh,” Felicity swallowed the word.
“Oh?”
“Your parents will be happy,” she added somewhat awkwardly, “wont your girlfriend mind?”
She bit the inside of her lip to stop any more words vomiting from her mouth. Honestly.

Oliver let the question linger, unsure how to answer it if he was honest, so he blended the truth and a lie and landed somewhere in the middle.
“I don’t think she would give it a second thought.”
It was sometime around 8:30am when Felicity’s body finally started to rouse. She stretched across the ridiculously large bed and imagined how much different it would be waking up on a single bed in a dorm room with a roommate she had yet to meet. She groaned to herself at the prospect, but she had wanted the full fledged college experience and so she was going to get it.

The night before had been – for lack of any other words that came to mind this early in the morning – weirdly comfortable. They had talked about nothing in particular, glossing through subjects that held little importance but were interesting all the same.

They spoke about their majors and minors – although Felicity kept to herself the very specific 5 year plan she had tucked away in her desk drawer complete with stepping stones and monthly personal and professional goals; her weirdly specific college plan was not something he needed to know about.

They talked about family; Felicity said hers were much the same and Oliver lamented that he felt bad he lived just over an hour away but barely came home.

They talked about friends; Oliver was still close with Tommy (as Felicity suspected, the two of them like two peas in a pod) and he grazed only slightly over Laurel, making a flippant remark that he “still knew her”. Felicity bit her lip to stop from prying down that well any further.

It was comfortable.

Easy.
Felicity found herself smiling up at the ceiling as she thought about it. She doubted she would ever outlive the embarrassment of him walking in on her naked – she wasn’t entirely sure she believed that he didn’t see anything – but last night was anything but awkward and she was glad for it.

She let out the smallest of sighs as she reminisced about the lingered moment on the steps when they said goodnight. She had absently placed her hand on the balustrade and just as absently when he took the first step up towards his room his hand fell on top of hers. Both sets of eyes had immediately honed in on the sight of his hand swamping hers but neither of them moved for what seemed like hours stitched together.

It was Felicity who had finally relented and slipped her hand out from under his before she had wished him a soft goodnight and he replied with an equally quiet “Goodnight Felicity”

Nice.

Maybe a little more than nice.

She huffed loudly to herself as she forced her way out of the cocoon of blankets and placed her feet on the ground. Oliver Queen was her neighbour, a playboy party animal who cheated and got shitfaced. She nodded her head in agreement with the last words that rolled through it – she was pretty certain she didn’t actually believe them but she couldn’t have herself veering off track with a crush that she should have gotten out of her system years ago.

Felicity ran a brush through her hair and pulled it up into a ponytail that sat slightly askew on her head before she checked her PJs for visible embarrassments (holes, stains, erect nipples) and then she padded to the door, took a deep breath, and exited. She could see Oliver in the morning – hopefully he was wearing more clothes this time.

Nice.

The smell hit her almost immediately as she stepped into the hallway, the sweet aroma of freshly brewed coffee and pancakes. How was that not a perfume scent yet?

She rounded the house following her nose like a Bloodhound until she found herself in the kitchen, watching a white tank wearing Oliver with loose fitting grey pants that still managed to somehow show off his very lush and pert ass. She swallowed down a lump in her throat before he noticed her standing there.

“Morning,” he smiled as he looked at home over the electric frying pan.

“How long have you been awake?” she asked as her feet dubiously stepped onto the stonewashed tiles.

“About an hour. Thea wanted pancakes,” he shrugged as he flipped two in succession.

“When did you learn to cook?” she laughed as she opened the fridge and searched the shelves for the OJ.

“My repertoire isn’t large, it’s basically just this and a handful of other things.”

Felicity hummed her way down the shelves before she found the OJ tucked in the back. She plucked it from the fridge and closed it instinctively with her ass as she started talking “And what are those…”

“Holy fuck,” she gaped before she slammed her hand over her mouth, dreading that Thea might be within earshot.

“Something wrong?” Oliver asked concerned as he spun around to face a very wide-eyed Felicity
standing behind him.

“Your hair,” she managed to say as her eyes tracked across the room for any signs that Thea heard her cursing.

“Oh right,” Oliver quipped as he ran a hand across his number 3 hairstyle, “I let Thea loose with the clippers, I’m told she gave me the Ryan, I don’t know what that means.”

“Was this because I said,” Felicity paused, searching for words to say that didn’t make her sound like she thought she had any say over his appearance.

“No,” Oliver laughed, “I mean I was fond of serial killer chic but it was time for a change regardless of what you said.”

“Oh, good,” Felicity smiled as she walked over to the kitchen island and placed the orange juice down.

She spun around so he wouldn’t see the cogs turning through a million different thoughts in her head, but if she was being honest Oliver had just gone from a very solid 8.5 to a way-out-of-your-league-Felicity-so-stop-panting-10.

“Does it look okay?” Oliver asked as he turned his attention back to the pancakes.

“Yea, you know, it looks fine,” Felicity shrugged as she stared vacantly at the glasses in the cupboard in an effort to not have to turn around in case he was looking at her.

Fine.

Oliver heard the word like a chime through his head. It was such a nothing word. It didn’t mean good, it didn’t mean bad, it just meant – fine. One very solidly apathetic Fine. He shook the thoughts from his head, honestly he didn’t know why he was expecting more.

Felicity was gorgeous.

He wasn’t even scaling up. If anything he was scaling her down on account of the fact he still could not believe the cute little nerd from next door had grown up into that.

She was gorgeous.

The way her softly lightened blonde hair caressed her face in light waves was like the perfect wave brushing up against a pristine beach.

The way her blue eyes looked a million different tones of blue rolled into one made him think that there needed to be a colour blue that was just called Felicity in honour of them. Even when she wore glasses there was nothing that stole the limelight from those eyes.

She was gorgeous.

She was his neighbour.

She was 17.

He pushed down the desires that had started to float their way back into his head.

“Maple or Golden syrup?” he asked as he tried to stem the fantasies that made his cock twitch.

“I’ll take mine with lemon and sugar,” Felicity replied as Thea strolled into the kitchen.

“Do you like his hair?” Thea asked as she took a glass from the cupboard Felicity was still staring into.

“Mmm yea, you did a good job, it looks nice,” Felicity answered, finally deciding on a glass from in front of her.

Nice.

‘Nice was better than Fine’ Oliver smiled to himself.
“Pancakes are ready,” Oliver adlibbed as he pulled the plug on the fry pan and set the plate full of fluffy pancakes onto the kitchen island.

“You guys want to eat out on the patio?” Thea asked as she tore a small section of the top pancake and pushed it into her mouth.

Oliver looked over at Felicity who bobbed her head in agreement to the idea. She had always loved sitting outside, there was something peaceful about sitting out in the lightly chilled Fall breeze, soaking up the last remaining weeks of sunshine before winter would eventually come knocking.

Oliver led the way with the plate of pancakes and four different condiments tucked under his arm, Felicity followed with the glasses and OJ and Thea walked along behind, wildly texting on her phone.

Thea plucked three pancakes from the stack the moment the plate touched the classic white wrought iron table and drowned them in both maple syrup and chocolate sauce before she licked her fingers and headed towards the door.

“I forgot, I have homework,” she shrugged as she walked back inside and closed the door without another word.

“That wasn’t obvious or anything,” Oliver laughed as he settled into the chair opposite where Felicity had sat.

“I think your sister is playing matchmaker,” Felicity scoffed in an attempt to hide the blush that fanned out across her cheeks.

“And that’s silly right?” Oliver posed, staring down at the empty plate in front of him, unwilling to make eye contact.

Silly.
That was a loaded word if Felicity had ever heard one.
“Right, yeah, silly. Us? Silly,” she laughed to mask the twinge of sadness she felt
“Yeah, preposterous.”
He heard it the moment he said it, but he couldn’t take it back – could he?

Preposterous. Oliver took this opportunity to use a four syllable word? Ouch.
“Absolutely,” she found herself agreeing, “can you imagine, us?” she added a laugh just so he might believe her.

Yes Oliver’s head screamed.
“No,” his mouth answered, “I mean we’re just friends right?”
“We’re not even really that,” she quipped, perhaps that was one step too far?
Oliver tried to hide his hurt at her answer, but he knew he didn’t have any right to expect different.

“I mean, we could be,” she added, realising she hated the idea of not, “friends that is.”
Runner up wasn’t always so bad.

Oliver took a bite of pancake to stop himself from saying anything stupid and he ended up simply nodding instead until he swallowed down the mouthful.
“Yeah, friends, we should be that.”
God, he could hear himself and he sounded like he was 15 again.

Oliver wanted to be friends.
Just friends.
Only friends.
Felicity managed to make the word friend sound so ominous in her head.

“Because,” he started, wishing he could stop himself, “you’re only 17.”
Too late.
She looked at him with doe eyes and an ever so slightly pinched brow.

What was that supposed to mean? Felicity bit down on her lip.
She should probably not say anything, just nod.
“And you’re not,” she added.
Too late.

“Right, I’m not, I’m 21,” he almost spoke it as if it was a question he meant for her to answer, “and you babysit my sister.”
“Babysat,” she corrected, although she didn’t know why.

She took a few seconds to consider her words.
“In that I probably won’t babysit her anymore, college and all that.”
She really wished she could just Stop. Talking.
Everything coming out of their respective mouths was just making this more awkward than a fourth grade dance.

“Of course, you have the college,” Oliver remarked, nodding his head as he took a sudden interest in creating a Picasso of maple syrup on his pancake stack
“Yes, the college,” she agreed.
“So friends?” Oliver asked just barely blinking up before she looked down.
“Yea, absolutely,” she dubiously replied.

Friends.
Nice.

Her phone sprung to life in her pyjama pocket and she almost screamed ‘praise Jesus’ as a result.
Thankfully her mouth finally listened to her head and said nothing as she pulled the phone from her pocket and stared at the message that popped up on the screen.

“Your parents just landed, they’ll be home in 30 minutes,” she said, reading the message out loud.
She noticed him sigh.
“I’m going to get changed before they get home,” Felicity continued as she stood, leaving most of her breakfast untouched, “I’ll clear these dishes away right after.”
“I can stay with Thea until the come home, if you want.”
“You don’t need to,” Felicity smiled as she backed away.

“It’s fine Felicity, it’s Sunday, you probably have other things to do.”
She supposed she did. Nothing important, but wallowing in self-pity at home over whatever this had been sounded like something she needed to do.
“Okay, that’d be great. Thanks.”
She kicked her heel on the ground and turned around – it was time to leave.

Felicity decided that self-pity was what the old Felicity would do but almost-at-college-Felicity wasn’t about that anymore. Was the conversation with Oliver the most awkward thing she had been party to in the last decade? Yes.
But, Oliver wanted to be friends, and that was good. It was great. It was *Nice.*
She couldn’t fault him on it because that was what she wanted too. *Right?*
She certainly didn’t want more.
It sounded more convincing the fifth time she repeated it.

So, that was all well and good and nice and she wasn’t going to sit in her room and dissect this anymore, which is why she found herself running – well jogging without dying was probably a more apt description.

The headphones in her ears weren’t playing any music (they only served to stop people from talking to her and for the most part they worked), the wind was brushing against her flushed cheeks and she hadn’t fallen over once, so win. She felt a sudden urge to high-five herself but resisted because College Felicity wouldn’t high five herself.

“You actually said the word preposterous?” Tommy laughed as he tapped out the beat of the song playing on the radio as he drove his midnight black Range Rover down the quaint suburban lanes. Oliver nodded slowly.

He had regaled Tommy with everything from the weekend that he could remember since Tommy had pulled into the driveway near on 20 minutes ago. Well *almost* everything. Oliver kept to himself just *how* much of Felicity he had seen the other morning and he didn’t have enough recollection of what had happened Friday night after Tommy had dropped him off, so it was really just a tale of how pretty Felicity had become and how stupid it was for Oliver to be nursing any romantic feelings for her.

At least that’s what Tommy was supposed to be telling him.

“Is it so preposterous though? She seemed like a nice kid back then so why not go on a date?”
“Because she’s 17,” Oliver repeated what his mind had told him more times than he could count.
“And that matters because you’re going to jump into bed right away?” Tommy sniggered, “I mean I know you’ve had your share of bounces Oliver but I assume this isn’t a tap and run?”
That made more sense than Oliver was willing to admit.

“No, friends is better,” Oliver remarked, it was what Felicity wanted too. He was hardly going to make a complete ass of himself by asking her out on a date.
“Is that you saying that or brooding Oliver?” Tommy joked, “is this because of Laurel?”
“No,” Oliver replied quicker than necessarily – and a blatant lie.

“Because you two have been toxic for years, I still don’t know how it was only just now you managed to break up, that girl is one straight jacket buckle short of crazy, if I’d have known it took her fucking-“
“Don’t,” Oliver interrupted, he didn’t need the reminder, “I don’t exactly have the moral high ground.”
“You wasted too many years with her, you need some distraction.”
“Isn’t that what you said Friday night, before you left me shitfaced on my parent’s porch?”
“You told me to drop you off there, and,” Tommy turned his attention from the road for a second to smile widely, “you’re welcome.”

His eyes focused back on the road as he went from jovial to nearing serious.

“Whether you want to spend time with Felicity or some other hot freshman, you just need to…”
Tommy stopped his mouth staying gaped, “holy saints I love the suburbs.” he gushed as his eyes zeroed in on a young blond jogging down the road.
Oliver followed where Tommy’s eyes had anchored and it was pretty easy to see why, she was wearing shorts that usually only summer blessed the world with – tiny grey spandex-knit shorts that hugged what could only be described as a perfect ass. Her hips dipped into a tight waist and a racer back top fit snug against the smooth curve of her back. Her shoulders were bare and Oliver found himself tracing the curve of them with his eyes.

It was only when Tommy almost hit the curb that Oliver realised he was pulling alongside her. “What are you doing?” Oliver panicked as Tommy rolled down the passenger window and crept along the curb behind the poor girl who was minding her own business. “That ass,” Tommy winked, “that needs tapping.” “You’re a perve, drive away Tommy.” “I’m just going to ask for directions.” “Don’t-“ But before Oliver could object further they were sitting almost alongside the girl who had stopped abruptly.

Oliver buried his head into his hands wishing the car seat would swallow him up; accosting strangers on the street wasn’t exactly his modus operandi.

“Excuse me, do you know where North Lester Street is?” Tommy asked as he leaned over the car seat into Oliver’s space. “I’m pretty sure that’s the street over from where your parents live Tommy,” Felicity replied as she leaned into the car.

Oliver heard it before she had finished the third word, he knew that voice. His eyes shot up from between his palms and he was met with a very confused looking Felicity.

He watched as Tommy’s mind flipped through the pages of his virtual black book trying to place the face of the girl who seemed to know who he was. “Hi Oliver,” Felicity half smiled. “Hi Felicity,” Oliver awkwardly replied as he raised one hand in a small wave.

“Wait. Fel-Lic-ity?” Tommy gaped as he slowly recoiled into his seat, “your neighbour? Your young neighbour, that Felicity?” His complexion turned as white as a ghost when he realised who the owner of ass he had been ogling moments before was. “Okay, well I’m sure you can find your own way there,” Felicity said as she tapped the car door and stepped back from it.

She tightened her ponytail and took a slow breath as she waited for Tommy to close his mouth and Oliver to say, well anything, but neither was forthcoming. “Okay, bye boys” she shrugged as she started to jog off. She had reached the next driveway when Oliver felt Tommy’s sharp slap against his shoulder.

“What was that for?” Oliver quipped “Go and talk to her.” “I think I’ve made enough of a fool of myself today.” “Just go.” Oliver’s hands were already one step ahead of his brain as they opened the door and he lurched from the car.

“Felicity, wait up,” he called, louder than he needed given she’d only run about 50 feet.
Felicity stopped although she had considered pretending she simply couldn’t hear him. She really didn’t feel like trying to one up the awkwardness of the morning’s conversation, but her body clearly had other plans seeing as she turned around to look back at him.

“Everything okay?” she asked, realising it was such a nothing question but having nothing more apt to offer in its place.

“I have your babysitting money,” Oliver blurted out as he silently prayed he had enough money in his wallet.

“Your mom already paid me Oliver,” Felicity replied as he walked closer, scouring the contents of his wallet.

“Good because I guess Thea emptied my wallet before I left the house,” he sighed starring at the blank cash pocket before slipping it back into the pocket of his steel grey chinos.

“What are you doing out here?” Oliver asked, immediately hating the question when he heard it outload.

“Jogging,” she smiled with a soft laugh.

*Of course.*

“Of course you are,” he paused as he stopped just in front of her.

She looked so tiny in front of him and with her hair pulled back she looked so much more like the little girl from next door, all she was missing was a pair of slightly oversized glasses.

“Aren’t you cold?” he found himself asking as his eyes swam over the soft sweeping curve of her stomach and waist, his mouth drying at the memory of her naked.

“The jogging helps.”

*Of course it does.*

“I have a jacket though, you could use it.”

“I think it’ll probably be too big,” she winked with her head slightly cocked to the side.

“Maybe just tie it around your waist,” he shrugged as he walked back towards the car.

“Oliver, I’m fine, I don’t need your jacket.”

“Do you want a ride home?”

She looked at him quizzically and waited for the penny to drip – it didn’t.

“You’re going the wrong way.”

Oliver nodded, point taken.

“We can double back, it’s fine.”

Her eyes continued to narrow, still waiting.

“And that would defeat the purpose of jogging if you were to take me,” she jested as she absently slapped his arm, immediately regretting the awkwardness such a gesture brought.

“Home,” she added abruptly after hearing where her sentence had finished, “take me home.”

Oliver hid a smile as he dropped his chin to his chest.

“Where are you heading?” she asked, changing the subject.

“Just back to campus.”

“Oh.”

She tried to hide her disappointment by twisting her fingers idly through her ponytail.

“Just there and back, I need to collect some stuff, including my car,” Oliver explained as Felicity tried equally as hard to hide her relief.

“Good, your parents will be happy,” she nodded, “and Thea.”

*And me.*

“Maybe we could hang out tonight,” he let the words sink in the space between them, but when she
didn’t reply he began to think of some way to counter them that didn’t involve turning around and just walking away.

“Um” Felicity started as she watched the blue of his eyes almost beg, “I can’t.” She swallowed the lump in her throat and expelled a small breath.

She probably could have; and she definitely wanted to, but she needed to put some distance between her and Oliver, distance where she could put this stupid crush she was harbouring to bed and not recount it every time she saw the tipped wings of his alluring smile or the pearlescent blue of his eyes.

“I mean I would,” she added. Oh god, where are you going with this? Her mind barraged. “But I volunteer at the shelter on Sundays so I can’t,” she didn’t know where any of this was coming from, she didn’t need to give Oliver an explanation he hadn’t asked for.

“Like homeless shelter?” “Animal,” she blushed, “You could come if you want?” Oh god she almost slapped a hand across her mouth to stop herself from saying anything more. “Yea, okay,” he agreed with little hesitation “Alright then.” She backed away as her arm dangled from her neck and her other hand gestured with a mind of its own.

“What time?” “Six,” she called before she felt the tight constrict of her throat about to say something more, something about dinner and getting it together afterward – she was not going to... “We could get a bite to eat afterwards if you’re hungry,” she blabbed. What. The. Fuck “That sounds good, I’ll pick you up at six.” She nodded, afraid to open her mouth.

“Enjoy your jog,” Oliver added with a smile. “I’ll be sure to,” she replied, rolling her head to avoid the blush spread across her cheeks becoming obvious. “Are you sure you don’t want my jacket?” She shook her head as she turned around, took a long, drawn breath and started running.

She thought about falling into a nearby bush where she could chastise herself in private but she figured he would probably see and find her relentlessly berating herself and she really didn’t need that.

Oliver watched her for a minute before he tore his eyes away and walked back to the car. “That was the worst thing I have ever seen in my entire life,” Tommy declared as he slowly shook his head back forth. “Let’s just go,” Oliver lamented as he sunk into the seat and pulled the heavy door closed. “Honestly, what was that cluster fuck?” “I don’t know, it’s like I forget how to talk when I’m around her.” “Oh but the offering her your jacket so other guys like us wouldn’t perve at her ass, that was smooth.” Tommy snickered as he pushed the keys into the ignition and started the car.

“Was it that obvious?” Tommy replied with a laugh as he pulled back onto the road.
“I’ve seen you charm your way through an entire sorority. You choked.”
“I choked.”
“So do better tonight.”

Felicity stood in the brisk air of the evening, hugging her arms tightly around her waist as she hovered above the first step of her parents’ porch. She could still avoid going, say she tripped and hurt herself on running, something came up, she wasn’t feeling well – there were a million excuses that could see her get out of having to awkwardly bumble through tonight.

Every conversation the two of them had had today was bordering on ridiculous and was poles apart from the ease with which they talked the night before. Felicity couldn’t pinpoint where it went wrong but if she had to guess it would have been right around the time where she realised that he didn’t see her as anything more than a friend. 

Still. All these years later and she still hadn’t caught his eye.

She breathed out a soft sigh, it shouldn’t matter – it really shouldn’t. She had gone through the last few years barely giving him much more than a passing thought and any time she did happen to think on him, she would excuse it by playing it off as concern for a friend she hadn’t spoken to in far too long; only now that he wanted to be her friend (and only her friend) she wished for the distance she had once lamented. At least if they never spoke, there would never be an opportunity to say something dumb.

Oliver was 21.
Oliver was in college.
Oliver was with Laurel.
Felicity stopped at the last one, Thea had said otherwise but she was 10 and adult relationships could be complicated – especially this relationship.

She stared back at her front door and wondered for a moment how quickly she could find herself behind it, hiding, pretending to not be home…

“Felicity?”
She melted the instant she heard her name with the soft infliction he gave it.
“Hi Oliver,” she bleated as she took the first step down the porch
“I wasn’t sure if I was supposed to come get you, or.”
“It’s fine, I was just coming around.”

He took a moment to appreciate her – she was wearing glasses, the rectangle frame of which perfectly surrounded her almond-shaped eyes. Her hair was pulled back, the tips of it still lightly wet from her shower. Her make-up was minimal – in fact with the exception of the light coat of mascara and the slightly pink gloss of her lips; he wasn’t sure she was even wearing any. She was dressed in effortless clothes – jeans, a t-shirt and baggy cable-knit pullover – but she looked breathtaking to him.

“You look nice,” he remarked, realising that was usually something said on a date – of which this was not.
“Thank you,” she replied quietly.
She was nervous and Oliver felt a sudden and overwhelming urge to wrap his arm around her shoulders and pull her in tight against his chest.

Oliver opened the passenger side door for Felicity and held it as she tipped him a soft smile and slipped into the seat.
The drive was taken in almost complete silence but for Felicity giving Oliver directions to the animal shelter where she spent more time than she was willing to admit.

“You come here a lot?” Oliver asked as they walked towards the side entrance.

“I come when I can,” she smiled as she slipped an access card across the door lock.

The door beeped and she pushed it open.

“I don’t remember you having any pets,” Oliver remarked as he followed her in through the Staff Only door.

“Oh we don’t, mom is allergic so I come here to play with the animals and help out where they need me.”

“Felicity, we weren’t expecting you tonight,” a broad shouldered hulk of a man announced with a ginger smile.

“Oh, I made arrangements with Lyla, I said I would come in,” Felicity lied as she shrugged wildly.

“That’s funny I don’t recall her—”

“Anyway, I’m here now, so point me towards something.”

“Who’s this guy?” Hulk asked as he looked behind Felicity and narrowed his eyes on Oliver.

“John, Oliver. Oliver, John,” Felicity introduced, her hand gesturing between the two.

“Nice to meet you,” Oliver smiled anxiously as he extended his hand.

“Oliver Queen?”

Felicity screwed her eyes shut and prayed for any form of interruption.

“Uh yes,” Oliver replied hesitantly.

“Mmmhmmm,” John grunted before his eyes dropped to Felicity who was surreptitiously avoiding him.

“The kennels could use sweeping out and Jonas will be glad to see you.”

“Thank John,” Felicity quipped as she took the broom from him in one hand and took Oliver’s arm in the other.

“That’s where I’ll be if you need me,” she called as she led Oliver quickly down the narrow linoleum lined hall.

“That guy seems terrifying,” Oliver breathed as the went through a set of double doors and into a chorus of barking.

“Oh John? He’s fine, just a big giant teddy bear, he’s been volunteering here for years when he’s not on assignment.”

“Assignment, like a reporter?”

“No,” Felicity shrugged, “like with the army.”

“Who’s Jonas?”

Felicity didn’t answer but walked Oliver all the way to the end of the kennels, and pointed down to a silky black dog buried in a torn up dog bed.

“That’s Jonas,” she smiled, “this is a no kill shelter so he’s been here for years, I remember the night we found him.”

“How come he hasn’t been adopted yet?” Oliver asked as he watched Felicity kneel and steady herself against the metal gate.

She threaded her hand through the gate and tapped her palm onto the concrete floor before she called the dog’s name. His head tugged up immediately and his little legs stretched in various directions before he pulled himself up and limped over towards the gate, licking long lines up Felicity’s hand once he reached it.
“That’s why,” Felicity sighed, nodding down towards the little stump that should have been one of the dog’s front legs, “nobody wants a three-legged dog apparently.”
“His name is Jonas?” Oliver asked as he squatted down next to Felicity.
“Mmmmm,” she piped with a quick nod
“Like my middle name?”
Felicity swallowed down the sudden wave of embarrassment and managed a short shrug.
“Yea I suppose it is, that’s funny.”
“Who named him?”
“Oh no idea,” she lied, knowing full well it had been her 15-year old self.
“Just a coincidence then?”
“Absolutely,” she smiled back at him, burying the truth deep behind her eyes.

“I’m surprised you know how to use one of those,” Felicity laughed as her foot tapped against the broom in Oliver’s hands.
“You think you know me so well,” he jested back as he pushed the broom towards her making her leap out of the way.

“I do know you Oliver. You climb fences and touch stuff that isn’t yours,” she mocked as she threw a roll of newspaper at him.
“Really?” he sighed as the newspaper hit him square in the chest, “you’re going to start a war you won’t win kiddo.”
“Call me that again,” she warned as she raised another roll over her head.

Oliver leant an elbow up on the top of the broom handle as a wicked smile slowly rose across his face. They had spent the best part of an hour before chatting as they moved around cleaning the kennels one by one. It had taken some time before they had fallen into a relaxed groove and the conversation became less awkward and much more like the night before.

Neither of them had particularly noticed the transition, but they were both glad for it.

“Why, what are you going to do about it?” he grinned mischievously.
“Say it and see,” she sassed in reply.
Oliver licked a slow and steady line across his lower lip and watched her with considered eyes as she stood with ones trained squarely on him.

“Kidd-oo.”
Before his lips had even closed around the word she fired the roll of newspaper at him, hitting him squarely in the jaw.
“Oh you’ll pay for that Ms Smoak,” he smirked as he collected the unravelled newspaper, bunched it together and threw it in her direction.

Felicity laughed as she ducked to the left and proudly exclaimed, “you missed me.”
She threw another roll at him, one that wasn’t wound as tightly as the first two and newspaper pages went flying across the kennel and scattering over the floor.

Oliver ran the broom through a pile that had formed in front of him sending them up into the air and towards Felicity. She squealed as he chased her around one of the larger kennels, the broom hot at her heels.

She threw more newspaper over her shoulder, laughing as he ducked and weaved each shot she took.
The dogs barked in raucous unison with Felicity’s shrieks and the playful thrumming sound Oliver was making as he drove the broom around behind her like a race car.

She stopped a few feet from him when she had run out of newspapers, the floor now littered with the same. She raised her hands in surrender and tried to catch her breath.

“That’s enough now Oliver, look at this mess you’ve made,” she grinned as she blew loose strands of hair back from her face and slid her glasses slowly back up her nose.
“I’m pretty sure I didn’t start this,” he winked.
“I’m pretty sure you did,” she pouted.

He raised one brow and jolted the broom towards her before tugging it back. She squeaked and stepped backwards, losing her footing for just a second but long enough to stumble, her arms trying wildly to regain her balance.

She could feel her centre of gravity contort and she knew she was going ass over head, until Oliver’s strong arms looped around her waist and pulled her back up onto her two feet, staying planted there long after she had regained her balance.

His chest was pressed against hers, his arms completely encasing her slender waist. Her palms were flat against the curve of his chest, the tips of her fingers just sliding over his shoulder and their eyes were entwined breathlessly with each other.

Her lips fell open, maybe trying to say thank you, but nothing more than a soft sigh came from between them. Oliver’s lips parted in slow motion as his knees bent a little and his neck stooped.

She knew what was happening and her breath hitched in anticipation of it. Oliver’s lips met softly with hers, like a feather brushed across them. He was waiting for her lips to reciprocate and within slivers of a second they did. Rising her body up onto her tippy toes she deepened the kiss, taking his bottom lip between her lips.

His tongue slipped over the threshold of her lips and swam into the warm and inviting confines of her mouth. His hands stroked up her back, following the arch of her as he held her tightly against him.

The area was filled with a chaos of noise but she heard nothing above the slow and measured thump of his heart under her palm and the slow gasp of her breath as his pillowed lips embraced and suckled her top lip.

It was a kiss.
It was the kiss.

And it was over all too soon.

She let his whispered name drip from her lips onto his and it was at that moment that the kiss came to a screeching halt. Oliver pulled back, severing every point of contact between them, with a pained expression burned into his face.

“I’m sorry,” he breathed, watching the confusion build up in her eyes, “I shouldn’t have done that.”
I’m sorry.
Those were his words. His exact words.
The ‘I shouldn’t have done that’ was icing on the cake really.
She heard them.
Every last one of them.
Sorry.
Shouldn’t.
That.
Oh she heard them alright.

Felicity’s lips were still poised just as Oliver had left them, parted and warmed. Her mouth could still feel the lingered sensation of his tongue batting around it. Her body still slightly concaved into a hand that wasn’t there anymore; and her ears echoed with those seven words.

“Felicity, I’m sorry.”
There they were again.
Her eyebrows flinched at them.
Stop saying them.

She finally managed to straighten her back, swallow the feeling of his tongue and fold her lips
together, but the echo remained.

*I’m sorry.*

“It’s fine,” she finally said, instantly hating the way it sounded from her mouth.

It wasn’t fine.

You don’t kiss someone like *that* and then take it back.

“I’m sorry-s,” are reserved for those times you accidently go for a kiss on the cheek but somebody moves. “I’m sorry-s” are for when you do something stupid, something you didn’t mean to do, something you wouldn’t do again if given a rewind button.

Felicity swallowed her last thoughts.

*Maybe that’s exactly why he said it.*

She backed away from him and dropped her eyes to the ground as she kicked her foot against a layer of newspapers. She was fighting back the tears – no way, *no how*, was she going to let them pass.

“Felicity I’m-“ he started as he reached a hand out in the dead space between them.

“Don’t say sorry again Oliver,” Felicity interrupted as she shied away from his hand, “I heard it the first two times loud and clear.”

Oliver opened his mouth to say something that didn’t contain the *S*-letter word, but he pulled up blanks. It wasn’t that he was sorry like it was a mistake or that he didn’t want to feel her lips again, *because god help him he did* – it was just that…he wasn’t even sure he could internally find the words.

“You’re sorry, you made a mistake, it’s fine, I get it,” she quipped as she walked towards the kennel door, “You finish up in here, I’m going to start on the last one,” she added as she tried desperately to put some distance between them – he would not see her upset.

“You’re saying that it’s fine, that you’re fine but I’m not sure you are,” Oliver said as he followed her through the gate.

“Why are you following me?” she snapped

“Alright,” he replied, holding his hands up in surrender, “I’m sorry.”

He grimaced as soon as the words left his mouth and he saw Felicity flinch at them just as instantly.

*I’m sorry.*

*I’m sorry.*

*I’m sorry.*

She stepped into the other empty kennel, slamming the gate closed behind her. She waited for a few moments, listening to hear if Oliver dared to follow her and she let out a small breath when she came to the conclusion that he did not.

She felt a tear slip from her eye and she batted it away before it could skate down her cheek as she willed herself to keep the rest of the ones trapped behind her eyes at bay.

There was nothing wrong with crying, it was healthy and honest and raw. But not here and not like this – she did not want to give Oliver another opportunity to say *Sorry*, especially now that she hated the word.

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Felicity had busied herself scrubbing on her hands and knees at the concrete floor, a lot more thoroughly than the volunteer job required, but it was a channel for all of the frustration, hurt and
annoyance she felt.

Oliver kissed her.
Oliver didn’t want to kiss her.

She wished she didn’t care, but it was hard not to, because the truth was – She had kissed Oliver back.
She wanted to.

She huffed loudly to herself, infuriated at the idle thoughts that were ping-ponging around her brain. She didn’t want to like Oliver, yet…

“So I’m finished,” came the familiar sexy gravel of a voice behind her.
She hated that, only because it made her for a split second forget that she was very mad at him and the word Sorry.

“Thanks,” she muttered without turning around, instead keeping her full attention trained on a spot on the concrete floor that wasn’t going to scrub out no matter how hard she tried.
“Do you want a hand?”
She could hear his shuffled footsteps getting closer.
“No, you should just go home,” she sighed, trimming back some of the anger she felt – the truth was, if Oliver wanted to take back the kiss because it was a mistake – she couldn’t really stop him, not matter how angry or hurt it made her.

“Did you still want to get a bite to eat, my treat?”
She closed her eyes slowly, steeled a breath for resolve and slowly shook her head. She wasn’t going down this rabbit hole with him again.

“I’m not hungry,” she spoke, still refusing to look back at him.

Oliver stood poised on the precipice of a million different decisions.
He knew why he said sorry and it was the right thing to do. He had spent the last seven years forgetting about most of the people in his life – it hadn’t been malicious or even a thought out process; but Felicity was one of the people he forgot about. He truly believed he had no right to come back into her life and kiss her.

When he saw the tipped up smile on her lips and the way her blue eyes just danced around the room he had wanted to kiss her; selfishly and ‘consequences be damned’.

But he shouldn’t have, not because it was a mistake or because he, god forbid, wouldn’t do the exact same thing again if presented with it, but because he had no right to. He was self-centred and selfish and people who kissed him usually ended up hating him. He didn’t want that for Felicity.

That was why he was sorry.

“I could stay, help you clean in here,” he offered.
“You’ve done enough,” she snipped before she took another breath to keep her snark under control, “I’ll catch a ride home with someone else.”
Oliver nodded, even though he knew she didn’t see him; her back still very much turned to him.

He wished he could say more, explain more, but what would the point be? They would still end up in this exact same position, in fact the way he was around her he wouldn’t be surprised if him speaking just made it a whole lot worse.

“Alright, goodnight Felicity.”
She barely hummed in response, but he couldn’t really blame her.

Oliver stepped away and trudged the halls. He probably should have asked her how to even get outside but he wasn’t sure she would have told him.

“Leaving?” a deep voice spoke as Oliver lumbered past the open door of an office. He stopped politely and nodded at John who was perched on the edge of a stainless steel examination table, nursing a hot drink between his large hands.

“Felicity still here?” he asked. A man that preferred to use his words sparingly Oliver decided.

“She is,” he replied in kind.

“She’s leaving for college soon.”

Oliver nodded, unsure if that was a question or a statement.

“There are a lot of shitheads in college.”

Oliver smiled, he couldn’t fault the man.

“Hope you’re not one of them,” John said as he settled his drink on the table behind him, “exit is that way, push the red button by the door and it’ll open for you,” he added as he pointed to the corridor to Oliver’s left.

“Thanks,” Oliver offered with a smile.

“Mmmhhmm.”

Oliver started walking, but there was one more thing on his mind. It was a very real possibility the Hulk’s willingness to chat wouldn’t stretch that far – but it was worth a shot.

“The three-legged dog that you have…” Oliver started as he took two steps back towards where John was still stood like a statue.

“Jonas? What about him?” John replied, his dark eyes narrowing like he had a reason to be suspicious about everything.

“How long has he been here?” Oliver asked, nonchalantly hiding the unasked questions.

“About 3 years.”

Oliver made a mental note to remind himself that John Diggle only answered questions asked, not the ones unasked.

“She never told me why she named him Jonas,” Oliver pretending to yawn like the answer didn’t actually mean anything – a classic diversion technique he was somewhat proud of.

The look on John’s face – the raised lip at one corner and the slightly pulled-in eyebrow – suggested he wasn’t buying it, but when they both dropped and he shrugged his broad shoulders, Oliver figured John Diggle didn’t really care all that much.

“She just said when she found him trying to jump a fence it reminded her of someone.”

Oliver exhaled a laugh from his nose, of course it did.

He thanked John with a nod before he turned back around and headed the way he’d been directed minutes before.

“You actually said the words I’m sorry?” Tommy spat, the background noise of the party or club he was in still not loud enough to drown out the hysterics he was in.
Oliver rolled his eyes as he sat in the parking lot of the shelter with his forehead pressed against the steering wheel, his cell phone on speaker sitting on his lap.
“Come on man, no girl wants to hear that,” Tommy continued as he navigated through the loud crowd until he found a quiet spot.

“I shouldn’t have kissed her,” Oliver bemoaned as he tapped his head sullenly against the steering wheel.
“Why?” Tommy sighed loudly down the phone line, the background noise now just somewhat ambient.
“Because she’s too good, she deserves better,” he huffed, rolling his head just enough to see the door in hopes Felicity might walk out from it and he could somehow make this right.

“So I’m dealing with self-deprecating Oliver? Good to know,” Tommy mocked.
“I’m serious, she’s too smart, too nice, I didn’t even consider what she wanted, I kissed her because I wanted to,” Oliver mumbled, embarrassed at the way it sounded out loud.

“Is that wrong?” Tommy asked.
“Yes, my whole life has been a series of what I wanted to do. She shouldn’t be sucked into that vortex,” Oliver explained, the truth as he saw it.
“Look I don’t get it, but if that’s really how you feel then you need to tell her. Don’t leave the poor girl with an ‘I’m sorry’.”
Oliver nodded painfully slow. Tommy was right, she deserved something better than an ‘I’m Sorry.’

“When are you heading back down?” Tommy asked, the party clearly found him as the raucous cheers echoed around Oliver’s car
“I’m not sure, see you when I see you.”
Oliver disconnected the call after Tommy yelled a quick ‘Bye’.

Oliver sank down into the beige leather seats of his BMW 7 Series and stared relentlessly at the door, half of him praying she’d come out and the other half legitimately terrified that she would.

He didn’t know what he was supposed to say to her, how he was supposed to fix it. He didn’t want to lose her as a friend. Not after he’d only just found her again.

It was nearing 10pm when Felicity stepped out from a silver sedan that pulled up along the curb near her house. She waved the driver a quick goodbye before she flicked the door closed with her wrist, sighed like the weight of the world was trapped on her slender shoulders and swung her coral slouch bag like no one was watching.

But Oliver was watching and the candid display made him smile. In his time away he’d forgotten how Felicity acted when she thought no one was looking. She did simple, silly things like jump over cracks in the sidewalk and talk happily to herself – or, he remembered with a bright smile, sung into her hairbrush a particularly fetching rendition of a Spice Girls song.

It was one of the last times he remembered tipping his head up to her window, years ago now. He was a senior in High School if his memory served him right. The music had been particularly loud and it had been that which had drawn his attention upwards. There she was, singing with absolute abandonment, her long hair was a little darker back then and she had pulled it up into a high ponytail.

He remembered feeling a little jealous, it had looked like so much fun.
And then she had seen him. She’d stopped dead, frozen in front of the window before she’d just dropped to the floor. Even now the way she just sunk to the floor made him laugh.

Forgetting that he was sitting in shadows on the curb of his driveway he snorted out a laugh at the memory of it.

“Holy fracking shit,” Felicity screamed at the sound that sprung out of the shadows. She steadied herself with her bag pressed to her chest and eased her glasses back up her nose. Honestly, she should have run the 50-something feet to her house.

“Sorry, sorry, it’s just me,” the shadows spoke again, a figure rising from the curb next to the Queen’s gate

“Oliver?” Felicity asked, her mind briefly wondering if she could find the pepper spray in her bag and if she could use it on him under the pretence that she thought he was a stranger.

“The light is out back here, I didn’t mean to scare you,” Oliver said as he stepped pensively from the shadows.

“I wasn’t scared, I was surprised,” Felicity pouted as her fingers plugged through the weave of her knit jumper.

Oliver chuckled in a show of surrender, “I didn’t mean to surprise you,” he smiled, that languid, charming, ice-cap melting smile.

Was it possible to both love and hate something at the same time? Because if it was, this smile was it. It held every promise and every regret. It was both beautiful and taunting.

It was everything and nothing.

She stole back the smile she would usually offer in return. She was mad, she had every right to be and no Oliver Queen charming smile was going to take that from her, not tonight, not that easily.

“What are you doing here Oliver?” she asked, drawing the question out with a perfectly timed sighed.

“I bought some food,” he beamed with a measured pride “Still a fan of Big Belly?”

“No,” she lied as Oliver disappeared back into the shadows then emerged holding the familiar white paper bag and a large drink.

“Cheeseburger, no mayo, extra pickles and a large chocolate shake if I remembered your order right.”

Fuck. He absolutely had and right now she wanted to hate that.
But, oh my God it smelled really good.

“I’m not hungry,” she declared, hearing the petulant child in her own voice.
She just really wanted to be mad at him right now.

Felicity felt like shit when he threw her that kicked puppy look it seemed he was still very good at, but she wasn’t budging, at least not while the last five minutes left of her resolve held out.

She swallowed down the gnawing hunger and made a beeline for her driveway a few hurried feet away.

“Please, can we just talk?” Oliver pleaded as he ran quick steps behind her.

“I don’t think either of us want to hear what the other one has to say,” she retorted as she paused at the letterbox.

When she was confronted with his stunned silence she slapped the top of the brick letterbox and carried on up the path.
“Felicity just wait,” Oliver called out as he foot reached the first step. She didn’t turn around straight away, but he heard the heavy sigh that fell from her lips.

“What Oliver? Are you going to say sorry again, because it’s unnecessary,” she slowly turned around, her fingers gripping onto the railing for some unspoken support, “It was a huge mistake, I get it.”

“If I could just explain.”

He took three timid steps forward.

“No need, I got the memo.”

“Felicity please.”

She should have walked up those stairs, slammed the door and eaten a tub of ice cream. That is what she **should** have done.

What she did was take the chocolate shake from his hands, take a sip that lasted 44 seconds (she counted) before she spoke, tired, drawn words.

“Okay Oliver what is it?”

“Can we start over, be friends?”

He’d practice a whole damn speech while he sat waiting for her, but as she tucked her hair behind her ear and he noticed she’d gotten her ears pierced, he forgot the entire thing.

“Why?” she quizzed, toying with the straw in a way that Oliver had to blink away from so he wouldn’t forget his name entirely.

But, it didn’t help, he didn’t have an answer.

“Yea, that’s what I thought,” she sighed as her head rocked from side to side and she started to turn back towards the house.

“Meatloaf!” Oliver announced, again much louder than he had intended.

Felicity perched her foot on the next step up and twisted back to look down at him, she had absolutely no clue what he was trying to say.

“That one Thursday night every month meant the world to be, I’m sorry I stopped coming,” he spoke genuinely, it was one of the most honest things he’d said since coming back.

“You moved on,” she shrugged, nursing the shake between her hands, her eyes suddenly interested in the little push bubble things on the lid.

“That’s why I’m sorry. I did, I moved on and I didn’t stop to care. We were friends and I forgot that. I come back here and after a couple of nights I do something stupid to risk it all again,” he said with rasps of regret threaded through each word, “I want us to be friends again.”

“Friends?” she asked, holding back the trepidation she knew that word held.

She’d spent a long time being Oliver’s friend, and for a lot of it he was a good friend. A bit dense and forever touching stuff that didn’t belong to him…but he was kind and he was nice to her at school and knowing him meant she was pretty much left alone at High School even when he left, something not all ‘nerds’ like her could say.

“I’m hoping,” he said, with just a hint of a smile as he held out the bag containing the cheeseburger that smelled **so damn good**.

*Just friends.*

*Only friends.*

She should say no, how are you supposed to be friends with someone once you know how nice it feels to kiss them?
How are you supposed to be friends when you know their lips form perfectly around your own? She should have said no.

“Sure, friends,” she smiled reluctantly as she took the bag from his hands.

The silence was virtually deafening between them, sirens in the distance and a dog barking a few houses away were the only thing that stopped them hearing crickets.

“Goodnight Oliver,” she finally spoke, cracking the silence between them, “thanks for the food.” Oliver bobbed his head slowly, other words sitting unsaid on the tip of his tongue. “Maybe we can hang out next week?” Felicity folded her lips together to avoid agreeing to something she needed not to agree to.

“We’ll see,” she replied simply as she walked backwards up the stairs, turning on the last one, a sense of relief dropping silently from her face – she hadn’t agreed to spending the last 8 days before she headed off to college with Oliver, good choice, smart choice.

“Night Felicity,” she heard him say as she reached the front door. She waved a hand casually over her shoulder, opened the door and disappeared inside, closing the door as she leaned against it with a heavy eyes and a languid sigh.

“Such a nice boy,” Donna smiled as she appeared – Felicity felt – out of thin air. Felicity jolted and her eyes startled open. “Who?” Felicity quipped, once again letting the plastic drink top take her full attention. She could feel her mother smiling at her. “That boy next door,” Donna replied as she breezed past.

Felicity didn’t have it in her to rebuke her mother so she did nothing more than shrug and bolt up the stairs.

She reached her room and hovered her hand around the light switch. Oliver could see her room from the driveway – he wouldn’t…

She crept into the dark room and put the takeout on the dresser near the door before she dropped to her knees, kicked the door closed and commando crawled to the window that overlooked the Queen’s driveway.

Felicity knew she probably looked ridiculous and that if anyone knew what she was doing right at that minute in her second storey bedroom she would die of mortification, but there she was, crawling to her own window.

She sat up with her back pressed to the wall alongside the window. She’d left her blinds open regretfully and she found herself praying Oliver’s eyesight wasn’t 20/20 anymore. She arched her head just enough to see out of the very corner of her bedroom window and when she saw him standing against the side of the his gate that did have a working light she fell back against the wall and sunk down into the smallest little shape she could make herself.

Stupid Oliver Queen.

Had her hiding in the dark in her own room because he wanted to be friends. She rolled her eyes at herself and dropped her head to her knees. It would be fine, she decided. If Oliver wanted to be friends then she could do that, no problem. She just needed a few days without him being him to get any residual feelings from the kiss out of her head.

Then she would friend zone him so hard.
She caught herself smiling at the way that sounded in her head, but her smile was quickly replaced with a slow groan. This was going to be a long 8 days.

Oliver kicked a stone in front of the gate, he didn’t really know what he was hoping for standing there staring up at her window. Perhaps just an indication that he hadn’t completely fucked things up between them would be nice.

But she never came. Her room stayed dark and eventually he realised it probably was a little weird to be standing out there anymore.

He smiled wistfully before he keyed in the code to the gate and disappeared down his driveway.

[Saturday, 2 September 2006]

Felicity had spent the last 8 days successfully evading Oliver. It was spy level genius really. She avoided opening her blinds, she ignored the couple of times he called. She didn’t venture into the backyard, she sent him quick “sorry I’m busy” texts so he wouldn’t get too worried and she left the house in a sprint to the car.

It was fine.
It was boarding on new levels of crazy, but it was fine.

The day had arrived.
She was huffing loudly and cursing under her breath as she tried to fit more into Zelena than was humanly possible. She should have packed lighter or she was forcing herself to make two trips. But it wasn’t exactly Felicity’s plan to come back here much.

She was going to college. One full semester she would allow herself to relax a little. Enjoy whatever fruits college had to offer, while still maintaining good grades (she wasn’t going to go stupid or anything). The break would be spent applying to continue her studies abroad, England to be precise. All going according to plan she would finish out the year at SIT and pick up her second year of studies in England.

She hadn’t exactly told her parents that part, but it was definitely written in her plan. Oxford was the goal, but she would accept Cambridge if needs must. Donna Smoak would be heartbroken, but Felicity needed to see something other than Starling.

She needed to fly.

“You forgot the kitchen sink,” Oliver chuckled as he appeared on silent footsteps behind her. Felicity said nothing as she squeezed her eyes closed, her head buried in the boot, praying he’d just leave. She had done so well.

“Where are you going?” he asked, stepping closer to her when she didn’t give him any response. “College,” she sighed, pulling her head back from the boot, a particularly superfluous purple and green lava lamp in her hands.

“This soon?” Oliver asked. Felicity smiled at his question, it was a reasonable one given it had only just gone 9am. It was two
days before classes started on Monday and they didn’t live all that far away, but Felicity had decided to have the entire weekend to settle into the dorm.

“Forty-eight hours,” she replied with a shrug, as her eyes looked across the remaining things that she somehow had to fit in her car.
“You’re not going to fit that all in,” he remarked as he followed her eyes with his own.
“No shit Sherlock,” she said as she blew out an exhale sending a curtain of soft hair up into the air.

Oliver smiled at the annoyed look on her face, he couldn’t help but find it endearing. He wasn’t a fool, he knew she’d been avoiding him, blowing him off with any offer he came up with – and he was certain at least two of them were pretty good offers – but he hadn’t pushed it and he wasn’t going to bring it up now.

He’d fucked up. If she wanted space then he was going to let her take it in hopes it was only going to last a little longer.

“My car is bigger I could drive you.”
“I need my car.”
He nodded, that was a fair call.
“I can drive down with you, a couple extra days before classes start might be good.”

Felicity looked at Oliver with a slightly puckered brow before she surveyed the stuff still to go in the car. She really didn’t feel like making two trips and it was a really good offer.

“That sounds like a perfect idea,” Donna grinned as she picked up an unpacked duffle bag and handed it to Oliver “then I can drive down with you and-“

“You’re not coming mom, we’ve been through this,” Felicity replied sternly, although still impressed at how her mother once again seemed to appear out of nowhere.

“Well I’ll be less inclined to worry sick if Oliver went with you,” Donna encouraged before she offered Felicity a knowing smile.

So that was what her mother was playing at…blackmail. Either Oliver went or Donna went. She played a few moments of eyeball chicken with her mother until she relented and blinked.

“That would be great, thanks Oliver,” she sighed, it seemed the lesser of the evils, he had to be less embarrassing that her mom, right?

It took them another 45 minutes to reshuffle and repack things until both cars were filled with just the right amount of stuff. Oliver had jogged down the driveway to collect some things and Felicity had ducked back inside to change out of the sweatpants and baggy tee she had been sporting.

Felicity hugged her mom on the porch for what seemed like at least 30 minutes before she managed to pry her off.

“I’m not going far mom,” she smiled as she tucked a section of Donna’s hair behind her adorned ear.

“Just make sure you come back like you promised,” Donna sniffed, pushing back tears.
“First Thursday of every month, all holidays, every family member’s birthday, every Jewish holiday and at least two random, no reason days a month, I know,” Felicity listed as she tugged down the hem of her black denim shorts.

The weather was surprisingly warm for Fall and she decided she might as well take advantage of
one of the last times you could comfortably wear shorts and not get chilblains.

She jogged to the car and buckled herself into the front seat just as she saw Oliver strolling back up
his drive, a duffle bag slung over his shoulder. He chucked the bag in through his passenger side
window and tapped on the roof of Zelena without looking inside.

“Look after my baby girl,” Donna sniffed as she walked towards the two cars, her arms tightly
woven around her waist.
Felicity scrunched up her face and let out a soft sigh.
“I’ll make sure she’s safe Mrs Smoak,” Oliver promised as he pulled open his car door and got in.

“I need to get gas,” Felicity said as she leaned over the centre console and spoke out the passenger
window into Oliver’s car sat alongside.
“You lead, I’ll follow,” Oliver replied as they both started their cars.

This was it.
Time for college
Felicity smiled to herself.
College was going to be epic.

Felicity pulled into a gas station a few blocks from home and pulled alongside the pump. She
watched Oliver in her rear view mirror pull to the parking at the side and step from his car. She
shut off the car and stepped out – she really didn’t need a chivalrous Oliver assuming she didn’t
know how to pump gas.

He waved at her across the forecourt as her head peeked over the top of her car. She caught herself
surprised and for just a few seconds a little disappointed she couldn’t prove to him that she didn’t
need her help.

But the tiny feminist in her was also kind of proud that Oliver hadn’t just assumed she didn’t know
what she was doing.

She swiped her card and plugged the pump into the car as she watched Oliver stroll around the
inside of the gas station.

Oliver, with his arms full of stuff he didn’t really need placed them on the counter before his eyes
wandered outside to watch what he could see of Felicity leaning up against the gas pump. Her hair
was pulled high and she was wearing her glasses with her slender arms wrapped around her body –
his waist he assumed but everything below her elbows was hidden behind her car. He waved, she
nodded back. It was fine.

He paid for the excessive amount of snacks and headed towards her car. He watched her turn and
replace the nozzle and, just as he rounded the front of her car her saw her bent over slightly
screwing in the petrol cap.

His eyes blew wide and he almost dropped his treasure trove of gummy bears and red vines.

Somewhere during the ten minutes he’d thrown his stuff into a duffle bag and said goodbye to his
family she had changed out of the cute sweatpants she was wearing into those….

“What are you wearing?” he gaped, his brain too slow to stop himself from asking the question he
knew he probably shouldn’t.
“Shorts,” she laughed as she stood back upright and padded over to where he’d frozen near the
They sat high up her smooth curved thigh, snug against her but not enough to make an indent, he surmised. His cheeks felt hot and his mouth felt like someone had stuck a fistful of cotton balls in there. His eyes darted around the forecourt and he caught at least three guys looking at her… looking at her.

Sirens screamed through his head in unison with a fire alarm, an air horn and the robot from Lost in Space repeating “Danger Will Robinson”. It was not fine.

“They’re missing at least three inches before you could call them shorts,” he stressed as he glared at one guy whose eyes lingered much longer than they ought.

“You sound like my dad,” she laughed as she plucked the bag from his hands and dropped it onto the car bonnet.

She leaned over and started her rummage through the stash of junk when Oliver caught at least three new pairs of eyes hone in on her ass as it curved into that perfectly dipped little back, the dimples of which were now exposed as her black tee fell forward a little to reveal them.

Oliver hovered behind her, shooting glares at all directions as he used his body to try and shield that perfect ass from anyone else’s view.

“Your dad has a point,” he grumbled as he tried, hopelessly, not to stare himself.

“Is there a problem with my clothes Oliver?” she laughed as she pulled a red vine from its packaging and flipped over on the car, her back propped up on her elbows and their bodies dangerously close.

They need to be longer was what he wanted to say, but instead he shook his head, stepped back and opened her car door.

“We should get going, the skittles in there are yours,” he smiled.

She pulled the share-size bag of skittles and squeaked in excitement.

“Still your favourite then?”

“I haven’t changed all that much have I?” she laughed as she ducked under the arm he was using to hold her door open and folded herself into the car, idly smoothing hands down her legs before she kicked off her tennis shoes and dropped them onto the passenger seat.

“I bet you’ve changed in more ways than you know,” Oliver reported.

He could think of at least five.

“I remember things about you too,” she mocked as she plugged her keys into the ignition.

“Like what?” he asked as he leaned just a fraction into the car window.

“You hate diet soda, you think proms are stupid, you never understood Shakespeare and you’ve never liked it when anyone other than Thea calls you Ollie,” she paused on the last one to watch his response play out across his face.

She knew she was right – at least at one point – about all of those things, which is why she could never understand why he let Laurel call him that.

“To be fair, I now kind of understand Shakespeare.”

“Oh really?”

Oliver laughed as he stepped back from the car and tapped the roof.

“No, not at all.”

She smiled brightly, her eyes dancing with an unbridled glee that he had always felt drawn to, as she drove away from pump and circled back around towards his car, waiting just ahead of his car as
he crossed the forecourt.

There was no doubt that in so many ways they had both changed. But there was also a case to be made that parts of them remained just the same. As for which was which, only time would tell.

Chapter End Notes

College is going to be epic....
“This room is small” Oliver noted as he dropped the last box onto Felicity’s lofted bed.
“And you have a roommate?” he asked as he nodded over at the pile of boxes on the bed along the opposite wall.
“Mmhmm” she hummed in response.
“Do you know this” he walked past the bookcase divider between the two spaces to read the name on the box, “Alison?”

“Only my mother calls me that, Ally will do,” a small girl with a decidedly large smile said as she propped herself against the doorway.
“Hi Ally, I’m Felicity” Felicity introduced as she navigated past Oliver and offered the girl, who was a full foot shorter than her, an outstretched hand.
“Nice to meet you, hot older brother or really hot older boyfriend?” Ally asked loud enough for Oliver to hear every word.
Felicity glanced over her shoulder before she shook her head exaggeratedly.
“Oliver and I are just friends.”
One day that word wouldn’t feel like arsenic on her tongue.

“Oliver,” he smiled as he jutted out his hand
Ally looked down at it, then drew her eyes up the centre of his body.
“Is your dad in your life?”
Oliver retracted his hand and ran it awkwardly down his leg.
“Ah yes.”
“Do you have a picture of him?”
Oliver stiffened and craned his neck to shoot a help me face at Felicity.

“I’m just kidding, mostly, I have a daddy kink and honestly I’m betting your dad is a silver fox.”
Oliver blinked furiously as Felicity leaned against the wall, a smile plastered across her face.

“Oliver Queen, I thought I heard your voice,” a stunning brunette with pert lips and a smooth English accent crooned from the doorway.
Felicity watched as the fierce red of blush spread across Oliver's face. He coughed belatedly before offering a reluctant reply,
“Hi Nyssa.”
Felicity shouldn’t have been surprised that one of the first attractive college girls she met knew Oliver. She shook her head softly at the realisation that she didn’t consider that sooner.

“On the hunt for new meat Oliver?” Nyssa cracked a smile as she fanned a stack of pink paper in front of her face.
Felicity didn’t bother stifling her snorted-laugh.
“We're friends,” Oliver replied as his feet shuffled on the spot, he wasn’t a fan of the way that word sounded either.
“Our parents live next door to each other,” Felicity felt the need to add.

“You two know each other?” Felicity asked, she didn’t actually want to know the answer but she might as well learn of Oliver's many conquests now.
“His attempt to get in my pants made me realise how much more I prefer girls,” Nyssa smiled as she tucked her richly dark hair behind her ear.

Felicity wasn’t sure what she found more entertaining, the way Nyssa was absolutely unapologetic for her remark or how the same remark made Oliver shrink into himself.

“You thinking of rushing?” Nyssa asked, her attention turned to Felicity.
“Definitely,” Felicity nodded as she toyed idly with the pen on the desk beside her.
“You should definitely consider Zeta Delta Psi,” Nyssa stepped in the room and held out a pink invitation to Felicity, “any girl who can resist Oliver Queen has a strength we're looking for,” she continued with a wink.
Felicity smiled her thanks as she took the invite.

“Open day is Wednesday, come on by.”
“Thanks I will.”
Nyssa left with one final smile as she patted Oliver's cheek, “Sara says hi.”

“That was not awkward at all,” Ally quipped as she folded clothes into her drawers.
She looked up and was met with Oliver's slightly exacerbated expression pinned to his face.
“I’m going to go buy snacks,” she remarked as she sidled past Oliver and out the door.

“Sara?” Felicity asked once they were alone.
“Sara Lance,” he sighed, running a hard hand through his cropped hair, Felicity didn’t need to ask, the inference was fairly obvious.
“Laurel’s sister, you and your girlfriend’s...” she trailed off before she could finish.
“It was years ago and not my finest moment,” he cringed as he sunk his arms across his chest, he had spent the last eight months trying to shed his past, it appeared the fates had a different plan.

He could see the masked expression on Felicity’s face, it was a unique concoction of hurt, relief, anguish and disappointment, and it stabbed him like a sharpened knife.
“So you’re thinking of joining one?” he asked, deciding on a change of subject as he nodded down at the paper clasped in her hand.
“I just didn’t think you,” he stopped his sentence short, realising there was probably no good way of ending it.
“Think that I what Oliver?” she asked, folding her arms and narrowing her eyes.
“That it was your thing?”
“My thing? What is my thing?”

Oliver shifted nervously, the hole he was digging was getting decidedly deeper.
“I just mean, you didn’t seem like the type?”
“There is a type you have to be?”
Oliver dipped his head and scratched his scalp, this wasn’t going well.

“Just tell me what I need to say to get myself out of this hole I’ve dug?” he asked with pleading eyes and a dropped lip.
“Good luck will suffice,” she smiled, deciding that she had let him sweat it out enough.

The truth was he wasn’t exactly incorrect, Felicity was well aware she wasn’t the standard ‘go to college and join a sorority’ type, but that was entirely the point. College to her was going to be about stepping outside of the mould she had cast herself in.

He was about to give her exactly what she had asked for when a third stranger appeared in the doorway and Oliver regretted not closing the door after Ally left.

“Welcome to McKinley Dorm, party tonight in the rec room on the first floor,” announced a quaffed brown haired guy in a Dr Who tee, his light eyes trained towards Felicity as he handed out a yellow flyer.

Oliver took it from the guy who was at least fifty pounds lighter and a foot shorter than him. The guy shrugged off the exchange before he smiled at Felicity and pointed towards something on her desk.
“Cool Tardis,” he noted.
Felicity looked down at the pen holder on her desk and smiled, it had been a 13th birthday present from her equally as nerdy dad.
“Thanks, I like your shirt,” she replied sweetly.

Oliver’s eyes darted back and forth.
This wasn’t, she wasn’t...
He saw the way her glossed lips turned up into a smile and she fidgeted with strands of hair behind her ear.
Oh god, she was flirting.

“Okay, yeah, great shirt, see you man,” Oliver threw a half arsed smile before he flicked the door closed.

“Oliver that was rude,” Felicity huffed as she walked towards the door.
“Oliver that was rude,” Felicity huffed as she walked towards the door.

“You’re not going to this,” Oliver assured as he waved the yellow flyer in the empty space in front of him.
Felicity stopped mid stride and turned on her heels to face him.
“I’m sorry, what?” she gaped, her head cocked and her eyes daring him to continue digging.
“You’re not considering it right? These things are just an excuse to get drunk and make out with everyone in your dorm.”
“And that’s a problem because?”
“You’re seventeen.
“And so were you once, doing the exact same thing, if not worse.”
She wasn’t wrong.

“That’s not the point.”
“Because you decided it’s not.”
“It’s different for me.”
“Why, because you’re a guy?”
“No,” he shook his head to try and drive home the lie.
“Bullshit. You’re a guy so it’s okay for you to put your tongue down a bunch of different throats, but I’m a girl so it’s not okay.”
Her arms were folded and her usually smiling blue eyes were deathly still but all Oliver could think was how not okay he was with her talking about tongues down throats.

“Because you’re smarter than me,” he retorted.
“So smart girls shouldn’t get to make out?” she was tapping her foot now.
This was going even worse he concluded.

“That’s not what I’m saying,” he huffed.
“Then spell it out better Oliver because from where I’m standing that is sure as heck what it looks like.”
He couldn’t help but smile at her choice of word heck, the little girl from next door was still in there somewhere.
“And now you think it’s funny?” she accused.
He caught the smile and swallowed it sheepishly.
“That’s not what I was smiling about,” he grimaced.
She shook her head in annoyance, the type of head shake that screamed ‘I’m done’.

“Thanks for your help Oliver, you can go home now,” she sighed as she opened the door and stood alongside it.
“I was going to hang the posters on the wall,” he reminded with a soft plea.
“I’ll manage,” she shrugged.
“But I could –“
“Go home Oliver,” she looked across at him with a blocked stare.
It was time for him to leave.

“You have my number right?” he asked as he stood in the precipice of the door.
“I’m sure I do,” she replied stoically.
“You should check.”
“No need.”
Her hand gently started to close the door, nudging him out.

“Call me anytime, if you need something or if-“
“Mmmhmm.”
Now she wasn’t even looking at him.
He wasn’t sure how he kept managing to fit both feet in his mouth so superlatively.

“See you around Felicity,” he smiled, a last ditch smile as he stepped from the room.
“Yip, see you around Oliver.”
Friend.

She flicked the door closed in much the same way Oliver had done to the guy in the Dr Who tee and Oliver realised what a cold gesture it had been.

Although he still didn’t feel bad about it. Felicity had been flirting with him, in front of Oliver, the
guy deserved it.

He caught everything his mind was ticking through and deep down he knew he absolutely had no right to dictate who she could or couldn’t flirt with, but all the same he was absolutely not okay with it.

No one was good enough to be flirting with Felicity. She was always too good and it was even more apparent now.

No one was good enough.
Not him and certainly not Dr Who.

Felicity was excited and as far as she was concerned she had every reason to be. The rec room was swarming with people, people in the same boat as her – just trying to enjoy the precipice years, the few remaining ones before life forces you into adult responsibilities.

Despite what she had said to Oliver, Felicity had no intention of letting her tongue go down anyone's throat tonight. Barry, the somewhat non-traditional cute guy with the pop culture tee, wasn’t exactly in her orbit, it only took her ten minutes to realise he did not bat for her team.

She had argued the point because Oliver had seemed so hell bent on deciding what she should or shouldn’t do like he had some brotherly overlord vibe going on. A shudder worked it’s way down her body when she considered that notion given how much she still secretly wanted to see him very naked.

“Great,” she huffed under her breath as she filled her red solo cup with root beer. Oliver was slotting himself into her life like an older brother and she was picturing him naked. Her face cringed at how that all sounded in her head and there was no way even a therapist’s couch would get her to admit that sordid state of affairs out loud.

“Are you Felicity?” a deep voice asked her from behind, his mouth leaned into her ear to be heard over the music.

She spun around, stumbling a little when she was met with the very broad chest of someone who look like he had fallen right out of the Abercrombie and Fitch Fall Catalogue.

“Uhuh, mmm, yes,” she replied.

Feeling her cheeks flush she idly held the cup against one in hopes it would cool her down.

“Oliver is waiting outside for you,” he said is before he pointed her attention towards the door.

The flush was almost instantly replaced with even hotter emotion – rage.

She stomped her embarrassment to the door, sliding past a crowd of people to find Oliver leaned up against a wall in the dorm foyer.

“Oliver, what the hell are you doing here? You don’t live in this dorm, you don’t even go to this school,” Felicity scolded as she held back her fist from thumping against his very hard, very taut chest.

Not the time she shook her head.

“I uh, bought you some lightbulbs,” he explained, though the idea had sounded much better in his head.
He jutted out the arm tightly gripping the Wal-Mart bag and Felicity stared down at it like it was laced with explosives.

“Why?” she asked with narrowed eyes, refusing the bag. “For studying and because eye health is important. I read once you should replace them regularly.”

Felicity raised a brow and met his stare with her own. “I wear glasses,” she said, dubious of every word that was coming from his mouth. “All the more reason.”

He pushed the bag into her hand and she took them with a dragged sigh before she opened the bag and peered inside. “Oliver?” “Yes?” “These aren’t the right lightbulbs,” she couldn’t help but smile as she threaded the handles of the bag back over his wrist. “I’ll take you to Wal-Mart, get you different ones,” he offered, a thread of desperation caught between his words, although Felicity was oblivious to it. “Oliver you need to go.” “Do you have a first aid kit in your room, you really should.” “Go home Oliver.” He caught her arm lightly and stole the solo cup from her hand. “You’re drinking?” he snapped, attempting his most disapproving of locks.

Felicity pursed her lips and crossed her arms across her chest, her foot tapping instinctively on the floor.

Oliver kept his eyes locked on her as he brought the cup close to her nose and sniffed, his expression not changing when, despite expecting the distinctive smell of beer, he got a nose full of root beer instead.

“Goodnight Oliver,” she laughed, unable to disguise it a moment longer. “Right,” Oliver croaked as he sheepishly handed her back the cup.

[Thursday, 7 September]

The first week of College was like a blur to Felicity. Like the world around her moved at breakneck speeds and she was barely keeping up, but as the week drew to a close she had found a niche that was chaotic and like juggling ten china plates, but it offered her a small amount comfort in the hope that things would settle soon enough.

As she pulled onto the highway she let out a small sigh she didn’t realise she was even holding before she rubbed her eyes and focused on the merging traffic. Honestly, she could have done without the two hour commuter drive back home for meatloaf night, but she knew if she missed the first one she would never hear the end of it from her mother.

Felicity hadn’t seen or spoken to Oliver since Saturday night, a fact for which she was both relieved and disappointed. She really didn’t understand why he was so quick to pick up this big brother mantle, but it was unwarranted and unwanted.

That’s enough of Oliver she concluded as she leaned over to turn the radio on. The crooned sounds of popular music flooded the car and Felicity relaxed into her seat.
It would actually be a welcomed respite to see her parents again.

Somewhere along the well-lit freeway, less than ten minutes after pulling onto it, the steering wheel shuddered in her hands and the car swerved wildly to the shoulder before an unholy bang thundered above even the sound of the radio. The temperature gauge shot up like it had been dipped in lava and a curtain of smoke blew up from the under the hood.

Horns blasted as they swerved to go around the barely limping car as Felicity, her lip trapped between her teeth veered onto the shoulder of the freeway just seconds before Zelena died with a cough and a splutter.

“Fuck,” she cursed forlornly. 
*Like this could get any worse.*

She was left with a few options…

One; call her mother to come and get her. *Nope, there would be tears and panic.*

Two; call roadside and get towed her parents. *Nope, that would mean no way of getting back to college.*

Three; call roadside and get towed back to college, cancel meatloaf night. *Would come with tears, but likely the best option.*

Four; do number three but catch a cab back home. *The cost would probably rival a year’s worth of tuition but her mom would be happy.*

Felicity settled on number three with due consideration given to number four when she had the time waiting for the tow truck to consider it. She tugged her bag from the seat beside her and rummaged through it in search of her purse. Her brow pinched inwards as all attempts to find her it came up empty.

She tipped the contents of her bag onto the passenger seat and sifted through it like she was panning for gold. *Nothing.*

“Great,” she sighed, her hands fisting into her tired eyes. 
No wallet, no roadside, no money to pay a taxi.

She stared at her phone and absently nibbled at the corner of her thumbnail. 
She could ring her parents. But the crying and the panic?

There was another call she could make. 
She didn’t really want to, but her options were scarce.

Felicity gripped the phone between her palms and sighed loudly, trailing it off with a groan before she thumbed through her contacts, dialled and held the phone up to her ear.

“Hello?” came an almost yelled response, music blaring in the background.
*I could still hang up, maybe he didn’t notice it was me…*

“Felicity?” Oliver asked, pushing the phone closer to his ear as he used a finger to block the other ear. 
“Hi Oliver, I need a favour,” she relented.

It was less than twenty minutes before Felicity noticed the headlights of a car pulling into the shoulder behind hers. Given she was sure she was about 15 minutes from campus it surprised her that Oliver could get here that quick, especially as it had sounded like he was out when she called.
She watched him from the wing mirror as he walked carefully along the roadside towards her car, which was still blowing up wisps of steam signals into the night.

Absolutely certain she didn’t feel like playing the damsel in distress Felicity grabbed her bag and carefully stepped out of her car, slinking into the side of it as she walked a path towards Oliver.

“Hi,” he smiled, his voice barely carrying above the sound of the nearby traffic.
She waved reservedly at him as she watched the headlights draw shadows and highlights across his approaching body.

He was dressed like someone who had somewhere to be. Dark jeans, a form-fitted knit sweater and a brown scuffed-leather jacket, his scruff was neatly trimmed and his hair was lifted just a little at the front. She definitely had not caught him in sweatpants and a tank top watching a football game.

“Do you want me to take a look at it?” he asked when they met in the space between the two cars. “You’re studying mechanics now?” she laughed, her shoulders shivering in the chill of the air, her cardigan forgotten in the backseat of her car.
“No,” he laughed as he shrugged off his jacket and wrapped it around her shoulders.

“Its fine, I’ll just call roadside when I get back to my room, where of course I left my wallet,” she explained as she offered him a thankful smile for the warmth of his jacket, the heat of his body still trapped inside it.

“Wait, where were you heading? I can take you there.”
“Just home but it’s fine,” she shrugged, her fingers tugging the jacket tighter around her.
“Are you home sick?” he asked.
For anyone else the smile he was wearing would seem patronising, but not on Oliver – on Oliver, Felicity decided, it almost seemed charming, and she hated that.

“No, I just promised mom I’d come home every-“
“-it’s meatloaf night isn’t it?” Oliver interjected, his entire face lighting up.
Felicity nodded with a laugh.

“I’ll take you home, you can’t miss meatloaf night,” he grinned with absolute certainty
“No Oliver, really it’s fine.”
“I was heading back there myself, so it’s not a problem.”

Felicity caught his eyes before he blinked away, nervous under the spotlight of her glare.
“Really?”
It was midweek and it had definitely sounded like he was at a party rather than getting ready to drive back to suburbia when she had called.

“Sure, I have to get something so it all works out,” he insisted as he nodded her back towards his car.
She wasn’t convinced, but as the wind grew cold against her face she didn’t really see the point of standing on the side of the freeway arguing with him.

“Okay, thanks,” she offered with a smile.
“Not a problem,” Oliver returned as they walked the short distance to his car. What are friends for was all she heard.

“Thanks for the ride,” Felicity said as Oliver pulled his car into his parents’ driveway.
They had taken the journey without much conversation, Felicity instead, to break the silence in the car, opting to turn the radio on and hum along with most, if not all, of the songs that played along the drive. Oliver, while keeping his eyes on the road for the most part, couldn’t help but look over at her and smile every now and again.

“No problem, I can take you back to school when you’re finished, just come over.”

Felicity opened the car door and let out a tiny exhale, she considered – for a moment – that maybe she should invite him over, but as her eyes darted between the two houses she thought better of it and slipped silently from the car.

“Okay, thanks Oliver,” she replied as she folded his jacket onto the seat and pushed the door closed.

She walked around the back of the BMW and watched him drive through the opening gate before she walked the curb, balancing like a gymnast, to the path up to her parents’ home.

When Donna Smoak was done freaking out about Felicity being possibly mugged on the side of the freeway – Felicity was almost proud her hunch had been right regarding the display of tears – she finally got around to asking Felicity how it was she had managed to get there.

“Oliver dropped me off,” she smiled as she took a sip of the juice Noah had slid across the counter for her.

She noticed her mother frown as she set the piping hot meatloaf on the cook top, fresh from the oven.

“Where did he go?” she asked as she placed a mitted-hand on her slender hip.

“I guess he’s with his parents,” Felicity shrugged, trying to avoid her mother’s eye contact knowing that it would always make Felicity blush a little more than she cared to when the topic of Oliver Queen was broached.

“Unless he’s meeting them in the south of France, he’s sitting alone in an empty house, they left for a week long trip this morning.”

Felicity mulled over the words, surely Oliver knew his parents were on holiday – which meant, her eyebrow raised when another hunch was proved right – he had no intention of coming home tonight.

“Go tell him to come over,” Donna said bluntly as she got another plate from the drawer. “Mom-“

“He saved you, off you go.”

She waved a dish cloth towards Felicity.

“Alright, I’m going,” she sighed as she slipped from the barstool and trekked over to the door. “But for the record, I wouldn’t call it saving me,” she called from the entryway before she disappeared out of the front door, pretty happy she had managed to get the last word in for once.

Her hand rapt against the heavy painted door as she swung between tippy toes and flat feet waiting for Oliver to answer. It was less than a minute before the door opened and Oliver was stood, leaned up against it, stripped down in air conditioned comfort to a navy blue tee.

“You done already?” he asked, surprised.

“Just thought I would come and say hi to Thea,” Felicity smiled, the walk over to his door allowing
her to hatch a fun little game.

“Ah, she’s busy,” he answered, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

“I can wait,” Felicity smirked as she slipped under his arm and into the otherwise empty house.

“You know they’re not here, don’t you,” Oliver sighed as he turned and kicked the door closed with his foot.

“Why did you lie?” Felicity laughed as she playfully slapped his arm.

“I wanted to make sure you got home. If you knew I was taking a special trip just to bring you, would you have agreed?” he asked as he folded his arms across his chest making them appear even bulkier than they had a few moments before.

Felicity placed a finger to her lips and tapped it softly.

_Absolutely not._

“Probably not,” she shrugged, playing down the absolution of the voice in her head.

“So, see,” he smiled with a jostled shrug, ripped solders pulling the fabric of his tee taunt.

“Come on you oaf,” Felicity huffed as she nodded towards the door.

What? His eyes asked.

“It’s meatloaf night.”

Dinner was just like it had once been. Fun.

Idle chatter filled the dining room without a contentious topic being raised the entire night. It was easy and effortless. Felicity took Oliver’s peas and swapped them for the mashed potatoes she had never been fond of, just like old times.

The hands of the clock moved like a spinning top and suddenly they found themselves settled into the old routine of Oliver washing the dishes while Felicity, perched cross-legged on the counter top, dried them.

“Thailand,” Felicity announced in answer of Oliver’s question of a place she would most like to visit.

“It’s hot there,” Oliver remarked as he slotted another plate into the dish rack.

The Kuttler/Smoak household had a functioning dishwasher (they always had) but it had become a tradition that both Felicity and Oliver fell easily back into.

“Just wear less clothes,” Felicity shrugged as she plucked the same plate out and folded the dish towel around it.

“If your shorts get any shorter you would be wearing a swimsuit,” Oliver teased.

“Old man,” she teased right back.

“You two should head back, it’s getting late,” Donna interrupted as she nodded up towards the clock on the wall.

Neither Oliver or Felicity had expected it to be after 9pm already and the drive back to campus was almost 2 hours.

“I guess we probably should,” Felicity remarked as she hopped down from the counter.

Oliver placed the last few pieces of cutlery in the rack and pulled the plug out of the sink.

“Thank you for your hospitality as always Ms Smoak.”

“I think you can call me Donna now.”

“Thank you Donna,” Oliver remarked, even though saying it felt weird.

The three of them walked towards the door, Felicity collecting her bag on the way.
“Night dad,” she called down the hallway, sure he was probably holed up in his study.
“Night honey,” came the call back.
“Night mom,” Felicity smiled as she leaned in and hugged Donna tightly.

Oliver opened the door and Felicity walked through it.
“Goodnight Donna,” Oliver remarked, testing the name again.
Still felt weird.

Felicity walked down the stairs a few steps ahead of Oliver.

“You should come back every month,” Donna smiled at Oliver as he reached the bottom step.
Felicity instantly shot her mother a look that teetered on unamused shock and outright horror.

“I’m sure your parents would love you see you too,” Donna continued, avoiding Felicity’s glare.
“I’m sure they would,” Oliver smiled as he walked backwards down the path.
“Mom, I’m sure Oliver has better things to do than to come to our house once a month for meatloaf,” Felicity said, holding back a groan – just.

Oliver paused, mid stride and looked across at Felicity who smiled awkwardly as she shrugged her shoulders.
“Actually I don’t,” he replied with a shrug of his own.
Felicity’s face paused, was she supposed to laugh? He was kidding right? He wasn’t suggesting-
“I’d love to come, thank you,” he continued as he flashed Donna thankful smile and a soft nod. He was.

“Excellent, goodnight kids, drive safe,” Donna waved before she disappeared into the house, no doubt as quickly as she did to avoid any changes of heart.

“Why did you agree to that?” Felicity laughed as she lightly backhanded his shoulder and he playfully winced in response.
“Now when you don’t show she’s going to be all ‘where is Oliver?’” she continued, putting on a slightly higher pitched voice to lovingly imitate her mother.
“Who says I won’t come?” Oliver said as his eyes narrowed and he pressed a hand to his chest feigning heartache at her suggestion.

Felicity stopped with her hands hovering around her hips, her brow raised and her lips pursed into a smirk.

“In seven years you barely came home to see your own family, but sure, you’ll come back once a month for meatloaf,” she laughed as she watched him walk around the car.
“It’s really good meatloaf,” he shrugged as he slid into the driver’s seat.
“It’s probably the only meatloaf you’ve ever had,” Felicity jested as she slid into her own seat and pulled the seatbelt across her chest.

“Why mess with a good thing?” Oliver decided after a few moments of silence.
Felicity twisted in the leather seat, her fingers lightly resting on his thigh, a gesture which forced Oliver’s breath to hitch somewhere in the back of his throat.
“You mean to tell me you actually intend to come back?”
“For meatloaf?” he smiled as his eyes watched her idle fingers before walking back up to meet the wide-eye stare she was giving him, “absolutely.”

Felicity let out a small, surprised, squeak before she retracted her hand and sunk down into her seat.
“Well alright then, it’s a date,” she spoke simply before she squeezed her eyes shut and heard each
word on repeat, “not, a date-date, like a calendar date,” she corrected with a sigh, her hand flailing over the explanation.

“It’s a calendar date,” Oliver remarked with a soft chuckle before he pulled the BMW onto the road and drove away from the house. Felicity let her eyes walk along the sidewalk as the car started to leave home behind.

“You can just take me to my car, I got the information I need and dad gave me some cash in the meantime,” she advised with a tap of her hand against her bag, “I’ll wait with it for the tow truck to turn up then I’ll catch a taxi back to the dorms.”

“It’s taken care of,” Oliver smiled as he navigated through the suburban streets. “You sound like the head of the Bratva when you talk like that,” Felicity smirked as she tucked one leg under the other, admiring just how comfortable these seats were, “but also, what do you mean?”

“Your car has already been towed and taken back to a mechanic I know, good guy, Zelena will be well looked after,” Oliver shrugged as the car merged into the highway traffic, the suburbs blending into the outer reaches of the City.

Felicity stared across the car at him with her head lightly cocked and her lips poised over her next words. “When did you? Why-“ she quizzed without breaking the stare. “After I dropped you off,” he shrugged, keeping his eyes forward although he could feel hers burning a hole in his cheek, “it’s nothing, I just know a guy.”

“You know a guy?” she repeated with a smirk. He glanced back towards her and shrugged his shoulders at the face she was pulling. “Yes, I know a guy,” he affirmed. “Oliver Queen, the serious senior who knows a guy,” Felicity bemused as she put on a deep voice before she tore aware from the stare and laughed.

Oliver couldn’t help the smile that was plastered on his face. Putting aside the fact that she now looked like that, he had always found talking to her like taking a breath of fresh summer air; and it went without saying that her smile was infectious.

“You still owe me ice cream,” she remarked nonchalantly as her eyes watched the cars on the other side of the freeway zoom past. “I don’t think the ice cream shop is open, it’s like almost 10pm,” Oliver replied as his palms grew sweaty against the steering wheel; a fact which he was struggling to explain and had never happened to him before. He didn’t get nervous; and even if he did, there was no reason to now.

“I’ll trade you ice cream for a slushy from the 7-eleven,” she offered as she nodded a to a sign that advertised one a mile ahead. “That makes economic sense for me,” he laughed as he signalled to move across to the approaching exit, “and after all I’m a business major so.”

Fifteen minutes later they were sitting on the hood of the BMW parked up alongside an alcove of the harbour that seemed to separate the City from the suburbs, the roar of the distant freeway blending into the subtle sounds of the wildlife that could still, if you looked hard enough, be found there.
“Thank you,” Felicity breathed into the night air, Oliver’s jacket once more adopted and sitting like a warm hug around her shoulders.
“For what?” Oliver asked as he dug his straw into his potently-blue drink.
“Taking care of the car, I appreciate it,” she smiled genuinely as her head lolled back against the windscreen and her eyes roamed around the sky above them.
“You’re welcome.”

He exhaled a soft breath, a gentle chimney of fog lifting from his lips and up into the air.
“Also no,” she said whimsically as a soft breeze lifted strands of her hair across her face.
“No what?” he chortled.
“I don’t have a first aid kit.”
She rolled her head and smiled widely at him before she slipped her straw through her pursed lips and took a slow drink.

“Wal-Mart is probably still open,” Oliver announced and he went to slip off the hood of the car. Felicity caught his arm and eased him back onto the car.
“Maybe another time,” she snorted before she her face softened and she looked back up at the stars, “for now I like it right here,” she breathed.

Oliver crossed his legs at the ankles and looked up at the same sky that had stolen her attention. It was beautiful, a far cry from the headlights and billboards and whatever else life pushed at them. It was quiet, tranquil, peaceful.

“Have you decided on a sorority yet?” Oliver asked, breaking through the silence that had fallen softly between them.
“I think so,” she replied through a drawn exhale.

It was only then that Oliver realised her hand was still cupped over his arm. For a moment he thought about removing it, but there was just something so natural about having it there that he simply couldn’t bring himself to do it.

“I bet you made a list,” he jested before he took another drawn sip of his drink the ice slipping down his throat with a shudder.
She laughed with a blush at the accuracy of that statement.

“How did you know?”
“Because you always have a list,” he chuckled, “Do you remember the first time my dad offered to take you on the boat?”
Felicity buried her head in the crook of her elbow, she remembered.
“You had that list with like every possible scenario.”
“I was ten,” she effused.
“We weren’t going to be attacked by Orcas Felicity,” Oliver smirked.
“Just because we didn’t doesn’t mean it couldn’t happen,” she cautioned with a whimsical smile.
“You were safe with me Felicity.”
For a split second she melted into the way her name sounded passing over his lips.
“I know,” she replied, her voice instantly softening.
Regardless of the distance that life had driven between them, she had always felt safe around him, even as the boat powered into the open ocean and she breathed in that strong salty water for the first time in her life, she felt safe sat there right next to him.

Silence slipped its way between them as Felicity’s hand slid away from his arm, a void felt instantly.
“So what’s on Felicity’s list now?” Oliver asked, bridging the silence just to hear her talk.
“Plenty,” she smiled, unwilling to let go of her carefully guarded secrets. “I’ll give it a guess,” he smiled, his eyes watching a plane track across the sky above them, “You’ll probably graduate early with two degrees and land yourself a great job in some rival corporation to Queen Consolidated and you’ll never be able to discuss work over the holidays with your dad because you know that would breach both of your contracts.”

Felicity laughed unabashed. “You sound almost like a grownup,” Oliver smiled as he watched her face illuminate under the white moonlight. “Scary isn’t it,” he winked.

“But,” he started down the path of idle chatter, “your dad’s name will open a few doors for you.” Felicity shook her head softly, her hair a tumble across her face. “That’s why I’ve never taken my dad’s name,” Felicity quipped as she stirred the melting drink, “I never wanted his name to open the doors I need to open myself.”

That was part of the reason London was calling. “Like I do?” Oliver lamented, fully aware that he had more often than not depended on the good graces of his family name.

“You shouldn’t,” Felicity sighed with a kindly smile, “you don’t need to.” His chuckle grew into a thankful smile, although he didn’t actually agree. “I’m serious Oliver, you’re much smarter than you give yourself credit for,” she insisted as she pressed her chin into his shoulder.

His head sunk into hers and he breathed in the notes of her citrus shampoo.

They lingered there in the moment before they both realised the intimacy of it and pulled slowly away, putting a little more distance between them with heavy hearts, both insistently sure they knew what the other wanted, or rather needed – friends.

They couldn’t have been more wrong.
It was the third week of September and Felicity had somehow managed to navigate the first month at college with only two, no three ‘shit-I-forgot-to-set-my-alarm’ moments. All things considered, the rocky start to college had plateaued out just nicely.

It was on this chilly Tuesday morning she found herself out with Oliver to collect Zelena from Oliver’s mechanic ’friend’. It was startling the difference, the once beat up green car that was all hers now almost resembled a brand new car.

She had attempted to listen as the shortish man with dark hair spotted with a few strands of grey, deepest brown eyes and a heavy, unshaven jaw walked her through the work – a new radiator, something about a head gasket, new brakes pads, some concern over the state of the filters and transmission and lastly four new tires – at least she knew what those were – that more 'suitable to the fall/winter road conditions'.

Felicity had nodded dutifully as she handed over a credit card her mother had insisted she take to college with her. Despite her desire to remain off the teat of parental aid, this was unavoidable.

“Already paid,” Anatoly nodded as he wiped grease covered hands on an even dirtier rag.

Oliver
She turned to face him with curt lips and an arched brow. “Oliver, why would you do that?” she sighed, as he attempted to look anywhere but at her. “Consider it an early Hanukah present” he shrugged, finally relenting and looking across the small room at her. “It’s September,” she huffed, trying to be annoyed, but honestly she wanted to hug him. “I said early,” he grinned. “You didn’t need to do that.”

Oliver offered nothing but a soft smile, “You pay for coffee and we’re even.” Felicity pouted her lips as she decided whether to make a fuss over his generosity, but when she saw the genuine smile blossoming on his face she decided to let it be what it was – at least for now, one day she’d pay him back.

Less than twenty minutes later found them sitting at a small table beside a window decorated in fall colours in a quaint little coffee shop, Verdant, that was positioned, like a nod to the refusal to grow as the City limits expanded, sandwiched between two high rise buildings a few blocks from Queen Consolidated.

Felicity nestled the warm mismatched cup between her hands as she waded through a million questions that sat on the tip of her tongue. But before she could properly formulate one, Oliver spoke up. “If you have any issues with Zelena, just take her back to Anatoly, he’ll look after you.” “Because you know people?” she laughed, effervescent, kind Oliver playfully pouted his lips and rolled his hand in a gesture straight from a mobster flick. “I know people.” “Do these people you know have cool nicknames like Johnny Fish Fingers?” “Fish fingers?” Oliver laughed, a great jolly laugh that it seemed only Felicity could tug so easily from him. “Frankie French Fries,” she snorted, steadying her cup on the small round table, knocked and scratched into a comforting homely feel, “Paulie Roast Beef.” “Now that one you made up,” he quipped as he watched the spark dance through her iris. “Hand on heart, I did not.” “Fine, fine,” he jested “what would you name me?” “Oliver Oreos and Milk,” she laughed raucously.

The cafe was nearly empty and the two other sets of eyes wandered over to the pair of them, but she didn’t care. It was beautifully refreshing. “And your second in command Tommy McNuggets.” Oliver met her laugh for laugh, it was infectious.

When the laughter died down they found each other staring wordlessly, taking notes of the fresh new eyes they were seeing each other in.

When his gaze felt like it might make her swoon embarrassingly, Felicity blinked away, blushed and gave into an uncontrollable urge to lick her lips. Did they still taste like him? No.

“Zeta Delta Psi bid for me,” Felicity spoke into her coffee, afraid to look up would mean he’d notice just how incredibly hot she was feeling, between her cheeks and between her thighs. “Will you pledge?” Oliver asked as he shifted in his seat, hoping his dark khakis were sufficiently hiding his growing erection.

She nodded, “I accepted the bid, there is a formal ceremony on Saturday, then straight into pledge.”
She spoke hesitantly, but with the most stunning half smile Oliver had ever seen.

It was a smile that was second nature, it wasn’t looking to be noticed or praised. It just sat there at the wing tip of the right side of her mouth. Delicate but so telling. Her smile came from below the superficial.

And, as she spoke about the wonders of what pledging might have her doing and those beautiful, soft lips folded over each word, always holding that tiny but powerful smile, Oliver wanted to lean over the table and kiss her so hard.

He wanted to swallow that smile and dance his tongue across those sultry lips. He wanted to stop her mid sentence, mid word, take her by surprise and just feel that smile melt into his.

And this time he wouldn’t say ‘sorry’, he wouldn’t even think it. Because he wouldn’t be sorry, he would be delighted.

And Felicity would kiss him back, folding those slender fingers into his hair and twisting one of them around the short hairs at his nape.


And then she would be dragged into his orbit, and her smile would fade and die and it would be his fault for stealing such a beautiful thing and destroying it.

*Because that’s what he did. He destroyed smiles.*

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**[Late June 2006]**

“You can’t keep throwing the same things back at me Laurel, it’s not fair.” Oliver pleaded, the lines on his face were like gorged tracks that aged him beyond his twenty-one years. “Don’t talk to me about *fair* Oliver, I hardly think you even know what the fuck that means.”

Oliver clenched his jaw stopping the words he wanted to say from spilling out.

She made everything so difficult.

“Your mother hates me,” Laurel snipped, her voice slightly tipped into a slur “your whole perfect little family hate me.”

“They don’t hate you Laurel,” Oliver remarked as fresh beads of perspiration dotted his brow – How many times would be circle back around to this?

“They always have,” she huffed, he could hear the venom in her words “they’ve always looked down on me and my family, how stupid do you have to be not to see that?”

He swallowed down any response – there was none that he could give that he hadn’t given a thousand times before.

“So who is the girl this time?” Laurel chuckled, the type where you were not supposed to join in, “Are you going to tell me, or should I just assume it’s Sara again?”

Oliver let the audible and irritated sigh slip from his lips – *How many times?*

“I made a mistake Laurel, but I have been faithful to you for the last six months-“

“And what about the six years before that?” she interrupted snidely.
Oliver held back the angered ‘You weren’t any better’ and the ‘How many apologies do I need to give you?’ – he’d said them before, foolishly, and they had resulted in her driving the distance between their two schools and smashing every window in his car.

The last few years with Laurel had been tumultuous at best; damn right insanity at worst. When Tommy asked why he stayed, why he let her dictate when he could see his own family and who he could be friends with, Oliver never had a very convincing answer.

But the truth was; it was guilt.

He had spent years being a terrible boyfriend, not that the discrepancies were all his, but Laurel didn’t miss an opportunity to tell him the same.

Tonight’s argument would be no different.
“If you want to make this work, you need to forgive me and move on,’’ he paused, expecting her to have interrupted him already “we both do.’’
“You always do this Oliver, you always find a way to make me feel bad.’’
She wasn’t listening – she never did.
“I’m not trying-‘’
“Not trying to? But here we are anyway.’’

He took a slow breath, it was nearing 2am and he was trying to keep his voice as low as possible, knowing full well the walls of the frat house were paper thin.

“You take people and you ruin their lives,’’ she spat.
That hurt.
“You walk around so calm and collected like nothing bothers you because you’re Oliver fucking Queen, why would anything bother you?’’
He should have just hung up on her.

“Any girl who ever falls in your orbit, you’ll ruin her too, because you don’t know how to love someone Oliver. You never have and you never will.’’

The sound of the click when she hung up the phone was surprisingly cathartic.

She called back the next day to apologise, said she had a few too many drinks, she didn’t mean it. She forgave him for all those whores and Oliver found himself, yet again, apologising and promising to drive down to see her that weekend.

He called his mother shortly after to cancel the trip they had planned to the beach house and to say Moira Queen was disappointed was an understatement.

“We haven’t seen you in months Oliver,’’ Moira sighed. Oliver hated when she made that noise, the slow, drawn out breath that meant there was more she wanted to say but her upbringing just didn’t lend itself to saying whatever unruly thing it was.
“I’m sorry. I just really need to,’’ he stopped, he knew it would be a Pandora’s box if he mentioned patching things up with Laurel – yet again – funny thing, Laurel was right about one thing, Moira disliked her immensely.

“I just need to do something,’’ he sighed wistfully.
“The Kuttlers from next door are coming,’’ a young voice interrupted.
“Hi Thea,’’ Oliver bemoaned, the girl was still stealthy.
“Hang up the phone Thea,’’ their mother instructed, not even a hint that there was any wriggle room in the words.
“Night Thea,” Oliver laughed, he could almost hear his little sister’s eyes rolling.
“Felicity’s-“
“Goodnight Thea.”
Moira’s second instruction was followed by a huff from a tween and the click of the second phone hanging up.

“So they still live next door?” Oliver asked, hoping to change the subject away from another lecture about the toxic relationship he’d found himself chest deep in.
“If you came home more, you’d know that”
*Point taken, but ouch.*
“I’m sorry about this weekend Mom, I am.”
“There is a line where the boat you’re trying to stop from leaking becomes more patches and less actual boat.”

He nodded even though he knew she couldn’t see him.
“I just want you to be happy Oliver.”
“I am,” he lied, but the sound of sigh – the second such in the space of ten minutes – lead him to conclude she didn’t believe him

“We’ll talk soon. Love you Mom.”
Another sigh.
“I love you too Oliver.”

[Present day]

It was the early evening of Saturday and Felicity didn’t know why she was anxious, well she *did know,* she was less than ten minutes away from parading in front of a ballroom full of invitation only college frat boys with trust fund money burning holes in their pockets – but all that aside she didn’t know why she was *this* anxious. The gnawing in her stomach was High School debate level and no amount of glossy nude lipstick was going to hide that slightly pinched lip that she sported when she was this level of anxious.

“It’s a silent auction, so you won’t know who bids or how much until you met your date for the evening,” Nyssa instructed the group of fresh new faces, none of whom looked as terrified as Felicity felt.

“You must spend the evening with your date in the ballroom, if you make arrangements to go out afterwards or another time, that’s up to you. But they have your company for the evening. Whether that’s dancing or sitting down to talk. If you feel unsafe find one of us and we'll have words.”
Nyssa continued their instructions, commanding attention as she stood in her sapphire dress and sultry eyes

“Remember it's for charity, all proceeds from tonight going to our charity, Starling Children's Hospital,” another sorority sister piped up, tossing sections of fiery red tresses over her shoulder “there are other sororities here tonight, so let’s not make fools of ourselves.”

“Eliza is right, make Zeta Delta Psi proud.”
Eliza piped up again, “Go mingle, keep your numbers where the guys can see them and let’s make some money pledges.”
Felicity had already surveyed the crowd from behind the thick red velvet curtain, she hated herself for looking, but Oliver wasn’t there. He hadn’t offered and she hadn’t asked why he wasn’t going to gala.

It was touted as one of the only times during the year that houses from the neighbouring schools ever officially gathered together. Some called it networking, others called it shopping – but regardless of how awkward Felicity felt in her little gold-foil dress, this was all part of the experience and she was determined to enjoy it.

She had already spied Tommy, dressed to the nines in a very dapper slate-grey suit, dark shoes and thin dark tie. Mulling around him were a few others – equally as polished, one significantly taller and broader and another two that sat less than a foot shorter. Felicity assumed they were frat brothers, which made them Oliver’s ‘brothers’ too.

He had always remained fairly cagey about them and she got the sense that he carried on with the house as some act of loyalty rather than embracing the lifestyle he’d spent years living amongst. In fact the more she thought about it, the less she knew about his life here. He had dropped everything to pick her up on the side of the freeway and she still had no idea where he had come from.

Her thoughts were jumbled and she was beginning to wonder why it had taken her this long to realise that, but there was no time in the present for idle thoughts as it was her group’s turn to smile like they meant it.

All part of the experience.

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Tommy was mulling around the grand ballroom decorated tastefully in hues of gold and auburn. It was the same every year and every year he tried to convince himself that this wasn’t nearly as creepy as it seemed.

At least, it wasn’t for him. He couldn’t speak to the three lascivious frat brothers around him – he swore if they had tails, they would be wagging them right about now. Most of it was harmless – the girls were here because they wanted to be and, as far as he was aware, there were a bunch of rules that had to be abided by, but Chad – the humongous lacrosse player to the left of him – was one sexual harassment write up short of being kicked from the frat, and lord willing from Starling U.

He was a jerkwad.

Tommy could think of far worse names to call him, but he was attempting – mostly in vain – to maintain some amount of decorum.

Chad was 6ft 2inches and 200lbs of senior ass. He was especially well known in circles for taking a ‘sweet’ one (a girl that didn’t look like she was all that worldly – ‘the more virginal, the better’ he had once claimed), wooing her with gifts and attention before sinking his teeth into her and brag about it afterwards to anyone who would listen.

There had only been one time that it didn’t go so well for him, at least as far as Tommy knew. The girl he’d set his eyes on had been a German exchange student, cute as a button and painfully young, barely scraping in at 18. Tommy wasn’t privy to all the details, but after whispers spread like wildfire about a tape being shown around, Chad’s parents donated a sizable amount of money to the school and the young girl moved back home.
If Tommy had a sister and Chad so much as looked at her, he would deck the guy without question.

“Fuck these smart girls get hotter every year,” Chad smirked as the sound of his voice pulled Tommy’s attention back to the moment, “fucking look at them man.”

Chad’s palm slapped against Tommy’s shoulder jerking him forward as Tommy rolled his eyes. “Fucking idiot,” Tommy mumbled under his breath as he corrected his stance “dumber than…”

His words stopped short as he watched the SIT pledges fan out into the crowd.

It wasn’t…
“I found my latest bed warmer,” Tommy heard Chad announce with a undeniably greasy tone. Someone asked Chad who as Tommy blinked trying to focus.

It couldn’t be…
“Hot blonde, gold dress, pretty mouth.”
There was distinct snickering from the yes men as Tommy took a very deliberate step to the side, his black shirt suddenly felt like it was choking him.

It was…
“Hi Tommy,” Felicity said quietly as she flicked him a nervous smile.

“Felicity?”
He realised his voice went up at least an octave, but in that gold embossed mini dress with her hair a loose tumble of golden curls he felt the uncharacteristic urge to wrap his Valentino jacket around her and threaten any one of these gross grabby hand idiots that dared even look at her.

Holy shit.
He was fairly certain by the fact his cock was still as flaccid as it was moments before that he wasn’t attracted to her – not because she wasn’t attractive, his wide eye stare at her jogging had proved that she most definitely was – but because he saw her and he expected to see Oliver right next to her.

But, holy shit, Oliver wasn’t here.
Felicity was here, dressed like that, and Oliver wasn’t here.

Holy shit.
“Oliver isn’t here,” he replied to a question that wasn’t asked.
Felicity squinted in contacts as she tipped her head to her shoulder, curious if she had asked a question without realising.

“I, I didn’t ask that.”
Her fingers played with the hem of her dress as she slowly realised this had been a huge mistake. She wasn’t good at this sort of thing and honestly she’d thought that maybe Tommy could just introduce her to a few people, but – judging by the gaped expression he was wearing – this had been a raving mistake.

Tommy coughed – choked more like it – through his surprise before he calmed himself and tried to look at this objectively. She was here, dressed like that, looking for the attention of frat boys…

If there was a silver lining, Tommy couldn’t see it.
What he could see was the vein on Oliver’s neck pulsing.

“Ah, right, excuse me for a minute,"
“Aren’t you going to introduce me to you friend?” that husky greasy tone asked.

No. Not good.
“Felicity,” she replied, offering a softly winged smile to go along with it.
“Chad” he charmed

_Really not good._

Tommy slunk into the wall, backing slowly backwards as he fumbled his phone from his pocket and dialled.

“Did they tell you not to bid on *all* the girls, or did you run out of money?” Oliver chuckled down the phone.

“You need to get down here!” Tommy spoke with an uncharacteristic tone of urgency

“Why?”

“Felicity is here.”

Oliver sighed, he knew she would be. It was part of the reason he’d decided to turn down the invitation.

“I know,” he replied, hedging his reasons within those two words.

“I don’t think you do,” Tommy maintained.

“Tommy, I know, she’s pledging a sorority,” Oliver explained, trying not to let the dislike for the idea resonate through his words.

Tommy grunted his frustration before mumbling, “Hang on.”

Putting the call on hold he held his phone just high enough to snap a shot of Felicity and message it through to Oliver.

“That’s what you don’t understand Oliver, she is here, *like* that.”

Oliver, taking a pause to suck down a drink of soda, opened the message and stared at the slightly out of focus picture Tommy has sent. It took every bit of control he had not to spit a mouthful of Dr Pepper on his phone as he coughed through swallowing it.

_Holy shit._

Composing himself as best he could he cleared his throat and put the phone back up to his ear,

“She looks nice.”

“Nice? She looks gorgeous, and it really feels weird saying it, so I’m not sure what’s going on with me right now,” Tommy groaned, wondering quietly to himself if this is what people with sisters felt like.

Oliver took a controlled breath. _Breathe in. Out._ This was the reason he didn’t go tonight, he couldn’t see her all dressed up and pretty and know that some other guy was going to get to talk to her all night; that someone else was going to see that perfect little smile that she wore so well.

“You need to come down,” Tommy interjected Oliver’s thoughts.

“I can’t,” Oliver lamented.

_That perfect smile, the one he would destroy if he kept this up._

“Whatever this thing is with you, put it the fuck aside and come down,” Tommy persisted, “Chad is going to bid on her.”

The phone line fell silent.

“Oliver?”

Deafening silence.

“Oliver?”

“Put a bid in for me, fifteen,” Oliver instructed as he sprung to his feet.

“Fifteen hundred is pocket change to Chad.”

“Thousand.”
It took Tommy a moment to realise he wasn’t hearing things.
“Wait what?”
“Just do it Tommy, I’ll be there in 20 minutes” Oliver assured, with the phone tucked into the
crook of his neck as he yanked the door of his closet open in search of a suit.
“You better make it 10.”
Tommy grimaced as he watched Chad talking up a storm with Felicity, he had an unfettered desire
to march her out of that conversation and give her a stern talking to.
Holy shit.
He ran a heavy hand through his dark quaffed hair – when had this become a thing?

“Bids are closing gentlemen, get your last bids in,” the MC, a pretty brunette with a peppy voice,
said.

Tommy could feel the sweat beading across his brown. The fates had shined on him and somehow
he had managed to sweet talk the bid takers into letting him place one for Oliver in his absence, but
if Oliver didn’t show up and write them a fat cheque it wasn’t going to end well.

Felicity was next and Tommy was crushing the numbered paper between his fist as the air grew
heavy and tight around him.

Felicity took a slow breath through her slightly parted lips as her eyes tracked across the room. She
smiled as landed they on Tommy – he looked like he was sweating bullets for some reason. Her
eyes filtered down to Chad next, he was okay she supposed.

It was undeniable that he was a good looking guy, typically superficial but nice enough. Before
they had parted he had leaned in to tell her that he was definitely bidding for her so when the MC
called the number “214” and she saw the perplexed look cross his face, Felicity wasn’t entirely
sure what was happening.

“Number 214” the peppy brunette repeated
Tommy grimaced as he looked down at the number clutched between his fingers 214.

Shit Oliver.
He swallowed down a world of regret as he silently reassured himself that he would find a way to
explain to his father a cheque for $15k; not a problem yeah right.

Before he’d completed a full step Oliver rushed into the ballroom like a bull out of the gates and
plucked the ticket from Tommy’s twitching fingers.

“Here, sorry,” Oliver announced as he waved the number and tipped his head apologetically to the
MC.
“Oliver Queen, lucky girl.”
Felicity offered a half-hearted smile of thanks, but as she watched him, with his shoe laces undone
and his tie slightly askew she wasn’t sure what to think.

Dutifully she threaded her hand through his arm as he walked her away from the stage. He wasn’t
even really looking at her and she couldn’t help but let her mind dream up a million reasons why.

“What are you doing here?” she asked as they reached a secluded table in the far corner of the
room.
“I was invited,” he shrugged, still refusing to meet her eyes.
Oliver kept his eyes low and his words brief, afraid that if he looked at her and saw how truly beautiful she looked tonight that he might never be able to look away again.

*But she deserved better.*

“You know that’s not what I mean,” she mused as her manicured nails toyed with the slit of her dress.

“I just thought I would pop in.”

Felicity knew he was speaking in half-truths, but maybe it wasn’t something she wanted to know the whole story of. It seemed pretty clear to her that Chad told Tommy he wasn’t interested in her after all. Tommy told Oliver and Oliver rushed down and placed some nominal bid just so she wouldn’t feel stupid.

Because; *that’s what friends do.*

“You don’t need to stay,” she said, forcing a smile.

“I want to.”

*And he did.*

“I know why you’re here,” she spoke softly as she wrapped her fingers around his skewed tie, caressing the soft silk before gently straightening it.

“You do?”

Felicity shrugged, the type of shrug that you do when you know the answer to the question but you don’t want to say it out loud for the fear that it might sound horrifically worse once it passed over lips.

Oliver had forgotten how to breathe; *did she know why he was here? Was it really that obvious? Maybe she could, maybe they would...*  

“But you shouldn’t have come,” she uttered, her words like a cascade of no, no, no from her lips.  

*Oh.* Oliver blinked.

“I don’t need you to keep looking out for me Oliver, I’m not a child,” she insisted as her palms flattened down his collar and tugged on his lapels to even them up.

*I know, God I know.*

He kept blinking like an entire army of dust moths had anchored themselves there.

“That’s not why I’m here,” he said, finally managing words.

“It’s okay” she peeped softly, once again with that same added shrug “I’m just going to say thank you, you’re a good friend and leave it at that, *please.*”

*Please don’t make this worse Oliver.*

She’d had enough embarrassment for the time being.

For a split second he thought about challenging her words, testing what she actually knew and offering a glimpse into what he was feeling, but that pretty little perfect smile had already started to dim and Oliver was afraid that if she knew what he felt, what he thought, what he wanted, it might make that smile disappear entirely.

He had made such a point of being ‘*sorry*’.

The strumming of a guitar and the sultry sounds of a piano bridged the silence that had fallen between them as a love song drifted through the ballroom.

*What day is it*
And in what month
This clock never seemed so alive

“They always play these slow songs, just to ramp up the awkward,” Felicity quipped with a slight, tipped smile.
“It’s like prom,” Oliver reminisced with a grin.
“I wouldn’t know.”
“Wait, you didn’t go to prom?”
Felicity shook her head slowly, tumbled curls bouncing over her shoulders and tickling her face before she brushed them aside.
“I had some extra credits to do, so I could, well be here” she laughed.
“Why don’t we just pretend this is your prom?”
Felicity snorted at his inference, because he was joking, right?
Only, the expression on his face wasn’t the usual one he wore when he was joking.

“Wait right here,” he grinned like a cat who caught the mouse as he ducked away from her and slinked through a nearby group.

Oliver plucked the two prettiest red carnations that he could find from the bouquet on the table beside the entry before he unravelled a white ribbon from around the neck of the vase they had been sitting in.

Felicity hadn’t moved and she was wearing the cutest look of perplex on her face when he reappeared with the pilfered items. Without a word he snapped the stem of the one he decided was the nicer of the two flowers and proceeded to wrap the satin-sheen ribbon around the short stem.

“Give me your wrist,” he spoke and she listened.
Oliver lay the flower in the centre with the care of a surgeon before he wrapped the tails of the ribbon around her wrist, three times in total, securing the makeshift corsage in place.
“It’s not perfect, but it’ll do,” he spoke as he touched a feather-light stroke down the underside of her wrist, his eyes admiring the way the crimson red looked against her milky complexion and his thoughts turning to something they ought not.

Felicity let a smile rise slowly from her lips, still unsure whether Oliver was soon about to announce that this was all just a joke and why would she think it any different; but when his index finger stroked that long, delicate line down her sensitive skin she almost professed way more than she should have.
Kiss me again, and don’t be sorry.

What are the things That I want to say
Just aren’t coming out right
I’m tripping on words
You got my head spinning
I don’t know where to go from here

“One last thing,” Oliver remarked as he took the second flower, snapped the stem and tucked it into the boutonniere of his lapel, “there, perfect.”
“They’re going to bill you for those,” she smiled as she dipped her head, afraid the rose red of her cheeks would give her innermost thoughts away.

Oliver shrugged, he doubted there was any price he wouldn’t be willing to pay…
“Dance with me?” he asked, interrupting his own thoughts before they got the better of him.
“I thought you hated dancing.”
Their eyes finally met and she folded her lips quizzically, watching as his azure blue eyes softened and he swallowed something down.

*Not if it’s with you* he swallowed the words before he had a chance to say them.
“I’ll make an exception, being fake prom and all.”

Wordlessly they walked onto the dimly lit dance floor, staying on the fringes before been swallowed up into the other couples that moved mindlessly around them.

His arms were around her like an embrace, one still at the small of her back and the other around her shoulder, holding her close with his thumb making the slightest of strokes down the mesh panels at the back of her dress, idly tugging at her curls.

It felt amazing. 
*Devastatingly so.*
Because it wasn’t real.

_Cause there’s you and me_  
_And of all other people with nothing to do_  
_Nothing to prove_  
_And there’s you and me_  
_And of all other people_  
_And I don’t know why_  
_I can’t keep my eyes off of you_

Her head buried itself into his chest, the subtle musk of sandalwood and citrus tugging at her senses. The _thud, thud, thud_ from his chest like a lullaby to her ears and she imagined that it would be such a pretty sound to go to sleep to. But it wasn’t real, none of this was.

And it hurt.
Felicity needed to not be in love with him, because he wasn’t in love with her.

She didn’t know it, but she was trembling with those thoughts until Oliver couldn’t discount the sensation of it anymore.
“Everything okay?” he asked as he stooped a little to watch the expression on her face  
“No, I, uh, actually don’t feel well,” she excused as she broke away from his embrace “I think maybe I should go home, maybe they’ll give you a refund.”  
“I don’t need one.”
She nodded as she walked away from the dancefloor, desperate to stem the tears that were building behind her eyes.  
“I’ll walk you home.”

He noticed her smile – that perfect one – was gone now.

_What day is it_  
_And in what month_  
_This clock never seemed so alive_

“Are you sure you’re alright?” Oliver asked, concerned as he pulled open the dormitory door for her.  
“I’m fine, sometimes wearing contacts gives me a headache,” she explained in half-truths
“You should wear your glasses more.”
“So I can look like a nerd?”
She chuckled, for fear she was on the brink of crying.
“I think they suit you.”

The truth of the matter to Oliver was that she could wear glasses or contacts and she would still look gorgeous; but sitting on the hood of his car or in the quaint little coffee shop when she wore them she looked like, like Felicity, like a future. She looked perfect.

They trudged up the stairs to her third floor room in nothing but stilted breaths and awkward distances before they reached Felicity’s door. She unlocked it and stepped into the darkened room, flicking on the light switch before she turned to face Oliver, stopping him at the door with just a look.

“Goodnight Oliver, thanks for my fake prom.”
It was all she could muster, it would have to do.
“You’re welcome. Goodnight.”
It was all he could reply.

It had been four days since the Felicity had seen Oliver, or even talked to him for that matter. It wasn’t unusual, they had their own lives, classes, activities and if she was honest, Felicity was thankful for that – he really didn’t need to see her moping about something that she loathed herself for.

He had made it clear.
They were friends.
She had agreed.
That was that.

Only, it wasn’t and she was moping because of it.

So, to be tucked up in the rec room with Barry, her new-found friend who could talk nonsense pop culture references and didn’t care if she wore Cheetos stained track pants while she did, was an absolute relief.

Once the initial disappointment that she wasn’t his type had past, she had found herself relaxing into an effortless friendship with him; and it was good.

“I still can’t believe you’re joining a sorority,” Barry gibed as he took a handful of popcorn smothered in confectioner’s sugar from the bowl on Felicity’s lap.
“I know, it’s not my normal idea of fun,” she spoke, covering her mouth with a polite hand before she swallowed, “I’d much rather be creating codes or breaking through firewalls.”
“Then why are you doing it?”

She sighed. It was a question she’d asked herself when she’d written the plan on her little chart.
“I spent most of my life boxing myself in, the nerdy girl with her head buried in her laptop or a book. Ink stains on my lip from chewing my pen in my favourite, and probably only, pair of black skinny jeans,” she lamented.
“That’s very precise,” Barry snorted.
“Point is, I just want to be something else, experience life before it’s not there to experience anymore. Joining a sorority is just one of those experiences, or experiments,” she laughed.
“And Oliver is okay with you experimenting?”
She felt her body go rigid at the mention of his name.
“Why would that matter?”
“You two are together right?”

Wrong.
She almost choked on a solitary piece of popcorn still in her mouth, “No.”
“Really, I just…” Barry trailed off, he was genuinely surprised.
“Just what?”
“You and he never?” Barry asked as he did some lewd gesture with his hands that made Felicity slap them away in a fit of laughter.
“No, we’re friends just friends.”
“You make it sound so ominous,” he mocked with widen eyes.
“Oliver doesn’t see me that way, he said so himself” Felicity spoke as she threw a kernel at Barry, dusting his cheek in white powder and making her serious façade crack as she laughed at his expression.

****

Oliver took a deep breath as he stood outside the door of Felicity’s dormitory holding an impressive bouquet of red roses and carnations. Chosen because he couldn’t seem to stop thinking how that colour looked next to her.

This had probably been the single most un-thought-out decision he’d made since he decided it would be fun to shack up with his then-girlfriend’s sister; and he instantly thought about running away – using the excuse that he didn’t have a key card to get into the dormitory – just as some random stranger held the door open for him.

Thanks, not.
He smiled and stepped into the foyer.

He couldn’t stop thinking about her since Saturday night and maybe it was absolutely ludicrous, but maybe she felt the same way?

Maybe.
He took two steps closer to the stairwell, steeled a breath then took two more.
Maybe.

He was about to take another two steps when he heard a pretty laugh he would recognise anywhere coming from the nearby rec room. He tucked himself into the wall and walked up closer to the wide open door.

****

“So if I said that we should go out, date, have all the sexing” Barry started, his tone threaded with all the male bravado he could muster, “what would you think?”
“Oh I’d say yes.” she replied, deadpan, “let’s be having all the sex Barry. Kiss me hard and fast right now.”
She purred loudly to make her point before a sarcastic smile crept over her face.

****

Oliver backed away from the door, he couldn’t see her speaking but her words had been enough. He honestly shouldn’t have been surprised, and he knew she deserved something better…
Better than him.

Still...
He dropped the flowers in a nearby bin and pushed through the glass entry doors.
He was too late.
Maybe that was for the best.

****

Barry pointed a finger into Felicity’s shoulder forcing her and the fake ‘kissy’ face she was pulling back onto her side of the pale brown settee
“What I’m trying to say is that just because I’m saying something, it doesn’t make it true. No offense, you’re gorgeous, I just prefer less boobs, more other things.”
“None taken. But Oliver meant it,” Felicity sighed, “And I’m okay with that.”

“Say it again, but this time more convincing,” Barry jested.
Felicity exhaled heavily, joking and dreams aside, she truly believed he had meant it, just friends, and everything else she was seeing – the lingered looks, the slow touches, the acts of kindness – were just the blown out wishes of a girl that needed to see the truth…

It wasn’t real.
“I’m just the awkward girl from next door and that’s all he’ll ever see me as,” she replied, softly, sadly, “and I just have to learn to be okay with that.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to Jen for giving me all the Sorority-workings help xox

Song quoted:
You & Me by Lifehouse
Thursday, 5 October 2006

It was after midday, almost 2pm but the wind was bitingly cold. It may have been the southerly front that was pushing across the City, or maybe it was her chosen attire – either way, Felicity was cold.

Another bucket of soapy water landed at her feet as did the chorused instructions from the Sister with the megaphone about how the pledges needed to get a hurry up if they were going to get all these cars cleaned.

Felicity tugged on her ponytail and shifted awkwardly in her allowed attire, consisting of a post-it note sized red bikini bandeau and gym shorts, as she tried to reconcile that this morning she was studying Computational Biology and this afternoon she was doing this…

When she received the ‘sprung’ text from the pledge Mom Felicity almost choked on her coffee and contemplated calling it quits. Wearing a bikini (or near enough to) while she washed cars wasn’t exactly her idea of a fun frigid afternoon outdoors. Yet, here she was, her blonde hair darkened with water and sporting clumps of soap bubbles, washing cars at $10 a pop. It hardly seemed profitable, but Felicity wasn’t naïve enough to think that this was about a profitable business venture.
“It was for charity.” Oliver sighed as he pinched the bridge of his nose, his eyes squeezed tight and the phone sitting an inch from his ear. He really hadn’t felt like talking to his father this morning, in fact after he went back to the frat house last night and sat alone in his room nursing a bottle of top shelf vodka, he really wasn’t feeling fit to talk to anyone. God only knows how he made it through back to back lectures this morning.

“You spent fifteen thousand dollars in one night and it’s for charity?” Robert nagged, the tone of his voice dripping with disbelief, not that Oliver could blame him. This wasn’t the first time he’d blown an exorbitant amount of money in one night and spoke with a husky voice the next morning as he scrupulously avoided talking about the night before.

“It was a good event dad, benefitting Starling Children’s Hospital,” Oliver explained wearily. “I hope whatever you got in return was worth it.”

For a moment it was.

When her head nestled into his chest and the puzzle pieces fit together – it was, it really was.

“I really should go dad, but I’ll see you tonight.”

“You’re actually…” Robert’s voice trailed off, he hadn’t thought for a minute that Oliver would actually continue to come home the first Thursday of every month, but he was glad to hear it, although Moira had unceremoniously warned him not to make a big deal about it in case Oliver pulled away again.

It had been years of sporadic contact with their son and while Robert could live off the crumbs of a phone call every couple of weeks, his wife couldn’t, and he wouldn’t see to jeopardising that.

“Good son, good.” Oliver smiled, it was nice to hear the lift in his father’s tone.

“Bye dad,” Oliver said, “add the fifteen thousand to an I.O.U.”

“Oh, I will.”

The two laughed before ending the call on a decidedly calmer front than it started.

Oliver had jostled with whether or not to ask Felicity whether she was still going tonight, but given he had mindlessly wandered the few blocks between their respective universities, he decided that his feet had already made the choice.

He wasn’t angry at her, he really didn’t have any right to be, but the idea that she was already experiencing college with someone other than him gnawed away at him like a Doberman’s low, constant growl in the back of his mind, just waiting to spring to attack.

He shook the imagery from his mind, he was just there to ask Felicity if she wanted a ride, any other topics were off limits.

I don’t need to ask and she doesn’t need to...

His pep talk halted like a five car pileup on the freeway when his eyes fell on a sight he wished they hadn’t.

Felicity bent over the hood of a car dressed in a strap of fabric across her chest and the gym shorts he’d spied her running in months back. Soapy water trekked slowly down her taunt calves before she popped one foot up into the air in a somewhat futile effort to reach further over the hood of the
beige coupe.

Fuck.  
The Doberman broke free from the chain.  
Shit.

****

“What are you doing here?” Oliver asked, unable to mask the growl in his voice, although he knew he should.  
Felicity spun around, a swipe of wheel grease on her cheek and a dripping sponge clutched between her fingers.  

Oh great, because this wasn’t mortifying enough, the Gods saw to sending him here too….

She pinched out a smile, one that wasn’t really a smile if you saw it for long enough.  
“Washing cars,” she shrugged sarcastically.

It wasn’t intentional – at least when she had opened her mouth to speak she wasn’t intending on being sarcastic – but whatever this weird balancing act of friendship they had going on was pushing her to her limits and it manifest itself in sarcastic and snide remarks it appeared.

“This isn’t you,” he bit back, although he should have walked away.  
“And how would you know that Oliver? Stop talking like you know everything about me, because you don’t.”

She wished the words hadn’t come with that snippy tone, but she was powerless to stop it.

You don’t know that I love you.  
You don’t know that I always – on some level – have.  
You don’t know that this time next year I’ll be in Oxford.  
You don’t know.

The Doberman was barking orders now, Oliver couldn’t stop his word vomit if he tried.  
“You’re better than this.”

He watched her recoil and he wasn’t surprised. Someone ought to muzzle him.

“You don’t get to make those observations Oliver. I’m here because I want to be,” she bickered as she folded her arms across her chest and straightened her back in a rigid stance.

“You should want for better,” he retorted  
I’m not with you because you deserve better.

“Why? What is so wrong with this?”

“People are looking at you.”

At least somebody is.

“So what? Maybe I want them to look.”

“You want to be the fantasy of college boys?”

“Sure, why not?”

She didn’t, but why should Oliver get the satisfaction of knowing that.

“Because you’re…”

“Don’t say better.”

“But you are,”

“God Oliver, it’s like you’re on repeat. If I want to be out here washing cars in a bikini for $10 then
I will do exactly that. You’re not my guardian or my Jiminy Cricket. You’re Oliver the-“*man that I love,*”-boy that lived next door.”

“There are other cars to clean,” a tiny blip of a girl with a case of resting bitch face interjected with one hand on her waist and her eyes directly focused on Felicity.

Oliver pulled his wallet from his pocket and fished out a $10 note from inside it quicker than Felicity could open her mouth to reply to either the snippety pledge or Oliver. Oliver pressed the crisp new note into the girl’s hand and shooed her away with his eyes.

“We’re not done talking,” he growled.

“I think we are,” Felicity replied as her crossed arm stance became more like a hug to herself.

“And what would Barry do if he was here?”

Felicity shot Oliver a perplexed look as she flicked her tongue across her dry lips.

“Red isn’t really his colour,” she replied, adding the pinched tip of a smirk as she glanced down at her top.

“Dammit Felicity,” he spoke, agitated – at himself more than her if he was honest.

“Stop it, stop projecting this perfect little ideology of me, that I’m that little girl from next door who needs you to tell the kids at high school to be nice to me. I’m not her, I’m not a child and I don’t need you out here lecturing me like you even know me anymore.”

He clenched his fist, forcing the words he wanted to say back down his throat.

“It’s Thursday,” he gruffed, changing the topic was all he could think of to do, after all that’s what he had come to do.

“I’m aware,” she replied, refusing to soften her stance.

She was mad – mad and confused, but only the mad mattered right now.

“Are you going home?” he asked, gritted teeth and clenched jaw

“Of course, are you?” she clipped back,

“I said I would”

“Good.”

“Fine.”

“I’ll pick you up at five.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

Half way through the journey the silence was becoming tediously awkward and as Oliver wrung his hands against the soft leather steering wheel, occasionally glancing over to Felicity who sat cross legged and scrutinizing chipped nail polish, he couldn’t take at any long.

“I’m sorry,” he sighed, a long overdue and broad apology.

Felicity dug her chin into her shoulder as her eyes watched him closely, waiting for a but that never came.

“What you do is up to you,” he continued, eyes forward, lips mildly pensive.

He was fairly certain that given his track record he could fuck things up pretty quickly if he let his words get away from him.

“It is,” she remarked, slightly guarded.

“If you want to wash cars in a bikini, well, I don’t really get a say,” he stopped his words short, there was more but he was trying to not push this downhill.
Regardless of how much in his soul he hated the idea that Felicity was being objectified by guys not fit to kiss the dirt under her feet, it wasn’t – isn’t, shouldn’t – be his place to say a damn thing about it.

“But?” Felicity teased, sensing there was much more his clenched jaw was holding back. “I’m just finding it hard to understand why...” he trailed off, hopeful he hadn’t set off a landmine. “I understand,” she nodded, and she did, the concept that she probably looked like a fish out of water not lost on her.

The only close person that wasn’t completely confused by her decision to join a Sorority was her mother who, incidentally, announced that it was the first time she saw glimpses of herself in her daughter.

Even Thea had laughed like it was perfectly timed comic relief. It had been Moira who spoke about the benefits of the sisterhood and making connections for life.

But it wasn’t about that for Felicity, not really. She took a slow breath in and shuffled in her seat, “I know it doesn’t seem like a typical choice for me, but maybe that’s exactly why I should.”

Oliver glanced over at her, wordlessly asking for more clarity. “I’ve missed so many rites of passage to get to this stage Oliver and I’m okay with that. It has all been worth it. This is my dream,” she spoke, her voice animated and her eyes dancing with joy. Oliver couldn’t help but hold his stare a few moments longer before he turned his attention back to the road.

“Every party I wasn’t invited to and every boy who barely noticed me...” she paused, like you, “has all been worth it, but this is college where, even momentarily, I can reinvent myself, before-” She stopped her words suddenly, a second away from uttering the word London.


Oliver nodded, he sensed there had been more to her words, but he wasn’t going to pry an answer from her and risk this truce they had stumbled into.

The car rolled into the driveway early than expected, the trip only taking an hour and a half tonight.

“I’ll drop you here and I’ll come over in a little bit,” Oliver smiled as the Queen gate rolled open. “Actually if it’s okay, I’ll come with you.” Oliver's curious eyes must have spurred her to explain more. “I have a book to give back to your Mom,” Felicity explained as she pulled a paperback from her handbag. Oliver plucked the book from Felicity's hand and searched the cover, “Enamoured; A Lake Tryst Novel,” Oliver read, a broad smile rolling over his face.

“Is this a dirty novel?” he smirked. “It’s a romantic work of fiction about a town on the edge of Lake Tryst, each book follows another story in the town,” Felicity pouted as she reached to grab it back. Oliver slipped out of the car before she could and opened the book part way through, squinting in the artificial lights nearby. “He cupped her face gently, stroking soft lines over her tear stained cheeks as he watched the tears leak from her dimmed blue eyes, ‘I love you Emma,’ he breathed ‘I'll come back.’” Oliver snorted as he flicked forward about 40 pages.
“Does he come back?” Oliver asked, skim reading pages as he spoke “...Emma pinched the zipper of Alex's pants and drew in a short, needy breath as she wrapped her slender fingers around his throbbing cock...”

Felicity stole the book from Oliver's hand and tucked it protectively under her arm. “It’s a dirty novel,” Oliver laughed. “There are some erotic moments,” Felicity shrugged, “But Kylie Rose is an amazing writer.” “Who writes dirty stories.” Oliver was laughing, having way too much fun with the knowledge that Felicity sat tucked up in her PJs, her glasses slightly dropped down her nose, reading erotic fiction. “Oliver,” Felicity smiled strolling through the gate. “Mmm?” “This is your mother's book.”

His smile vanished instantly, suddenly the cute imagery he'd built up and Felicity getting turned on by a book was replaced with... He shook his head before repeating it scarred him for life.

“Take a picture, it will last longer,” Thea mocked as she slipped onto the seat next to Oliver. Oliver shifted in the seat as he pryed his eyes away. “Everyone likes her,” Thea spoke as she nudged an elbow into his back, “Why are you acting dumb?” “Thea, things are complicated,” Oliver sighed. “Why?” “You wouldn’t understand.” Thea didn’t try to hide her very audible and frustrated huff.

“It’s not complicated to anyone else but you idiots,” she protested. “She’s seeing someone Thea, drop it,” Oliver gritted.

“Dinner will be ready now, we should go, if you’re coming,” Felicity said as she passed by the settee on her way out. “Dinner is here Thea,” Moira replied. “Please, Oliver made it sound so good.”

“Sometimes you just want something simple, something that has always been there, that you know, that you trust,” Oliver reminisced as he walked with Felicity to the door. “You make meatloaf sound poetic,” she laughed as they walked out into the brisk evening air.

“Can I go?” Thea piped up moments after the door closed. “Dinner is here Thea,” Moira replied. “Please, Oliver made it sound so good.”
“Go and ask if it’s okay with Donna and Noah. Come straight back if...”
“It’ll be fine, I’ll take them some wine,” she called over her shoulder as she nabbed a bottle of Château d’Esclans Rosé and slipped it into her bag before she skipped through the door.

“Is it okay if I come?” Thea asked as she ran down the path, catching up with Oliver and Felicity. Felicity looked down surprised, but nodded with a tipped smile, “Sure, there is always extra.”

“So, how is college?” Thea asked Felicity, breaking the lull in the idle chatter and clinking of cutlery, “Met anyone?”

Oliver choked on a green bean as he shot Thea a stern cease and desist stare. Thea idly shrugged him off.
“That’s not appropriate for you to ask Thea,” he gritted as Felicity's expression grew more confused.
“Oliver's right hon, you probably shouldn’t ask Felicity those questions,” Donna agreed kindly, “But, it is appropriate for me to ask.”

“Mom don’t,” Felicity groaned, her miserably dull love life wasn’t something she needed Oliver to know about.
“I’m your mother it’s my job.”

Felicity sighed as she stabbed unforgivingly at the slab of sauce-covered meatloaf. If she let her mother keep digging there was a possibility it would turn into Donna proclaiming that Felicity needed to find a guy to lose her v-plate to; and that was not something she needed Oliver knowing about.

“There’s no one,” she relented.
“No one?” Donna asked, a perfectly groomed blonde brow raising suspiciously.
“Nope,” Felicity said, smacking her barely-glossed lips together.

“Well there’s the skinny guy, what’s his name, Barry?” Oliver blurted, it hadn’t been his intention but he couldn’t take the words back now.

Felicity mouth pinched tightly as she looked across the table at Oliver, threads of confusion caught in her eyes.
What the heck?
She begged him for some explanation but he wouldn’t look up from his plate.

“How’s Barry?” Donna grinned leaning forward.
For one of the few times that evening even Noah seemed interested, “What’s his GPA?”
“What does he drive?” Thea added with a wickedly twisted smile for someone so young.
“Stop!” Felicity huffed, agitated by the interest, “Barry is a friend, nothing more.”
The table fell quiet, thankfully.

“Thanks for the Barry thing by the way,” Felicity clipped sarcastically as she sat perched on the counter, her foot digging into Oliver's armpit to vent some frustration.
“I just think you should tell them,” Oliver shrugged as his hands sloshed around the dish water gathering cutlery.
“Tell them what? Oh my god, there is nothing to tell.”
Her head lulled backwards and rolled exaggerated half circles from shoulder to shoulder.
Oliver clunked the handful of loose cutlery into the dish rack and dried his hands on the dish cloth Felicity waved around.

“I overheard the two of you talking last night” he admitted as he leant against the counter beside her, her bent knee grazing the rolled up sleeve of his charcoal grey crew neck jumper.

“What? Where?” Felicity quipped, her body revelling in his comforting musk that seemed teasingly close right now.

“I came by your dorm to make sure you were feeling better, I heard you talking in the rec room, it sounded like a private conversation so I left.”

Oh...no. shit.

Felicity bit back her worried lip, snagging it tightly between gnawing teeth, “How much did you hear?”

Shit. Shit. Shit.

“He asked you out, you said yes,” Oliver replied as he awkwardly shifted his weight between his feet, the heat of her body touching his – knee to arm – a torment he couldn’t move away from.

“That’s all you heard?” Felicity asked with utter trepidation.

“Like I said, it sounded personal. I left,” he lamented.

Felicity waited for any sign he was lying, but nothing came. That was seriously all he heard and she had a right mind to scream hallelujah.

It started as a snicker, then moved to a chuckle before Felicity's entire body was shaking with full fledged laughter.

“Oliver he was...um... look it’s not what you think.”

“It doesn’t matter what I think, you can date whomever you chose but your parents should know,” he cautioned, jealously hidden under the guise of concern.

“We're not dating, honestly he’d probably rather date you,” she snorted.

“What?”

It was Oliver's turn to look confused.

“Or Tommy, but Tommy likes girls though right?”

“What?”

Felicity wrapped her hand over the curve of his shoulder and dropped her head to rest on the crown of his head as she tried to stem her laughter.

“Oliver,” she calmed, breathing deeply, “Barry is gay.”

“Very gay so clearly I’m not his type,” Felicity added as his hair brushed over her lips in an intimacy neither noticed, or stopped.

“Clearly,” Thea remarked from behind them, startling them apart.

“You two should head back,” she continued with an unfettered smile.

“I thought you wanted to watch the OC?” Oliver asked as he stepped distance between him and Felicity.

“Changed my mind, it’s okay, you go,” Thea urged as she pushed Oliver to the door, before she returned to the kitchen for Felicity.

“I’ll meet you outside, I’m going to say goodbye” Felicity smiled.

Once outside in the quiet night air, Oliver turned to berate his sister over her various missteps but he was met with a petulant expression instead.

“We all know you and Laurel broke up,” Thea remarked dryly.

“What?”
“We’ve known for weeks.”
“How?”
“That doesn’t matter,” she huffed, irritated by his side questions “She was awful, Felicity is nice.”
“I know,” he concurred as his hands drove parallel lines over his scalp.
“So what’s the problem?”
_She wasn’t backing down._
“I’m not discussing this with you Thea,” he concluded.

“You guys okay?” Felicity asked as she stepped onto the porch closing the door softly behind her.
Thea nodded as she pulled the sequestered wine.
“Oh, here, mom wanted you to have this,” she smiled, folding it into Felicity’s hands.
“Your mom is giving me wine?”
Felicity looked past Thea to Oliver who simply shrugged.
“You two should share it when you get home. Night,” Thea spoke as she ran down the path,
wavering briskly as she went.

“Oliver, is your sister trying to get us drunk?” Felicity laughed, waving the bottle.
“Quite possibly.”

“Slushies?” Oliver asked as they approached the City on the drive home.
“How about something warmer, Verdant? It’s on the way,” Felicity offered as she rubbed her
hands together, the temperature dropping a few degrees in a matter of minutes.

The traffic gods must have been smiling down on them as they took the ten minute detour and
found a car park virtually right outside the coffee shop that was fast becoming a fixture in their
lives.

Once inside Oliver's eyes roamed over the chalkboard menu as he tried to decide whether to go
traditional or try something new from the specialty range.

“Cocoa,” Felicity cheered, “I want to be seven again.”
_That sounded perfect._

“So you and my mom, some sort of book club?” Oliver asked as they chose a small table near the
back of the empty coffee shop.
“A while back she saw the book I was reading and asked me about it, after that we would
sometimes talk about what we read every second Sunday,” Felicity explained, blushing slightly at
the smile on Oliver's face.

“You and my mother?” he marvelled.
“Why, is that a problem?” Felicity asked, nibbling her bottom lip.
“No,” Oliver assured with a soft gesture of a smile, “I’ve just never known mom to get on with
girlfr-,“ he stopped the word short, surprised at the ease in which he almost wrongly spoke it.
_Girlfriends._

“So what’s Emma and Alex’s story?” Oliver enquired, opting to shift the conversation a little.
“They were childhood friends who fell in love, but Alex enlists and gets sent to Afghanistan. When
he returns he’s broken and paralyzed,” Felicity paused remember how the moment of his return
was written so hauntingly that she had sobbed her way through the entire chapter.

“Well his cock obviously works,” Oliver grinned, still besotted with the idea that something might
make Felicity flush and excited rouge.
“Quite proficiently eventually,” Felicity smirked “the part you stumbled upon was her trying to uh...”
She took a slow sip of her warm cocoa as she considered her words.
“Stimulate him...” another pause “with her mouth.”
“Proficiently?”
“Expertly.”

They laughed lightly through the effortless moment before Felicity blew softly on her drink and Oliver considered his next words.

*Time for some of his truth.*
“So, Thea told you Laurel and I broke up,” he sighed, his eyes buried into the creamy swirl in his cocoa.
“She did, I’m sorry Oliver,” Felicity offered
“Don’t be, it should have ended a long time ago.”

*A long time ago.*

“What happened?...sorry it’s not my place to ask,” she shook her head softly as he looked up from his mug.
“We made each other miserable, no matter how hard we would try. I was a bastard.”
“I wouldn’t say that,” she consoled, her hand desperate to comfort the one he had laid flat on the table.
“You should say that,” he retorted, *he really was*, “but even when I put everything into not being one, there was no fixing it, the damage was done.”

“What finally broke you?” she paused, their eyes meeting for the first time in what felt like hours, “what made you say enough?”

Oliver took a deep but unsteady breath, the final nail had been a damning one.
“I found out she was sleeping with someone else and had been for months. It was then I realised how nothing was ever going to change that we were going to be stuck in this perpetual war where no one wins.”
“That can’t have been easy,” she breathed as her hand couldn’t be stopped a moment longer and she wrapped it over Oliver's much larger hand, barely covering it.

“It’s easier when you know it’s the right thing to do.”
“How did she take it?”
“Bad is an understatement,” he remarked, a wisp of a smile floating over his lips.

“Do you still think you made the right choice?” Felicity quizzed as she pulled back her hand and wrapped it around her mug.
“Without a doubt.”

*Without a doubt.*

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**Tuesday, 31 October 2006**

Just as Felicity thought she had college all figured out, the last few weeks had found her buried under a mountain of assignments and what little time she had left was promptly swallowed up doing whatever menial task a Zeta Delta Psi sister had her doing, at least none of it had involved any more bikinis, for what that was worth.
Her and Oliver were...good.
College life had kept them somewhat apart, but Felicity had decided that perhaps that was what they needed. They spoke through text messages when they could, simple, uncomplicated gestures that felt so natural that Felicity decided this friends thing wasn’t as ominous as it had once seemed.

Tonight was the last of the pledge trials; a Halloween party at an SIT frat house. It boasted an open campus-wide invitation and costumes were compulsory. Somehow Felicity had managed to convince Barry to accompany her but as he stood, dressed as Count Dracula, scrutinizing her costume, she was regretting being so pushy about his attendance.

“What are you wearing?” he quipped as his eyes bounced from her red cowboy boots to the pink shirt.
“Apparently Jessica Simpson’s version of Daisy Duke. I already told you I didn’t get a choice,” she huffed “I have to wear what I’m told.”
“I can see an ass cheek.”
Felicity tugged on the hem of the barely-there shorts, “I know.”

“But enough about my costume. This month has been hard and I am ready to party,” she proclaimed as she tightened the shirt-tail knot above her navel.

The music was blaring, the bass thumping through Felicity's head like a private percussion band had taken up residence there. She snorted through the imagery of it as another red solo cup was pressed into her hand. She didn’t remember finishing the last one.

The room was swarming with people and it felt to Felicity like the house had been dumped into the Pacific Ocean the way it was swaying underfoot.

Wait, was she drunk?
Before her head reigned in her hands she had already drunk half of the replenished drink and looked down at the table she didn’t realise she was standing on.

There was a chant of words as she felt strong hands sink in around her waist rolling her hips like she was Shakira.

“Felicity,” Barry pleaded as he urged he from the table.
Blurry eyed and wobbly Felicity nodded as she went to step down, perhaps she had partied enough.
“Get that fuckwit out of here,” Chad growled, before his palm knocked the wind from Barry's chest, “Stay sweetheart, you’re having fun aren’t you?”

Felicity stumbled in her boots before his hands clamped around her ass.
“You’re fun right?”
She bobbed her head as another full cup if beer found it’s way to her hand.

Barry was jostled from through the partying crowd before he was unceremoniously dumped on the front lawn.

He picked himself up and weighed up his options as he dusted hands down his black trousers, skating over...
Kat’s phone.
She had asked him to hold that and her wallet because her shorts ‘barely held her ass in, let alone anything else’.
He wrestled her phone from his pocket and scrolled to the last number called and hit redial. “Oreos and Milk speaking,” Oliver jested as he stepped away from the speakers in the living room of another Sterling U party house.

“Oliver?”
“Who is this?”
Oliver ploughed through the crowd and fought his way out onto the porch.
“Uh, Barry.”
“Barry?” Oliver repeated, the noise a little dimmer out in the darkened night as it neared 12am.
“Allen.”
“I know who you are, what are you doing with Felicity’s phone?”
“I’m worried about her...” he began, ready to explain the situation.
“Where are you?” Oliver interrupted.

“Uh,” Barry scrambled to the curb to find the number on the house, “1712, I don’t know the street, Grimell, Grevell,” he stumbled “It’s two streets over from Campus, Sigma something.”

“I’ll find it.”
Before Barry could give a jumbled description of the house Oliver had already hung up and sprinted from the house, a 20 minute walk from SIT.

Oliver rounded another corner, the seventh since he’d taken off running with no clear idea where to go. His forehead was bathed in sweat and his feet ached in the steel capped shoes he was wearing as part of his costume. He prayed seven was his lucky number.

Wild waving hands from a figure dressed in black met him around corner number seven.
“Where is she?” Oliver asked immediately as he stopped in front of Barry.
“She's inside and she's really drunk. They won’t let me...” he watched as Oliver heard enough, sprung up the steps of the frat house and barged through the throng of people gathered there.

Oliver had never been more thankful for his height and broad shoulders as he was right at that moment as he used both of them to plough through the swarm of drunk college students. He passed on ever drink that was offered and ignored every high five and/or fist bump that was jutted out in front of him.

And then he saw her, swaying in a rhythm that didn’t match the song playing. Her smooth, curvy legs on display in his clothing nemesis, denim cut offs, which appeared to be even shorter than they were last time. Her hair was a beautiful tumble of natural curls that sprung and bounced across her face and shoulders.

If it was just him and her in that moment he would have had to pause a moment longer just to appreciate how warm his heart felt when he looked at her.

But, they weren’t the only ones there and when Chad's greasy hands snaked up her legs and sunk in around her pert ass Oliver saw red...complete, blinding flames of murderous red.

“Get your fucking hands off her,” Oliver bellowed as he made it across the room in seconds and launched a flattened palm against Chad’s chest, barely able to hold it back from being a fist. Turning his attention to Felicity on the coffee table, she looked down at him with pursed lips and narrowed eyes.

“Get down,” he gravelled as he fumbled for her hand.
“What the fuck is your problem man?” Chad retaliated as he regained his imposing stance. “Felicity get down, I’m taking you home,” Oliver growled through a pulsing desire to clench his fist and introduce it to Chad’s face if he didn’t back the fuck up.

Oliver didn’t think he could get more heated up until he watched Felicity drunkenly consider his request then shake her head in a blur of red lips and blonde curls.

“She wants to stay,” Chad crooned.
Oliver clenched a fist, but ignored him.
“Get down,” Oliver fumbled for her hand again but Felicity pulled it out of reach.
“You want to stay don’t you darling?”
Chad’s hand sunk into her leg.
Chad was about to lose that fucking hand.

Oliver batted it away, his jaw clenched and his rage barely contained, one more fucking time, do it one more fucking time and I will break every finger on your hand.
His stare turned to ice and his finger pointed into Chad’s chest speaking his intentions.
One more fucking time...

“Felicity, get down.”
If he had to climb on that table himself, he would because he was done asking.
“I don wan-t toooo” she finally spoke, slurring her words.
“Get down.”
“No, I’m having fun,” she stamped her foot and glared down at him like a petulant toddler.
“Lady says to leave her alone, find your own,” Chad slipped another beer between her fingers and winked, “put this against those pretty little lips.”

Oliver took the cup roughly from Felicity’s hand, sploshing it down her pink shirt, before he slammed it into the ground and crushing the plastic cup mercilessly in his grasp.
“She’s under age,” he gritted.
“For what?” the wink gave Chad’s motives away, “she’s at college, she’s 18.”
“She’s 17 because she’s smarter than you will ever fucking be.”

Oliver’s tether snapped, they were leaving this party now, whether she liked it or not. His arms folded around her knees and he lifted her enough to send her flailing over his shoulder before the sea of people parted and he walked out of the house without looking back.

“Ah, you got her good,” Barry said, relieved, as Oliver carried Felicity, fireman style, down the rubbish covered path.

“What were you thinking letting her drink, she’s 17,” Oliver ranted, his tone thick with a gravelled rasp.
“I didn’t get much say in the matter.” Barry explained nervously, fairly sure that in one barely aimed punch Oliver could knock him flat on his back “should I take her...”

“Go home Barry.”
There was only a split second where he considered arguing with Oliver, but Felicity trusted him without doubt and he wasn’t going to win said argument anyway.
“Right, okay, yes.”

Oliver watched as Barry disappeared around the corner before he started his own trudge down the sidewalk.

“What the hell are you doing Oh-luh-ver?”
God he loved the way she purred his name.
If only she knew what it did to him.
“Why did you do that,” she berated as she bet tiny fists into his back and squirmed in his hold, “I’m not drunk!”

He could hear the pout in her voice.
“You are,” he countered.
He should have been mad at her, absolutely livid, but all he felt as he listened to her frustrated huffs was absolute relief that corner number seven was the right one.
*If anyone had hurt her, taken advantage of her...*he had to stop he thoughts before they grew unmitigated.
“I distinctly uh-member not beings drunk.”
“Really?”
“Yes,” she snipped, “so you can puh-t me down.”
The party house was already a block behind them when Oliver stopped and let Felicity down from his shoulder.

She stumbled like the ground was jelly before she braced herself with her palms against his chest. Her fingers strummed over the emblem sewn onto his flight suit.

“Did you join the army?” Felicity quizzed, her eyes widened with disbelief.
“You mean navy,” Oliver joked.
“You joined the navy, and you didn’t tell me?”
Her smile dropped and she looked genuinely upset.
“Felicity, I’m Maverick.”
“No silly, your name is Oh-luh-ver, I should know.”
*God, she was purring his name again.*
He cleared the thoughts out with a cough, “You should?”
“Mhmm, I’ve been in lo...” her words trailed off to inaudible before she stumbled.

“The ground is moving,” she squeaked, “is it an earthquake?”
“No you’re just drunk.”
She bobbed her head wildly in agreement.
“Perhaps you’re ri-right,” she babbled, “you, carry, me.”
She dug the toe of her shoe into his thigh in a futile attempt to climb him like a tree.

“Hop on my back,” Oliver laughed.
Felicity scrambled around to his back. She swept her hands along the curve of his broad shoulders and he heard her sigh wistfully.
“Everything okay?” he asked, craning his neck to look back at her.
“Mhmm, yep,” she breathed as she, for a fleeting moment, imagined what it might be like to kiss a slow trail down his spine, or lick a bridge between his strong shoulders, tasting the salt of his skin.
*If she asked to try it, would he let her?

While she walked the path her lips would taste and her mouth dried at the prospect. Without prompting or forewarning she watched as her hands grabbed an ass cheek each and squeezed. Nor could she stop her lips from smacking together or the words that followed;
“I’ve always wanted to do that.”
Felicity hugged her hands around his neck and lifted her body up onto her tiptoes, “Ready for my ride,” she snickered, the innuendo lost on her, but not on Oliver as he tried to temper his broad smile.

He lifted her up, his hands unintentionally cupping her ass as she anchored her legs around his
waist.

I’ve always wanted to do that.

“What were you saying, why you know my name is Oliver?” he questioned, curious where she had been going with that.

“I just do,” she yawned.

Felicity's eyes felt like lead as she rested her chin into the crook of Oliver's shoulder and breathed in his subtle musk of sandalwood.

“Mmmm you smell like a forest adventure,” she sighed contentedly before her lips pressed a soft kiss against his warm neck.

“Don’t be sorry,” Felicity breathed in a sleepy whisper before she dozed off.

The jolt of Oliver walking up the stairs at his almost deserted frat house twenty minutes later woke Felicity with a soft yawn. Every muscle Oliver had was burning as he pushed open his bedroom door and carried Felicity to the bathroom.

“You have your own bathroom? Oliver is so fancy,” she laughed as he lowered her into the bathtub, “Why are you putting me in the bathtub?”

She snorted out a laugh as she propped herself up against the eggshell-white tiles of the wall behind them.

“Because you’re drunk,” Oliver smiled as he brushed hair back from her face, relishing the way her softly blushed cheeks felt under his fingertips, “Stay here, I’ll get you a change of clothes.”

“I’m not drunk, if I was drunk could I do this?” she giggled as she reached out an unsteady finger and aimed for her nose, missing it entirely.

She laughed raucously as she stumbled backwards. Oliver tried to steady her but lost his balance just as her elbow caught the shower tap, instantly soaking them both in cold water.

Oliver leaned over her to shut the tap off, grazing sodden cheek against sodden cheek. When he pulled his head back her smile had vanished. Water beaded across her plump ruby lip as her eyes hooded over, watching him with threaded desire.

She tipped her chin up and caught his moistened lips between her own, her fingers floated across his neck, goosebumps erupting in the wake of them before they tangled in his hair. Breathlessly she kissed him, slow, practiced, longing.

His lips caved to her lead as her tongue swiped over the seam of his lips before burrowing into the hot cavern of his mouth.

He could kiss her for hours if she would have him, bounce between soft and slow to heavy and needy. He would discover every sound she could make and memorize each crease of the soft, swollen pillow of her lips.

If she let him...

He pulled back, fighting between his desperation to continue and his knowledge that he shouldn’t. Her eyes were closed, long, thick lashes fanned over wet cheeks. Her nose skimmed his as their breaths misted together. Another inch away and she slowly opened her eyes. The bright blue was tinged with jousting emotions; fear, sadness, longing and pleasure.

“Felicity...” he breathed, her name floating like a breeze from his lips.
Don’t say sorry, her heart begged, before a very different wave hit her.

*Oh god...*

He watched her eyes bulge and her hand clamp over her mouth. She twisted in circles desperate to find...

She lurched towards the toilet, with milliseconds to spare as she threw up, and threw up, and threw up.

*Oh god.*
“I think I ate bad sushi,” Felicity groaned into the porcelain bowl. Oliver smiled as he sat on the rim of the bathtub, holding her hair back from her face and stroking calm lines down her back.

“Maybe I’m allergic to sushi,” she sighed as she kicked her sprawled legs, scraping the rubber soles of the cowboy boots across the dark grey tiles. “Or, you drunk too much beer,” Oliver smirked, unable to resist the small jab. “That’s probably it.”

She sighed loudly, like it took much more effort than she had been prepared to expend, as she drew back from the toilet and jostled her shoulders between his legs with her back pressed against the built-in tub.

“I love you Oli,” she paused to take a breath “ver.” “I love you too,” he whispered as he gently kissed the crown of her head before he realised what he was doing. “No you don’t,” Felicity quipped, her voice faltering a little between the words, “but that’s okay.”

Oliver thought about saying more, telling her how he really felt, but as her head slumped against his leg and she rolled through at least three yawns he knew that it was neither the time nor the place.

“Imsosleepy,” she breathed, as though it was all one word.
“We should get you changed.”

No sooner had he said that words and Felicity had untied the pink shirt, tugged it down both arms and bundled it up, sticking it behind the toilet.

“I don’t what that back,” she muttered as she reached behind her back in an effort to untie the shoestring straps of the little red bikini top she was wearing.

Oliver caught her hands before she could tug the knot loose and folded them back around the front. As much as a part of him wanted to see those beautiful pert breasts of hers and the deliciously pink nipples that he bet would turn darker if he played with them – this wasn’t right, not here and not like this. Felicity meant too much to him to even consider it.

“Wait right here, okay?” he spoke as he stood up from behind her and gently eased away from the entanglement of his legs and her arms.

“Where are you going?” she moaned sadly

“I’m going to get some help.”

“Don’t call my mom, please don’t call my mom.”

He couldn’t disguise the smile that sparkled across his lips as she peered up at him with wide, puppy dog eyes. Even if he had been intending on calling Donna Smoak, after the look Felicity gave him, he wouldn’t be now.

“I won’t Felicity, just, stay here, okay?”

She nodded like a bobble head.

Oliver took a few short steps towards the door before she spoke up again; “Oliver?” she said.

“Yeah?”

“I wants yoooo to be my best friend. I dun really have one so that would be great,” she smiled as her eyes barely stayed open, her voice becoming more drawn with each word.

“Is that what you want?” Oliver enquired, unsure what answer he wanted to hear.

“Nope,” she shook her head forcefully “but it’s the right thing.”

Oliver wasn’t sure what she meant or even if she meant anything at all. Right because he had ‘brilliantly’ convinced her that was what he wanted? Or right because that’s what she wanted? As much as he wanted the answer, now was not the time to ask the question.

“Wait right here, I’ll be back soon,” he instructed, grazing his hand down the doorframe before he bowed his head over his shoulder and offered her one last smile.

Oliver banged on Tommy’s door and waited impatiently as there was voices followed by a crash and then the sliding of the lock Tommy had installed on the back of his door. The door opened a foot and Tommy, shirtless with the top of his matching flight suit hanging down his legs, answered sheepishly.

“Oh fuck, it’s just you, good,” he spoke, relaxing his shoulders and opening the door a half a foot more.

“Who were you expecting?”

“There is a high chance I made out with someone’s girlfriend tonight,” Tommy shrugged devilishly.

“Just the one?”

“That I’m aware of. Now, what are you here for because I’m uh,” he paused to wink, “a little indisposed at the moment.”

Oliver shook his head but not out of disbelief, it was Tommy after all.

“Do you have a girl in there?” Oliver asked, knowing full well the answer was going to be some form of yes.
“A girl? Uh, sure,” Tommy smirked, with the hazed eyes of a few beers.

Oliver rolled his eyes, of course he did.
“Look, just send out the smartest one will you.”
“We’re friends and all Oliver, but…”
“Felicity is drunk on my bathroom floor,” Oliver interrupted, “I need someone to help clean her up. Someone that isn’t me.”

Tommy thoughtfully considered the request, tapping it out against his clean shaven jaw, riddled with lipstick smudges, “yeah okay, that makes more sense, hold on.”

The door closed a fraction as Oliver listened to the mumbled conversation. Within a minute the door opened again and a pretty co-ed with deep brown eyes and hair like swirled chocolate stepped out into the hall wearing a singlet emblazoned with a Puerto Rican flag and a headset with earmuffs and a microphone.

“Camila, Oliver. Oliver, Camila,” Tommy introduced, “Camila studies drugs or something.”
“I’m a pharmacology major,” she chuckled as she handed Tommy the headset and he playfully squeezed her ass.

“You have a friend who had a little much?” she asked as she followed Oliver to the next bedroom over.
“Her name is Felicity, she’s in here,” Oliver explained as he ushered her into the bathroom.

“Hey girl, rough night?” Camila spoke kindly as she crouched down beside Felicity who groaned underneath the hair strewn across her face.
“Is she alright?” Oliver worried.

“Has she lost consciousness at all?” Camila asked as she brushed hair back from Felicity's face, “Oh she’s just a young one.”
“She's seventeen and if I had known she was drinking....” his words trailed off, but his mind was pretty clear I would have gone with her, watched out for her, watered it down if she insisted on drinking something.
“She did fall asleep on my back when I was carrying her home but she snored the whole time, so she was conscious,” he added.

Camila turned her attention back to Felicity, checking her eyes and the inside of her lips.
“Can you tell me your name sweetheart?”
“Fel-lissty”
“And who’s this guy?” Camila quizzed, nodding her had back to Oliver.
“He's Ouhliver, I love him, he’s my best friend.”
Oliver swallowed down Felicity’s second proclamation of love, she was drunk, that’s all it was.
“Where do you go to college?”
“SIT. Oh god,” she snapped her head up and her eyes flung open like saucers, “don’t tell them though okay?”
“It’s alright, sweetheart, I won’t,” Camila assured as she checked Felicity’s skin for any blue tinges.

“Apart from the hangover she’s going to have tomorrow, she’ll be fine. Just get her to drink some water and keep her warm,” Camila instructed as she walked over to Oliver.
“Okay good.”
“Towels?”
“Under the sink.”
“Do you have any clean clothes she can borrow?”
Oliver patted the clothes he’d found for her earlier, folded and left on the corner of the vanity.

“I’ll clean her up and get her changed.”
“Okay, thanks,” Oliver agreed.
“So you should probably leave the room,” she smiled.
“Oh right, yes, okay,” Oliver replied as he stumbled backwards out of the bathroom, closing the door with an unintentional thud.

“Your boyfriend has nice shampoo,” Camila smiled as Felicity stood in the warm shower dressed in her bikini top and panties, slowly sobering up.
In her own freshman year she too had over done it at a Halloween party and someone had dutifully cleaned her up too, it was like some weird alcohol-fuelled pay it forward.

“Oh Oliver’s not, no, we’re just friends,” Felicity explained, letting the warm water seep into her back.
“Is that his choice or yours?”
“His,” Felicity sighed, “I think.”
“Do you trust Oliver?” Camila asked, rinsing the last of the shampoo from Felicity’s hair.
Felicity nodded without reservation.
“And you feel safe with him?”
“Don’t worry, he’s not going to take advantage of me,” Felicity laughed, her voice tinged with almost a little sadness, perhaps on some level she wouldn’t mind him taking advantage…

“What makes you so sure?”
“He kissed me once and then said sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry and I kissed him before I puked, nothing! So that’s how I know, he just doesn’t see me that way,” Felicity bemoaned as she stepped from the shower and wrapped the large bath-sheet around her small body – *of course Oliver had big towels that could wrap around her twice.*
She pushed out an exhale as she lamented that the mere fact of that turned her on.

“Can I tell you a secret?” Felicity sighed, the lingered effects of a six-too-many drinks still coursing through her filter system.
“Sure,” Camila replied with her back turned as Felicity peeled off her wet clothes.

“I love Oliver, I have for years,” she gulped, “well as much as a kid can love their slightly older neighbour, but I love him now, good and proper.”
“Have you told him?”
“I could never,” Felicity sighed as she threaded her legs through the grey cotton running shorts that she had seen Oliver wear a least two dozen times, “that’s not what he wants and I’d rather have him in my life as a friend than risk losing him.”

Felicity let another sigh fall from her parted lips as she pulled on plain tank and cosy knit hoodie that completely swamped her.
“He’s seems pretty smitten with you,” Camila shrugged.
“No, that’s just Oliver, he does nice things.”

“All done,” she yawned as she walked a slalom path to the door.

“How are you feeling?” Oliver asked as he sprung from the silver-tweed occasional chair his mother insisted he have in his room, *to inject some class.*
“I’m really tired, can I lie down?” Felicity whimpered, digging her fists into her eyes as she
stumbled across to the bed.
“Of course you can,” Oliver smiled, relieved to see much of her slur had gone.

Camila walked Oliver to the corner of the room and stared at him with suspicious eyes.
“Ordinarily I wouldn’t leave a girl who is clearly inebriated with a college frat boy,” she spoke, pensive and commanding, even in a hushed tone.
“But,” her voice perked up a little as she noted the genuine concern in Oliver’s expression “she seems to trust you.”
“We lived next door to each other for years, our parents still do."
“I know, she told me, so that’s why I’m going to trust that you’re not going to try anything on.”
“I would never,” Oliver gaped, disgusted at even the idea.
“Tommy is a good guy and he trusts you and she seems like a smart girl who trusts you, so I’m going to trust you too,” she decided, before adding, “but if that girl so much as says you…”
“Felicity is…” Oliver paused, perfect was the only word he could think of, “I would never do anything to hurt her.”
“Good,” Camila affirmed as she opened the door and went to step outside.

“Oh and one more thing…” she started, pausing in the doorway, “you shouldn’t have apologised to her after you kissed her that was messed up, no girl wants to hear that.”
“She told you?” he sighed, “of course she did.”
He couldn’t help but smile, drunk or not Felicity was never going to let him live that down.

In the minute that Oliver had waved goodbye to Tommy’s Good Samaritan bedfellow and turned back around, clipping the door closed with his foot, Felicity was already curled up asleep on his bed. He watched her from a distance for a few moments, her legs bent at the knee and tucked up close to her stomach, a hand folded under her head, the other wrapped tightly across her chest, her lips pursing and relaxing as though she was having an argument with herself and her eyes rested gently closed.

She looked beautiful; even when she didn’t try, she was beautiful.

Oliver walked the short distance to the bed and gently laid the blanket over her body before he brushed back a loose wisp of hair and stilled himself from placing a tender kiss against her temple – as much as he wanted to, he wouldn’t, not tonight.

He reached over the bed and carefully plucked the pillow from the other side, intent on sleeping in the chair, praying that his mother’s good taste equalled some amount of comfort too.

He switched off the lights but left a lamp in the corner on to have just enough light to check on her to ease his worry.

“Oliver?” he heard her whisper softly.
“Yes?” he answered, matching her tone.
“Sleep with me on the bed, please?” she spoke, her words sending a jolt across his heart, “Please.”

She opened her eyes just a fraction and Oliver melted into them, there was a sadness trapped in them and he didn’t have the heart to say no. He left the blanket on the chair, intending to return there once she had fallen asleep, and climbed into the bed beside her, laying on top of the blankets.

Felicity mewed softly and she nudged backwards, pressing her back against his chest.
“You’re…” she yawned, pausing for a drawn amount of time, “so warm.”
He listened to her lips softly smack against each other as she nestled in tight against him. The smell
of his own shampoo seemed so much more feminine and floral on her and he let his eyes slowly close to the scent of it, sure that once Felicity was asleep he could wake up and leave the bed.

Only, Oliver didn’t realise just how tired and aching his body was; and even when she was snoring softly in her slumber, he never woke up. Instead he spent the night lying next to her and dreaming of a world where that would be okay.

[Next Morning]

Oliver had woken up before Felicity sometime around 9am. He spent ten minutes chastising himself for staying there the whole night, while he simultaneously relished just how natural it felt to wake up next to her.

It had taken him another few minutes to finally peel himself away from her and trudge into the bathroom to begin his normal morning routine, only this morning attempting to do so in almost complete silence.

When he stepped out of his room, cleaned and dressed, Felicity was still fast asleep and he stole a moment in the doorway to bathe in the sight of it.

Maybe there would be a time when this could be a reality...

It was Tommy who stopped him at the top of the stairs, a concerned look threaded across his face. “Don’t go all Oliver, but Chad is downstairs boasting that he has videos of drunk co-eds from last night, tell me Felicity can’t be one of them,” Tommy asked, a pensive fist hovering near his lips, his brow pinched inward.

Oliver’s face told a story his lips didn’t need to and wordlessly he started down the stairs. “Oh shit,” Tommy called after him “you’re going to go full Oliver.”

Oliver swerved into the kitchen with a pulled smile plastered across his lips. To anyone that didn’t know Oliver all that well it might look genuine, but to Tommy he knew it absolutely meant something was going to get broken.

“You got some videos from last night?” Oliver joked with jostled shoulders and that concrete grin as he walked across the kitchen to the group gathered around Chad. “A few,” Chad replied hesitantly. “No shit, that’s great man,” Oliver started as he took another step closer, almost imposingly so, behind Chad’s back, “mind if I have a look?”

Before an objection could be made Oliver swipe the phone from Chad’s hands and glanced down at the screen. He only needed a second to see Felicity, he had no doubt that there were more.

The phone hit the sandstone floor with a crack that echoed through the house and made most of the younger frat members scatter. The heel of Oliver’s boot came down on it without restraint, smashing it into even tinier pieces.

“What the fuck?” Chad called as he bound towards Oliver, Tommy stepping into his path to slow him down.

Oliver, still with the smile in place, dropped the inside of the phone into the garbage disposal and turned it on. The sound of it was unmistakable, there wasn’t going to be anything to salvage from that phone.
“It’s about time you upgraded your phone anyway,” Oliver shrugged, the smile slowly becoming more genuine.

*Fuck that felt good.*

“Send me a bill,” he added as he took two communal mugs and poured fresh coffee into each.

“That was my fucking phone,” Chad hissed as he pushed Tommy out of the way and flared his chest, positioning himself in front of Oliver.

Oliver took the milk from the fridge, still smiling, and poured it slowly into each mug, pausing to measure the ratio before adding a splash more, before he finally looked up at the hulking menace. “I’m doing you a favour sh**t head. She’s seventeen and that’s you on video giving her alcohol. Take this as a public service announcement.”

Oliver added a teaspoon of sugar to each, then added an extra half to Felicity’s before he breathed in the smell of fresh coffee.

“God I love a good coffee in the morning,” he chatted before the smile drop from his face and his eyes met squarely with Chad’s, “stay the fuck away from Felicity or it won’t be your phone I break next time.”

Oliver didn’t wait for a response.

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The cracking sound from the floor underneath the bedroom startled Felicity awake at first, but it was the god awful sound of grinding metal that made her sit upright in the bed. Which was when she realised she was not in her bed.

She had sat perfectly still for about 30 seconds, wondering if this was another dream she needed to wake up from, but when she looked down at her clothes and recognised the knit hoodie her body was draped in she instantly relaxed.

Her head was foggy and she had little recollection of how she got here, but the blankets smelled like Oliver, the clothes she was wearing smelled like Oliver, stranger still even her hair smelled like Oliver.

The photo on the bedside table just confirmed what she already knew, unless Oliver had some weird stalker who stole his clothes and bed linen and kept one framed photo of his family beside the bed….

“That seems highly improbable, although Oliver is well-known enough that maybe it isn’t impossible,” she muttered to herself, “although that doesn’t explain why I would be here, unless…”

The door creaking open startled her for the second time that morning and she closed her mouth tightly as she waited anxiously for Oliver’s stalker to enter the room and tell her some over-thought-out, but woefully inept, plan to get Oliver to notice them…

Stop watching low-budget horror films she chastised stalkers only exist on Facebook with famous people.

“Morning,” Oliver smiled as he entered the room holding two cups of coffee in one hand Felicity exhaled the breath she didn’t know she was keeping as she marvelled at just how big his hands must be to complete that feat.

“Morning,” she replied awkwardly shifting under the blankets of his bed; his bed. Why was she in his bed?
Oliver walked around the bed and placed one of the mugs down on the bedside next to her. “Um thank you,” she said, folding her lips over the metaphorical elephant in the room.

Why was she in his room, in his bed?

“You’re wondering why you’re here?” Oliver smiled, he couldn’t help the smile as he watched her face twist awkwardly.

“The thought had crossed my mind,” she replied as she folded her hand around the handle of the mug and blew gently into the hot coffee.

“You might have had a couple of drinks too many, I didn’t want to leave you at your dorm,” he explained, kindly skirting around just how drunk she was. Felicity’s face turned a bright shade of red.

Oh god…

“How drunk?” she asked shakily.

“Just a little tipsy.”

Telling her she was dancing on a coffee table in daisy dukes didn’t seem like the kind thing to do as she nursed what was probably her first hangover.

“Oh…” she started as her eyes looked down at her clothes, the clothes she knew she hadn’t been wearing the night before.

“It’s okay, one of Tommy’s girls helped you get changed, not me, I promise,” he assured kindly.

“One of Tommy’s girls?” she asked before taking a sip of her drink and watching Oliver’s animated face try to find an answer to her question, “on second thoughts, I don’t want to know.”

“Probably wise.”

She took another slow sip as she struggled to remember anything from the night before. There were flashes but nothing that equated to an actual memory.

“Did I say anything stupid last night?” she asked, trepidation tipped in her words, “because even sober I say dumb things, so I hate to think what I say drunk.”

You told me you loved me, that wasn’t dumb…

“Nothing,” he smiled, “just some babbled comments on my costume and life in general.”

She clenched her teeth pulled her lips back in an awkward expression of ‘sorry’.

“I really don’t remember anything.”

You kissed me.
I wasn’t sorry.

“If I made a mess or something you would tell me right? Because I’ll clean it up.”

Oliver had already attended to the bathroom and had even rinsed off the chunks on her shirt, leaving it together with her other clothes, to drip dry over the bath until she could take them.

“You didn’t,” he smiled.

“It was really stupid wasn’t it?”

She could see the slight wisp of disappointment in his eyes.

“I’ve seen you make smarter choices, but I’ve also seen me make worse ones,” he commented.

As she watched his lips smile up at her a flash of them wet, beaded with water moments before she kissed them...oh god, had she kissed him?

She ghosted a finger across her lips, would he tell her if she asked?
Did she want to even know?
“I should go home,” she pipped as she settled the half-drunk coffee back onto the bedside table, “wait – if I go, will the frat guys do that chant?”
Oliver laughed at the look of sheer terror in her eyes.
“No Felicity, not if they want to keep their noses straight,” he winked.

“Thank you Oliver ,” she breathed.

*He missed the purr.*

“You’re welcome Felicity.”

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**[2 November 2006]**

Oliver had been thinking about her non-stop. The texts between them had doubled in number and he smiled every time he saw one. She was still pestering him about whether or not she had embarrassed herself and briefly Oliver had considered telling her about the kiss, but on reflection decided not to. At least not yet.

Tonight he would bask in her company, maybe tell her he could see this going beyond just a friendship... *maybe.*

Oliver’s phone rung in his pocket and his smile grew when he saw Felicity’s name flash across the screen

“Hey, I was just thinking about you. You all set for tonight?” he asked cheerfully.

“That’s why I’m calling, you’re off the hook tonight. I won’t be going,” she replied, it sounded like she was outside, the wind blowing against the speaker on the phone and background noise filtering down to him.

“But it’s Thursday.”

“I know,” he could hear the sweet chuckle in her voice.

“Your mom…”

“It’s okay, I’ve already spoken with her and I promised to spend all Thanksgiving with her so she’s fine." She was smiling, he could hear it in her voice, and he was jealous that wherever she was right now the voices he could hear could see her smiling.

“Are you sick?”

“No,” she chuckled *again,* “I’m just out with some girls from the Sorority and their boyfriends near the bay, we’re probably just going to have dinner nearby and catch a movie.”

*She had plans.*

“Actually I think there’s one guy here that’s from your Frat,” he could hear her walking around and there were voices closer now, laughing, “I met him at the charity thing a few months back.”

*Don’t say Chad.*

“Chad, is his name. Do you know him?”

*Fuck.*

“I don’t think you should go?” Oliver remarked, his tone darkening as he gritted his teeth.

“You’re breaking up Oliver, the reception seems kind of bad out here, what did you say?”

“You shouldn’t…”

A female voice in the background called her name.

“So anyway, you have Thursday to yourself again for tonight,” she gushed.

“Felicity…”
“I can’t hear you Oliver.”
A chorus of voices chanted behind Felicity, “*Hang up the phone.*”
“Sorry, I have to go, we’ll talk soon,” she simpered before the phone line cut out.

He paced around his room for a few minutes before he tried to call her back. It rung, but went to voicemail.

*Shit.*

‘*Sorry about hanging up, coverage is so patchy out here. Have a good night Oliver, we’ll talk soon, xo*’

He stared at the message, trying to decide whether or not to reply. The argument going on in his head was deafening, but in the end he simply typed back ‘*You too. Be safe*’

He knew deep down that if he pushed the issue, told her to come home, it would only make her draw further away. They had found something comfortable and Oliver wasn’t prepared to jeopardise that.

Oliver had decided to drive home regardless, much to the delight of his parents and Thea who was now curled up next to him with a pizza in front of the watching the season premier of the OC. She was silent, with a big smile, until the ads started.

“Have you asked her out yet?” Thea asked before she took a bit from her large slice of pepperoni.
“*Thea…*” Oliver sighed, he knew where this was going.
“Oh come on,” Thea huffed, throwing her head back in a typical exaggerated fashion, “you thought she was dating some gay guy, she told you she wasn’t and you guys are always sending each other cute little text messages.”
“How do you know that?” Oliver questioned, watching as Thea sunk back into her chair.
“It doesn’t matter,” she shrugged, trying to brush it off.
“It does matter, have you been going through my phone?”

Thea groaned loudly before plopping the pizza slice onto the lid of the box and brushing her hands together.
She meant business.

“Do you or do you not love Felicity?” she asked pointedly, without blinking.
“Thea, its complicated,” Oliver replied, dropping the phone issue as his sister’s eyes burned into his forehead.
“O.M.G no wonder she’s out with another guy, you’re infuriating!”

“She’s not…” he retaliated, “at least I don’t think so, not just another guy.”
“Well she probably is and honestly I’m not surprised. She’s gorgeous and it was only a matter of time before some hot college guy noticed,” she lectured.
Definitely not backing down.
“Now you’re really going to have to…”

The ad finished and Oliver turned the volume up, interrupting the continuing lecture he was getting from his much younger sister.
“Your show is back on,” he smiled.
*Enough.*
Oliver arrived home just as Chad did and despite knowing he shouldn’t say anything, he wasn’t thinking clearly enough to hold himself back.

“I thought I told you to stay the fuck away from Felicity,” he growled, with grasped undertones and narrowed eyes.

Chad’s phone chirped in his hand and he smiled.

“Guess she didn’t get the message,” he smirked turning the screen of the new phone so Oliver could see Felicity's name on it, “excuse me, I’d like to take this in private. Can’t have you breaking another phone.”

He laughed as he walked away, keeping eye contact as he answered with a, “Hi gorgeous.”

If it wasn’t for Tommy placing a decidedly heavy clamp on his shoulder Oliver was certain he would have broken the phone; and then Chad's nose.

[Thanksgiving]

That time had rolled around and both Oliver's family and Felicity's had decided to spend Thanksgiving Day weekend at the stunning 3 storey Queen beach house that sat a stone's throw away from the Pacific Ocean.

Felicity had always been in awe of its beautiful simplicity; from its crisp wooden floors and calming eggshell walls, to the built for comfort sectional lounge suite and the decadent heated pool, it always felt wonderfully isolated, like she could bury herself in a book and stay there indefinitely. This trip was no exception to that feeling.

It was on the cusp of dinner time when Felicity found herself in the kitchen with Oliver tending to the finishing touches of the meal.

“So, you and uh,” Oliver started, purposefully stumbling over the name in an effort to portray he wasn’t raging inside.

“Chad?” Felicity offered.

“Yea, you didn’t invite him?”

Felicity smiled as she stirred the simmering cranberries.

“Invite him to a thanksgiving at someone else’s house that we were invited to?” she smirked, “I don’t think so. Plus, it’s nothing serious, not even close. We just talk.”

That was the truth, one movie date and a few charming phone calls didn’t make it serious, not even close right?

He watched her shrug and wondered for a moment if she was playing it down; and if she was, was it for his benefit?

“He was the guy at the party that got you drunk,” Oliver blurted, way more abruptly than he had meant to.

He cringed, expecting her to be mad, but she wasn’t. She just smiled softly and nodded.

“I know, he apologised profusely for it and he really regrets it. He was drunk himself and he feels terrible,” she explained softly, “he’s actually a really sweet guy.”

No he’s not.

“He was the guy at the party that got you drunk,” Oliver blurted, way more abruptly than he had meant to.

He cringed, expecting her to be mad, but she wasn’t. She just smiled softly and nodded.

“I know, he apologised profusely for it and he really regrets it. He was drunk himself and he feels terrible,” she explained softly, “he’s actually a really sweet guy.”

No he’s not.

“Are you okay with it?” she asked quietly. Oliver had wanted to be friends and friends meant she couldn’t sit around waiting for the slight possibility that he might change his mind.
“I know you guys are in the same frat and I know it’s your protective nature…” her voice trailed off softly, maybe a part of her wanted him to say no.

No. No, I’m not okay with that.
Oliver watched her as he tossed the green beans through the garlic butter. If he said no, it could just push her away and he couldn’t not have her in his life, not when it felt so good to have her near, even if it was just as a friend.

“If you’re happy,” he breathed, it was the best he could offer.
Felicity could sense the hesitation in his voice, but before she could ask him about it the kitchen flooded with people and they were all called to dinner.

The feast was ready.

Felicity sat quietly into the bench seat on the long beach-wood table, directly across from Oliver, she could tell there was so much he was keeping back, things he was refusing to say and it had her mind a jumble of what those things were and why he felt he couldn’t speak openly with her.

The clinking of a fork on crystal jerked her attention down the end of the table as her Father cleared his throat.
“If it’s alright with the host, I would love to start off what I’m thankful for,” he started, waiting for a nod from both Moira and Robert before he continued, “every year I am thankful for my wonderful, smart daughter who continues to amaze me and make me proud.”

Felicity blew a kiss down the table and he caught it with a wink.
“And every year I am thankful to have this beautiful woman beside me, my partner, the mother of my child, my friend…” he paused, taking something from his pocket “and hopefully next year, my wife.”

Donna gaped, a silent scream, before finally filling the air with a shriek of delight.
“After all these years, what do you say Donut?”
Donna clasped her hands to her mouth and nodded furiously, “Yes.”

The table erupted into applause as Felicity wiped a happy tear from her cheek. Oliver’s hands were clapping for her parents, but his eyes couldn’t look anywhere but at her.

It was Donna’s turn next but she sobbed out half words before she kissed Noah’s cheek, pointed to the ring freshly placed on her finger and then kissed Felicity’s cheek – that was what she was thankful for.

Thea raised a glass of non-alcoholic grape juice, “I’m thankful that I’m pretty certain Seth is going to marry Summer this season because they belong together,” she toasted before shooting Oliver a long, hinted look,
“People who belong together, belong together,” she concluded with a nod, “Oh and family and stuff.”

“That was interesting dear,” Moira remarked as she gently smoothed her palm down Thea’s shoulder and brought her in close for a quick hug.
“I am thankful that my family are altogether and blessed with good health and good fortune and that Oliver is home more. The last few months have seen my family seem complete again. Whatever brought you home, thank you.”

Her words resonated in the blank space between Felicity and Oliver. She had brought him home, but sadly only Oliver appreciated that truth.
“Your turn dear,” Moira said as she nodded towards Felicity.

“Oh well, I’m thankful that I didn’t burn the cranberry sauce, so that’s a win,” she paused to smile, that sweet little smile that Oliver refused to imagine a world without.
“I’m thankful for the undying love and support of my parents and I’m pre-emptively thankful that whatever bridesmaid’s dress you put me in, that’s it’s not ugly, and lastly” she paused, just long enough to look at Oliver like he was the only one in the room, “I’m thankful for having good friends, friends who mean the world to me.”

Oliver couldn’t look away even if he wanted to, she had his eyes trapped and she held every word he knew in the palm of her hand.

“Your turn,” Thea interrupted his thoughts as an elbow into his side jolted him back
“I’m just thankful to be here,” he smiled.
“Boooooo, say more,” Thea teased mercilessly, sending a wave of laughter across the table.

“Alright, I am thankful to my family for putting up with me for twenty-one years, you are saints,” he smiled, looking first to his father then down to his mother and lastly to Thea.

“I’m thankful for the company they keep, that they can be as warm and welcoming as my own family,” his next smile went to Felicity’s parents and Donna blew a kiss in response, “I’m thankful to Thea for introducing wonderful new experiences into my life, I really am a big fan of the show.”

Oliver took a breath, wondering if he should finish it there, but as he looked across at Felicity there was more he needed to say.
“And, in no way least I am thankful for the lights that lead us, the friends that challenge us, believe in us, fight with us and love us. Those are the ones that guide us home and make us believe…” he paused, this was for her, “in love.”

Felicity felt the air hitch in the back of her throat as her eyes searched across the table at his, for a moment her mind wondering if he meant…No. He couldn’t. She was imagining things again.

Robert spoke next, but neither Felicity or Oliver heard a word of it, they were transfixed, completely absorbed in each other and the words that time, and time again, they left unsaid.

I love you.
I’ve always loved you.
If we could just…
…Maybe we could just.

Glasses around the table raised and Felicity followed suit, Oliver mimicking moments later.
I love you.
Someone needed to say it, the words were burning holes inside both of them.

But neither did.
Not once that whole night.

[Later that night]

Oliver was awake.
Wide awake.
Transfixed on a spot on the ceiling he could now see in the dark.
There were so many words he wanted to say to Felicity, but they were trapped behind a wall of self doubt. Still so sure he would ruin her, and not in the good way, but in the way that would see those beautiful blue eyes flood with tears and that light-lifting smile dull to nothing.

He had done it to Laurel, or so she said. Why would this be any different?

He tossed and turned through the doubts, knowing that her room was just across the hall from his.

They were alone on the first floor, her parents in the master suite on the second floor and his family sequestered on the third floor.

They were alone...

The thoughts drove him from the bed, he needed to stare into the light of the fridge for 20 minutes in hopes it would distract him from his thoughts.

****

Felicity nestled deeper into the plush couch, the mink blanket tucked over her knees and sprawling down onto the floor. The gas fire silently glowed with warmth as the house sat eerily quiet and she read each word on the printed page, slowly, the temperate within her starting to rise;

*His hands touched her breast, circling it teasingly slow. Adison would give anything to feel his lips around her nipple, chasing it around his mouth as she had dreamed he would one day. The foreboding fabric of her shirt felt like fire against her enflamed skin as her eyes begged him to rip it from her. Her body was veiled in tiny beads of anticipation and she could feel his erection against the seam of her jeans.*

*Their skin hadn’t even touched and she was about to have the first orgasm of her life.*

Felicity gulped down the truth of those words as though someone had stolen them straight from her own thoughts. She had not yet experienced what Adison had, she wasn’t as completely naïve to the sensation as the Preacher’s daughter, but the end result was the same.

She was buried in the book, each word driving her deeper and deeper until she could feel the aching of her own breasts and the subtle but constant thump of the spot between her legs. For a moment she considered easing the ache, touching herself like….*like he might.*

Until she heard the creak of the stairs. She sunk down into the puffy pillows and peeked out over the blanket.

“Oliver?”

Startled by the voice of the person who had been occupying his mind, Oliver stumbled and tripped up the last stair, his hands helping him to narrowly avoid smashing his face into the ground.

“Oh, are you okay?” Felicity yelped as she went to stand up.

Oliver stood like a rocket, dead still and thankful that the dim light meant Felicity couldn’t see the fire engine red he had gone.

“I’m fine,” he coughed, embarrassed.

She settled back down into the couch and folded her bookmark into the page she had been reading. “What are you doing up?” he asked, casually walking over to where she sat.

“I couldn’t sleep so I decided to read for a little bit,” Felicity replied, shifting her body under the blanket to try and simmer the leftovers of her arousal between her legs.

“Another Lake Tryst saucy novel?” he smirked as he sat at her folded feet, just close enough to see the flushed swipe of colour across her porcelain cheeks.
Was it turning her on?
Was that the slight rose in her cheeks?

Felicity dropped her chin to her chest under the weight of his stare.
Could he tell she was turned on right now?
That she pictured him when she read this book?

“What’s this one about?” Oliver asked, shifting in his seat, his fingers absently tweaking her toe hidden under the soft mink.

“Uh, it’s call ‘Forbidden’,” Felicity replied, her fingers absently stroking the edge of the book, “Uh it’s about Adison who is the local minister’s daughter.”

“Who does she sleep with?” he smirked
He didn’t even realise his hand was still toying with her foot until she used it to flick his hand away with a smirk of her own.

“There is more to the story than that Oliver.”

“Who does she sleep with?”

“Who does she sleep with?” she relented.

“What’s his name?”
She let out a soft shy imagining how this was going to go down.

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Who does she sleep with?”

Oh god.

“Oliver,” she mumbled, refusing to look at him.

Oliver went to laugh at the clear joke she had made, except when she wouldn’t look at him he decided that maybe it wasn’t a joke. He plucked the book from her unsuspecting hands and flicked it open to where she had carefully put the bookmark.

His eyes skimmed the words and his breath froze in his throat, she was reading a very intimate scene where the protagonist was intimately showing the female protagonist where stimulating parts of her body could be found in an erotic portrayal of innocence lost. Oliver swallowed heavily.

Fuck.
This was what she was reading?
He was unequivocally turned on by it and he quickly placed a nearby pillow onto his lap, sure of what would soon happen.

Despite reading enough to know himself, he felt the urge to see just how much Felicity would tell him, what her eyes and maybe even her body would divulge.

“What were they doing in this part?” he asked as he handed back her book.

She didn’t even need to look at it to answer him, she had already read that page at least three times.

“Uh, he’s teaching her I suppose,” she shrugged, her eyes walking up his body with lingered, famished eyes.

“Teaching her what?”

Say the words Felicity.

His pants began to tighten.

“How to, uh, find pleasure,” she nervously replied as her fingers picked along the edge of the blanket, “she’s quite repressed.”

Do you know how to find pleasure? His brain was tormenting him, his erection giving him away just underneath that one pillow.

Fuck.
The light was swarming her, dancing over her curves and giving away her budded nipples, coiled tightly and tented under her thin cotton tee.

_Fuck._

He let his mind wander down her body when he caught a flash of her Russian nesting doll pyjamas. _Was she wearing underwear? Could he reach out and touch her there? Would she push him away? Or would she move closer? Would she lay her head down on a cushion as ask him to teach her what feels good? Could he kiss her through the cotton, smell her, maybe even taste her? Would she like it? Would she ask for more?_

The pole wedged between his thighs was becoming so painfully hard, could she tell?

Felicity watched raptured as she caught glimpses of the way he looked at her. _Was she imagining it?_ He shifted in his seat, hugging the pillow close to his lap, but giving away just enough....

_Was the bulge in his pants there before? Was he large? If he was inside her would the stretching feel amazing? He would be slow the first time, she was sure, but would he used his fingers, his tongue? Could she, like Adison orgasm by just his hands caressing her? If she asked to see, would he say yes?_

A soft whimper escaped her lips and she coughed quietly in an attempt to disguise it. This was too much. Her arousal was becoming painful, her panties becoming soaked. _Could he tell?_

Oliver breathed in, the smell was unmistakable and the glow under her skin was unmissable. She was equally as turned on as he was.

_Shit._

Felicity patted her cheeks, they were burning up like every other part of her body. She needed to leave... _she needed to..._ she stopped herself before she could think it, just in case the words slipped absently from her lips.

“I’m pretty tired now, I think I’ll go to bed,” she yawned, each move she made sending a jolt of pleasure to her aroused heat. _If she stayed a minute longer she might just ask him..._

“Uh, okay,” Oliver replied, his sadness tinged with relief because there was no way he could have gotten up first, not with the epically hard erection he was touting.

“Are you going to bed?”
He couldn’t. Not yet anyway.
“In a minute, I’m just going to get a drink,” he tried casually to answer. Felicity stood on unsteady legs, legs that felt like Jello underneath her. “Goodnight Oliver,” she squeaked, praying she wouldn’t crumble into a heap of orgasming-goo. “Goodnight Felicity,” Oliver cooed as he watched her almost run down the stairs to her first floor room, the one directly opposite his.

Ten minutes it took for his erection to go down. It would have been shorter if he could have taken
care of it, but he didn’t want to risk getting caught. He really didn’t need to add that to his most embarrassing moments.

When it finally subsided he crept quietly down the stairs and along the hallway. The night was silent, just the light dusting of wind against the window panes and the distant hum of air con.

He was almost tip toeing when he walked past her door. The noise was faint but it made him pause. So soft, so muted. Tiny little breathy....moans.

_Fuck._
_She was...in the room just opposite his._

His erection came back with a vengeance knowing that Felicity was doing _that_. It throbbed between his thighs and he could feel it leaking at just the image his mind had conjured up.

_Fuck._

It barely took him five minutes behind his locked door, thinking about her, to get rid of his erection this time.

And when sleep finally took him, it was with a broad smile plastered on his face.
Oliver smiled through the patio doors, his smile slightly hitched at one side, as he watched Felicity, hair piled on top of her head, oversized cat sweater pulled over her crossed knees, glasses slipping down the bridge of her nose and a pen flicking from one side of her mouth to the other, tapping away on a laptop perched on a makeshift table made from an outdoor cushion on the edge of the silver lounger that she had taken residence up on alongside the pool.

If it wasn’t for the stirring noise of people behind him Oliver would have been quite content standing there in his grey track pants and mismatched green hoodie just watching her for hours.

“Sleep well?” his mother asked, unsurprisingly made up for 9am.
Honestly, Oliver couldn’t remember a time he had seen her anything but Very well.
“Fine,” Oliver piped, trying to disguise the broad smile that plucked his lips when he allowed his mind to wander back to the night before.
That book.
Her face.
Those noises.
Sweet fuck.

He swallowed down the thoughts before they became much more of an arousal than he could hide in these pants.
The coffee machine made its whirling grind follow by the three short beeps to signal the coffee ready for consumption and Oliver almost jumped at the sound of it, hot footing it into the kitchen to fill two mugs he had already prepared.

He kissed his mother’s cheek as he sidled past her heading back towards the patio doors. He didn’t notice, but if he would have glanced back as he pushed down on the door handle with his elbow he would have seen a very knowing, very happy smile pass over his mother’s face.

And, if he was really observant, he would have known it was the same smile that she gave him all those years ago when he came back that Thursday morning after hopping the fence to talk with the new neighbour. The same smile she had when she heard him through the gate’s intercom bribing Felicity with ice cream dates not to tell his father what had happened to his car.

It was the smile a mother wore when she knew much more than she was willing to divulge.

“Coffee?” Oliver asked as he held out the mug with the extra sprinkling of sugar.
“Decaf?” she asked without looking away from the screen.
“Uhhh,” Oliver paused, debating whether he should lie or…
“I’m kidding,” she snorted as she pushed her glasses back up her nose and took the mug from him, holding it between mitted hands buried in the oversized sleeves of her sweater.

“What are you doing?” Oliver asked as he took up residence on the neighbouring lounger.
“Testing the neighbours firewall, it’s pitiful really,” Felicity laughed before she took a long drink of the fruity beverage.
Despite the season the sun had begun to warm up, though the chill in the air still packed a bite.
“Isn’t that, I don’t know,” he smiled, “a just a little bit illegal?”
Felicity laughed as she set her drink on the stone floor and flurried her fingers across the laptop keys.
“Are you going to tell on me Oliver?” she winked, looking away from the screen as she continued to type.
“Maybe,” he shrugged with a feigned purse of his lips.
“I know your secrets,” she hummed, adopting a low, gruff voice.

Oliver threw his hand up in surprise, “I have none.”
“Mhmm,” she hummed, “so I suppose it wasn’t fifteen year old you that asked me to hack into your high school to change your report?”
Oliver’s mouth gaped, he had forgotten that. His parents had threatened no ski trip to Aspen if he had anything ‘disappointing’ in his report and his maths grade definitely fell into that category. He had grovelled on the floor for near on ten minutes asking Felicity to “have a heart” until the wide-eyed pre-teen relented and gave him a new, modest grade, just enough to get him to Aspen.

“Yea I thought so,” she laughed.

Oliver clasped his hands in front of each other, his elbows poised on his knees and the worry of his next words playing heavily on his mind. But it needed to be said, she needed to hear it, even if it broke this wonderfully beautiful level they had found themselves on.

He took a drawn breath inwards, sucking are through pensive lips, before he finally spoke, “you’re going to get mad at me, but hear me out.”

Felicity glanced over at him and noted the trepidation written clearly across his face. She closed her laptop and tucked her legs up under herself, giving him her attention.
“Oh these talks always end up going well,” she sighed with a slight smile.
“Felicity,” Oliver started, “Chad isn’t a good guy.”
Felicity ran a finger slowly under the rim of her glasses, wiping a tired eye.
“I knew you had more to say yesterday,” she said softly.
“He’s not, he’s a guy that’s…”
“…only interested in one thing?” she interjected.
“That and using dubious ways to get it,” Oliver scathed.

“Do you have proof? Or is this all coming from a different place?” she asked cautiously, she didn’t believe Oliver would lie, but college was full of half-truths and misunderstandings.
“I have enough experience living in the same house as him, Felicity,” he soured.
“I get it Oliver, I do.”
“If you do then you need to stop…”
“…but,” she continued, her hand laying calmly on his leg as she leaned across to him, “I am asking you, as your friend, to stop.”
“Felicity,” he gritted, exacerbated.
“Oliver, I don’t expect you to be happy about this, I know that you wouldn’t be if it was Thea and you didn’t like the guy,” Felicity started.
Oliver opened his mouth to retort her words.

This wasn’t about not liking anyone this was about Chad.

“Please, let me finish,” she pleaded, squeezing his knee, “I’m not asking you to get behind this but I am asking you to let me decide that for myself.”
She sat back, her hand dropping off his leg, making Oliver miss it almost instantly.

“I know that I made a huge mistake getting that drunk on Halloween and I am eternally thankful that Barry had the sense to call you and that you came,” she remarked.
“I wouldn’t have needed to if he wasn’t plying you with alcohol,” Oliver scoffed.
“No one forced me to drink Oliver, you have to understand that I make my own choices, good ones, poor ones, but they are mine to make.”

“Not him, Felicity,” he sighed, dragging her name with a long exhale.
God, she loved the way he said her name, like he could make it last minutes if she asked him to.
But it wasn’t the time for those day dreams, they were for quiet moments in a large, empty bed.

“I don’t know why no one will be good enough,” she said, barely above a whisper
“Not him.”
Why can’t she get that?
“This isn’t about him,” she spoke, her chin lifting and her eyes slightly hooded, tired.

“Yes it is,” he argued.
“No, its not. It’s about me, asking you, to stop,” she raked an agitated hand over her scalp, “Please Oliver. I need you to trust me, that I might have a good head on my shoulders, and that even if I make a mistake that it’s my mistake to learn from.”

She shifted forward, her hands now both resting on his clasped, together in front of him. She
wasn’t mad, not this time, but if this friendship was what he wanted, Felicity needed him to stop.

“You made mistakes didn’t you?”
“Plenty,” he acknowledged as his thumb stoked the side of her hand, neither of noticing the gesture.
“And maybe you’re a little wiser for them?”
“Not him,” he repeated, his voice strained and rasped.

“Please Oliver, don’t drive this between us.”
*Not when this balance is so fragile.*
“He’s not a good guy,” Oliver gritted.
“Maybe you’re right, maybe he’s not, but let me find that out. Trust *me* that I know how to protect myself.”

It wasn’t that Felicity particularly cared for Chad, she didn’t. Sure he was ‘nice enough’ to her and maybe she would see him again, maybe she wouldn’t...that wasn’t the point. The point was she needed to feel free enough to trust her own instincts, to make her own decisions.

“I don’t want to see you hurt.”
Before either of them realised it they were holding hands.
“I know,” she sighed, offering him a kindly smile.

*I know.*

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**[23 December 2006]**

It was crazy how the last month had flown by. The pair of them had reached some form of Chad-truce and while Oliver was none-too happy about it, he wouldn’t risk pushing her away so that if, *god forbid,* she ever needed him, that she wouldn’t be too weary of an ‘I told you so’ to ask.

So that’s where it stood, balanced on a knife’s edge. Felicity didn’t mention him and Oliver didn’t ask – at least not directly.

She had once again missed Thursday night dinner in December, but Oliver had been less demanding of an explanation when it took her two minutes of sneezing and coughing to explain that she had developed a cold, thanks in part to her roommate’s insistence on keeping the aircon on 68° regardless of the frigid temperature. It had taken him less than 40 minutes to show up at her door with a thermos of chicken soup and a DVD of one of her favourite childhood movies, Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang.

The night had seen them imitating British accents and deciding that the movie was way creepier than they remembered it as they sat together on the tiny bed watching it on Felicity’s laptop until she fell asleep with toilet paper up her nose and making the little snore that Oliver unequivocally adored.

The rest of the year had gone like a bullet train until, finally, all said and done, they had reached the end of the year and were in the process of driving home in their separate cars.

Felicity had decided to take a short detour to drop off a late Hanukkah gift for Jonas and Oliver had, without hesitation, decided to join her on the pit stop.

“Come on, it’s adorable” Felicity gushed as she held up the bumble bee costume.
“He’s a boy, other dogs are doing to make fun of him,” Oliver joked.
“Nonsense,” she pouted as she handed the costume to Oliver, “you hold it so the other dogs don’t get jealous.”
“I don’t think that’s going to be a problem,” he laughed eyeing up the costume in close detail, “it’s glittery.”
He shook his head in dismay.
“Well I won’t bother buying you the matching one then will I?” she smirked as she stopped at the first kennel talk to an Alsatian, who immediately started beating his tail against the ground in joy.
“Hi, Spartan,” she said, leaning over to read the name written on his kennel, “I see John has been naming the animals again,” she laughed.
“You’re new and you’re very handsome, yes you are,” she cooed as the dog lapped up the attention, spinning circles in his run.

“So, I was thinking,” Oliver started as Felicity, perched on the balls of her feet, looked up to watch him, “Thea wants a dog for Christmas.”
“And you want me to help convince your parents?” Felicity asked as she stood from the first kennel and made her way to the next.
“Actually,” Oliver nodded proudly, “I’ve already managed to do that.”

Felicity crouched in front of Roscoe the terrier’s cage and spoke gibberish as he licked her hand affectionately.
“Well that’s great Oliver,” she smiled, as she glanced up at him, her blue eyes so reflective in this light, “she’s going to love a puppy.”
“That was one of the conditions,” explained Oliver, “no puppy, they need to be trained. I was thinking maybe one of the dogs from here,” he finished, looking around the kennel.

“Ahh so you want me to help find a nice one?” she asked exuberantly, as she stood from the door and dusted her black jeans.
The jeans that Oliver found it almost impossible to tear his eyes away from.

“Mac here is good, he’s fully trained and won’t grow much more but he’s still young enough to keep Thea on her toes,” Felicity spoke, her eyes dancing with so much enthusiasm that Oliver couldn’t help but match her smile with his own.

Oliver idly drew a finger across his lower lip, a move which when Felicity caught it, made her imagine how that would feel under the print of her own finger.

She made a mental note to find an excuse to do that one day....

“No,” he hummed, dropping his finger from his lip, “less furry.”
Felicity laughed joyously before she nodded and bounced to the next kennel.
“Okay, short haired it is,” she piped, “Josie is lovely, kind nature, loves kids, she’d be perfect,” she continued, crouching down in front of the Greyhound cross.
“I was thinking a boy,” Oliver replied, sliding his feet along the concrete floor towards the end of the row.
“Um, well...” Felicity considered as she stood him and let her eyes rove across the dogs left.

“Felicity?” Oliver said, scooting further down the run.
“Mm?” she hummed absently.
“How about Jonas?”
Oliver slid one more foot before he was stood at Jonas’ cage with a smile that started at his lips, rose through his cheeks and blossomed into his eyes.
That was a smile.
“What? No, she wouldn’t want him,” she squeaked unintentionally, before pinching her lips closed. “She would, he's perfect.” 
Felicity could feel her hands trembling and her heart thumping, which she realised was ridiculous, but the idea of Jonas having a fire to sit by in the winter and a bed to curl up on for lazy Sundays was a recurring dream she had had for years.

She had done as much as she could, even trying to crochet that disastrous blanket for him a year back, but nothing could compare to having a family of his own, and the Queen house was like hitting the dog lottery.

“Oliver, I...” she struggled for words, tears building behind her eyes. “You can visit him anytime you want,” Oliver grinned.

Felicity brushed back a tear, “but what if she doesn’t like him?”

Oliver wrapped his arm instinctively and consolingly around her shoulder. “She likes you and you like him.”

Felicity choked back more tears, looking up at Oliver with a concoction of emotions. “Really Oliver?” she stammered, “because you can’t joke about this!” “I’m not, he’s perfect.” Oliver chuckled, watching enamoured as she frantically pushed away tears.

“Swear you’re not lying,” she warned, stretching up on her tippy ties to stare directly into his eyes. “I’m not lying.”

She shrieked happily as she threw her arms around his neck and leapt into his arms, his quick reflexes strapping his arms around her to hold her there.

“Oliver Queen you big dumb tree, I love you,” she cried, “for this, I mean,” she added blushing across her cheeks.

“I knew that” he winked, his hands cupping her waist like it was the most natural thing in the world. “Because for Jonas, this is good for him, that’s why,” she continued, her eyes sinking into his as her teeth nipped her lower lip.

Oliver watched it closer than he’d watched almost anything else in his life. The line of pinprick dots that peppered her lip, the way her tongue would soothe over them afterwards, what he wouldn’t give to have that be his tongue...

As if realising she was wrapped around him like a koala, she slowly unravelled her legs and shimmied down, stepping back as soon as her feet touch the floor. She smiled as she brushed her palms down his chest, straightening the shoulder seams of his tee.

“I’ll um, get the adoption papers ready,” she trilled. “Yea, okay, good,” Oliver crooned. “So I’ll just go...”

Her words trailed off as her lips curved into a smile. “Uuh,” Oliver dazed, still caught up in thoughts of her lips. “Oliver?” “Yea?” “You’re still holding me,” she said as her fingers drew lines up over his wrists, his hands still anchored at her waist. “Oh right, sorry,” he said a little flustered as he pulled his hands back.

“Thank you Oliver,” she smiled kindly, “this means the world to me....” she paused, “him,” she
"I don’t get the joke," Thea said dryly as she pulled out a bumblebee costume and stared across the day lounge at Oliver who was in fits of laughter.

"Technically, that’s Felicity’s present," he laughed, his words stunted as he tried to control himself, only to see the complete lack of amusement on his sister face which set him off again.

"Why did Felicity buy me a tiny costume?" Thea spoke with squinted eyes and furrowed lips. "It’s not for you," Oliver spoke, his laugh just a chuckle now as he stood and beckoned her to follow.

"Are you on drugs?" Thea asked as she followed him through the foyer towards the front door, both parents standing back a few steps to watch, "Mom, Oliver is on drugs."

Oliver smiled as he ruffled her hair and she batted him away.

"Merry Christmas Thea."

He opened the door to Felicity who was sitting on the porch with an excited Jonas in her arms.

"Is that," Thea stammered, "Am I? Is it…"

Felicity let Jonas go and he bounded happily to Thea who crouched down to meet him.

With her lip snagged anxiously between her teeth, terrified that Thea would reject him, Felicity looked over at Oliver.

"His name is Jonas and Felicity has looked after him for years, he can do anything…"

"He’s perfect," Thea exclaimed as she let him cover her face in a flurry of licks.

"But if he’s not, I can take him back…" Felicity started.

"No," Thea interrupted, "I love him, but why does he have the same name as your middle name?"

"Coincidence," Oliver smiled, looking over at Felicity he looked away.

"Hmm" Thea shrugged, "well it does suit him."

She stood up and hugged Felicity, "thank you."

"It was all Oliver’s idea," Felicity replied.

Thea turned her attention to Oliver and flung her arms around his waist, burying her head against his broad chest.

"Thanks Summer," she laughed before she ran over to her parents, Jonas hot on her heels.

"Summer?" Felicity laughed.

"Don’t ask."

"If there are any problems with him, just let me know but he’s already taken a shining to her so that’s good," Felicity said, her chest heaving with emotion.

"Do you want to stay? We could watch a movie or…” his voice trailed off.

Or, I could kiss you because I really want to.

"I can’t, I’m so sorry, my mom booked this cabin in the woods thing for a few days so I kinda promised I would go,” she chuckled, it was another one of her mother’s ludicrous ideas, but it wouldn’t be the end of the year without it.

“A cabin?”

“I know, she thinks dad and I need a break from technology, I think she saw something on Oprah that has her all worked up. So I should go pack, I’m going to need a lot of books.”
“Wait, I have something for you.”
He left her on the doorstep with a confused smile as he disappeared into the day lounge and came back less than a minute later holding a shoe box size gift.
“What is this?” she asked as she took the silver box from his hand and started down at the green ribbon tied in a bow around it.
“Open it and find out,” he laughed.

Darting her eyes between him and the box she tugged the bow undone and lifted the lid, almost terrified that something might jump out at her. But nothing did, and when she removed the lid completely a soft toy of a black dog with a tan muzzle and three legs was smiling up at her.

She laughed jubilantly as she freed him from the tissue paper and brought him close to her face.
“Where did you find this?” she cried.
“I had him made, I thought you could keep him at home with you, no allergies.”
“Oh he is coming to college with me,” she squeaked.
“I’m glad you like him.”
“I love him.”
She smiled as she stretched up and kissed his cheek and in that moment it took everything Oliver possessed not to turn his head so her lips would be against his instead.

“Okay, my present seems way less cute next to this, buuuuuut…” she smiled as she rummaged through her bag on the doorstep to pull out a little white box, “I didn’t have any ribbon so I kinda just drew a bow on there,” she laughed as she pointed to a red and green marker drawing of a bow.

“You should change your major to fine arts,” he smirked as he opened the lid of the box, “a mug?” he quizzed as he found himself looking at a middle of a plain white mug.
“Pull it out silly,” she mocked, instinctively clutching BabyJonas to her chest

Oliver did as instructed and pulled the mug free from its paper casing, he turned it in his hand and stopped when he saw the front.
I Know People it read in black typeface, a mafia-esque hat sitting just above the words.

“What is this?” he laughed.
“For when you conduct your clandestine mafia meetings,” she spoke seriously before her lips cracked a smile, “it’s super corny I know, there is a place in the mall that makes them and I couldn’t help myself.”
“This is by far the best Christmas present I have ever been given.”
“Didn’t you get your car as a Christmas present?”

Oliver shrugged nonchalantly, “still, this is better.”
“Well, you’re welcome. Thank you for BabyJonas.”

The air between them fell silent as they both hung on words they had considered saying, but neither could, neither would.

“When will you be back from your cabin in the woods?” Oliver finally spoke.
“About the twenty-ninth, but I’m heading back to school straight after,” she said, somewhat hesitantly – she knew what was coming.
First, Why?
“Why?” he asked.
She smiled.
“I’m moving from the dorms actually, the Sorority has offered me a bed, it’s a shared room, but it’s much bigger than the dorm.”
He’ll offer to help.
“That’s great, I can come down and help.”

She blew out a soft chuckle.
“No, it’s fine, Barry is going to help me,” she replied.
“No offence to Barry, but you had some pretty heavy boxes last time.”
“It’s fine, really.”
He’s going to keep asking.

“Felicity, it’s not a problem, I can drive down and…”
Oh god.
“Chad is helping,” she blurted.
She didn’t mean for it to come out like word vomit, but she knew Oliver would have never let this go.
“Oh.”
That was all he was going to say?
“It’s just that he’ll already be down there and one of his friends is dating a girl in my Sorority so he knew, and just…”
“You don’t need to explain it to me Felicity, I get it.”

She knew that was a boldface lie, the twisted lines around his mouth were a fairly good indication that Oliver Queen most certainly did not get it.

“I’ll be back up for your parents’ New Year’s party,” she offered apologetically.
“Great, good, Jonas will be excited to see you then,” Oliver replied, holding back the barrage of reasons why Chad was an asshole from the mental list that he would occasionally add to at night when he found himself thinking about Felicity.

But not you? You won’t be excited to see me?
Felicity shook the thought from her head. It was pointless to dwell on it. She would have hours in a cabin to dwell on it.

He smiled, just briefly, but she’d take it.
“Bye Felicity, and thank you,” he spoke as he raised the mug and winked, “have a safe trip.”

[31 December 2006]

It was near on 8pm when Oliver opened the door to Felicity’s parents with her tucked in behind them.

“Mr Kuttler, future Mrs Kuttler,” Oliver smiled as he gestured them inside, strangely reminiscent for Felicity to the first time she had been at one of these events.

Only this time instead of tweed two piece outfit she was dressed in fuchsia draped silk chiffon hidden underneath her winter coat. She stepped into the foyer, her panda flats now replaced with classic nude stilettos. Even after all these years, the Queen foyer decorated in charming little touches, still made her eyes widen with awe.

“You look...” Oliver started, his breath fanning across her cheek as he stepped closer behind her,
“can I take your coat?”
She smiled softly as she threaded out the buttons and shuffled it from her shoulders. Oliver slipped it gently from her arms, his thumbs trailing down her arms, skin to skin.

The coat came free in his arms and as he draped it over his arm, intent of putting it somewhere safe, she turned around, a halo a blonde hair skimming against his black Armani jacket.

_Shit._
He swallowed the exclamation but he couldn’t hide it in his eyes. When he saw her in the gold dress he thought he’d seen her as beautiful as she could possibly get, but he was wrong. She was ethereal, like someone had plucked her from the pages of Greek mythology and deposited her in the foyer of his parents’ house.

Golden hair like silk ran smoothly down her back with the front pinned up. Blue eyes lined in smoky greys and lips painted in a stain that was teasingly similar to her nipples.

“You okay?” she asked when it had been over thirty seconds of silence since she’d asked him how his day had been.
“Uh, fine,” he nodded in slow bobs.
“Oh, good,” she chuckled, those glorious lips staying parted to tempt him.

_Fuck._
He could imagine thumbing that luscious lower lip, dragging it open. _Would she enjoy that? Would she cheekily suck the tip of his thumb?_ _Fuck._

“No Chad?” he asked, instantly hating himself for even mentioning him.
Felicity's lips pursed closed and her brows pinched inward for just a second.
“He's with family,” she replied hesitantly, completely stumbled by Oliver's question.
“Trolls have families?” Barry quipped as he slunk in through the open door.

Oliver's head snapped towards him, he hadn’t even noticed Barry standing there.
_How long had he been there?_ “Your mom said it was okay for Barry to come,” Felicity explained as she watched Oliver eye him up suspiciously.
“That walking radiator brain...”
“Barry, that’s enough, thanks,” Felicity huffed
She didn’t need Oliver knowing that Barry was also bothered by Chad being anywhere near her.
The last thing she felt like dealing with tonight was a tag team of reasons why she needed to tell him to take a hike.

Oliver smiled at Barry who offered a pleasant shrug in response.
“So you and dipshit are dating?” Oliver asked, finding a certain level of pleasure in his decision to use anything _but_ his name from now on.
“No,” she flippantly remarked, “It’s casual, whatever that means.”
Those had been Chad's words, not hers, she wasn’t entirely sure where that put them, but he had given her a surprise kiss right after. It hadn’t exactly been memorable or expected and she was still trying to decide how she felt about his rough lips sinking against hers in a slobbery flurry. But, Oliver didn’t need to know that either.

“It means he wants to hook up with random girls and not get in trouble for it, that’s what that means,” Tommy interjected as he floated into the foyer, trailing Camila along behind them.

Felicity looked around at the three set of ‘big brother’s eyes and let out an exacerbated sigh, “so
“you are all against this?”

*Stupid question.*

“Yes,” Barry nodded.

“Absolutely,” Tommy seconded.

She looked over at Oliver, her eyes begging for something she knew she wouldn’t get.

“You know how I feel,” he gritted his teeth, holding back so much more.

Felicity looked across at the only set of female eyes, she didn’t know them, but maybe there was something in the girl code?

“I’m abstaining because I don’t really know what you’re talking about,” Camila shrugged apologetically.

“Felicity’s boyfriend, I mean casual date partner wants to hook up with other girls,” Tommy explained as he took Camila's coat and folded it over Felicity's one still on Oliver's arm.

“Really? You’re okay with this?” Camila asked, her big brown eyes wide with surprise.

“Can we not talk about this please?” Felicity pleaded, unprepared to go another round of *Who wants to Decide her Life.*

“Fine, drink?” Oliver asked.

As much as he would have liked to continue this barrage of Chad-hate, he didn’t want it to come at the expense of enjoying her company.

A week without her had felt like a lifetime.

“Soda is fine,” Felicity replied, thankful that he didn’t go ‘dog with a bone’ on this.

Oliver pushed the two coats he was holding into Barry's chest.

“Coat closet is second door down the hall,” he instructed.

Barry looked down at his new acquired task and shrugged softly, at least this time Oliver didn’t look like he wanted to punch him square in the face, he’d take it.

Felicity watched the group scatter before she walked towards the backyard.

“Sorry about that,” she smiled towards Camila, “we can meet the boys out the back,” she paused, considering whether she had met the stunning date Tommy had brought.

“Yes, we’ve met.” Camila laughed, sensing the question on the tip of Felicity’s tongue, “but you probably don’t remember, I washed your hair in the shower.”

Felicity instinctively ran a hair through her locks and blushed a heavy shade of pink that rivalled her dress.

“Oh, you were ones of Tommy’s girls?” Felicity spoke, awkwardly smiling

“One?” Camila quizzed with a raised brow

“Oh I just mean, um...”

*Foot, meet mouth.*

Camila laughed genuinely, the type of laugh that could almost immediately defuse a socially awkward moment.

“It’s fine, I’m messing with you, I was one but I’m working towards being the only one,” she smiled coyly.

“Well, it’s nice to meet you sober and I owe you a world of gratitude,” Felicity praised.

“Honestly, I’m surprised you and Oliver aren’t together,” she remarked, “I hope that wasn’t too forward of me, I can be a little blunt.”

“Oh, that’s fine,” Felicity chuckled, blunt was a characteristic she could appreciate, “but Oliver and I aren’t like that.”
The pretty brunette with shimmering caramel skin smiled as she shrugged in her black party dress that looked like it would put Kate Moss to shame.

“Have you told him how you feel?” she asked

Felicity choked back a gape, folding her lips over themselves before a burst of air pushed through.

“I don’t, uh, understand,” she replied, scratching a finger along her hairline.

“I just mean after you kissed him and all. I’m surprised you guys didn’t talk about that…”

“Wait, what?” Felicity’s eyes widened, “I kissed him?”

“You really don’t remember? In the bathtub, all wet, a few seconds before you threw up…nothing?”

Felicity walked a finger across her lip.

It hadn’t just been a dream.

“You told me afterwards that you loved him, ‘good and proper’.”

Felicity pinched her brow together.

“It was probably just the beer talking,” she replied, fidgeting with a ring on her finger.

Camila nodded slowly, realising she had probably already lay too much at Felicity’s feet.

“I’m sorry, none of that is my business,” she spoke softly.

“It’s fine, I just, I don’t really remember saying that,” Felicity sighed.

Not that it wasn’t true.

“Seeing as I’ve already probably put my foot in it, if I could just say one more thing?” Camila queried.

“Sure,” Felicity said with a soft bob of her head.

“Don’t hide behind words that you don’t say while you still have the opportunity to say them. That’s all,” she spoke kindly, finishing her words just as the guys approached, drinks in hand.

There were a lot of words Felicity had thought about saying, but the problem was once they were said they couldn’t be taken back.

Because even when you say ‘Sorry’ after you kiss someone, it doesn’t erase that kiss.

If she finally could make sense of the thoughts that were floating through her head and put them into coherent English, there would be no amount of sorry that would erase it; everything would change.

This time Felicity didn’t want change.

Not when status quo meant she had Oliver in her life.

[11:10pm]

Felicity had been quietly nursing the soda gripped in her hand for longer than necessary, but every time Oliver would look over at her, appearing on the cusp of saying something, she would take a slow, painfully slow, sip and he would squint his brow as he waited uncomfortable seconds until she finished – which she never did (because she would just let the drink lap against her lips without actually swallowing any) – until he gave up and would turn back to another conversation.

And that had pretty much been the last 3 plus hours of her life. Awkwardly avoiding having a conversation with Oliver, because that was who she was now.
She sighed audibly, catching Oliver’s attention before she put the glass up to her lips and did exactly the same thing as she had done every other time. Only this time Oliver wasn’t plucking his brows and he wasn’t looking away.

*Oh god, how long can we keep this up?*

“Felicity is everything alright?” he asked touching her shoulder and keeping the soft words just between them.

Glass still pressed to her lips she nodded.

“Because it seems like you’re avoiding talking to me.”

The soda was tickling her nose, but she wasn’t going to move it as she shook her head from slowly from side to side.

“You know I can tell you’re not actually swallowing anything right?”

He pointed to her throat.

*How the fuck was he so observant now?*

She swallowed before she peeled back the cup and looked sheepishly at him.

“Um,” was all she managed before Thea grabbed their arms

“Guys, Jonas has gone down into the cellar and he’s really scared and he won’t come out, can you help?”

Without question, Oliver and Felicity followed Thea down through the house where only a little of the party could be heard.

“He was just in there,” Thea said, pointing down the staircase to the windowless tasting room.

Felicity followed Oliver down the stairs into one of the few rooms she realised she had never really had an opportunity to be in. The Queens kept the area well stocked and mostly out of bounds to anyone under the age of 21, herself included.

Her eyes scanned the warmly lit room but she didn’t see Jonas anywhere.

“Never mind, found him, he’s fine now” Thea called from up the top of the stairs, a drooling and content Jonas in her arms.

Oliver reached the second step before Thea closed the door with a thud.

“Sorry the wind blew the door closed...”

Oliver rolled his eyes as he trekked slowly up the remaining ten stairs and reached the door. He twisted the handle but it wouldn’t budge.

“Thea, what’s wrong with the door?” he called through the heavy wood.

“I don’t know, it won’t budge” she called back.

“Everything alright?” Felicity asked from the bottom of the staircase.

“The door is stuck,” Oliver said over his shoulder.

“I’m going to go get some help,” Thea called.

“Thea!” Oliver yelled as he tugged relentlessly on the door.

“You don’t think...” Felicity trailed off.

Oliver looked at her then back at the door.

*He did think.*

“Thea!” he banged out her name.

“I don’t think she’s coming back,” Felicity sighed as she noticed the tray of food set up on the long redwood table.

“She is not very subtle is she?” Felicity laughed as she fed a Ritz cracker through her lips.

“Nope,” Oliver sighed as he pulled out one of the chairs and flopped into it, “she definitely isn’t.”
“So who’s going to tell her?” Felicity pondered as she floated around the room, sliding her shoes against the slate tiles.
“Tell her what?” Oliver asked before he toed off his shoes and stretched his long legs.
“That whatever she thinks might happen,” she started, slapping her palms against his shoulder as she slunk in behind him, “isn’t, going to happen.”

Oliver bobbed his head pensively, more to acknowledge her words rather than agree with them.
“Because that’s what we decided right?” she pushed as she dropped her chin to his shoulder, her lips dangerously close to his cheek.

What kind of game was she playing at? Did she even know what this was doing to him?

Suddenly the air felt strangled and hot and Oliver slipped from the chair, flushed and bothered.
“You okay?” Felicity asked.
“Small spaces,” he shrugged, it wasn’t true and he was fairly certain she knew that – as well as the fact his parent’s wine cellar would hardly be classed as small, but she smiled kindly and didn’t ask anything further about it.

“At least she left us food,” Felicity chuckled as her eyes skimmed over the array of canapes, fruits and crackers.
“And we shouldn’t get thirsty,” Oliver added nodding towards the wall of wine.
“Oh I better not, underage you know,” Felicity winked, “I know this guy called Oliver who would be very disappointed in me.”
“It’s New Year’s Eve he’d probably let it slide.”
“Do you think so?” Felicity smirked as she began making a nest of pillows on the floor.
“Sure, if he trusted the guy you were with,” Oliver replied, setting down two champagne flutes beside the platter of food before padding across the room to the wall of choices.

“Red?” he asked, watching as Felicity busied herself with her next project despite there being more than enough comfortable chairs.
In all these years, she hadn’t changed that much, still preferring to sit on the floor over the strict ordinance of a chair.
“Nope, something pinker,” came her response as she proudly looked down at every pillow in the room made into a nest with the platter of food now on the floor beside it.

He smiled, plugging his finger into the air as he stepped over the nest and back towards the chiller. His wine knowledge was limited to what he overheard in fancy dinner conversations, but he knew enough to know the perfect wine.

He popped the cork on the Charles Heidsieck, Brut Rosé circa 1999. It certainly wasn’t the most expensive, oldest or fanciest in his parents’ collection; but that was never what mattered to Felicity, of that much he was certain.

Once he had poured two glasses he said down opposite a now barefoot Felicity in the nest that she had so carefully built.

“To being locked in a really nice wine cellar with an exceptional friend,” she smiled as she raised the glass.
Oliver clinked her glass then watched as her lips framed around the edge of the glass and she took a sip.

He found his mind wandering, thinking about how slowly he would peel that dress from her body. Would she laugh? Giggle? Blush? Would she snap that lip between her teeth and let her eyes do all the talking?
To friends.

He swallowed the images. They weren’t for him.

“So, how is school?” Felicity asked, it was probably the lamest question besides talking about the weather, but she needed to say something, anything, because her mind was a fog of tantric ideas of where she might like to ask Oliver to drink this champagne from.

Her breasts were the obvious choice, she would pour it and he would lap it up. Or pooled at the small of her back, he would be so close to her intimate area down there…

Fuck.

She took another sip and tried to banish the thoughts from her brain.

That wasn’t going to happen, they weren’t in some regency romance novel and Felicity needed to make her peace with that. Dirty dreams and all.

“It’s going well, I’m trying to make this one stick, you know?” Oliver replied slowly, carefully considering each word in case something he wasn’t planning on vocalising came out – something like asking Felicity if she enjoyed *that* book.

“That’s great Oliver,” she smiled in reply, glancing up just briefly to catch the way his eyes seemed to be staring at her, “I’m proud of you.”

She took another sip before she shook her head softly.

“Not that you need me to be proud,” she corrected, her voice a soft babble, “I’m just, uh, that’s great…for you.”

She folded her lips closed.

“Thank you,” he replied, taking every word in with a cracked smile verging on a laugh

“You’re welcome,” she laughed, “but, hey, if you ever need a study buddy.”

She bowed her head and offered him a quick shrug.

*She was there if he needed it.*

“Careful or I’ll take up your vacation time making you help me study economics as they relate to demographics,” Oliver winked, stretching out his legs so the skimmed past her waist.

“Only if you’re flying to Central City to do it,” she smiled as she watched the confusion roll across his face.

She hadn’t actually had a chance to tell him yet.

“And on that note, I’m spending vacation in Central City,” she chuckled softly as she found herself leaning into his legs, an arm slouched over them.

“You are?”

“One of dad’s old work friends had this holiday internship available at his company, they want to run some security protocol software through a development stage and they asked if he knew anyone that might be able to test it for them. He asked me and I jumped at the opportunity, it’s a worldwide leading edge technology firm so it could be really good for me you know…” her voice trailed off, half expecting Oliver to react with the same ‘couldn’t care less’ attitude that Chad had shown.

“That’s awesome,” he replied, his face brightening, “I have no idea what most of what you said means, but I’m happy for you.”

Felicity let the soft exhale of relief pass over her lips. She should have known better than to think Oliver would be anything but excited for her.

“Barry actually has family there, so they’ve offered me somewhere to stay.”

“Good, that’s good,” Oliver nodded.

“Oh God, Barry,” Felicity snorted as she looked up at the ceiling, “he’s going to assume I’ve just
ditched him.”
“I’m sure he’ll be fine, I know at least two very rich older guys who would have spotted him a mile
away.”

Felicity pinched the underside of Oliver’s leg through his suit trousers as she shot him a pseudo-
appalled look.
“Anyway, aren’t you going to France with your family?” she asked, holding out the empty glass for
a refill
“I hadn’t decided on whether I was going or not,” Oliver replied as he carefully filled her glass to
just above the centre line.

The truth was, Oliver had considered staying home to spend time with Felicity – he just felt like
everything was new and exciting and good when he was in her company. She made the sun shine a
little brighter and after years of grey clouds, he needed that.

“Oh well, you should go,” she encouraged
“Yea, we’ll see.”

“So,” she sighed as she looked up at the clock, 11:50pm.
Forty minutes had felt like five.
“I kissed you,” she continued, the one glass of wine giving her a little extra courage to say what had
been sitting on the edge of her tongue all night, “and you didn’t say anything.”

She watched as Oliver shifted nervously before he peeled off his jacket and laid it carefully behind
him.
“You were drunk and I didn’t think you needed to suffer more by me bringing it up,” he finally
replied, his eyes fixated on hers even though he knew he should look away right now, that his eyes
may say too much.

“I’m so sorry for that Oliver. God, I was such a mess,” she said, embarrassed, as she stroked a
finger across her brow, her skin feeling flush from either the wine or the heat radiating from his
eyes.
“You never need to say sorry,” he smiled as he looked away, “that’s my job right?”
He regretted it the instant he saw the tiny twitch of pain at the corner of her lips.
“Too soon?” he winced.
“No, I get it,” she started softly, her finger running the rim of her glass, “I was mad at you for so
long but I understand it now. We were caught in a moment, it wasn’t anything more than that.”

She swallowed the lump that was building in her throat.
“Life isn’t about moments set aside from realities.”
Even when we wish those moments could be part of our reality.

Oliver thought about disagreeing with almost everything she had said, but he could still see the
pain threaded around the blue of her eyes – they dimmed just a little – and he didn’t want to see
them dim any more, not for him.

“You kiss me and regret it, I kiss you and don’t remember it,” she chuckled softly, “it seems like
you and I have a terrible track record.”
“At least you threw up after you kissed me,” he offered with a hefty laugh.

“Well I mean there was that one time, at a party just like this,” she reminisced, as she tucked her
legs under her body, scooting her just a little closer to him, “you wished me a happy New Year
and…” her voice trailed off as she looked down, feathering fingers across the soft fabric of her
dress.

She felt foolish, but she was blushing at the memory of a kiss that had been so long ago now.
“You remember that?” he asked quietly, instinctively moving himself a little closer to her until her
knees touched his hands and their faces were close enough to feel the breaths passed between them.

“A girl doesn’t forget when her cute neighbour gives her first kiss even if it was just…” she
started.
“...on the cheek,” he finished.

Her eyes lidded and her lips quivered, _he remembered._

Oliver wasn’t sure if it was the moment or the wine talking; and if he would have said the same
thing in another time and place, but here and now there was only one thing he wanted to do.

“I’m sure if we wanted to, we could kiss better,” he breathed, skating his tongue lightly across his
bottom lip, imagining what it would be like to taste her lips again and to not be sorry, because he
wouldn’t ever fucking be sorry again.

Felicity hitched a brow, watching his expression and expecting him to laugh any moment, but it
never came. _Had she imagined it? Had he just suggested…_

She blinked down, her lips falling open with questions she would never ask.

His thumb caught her, skimming across the remnant of gloss that still remained there. His fingers
cupped her chin and she willed herself to wake up.

This was a dream, a wickedly beautiful dream, but just a dream.
“At midnight,” he tip her chin towards him, they were so close now that they shared the same
breath.

“Ten, Nine..”
They could hear the chanting.

Her hands were anchored to the floor, she was sure she was trembling.

“Eight, Seven…”
His hand was at her waist, his thumb smoothing across the soft fabric, wondering if it might tear in
his hands.

“Six, Five…”
She closed her eyes to steady her heart.

“Four, Three…”
He kept his open just enough.

“Two…”
The door cracked open and footsteps crashed down the stairs.

Felicity scooted backwards, breaking through the wall of her nest just as Tommy and Camila
appeared at the bottom of the staircase, wrapped up in each other.

“One.”
The noise engulfed the house and fireworks went off in the background as the four sets of eyes
looked around startled.
“What the hell are you guys doing in here?” Tommy laughed, his cheeks flushed with the sign he had happily partook from the open bar, “what was with all the pennies stuck in the doorframe?”

Camila looked first at Felicity then at Oliver, before they returned to Felicity.
“Tommy, let’s go,” she urged pulling him up the first step.
“It’s okay, Oliver will share his parent’s hoard, won’t you my man?”
“Upstairs now,” Camila ordered.
Tommy grimaced before he hurried up the stairs behind her.

“We could still…” Oliver whispered in the space that had opened up between them
Felicity stood, plucking her shoes between her fingers. She just needed to leave.

She headed towards the stairs with nothing more than an apologetic drop of her shoulders.
“Felicity, wait,” Oliver pleaded catching her arm as she floated by.

“Can we just…” she took a sharp breath in before she blew it slow out, “can we just not do this, not tonight Oliver. This thing that we do, I can’t.”
The tears formed behind her eyes, glassing them over almost immediately.

Kissing Oliver Queen would have been a mistake.
Because, like everything else, it wouldn’t have been real; or at least that is what she thought.

He would be sorry again and for the love of what little strength she had left, she couldn’t hear him be sorry again.

She couldn’t see him regret and rethink and realise the mistake.
Because he would.
And she would be crushed all over again.
_and she couldn’t.
_Not tonight.

I can’t.
That was what he saw as her eyes filled with unshed tears.
The smile had dropped, though she tried her hardest to keep the slight flicker of one there.

“What we have is good,” she whispered, “please, just let it be.”
Maybe, for all she knew, he wouldn’t have regretted it. They would have kissed and touched each other softly, he would have caressed her face and her fingers would have held him by the collar of his shirt.

Maybe it would have been everything she wanted it to be.
But…
If it wasn’t, and she saw that regret again, and the sorry fell from his lips, Felicity knew they wouldn’t come back from that.
She just wouldn’t.

Oliver nodded slowly, he understood.
“Happy New Year Oliver,” she breathed as she pressed a kiss against his cheek.

“When do you leave for Central City?” he asked, swallowing back so much more.
“Tomorrow, noon,” she replied sadly but sure of her decision.
“I’ll come around before then. I’ll bring Jonas and we’ll say goodbye.”

She smiled through a nod.
“Thank you, I’d like that.”

She turned away and walked up the stairs, waiting until she was at the very top before she let a single tear slip down her cheek.

Seven years on and here she was again, trying not to cry over a kiss on the cheek at Midnight.
“Hi Ms Smoak, is Felicity around?” Oliver asked as Jonas ran rings around his legs.
“Oh hun, she's already left,” Donna spoke, with a soft smile at the tips of her lips.
“I thought she was leaving at noon?” Oliver queried, keeping the smile locked onto his lips to hide the thud of his heart.

“They were supposed to but the airline rung this morning and said the flights had been changed and it would either be a morning flight or late tomorrow, Barry needed to get home so they left in a rush this morning.”

“What time?” Oliver asked, as his eyes stared at the watch strapped to his wrist.
_Maybe he could make it?_
“About eight this morning.”

**Almost 4 hours ago. They would be there by now.**
“Oh, but she did ask me to give you this,” Donna remarked, disappearing behind the door for a few moments before she reappeared with an small white envelope with Oliver’s name written on the front.

“Thank you,” Oliver breathed as he took the envelope from her hands, staring at it like it could hold the best or the worst.
“You must be leaving for France soon,” Donna chatted.
Oliver’s eyes dropped to Jonas who was busy snuffling his nose into the wooden porch.
“Actually I’m going to hang out with this guy. He’s spent enough time in cages and kennels to last a life time.”

“I would invite you around, but the Mister and I are flitting off to look at some places to have the wedding.”
Oliver smiled with a soft chuckle, “It’s fine Ms Smoak...”
“Donna,” she interrupted.
“It's not a problem Donna,” Oliver nodded still felt weird, “I have a lot of school work to catch up on.”

Oliver backed slowly away from the door, “thanks for the letter.”
“Her cell phone works in Central City,” Donna called out as she slowly closed the door
Oliver nodded, point taken.

Oliver stopped midway down his driveway, a breath hitched in the back of his throat. The thin paper in his hands felt like an ominous weight between his fingers.

Last night had been everything he wanted and everything he didn't. What she had thought was a mystery, made clearer in this letter.

Maybe.

He opened the unsealed envelope and tugged the note out from it.

Dear Oliver,

Sorry I didn’t come by this morning, I didn’t want to wake you up and maybe I thought seeing how I handled last night that it would be better this way, so this, us, awkward, doesn't become a thing. I say that word like I know what it means...

Anyway I'm sorry I left like I did last night, you didn't do anything wrong and I don't think I did either, but maybe it was good that Tommy came in when he did.

I'm so glad to have you in my life Oliver, enjoy France

~F

PS: I've taken BabyJonas with me

Oliver walked slowly the rest of the drive and into the house, his heart heavy and twisted with a concoction of emotions he didn't know how to filter through. He had tried last night to convince himself his feelings for her were a phase, some desperate search for something that felt so easy in comparison to his relationship with Laurel.

Something that felt normal. But, when he woke up this morning with her image still on his mind and the idea of her warming his heart, he knew it was more.

But how was he supposed to make her see that?

He closed the front door with a heavy and trouble sigh... sorry had done so much damage.
“What the hell?!” Thea called, her arms strapped across her chest her eyes wide with disbelief. “Not now Thea,” Oliver gritted as he walked around her and stooped to take the lead off Jonas.

“Are you freaking kidding me?” Thea continued as she padded through the foyer, following Oliver as he navigated towards the kitchen. “Thea,” Oliver rasped, his head foggy and conflicted, “last night's stint crossed a line. Stay out of it.”

The vein across his temple was thumping, his lips twisted at the tips and his voice was cracked and strangled as he rounded the corner into the kitchen where Moira was sat at the breakfast table next to Robert, his nose buried in the morning paper.

“How can you two be so smart and so stupid at the same time?” Thea badgered. Oliver opened the fridge then slammed it shut. “Thea, that's enough,” Moira interrupted as she stood to bridge the hostile air between her children. “No it's not, someone needs to say it,” Thea huffed.

Oliver's jaw clenched as a hand scraped across his scalp. “SHE IS YOUR SETH YOU BIG DUMB IDIOT,” Thea yelled. Oliver's head shook in his hands.

“You're supposed to fall in love, get married and have cute half Jewish babies,” she continued. “I don't think that's how it works,” Oliver interjected, with a soft jostle of his shoulders to calm the thump of his heart.

“I see it, her parents see it, our parents see it...” “Thea,” Moira insisted. “How the hell can you two not see it?” Thea growled, frustrated as she stamped a foot on the floor, “I can only do so much, one of you idiots needs to...” “Thea, that is enough,” Moira warned. Thea huffed before she stormed from the room and mumbled down the hall.

“Is it true?” Oliver asked as he listened to Thea stomp up the stairs. “Which part son? Your sister is prone to exaggeration.” “You think Felicity and I...” Oliver's voice trailed off, he couldn't say the words. “All we want is to see you happy son,” Moira sighed. “And you think she and I...” Oliver shook his head softly. 

*He couldn't say it. Why couldn't he say it?*

“I'm not the one you should be talking to.”

Moira wrapped a palm around Oliver's shoulder and squeezed it gently, “but she is young, so make sure whatever you say you mean.” Oliver nodded slowly, he understood.

“Are you sure you won't come with us?” “I don't think Thea would let me,” Oliver jested quietly, “but yes, I'm sure.”

Oliver walked through the kitchen, picking up an apple from the fruit bowl as he walked.

“Actually dad, I was hoping maybe I could look around QC while you're away, see how it runs.” Robert looked up from the newspaper, folding it along the crease.
“Really? You’ve never shown much interest before,” Robert said, a smile growing softly across his lips.
“I know, but I should take advantage of the opportunities afforded to me.”
“Those sound like someone else’s words.”
“They’re still true.”

Robert nodded with a knowing smile.
“I’ll call my EA Julie, when you decide to go in she can show you around.”
“Thanks dad,” Oliver remarked as he headed away.

Robert and Moira shared a look across the kitchen, a mix of pride and surprise.
“Oh and mom,” Oliver piped as he tapped the door frame of the kitchen.
“Yes son?”
“Laurel and I broke up, a while back, feel free to take down any photos you want.”

Oliver walked away like a weight had been lifted, he knew that they would have already known and he had no idea why he had kept it in for so long, but when the words fell from his mouth, the relief was almost instant.

A few days later found Oliver sitting on his bed surrounded by textbooks he didn’t realise he had, a laptop he barely knew how to use and a confused expression threaded across his brow. The TV in the background played repeats of some sitcom and Jonas sat curled up on the king sized bed beside him.

Take out boxes covered the bedside table and Oliver's white tee and grey track pants were about ready to disintegrate, but he was too engrossed to notice.

Jonas yawned beside him, tapping Oliver's leg with his outstretched paw.

“I stink that bad huh?” Oliver laughed as he watched Jonas stretch his nose as far away as he could, “should I shower?”
Jonas nuzzled his head into a pillow.
“Alright, soon, I promise,” he sighed wistfully

His eyes tracked to the cordless phone buried under his economics book and he sighed for the second time in less than a minute.

“How do you think she is?” Oliver asked as he checked his watch and did a quick guess of what time it would be for her.
She would probably still be awake...or out on the town, dancing dangerously close to a guy that didn’t deserve her, didn’t know how lucky he was to be near her...

He huffed loudly, startling Jonas awake, before he fell back onto his pillow.

His thoughts were tortuous, when he allowed himself even a minute to think, thoughts of her inevitably crowded his mind.

“I really fucked up,” he grunted before Jonas turned on the spot and pushed his wet nose into Oliver's neck.
“I hurt her bad,” he lamented, “what if I tell her how I feel and she takes a chance on me but I hurt her again?”
Jonas licked up the side of his face with a drawn yowl. “I appreciate the vote of confidence but I’ve only ever been a shitty boyfriend,” he quipped, his hand ruffling over Jonas’ head.

“She deserves the best,” he sighed, “she’s smart, funny, beautiful...” His voice trailed off but he could have kept going.

“I just want her to be happy.”
Another long lick up his face.
New Years had shown him she seemed worried he would regret kissing her again, even though his sorry had never been about her. She didn’t trust that the next time he kissed her that word wouldn’t come from his mouth.

She needed him to show her that he wanted to be present in her life. The words of his mother ringing true, whatever he said to her he had to mean and she had to know it.

It wasn’t about kisses at midnight or the dreams that invaded his mind. It was about something more, something that started with...

He looked down at the phone again.

It started there, where they were effortless and easy. Where they could talk about everything or nothing at all.

He picked up the phone and stared at it.

Felicity hung up the phone and sighed, tapping it against her forehead as Barry slunk into the room.

“Chad?” he asked, tapping his fist against the door frame.
“Please hold your disgust,” Felicity smiled as she toyed with the phone between her fingers.
“Honestly, I don't understand why you're dating him.”
“I'm not,” she argued, “we are just friends, that is what that little talk was about, just friends, nothing more,” she continued as she floated the phone on the air.

Barry rolled his eyes, “even that is too much,” he grunted.
“I know Barry, you Oliver and Tommy made your feelings very well known.”
“So don't you think...” Barry trailed off as he kicked his feet across the carpet.
“Look I appreciate that you are just trying be a friend and Oliver has this big brother complex, but I have to be able to make decisions for myself and to believe that I can,” she sighed.

It didn't matter if that didn't make sense to anyone else, but with the idea that she might one day navigate her life through the streets of London, and for her to believe that she can – alone – she needed to believe that she could now.

“And Oliver,” Barry started.
“What about him?”
“You don't honestly think this is about him being a big brother?” Barry slumped onto the bed beside Felicity.

Felicity shook her hands through her hair and grunted.
She didn't know what Oliver was, not really. Although how much of that was just her imagination's cruel joke was up for debate.

“You know Felicity Smoak you have an exceptional brain but almost no sense, he is in love with you.”
“No he's not.”
“He is,” Barry answered, nodding.
“He's not.”
“He is.”
“He's...”
Felicity's phone sprung to life in her hands.
“He's...ringing,” she gaped, staring at his name flashing across the display.

Barry raised his brows as he stood up from the bed and backed away.
“He is,” he mouthed as he reached the door
Felicity shook her head before she answered the phone.

“Hi Oliver,” she smiled down the phone.
“Hey,” Oliver replied, a smiling forming on his face from just her voice.

“How is it going?” he asked.
“The job is amazing Oliver,” she raved, thankful she knew Oliver would welcome her talking his ear off, “I'm learning so much, this place is amazing, they have tech I have only ever dreamed about touching, stuff that hasn't even hit the market.”

Oliver chuckled down the phone, hearing her so animated was contagious.
“I got to touch the T750 Micro...” she paused, snapping her lip between her teeth, “which I'm not sure I'm supposed to tell you about.”
“It's fine Felicity, I literally have no idea what you're talking about,” Oliver jested.
“But listen to me,” she snorted, “how is France? What time is it there?”
“Uh,” Oliver started, “I actually decided to stay home, just me and Jonas.”
“He's with you?” she squeaked, the thought that that adorable little puppy she found all those years ago finally had the home he deserved warming her heart.

“He sure is.”
“Is he happy?”
“I tried asking him, but he's giving me a weird look,” Oliver laughed.
He listened quietly as she cheerfully laughed down the phone.
“I can send you a picture if you want,” he offered.
“Yes please,” she beamed.

Felicity squealed when the picture came through.
“He looks so happy,” she bubbled as she pushed a fresh tear from her cheek.
“Well, you would know,” he replied, a permanent smile across his face.
“Thank you so much Oliver.”
“I didn't do any...”
“Yes you did,” she interrupted, “you did.”

They spent the next hour talking about everything from the weather to the plants Donna had asked Oliver to water next door until every second noise Felicity made was a soft yawn and Oliver wished her goodnight.
They both went to sleep that night with smiles that couldn't be wiped off if they tried.

[Thursday, 22 February 2007]

School had already been back for a month when Felicity finally gave herself a minute to breathe beside the coffee cart this crisp morning as Barry got their order.

Central City had been everything she had hoped for, the internship had given her a short, but clear, view of where she needed to be and has luck would have it, one of the top supervisors of the team was an Oxford alumni and, twisted nerves aside, he had encouraged her to apply for the second semester, and soon, with a personal letter of recommendation from him.

With an uncontrollable tremble in her hand she had posted the thick brown envelope just yesterday without telling a single soul.

Felicity wasn’t sure why she decided to keep the application a secret, but she continued to convince herself that when the rejection letter came it would be so much easier to accept if she didn’t have to see the disappointment on her father's face and the relief on her mother's.

And Oliver... What would his face say?

Oliver...

He still occupied so many of her quiet thoughts.

“Felicity?” Barry repeated, passing the extra-shot coffee under her nose.
She shook the thoughts of Oliver from her mind and took the cup, her hands melting into the warmth of it.
“I asked you about spring break,” Barry explained as the two headed towards their respective morning lectures.
“Oh, the house is going to Cabo, so I’m going with them...” her voice trailed off as she decided whether to say the rest of what she had found out yesterday, “and some other people,” she coughed, hoping he wouldn’t ask...

“Who?”

Dammit.

“Just some boyfriends of the big sisters, and,” she paused, considering her next words, “their friends.”
“You’re being particularly cagey,” Barry coached as he tapped his elbow against her arm.
She huffed a sigh, she knew better by now, he wasn’t going to let this go.
“I believe Chad is going.”

Barry stopped walking and caught her arm to stop her too.
“He’s going with you?”

“Not with me, with his friends.”

“But you told him you weren’t interested in him right?”

“Yes...” she breathed, “but he’s not going with me Barry, he told me...” she clamped her lips closed.

“He told you? You’re talking to him?”

Her head groaned, Barry was going to make a big deal about this.

“He met me outside class yesterday, he wanted me to know I suppose,” she shrugged as she started to walk off.

“He met you after class?” Barry repeated, standing in front of Felicity to stop her leaving.
She shrugged, if she was honest it had been a strange conversation that she wasn’t exactly comfortable with, but nothing untoward had happened, so she had written it off as awkward but that
was all.

“He doesn’t even go to this school Felicity and he knows your schedule?”
She opened her mouth to retort his statement, but there was nothing she could correct.
“It’s nothing, my roommate in the house told him where he could find me,” Felicity blew off Barry's concerned expression, “she thinks I should be dating him.”

That was an understatement, the second year she shared a room with told her much more Felicity wasn’t going to repeat, but basically that she should let him stick whatever he wants wherever he wants because that’s how freshman get noticed and she should count herself lucky.

Felicity had countered with his checkered history, but it seemed like nothing the other girl wasn’t easily able to dismiss as the young German girl getting, ‘what she wanted'. No amount of arguing the point would have changed her mind, so Felicity saved her breath.

“You shouldn’t go,” Barry said with narrow eyes and pursed lips.
“Barry, you’re overreacting,” she replied, hiding her own twisted gut feeling.
“What did Oliver say?”
Felicity folded her lips inward and dropped her eyes to the spot of coffee staining her white lid.
“I haven’t really had a chance...”
“You haven’t told him the guy is stalking you?” Barry lambasted.
“God, Barry, he’s not stalking me,” she laughed anxiously.

“This doesn’t creep you out in the least?”
Felicity took a slow, considered, sip of her coffee.
Maybe a little.
“No, it’s not a problem,” she replied.
Maybe she thought she could handle it, maybe she didn’t want to be seen to overreact or maybe she just didn’t want them to be right...or maybe it was a combination of all three that made her brush off Barry's concern.

“So where is spring break for you?” she asked Barry, desperate for a change of discussion.
He studied her for a minute, debating on whether to push the issue, ultimately deciding not to, “I’m going to study rates of decay at a body farm,” he replied.
“Come with?” he added with a smile.
“That’s disgusting,” Felicity gagged.
Barry shrugged as they reached his lecture hall.

“See you tonight?” he asked, pausing just ahead of the door.
“They said to meet them at half five at Mario’s, so we'll walk over together?”
Barry nodded, “I’ll meet you outside your house at five.”

He waved goodbye before he slipped into the hall and Felicity made her way to her own class.

Despite her heavy heart at keeping a few things from Oliver, they had fallen into a nice rhythm. Monday's saw them talking on the phone for at least an hour, Meatloaf night had started back up and, when they could, the remaining Thursday's saw her, Oliver, Tommy and Barry meet up for dinner at Mario's, a wonderfully typical Italian restaurant that seemed like it was torn from the pages of Lady and the Tramp.

Tonight was no exception, but the dinner had been brought forward to allow Felicity and Oliver to make a surprise visit back home before 9pm.

Thea was going to lose her mind and Felicity couldn’t wait.
Half five found Mario's almost deserted except for a few older couples who ventured out for early dinners before the rush from the nearby college campuses. Drinks were ordered together with more authentic pizzas than they needed, but somehow would manage to eat as the group settled into the half round booth they had adopted as their own over the last few visits.

“Where is Camila?” Felicity asked.
“I didn't invite her,” Tommy replied, scratching the side of his head, “should I have?”
“Yes,” Felicity laughed as Tommy looked around to both Oliver and Barry nodding in agreement.

Tommy sat back against the red vinyl and folded his arms carefully over each other, “You guys really like her?”
“She's great,” Oliver offered.
“I'm with him,” Barry agreed.
“I think I might like her more than you,” Felicity laughed.

Tommy rocked slightly on his seat, surprised.

“Is this a new concept Tommy, people liking your girlfriend?” Felicity jested as the waitress arrived with their drinks.
“Tommy having a girlfriend is a new concept,” Oliver added as he sucked down a drink of beer.

Tommy opened his mouth to retort Oliver's remarks, but shrugged with a smile when he realised he had no reply.

“Should I go and invite her now?”
A “yes” echoed around the table.
“Right,” Tommy laughed as he slipped from the booth and pulled his phone from his pocket as he walked away.

“So Spring Break,” Oliver remarked, watching Felicity as she stirred the drink in front of her, “plans?”
“Cabo, with the house,” Felicity shrugged softly as she watched Oliver over the rim of her glass. “Chad is going,” Barry quipped before Felicity kicked him under the table.
“I didn't realise...” Oliver trailed off, unsure what to say next, “I thought, uh.”

Felicity had told Oliver that she had no interest in dating Chad. He had tried to hide it but she could hear his smile down the phone.

“He's not going with me,” Felicity replied, glaring at Barry who buried his eyes in his drink, “he will be there with some of his friends, who are dating my friends.”

Tommy walked back up to the table and sunk back into the chair, pushing Oliver around the curve of the booth to make more room.
“If she asks this was a last minute decision and we only just got here,” Tommy chirped.

“So what did I miss?”
“Felicity is going to Cabo,” Oliver replied. “With Chad,” Barry added.
Felicity sighed loudly and dropped her head into her hands. “Not with him,” she huffed.
“But he's going?” Tommy remarked, “Is he allowed out of State?”
“Oh ha ha,” she mocked with a roll of her eyes, “but again, for the record, I am not going with him, he will be there and that's it.”

“Well,” Tommy said as he drew a line down his jawline, “We'll see you there then.”
“You're going to Cabo?” Felicity questioned, her head cocked a little to the side.
“Sure, Oliver and I are going, aren't we?”
Oliver twisted his head to look at Tommy with weary eyes.

“Where are you staying?” Tommy asked as his fingers flitted across the keypad of his Blackberry.
“Ah, Pedregal Resort, one of the girl's uncle owns it so huge discounts and we're sharing rooms but it’s super fancy”
“Wow, that's crazy, so are we.”
“Oliver, you didn't mention you were going to Cabo,” Felicity quipped.
“Ahhh,” Oliver hummed, “Tommy, I left something in your car, come with me and get it.”

Tommy smiled brightly before he scooted out of the booth, Oliver following.

“What are you doing? We're not going to Cabo,” Oliver snipped the instant they walked through the doors into the falling evening, “we’re suppose to be going to Vegas.”
“Change of plans,” Tommy shrugged.
“You hate Cabo”
“Tate hate Chad more.”
“You heard Felicity...”
“No, this shit needs to stop,” Tommy interrupted, “she's not going to Cabo with Chad.”
Oliver rolled his hands through his hair, he couldn’t believe he was about to say what was sitting on the tip of his tongue, “Felicity said they were just friends, I can’t just...”
Keep showing up.
Oliver sighed, he didn’t need Felicity having another reason to assume his jealous streak came from something that resembled a brother.

“Nope, you are going to Cabo and you are going to tell her how much you fucking love her on some beach at sunset, for god sakes we’ve all had enough.”
“Who is we?”
“The world Oliver, the damn world,” Tommy laughed, “you are not letting Chad anywhere near her.”
“Everything will be booked,” Oliver quipped, just seconds before Tommy's phone sprung to life.
“Good news?” Tommy asked down the phone as he held a finger up to Oliver and winked, “That’s fine, book it.”
“Who was that?” Oliver asked, with pensive eyes.
“Dad’s EA, I think she’s a witch or something because she’s amazing. Two suites booked, it’s going to cost a fucking fortune but oh well,” Tommy smiled.

Oliver rocked his head as a smile grew across his face. Tommy slapped his shoulder and jostled it lightly.
“I stood by and watched my best friend become a shell with Laurel, this time I’m not standing on the side lines,” Tommy avowed.
“So Cabo?” Oliver quizzed.
“Cabo.”
Thea huffed audibly as she trekked to the front door of the house, muttering her annoyance that her mother had called her away from the TV to see who was knocking at 8:50pm on a Thursday night, although careful not to allow said muttering to be heard in case Moira revoked the special allowance she had given Thea to stay up to watch the final of her favourite show.

To say the pre-teen was emotional was an understatement.

She pulled back the door to a loud; “Surprise” and an insanely large bag of popcorn that hid Oliver from view.

“What are you guys doing here?” Thea exclaimed as she peered around the popcorn to see Felicity holding a tray of super-sized slushies.

“We’ve come to watch the final with you, is that okay?” Oliver asked, dropping the bag of popcorn to reveal his beaming face.

“Ye-es,” Thea bubbled as she threw the door open and gestured wildly for them to come inside, “it’s just about to start,” she added as she ran towards the living room.

“So you ready to owe me?” Oliver winked as he shut the door behind Felicity.

“Remind me again, we made bets that…” Felicity started as she kicked off her shoes, enjoying the warmth of the underfloor heating.

“Firstly that Thea would cry. I said it would take ten minutes, you bet twenty; and secondly that Seth and Summer get married, I said they would, you said they wouldn’t,” Oliver explained.

“And if I win you let me drive your super fancy car home,” Felicity grinned, “and if you win…” she pursed her lips trying to remember the rules of the wager.

“Well, let me do something from that bucket list of yours,” Oliver reiterated.

“You don’t even know I have one,” she said with narrowed, suspicious eyes.

“Fe-licity,” he crooned, “just admit you have one.”

She crossed one arm across her chest and raised an eyebrow – of course she had one, but there was no way she was going to let him read her that easily.

“Where are you guys, come on,” Thea called from the living room.

“You’re going down Smoak,” Oliver laughed.

“We shall see Queen, we shall see.”

Thea had made a nest of blankets across the couch and sat herself directly in the middle, only to start to shuffle over when Felicity and Oliver came into the room.

“It’s alright, I prefer the floor,” Felicity remarked as she took a seat on the floor in front of the couch, her back pressed against it.

Oliver threw her a pillow, which she caught, before he settled next to her, just below Thea’s feet.

Neither of them saw the smile that grew widely across her face in the dimly lit room.

“You guys want a blanket?” she asked, not waiting for an answer before she threw one of the larger ones over them.

“Thanks,” Felicity smiled over her shoulder.

****

Less than fifteen minutes into the show Thea was brushing back unapologetic tears and Oliver was proudly smiling like he’d won the lottery.

“One down Smoak,” he whispered in her ear as they found themselves shoulder to shoulder.

It took everything Oliver had to keep his hand from sliding up her leg under the blanket that covered them both. Just to be near her – to touch her – even in the most innocent of ways, was all...
he really wanted, but Oliver had decided to prove that it was more than just an attraction, show her that although he was insanely attracted to her, there was so much more about her that he... that he...loved....that was the first step in showing her, and himself, that he could be the type of guy that she deserved.

So when he finally told her, she knew he meant it.

****

“Just remember this isn’t goodbye, you’re my destiny Cohen.”
“Go save the world Summer Roberts.”

“Wait, what just happened?” Thea quipped as Summer boarded the bus.
“He’s letting her go...” Oliver breathed, his mind now fully engrossed.
“Why, why would he do that?” Thea announced, the look on her face one of absolute horror.
“Sometimes people...”
“No,” Thea interrupted.
“Sometimes when you really love a person, you understand that something else might be right for them, even if that something else isn’t you.”
“No, I, I, don’t...” Thea trailed off.

Felicity folded her lips together as Oliver shot her a help me look.
“Seth just wants the best for Summer, he wants her to be what she needs to be,” Felicity explained, getting a slightly more receptive response than Oliver did.
“But he loves her,” Thea cried.
“No,” Thea interrupted.
“No, that’s stupid.”

Felicity folded her lips together as Oliver shot her a help me look.
“Seth just wants the best for Summer, he wants her to be what she needs to be,” Felicity explained, getting a slightly more receptive response than Oliver did.
“But he loves her,” Thea cried.
“Sometimes when you really love a person, you understand that something else might be right for them, even if that something else isn’t you.”
“No, I, I, don’t...” Thea trailed off.

“Seth married Summer.

Oliver turned his head to looked at Felicity who had a serene look of surprise threaded across her face. Two expressions that would usually work against each other looked simply stunning on her face.
“Are you sure you’re okay with, ah,” Oliver paused as he tapped unspoken words on the steering wheel, “Cabo.”
He let the word hang between them before he glanced across the car at her, the street lights catching the smile sewn on her lips.
“I’ll probably be wearing a bathing suit,” she laughed as she tucked her feet under her body.
Oliver tried to pull back his smile as he nodded softly.
“Do you have enough jackets?” she teased with a charming laugh.
“I’ll bring extra,” he replied, furrowing his brow into a faked brooding.
“Good, good.”
Her laughed filled the car and it was a beautiful.
“Are you okay with it though?” Oliver queried, “because we can change...”
Felicity lay a hand on his knee and his words stopped.
“Absolutely, it’ll be nice to have you around,” she replied genuinely.

She was still certain that she could deal with Chad if the need arose, but the safety blanket of having Oliver nearby was comforting.

Also, shirtless Oliver didn’t seem like a bad thing.

“Now about this bucket list,” Oliver remarked, enjoying the way Felicity almost squirmed in her seat.
“It doesn’t exist,” she lied.
“You know I don’t believe you, you have a list for everything,” he smiled, one day intent on telling her just how endearing he found that fact.
“Fine,” she huffed playfully, “it exists.”
“So, what are we doing from it?”
“We? I don’t think we was part of the deal.”
“I have to verify that you did it,” Oliver smirked, twisting his head to see the pout that had taken up residence on her face.
“Okay,” Felicity sighed, pausing as she considered the list she had embedded in her mind, “tomorrow night, meet me outside my house at seven.”
“What are we doing?”
“Tomorrow Oliver, you can help me cross one thing off the list,” she smiled as she played idly with the tip of her ear.
“So, what are we crossing off?” Oliver asked as Felicity slipped into the passenger seat of the car.

Felicity ran a nervous hand through her loose locks and toyed with the rim of her glasses. She could feel her hands shaking and she was a few moments away from sitting on her them.

“Are you okay?” Oliver questioned as he turned in his seat to look at her. The nerves seemed something more, something different.

Felicity let her thoughts sit on the edge of her tongue, there was something she wanted to say, but she didn't, she kept her mouth closed and forced a smile. Oliver didn't need to know that Chad had cornered her walking home from class this afternoon and walked, unwelcomed, the rest of the way with her.

It wasn't anything she could pinpoint and a part of her just felt that maybe it was the idea Barry had put in her mind yesterday, but the whole thing made her terribly uncomfortable.

She tried to put it to the back of her mind, worried that telling Oliver would make him do something he couldn't come back from.
“To the City knave,” Felicity smiled as she tapped the dashboard.
“Where are we going?” Oliver asked as he pulled away from the curb and started the journey.
“In due time.”

The drove along in idle chatter until Oliver found himself ducking in and out of unnecessary one-way streets waiting for Felicity to give him some sort of indication of where they were heading.

“Felicity, you need to tell me where we're going?” he laughed as he dipped down another cross-hatch road.
“Umm.” Felicity hummed as she looked out the window through the drizzling rain, “I guess just park here.”

Oliver pulled the car into a park and shut off the engine.
“Are you going to tell me?”
Felicity handed Oliver a piece of paper with her lip snagged between her teeth.

Oliver unfolded the small piece of paper and stared at it for a few seconds.
“What is this?” Oliver paused, reading the note, “get an industrial piercing?”
“It’s a piercing that goes from here,” she tapped the round tip of her ear close into her head, “across to here,” she continued as she rubbed to fingers against a spot roughly diagonal from the first imagined hole.

“That’s on your list?” Oliver asked, surprised at the nature of it, while she had worn earrings since he had known her and at some stage during the course of the last few years she had gotten a second earring hole, he hadn’t considered she wanted something a little more ‘left of field’.
Felicity smiled curiously at the look Oliver was giving her, it was a charming mix of surprise and excitement and she would have paid a substantial cost to be able to read his mind right now.

“Yes, why?” she said with a growing smile.
Oliver folded his lips into a soft smirk and rolled his head softly from side to side, “no reason.”
“There is a tattoo and piercing place just around the corner, they have exceptionally good hygiene ratings,” Felicity rattled almost to herself before she took a deep breath and cracked open the car door.
“I get this feeling like you didn’t just ask for their rating,” Oliver laughed as he got out and walked around the car to meet her at the curb.
Felicity raised her brow and shrugged, she knew what he was implying and she wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction of being right.

“Does your mom know?” Oliver asked as they walked together down the sidewalk.
“Well given I know what place she has a piercing, I hardly think she’s in a position to judge,” Felicity snorted as the wind gently blew locks of hair across her face.
“Where does…” Oliver started, but stopped his words short, thinking better of the question.

“My mother is not the all-American woman you think she is Oliver,” Felicity winked as she walked a little ahead of him and watched him over her shoulder, “maybe I’m not either.”

The tipped little smile she wore made him want to wrap his arms around her waist and haul her up into the air, she would probably laugh until he turned her and pressed her back gently against the building façade of the boutique they were walking past at that moment. Then he would take a moment to appreciate her before she would take that tipped little smile and brush it gently against his lips making his breath hitch and his knees weaken.
He would swipe his tongue across the seam of her lips, hungry for more than just the slight brush she had teased him with….

It took him a few extra moments embroiled in his daydream before he noticed she had stopped outside the tattoo and piercing parlour.

Oliver reached to open the door but stopped when he realised Felicity wasn’t moving, her feet planted to the sidewalk.

“Are we going in?” Oliver laughed as he searched her wide eyes for an answer.

“Did I ah, ever mention,” she faded as she twisted a finger through a section of hair, “I might be a little grossed out by needles.”

She coughed awkwardly and crossed her hands anxiously across her chest.

“How much is a little?”

Felicity rolled her eyes upwards, considering his question.

“Like a lot.”

“You have other ear piercings,” Oliver remarked, lightly stroking his finger across the silver tear drop earring she wore there as if to prove a point.

“I was seven when I got them done and I almost fainted,” she sighed.

“You fainted?”

“Almost and don’t laugh,” she pouted, slapping his tight bicep.

“I’m not, I swear,” he replied, trying to stifle the smile.

Everything she did was insanely endearing that it was verging on euphoric.

“Look,” he smiled, smoothing his palms down her shoulders, “is this on your list?”

Felicity looked up at him and nodded.

“Then let’s do this,” he smiled, “I won’t let you faint.”

“And how do you propose on doing that?”

“Distraction,” he winked, waving a hand in front of her face.

“You ready?” Oliver smiled as he pulled open the door and the tiny bell announced their arrival. Felicity shook the nerves down her body as she stepped over the threshold.

That bucket list wasn’t going to do itself.

Oliver snatched up her hand and walked to the counter with her trailing behind. A beefy guy that looked something like a really buff and heavily tattooed version of Homer Simpson met them with a smile that seemed utterly genuine.

“If you’re here for tattoo wedding bands I’m going to say no,” he said jovially.

Felicity pulled her hand free of Oliver’s but before she could jam the same into her pocket he had snatched it back up again and given it a small, but reassuring, squeeze.

“Alright,” Homer nodded as he leaned over the glass display counter and checked Felicity’s ear wordlessly, “it looks good, the bars are over in that counter,” he continued pointing a few display cases over.

“Pick one you like, then come back and see me.”

Ten minutes later found Felicity opting for a silver bar with a wavy middle that resembled a ‘w’ and another five minutes found her sat in the grey pleather chair with her ear numbed and both hands gripping the arm rests while she took slow and deliberate breaths.
“You’re going to feel this,” Homer warned in an accent that almost seemed southern now that Felicity had time to focus on it. Oliver peeled one set of fingers from the armrest and sandwiched her hand between his own, completely burying it.

“Any question you want to ask me, now is the time,” Oliver spoke, kicking into the art of distraction, “I’m an open book.”
“Any question?” Felicity asked in between short, sharp breaths.
“Anything,” Oliver replied, watching Homer over her shoulder as he prepared what looked a little like a torture device if he was honest.

“Why did you stop coming home?” Felicity asked, keeping her eyes locked on Oliver.
“Because I was a jerk.”
“That isn’t an answer,” she chastised.
“Because I became a person I didn’t want to be.”
The needle went through the first mark and Felicity gripped down on Oliver’s hand like a vice.
“Look at me,” he whispered gently.
She focused her breathing and kept her eyes locked on Oliver, it wasn’t so much the pain, although that was far from comfortable, but more that she knew exactly what was making that hole.

Felicity found herself trekking down his jaw with her eyes and wondering what it might be like to run fingers through the scruff there. He hadn’t trimmed it in a few days and it was looking a little fuller than it usually did. Their first kiss had been brief and she couldn’t remembering feeling it, but now all she could think about was how it might feel, brushing against her lips, bristling against her cheek.

Oliver watched as tiny drops of trepidation rippled through the blue of her eyes and in that instant all he could think about was trying to come up with something that would see a smile float up into her eyes until the idea of that perfect little smile of hers made him jealous at the thought that someone else might get to see it.

When she was older and married to some genius CEO with an empire in his palms and her stood beside him, would that guy appreciate just how stunning and precious that smile was? Would he memorise the colour of her eyes, every fleck and every shadow? Would he know just how lucky he was that she chose him?

“All done,” Homer announced, pulling them both back to reality, “you need to keep it clean and follow the instructions in the pamphlet.”
Felicity nodded, the movement alone felt a little weirder now.
“Anything else?” he asked looking between Oliver and Felicity.
“Oliver wants a Prince Albert,” Felicity said with only a hint of a smile.

Homer looked over to Oliver and snorted out a laugh.
“She’s kidding,” Oliver remarked as he pushed his legs a little tighter together at the mere thought of it.
“Am I?” Felicity snorted.
“Yes, that numbing agent has gone to your brain.”

After they paid and left Felicity found herself walking, her hand still entrenched in Oliver’s, wiggling her nose and jaw just to feel the gentle tug of the piercing.

“So what’s next on your bucket list?” Oliver asked as he admired the way her new adornment caught the streetlights.
“A woman needs her secrets Oliver,” Felicity smiled as they stopped beside the car.
Oliver let a soft smile drift across his lips, if he had his way he would discover every secret Felicity had… every, single, one.

[March 17, 2007]

It was a Saturday, just after noon, and the sun was already blanketing the town of Cabo San Lucas in rays of deliciously warm sun. Their flight had landed about an hour ago and after clearing customs and driving for about 30 minutes the group was now filtering into the rooms they had booked.

Oliver and Tommy were flying a different airline and would be landing closer to 2 o’clock.

Felicity had already thrown her suitcases on one of the beds in the twin share room and was busy admiring the view from the second story room when a knock on the door broke her attention. She padded to the door, her bare feet cooling against the tiled floor, assuming that it was probably her roommate who had promised to catch up once she was done flirting with a particularly handsome porter.

Felicity opened to the door to a familiar but unexpected face.

“It looks like we’re neighbours,” Chad smiled as he leaned against the door frame of Felicity’s room and nodded to the door directly opposite.

“By coincidence I’m sure,” Felicity groaned as she stepped back in an attempt to close the door.

“I feel like you’re mad at me babe,” he laughed, superstitiously putting his foot in the door.

“Please don’t call me that, I thought I made it clear in January we’re not an item,” Felicity replied.

“You can’t help a guy for trying, right?”

She shifted awkwardly from one foot to the other.

“Maybe we can try again, what happens in Cabo stays in Cabo.”

Felicity exhaled heavily, if only to stop the words never in a million years from falling from her mouth.

“You’re a great guy,” she started – new to this whole idea of making oneself permanently unavailable, “but I think we tried that and it just wasn’t there.”

She spoke calmly, but perhaps with a little more kindness than he deserved.

She wasn’t interested; and she wouldn’t be tomorrow, or the next day, or in however many days he thought to wait.

“Alright, I understand,” he replied, a smile still caught on his lips, “but at least let me buy you a drink while we’re here…as friends.”

Felicity rolled her lips together imagining what Oliver’s response would have been and smiling at what name he might have chosen to call Chad. But, that aside, Felicity wasn’t Oliver and she wasn’t trying to hurt anyone.

“I don’t think so” she replied, caging her body with her arms.
“Well if you need to borrow some sugar or anything,” he laughed, pointing his thumb over his shoulder towards the room opposite. “I’ll be sure to remember that,” she replied with a feigned smile.

“See you by the pool?” “I’m sure,” she shrugged, although she intended to spend the next hour or so stooped in the armchair near the large windows in the room, soaking up the sun and reading.

His foot finally retreated from the door and Felicity took the opportunity without reservation to close it quickly. She exhaled heavily as she pushed her weight against the door and wished, idly, that Oliver would hurry up and arrive.

“What’s with you and the blonde?” Chad’s roommate, Gavin, asked as he ran a hand through his greasy mane. “I’m working on it,” Chad laughed with a shrug as they walked into the room and chose beds. “I don’t think she's interested bro.” “Don’t matter,” Chad smirked, looking back at Felicity’s door before he closed his own, “I got some special plans for that one.”

Reluctantly, after only 30 minutes, Felicity found herself being dragged out towards the pool by her well-meaning roommate, Lonnie, a particularly peppy biology major who had put an embargo on staying inside for any longer than it took to get changed into an appropriate outfit.

The term ‘appropriate’ was probably not the one Felicity decided her father would use as she shifted the black tube top bikini under the peacock blue kaftan.

“You have a fantastic ass,” Lonnie said matter-of-factly as they headed towards the stunningly blue pool. Felicity smiled awkwardly, she wasn’t use to compliments like that, she was the bookworm, the quiet girl, the only that slipped into the background without much effort. “You should show it off more,” she winked as slipped onto one of the loungers, claiming it as her own, “when in Cabo.”

When in Cabo… Felicity had decided on the flight down, quite proactively, that she was going to admit something to Oliver and that she wasn’t going to let him speak a single word until she had said it all. It didn’t matter where it went or what he took from it, but she wasn’t leaving this place until it was said.

The flight had seen her batting between a few different ways of essentially saying the same thing: Oliver, I think we should see each other – a cute play on the ‘see other people’ remark; or Oliver, I was thinking you and I could just work out this weird dynamic we have going, naked, in the bedroom – she stole that one from ‘Forbidden’ the book Oliver had found her reading at Thanksgiving. Oliver, I love you – simple but maybe a little much to be throwing the L-word around so flippantly.

She finally settled somewhere around: Oliver, my life is better for knowing you and I don’t want to go on burying how I feel about it. I don’t need an answer from you, but if I let another minute slip by without telling you…

Felicity stopped her mind from repeating it, because the more she thought about it, the more the idea felt absurd. To admit to him how she felt meant changing the goal posts and despite what
everyone told her, she wasn’t sure Oliver would want that.

She peeled off the kaftan and lay on the empty lounger beside Lonnie. The sun was heavenly and, safe in the knowledge she had very liberally applied the highest rated sunscreen on the market, she buried her face into the towel draped over a pillow and closed her eyes.

*When in Cabo…*

Oliver stopped in his tracks when he saw her. He didn’t even need to see her face to know it was her. Lying face down on a white lounger, her wavy hair like a waterfall of blonde spilling down her back and over her shoulder with a thin strap of black the only covering on her upper body.

The small of her back sunk in deep the way she was lying, almost as though he could lap champagne from it if she let him, before it rose back up and melted into her ass, covered in a high-cut pair of bikini bottoms. He had thought the Daisy Dukes would be the death of him – this was on another level.

The ‘level’ that made you forget your name and drop your suitcase onto the ground.

The ‘level’ that forced your mouth to gape and the entire culmination of your vocabulary to be reduced to a “hrghmph”.

“Dropped your bag,” Tommy smirked as he and Camila strode up behind him. “I think he’s preoccupied,” Camila whispered as she nudged Tommy and nodded his attention towards Felicity. “Oh now that is just cruel,” Tommy breathed, his lips locked in a smile as he decided whether or not to whack the back of his hand against Oliver’s leg for just the right amount of startle for it to be embarrassing.

Before he had a chance to draw his hand back Camila tugged his ear, “don’t even think about it, he’s supposed to be your friend.” Tommy shrugged with a laugh, guys had different ideas of what being a friend actually meant you could get away with.

“Oliver, surprised you came,” Chad quipped as he walked up to them, sans top and oiled down like a wrestler. Oliver said nothing but the terse lip and narrowed eyes spoke volumes. “She's a looker isn't she,” he continued, his eyes jogging over to where Felicity was lying on, “that ass.”

“You reckon she's ever had it that way?” Oliver dropped the knapsack slung over his shoulder and launched towards Chad almost making contact before Tommy pulled him back.

“Not here Oliver, not now,” Tommy warned as he put himself between the two hulks, “let’s at least put our bags in our room, my nice suit is in this bag and I don’t want to throw down without making sure its nicely hung up.”

“Listen to your little bitch Oliver,” Chad mocked, jostling his shoulders in a laugh. “Step back riograge,” Tommy jeered. “You stay the fuck away from her,” Oliver hissed with deep set eyes. “Cabo baby,” Chad cheered as he backed away with his hands punched into the air.
Felicity rolled her head across the pillow and fluttered her eyes open just in time to see a war of words between Oliver and Chad, Tommy stood between them. By the time she had thrown the thin wisp of fabric over her swimsuit Chad had walked away leaving Oliver seething and Tommy clearly trying to quell the rage.

She walked quickly as she shuffled her feet into the beaded sandals.

“Oliver, what's going on?” she asked wearily.

“Nothing,” he gritted, “it doesn't matter.”

“Don't let him get to you,” she calmed as Tommy stepped back and Camila rubbed a gentle hand across Tommy's back.

“The way he talks about you,” Oliver gritted, clenching and releasing his fist like it held an invisible stress ball.

“I know,” she sighed.

Perhaps it was time to tell him.

“Can we talk?” she asked before snagging her lips between her teeth, foolishly anxious about how this might pan out.

Oliver looked at her, square in the eyes, for the first time since she had been stood there. There was a fear weaved through her eyes, a trepidation that seemed to distract him from his anger almost immediately.

She needed to talk to him...

“Sure,” he agreed, glancing back over his shoulder to Tommy, who wordlessly caught the hint.

“We’ll take the stuff to the rooms,” Tommy commented as he collected Oliver’s dropped luggage.

“Is everything alright?” Oliver asked as he followed Felicity, her dress waving like flag behind her.

She sat down at a secluded table, the furthest from the outdoor bar that was buzzing with college students starting the binge early in the afternoon sun.

“If you could just hold the ‘I told you so’ until the end,” she breathed taking a long, hindered breath to try and quash the nerves that were slowly bubbling up her throat.

Before she could admit to him her feelings, there was something else she needed to tell him.

“Chad,” she spoke his name like a whispered omen as she leaned in, unwilling to let this conversation leak beyond this table, “he’s been following me.”

She looked across the smooth wood bridge between them, unsure what to expect as a result of what she had just said.

“Like stalking you?” he queried, the concern on his face instantly making her feel safe.

She sat back against the chair and shook her head softly.

Barry had called it that, but she didn’t.

“I don’t know if that’s what I would call it, but…” her words trailed off.

“Felicity,” Oliver encouraged as he hand sought out hers, smothering it, “tell me what happened.”

“It started off pretty harmless, he met me after class a couple of times.”

Oliver watched the smile dwindle from her eyes and fade from her lips, she was trying to downplay it, but Felicity was scared.

“Outside your class?”

She nodded, she could see the same wheels turning in his head that had turned in Barry’s – Chad
didn’t even go to the same school as her.

“The night you pick me up to get this done,” she spoke as she touched a hand till the still-tender piercing, “he met me outside class and asked if he could walk me home. I said no, that I was fine but he wouldn’t leave.”

She paused, this was the first time she was saying it out loud.

“Nothing happened, but I felt so uncomfortable. It doesn’t matter how many times I say I’m not interested,” she sniffed, the truth was she was scared, she had buried it but over the last couple of weeks he had amped up his pursuit and she was scared it was only going to get worse.

“He sends me notes and flowers and lately I’ve been getting hang up calls on my phone. I feel like I’m being paranoid.”

“Have you told anyone?”

Felicity shook her head, her naivety had led her to think that people would brush her off as having an overactive imagination and her housemate back in Starling told her she should take the compliment so many times that perhaps she was starting to believe that to be the case.

Those feelings combined with the utter failure she felt at ignoring Oliver’s original warnings left her feeling stupid.

“It’s not your fault,” Oliver insisted, seeing the guilt poised in her expression.

“I should have listened to you,” she whispered.

Now wasn’t the time to be right, and Oliver knew it.

“Is his room near yours?”

Felicity brushed back a single tear that had broken free as she nodded slightly, “just across the hall, but I have a roommate…”

“No, we have two rooms, you can stay in one with Camila,” Oliver interrupted.

“I don’t want to be a nuisance, it’s probably all just in my head,” she remarked softly as her chin dropped to her chest.

“Hey,” he soothed, “you’re not, okay? Do this for me.”

She looked up at him, perplexed.

“I won’t have a good spring break if I’m worrying about you, I won’t worry as much if you’re staying right next door.”

The smile on his face was like a breath of fresh air.

There was no ‘I told you so’, no roll of his eyes, no frustrated sigh that she hadn’t told him earlier how she felt. All she saw was genuine concern and a friendly smile.

“But,” he added, his eyes locked with hers, “when we get home you need to report him.”

“Oliver, I…” she sighed before she looked up at him once more.

He wasn’t backing down on this and, if she was honest, she wasn’t going to fight him on it either.

“I want you to stay close with either one of us, non negotiable.”

Felicity nodded, the relief of telling him like the splash of cold water during a heatwave.

It was almost eleven and the music was coursing through Felicity like electricity. He was close, even in the flashing lights of the nightclub, with her senses heightened by every sight, sound and smell, she knew he was there, watching her and she was lapping up every minute of it.

It was too loud for words, but his eyes said it all. Maybe it was her imagination playing cruel tricks
on her, but tonight – just for tonight – she was going to let it. She was going to believe that the smile permeated on Oliver’s lips was for her and the darkness threaded through his heavy brow was because of dirty thoughts of her that ran through his mind.

Tonight Felicity was going to believe that he wanted her, in every carnal way he could.

If she had wagered a bet on that belief, she would have cleaned up, because that’s exactly what the smile on Oliver’s lips meant and his mind was swirling with images of her dancing like she was right now, only in his room, naked.

And for just tonight, he wasn’t going to push those thoughts away.

The sway of her hips was like a snake charmer to the one he kept sheathed behind dark jeans. The nip in of her waist was like artwork and her bare shoulders glistening under the strobe lights with a thin film of sweat was like an ice block waiting to be licked.

Just the idea of it forced his tongue to push between his lips and swipe over his lower lip.

Thoughts ran through his brain, did she know he was watching her? Did she know he hadn’t taken his eyes off her all day?

The sly glances that she gave him over her bare shoulder told him she knew that fact all too well.

There had been so many times that day he almost told her, almost took her hand between his own, stroked a hand across her cheek and told her that he wanted to be with her, but each time he had stopped himself, it hadn’t been right – it hadn’t been perfect; and he just wanted it to be perfect.

But enough, he would tell her tonight.

He needed to tell her tonight.

Whatever her response was she needed to know that he was head over heels in love with her. So tonight, he would take the chance in the hopes she would follow him there.

He put his hand up to his lips, wordlessly asking her if she wanted another drink. She nodded with a full smile danced across her lips.

He slapped Tommy’s arm, jerking the phone he was using to record the ‘epic events of spring break 2007’ (as he called it), before he nodded back towards the bar.

Tommy followed, the music fading some the further they walked from the dancefloor.

“I’m going to tell her, tonight,” Oliver spoke loudly into Tommy’s ear over the music, “I know it’s not a beach at sunset, but I can’t…”

Tommy’s face lit up with a smile, silently wishing him all the luck he could muster.

They ordered drinks and relaxed against the purple-lit bar as they waited for the bartender to mix them.

Oliver was still watching her across the room, her figure pulsing in the intermittent light as she danced beside Camila.

Fuck.

He wanted to feel her skin with his lips, feather the flimsy fabric of her clothes between the pads of his fingers, fold a hand through her hair – anything that would see him touching her.

He shifted, agitated, during the second she was stolen from view when the strobe went black
before the white flashed, showing her exactly where his eyes had left her. It was a torturously engaging game that drove him to the brink of insanity.

Black.
White.
Black.
White.
Chad.
He shook his head, had his eyes deceived him?
Black.
White.
He was there. Behind her.
Black.

He pushed off from the bar and pressed through the swarm of people.
White. She was smiling at Oliver.

_Turn around._
Black.

Hands flailed around him but he pushed through them, unrepentantly pushing people aside. Tommy had seen it too, walking a hurried pace just behind him.

White.
She was gone.
Black.

The cool air whipped against Felicity's face as Chad pulled her out into the club's courtyard. He had taken her by surprise, her mind a daze of thoughts about Oliver, about telling him her feelings, that she hadn’t even noticed Chad there and she only registered what had happened when the salty air smacked against her lips.

“What the hell?” she spat as she violently tugged her hand from his grip.
“I just want to talk,” he slurred, clearly inebriated.
“And you didn't think to ask?”
She wasn’t scared, perhaps she should have been, but she was mad.

“Why d'you act like such a fucking cock tease?”
His hand reached for her, but with her full faculties and his stunted by alcohol she was much quicker than he was, easily side stepping his advance.
“Go home Chad,” she spoke through gritted teeth.

Oliver, Tommy and Camila burst through the revellers just in time to hear the next words fall into the night air.
“You stupid whore,” Chad seethed.
Felicity's knee slammed into the target between his legs, cracking him in half with a jolt that was felt by anyone with a dick.

Tommy winced as he watched through the screen of his phone and Oliver immediately halted his ‘to the rescue’ advancement.

“What happens in Cabo,” Felicity smirked as she watched Chad crumble to his knees
She was fairly certain he wouldn’t be fucking anyone in Cabo.

“Don’t you ever fucking touch me again.”
“Holy shit, this is going on You Tube,” Tommy cackled as the camera zoomed in on Chad's
“Felicity, are you alright?” Oliver asked as he resisted the urge to land a kick while Chad was still writhing in pain.

Felicity felt the hot rush of embarrassment fan out across the apples of her cheeks. She felt so foolish.
“I just want to go home,” she replied as she hurried out into the street.
Oliver caught up within seconds, just to see the first frustrated tear slip down her face.

“Are you okay?” he asked again, his eyes pleading for any answer.
“I’m fine,” she huffed, clearly a lie to anyone looking and Oliver was looking.

She forced back the tears and walked back towards the resort not far down the street.
She wasn’t fine.
She was embarrassed, hurt, annoyed and whatever other synonym she had that said the same basic thing, she had fought so hard for the choice only to have it backfire so spectacularly.
She couldn’t have this discussion with him.
“Felicity, talk to me,” he urged.
“I don’t want to,” she fired back as they reached the resort.
She was walking as fast as she could before it became a sprint and Oliver widened his stride to keep pace.

“Felicity, wait...”
She stopped hear the stairwell that lead to their rooms.
“Why? So you can say I told you so? Gloat in the knowledge that I’m just as completely ill-equipped to make good decisions as you thought?”

She was been unfair and she knew it, this wasn’t about Oliver, not really, but she couldn’t stop it if she tried.

She ran up the stairwell, crashing around each corner in an attempt to escape him and this impending feeling of stupid that was gaining on her.

“You know that’s not what I think,” he shot back.
*It should be, I am*
“Just say it, say you were right,” she snapped.

She was pushing him away, Why? She didn’t know, maybe it was easier that way.
“I told you there was no I told you so?”
They reached their rooms as the tears were scolding the back of her eyes.
“Are you okay?” that’s all he wanted, needed, to know.
“Just leave me be, please.”

He wanted to say no and pull her into a hug that maybe she would resist at first. To protect her, comfort her, whatever she needed from him.

But he didn’t, her eyes begged him not to.

Felicity thought it was about ten minutes before the door to the luxury apartment opened and Tommy and Camila stumble inside. She had heard them outside the door and spent the precious moments brushing away the tears that had marred tracks down her sunken cheeks.
“Felicity,” Tommy said, startled as he saw her hunched up on an armchair towards the corner of the room, “I wasn’t expecting you to be…”

His words trailed off as Camila dropped his hand and walked across the room towards her. Felicity tensed, she hated seeming vulnerable.
“I can go back to my own room, I don’t need to be here,” she spoke, shuffling her legs from the chair.
“Don’t be silly, we asked you to stay,” Camila assured, her voice soft and kind. Felicity realised then that she hadn’t really ever had a friend life that, the likely result of burying oneself behind a wall of books.

“I just didn’t expect you, here,” Tommy remarked, his head nodding towards the wall that was shared with Oliver’s room.

He breathed out heavily with a sigh that echoed through the quiet room.
“He didn’t tell you did he?” Tommy asked, wracking a hand through his quaffed hair.
“Tell me what?” Felicity sniffed, brushing a hand across her cheek.

That I’m not equipped to function in the real world and make good decisions? Felicity shook the thought from her head, Oliver would never say it and she was saying it enough for the two of them.

Tommy walked in circles, brushing his loafers through the thick-pile carpet, debating with himself about whether or not he should say anything more.

“I said to myself that I would let him do this, that I would let you two figure this out, but for one genius and the guy who is way smarter than he lets on, the two of you are just…” he paused, contemplating a raft of different synonyms to use, “really daft.”

Felicity let a smile pop across her lips as she watched Tommy shake his head back and forth in absolute and complete disbelief.

“So, I can’t just let you two figure this out, because you won’t and it’s going to drive me to a padded cell somewhere.”
“Tommy, I don’t know what it is you’re trying to say,” Felicity breathed, a very slight chuckle following her words, mainly caused by the swipe of red that was growing across his cheeks.

“Oliver,” he paused, “is,” he paused again, stooping down in front of the chair she had made her home on, “in-love-with-you.”
Felicity laughed, almost directly into his face.

How did everyone say that when it was so far from the reality?

“Tommy, he doesn’t,” she answered matter-of-factly.
“Are you kidding me?” Tommy sighed as he stood up and spun around in a frustrated circle.

“He wants to be friends, we’re friends,” she continued, now somewhat defensive at the fluster in Tommy’s breathing.
Tommy scratched his head and planted his feet into the ground.

“Felicity, Oliver wants to be with you,” he spoke, almost sternly but with a smile folded at just the tips of his lips.
“He does’n-“
Tommy held up a finger to stop her words as Camila smiled at his theatrics.

“The night your car broke down,” he started.
“I remember,” she shrugged.
“Did Oliver tell you where he was when you called?” Felicity shook her head softly, she had always wondered but never asked.
“He was at one of those invitation only events where rich, powerful people get together and pat each other on the back about how important and how rich they are. They’re awful, boring and full of the smell of Viagra, but you go to these things to make connections. You rung, he left, no questions and if history repeated itself he would do it again.”

Felicity pressed her head into the back of the chair, she hadn’t known that, assuming he was just at some frat party.
“Like you said, they’re boring, so—”
Tommy raised a finger again, he wasn’t done.
“The charity auction…”
“I know,” Felicity interrupted, “you told him no one was bidding so he came down to save the day?”
“That’s not what happened,” Tommy quipped.
Felicity furrowed her brow and pressed her lips together as she waited for Tommy to continue.

“He came down because he didn’t want you to spend time with anyone else, especially roid-fuck, so he hauled ass down and bid on you.”
“As friends…” she retorted, realising it sounded rather juvenile when it fell from her lips.
“You don’t drop fifteen on a ‘just friend’,” Tommy remarked, making the quote marks with his fingers
“Fifteen hundred isn’t all that much to Oliver.”
The room they were in probably cost that a night.

Tommy leaned down to ensure he had her full attention, a hand either side of the chair and a all-knowing smile gracing his lips.
“Fifteen thousand Felicity.”

“Shut the fuck up,” she gaped before she slapped her hand over her mouth.
She slowly peeled back her hand as Tommy stood, nodding his head slowly up and down.
“But, he,” she stumbled over words, “he said sorry.”

“That wasn’t about you, that was about him and there isn’t a minute that goes by that I bet he doesn’t wish he could take it back,” Tommy heaved, words vomiting from his mouth like an explosion.
“I think,” Camila started as she put a steady hand on Tommy’s shoulder to stop him bouncing on the spot, “what Tommy is trying to say is that Oliver could explain it better, but you guys need to talk, really talk.”

Felicity stood, smoothed her palms down her skirt and headed towards the door.
“I have to go,” she said simply as she walked from the room, closing the door with a thud behind her.

Felicity rapt her knuckles against Oliver's door as her other hand fidgeted through her hair and her brain searched for the words she had so carefully constructed on the way down to Cabo.

But, when Oliver opened the door everything fell away to nothing.
“Felicity is everything…”
She employed Tommy's tactic and raised a single finger in the air. She needed Oliver to listen before she lost the nerve to speak.

“Tommy told me,” she breathed, her heart thumping like a club anthem behind her ribs.
“Told you…” The question trailed off before Oliver had a chance to finish it.
“He told me,” she sighed, wishing her heart would slow itself down before it burst through her
chest, “everything you did.”

He knew what she was saying and a small “Oh,” dripped from his mouth. “I have all these words that I want to say, that if I don’t say them I’m going to lose all nerve to say them, so I just need you not to speak, don’t say a thing, not till I’m done,” she looked up and him as he nodded.

“I don’t know what we are Oliver, I’m confused, I know how I feel and,” she tugged at her chest, stop beating so fucking hard.

“I want to tell you, I want to say the words and just leave them there for you,” she babbled, closing her eyes and trying to shake the words out coherently, “I had all these grand plans of how I would say it, what you needed to hear, grandiose plans of one of those moments in movies where they have a speech and it’s cute and funny and touching and it says everything, *everything*, that the other person needs to hear and the audience is just lapping it up,” she paused to breath, looking around at an imaginary audience.

“One of those I’m just a girl, you had me at hello moments. I had it all planned,” she stopped and sighed, “but right now in front of you I have nothing, no speech, no words, nothing. Well not nothing, I have a head full of stupid useless facts about security protocol codes and about seven illegal uses for said codes, but none of that matters, because that’s not what I want to say.”

*Thud, thud, thud.*

Her heart echoed through her brain like an earthquake that shook anything useful out.

“I have nothing, I wanted to say so much and now I have...”
Oliver scooped his hands under her chin and swept her lips up with his. He stole her words and swallowed the soft breath that passed over her lips.

Her glossed lips tasted like strawberry and they felt like silk against his own. He lingered there, his tongue stroking a soft line over the seam of her lips. Her body was frozen against his as he combed through her hair before he stepped back, leaving her lips hanging there, slightly parted and her eyes heavily lidded.

Silence hung like a curtain as her eyes widened, carving into his soul.
“Say something,” he breathed when the silence between them became too much.
“I’m waiting for you to say you’re sorry,” she spoke, her voice strained and trembled.

“But I’m not sorry Felicity, I’m not sor...”
Felicity stopped him mid word. Her lips pressed against his and their noses skimming each other. Her palms anchored to his cheeks and her fingers fanned into the shorts of his hair.

She kissed him.
With everything she had, her chest pressed to his, her body stretched up on her toes, she kissed him. Not a sorry to be found.

Chapter End Notes

The Kiss.
THE Kiss.
God, he tasted fantastic. His lips were soft and the sweeping of his slightly bristled face against her own was much smoother than she had anticipated. There wasn’t a single thing about kissing Oliver that Felicity didn’t enjoy.

No sloppy noises. No squashed nose. No ridiculous amount of saliva passing between them. It was perfect; and it was still going.

Her hands had dropped from his hair and were now coiled around his neck, holding her body close against his. His palms wouldn’t stay still, sliding enticingly slow paths up and down her back to the point where she thought she might start purring soon.

God, he was good at this.

The salty sea air rubbed across her skin as a small breeze swept up from the beach carrying with it the realisation that they were still outside.

Reluctantly Felicity uncoiled her arms and flattened her palms against the curve of his broad shoulders to push herself off from. The severing of the kiss was tortuous and the moment it happened she considered pouncing right back.
“Is everything alright?” he asked nervously as a barely felt fingertip brushed back hair from her face, pinning it just behind her temple. He was nervous, somehow in this reality Felicity had made him nervous.

“Yes,” she breathed, the word carried to him on a wisp of wind, “just maybe we could go inside?”

She smiled as he looked around, as though he too had completely forgotten where they were. His hands swamped hers like they had done all those years ago when she had burned herself while recklessly staring at him. Every part of him seemed to dwarf her in comparison and there was something uniquely comforting about that.

“No sorry?” she asked as she stepped through the threshold of his room and he closed it behind them with a soft click.

She heard him sigh before she turned around to see the regret Tommy had spoken of written all over his face.

She didn’t know why she hadn’t seen it before, had he masked it well? Or had she just always assumed it had meant something else?

“Felicity,” he breathed.

God the way he said it made her body temperature spike and she considered how it might sound a little breathier, rasped, heated…in the throws of passion.

“That wasn’t me regretting kissing you,” he started, his voice soft and kind, “that was about me thinking I didn’t have a right to, that you wouldn’t want me to.”

She let out a small puff of air as she took a half step towards him.

“And what about now?” she asked, letting her luscious lips fall open on the last word, her eyes a sea of affection towards him.

“Now I know how much of a fool I was,” he smiled, leaning at least 70% of the way towards her lips.

Felicity came the remaining 30, their lips brushing across each other with feather-light touch. It was innocent, simple and charming and through it Felicity discovered that it was her second favourite kiss behind the tied equal ones from outside.

“So, what happens now?” she asked, the words ghosting over his lips as their foreheads melted together, the breaths taking from the same air.

“I think I’m supposed to buy you a coffee and ask about your family,” he smiled, rolling his head just a little so his nose brushed against hers.

“You already know all that,” she chortled softly as she threaded her fingers into his, their palms flat against each other.

“A date then,” he spoke before stealing a peck from her lips.

“An actual date?” she smiled as his lips were still formed against hers.

“Yes,” he sighed, his tongue sweeping across her plump lower lip, “an actual date.”

Felicity lifted her head up, separating their foreheads before her hands cupped his face holding it there while her thumbs stroked delicate lines across his cheekbones.

“I’d like that,” she replied.

Her lips tipped up into that perfect little smile and Oliver felt his heart lurch inside his chest. That time her tiny wingtip smile was because of him, nothing could compare to that feeling and without hesitation he lightly caressed it with the pad of his thumb.

“What was that for?” she asked as his thumb fell from her cheek, “did I have something there?”

“Mmhm,” he nodded, “my smile.”
Oliver’s phone vibrated on the nearby table and Felicity rolled her head to look at the intruding sound.

His finger lightly grazed under her chin and drew her face back towards him before he lay a gentle kiss onto her top lip, surrounding and caressing it. It was soft but passionate and without question it took the second place from the kiss they shared a few moments before.

They walked deeper into the room, their lips still melded together and his finger still braced under her chin. Her hands fist...
Go forth, touch boobs. We're good

They both laughed when seconds after Oliver pressed the send button they heard a muffled but ultimately clear “woohoo” from next door.

“I wish I had brought my luggage with me,” Felicity shrugged as she looked down realising she was still in the clothes from the nightclub. Oliver’s eyes followed hers as they walked down her body and she felt increasingly aroused by the obvious perve he was delighting in. The heat of his eyes became a little too much and she wrapped an arm around her waist and buried her chin to her shoulder.

God if he wasn’t undressing her with his eyes.

The arm slunk around her shoulder pulled Oliver attention away and his eyes snapped up to meet her own. The apples of her cheeks had peached and she was wearing a particularly endearing expression of coy.

“I have something you can wear,” he offered as he walked over to his still-packed suitcase and dove a hand in between the shorts and tank tops to pull out a white tee. He held it up and smiled knowing it would absolutely swamp her.

“I can probably find some shorts,” he continued as he snaked a hand through the small suitcase. He honestly hadn’t packed much and mostly it consisted of fly closures or board shorts, nothing astutely comfortable like the gym shorts she had worn before.

“This is fine,” Felicity piped as she held the tee up against her body, chuckling slightly at the realisation it skimmed around her kneecaps and the sleeves would touch her elbows.

Felicity sidled past him taking two steps away from him before she stopped, leaned up on her tiptoes and kissed the side of his face, delighting in the way his scruff prickled against her lips. She could get used to that.

~*~*~*~

Starring at herself in the softly lit bathroom mirror Felicity realised that much of the trepidation about the bed had slipped her mind because of the effortless comfort she felt around Oliver. Still, a few thoughts lingered and as she combed her fingers through her thick and wavy salt-licked locks, she considered the idea of having sex…with Oliver.

She wanted to, or at least the gnawing sensation between her legs every time his lips met with hers would suggest she wanted to and she wasn’t under any religious banner that would stifle such an act.

An act she found herself chuckling at the way even her mind seemed to be stuck in a time warp. It was amusing given her propensity for verging-on-erotic-novels and the fact she was hardly a prude.

No matter how hard Felicity tried she couldn’t pinpoint what it actually was that had her nerves fraying and her heart sitting in her throat.

Would he see how completely inexperienced she was and laugh? Would it be worse if he was shocked at her lack of experience?

She shook the thoughts repeatedly from her head and decided to float back into the natural calm that seemed to come from just been around Oliver. She nodded resolutely at the decision as she pulled her hair back into a bun and swiped her tongue absently across her lips.
God he had tasted fantastic.

Felicity steadied her body against the bathroom vanity and locked eyes with herself as she took a long, drawn breath and pushed it through ruby lips.

“It was just Oliver out in that room,” she spoke to herself in a chuckled pep talk.

Three controlled breaths and a practised smile later found Felicity on the other side of the bathroom door smoothing down the hem of Oliver's tee as it skimmed her silk thighs, honestly she couldn't imagine ever thinking slightly stretched cotton was a sensual fabric but damn if it didn't feel like fingers stroking the inside of her legs.

“You want something from the mini bar?” Oliver asked as he crouched in front of the ornately carved cabinet.

“Oooh big spender,” she cracked a smiled and she palmed the alcove framing of the bathroom door.

“Only the best for you,” he winked, looking up and across the room at her, the bed like a beacon between them.

Felicity skipped, light-footed, past the beacon and hopped up on the smooth stone top, her bare feet skimming against the rich chocolate coloured panelling of the three-cupboard wide ‘refreshment’ cabinet.

“Kettle chips and soda,” she grinned as she bent it half to stare at the contents of speciality chocolates, tiny bottles of champagne and an assortment of the ‘finer’ snacks.

Her choice was decidedly simple given the options.

Oliver grabbed her request and slid up between her legs which parted around him.

He placed the items to one side, taking the opportunity to graze a fingertip across her knee.

“This should feel weird,” she breathed as his face lingered dangerously close to hers. Oliver pecked her lips, the smallest of gestures that could hardly be counted as a kiss, but its simplicity made her heart melt and her body suck in a sharp breath of air a second after.

“But it doesn’t,” he whispered, his lips staying just above hers so syllables grazed against them. He kissed her again, his bottom lip fanning out to capture her top lip as his tongue rode over the wave of her cupid’s bow as an ethereal sigh flittered, unfiltered, from her lips.

She blushed at the sounds she made, mindful that they made her sound positively taken with him. Which she was, but god forbid he knew that, because then he would smile…

Oliver pulled away, his hand cupping her cheek and a smile pulling back the tips of his lips and dancing splendid shades of blue across his eyes.

That smile
That all-knowing, devilishly charming, polar-cap-melting smile.

He knew when her hand trembled against the polished counter top and when she let out a soft sigh of agreeable satisfaction that she was feeling the same heart-skipping, butterfly-swooping, angels-singing euphoria that he was.

It was like pulling back black-out curtains and realising it was the middle of the day as the sun’s rays burst through the window panes.
Oliver thought for a moment that perhaps, if he listened hard enough, he might hear a distant *Hallelujah*.

“No it doesn’t,” Felicity finally found the words to speak something other than muted breaths and pleasurable sighs that gave far too much away.

Oliver kissed her again, no hesitation or reluctance. He kissed her lips like he had been kissing them for 20-odd years beforehand, like he already knew them. Felicity met his kiss with one of her own, her tongue forging through the seam of his lips to elicit a guttural hum to reverberate from his chest.

She smiled against his lips. *Perhaps she could melt ice-caps too....by licking them.*

“Let me just,” he mumbled against the pressure of her kiss before deepening the kiss and flourishing his tongue across her pillowed lips, “test.”

The final word fell more like a sigh than an actual word.

His fingers combed into her hair as they enveloped her head. She found her hands trekking tantalisingly close to the waistband of his jeans, her thumbs sneaking under it. She felt his back stiffen with the skin-on-skin contact and holy shit it made her smile from the inside out because, it seemed, Oliver was just as nervous, just as taken, absolutely as smitten, as she was.

They both separated at the same time, foreheads locked and misted pants fanning across their wet lips.

“So what’s the verdict?” she asked, tensing at the pinprick moment she wondered if he might decide in fact that this was quite weird.

Oliver let the question sink into his mind and a thousand responses came bubbling to the surface; *amazing, earth-shattering; cataclysmic; erotic; sensual; enthralling*…

But only one, very simple, seven letter word came to a summation of all those things and he spoke it directly into her questioning blue eyes;

“Perfect.”

The silence that fell like a curtain around them wasn’t awkward and for once Felicity didn’t feel the need to fill it. In fact, she rather enjoyed it, the way he was looking at her like nothing else could ever be worth looking at again. The way his lips stayed slightly parted after his last word. The way his arms had slipped down her body, although she couldn’t recall when, and had locked in around her waist, holding her there like she might try to make an escape….

Which of course she wouldn’t, even as she glanced over his muscular shoulder to the luxury bed that looked like it was torn from the pages of a bridal magazine and emblazoned with the caption “honeymoon”.

Because the idea that Oliver might want to do it didn’t absolutely fray her nerves and jolt her heart; although *it absolutely did*.

Oliver knew what she was looking at and he doubted she even realised she had been gnawing away at her bottom lip for a good minute straight as her eyes blinked like morse code.

She was looking at the bed, not with half-lidded eyes and a seductress smile, but with a good dose of anxious trepidation.

“Do you want to watch something?” he asked nodding to the TV on the wall behind her head.
He watched her soft, stubble-grazed lips fold into a thankful smile. “Mmmhmm” she nodded as she slipped her body to the edge of the counter. Oliver lifted her down, though he didn’t need to, but selfishly he used the manoeuvre as an excuse to slide her body down his own as her feet slowly lowered to the floor.

He would have been lying if he said he hadn’t considered throwing her onto the plush bed, tearing the pillows off it and devouring each and every inch of her body with his tongue. *Inside and out.*

She was insanely gorgeous, draped in a tee that he would never be able to look at without getting an erection again, her hair pulled back into an effortlessly knot, her face clear of makeup and littered with a smattering of adorable freckles across her nose. There was absolutely no denying he wanted to do very, very *delightfully sinful* things with her, but more than that he wanted to *love* her.

Felicity Smoak wasn’t a one night stand.

He was going to woo her.

He chuckled at his thoughtful use of a word that probably hadn’t seen much use in the last hundred years, but as he watched her shuffle under the covers of the bed it seemed like the absolute perfect word. He was going to be everything she deserved.

“There is going to be over the moon,” he smiled as he perched on the edge of the bed and toed off his shoes.

“About that,” he heard her hesitantly breathe as he settled himself on top of the covers, his legs stretched out in front of him.

Oliver turned to look at her as she twisted a finger through a sprig of lose hair.

“I was kind of hoping to not tell them,” she looked at him with quizzical eyes, unsure what he would make of the request.

Oliver didn’t say anything, not right away at least, as he ruminated over the inference in her words. “I just don’t want to make it a thing with them,” she explained, “I want us to figure this out first before the world knows,” she stopped to study his expression, but it was giving little away.

“Is that okay?” she asked, stroking her hand across his to ensure he understood this request wasn’t in anyway because she didn’t want people to *know*, rather just that she didn’t want them to know *just yet*.

“If that’s what you want,” he replied resolutely.

He understood what she was saying, and what the hand with fingers threaded through his was also trying to say.

“It is,” she nodded, letting out a silent breath of relief, “mom is planning the wedding and she will absolutely make this exhausting and I’m just not ready for that at the moment.”

“I understand.”

He did.

“I'm not ashamed of you,” she peeped with pouted lips and widened eyes.

“I know,” he chuckled out a breath as he squeezed her hand in reassurance.

“Like this isn't some crazy secret affair or anything.”

Oliver nodded, a corner of his mouth twitching with a blossoming smile.

“I'm not intending to lie or that we sneak around, although I’m sure finding an alcove for a quick kiss does seem rather exciting, but that’s not what I was suggesting, although I suppose it kind of is, because obviously you can’t go kissing me...”
Oliver interrupted her with a sweeping kiss, making her head relax into the fluffed up pillow, the down feathers inside making what sounded like a breathy sigh at the pressure. Dragging his lips across hers he slowly pulled back before lightly touching his lips to hers in lingered hums.

“Did you just do that to shut me up?” she guessed, her eyes stayed lazily closed. Oliver pecked her still-pouted lips, wet from a swipe of her tongue. “And if I did?” he quizzed with a playful glint caught in his sea-of-blue eyes. Felicity shrugged, “I'm actually really okay with that.”

They settled into the puffed pillows and fine linen before choosing a movie neither cared to watch although they sat in calmed quiet. They were less than halfway through it when Felicity’s eyes draped closed and her head rested against Oliver’s warm and inviting chest.

Careful not to wake her Oliver shifted only a little to reach the remote and shut the TV off, swallowing the room into silence but for the tiny wisps of breaths coming from the angel on his chest.

He nestled into the bed, scooting down just enough that her head lulled and nuzzled into his shoulder before he shut off the lamp beside him. His eyes stayed opened as he listened to her breathe and let the scent of her play upon his senses. Coconuts and lavender did a pirouette up his nostrils as a smile softly whispered across his face.

Recalling his earlier word made his smile grow.

*Perfect.*

And it was.

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The morning found Felicity stretching out across the large king bed and smacking her lips softly together as recollections of the night before slowly started to dawn on her. She couldn’t catch the smile if she had tried, so she let it grow across her lips as her body recounted the places Oliver’s skin had touched her own.

His lips on her lips.
His hands entwined with hers.
Hands sunk in around her waist.
The low hum of his breathing that had lulled her to sleep the night before.

The pillow smelled like him.
Her lips tasted like him.
Her body…

As her eyes fluttered open she realised that she was alone in the bed and Oliver was across the room talking quietly into the resort phone, his back to her.

There was a low hungering in the pit of her stomach and a tingling between her thighs. Nothing about last night had been more than PG but as she watched his butt tighten and relax when he shifted his weight from one foot to the other she couldn’t help but imagine her brightly painted nails digging into that exact ass as his body pushed her into the mattress and he slowly drove himself inside her.

The feeling of it was so vivid in her mind that she caught herself gasping at the idea of what it might feel like. Would it be slow at first, centering himself above her, holding his cock at her
entrance with his eyes looking for approval?

*Fuck.*

Her whole body felt raked with desire and for a moment she considered tearing his tee from her body, throwing back the covers of the bed and positioning herself so Oliver knew exactly what she wanted the instant he turned around.

*Or perhaps.*

She found her hand slowly gliding down her body without her realising she had given it such an order. Her fingers grazed over the hem of the tee and sent a prickle down her thigh.

In the truest sense of the word Felicity was a virgin, however as her hand snaked under the makeshift nightgown she knew she wasn’t entirely innocent.

*The beach house.*

She blushed at the memory of it. She had gone to bed with an empty feeling and it hadn’t mattered how hard she had squeezed her eyes closed and forced a yawn to come from her mouth in hopes either of those things would speed up the inevitable sleep, neither did and she was still left with that hot, wet, slick of needing *something* to touch her.

She had just meant a light touch, feather light, barely there, just enough to stem the sweltering sensitivity that being so incredibly turned on by him had sent racing through her veins.

It had started off light, barely there, but it turned out Felicity had an extremely vivid imagination and the next thing she knew she had thought them to be his rough and calloused fingers touching her, playing with her pebbled nipple and skating slow drags through her folds.

Her breath had become ragged and needy, *did she squeak?* She had thought she must of, because there was some noise that had made her hands retreat before she’d taken herself over the edge that night at the beach house.

“Felicity?” she heard her name drift from across the room and she snapped her hand back from the hem of the shirt and blew her eyes wide open.

“Sorry,” Oliver apologised, noting that she had the look of a deer caught in the headlights.

“I didn’t mean to startle you,” he continued as he walked across the room.

He had hung up the phone a few moments earlier and turned to see a half dozing Felicity wetting her lips and twitching her brow in something which seemed to be the most pleasant of memories and, if he was honest, he desperately wanted to know what had made that expression wash over her face because he was determined one day to be the cause of it.

“You didn’t, I was, uh,” Felicity twisted a finger into the billowing covers, “thinking.”

“About what?” Oliver asked.

Because you looked like you were about to give me something to lick off your thighs.

*Holy shit.*

He swallowed down his last thought, it had come out of nowhere, and yet, it wasn't a lie.

*Fuck.*

He could feel his erection swelling against his beige shorts. He had already woken up with one, unsurprisingly, and had forced himself under an ice cold shower to banish it before Felicity woke up and screeched at its very prominent presence.

He took three short, stilted breaths to try and quash it before he needed to take the step of slipping an ice cube down his pants.
“Nothing,” she shook her head, spilling loose hair across her face.

Oliver wasn’t going to push the matter, maybe he was better off not knowing in case it sent him down a spiral that even an ice bath couldn’t pull him back from.

“I made reservations for tonight,” he smiled proudly. It wasn’t the first time he’d made reservations and it wasn’t the first date he’d been on either, but at this moment he wanted approval in the form of that beautiful little smile.

He wanted to know if it still looked the same in the morning.

“Our date,” Felicity gushed as she tipped the corners of her mouth up into a gentle smile.

Oliver decided it looked even better in the morning. “Would it be weird if maybe I met you there?” she asked, scrunching up her nose at the way it sounded, probably childish and mushy.

Oliver looked at her inquisitively. “It’s silly and it’s sappy, but I kind of have this whole idea in my head of what a first date with you would look like,” she blushed as she spoke, lowering her head before she pulled it back up, showering him with the most charming blue eyes, flecked with patches of green.

“What does it look like?” he asked, watching her as her head shuffled against the crisp pillow slip. She trapped her tongue with her teeth and pulled back an even more radiant smile as her lashes fanned down and then up.

_He was going to need a fucking ice bath._

“You’ll have to wait and see,” she winked.

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After a delectable breakfast of almost every fruit available and a honey-sweetened cereal, together with possibly the best cup of coffee Felicity had ever tasted, her and Oliver walked hand and hand behind Tommy and Camila as they headed towards the expansive lower grounds of the resort, the pack deciding on a self-designed walking tour of the nearby shops and sights.

Not much had been said about the night before between the two couples, smiles and knowing looks were exchanged and it, for now at least, had been left at that. The only actual words about it had been between Tommy and Oliver as Oliver relayed Felicity’s request for their families not to know, _just yet._

Tommy had furrowed his brow, not because he disagreed with the request but because he knew he would virtually have to sew his mouth shut if he happened upon either of their parents because he was _terrible_ at keeping secrets.

The tightly pulled smile on Oliver’s lips indicated that was something Oliver was very much aware of.

The group was taking the path not far from the pool when both Oliver and Tommy halted and stiffened like guard dogs, pausing for effect. It didn’t take long for Felicity’s eyes to discover what had made their heckles stand up.

Felicity gripped Oliver’s hand tighter, she could tell what he wanted to do, if she was honest she kind of wanted to see it happen, but it wasn’t worth it. Chad wasn’t worth it.
Camila didn’t notice until Tommy had already escaped and was heading directly for Chad who was leaning against the bar chatting up a stunning brunette in a pearl white bikini.

“Hi, Tommy Merlyn,” he interrupted as he took the seat next to the girl and pulled his phone from the pocket of his shorts, “with a PSA.” The girl tipped her head to look at the intruding stranger quizzically.

With the tap of a few buttons Tommy’s phone started playing a loud video of the events of last night just as the other three reached him.

“Ooooh,” Tommy cringed as the video looped back on Felicity landing her knee directly on target, “Still iced bro?” Tommy snickered as he looked past the girl and directly into the darkening eyes of the lacrosse player in need of an attitude adjustment.

Tommy played it again, the insult that came so easily from Chad’s mouth the night before making the pretty brunette stiffen in the stool. “Two-hundred-k hits overnight,” Tommy remarked, watching her pretty lips turn into a knowing scowl, “you're famous dipshit” he added as he relished the clench of Chad’s jaw.

The pretty brunette offered Tommy a thankful nod and wordlessly slipped from her seat. “Ignore this douche,” Chad pleaded as his hand caught her arm.

The girl looked down at her arm unamused before she lifted her barely touched drink from the bar and tipped it down Chad’s chest, spilling the raspberry daiquiri in a cascade of pink down his ivory tank.

“Who’s the fucking whore now?” she challenged before she turned and walked away, stopping only briefly in front of Felicity to add, “nice aim.”

Felicity thanked her with a smile and a bob of her head, there was some degree of social justice that came along with knowing that was one more girl who wasn’t going to fall for Chad’s bullshit.

“Get that off your fucking phone,” Chad raged as he threw the stool between him and Tommy to the ground.

Oliver stepped up beside his friend, ready to fight – in fact the look on his face almost suggested he would enjoy it a lot.

Which he absolutely would.

“He could,” Felicity spoke up, stepping in between the war of muscle twitching that was going on, “but it wouldn't make a difference because it’s made its way onto internet. Don’t you just love the internet?”

“Bitch,” he spat.

Felicity halted Oliver with a hand on his chest. While she appreciated the sentiment, Chad wasn’t the first person to call her that and she was fairly certain he wouldn’t be the last.

“With Wi-Fi,” she smirked as she pulled her Windows tablet from her backpack, “and a propensity for hacking.”

Oliver relaxed beside her. Last night had proven that she wasn’t a damsel that needed rescuing but regardless he stood, relaxed, but ready to throw the first punch if needed.

“That’s a really nice, healthy bank balance you have, it would be a super shame if you made some poorly thought out stock choices...” she tapped happily away on the display of her tablet, turning it just enough so Chad caught a glimpse of familiar information, “oh, oh, no I have a better idea.” She smiled almost wickedly as $100k dropped from the balance.

“Rape Crises America thanks you for your generous donation.”
Chad went to push forward but all he was met with was both Tommy and Oliver chomping at the bit for him to give them a reason to start something.

“What do you want?” Chad grimaced.
“From You? Nothing,” Felicity quipped, “but if you ever lay your hands on another woman without her sober consent I will find out. If you ever come near me, I will destroy you and if you ever call a woman a whore again I will take everything you have. Are we clear?”

Felicity stared him down with an unflinching glare. He may have been twice her size but she wasn’t going to fade meekly into the background.

She couldn’t help the German girl who she was almost certain had been violated by that asshole, but she could see to it that the world and its Chads were given a swift and brutal wake up call.

It was about that moment that Felicity decided that she would tip whatever resources she had into making sure of that.

“I’m done with you,” he gritted before he attempted to chuckle like he didn’t care, the sound however was more like a strangled whimper and it made Felicity’s smile widen.
“Good to know Chad.”

She slipped the tablet back into her backpack, turned on her heels and walked away with her back straight and her chin lifted.

Oliver watched her with a beaming smile of pride.
Holy shit there was so much more he wanted to know about the cute girl from next door with the wicked grin and the inherent nature for good.

He felt Chad shift ahead of him and his smile vanished immediately, replaced with a stone-faced glare as he leaned in close, “she has this covered but just so you know, I will break your nose and every one of your fingers if you even try to touch her again.”

“Felicity,” Tommy called as he skipped alongside her, “Sandy from Florida wants me to take a selfie with the,” he paused to read directly from the comment on his video, “hot fierce blonde.”
“I can only assume she means you,” he smiled as he wrapped a kindly arm across her shoulders, raised his camera phone and snapped a picture of the two of them.

[That Night]

Oliver felt like he had just come from the dentist, not due to any mouth pain but because the distinctive feeling of a dry mouth stuffed with cotton balls that he was experiencing. The waiter offered him an almost apologetic smile as he past the table for the third time in the last twenty minutes.

Felicity wasn’t late, far from it, she still had another good ten minutes before she would be anything other than earlier. It had been Oliver that had been unbelievably early. Verging on retirement village early, in fact it had been just after half five when he had shown up for his half six reservation.
He had wished Felicity goodbye some time around 2pm after their late lunch when Camila and her parted from the boys to indulge in some *girl only* shopping. He had almost pouted, he honestly didn’t want to leave her side, not now that she knew how he felt and not when he could hold her warm hand in his slightly colder one or when he could lean in to whisper nothing in particular into her ear so he could bathe in the scent he found there.

He didn’t want to shift from his position next to her *at all.* But she had flashed him the sweetest, charming and most undeniable smile he had ever had the pleasure of seeing and right there – *that exact moment* – he knew she would only have to show him that smile and he would literally do anything she requested.

So, that was in fact the last time he had seen her. He glanced down at his watch, over 4 and a hours ago.

Three pm had seen him sulk into his room, Tommy falling into the life of a retiree or pre-schooler and demanding a mid-afternoon nap.

Four pm found him walking circles around his room, touching furniture and starring at artwork like he was suddenly encapsulated by it (he wasn’t).

He sunk into the private plunge pool shortly after but the idleness if sitting in it starring out towards the ocean didn’t last long and by 4:50 he was showered, his scruff neatly trimmed and his clothes were laid on the bed.

He had poured over his clothes for longer than he ever had ever before. He didn’t bring a suit and while Tommy had offered his, Oliver had decided that given their size discrepancies Oliver would likely resemble the hulk if he wore Tommy's. He had chastised himself for scoffing at his mother suggesting he might want to pack something other than shorts and Henley tees, but, despite wanting to tell Felicity his true feelings this week, he had never considered what might happen *after* that and he had certainly never considered on Day 2 he would be sitting at a table of a decidedly nice restaurant waiting for her, waiting for their first date.

After much huffing and a sudden appreciation of what girls go through in the clothing selection process, Oliver settled on midnight black pants and a deep blue and threaded-white button up shirt with the sleeves rolled up just below the elbows and the top button discretely open.

All that and anxiously trying to watch a TV show, that 10 minutes into he realised wasn’t in English, brought him to 5:00pm.

Unable to stay in the room a minute longer, he took the longest route he knew and ended up at the restaurant an hour early. The maitre’d had shuffled papers nervously until Oliver managed to convey that it was his mistake entirely and he would sit at the bar and wait.

Thirty minutes later they offered him pick of tables and Oliver chose the one directly in line with the door.

The door that he had been starring at ever since.

The door Felicity would walk through.

The door he couldn’t pry his eyes away from.

Even with his cotton mouth and lacklustre outfit.

~*~*~*~

Felicity took a breath, one that was so deep it must have sounded like she was choking to the older
couple who stopped as they walked towards the same restaurant entrance.
“Are you alright dear?” she asked, a very distinctive English accent running through each word – she sounded almost like Mary Poppins would with a few years on her.
“Quite alright, thank you,” Felicity blushed, although her trembling hands said otherwise.

The older woman smiled, the kind lines on her face each telling a story of how much smiling she had done over the years, “he’s going to be breathless.”
Felicity couldn’t stop the smile fanning across her lips and floating up into her eyes as they fluttered softly, all black lashes and bright blue saucers.

“Which one is he?” she asked gingerly as the man who held her hand in the crook of his elbow like a true gentlemen just offered a soft shake of his head and smile.
“I’m not sure, I haven’t looked yet,” Felicity replied, the nerves crawling up her back as silly ideas about him not showing up or seeing her and walking away foolishly plagued her.

“Blind date?”
“Oh no, I’ve known Oliver for years, but this is our first date-date,” she spoke as she rolled her fingers over each other in an attempt to stop herself from picking at the ivory polish she wore.
“Go look if there are any young men sitting at a table by themselves Harv,” the older woman smiled, tapping the older man’s arm.
Wordlessly he did just as she instructed and ventured into the restaurant alone.

“We’ve been married for 65 years this month,” she offered, reading the question on Felicity’s mind, “my first and only love. Not that there is anything wrong with trying out other goods first of course.”

Felicity chuckled, instantly feeling a least some of the anxious tension floating off her shoulders.
“Mavis, there’s one fella, cropped hair, scruffy face, looking like he’s sweating bullets,” Harv announced rather loudly as he joined the two woman, instantly linking arms with Mavis.
“Oh let me look,” she chatted as she disappeared into the restaurant, dragging poor Harv along behind her.

Felicity relaxed her shoulders and took a few short breaths, first and only love. She was certain Oliver was her first at least.

“Oh he’s quite a catch, sandy brown hair, blue eyes, big shoulders?” Mavis asked and her and Harv pottered back out the doors.
“That sounds like him,” Felicity smiled before she blew out a soft exhale.
“Well, if it helps he looks more nervous than you do.”

Felicity laughed, a bright, bold, effervescent laugh, “it does help, thank you.”
She was ready. Crossing that door could mean everything or it could mean nothing, but either way she needed to know.

One more breath and a smile back at Mavis who looked like she was about to tear up, found Felicity stepping through the doors and immediately locking eyes with Oliver.

~*~*~*~

Fuck.
That was the only word Oliver knew anymore.

Fuck.
His palms felt like waterfalls and his chest felt like that time Tommy sat on it while holding 20lb
dumbbells.

Fuck.
It wasn't that she looked gorgeous in that red dress that floated like silk around her body, Felicity had looked gorgeous so many times before, but it was more that she looked that gorgeous for him.

She had dressed that way for him, and he didn’t mean that in a possessive or expectant way, but in a fuck, what did I do to deserve her walking in here looking like that kind of way.

Oliver stared and Felicity froze.

This was one of those moments. The type of moment that gets written indelibly on the story of your life. The type of moment where you’re scared that the reality will never meet the expectation.

But, when Felicity saw the smile walk up Oliver's face, she realised it absolutely did – from the fragrant smell of the nearby flowering trees and the soft sounds of the crashing waves in the distance, this moment was everything.

His eyes became too much and she found her feet refusing to move because once she takes that step nothing goes back to the way it was. Last night could have been explained as heated moments fuelled by desire but tonight would be about something different, something more.

Tonight they would see if there was more to this than a few exceptional kisses and Felicity couldn’t help but glance over her shoulder towards the door because a part of her was too afraid to find out, but all she found was Mavis’ smiling face and a nodding Harv.

Felicity looked back towards Oliver and her eyes sunk closed for just a second to let the memory of the moppy-haired blonde with an ice cap melting smile and Air Jordans float into her mind; and, when she opened her eyes again, that was all she saw.

She looked down at her foot hovered over the first stone step down towards the restaurant floor and saw the small feet of a 10 year old slipped into those beloved panda flats.

And, just like that, the world didn’t seem quite so scary anymore.

Oliver stood, as a man, but all Felicity saw was her first crush. The first step was easy now.

Wherever this night went she would accept it because at least, even if it was only this moment here and now – she had it and she lived it; and it was theirs.

“Hi,” she breathed as she reached him.
“Hi,” he replied, his word drawn out into a sigh.
Oliver kissed her cheek, the kind of kiss that showed how much his lips trembled. She smiled at the gesture as his warm breath misted across her cheek and sunk into her lips.

“You, ah, you look,” Oliver stumbled for words as they took their respective seats, breath-taking, perfect, “beautiful,” he finally settled on.
“Thank you.”
Felicity smiled as she drew an imagined line through and envisioned bucket list: go on a date with Oliver Queen.

“Do you want a drink?” Oliver asked as he rested his hands on his lap, suddenly aware he had no idea what to do with them.
“I don’t think it will mix well with the concoction I took to calm my nerves,” Felicity explained as her nose creased up.
“You’re nervous?” he charmed, his lip spiking up at the corner.
“And you’re not?”
“Insanely so, I don’t even know what I’m supposed to do with my hands,” he laughed as he pulled them out from under the table.

Felicity laughed a little louder than expected before she clamped a hand over her mouth, but continued laughing underneath it.
“Honestly, what am I supposed to do with these?” Oliver grimaced in jest, “if I put them under the table it looks like I’m doing something inappropriate under there.”
“Are you?” she winked.
Oliver gaped in exaggerated horror before he returned her wink with one of his own.

“But if I put them on the table,” he continued as he demonstrated them palm down on the table either side of the space left for the plate, “I look like I might pounce across the table and...”
Oliver tapered out his words, unsure if it was first date banter or not.
“And what?” Felicity smirked, although she knew full well his implications.
“And that is not first date conversation,” he laughed before he gulped down water to buy himself some time.
“Second date conversation?”
She wasn’t letting this die.

Oliver wobbled his head while he swallowed the last mouthful of water.
“At least the fifth,” he finally answered.
“Oh, do you think there will be a fifth?”
She leaned her chin into her cupped hands to watch, with great enjoyment, as Oliver shifted in his seat.
“I know there will be,” he spoke, the stutter in his words now vanished, his eyes seeing only her with a gaze so weighted that Felicity had to blink away for a moment, “I just hope you know that too.”

Oliver finally found something to do with one of his hands as he lay it gently on top of Felicity’s, sandwiching it between him and the table, as his thumb stroked a soft back and forth across it.

“Of course,” she whispered, the words barely heard above the ambient noise of the restaurant, but Oliver didn’t really need to hear it, her piercing eyes and the beautiful poise of her softly painted lips said all Oliver needed to know.

Yes
The salty air whipped through Felicity’s hair and caught the back of her dress waving it like a red flag behind her as Oliver and Felicity strolled along the beach, fingers interlinked and palms sunk together.

The moon was high but hidden behind smooth streaks of creamy clouds imbued with hues of midnight blue. The sand sunk around each footstep as Felicity dangled her shoes from her free hand.

The nerves of the first date had faded as they settled into a calm banter throughout the meal. Oliver asked about school, and Felicity regaled him with things he already knew but loved to listen to her enthuse about regardless. Oliver chatted about spending some of the winter break at QC and how much he had learned, to which Felicity smiled proudly and softly encouraged him to believe that he could one day take the helm, onwards and upwards.

What remained unsaid was the brown envelope Felicity had posted, a truth she kept close to her heart for reasons she couldn’t quite explain; and Oliver’s deep down fear that he could never be the type of boyfriend that Felicity deserved, that inherently, one day, he would fuck it all up.

No doubt those things ought to have been spoken about, admitted to, ironed out. But they weren’t, not even now as they strolled in tranquillity along the shoreline of the nearby beach.

“What do you want to sit a moment?” she asked as her toes dug into the fine grains of sand and she
glanced across her shoulder to catch Oliver unapologetically staring.

He nodded before Felicity took a seat, the sand cool, but a dry as the night air. Oliver sat down beside her, his arm instinctively slipping behind her like a protectively barrier. She scooted closer, so close that their bodies touched and a single sheet of paper couldn’t pass between them. They sat like that for a few moments until Felicity finally broke the silence.

“I need to tell you something,” Felicity sighed as her head nestled into his shoulder and she took a deep breath of salty air. Oliver hummed into her temple before he placed an air-soft kiss in the same spot.

“It’s probably presumptuous given this was our first actual official date, but, um…” Felicity huffed through her inability to get the words to get from her head to her mouth as she dug her toes into the sand. “Okay,” Oliver remarked, as his hand automatically sought out hers, fingers entwining in the cool sand. “I’m very, um, attracted to you,” Felicity explained with her eyes anchored out towards the rolling waves of the ocean.

“That’s a good thing right?” Oliver laughed, as he walked gentle fingers up the back of her arm causing a wake of goosebumps to spring up. “It is, it’s just, I um, I’m Maria,” she fumbled with a nervous tremble in her voice. “I don’t follow.” “From the sound of music, I’m Maria.” “I’ve never heard you sing,” Oliver was laughing as he tried to piece together her words. “No, the um, nun part.” “You’re Jewish?” Now he was really lost. “I know,” she flustered.

Felicity rolled her head and took a drawn breath in before she blew it out quietly through rounded lips, she needed to get this out.

“I mean the celibate part,” she piped as he eyes squeezed closed. “Oh,” Oliver spoke as he slowly registered her words, “you’re a vir...” he mumbled the rest “Yes, that,” she smiled at the sudden nerves emanating from Oliver, “although I’m not entirely inexperienced.”

“Oh really?” Oliver smirked. “There was this guy in high school, one of those high achieving types, researched everything, anyway, he was under the impression that two fingers and three thrusts were enough to satisfy a woman, they were not,” Felicity huffed, perturbed. Oliver snorted out a laugh before it turned into a chuckle. He couldn’t actually think of a time he’d ever made that noise.

“Don’t laugh,” she pouted before flicking sand onto his foot with her own. “I’m sorry, it’s just, what?” “He had a theory that it was all about angles or something, that the hole to finger ratio of two to one was enough,” Felicity reminisced as she shook her head in embarrassment.

Oliver stifled another laugh, trying his best to maintain a straight face despite the conversation he found himself having. “Where was this?” he asked, invested in this story for reasons unbeknownst to him. “In his parents’ minivan he had borrowed, I barely touched him and he was still wearing pants and
boom so…” Felicity buried her face in her hands, she had kept that story close to the chest, not even divulging the full cringe worthiness of it to her mother, “that is about the saddest story and I actually can’t believe I told you.”

Felicity found herself grimacing at the harsh reality that she had just confessed something so embarrassing to Oliver.

“I’m glad you told me,” Oliver responded, trying to hide the slow realisation that he was becoming aroused at the idea of intimacy with Felicity.

“Why?”
She looked at him with one eye and a slightly hitched brow, the other half of her face still shielded by her hand.
“Because,” he paused to brush back the other hand from her face, “one day I’ll show you what fingers can do.”
Oliver’s laugh had been replaced with a soft smile and a voice as smooth as caramel.

Felicity felt her breath hitch and words failed her for a few moments as she gnawed on her bottom lip.
“One day?” she asked, her voice barely above a whisper and her eyes searching his face.
“I don’t want to rush things with you Felicity, we don’t need to. I’m not going anywhere and I want you to be sure. This is more than just physical for me,” he assured before he placed a tender kiss against her cheek, his hand still folded into hers.

Dirty dreams aside, Oliver was right, Felicity didn’t want to rush this and despite the low hum between her legs that sought out the realisation of said dreams, sleeping with Oliver in Cabo felt like too much too soon.

“I do like kissing you though,” Felicity simmered before she captured his lips with her own, fluttering a kiss across them like a breaking wave.
“Well that’s good,” Oliver hummed his approval before pressing his lips to the wing of her lips, feathering a few peppered kisses there.

Their lips walked closer before they met, his folded around her lush bottom lip, hers caving around his top lip. One hand walked up the sweeping curve of her waist as the other sauntered slowly across her collar bone and up the veil-thin skin of her neck.

As Felicity twisted two fingers into strands of hair at the back of his neck and danced her nails underneath Oliver’s shirt he sighed wistfully into the kiss. He meant what he had said, he wasn’t going to rush into the physical with Felicity, a vice which had always see him screw up in the past, but fuck if every single thing she did gave him a raging erection that was screaming for satisfaction and urging him to show her the same.

“Hotel,” he sputtered as he tore himself away from the sweet arousal of her lips, he needed a distraction – a restocked mini bar and 200 channels might just provide that, “not for that,” he added breathlessly as he spotted the quizzical look she was firing at him.

Oliver caught his breath and shifted in the seat of the sand to squash his swelling erection.
“I just mean we could watch a movie or...” he trailed off because he had no other PG ideas if she rejected that one.

“Okay,” she prattled before she stood and brushed the sand off her ass in a motion that left Oliver speechless and unable to avert his gaze, “I get to pick the movie though.”

Her last words sparked him to action and Oliver stood and brushed heavy strokes down his long
legs before, eager for the contact, his hand sought out hers, finding it quickly, open and willing.

In an action he gave no forethought to, Oliver raised her hand and brushed his lips across the back of it.
“What was that for?” Felicity asked before her lips curved into a beautifully entrancing smile.
“Nothing,” Oliver breathed, fanning the word across the back of her hand before his eyes rose upwards to meet, locked, with hers, “everything.”

They took the slow walk back to the room in almost-silence, the peaceful lull of the same interrupted only briefly by content hums and distant ambience. Felicity usually hated silence, the act of it often causing her to fill it with words that were better left in her head, but there was something utterly unique about the silence that enveloped them this star-lit night with the warmth of his hand melting into hers and the slight graze of her finger tips against his leg and his arm against the curve of her shoulder.

It was something that could only be described as *perfect* and even then, she concluded, it didn’t quite do the moment justice.

Felicity caught the smile of a newly familiar face as they passed by Mavis and Harv sitting on a bench overlooking the beach. Felicity nodded a smile and noted the surreptitious thumbs up that Mavis replied with.

“Do you know them?” Oliver asked quietly as they walked out of earshot.
“Mmhmm,” Felicity smiled through the hum, “new friends.”
Oliver chuckled lightly, endeared by her whimsy.
“Of course they are,” he smiled as he glanced backwards and waved.

[A Few Days Later]

The last few days in Cabo had seen Felicity and Oliver spending days together soaking up the sights and the sun and nights together hauled up in the room eating overpriced snacks and watching movies until they fell asleep, usually with her head on his chest.

Chad had kept his distance, in fact if Felicity was honest she didn’t recall actually seeing more than a passing glimpse of him. His face had become somewhat recognisable and Tommy found extreme pleasure in making sure everyone had seen his “*directorial debut*” as he liked to call it. Felicity didn’t believe in counting chickens before they were hatched but she didn’t envision any future run-ins with Chad; and if the need arose, her knee was almost certainly up for a repeat. She had written herself a note to thank her mother for the two years of self-defence classes they took together.

Tommy had been sworn to secrecy and while it looked like the idea of keeping something pained him immeasurably, Felicity still adamantly believed it was the right call, at least until *after* her parents wedding, the date now set for May 12 in Florida.

It was now their last night in Cabo as they sat out on the private patio overlooking the ocean beside the plunge pool. His board shorts and her rainbow bandeau two-piece still damp from the dip a few minutes before as they sat, somehow, squished together on a single patio lounger.
“Can’t we just stay here?” Felicity begged as her fingers drew patterns across the tight muscles of Oliver's chest, gathering tiny droplets of water still to be found there.

“And what will we do for work? Because I think pretty soon my parents might cut me off,” Oliver chortled before he kissed the top of her head and swept his hand in lazy lines up and down her lower back.

“I’ll make shell necklaces and you can teach golf to rich tourists,” she concluded with a resolute nod sending lose waves of hair tumbling forward onto his naked chest.

Oliver sighed at the harmless sensation, each night they had spent together causing him to find arousal in even the smallest, most inane contact between them. The accidental touch of her finger against his wrist when he handed her something made his pulse race. The feel of her eyelashes fluttering against his shoulder as she slept felt like an inferno. And, just like this moment now, whenever her hair brushed against his bare skin it felt like the most sensual of secrets between them.

“You’ve given this some thought,” he finally spoke as he tried to pull focus from the veil of hair that the wind softly danced across him.

“Or tennis, you’d make a very cute coach,” Felicity continued as she raised her head and nestled her chin into the dip of his shoulder, her lips now close enough to kiss, which he did.

“Do I have to wear those little white shorts?” he asked, ghosting the question over her lips Felicity pecked his lips softly before she replied, “Of course, that’s how you’ll get tips.”

Oliver turned his head slightly as the setting sun threw whips of orange and pink hues through the sky ahead of them. Felicity tipped her head up and kissed a soft path from the edge of his lips, along his unshaven jaw and into the pulse point of his neck eliciting a guttural growl from deep in Oliver's chest.

Her tongue swirled over the lightning fast pulse as her eyes watched his lull closed and her hips rocked gently against the outside of his leg with her toes curled against his calf. Felicity could feel her nipples hardening against the damp swimsuit and, as she instinctively pressed her body closer to his, the simmering arousal between her legs became almost unbearable.

Fuck Maria.

“Going home means going back to reality,” she divulged, her voice soft and almost trembled “And that’s a problem because?”

Because you might realise how foolish this is?

“I don’t want this to end,” she sighed, burying the other thoughts for the time being.

“It won’t.”

There wasn’t even a hint of uncertainty in his response.

“You think we’ll find the time to just be like this?”

“Felicity,” he kissed her forehead gently, “we’ll make the time.”

Felicity anchored her palms into his chest and slowly lifted herself up before crushing her lips against his. His fingers fanned through her hair as the kiss became more desperate. Her body writhed against his and the damp material sliding against his bare chest made him gasp hungrily into her mouth. She lapped her tongue against his lips, drinking in each sweet, needy breath that fell from them as her hips bucked against his waist, seeking out a friction she could feel through the thin fabric of her shorts, now patched with water leaked from her bathers underneath.

Oliver's fingers tightened in her hair making her mewl against his lips in enjoyment.
Fuck, the idea that Felicity might enjoy him a little heated wound him so tightly that he walked a tightrope of arousal and control.

He could feel her shorts riding up as she rolled herself against him and peppered soft pleasured moans against his mouth.

FUCK.

Oliver's control was waning as his cock grew thick and hard against the confines of his board shorts and when her teeth lightly nipped at his lower lip he all but lost it, flipping their position so he was above her, panting hot breaths against her neck as he devoured it.

His hand cupped her breast, his thumb sought out her nipple and found it hard and peaked against the smooth fabric. Without semblance of thoughts Oliver kissed a slow, hopped, track down her neck, over the rise of her collar bone and down towards her breast that he kneaded with his palm.

Felicity moaned his name as her chin tipped upwards and her hands anchored into his waist. She held him there as she lifted her ass from the lounger and stroked herself against his prominent erection.

FUCK. FUCK.

Oliver pulled back, brutally severing the kiss as his eyes roamed across the vision beneath him, she was gorgeous. Her hair spilling like a halo of blonde across the outdoor pillow, her sun-blushed cheeks, lips slightly parted, still wet from his tongue.

Felicity looked up at him with doe-soft eyes, the blue so deep he was almost certain he could fall into them infinitely. With a trembling hand she sunk his palm back into her breast and nervously snagged her lower lip between her teeth.

Her breath was shaky but her next words were unbelievably clear.

“Could you touch me tonight, maybe a little?”

Fuck.

The way she asked.

Oliver didn’t know what threads of control he had left and perhaps he should have said no, but her eyes begged him and her lips welcomed him and honestly he doubted that even a crowbar could pry him away from her.

He kissed her lips, feather soft, dragging them upwards just a fraction before letting them drop again, pouted and swollen.

His nose nudged into the fabric of the bandeau top as his lips warmed against her achingly soft stomach. She arched her back at the sensual feel of it and skimmed her sweltering heat against his core.

Oliver kissed a slow and straight path down her stomach, his hot breath melting into the misted traces of pool water trapped there. Felicity's eyes hooded over with the intoxicating awakening his mouth was provoking.

He reached the waistband of her shorts, nipping the thin fabric between his teeth as he ravenously considered how easily he might strip them from her body.

He felt her fingers swarm around the button, seeking to undo it, before he caught her wrist and shook his head softly. If this was only to be a touch, he needed a barrier between them, even if that barrier was only a thin wall of cotton he was almost certain he could tear in two without straining a
muscle.
“Leave them on,” he rasped as her hands fell away.

Gently he spread her legs, dropping one to the warm tiled floor and wrapping the other around his back as he sat against his heels between her widened legs.

He watched her willowy body shift underneath him, her hands seeking out something to touch before they trickled down his chest. If Oliver was to have a hope of holding himself together and not repeating the only experience Felicity had (and firing his load prematurely in his shorts) she needed to not touch him, at all.

Oliver stroked his palms down her arms, trailing soft fingers behind, until he reached her wrists where he clamped his hands. He lifted her arms guiding them above her head, stretching her svelte figure and tightening every inch of her. Her arms bent at the elbows and dropped behind the lounger.

“Keep them there,” he whispered huskily into her ear as he pulled back. Wordlessly she nodded.

Oliver's eyes walked back down her body, taking in each sight, each inch, as though it was a work of art, and it fucking was.

His hand touched her first. His palm smoothed against her clothed mound and his middle finger tracking lightly between her legs, applying just enough pressure that she felt it under the thin walls of fabric.

“Oliver,” she said, her voice honeyed with arousal.
He simply smiled as he applied a little more pressure, rolling his finger like a snake against her.

Felicity bucked at the caress, her whole body reacting to the slight movement of a single finger. Oliver watched the slight twitch of fabric as her nipple budded even tighter than before, her arousal now dripping from her and mixing with the subtle scent of coconut body oil. He hadn’t even considered acting on it, but before he could stop himself his mouth was caved around her breast, his tongue lapping over the fabric, skimming her nipple underneath.

She keened under him, her nails now gripping into the lip of the lounger, almost fearful she might float away if she relinquished her hold. Felicity could feel his chin kneading into her breast and his breath through the weave of the fabric and it was undeniably more pleasurable than anything her own hands could muster.

Felicity jolted her hips upward, pressing Oliver's fingers deeper between her sheathed folds, her thighs rubbing with enticing strokes against his aching cock.

“Fuck,” he cursed as he bucked forward, thrusting the rod against her apex.
She whimpered with undulated pleasure as she propelled the back of her head into the woven plastic of the lounger.

Oliver grabbed her hips and plunged them down, nailing them to the chair as he growled against her breast. He couldn’t have her doing that again.

He dropped her breast with a wet plop before he skimmed his teeth across the tented nipple his eyes watching as her mouth flew open in a desperate, silent choke.

Without any further delay Oliver buried his face between her legs and Felicity mewled, her voice throaty and wet with need. She bucked against the restraint of his hands but he didn’t relent.
He nuzzled deeper, his breath like a beautiful torture of heat against her dripping folds as it pressed through the fabric. Oliver could smell her arousal and fuck it was probably the single best scent he had ever encountered. He swore he could taste her on the tip of his tongue, but perhaps that was simply his mind playing the most avid and rousing of tricks.

Oliver pried himself away, replacing his lips with his fingers. He rubbed her a little harder, rougher, to see her limits. The smile that floated across her lips told him all he needed to know.

The cotton bowed and gathered as Oliver pushed deeper between her folds, blindly navigating his way upwards with sharp, broken strokes. When he found her clit Felicity gaped and bleated tiny whimpers of pleasure, his name stroking the inside of her lips.

Felicity's eyes were sealed shut and her knuckles were whitening as she held onto the chair. The pleasure was like a thick, heavy curtain that completely covered her. There wasn’t a single part of her body that wasn't inflamed with carnal desire. She hummed, breathy, as he quickened his strokes, adding more fingers that swerved around the others in rapturous pleasure.

She knew what was coming.
It was familiar, but new.
For a brief moment, as she squeezed her eyes and gnawed her lip, she thought about holding it back, until Oliver kissed her neck and whispered, “come Felicity.”
So she did, the sensation of it rippling through her core and dripping off the tips of her fingers.

Cries of nonsensical words fell from her lips and her toes clenched as she jolted beneath him.

Oliver straightened his back and eased the pressure of his fingers, slowing them to ease her through the orgasm. Her shoulders glistened with a sticky, rose-tinted mist of sweat and Oliver imagined himself licking that lithely one day when he too could feel the tremble of orgasm, just the idea of it now enough to make him sigh happily.

Felicity's eyes fluttered open, “Oliver,” she spoke with a tremor.
He smiled kindly at her as he slowly released her hips.
She thought about apologising as she noted the erection he was still carrying, but the smile on his lips was not pained or twisted, it was genuine and calm.

“Don’t worry about this, it’ll go away,” he chuckled with a silvery tone, “seeing you,” he added as he cupped her face, “was...” amazing, beautiful, erotic, consuming, “perfect.”

He kissed her lips lightly, just a brush against them, soothing the swollen feel of them.
Felicity could feel the heated blush across her cheeks beginning to fade as she blinked up at Oliver.

“Are you sure you’re okay with keeping this from our parents, at least till the wedding?” she asked as he stood from the lounger, his eyes still admiring her.

“It’s just over a month away, it will be fine,” he winked as he bent down and kissed her forehead.

What could go wrong?
Famous last words.

The airport was filled with new thoughts moving forward and sad goodbyes to what Cabo had become for both Felicity and Oliver. Once they left the island and returned home they would, at least in front of their families, maintain some distance, but it wasn’t the idea of keeping something from her mother (when she almost always failed to do so in the past) that worried Felicity the most.
It was something else, something which she had expressed last night and Oliver had so easily
soothed her concerns – at least until this morning, when she woke up to find the bed empty and for just a second, until he emerged showered and dressed from the bathroom, she had worried that he had finally woken up from the Cabo daydream.

This place was magical, surreal, perfect and the time spent here with Oliver had been all those things, to the point where Felicity worried that the harsh reality of school and study and responsibilities would shine the bleakest of lights of them and – when they realised Starling was not the beachfront paradise – Oliver would walk away and she would be heartbroken.

Not intentionally of course…
But all the same.
*What happens in Cabo doesn't work outside of Cabo…maybe.*

Those thoughts continued to flood her mind as she watched the land disappear beneath them from the airplane window, and they still sat somewhere in the back of her mind when the plane touched down in Starling, and even when Oliver was driving her home along the highway, taking the well-travelled off ramp into suburbia.

“Stop the car,” Felicity piped as the streets slowly turned from city limits to suburban tree-lined. “Is something wrong?” Oliver asked as he signalled and pulled the car over to the side of the road.

When he pulled up the handbrake and tilted his head towards her, Felicity clasped her hands over his cheeks and pulled his lips onto hers urgently and impulsively kissing him as she scrambled her knees onto the leather seat.

Moments later Oliver’s head caught up with his lips and he kissed her back, his hands folding into her hair, a smoky groan dripping from his mouth.

Felicity sighed as she pulled free from the kiss and swiped her tongue between her lips.

“What was that for?” Oliver chuffed as his thumb brushed the corner of his mouth.

“Just because,” Felicity shrugged.

“I like because,” Oliver winked as his fingers trickled up her leg under the hem of her white scalloped-trimmed skirt.

“I just wanted to make sure.”

Oliver's eyes quizzed her as he shifted in the seat, “make sure?”

“That I could still kiss you, away from Cabo.”

“And?”

Felicity smiled before she pecked his lips and innocently hummed her pleasure.

“How am I not supposed to kiss you whenever I want?”

Felicity sighed softly as her fingers danced around her neck.

“I’m sorry, I just…”

“It’s okay, but you know my mom loves you,” Oliver chuckled, “probably more than me.”

Felicity smiled through a soft laugh.

“I just want us to have a chance at being *just us,*” she breathed, “is that silly?”

Oliver shook his head, he understood.

“It would be different if you weren’t you and we hadn’t lived next door to each other for years and my mother, wasn’t,” Felicity paused to roll her eyes gently back with a soft sigh, “wasn’t my mother. But because all of that is the case, I just want a few weeks where we can figure out us before everyone is granted a say on it.”

“You think everyone will want a say?” Oliver asked cheerfully.
Felicity rolled her head across the headrest of the leather seat and smiled, “as soon as my mother finds out you know she’ll have a posing for photos and planning our children’s names.”

“Our children?”

Felicity cupped a hand over her mouth and squeezed her eyes shut, they had only just started dating and she’d already thrown the idea of children into the mix.

“I’m sorry, that was way more forward than I intended it to be, I don’t want kids with you.”

The words slipped out of her mouth before she had a chance to think them through and those last few sounded just awful. Oliver shrunk a little into his seat when he heard them, unsure of what to make of that.

“I mean yet, yet,” she explained as her cheeks turned a bright shade of red.

“I would greatly appreciate it if you could just maybe forget the last five minutes or so.” Felicity sighed as she rubbed a finger across her brow and cocked her head a little to the side, “because it all came out horrendously wrong. I just meant my mom would have our whole future planned out ahead of us and we haven’t even started practicing.”

Oliver nodded along with her words until he caught up with the last one, a quizzical expression crossing over his face, “practicing?”

“Making babies,” she smiled coyly as her eyes dropped to the floor before sneaking back up to watch the smile grow across Oliver’s face.

“Practice makes perfect,” he replied with a fixed smirk.

Felicity sucked her lower lip inward as she looked across the car at Oliver with lidded eyes, “so they say,” she whispered with a velvet-smooth tone.

Oliver took the unspoken invitation and leaned across the centre console of the car to press his lips gently onto hers.

Felicity kissed him back, deepening the kiss with impassioned fervour.

*God, she enjoyed kissing him.*

Her thumb sunk into the corner seam of his mouth and floated down through the five-day’s growth along his chin, remembering the way the same had felt between her legs the night before and the yearning started to emerge from low inside her.

Oliver fisted his hand at his side, the only way he saw fit to hold back from cupping her breast and skimming a thumb across her nipple to discover if it was hard or not. If he didn’t stop this soon when he dropped her off home he would need to carry a pot plant in front of his junk to hide the very prominent erection and that might solicit more questions than he was prepared to answer.

He broke away slowly from the kiss, falling back twice to ghost a soft peck against them before he settled back into the seat and pulled the seatbelt back across his body to hold him in place.

Oliver intended to do a lot of *practicing* but not here and not now.

“We should get you home,” he smiled softly as he casually attempted to adjust his pants to quash the throbbing.

Felicity nodded with a smile as she settled into her own seat and tugged the seatbelt across her chest.

“Thank you for understanding Oliver,” she spoke simply.

“Do you think I should come in?” Oliver asked as he helped Felicity to get her bags from the boot.

“No, it’s fine. You should go see your family,” Felicity responded as her fingers fluttered playfully along the collar of Oliver’s polo shirt, skimming her knuckles against his firm chest.

“Wave goodbye to me?” he questioned as his eyes travelled up to her room’s window.
She bobbed her head in a soft nod before she leaned against him, brushing a soft kiss against his cheek, “I’ll see you later?”

Oliver closed the boot with one hand, sinking the other into her waist.

“Absolutely,” he breathed into her ear, fanning the encompassing word against her jaw.

She mouthed him a soft bye as she stepped away and walked the short distance to her house, glancing back just the once to flash him a bright smile.

“How is that you?” Felicity heard her mother shriek as she closed the front door with a barely audible click.

“Yea mom, it’s me,” Felicity called back as she dropped her bags and padded across the deep wooden floors into the living room, following the sound of the TV playing a fast-paced Latin-style music.

“What are you doing?” Felicity smiled as she leaned against the archway into the living room, her mother in work-out clothes dancing in front of the TV set blaring the energetic tune.

“Zumba,” Donna puffed, “it’s a fantastic work-out.”

“I’m sure,” Felicity laughed, admiring her mother’s ability to move like a crazy person while still attempting a conversation.

Her family hadn’t always been well-off, in fact during a lot of Felicity’s early life it was quite the opposite. Those struggles had given her mother a drive that, even though Felicity scarcely admitted it, she hoped that she had inherited.

“How was Cabo?”

Felicity caught her words before she allowed everything to come spilling forward. She was never one for keeping secrets, especially from her mother, but over the last few months she had become somewhat adept at it, now carrying both the application to Oxford and the budding relationship with Oliver under lock and key.

“It was amazing,” she replied simply.

“I’m so glad hon, you work yourself so hard, you deserve a vacation, now all we need to find you is a nice boy and…”

“Good chat mom,” Felicity interrupted with a smirk.

“Oh wait, hon, your bridesmaid’s dress arrived. Can you try it on and let me know what you think?” Donna added before she waved through a three point lunge into an air-kick.

Felicity threw her bags onto her bedroom floor and kicked the door closed with her foot before her eyes fell onto the bright pink Grecian style dress. It was more demure than she had expected it to be, her mind somehow envisioning a mess of rhinestones and tulle, but the dress itself was simple, one-shoulder, A-line, empire bodice made of draped silk chiffon and a plaited belt. Aside from the bright, candy pink, colour it was fairly classic, albeit quite short.

A smile snuck across Felicity’s face as her eyes wandered across to the window. She gathered the dress and skipped over to the window to find Oliver, hands in pockets, leaning against the side of the car, looking up at her.

She waved, he waved back.

She held up the dress and he offered her a charmed nod and a thumbs up.

She pushed the curtains a far open as they could be and positioned herself in the centre of the window, her back facing Oliver and her chin tucked into shoulder.

Felicity shuffled the thin cotton cardi from her shoulders and let it drop to the floor as she watched
Oliver straightened his stance and look briskly from the left to the right before settling back, his eyes focused on her.

She tugged the baby blue scooped singlet over her head and tossed it to the side, glancing back for just a second to ensure Oliver was still watching – he was.

She twisted to the side to slowly peel down the zip on her skirt as Oliver shuffled from one foot to the other, swallowing the heavy lump in his throat.

Her skirt dropped like a weight from her body and he coughed through a gasp as it revealed tiny ivory-lace panties that were made of a fabric that just begged to be run through his fingers. And when she wiggled her ass Oliver thought for a second that he had forgotten how to breath and would asphyxiate himself right there and then.

He watched her hands float around her back, trickling across the clasp of her matching ivory bra, which he could only imagine was cupped in the same soft lace at the front. He almost cheered when her fingers reached the clasped, pushed the strap together then pulled it loose…

“What are you doing?” Thea asked as she appeared from thin air, approaching the front of his car. Oliver almost screamed before he reached through the window and pressed the horn.

Felicity spun around with the sound of the horn, her bra still clutched across her breasts just as she saw Thea slink into sight. Without a moment’s thought on the million and one things she could have done, Felicity dove to the floor and held her breath.

“I ah, just got back,” Oliver coughed, sneaking one eye upwards to Felicity’s window which was now, thankfully, empty.

“I can see that,” Thea smirked as her eyes travelled up to where she had seen Oliver looking, “is that Felicity’s room?”

“Uh, I’m not sure, never really thought about it,” Oliver shrugged, twitching a hand through his hair.

“So, why are you waiting outside the gate?”

“I uh,” he blew out a breath and tapped the roof of the car, “couldn’t find the gate beeper so I got out to manually open it.”

Thea screwed up her lips in disbelief, stealing another look up at the empty window before she walked around the car and opened the passenger side door.

“It’s on the centre console, where it always is,” she remarked as she emerged from the car with it pressed between her fingers.

“So it is,” Oliver croaked.

“You’re so weird,” Thea remarked shaking her head as she pressed the gate button and sunk into the passenger seat.

Oliver glanced back up and the window and smiled even though he knew the smile wasn’t seen by anyone, before he slid into the driver’s seat and started the car.

“How was Cabo?” Thea asked as Oliver eased through the opening gate.

“Hot.”

“I saw Felicity knee that guy in the junk, that was pretty awesome,” Thea laughed.

“Tommy sent you that?”

“Naw, I saw it on YouTube, everyone has seen it.”

Oliver laughed without remorse. It was nothing Chad didn’t deserve.

Oliver pulled the car to a stop outside the house and popped the boot before both he and Thea
emerged from the car.

“So, what did you get me from Cabo?” she asked as she followed him around the back of the car and, before he could stop her, started unzipping his suitcase.

“Nothing,” he smirked as he grabbed his duffle bag first.

“What’s this?” Thea asked as she pulled a brightly patterned bandeau top from Oliver’s suitcase, the same one Felicity had been wearing.

“Nothing,” Oliver yelped as he reached a hand out to grab it a few seconds too late as Thea stepped backwards and held it up against her body.

“It doesn’t have any tag on it, so it’s not new,” she remarked as she Oliver approached and she took three more steps back.

“Whose is it?”

“Thea, just give me the top,” Oliver pleaded, flustered at the feel of his cheeks warming.

“Are you seeing someone?”

“No,” he lied.

“You’re lying,” Thea quipped with a single raised brow, “who is she? Did you meet her in Cabo?”

“Thea, give it back.”

He was almost chasing her around the front yard at this point.

Thea wiggled as she held it against her chest, “This is cute, is she pretty?”

Finally Oliver managed to grab the top before balling it up and locking it between his fists.

“It must be Tommy’s girlfriend’s, mixed up in my bag, that’s all,” he explained, it wasn’t the best of explanations but it would do in the circumstance.

“I see...” Thea smiled before she bounded up the front stairs and into the house.

Shit.

It had only been an hour since they had arrived back in Starling and already they had almost been caught and his sister – like a dog with a bone – had caught whiff of something; and if Oliver knew his sister (which he did) she was not going to just let this go.
Settle down with me  
Cover me up  
Cuddle me in

Lie down with me  
And hold me in your arms

The crystal blue water of the Queen pool shimmered in the high late morning sun as Felicity sat on the edge of the warm stone tiles, her feet drifting in the pool as Oliver treaded water nearby.

His eyes lingered on her as he attempted to keep some distance between them, although he would like to have her wet body pressed against his...

Oliver swallowed the thoughts down as he tried to focus on something else before, even in the cold pool, his arousal became apparent. Something he needed to avoid given the fact his parents were a stone’s throw away in the gazebo.

Even though they had their backs to the pool, idly talking together, he wasn’t going to risk the life altering embarrassment which would undoubtedly follow.

His eyes scouted through the open patio doors to see if he could spy Tommy coming yet with the drinks he’d gone off about ten minutes ago to make.
“What are you looking for?” Felicity badgered playfully as she kicked water against Oliver’s arm. “Did you just splash me?” Oliver remarked feigning disbelief. “Maybe,” Felicity smirked before she flicked him again, sending water splashing against his broad shoulder and chest this time as he slunk through the water towards her, “what say you?”

Felicity laughed as Oliver moved closer, his fingertips now circling her submerged ankle. “I say if you do it again I’m going to pull you in this pool,” Oliver smiled, the rasp in his voice like a spear of awakening straight between her legs to the point where Felicity had to close them a little bit tighter.

“I just dried off Oliver, you’re not going to get me wet,” Felicity heard it soon after she said it and really heard it when Oliver’s face lit up like a street lamp. “You know what I mean,” she croaked as her cheeks peached over and her lip blossomed into a soft shade of red from her nibbling at it.

“I’m pretty sure I could make you wet Felicity,” he hummed as he stroked the underside of her calf up to her knee. She shuddered at his slow and deliberate touch and if she had any sense she would have pulled her leg away that instant, but, instead, as she watched Oliver caress his lower lip with his tongue all she could do was imagine how wonderful that would feel.

“Okay,” she squeaked, before she shook the unfamiliar pitch of her voice and cleared her throat, “I mean, um, no,” she finished with a short nod of her head in partnered resolution.

Oliver slid his hand back down her leg and, although she hadn’t meant to, Felicity let out a soft, pleasured sigh that trickled from her lips and danced in Oliver’s ears.

With his hands now anchored against the lip of the pool, his pinky finger deliberately brushing against her naked thigh, Oliver hoisted himself out of the pool, and once again Felicity let out a honeyed sigh followed this time with a soft smack of her lips and a sweep of her tongue as she watched the water cascade down the ridges of his back. It was like something out of a romance book – with pictures – hot pictures, and even though she knew he was taking extreme amounts of delight in the way she was ogling him right now, she could not drag her eyes away.

“So wet,” he whispered as he stooped for a second beside her. Felicity went to slap him with the back of her hand but by the time she had gained enough cognisance to do so, Oliver had paddled at least a dozen steps away and was busy drying himself.

There was a ludicrous amount of jealously beaming off her face towards the navy and white striped towel that Oliver was rubbing back and forth across those delectable back muscles that Felicity could vividly imagine biting down on, just enough to make them tense and for her to discover even more.

“Here’s your top back,” Thea announced before Felicity even realised she was there, the small girl’s affirmed voice pulling Felicity abruptly from the day dream she had been enjoying.

Felicity blinked up to the rainbow patterned bikini top and recognised it almost immediately, it had been one of the ones she had taken to Cabo, but why did Thea have it? From between Thea’s legs Felicity saw Oliver shaking his head wildly before halting the minute Thea turned around to scrutinise him as he cleverly pretended not to notice.
“That’s not mine,” Felicity shrugged.
“Are you sure?” Thea questioned, her eyes narrowed and stared into Felicity like she was attempting to recreate an episode of CSI.

“Mmmhmm, I’m sure,” Felicity expertly lied, she was actually kind of proud of herself though she probably shouldn’t be, “it’s cute though.”

Thea huffed, frustrated, as she mumbled something about not believing Felicity under her breath.

Felicity watched Oliver for some sort of explanation but he offered nothing more than a squished smile before he followed Thea inside.

“Thea, what are you doing?” Oliver called as he caught up with her in the conservatory.
“Trying to prove a point,” Thea pouted as she spun the top in small circles and held her stance mainly on one foot – Oliver recognised it as his little sister’s ‘I mean business’ stance.

“I told you there was no point to prove,” Oliver maintained, “I told you this belonged to Tommy's girlfriend and you went and took it from my room.”

Whether she was onto something or not, he needed her to stop snooping, so it was time for his ‘Big Brother means (more) business’ stance of folded arms and terse lips.

“I just thought…,” Thea spoken with a softened voice as she lowered her chin to her chest.
“You didn’t think, you went through my stuff,” now to run it home, “don’t do it again Thea, I mean it.”

She almost rolled an eye at him as she blew hair back from her face and half nodded. Oliver decided that was enough, he’d made his point.

“Look,” Oliver assured, as he plucked the top from her fingers and stalked into the kitchen where he found Tommy dropping ice into the drinks.

“Here, Tommy this is Camila's,” Oliver said and he held it out to Tommy.

Tommy looked down at it and took it hesitantly from Oliver before his eyes tracked over to Thea who was standing in the doorway with her arms folded across her chest.

“Uh, yep, it sure is,” Tommy replied, his head bobbing resolutely as a show for Thea.

“See Thea, there is nothing to prove,” Oliver snipped as he twisted his head back to stare at Thea with a smile.

“Fine, I get it,” she shrugged, although she seemed a lot more upset by it than Oliver had expected.

“So you’re going to drop this?” he asked, his voice softening as he treaded the line between being firm, but kind – after all she was just a kid, who had absolutely got it right.

“Consider it dropped.”

She gave one last deflated huff before she left the kitchen.

Tommy looked at the top in his hands and then back up to Oliver, questions written all over his expression.

“Just keep it,” Oliver answered, for now to avoid Felicity forgetfully wearing it before they came out as a couple to their respective parents.

Tommy shrugged, the answer was good enough for him and he tucked the newly acquired top into his oversized chino pocket.

Oliver scooped up two drinks and walked them outside. Felicity had moved to one of the grey
rattan sun loungers, unsurprisingly with her laptop perched precariously on a towel draped across her crossed legs.

“Put the laptop away Felicity, this our last vacation day,” Oliver joked as he placed the tangy lemonade on the glass-topped table beside her.
“Mmm, minute,” she replied in stunted words as her fingers tapped away on the keys faster than Oliver's eyes could keep up.

“What are you doing?” he asked, although well aware he had little, if any of her attention right at this moment.
“Sure, right there is fine,” she mumbled as she waved at the table where Oliver had already put her drink.
He waited patiently with a smile woven through his lips and glowing in his eyes, just watching her. Watching as she scrunched her nose, tugged on a thin section of hair, nibbled on her pinked lip and made tiny little snorts of annoyance, before said snorts were replaced with a self-five.

“So, I’m sorry what did you say?” Felicity asked as she tugged her eyes from the screen and sunk her hand around the glass beaded with condensation.
“You won?” he quizzed as he nodded towards her laptop.
“Of course, honestly how Chris thinks he can build a code I can’t crack is laughable,” she snorted before she took a long drink, Oliver losing focus from the time her lips brushed against the chilled glass until she licked remnants from them moments later.

“Oh, Chris?” he asked, suddenly regaining focus.
“Mmmm, Christopher Chance, an old friend from Vegas, we were neighbours,” Felicity explained as she idly drew patterns in the condensation.
Oliver was pretty certain she had no idea how much of a turn on that small thing was, although, hand to heart, pretty much everything she did Oliver found a way to be turned on by it.

“Like us?” he stumbled with the words, cringing at how juvenile he sounded.
“I mean, sure, but in a much, much less fancier abode,” Felicity smiled as her eyes widened across the expansive back yard, sometimes she forgot just how different her life was now compared to what it had been.

“It was an attached townhouse, Chris and I shared a wall,” she reminisced, without noticing Oliver's almost instant unease.
“Oh also we didn’t do what,” she paused, her cheeks blushing, “well what you and I do.” The thought of knowing exactly what she was referring to made Oliver subconsciously lick his lips, top and bottom, twice.

“I’ve never heard you mention him before,” Oliver commented, returning to a mild grimace of unease.
“He came to stay once, I believe you said he was ‘odder than me’,” Felicity laughed, folding the section of hair she had been playing with moments before behind her ear, drawing Oliver's attention the industrial bar that he still found indescribably sensual, for reasons he had yet to dissect.

“Wait, short guy, braces, big floppy hair?”
“Sounds like Chip,” she nodded through a soft chuckle.
“I thought his name was Chris?”
“It was,” she nodded, “is,” she corrected, “but I have always called him Chip.”
“Because of computer stuff?” Oliver asked, waving a limp hand towards her laptop.
“Computer stuff?” Felicity snorted, “talk computer stuff to me Oliver, it really turns me on,” she
mocked as she rolled and smacked her lips, in a way that was probably way more sexual than she had meant it.

*Everything she did turned him on in some capacity.*

“No,” she interrupted his day dreams, “I called him that because before braces he had big old buck teeth, like a Chipmunk.”

Felicity clapped her hand over her mouth, it had always been a term of endearment and honestly, his nickname for her had similar roots, but the more she thought about it the crueller it seemed.

Oliver shook his head in exaggerated horror, while he secretly smiled.

“Is uh, Chip, still in Vegas?”

Oliver was absolutely running reconnaissance.

“He actually enlisted when he turned 17, he's been with the Air Force for almost two years now.”

Oliver nodded through her explanation as he imagined a scrawny buck-tooth kid stuck on some desk job and wheezing through an asthma attack at the mention of a physical.

“I have a few pictures of us in Vegas I think,” Felicity turned her attention to her laptop and spent a few seconds searching until she found what she was looking for in her perfectly organised folders.

She turned the laptop towards Oliver with a picture of two young kids sitting on a curb drinking soda from glass bottles and straws, Felicity wearing a pair of très chic heart shaped sunglasses and ‘Chip’ decked out in a mildly eclectic outfit, his arm around Felicity’s shoulder.

“Did you date?” Oliver questioned, cringing at his almost pleading tone.

“I was ten when we left Vegas Oliver,” she chuckled, “No, we never saw each other that way.”

“He has his arm around you.”

“Oh, that was his Mom’s idea,” Felicity shook her head, smiling as she remembered just how uncomfortable they had both been with it.

“So you never had a crush?”

“Oliver Queen are you jealous?”

Oliver shook his head in a complete lie.

“No,” she replied honestly, Oliver had been her first crush, although she kept that tidbit to herself.

Felicity’s eyes moved back to the screen when an instant message popped up in the corner. She spun it back to face her and read it, captivated, before she screamed excitedly.

“Everything okay?”

Felicity nodded with quickly successive bobs as she closed her laptop, “Chip got his leave approved for mom and dad's wedding, I have to go tell mom, she’ll cry, it’ll be great.”

“Oh, he is coming?”

“His dad is dad’s best man so it’s good he can be there, our families have always kept in touch. Especially him and I, even all those miles apart.”

Oliver knew she didn’t mean any harm by it, but regardless, Oliver moved across the State and couldn’t keep in touch. The guilt made him flinch for a second.

“You want to come see mom cry?”

“No, I’m good,” Oliver smiled in response.

“I’ll be back for the barbeque a bit later.”

Oliver leaned in to kiss her goodbye but stopped short when he realised his error.

“I’ll see you then,” he nodded.

“Scout out a secluded corner,” Felicity whispered, followed up with a playful wink.
The night had well and truly fallen when Felicity and Oliver disappeared out into the yard their path illuminated by blue-tinged garden lights. Felicity doubted their parents even noticed they were missing yet and for that reason they could steal at least a little time alone before they went home.

Dinner had been filled with glances across the table and quiet messages spoken only through expressions.

They reached a corner of the garden against the pool house, just out of reach of the tips of the lights.

Oliver took Felicity by surprise and crashed his lips onto hers, sweeping her chin up and slipping a tongue through her lips as they slowly parted, finally aware of what was happening. Their bodies slid against each other as the kiss became more desperate, their lips caressing and sucking hungrily.

Breaths were shared when amorous mewls hung from their mouths. His tongue swirled around her mouth, relishing the way her tongue danced playfully.

When they finally pulled away, they were both breathless.

“What was that for?” Felicity sighed as her eyes slowly fluttered open.

“I have a confession,” Oliver growled into her ear, his palms flattened against the wall either side of her head and his chest pressed against hers.

The feeling would have been oppressive if anyone else attempted it but for Felicity the closeness of his impressive stature was comforting and highly appealing.

“You do?” she piped as her lashes blinked heavy strokes across her smooth cream cheeks.

“I was jealous, hideously so,” he admitted, not giving an inch of space between them.

“Oliver, I...”

“Was, Felicity. I realise now that was stupid. You say there is nothing to it, then I believe that.”

That was the truth, but not necessarily the whole truth, Oliver also found a level of comfort in his imagined picture of the buck-toothed Christopher Chance.

He watched a visible sigh of relief bleed from her expression.

“Oliver, that means so much to me,” she spoke, her voice light and almost trembled. Felicity had spent countless hours explaining the absolutely platonic nature of her and Chris’ relationship and she knew it had cost him at least one long term relationship when he refused to stop talking to her.

“That you trust me,” she continued, pausing to kiss his cheek, “it means the world.”

Oliver watched her wordlessly for a few moments, drinking up every little expression she gave him. He wanted to memorise them all. It was a new feeling and for the first time Oliver wondered if now he finally realised what it was supposed to feel like to be in love.

*Love.*

He had fought with that word for years. Never truly understanding why people put so much emphasis on it. It was four simple letters, two vowels and two consonants. Sure it looked pretty on bumper stickers and splashed across advertising, but it was just a word.

Only, when Oliver lightly stroked Felicity’s hair back from her cheek, bushing only the pads of his fingertips against her smooth skin, he realised it was so much more.
Had he always loved her?
At least on some level and never actually know it?
Did she feel the same way?

The last thought hit him like a brick across the face, concussing his thoughts almost immediately.

It had been barely a week.
7 days.
168 hours
10080 minutes
Give or take of course.
How could she?

“Everything okay?” Felicity asked as she felt Oliver’s chest starting to crush more against hers as his attention to his stance waned.
“Yea, uh, fine,” he sighed as he pulled back, letting her lungs expand again, “Just thinking.”
“About?” she asked softly, her lips puckered and begging for him to kiss them.

Oliver leaned in and placed a delicate kiss against her lips before he pulled back just a fraction, “nothing that matters,” he ghosted across her velvet-soft lips.
“I’m sorry about Thea today,” Felicity started as she watched Oliver pull his lips a little further away, “I know I’m asking you to keep things from your family and that you don’t like it…”
“It’s okay, I…” Oliver interrupted.
She stopped his words with a finger across his lips and there he went again finding everything she did hugely endearing.

 “…and I know it’s not easy for you to do that, so thank you” Felicity finished.
“ You’re welcome. I do think Thea is quite invested in us,” he winked.
“She needs a new show to watch.”
“Maybe when we’re ready to tell people, we could give her a heads up first.”

Felicity nodded as she lay her head against his chest. Oliver combed his fingers through her hair and found himself imagining that moment, right there, going on indefinitely; and he decided he would never tire of it.

They both fell apart when the sound of her name echoed through the yard.
“I should go,” she smiled as she regrettably pulled away from the embrace.
“Can I call you later?” he asked.

Felicity’s eyes lit up at the prospect and she bobbed her head to the idea as she mouthed a very soft, “yea”.

Felicity lay still in her bed, her eyes watching the lines of hallway light as they pierced through the edges of her closed bedroom door and drew lines across her ceiling. She had spent the last twenty minutes saying goodnight to Oliver in a hushed tone until she believed she couldn’t talk without being heard anymore.

The hallway light went out and her room was cast into almost darkness, the only light now breaching it was a cool glow from the full moon outside her window as it crept through the cracks in her curtains.

She rolled her head to look at the time and the red numbers fired ‘1:15am’ back at her. Her body
was tired and it felt relaxed and calm in the warm arms of her bed, but her mind was far from sleepy. It was bouncing ideas around like a tennis court.

Some good, the freedom to date Oliver back near campus without having to hide.
Some bad, an idea that her mother might actually hate the them dating when it came time to tell them.
Felicity understood that the last one was never going to come to fruition, Donna Smoak adored Oliver Queen and she had never been shy about reminding Felicity what a great catch he would be.

And then there was London.
Her application to Oxford had honestly slipped her mind this last week, right up until tonight on the phone Oliver said something about Trafalgar Square during the wintertime was one of the prettiest slabs of concrete he had ever seen.

His wording had made her laugh, until she remembered about Oxford and then her laughing pulled back to a soft chuckle before it disappeared completely under the weight of telling Oliver that she had applied to go to school there.

She had her reasons for not, none of them were particularly good reasons and she knew it, but in the end it all seemed to boil down to not wanting to make it a thing before it was even a thing.

In her heart, Felicity imagined getting the rejection letter, balling it up and throwing it in the trash before anyone could try and tell her it was okay and that the school was missing out.

It was better that one day, in the long, distant future, she would tell them and laugh about it then, rather than get everyone’s hopes up now only to mope about it in a few months when she heard back.

At least that was her reasons; and for now she was sticking to them.

Her phone beside the bed jumped in a short vibration before she snapped it up and watched the message scroll across the screen.

Oliver: Are you asleep yet?
Felicity smiled as she typed back a quick response.
Felicity: No :)
Oliver: I miss you
Felicity: I miss you too
Oliver: I forgot to ask what you’re wearing
Felicity cupped a hand to her mouth to silence the laugh that fell from there.
Felicity: wouldn’t you like to know
Oliver: yes, that’s why I asked…
Felicity: why don’t you come over and see

She smiled to herself as she pushed the send button. After a few minutes of silence Felicity stared down at her phone and snagged her lip nervously into her teeth – had she said too much?

It was a soft tap on her window that made her instantly sit up in her bed and stare wide-eyed at the curtain-covered windows.

“Felicity, open the window before someone sees me?” Oliver whispered against the glass. She tapped on her bedside lamp before she crept from the blankets and tiptoed towards the
window, pulling back the curtain just an inch to see Oliver’s moonlit face staring back at her.

Felicity pulled back the curtain and opened the window as Oliver hung, somewhat precariously, from the trellis that stepped up the wall.

Oliver clambered into the window and Felicity stifled a laugh as he stumbled onto the floor.

“What on earth are you doing?” she laughed under her breath, aware that noise could travel in the still of the early morning.

“You told me to come around,” Oliver shrugged as he picked himself up off the ground and toed off his shoes.

“So you though you would climb into my first storey window?” Felicity smiled as she playfully slapped his arm and he feigned hurt.

“You’re supposed to swoon over how sweet a gesture it was.”

She smacked his arm again before she quickly pecked his lips. They were chilled like the crisp night air and against her fiery hot ones they felt quite amazing. So much so that a shudder of excitement raced down her spine.

Oliver took a step back, holding her, pouted lips and lidded eyes, at arm’s length as his eyes walked slowly down her body, tracing the silhouette her body made in the white tank top and unicorn print PJs.

“If I’d have known you would actually…” her voice trailed off as she realised how infantile her outfit must have appeared.

“I think you look gorgeous,” Oliver interjected.

She could only offer his a small, tipped-corner smile as she blushed at his compliment and the absolutely sincere way he spoke it.

Oliver looked around the room, finally realising that in all the years they had lived next door to each other, he had only ventured in here once before that he could recall.

He walked slowly around the room, taking in what the warm orange light from her beside lamp reached out and touched. Her school desk had grown since the last time he was in here and it was no longer painted a soft pink. In fact very little in this room looked like it once did, the posters of the Spice Girls were replaced with framed black and white prints of landmarks and landscapes.

The dresser drawers that were once home to ornamental dolls now held a small collection of lipsticks and nail polishes; and where he was sure there had once been a toy box full of old computer bits now sat a Swiss ball and a blue stretchy band that looked like a re-invented torture device.

“Everything to your liking?” Felicity asked with a smile as she watched Oliver sulk around her room.

“It just looks so different,” Oliver replied as he took a few lingered moments to admire the London Bridge photograph.

“You’ve never been in here before,” Felicity remarked as she walked with loosely folded arms towards him.

“Yes I have,” Oliver chided as Felicity sunk her chin into his back and he sighed contentedly at the contact.

“No,” she smiled as she rolled her head back and forth, “you haven’t.”

“You don’t remember?” he smirked, enjoying the fact that for once he could remember something
She could not.

“I would remember Oliver,” she pouted as he turned around and her chin ended up against his peck, the smell of clean cotton emanating from the tight tee he was wearing. “You were eleven and you’d had your tonsils out,” he started as his hands sunk in around her waist and he danced her slowly back towards the bed.

Felicity looked up at him cynically second before she toppled onto the bed and shuffled her way up towards the headboard.

“I was fifteen and your mom said you were worried about missing your homework while you were off sick,” he continued as he crawled onto the bed and tucked her feet up onto his lap.

Felicity watched him with slowly widening eyes as his story became more and more familiar. *But Oliver hadn’t come to see her, there was that one time she imagined him…oh no.*

Oliver wrapped his large hands around her foot and massaged it gently, washing a feeling of euphoria across her body as her mind wandered into thinking about just how amazing Oliver’s hands were.

“I walked to your school on the way home from mine and collected your homework from the office.”

His thumbs kneaded into the ball of her foot and she let out a whimpered sigh. “Your mom let me in, told me you were upstairs refusing to watch cartoons like a normal kid and insisting on watching nature documentaries instead.”

Fingers fanned up the back of her lower calf as she tried to paint a vivid picture of the story he was telling.

~*_~*_~*_~

[October 2000]

Oliver brushed back his mop of blonde hair as he knocked on the slightly ajar door to Felicity’s room.

“I don’t want to watch Scooby Brown,” a slightly slurred voice called from inside. Oliver pushed open the door, “I think you mean Charlie Brown or Scooby Doo.” “Whatever,” Felicity rasped before she remembered how much it hurt to talk. “And I don’t think you’re supposed to be talking so much.”

Felicity pouted although she was struggling to keep her head upright. It gave way and she slumped back down onto the pillow, her eyes a little glazed and her mind fogged like a dream.

[An Hour Later]

When she managed to open her eyes again Oliver was sitting in her bed beside her eating ice cream, even though she had no idea what it had come from.

“Your mom gave it to me, you want some?” Oliver asked as he held out the spoon. Felicity looked at him with rounded but suspicious eyes.

*Oliver Queen was in her room, scratch that – in her BED. He had really pretty hair.*

She walked two fingers up his arm and casually tugged on strands of hair at the back of his neck.
Oliver chuckled at her attention as he flicked through channels on the TV that Noah had moved into her room.

“Yos have pretty hair,” she slurred as she nestled into his arms, safe in the knowledge that this was just a dream because that was the only logical explanation and Felicity was very logical.

“An-nd pretty lips,” she sighed as she blindly stroked a finger across his bottom lip, puckering it in the corner.
She could feel the jostle of his chest as he laughed and his warm breath down the back of her neck.

She was quite impressed with how vivid this dream was.

“You shouldn’t talk so much,” Oliver soothed as he instinctively placed his arm around her back and touched a hand to her shoulder.

“And you, ssshh-o-dn’t be so cute,” she hummed against his arm.

It was her dream, she could talk all she wanted to.

“They gave you some strong pain medication huh?” Oliver grinned as the sound resonating from Felicity started to sound a little like a cat purring.

“Appas-ently,” she mumbled, poking her tongue out to try and see why it felt so big all of a sudden.

She crossed her eyes trying to see it before she gave up and sunk into his lap.

Oliver shifted uncomfortably as her head lay only a few inches from the dead centre of his lap.

“I’m going to go now, but get some rest okay?” he smiled as he eased himself off the bed.

Felicity’s face sunk into the blanket as her arms reached out to grab his leg.

He stood beside the bed and waited as she slowly dragged her head up to look at him.

“Have you ever said the L-word?” she asked, her tone a lamenting one.

“What L-word?”

She huffed, annoyed at dream Oliver for being so much like real Oliver.

“You know what word I mean,” she said, her voice starting to sound strangled and hoarse again, “love.”

Oliver shook his head, it never ceased to amazing him what an old soul she was sometimes.

“Neither,” she sighed.

“Well then, I hope when you do say it, it’s to someone special,” he smiled.

That beautiful big, dumb smile – even dream Oliver could melt ice caps.

“I love you,” she quipped.

She had thought this might sound strange to say, but it didn’t – honest to god, it didn’t. But, she surmised, that was probably because everything was easier in a dream.

“I’m going to let you keep that one,” Oliver said kindly as he managed to slip his leg from her grip, “give it to someone worth it when you’re older.”

[Present Day]

“That happened?” Felicity sighed, not quite in disbelief as the memory of it slowly started to come back to her.

_Dream Oliver hadn’t been a dream after all._

She had remembered his little instruction to keep it and give it to someone worth it when she was older, but she had always thought of it as subconscious assurance. All these years later and she had never found someone worth it.
Oliver placed a soft kiss to her ankle before Felicity scooted down the bed towards him and captured his lips with her own. Soft and warm they melted together, drips of pleasured moans floating between them as their hands explored each other with new vigour.

Felicity swept her tongue along the seam of Oliver’s lips, humming in a way that sent blood swarming to Oliver’s nether region.

Her fingers toyed with his shirt before they lightly stroked over the bugle between his legs.

“I want to, if you want to,” she breathed, the words written against his lips as her fingers traced the length of his shaft.
Oliver kissed her deeper as he reluctantly plunked her fingers from the outline of his cock.
“Not here, not now,” he grimaced, using every bit of control he had to utter those words, “I didn’t bring any condoms with me.”

Felicity smiled against his lips as though that word made her giggle innocently, but when she pulled back and their eyes met, they were anything but innocent.
“I could hold you till just before sunrise though,” he offered and she accepted with a kiss.

When they nestled into the bed, wrapped in each other’s arm, Felicity considered saying the L-word again, but when her mind finally came to the conclusion that she should, Oliver was already fast asleep.

“I love you” she whispered, her words lost before they reached his ear.

This feels like falling in love
Falling in love
We’re falling in love

~ Kiss Me Ed Sheeran
The rest of March flew by like a cyclone through a vacant trailer park, leaving a mess of homework and stress in its wake. Felicity had felt the force of it like a bucket of ice over her head that had once been used to wake her and was now beginning to feel like it was, in fact, drowning her.

As she stared down at her course expectations for the semester she started to gnaw haphazardly on her bottom lip and wonder whether she had – somewhat foolishly – bitten off way more than she could chew.

“Are you alright?” Oliver asked as his second general question about her day still sat unanswered. Felicity looked up, the memory of where she was (that quaint little café, Verdant) and who she was with (Oliver, looking particularly dapper in a brushed leather jacket) came flooding back to her.

“Fine, fine,” she bumbled as she carefully folded the paper and slipped it back into her bag. “Because you don’t look fine,” Oliver noted, a concerned smile weaved across his face, “and I made a particularly charming remark about how pretty you are and I got nothing.” he chuckled lightly as his fingers brushed across the top of her hand – a simple gesture that had become like the most pleasant of sensations now that, free from prying eyes, it could be given so freely.

“I’m sorry, I’m just a little overwhelmed,” she offered as she flipped her hand on the table so their fingers could dance together.
“Graduating with two degrees in two and a half years is a lot...” Oliver started.
Felicity let out a tiny squeak, imagining Oliver standing by as the ice water took her...
“...but if anyone could do it, you could.”

She walked her eyes up to meet his and the pride in them was immeasurable before he glanced
down to his watch and let out a melancholy sigh.
“We should go, or we’ll be late.”

Felicity read the hands of the kitten clock on the wall to the left and concurred with a shallow nod.
It was well before dinner, but Donna had asked that Felicity come back a little earlier today to have
another dress fitting and a trial hair and make-up run.

Unfortunately the nightmares about looking somewhere between Vegas drag queen and a high-priced escort had sullied the idea in the back of Felicity’s mind and she wasn’t exactly looking
forward to it.

In fact, April hadn’t seen her looking forward to much of anything... she hadn’t heard back from
Oxford which, of course, in her mind meant it wasn’t happening – a result she had readied herself
for and in fact had pretty much predicted, but it didn’t take the impending doom of failure away
from her.

Oliver had been sweet and courteous and kind and considerate and slow and gentle and everything
she didn’t want him to be... Okay that was a slight exaggeration, of course she wanted him to be all
those things, it was like being written into the pages of the most charming of novels set amongst
the rolling hillsides of the English Countryside where he was an Earl and she was a Lady and they
had the most exquisite courtship and it was lovely and charmed and passionate with just the touch
of his hand in hers...it was the thing love sonnets were written about.

Only...
Right about now Felicity wanted something a little less Pride and Prejudice and something a lot
more 9 ½ Weeks.

She didn’t need courting, she needed – quite frankly – him, naked, on top of her.

Felicity felt the sudden slap of a heated blush across the apples of her cheeks and the flourish of a
smile across her lips that she couldn’t quite contain.

“Something funny?” Oliver asked as he looked around the near-deserted coffee shop in search of a
reason for Felicity’s tiny cackle that she was trying desperately to keep in check.
“Uhh,” she scratched the back of her head before she shook it in fervour.
“Okay,” Oliver smiled as he stood and adjusted his jacket.

Fuck.
Felicity felt the sudden ping between her legs and she sat, glued to her chair, undecided about
whether, if she attempted to stand, that said legs would hold her up.

She was absolutely, irrevocably, insatiably, turned on by Oliver Queen and everything he seemed
to do in front of her was predicated with porno music she heard in her head.

EVERYTHING.
The other day he asked where she wanted to sit at the movies, the first response that popped into
her head (but thankfully didn’t make it past her lips) was on your lap with your fly undone.

Maybe it was the stress of school, or life’s cruel way of punishing her for keeping this from her
mother, but she needed little Oliver, bad.

_Little Oliver._
She clapped a hand over her mouth and her whole face went fuchsia as she made a mental note to do some research on whether high levels of stress are linked to a sudden degrading of morals.

“Is my fly undone or something?” Oliver laughed as he peered down at the completely secured zipper

_I fucking wish._
Felicity squeezed her eyes closed and managed a very strangled sounding “No.”

“Okay,” he relented, “let’s go.”

His hand skimmed over hers, drawing circles over it for two seconds that felt more like a lifetime before he sunk in around it, completely swallowing her hand.

They walked back to the car, each step like a tortuous wave against her sweltering heat. Something had to be done.

Felicity pushed Oliver into the brick wall with a thud that both caught him off guard and forced a sharp exhale to gasp from his mouth. She didn’t give him time to recover before her lips were on his, wet and hot like a fever.

Her tongue forged through his lips and batted his against the roof of his mouth. Her body pressed against him as her hips rocked into him, skimming her tormented arousal against his thick, dark-wash jeans. Her nails dug into his neck, anchoring him there and she wasn’t letting go.

Oliver’s mind was raging faster than he could keep it.
He knew this was real, he could actually taste the extra shot of vanilla on her tongue as it swiped and played and toyed with his own (frankly limp) tongue.

The nails digging into his neck was a painful turn on that made him momentarily wonder how they might feel digging somewhere much less PG.

He was sandwiched between the rough brick façade and her smooth soft body and it was like being caught between heaven and hell.

He could absolutely hear the soft keens that peppered his mouth and could feel her hips grinding against him.

_And goddammit_ if he didn’t want to throw her onto the hood of his car and just kiss the life out of her.

Her neck.
Her lips.
That slope of her collarbone.
He would kiss every part of her body not shielded behind clothes until he could find somewhere more private to tear the clothes from her body and….

Oliver pushed her back, just enough to break the seal of their lips but not enough to stop them breathing the same air.

_Shit._
She looked hurt.
Confused.
“By a thread Felicity,” he growled in her ear before he placed a gentle kiss just under it, lingering a moment longer to let the delicate notes of her shampoo salaciously taunt his senses.

When he pulled back she looked less mad, but the confusion remained coiled together with hurt. “I want to,” he fought the gravel in his throat, “fuck,” his eyes tapered closed as he sighed, “do I want to, but if we’re late…”

“It could be quick,” Felicity pipped, her eyes widening with desire as her tongue drifted across her lower lip, still dotted with marks left behind from his scruff. “Felicity,” he spoke her name like a whispered secret, “when you’re naked in front of me, I will be taking my time.”

His fingers dripped down the back of her arm and she felt her skin melt around him. His strong hand locked into the small of her back and held her in place as her legs turned to quivering tubes of jell-o.

She wanted to say something sexy in return, because Oliver fucking eluded it – but the only words that came out were a shaky, “yes please.”

Oliver’s hand slipped from the small of her back down her ass, cupping it for much longer than he needed before opening the passenger door behind her.

Afraid to stand much longer Felicity slipped into the car and watched Oliver walk around the front of it, his eyes tracking her as he moved, all shoulders strapped in leather and very prominent erection.

He sat in the driver’s seat and grinned, watching Felicity as she shifted in her seat, a blush of arousal still dusted across her cheeks.

They pulled into the driveway of the Queen house, clothes in tack and hands firmly kept to themselves. They had driven past Thea walking Jonas only moments before and Oliver could now see his younger sister approaching in the rear view mirror with Jonas bundled in her arms.

“I’m going to go hang out with Thea for a little while, I’ll come over around five,” he smiled as he leaned across the car, his lips pouted and ready to taste the strawberry blast from her lip balm.

Felicity pulled back, pressing her body against the inside of the car door. “Oliver…Thea,” she whispered with wide, gently chastising, eyes.

Shit.

They had spent the last couple of weeks being able to kiss, hold hands, embrace and see each other in relative obscurity around the campus haunts. Not kissing her right now felt like some act of treason against his body and he did not enjoy it.

“Sorry, I…” he paused to lock eyes with that luscious bottom lip, it was wet from a slow lick from her tongue, it was pouted because it always fucking was and it was screaming out to be kissed, “…forgot.” he finished with a sigh.
It seemed the French lessons his mother had once insisted on were now taunting explicit slogans at him in his mind.

Oliver settled for a soft squeeze of her hand before the car door opened and Thea was standing there with a smile on her lips and a set of narrowed eyes.

“Sitting in a car in the driveway is for lovers,” she smirked as Jonas swept excited kisses up the side of Oliver’s face.
“Or,” Oliver offered as he stepped out of the car, “it’s for adults discussing what time dinner will be.”
He plucked Jonas from Thea’s arms before he bumped the car door closed.

“Felicity is still seventeen, she’s not an adult yet,” Thea replied with the same smirk locked on her face.
Her smirk disappeared when Oliver placed his car keys in the palm of her hand.

“You’re actually…” she squealed as she clamped her hand closed around them, jumping on the spot at least three times.
“Sure, knock yourself out. Straight down the driveway, DO NOT hit anything.”

Oliver walked around the front of the car, tapping the electric gate open on his way as Thea got in the car and adjust the seat until her chin was practically touching the steering wheel.

She offered Oliver a thumb’s up as the car started and she proudly revved the engine.
“Your sister is twelve,” Felicity remarked with a soft shake of her head, “and you put her in charge of a car that is worth a lot of money.”
Oliver shrugged as Felicity scratched Jonas under the chin and smattered kisses across the excited dog’s face.

“Park brake,” Oliver grimaced as he hunched down to look through the window.
Thea smiled apologetically as she used two hands to release the brake.
“Go slowly.”
The car lurched forward once, twice, a third time, bunny-hopping between the gate’s pillars.

When she came dangerously close to jumping the curb of the driveway the colour fell from Oliver’s face.
“I uh, better…” he stammered, apologetically nodding that he had to take Jonas away from Felicity’s attention.

Felicity laughed rambunctiously as she nodded and then cringed when the car hopped the curb, no doubt scraping the underside of his precious car.
“Yeah you better,” she waved him on before he took off and demanded Thea stop and get out of the car.

She stood, watching a few moments more as Thea, head hung low, stepped from the car and took Jonas from Oliver’s arms. Thea waved down the drive solemnly and Felicity waved back before she headed towards her own house, leaving the Queen siblings to it.

Four-thirty saw Oliver stood on the doorstep of Felicity’s parents’ house wiping sweaty palms down the legs of his dark jeans. It was ridiculous. He had been in this position a whole raft of times before.
Knock.
Eat.
Chat.

Simple.

Only, it wasn’t, because this time he was deathly afraid that Noah Kuttler would recognise the completely salacious thoughts he was having about his daughter, his underage daughter.

That, or Donna Smoak would recognise the smile that he couldn’t hide whenever Felicity spoke. That dumb, wistful smile that showed just how far his mind had gone into some fairy tale bliss.

His hand was hovering in front of the doorbell, one finger sitting barely half an inch away as he tried to will himself into pushing it. Unfortunately the door opened and left him standing there, arm outstretched, finger poised – absolutely idiotically.

“Everything alright son?” Noah asked tentatively as he cocked his head around the corner of the doorframe to see Oliver’s finger stopped short of the bell.

“Oh, yes sir,” Oliver cringed as he jammed his hand into his pocket, “I just realise I’m a little early.”

“Felicity’s upstairs, she won’t be long,” Noah remarked as her gestured for Oliver to come inside.

Still mildly embarrassed, Oliver stepped in and thanked Noah with an attempted smile before Noah walked towards the kitchen where the sound of clanking dishes was emanating from.

Oliver’s eyes followed him before they walked up the stairs, unsure whether Oliver should follow Noah into the dining/kitchen, or go upstairs and see Felicity. Ordinarily he would have followed Noah and asked Donna if she needed any help as he poured himself a drink – that was what he always did. Only today he didn’t think he could, the secret relationship hanging over him like an anvil just waiting to drop.

He took another look up the stairs and opted for that choice instead. His long strides took two stairs at once as he feet soundlessly sunk into the plush carpet. He rounded the bend of the stairs and sauntered along the landing. Aside from a few updated photos nothing much had changed up here and he found a comfort in that.

As a child it had always struck him as quite odd to not see an array of dated wedding photos like his parents displayed and he lost himself in thought for a minute imagining the next time he came up here there just might be some.

He stopped ahead of Felicity’s door and took a few moments to regain his thoughts as he reached a hand to knock only to realise the door was about half a foot ajar and then he saw her…

Felicity stared wide eyed into the mirror, the stupidly long eyelashes the make-up artist had glued onto her eyelids looked like gargantuan spiders trying to escape from her face. She shuddered all the way down her spine just thinking on it. She had managed to free one eye and now just the second remained to be done.

Forcing her face as close to the mirror as she could get and dressed in nothing but a matching set of black lingerie trimmed in white lace, Felicity begun the arduous task.

She could hear the clanking of dinner preparation downstairs and her mind had wandered just far enough to forget that she had left the door a little ajar before stripping off the bridesmaid’s dress.
that now fit like a glove and meant absolutely no Big Belly Burger until after the wedding.

Oliver’s jaw was hung open and it didn’t matter how many times that tiny, rationale part of his brain still working urged him to close it, it just sat there, open, catching flies.

Felicity finally managed to peel back the fake row of eyelashes, cringing through the entirety of it before she twisted to place them on the nearby dresser.

That’s when she saw him.
Hands in pockets.
Blue eyes like saucers.
Mouth hung open like his jaw was broken.

Oliver was staring at her like he was starving and she was to be his very last meal.

Felicity swallowed down her surprise, inhaled a soft and trembled breath and took the few small steps to the door.

Wordlessly she opened it and stepped to the side. Maintaining the silence, Oliver walked forward and took a few paced steps into her room. Staring at the stark white of her door, Felicity slowly pushed it closed, leaning against it until she heard the light click break through the silence.

She turned around slowly, unsure what she would find, but when she finally had the courage to look up from the spot on the ground, Felicity saw the same expression on Oliver’s face that he had been wearing outside her door.

Desire.

Her bare feet meshed into the carpet as she took tentative tip-toed steps towards him. Two forward and half a step backwards found Oliver still stood there, silent and still like a cardboard cut-out.

She nibbled along the inside of her lip as she took another two steps forward. Oliver’s hand slowly emerged from his pocket but stayed trapped to the side of his leg, two fingers tapping out a code against the denim.

One final step found Felicity close enough to walk delicate fingers along the very edge of his t-shirt. He must have left his jacket at his parents’ house which, if she was honest, saddened her a little, but it was one less barrier between them.

Hesitantly, her eyes locked on his for reservations, her fingers slipped behind the cotton curtain and grazed against the hard muscles that pulled taunt across his stomach. He flinched under her touch but his hand didn’t attempt to swat her away.

That neither of them spoke should have been strange, but it wasn’t. Even as Felicity pulled his tee up around his chest and Oliver lifted his arms to help it the rest of the way off his body, the silence wasn’t weird.

Even as a tiny stilted breath came out like a gasp from her pouted lips when her fingers travelled the lines of his distinguished muscles – sliding through the abs, rolling over the pecs and circling his dusty-red nipples – the silence wasn’t imposing or deafening.

Her lashes splayed across her paled cheeks as Felicity blinked her away up and down his body. She caught the heavy way he swallowed when her fingers ran across the waistband of his jeans – the way that round lump in his throat rolled down so slowly before it shot part up and forced a hum to reverberate across his lips.
Oliver couldn’t believe he was going to repeat the same stupid words he had said the last time he had been like this in her bedroom – not all that long ago – and ruin the beautiful silence that have enveloped him.

He could see the way she was trawling her tongue across her ruby-painted lips and the way her fingers feathered across his chest – she wanted something from him that he absolutely wanted to give…but for one small problem.

“I don’t have…”
He didn’t finish his sentence before Felicity tugged open the drawer beside her bed and plucked out a little square packet that was instantly recognisable.

“I do,” she whispered, a devilish glint sparking in her eyes as she twirled the condom packet around her fingers.

Oliver didn’t even try to hide the smile that broke out across his lips.

Libère le pénis

The battle cry echoed through his ears as he swung her around and she toppled like a autumn leaf to the smoky grey bedspread below. He stole a kiss from her lips before he hopped fevered ones down her neck. Their fingers embraced, locked into the linen above her head with the tiny foil packet sandwiched between their palms.

Her other hand pawed at him, unsure where to stay – gripping his shoulder, sliding down his back, sunk in around his waist. Felicity was smitten with every single part of him and only one part remained to be feasted upon by her eyes.

She sat up, pushing him off the bed as she slid onto her knees and perched on the edge, causing the mattress to buckle every-so-slightly underneath her. Her hands, still clutching the condom like it was treasure, tugged and pushed and threaded their way through the fly of his jeans until, finally, she pulled both sides open and angels chorused hallelujah in her head.

The bulge was a mere stroke away from being rock hard and the simpered moans that Oliver expressed made no secret of that.

Felicity’s fingers eased between the elasticated waistband of his briefs and the boiling hot skin that raged underneath and she smiled she knew a present waited just… on… the…. Other Side.

“Felicity?” the shout of her name came from downstairs but Felicity and Oliver flew apart like it had come from a few inches away.

In seconds his fly was yanked up and he was scurrying along the floor in search of his t-shirt. The same seconds saw Felicity clutching a pillow to her chest and staring at the door, begging for it to remain closed.

“DINNER!” came the second call but Felicity was frozen as Oliver threw on his t-shirt, ran a heavy hand through his hair and tried to calm his irregular heartbeat.

“Felicity,” he rasped, pulling her from her recession, “put some clothes on.”
She wobbled her head in acknowledgement before she reached across her bed and found her earlier discarded jeans and tank top. She looked up at Oliver with questioning eyes before she finally found her voice.
“Could you wait outside?” she piped, aware of the silliness of the question given they had been fairly close to naked just moments before.

But Felicity didn’t want to get dressed in front of Oliver – not when she’d never actually had a chance to get undressed in front of Oliver.

Oliver turned half a circle before he turned back, his mouth poised and open over words but snapping back shut when he thought better of it. He turned a full 180 and scampered out of her bedroom without a word. For a few seconds he contemplated whether to wait for her or put some distance between them – for no absolute reason he opted for the latter.

Half way down the stairs found him face to face with Noah who, with a pensive look threaded across his brow, had come to find them.

“Felicity just went to the bathroom, she won’t be long.” Oliver spewed, barely taking a breath between each word as he tried to stop himself from asking if it was ‘hot in here?’ knowing it was his nerves spiking his temperature.

Noah offered nothing more than a short smile before he turned around and walked back down the stairs. Oliver held back a sigh of relief.

“Are you coming son?” Noah asked as he stopped just shy of the bottom step and looked back up the stairs.

Oliver nodded like a bobble-head going over a concrete cattlestop before he started down the stairs.

As Oliver reached the bottom step Felicity appeared at the top and he had to stifle yet another sigh of relief.

The smell of the meatloaf had always given Oliver a mouth-watering sensation. It wasn’t by any stretch of the imagination a fine dining experience.

Donna had always insisted there wasn’t much too it, and she was probably right, but since the first moment he smelled it wafting into the backyard when he jumped the fence and met the adorable little nerd sat opposite him right now, the slow-cooked scent had become synonymous with a feeling of security.

Oliver had a family, a great family, a family he loved with everything he had, but there was something a little more special about being welcomed into someone else’s; and on meatloaf night, he always felt welcomed.

Except tonight.
Tonight he felt something different.
Tonight he felt like a thief, marred with a scarlet letter.

But he wasn’t caught stealing silver-plated candlesticks. No, his eyes were set on something much more precious – and she was sat just across the table putting a fork to her lips like it was some sort of erotic dance.

God he wanted to be that fork as it slipped from between her lips, wet from her tongue.

He wanted to slip his finger between those faded red lips and feel her tongue play with the tip, her
eyes wide with wonder and sprinkled with tiny demons of desire.

Fuck
He could almost feel it.

“So you’ll be graduating next year?” Donna asked, severing Oliver’s dirty thoughts like a guillotine.
“Actually, all going well I’m hoping to graduate at the end of this year,” Oliver replied, seamlessly returning to reality.

“You will,” Felicity added without a hint of doubt in her voice.
It would never cease to amaze him how much faith she had in him. His professors might not agree with her levels of surety, but he loved her all the more for it.

“And then what?” Noah asked.
Oliver felt the heat of his eyes, they weren’t angry or rude and maybe it was all in Oliver’s imagination, but they seemed a little more challenging than they had before.

“I’m not really sure, I was thinking about travelling for a few months.”
“You’ve spent a long time travelling the world already wouldn’t you say?”

Felicity tapped her fork against the rim of her plate as she shot her father a look.
“Daddy, why are you grilling him?” she laughed.
“Because everyone should have a plan Felicity, Oliver included.”
Felicity noted how his back was much more rigid than normal and his conversation was certainly more direct than it ever had been.

“Actually, it wasn’t entirely social travelling, I mean more to the places where QC has branches, to see how they operate, what they can learn from us and what we can learn from them,” Oliver clarified.
“See daddy, Oliver will be just fine,” Felicity added with a sharp nod of her head and tip of a smile.

“Well, when you do go be sure to send us back some postcards,” Donna smiled as she deliberately set about lightening the mood.
“I’ll be sure to Ms Smoak.”
“One day Oliver,” she laughed with a soft bounce, “I will get you to call me Donna.”

F: Sorry about my dad, I’m not sure what his problem is
Felicity typed the message out and pressed send on her phone as she hid it from her mother’s eyes under the navy tablecloth.

She watched as Oliver adjusted slightly in his seat before Donna moved onto regaling him with wedding planning horror stories after he made the mistake of asking how it was going.

F: Your reply was really sexy though
She bit her lip to stop from smiling as she sent that one.

Oliver shifted again, pressing his shoulders into the back of the dining chair, glancing only briefly at Felicity before he turned his attention back to Donna and her retelling of the “cake tasting nightmare”.

Felicity imagined each message she sent him vibrated his phone against his leg and the idea of it made her a little turned on.
F: Does QC have a Russian branch? Maybe I could come with you and we could keep each other warm?
She circled her toe across the wood floor as she pressed send on the message, her mind toying with another idea that she quickly decided to act on.

Slouching down a little in her seat, Felicity lifted her leg under the table and stretched it out until her toes lightly grazed over Oliver’s ankle, causing him to instantaneously look at her.

“And then they said they couldn’t make a cake like that because it would be too heavy and topple over…” Donna continued as Oliver felt the heated strokes of Felicity walking her toes up his leg.

He tried to remember if he knew what colour they were painted, he couldn’t fathom why it mattered, but it seemed like something he desperately needed to know.

Two nights ago she had painted them a rich shade of wine red as they passed the time together in his room. Oliver remembered the detail vividly because the colour made it look like someone had gently placed rose petals atop her slender toes.

He swallowed down the thoughts of that night, afraid that remembering she had been wearing a sweater of his that swamped her frame so seductively, might make leaving the table without a raging boner virtually impossible.

So, Oliver kept his eyes on Donna as he tried to envision a 5-tiered cake covered in pink frosting and nodded slowly to act as though he was listening to every word.

*Even as her daughter’s foot slid between his thighs.*

**F: And by keep warm I mean…sex.**
Her foot rounded over his muscular thigh as she watched his eyes blink rapidly.

**F: with you. Obviously.**
**F: repeatedly.**
**F: You’re gorgeous**
**F: I wish I could kiss you right now**
**F: Like Cabo**

“Felicity,” he mother spoke sternly causing Felicity to drop her phone, “no phones at the dinner table, you know the rules.”

Felicity’s foot fell away from Oliver as she watched a tiny morsel of tenseness leave his expression.

“Sorry, forgot,” Felicity shrugged as she shut off her screen and placed the phone on the table. “Oliver do you have your phone?” Donna asked, tapping an impatient finger on the table. “No ma’am,” Oliver smirked at Felicity as he raised his hands, “I know the rules.”

Felicity swallowed the smile she had been wearing for the last twenty odd minutes – he didn’t have his phone. She jostled nervously before she shook the worry from her head, so he’d see her dirty text messages later – *that’s okay.*

~*~*~*~*~

Thea tapped her pen against the back of her head and she pressed her forehead into the breakfast bar.
She hated math.  
Math had come from the devil.

A buzzing beside her, which felt suspiciously like an omen, made her lift her head and scout the room for its source. The chef was in the kitchen obliviously juliennning carrots and her parents were nowhere to be seen, although she could hear the mumble of them chatting in the next room.

When another low buzz echoed off the granite top Thea went on a hunt under the homework papers she had spread across it, lifting and shuffling until she found the source.

The screen lit up and a message rolled across it, too fast for Thea to read what it had said.

It was Oliver’s phone.  
“Oliver left his phone here,” Thea called out.  
“It’s fine dear, just leave it with his keys,” her mom called back.

Thea shrugged just as another message rolled in, she looked down just as the last word scrolled across the screen  
“Obviously”

She watched as Felicity’s name faded, before it popped up again and this time her eyes were ready to see it.  
“Repeatedly”

She put the phone back on the table top and stared down at it just as imagined puffs of smoke made a devil and an angel appear on her shoulders.

*It’s not your business* said the one dressed in white who looked suspiciously like her mother  
*He shouldn’t leave his phone lying around* said the red one who sounded a lot like Tommy

Thea laughed them both away as her finger drew around the outside of the screen  
“I wonder…” she whispered as she keyed in the same code Oliver had always used  
The phone buzzed again in her hands, three successive times as the phone sparked to life – *he still hadn’t changed it.*

Her fingers hovered over the message folder, a debate raging in her head over whether or not to read them.

“Shit,” she quipped as she slammed the phone down on the counter and sighed.

The angel won out this time.

The night sky was a thick curtain of black with only a few distant stars by the time Felicity and Oliver were strolling down the driveway. Oliver was holding the leftovers Donna insisted he take with one hand as the other hand fit snug into Felicity’s waist with his arm snaked around her back.

“What did they say?” he laughed as Felicity finished explaining that she was sending him messages to him when she had been caught with her phone at the dinner table  
“You’ll see,” Felicity replied, thankful that the deep evening night disguised the fuchsia blush of embarrassment she was wearing, “just don’t read them while I’m in the car.”

He nestled his nose into her neck and peppered soft kisses across her jaw as the subtle notes of her perfume floated through his senses.

“But I really think I should,” he whispered, ghosting his lips over her ear.
“That’s not fair,” she hummed, relishing the precious little moments of privacy the walk in the dark had afforded them.

“I’ll just go inside and get my phone; and then we…” Oliver started as he slowly peeled himself away from Felicity’s side.
“Looking for these?” Thea asked from the dark porch a few steps ahead of them, Oliver’s phone in one hand and the keys jangling from the other.

Felicity stopped walking as an audible gasp fell from her lips. Oliver, however, took a rushed step forward and snatched the two items from Thea’s hand.
“What you think you saw…” he started, the anger in his voice bubbling up.
“I know what I saw,” Thea interrupted as she stood from the porch and brushed a hand down her striped pyjama pants.

“Oliver, maybe you could go say goodbye to your parents?” Felicity spoke softly as she placed a calming hand on his shoulder, “I got this.”
Oliver, his brow still darkened and his lips tersely straight, relented with a nod before he stepped around Thea and through the front door, kicking it closed behind him.

“I don’t know what you saw Thea,” Felicity started as she perched herself on the step and gestured for Thea to do the same, “but I’m sure you’ve already formed an opinion of it all.”
“You and Oliver are together,” Thea remarked bluntly as she took up the seat she had vacated only seconds before.

There may have been a million ways of trying to lie about this, but in the end it just didn’t seem right to look Thea in the eyes and tell her she was wrong.
“You’re right,” Felicity agreed.

“I didn’t read the messages BeeTeeDub,” Thea admitted as she glanced back towards the door, “I could have, but I didn’t.”

Felicity breathed a shallow sigh of relief, at least there was that.
“You guys aren’t just casually hooking up though right?” Thea questioned as she raised a worried eyebrow at Felicity.
Felicity thought about asking where Thea had heard such terminology, but instead decided to simply allay the worry in Thea’s tone.
“No, of course not,” Felicity smiled before she glanced back towards the door, “I really care about Oliver and I think he feels the same way about me.”

“So why hide it?”
Thea seemed genuinely perplexed by the notion and Felicity couldn’t exactly blame her.
“We, or more so I, just wanted a chance to know where we stood first,” Felicity explained, although the words streaming from her mouth didn’t sound all that convincing.

“Well, I don’t really get it, but your secret is safe with me,” Thea spoke, wisely beyond her young years, as she stood up once again, “I should probably go inside.”

Felicity nodded as she mouthed a small thank you.

Thea opened the door, but paused on the threshold of walking through it.
“Felicity?” she asked turning her head back towards Felicity.
“Mmmm?”
“Please don’t hurt him like she did,” she whispered with a slight tremble in her voice, concern threaded through each word as she spoke it.
“I won’t,” Felicity replied softly, “I promise.”

Thea nodded, Felicity's response enough for her, before she disappeared into the house leaving Felicity to sit alone with her thoughts.

There was a kind of comfort in the fact that now one of their family members knew and, as a light wind swept strands of blonde across her face and she breathed in the soft floral notes of the nearby gardens, it was oddly liberating.
“We really need to work on your idea of dirty texts,” Oliver smiled as he scrolled through the messages she had left with him as they sat in the car stopped at an amber light. “I told you not to read them while I was in the car,” Felicity pouted, the street lights illuminating the soft sweep of embarrassment across her cheeks.

“And you knew I wouldn’t be able to help myself,” he smirked as he chucked the phone into the centre console, anticipating the light change.

Felicity’s eyes roved across the darkened streets and her eyes lit up when she realised where they were close to.

“Take the next right,” she instructed coyly as a flux of ideas scattered inside her mind. “That’s not the way to the freeway,” Oliver replied, his eyes glancing for just a few seconds across to her to watch the smile flickering onto her lips. “I know,” she shrugged with one slightly raised brow, her eyes locked forward.

“The next right takes us to…”
“*I know,*” she interrupted just as the light turned green.

As he neared the next intersection Oliver weighed up the choice ahead of him, however his hand
had already made the final decision when he flicked on his blinker and turned right. It made him smile when he heard a soft sigh of enjoyment pass from Felicity’s lips.

“The next right,” she continued and wordlessly Oliver followed.

The street lights got further apart and the road narrowed down to single lanes as they drove further away from the freeway and back into the suburbs, albeit a handful of blocks from where they had started out.

“Left.”
Oliver pulled into the deserted High School parking lot and watched the smile blossom into Felicity’s cheeks as she directed him no longer with words but with an outstretched finger towards a secluded part of the parking lot.

The lights barely touched the inside of the car as Oliver pulled alongside a hedge and shut off the engine.
“I never went to my prom,” Felicity reminisced as her eyes walked the familiar outline of the High School she had attended not all that long ago, even though it felt like decades had passed since she walked its halls.

“I know,” Oliver replied softly as he watched the white fingers of the moon caress the side of Felicity’s face.
“That means I never got to make out in my date’s car,” she added whimsically as she unbuckled and turned in the seat to look at him.
“I suppose that’s true,” Oliver remarked, smiling as he felt her eyes wander up his chest.
“You’re about the closest thing to a prom date, Oliver,” she licked her lips over his name and he watched every millisecond of it with avid and aroused eyes.

Felicity reached over and unbuckled his seatbelt before she slipped between the front seats and settled into the backseat with her back pressed to the inside of the door and her hand lightly stroking the soft leather interior.

She watched as his eyes flittered through the scenario and she knew he was slowly piecing together what he should do.
“It’s not an essay question Oliver,” she whispered as the blue in her eyes softened and her lashes fanned across her cheeks in slow, measured blinks.

Oliver laughed soundlessly as he clambered, with less finesse than Felicity had, onto the backseat. His hand brushed back her hair softly giving her every chance to retract her offer if she wished before his lips lightly shaved hers.

Just a peck.
A blissfully soft rapture of his lips against hers, innocent in its kindly caress.
Just a peck that Felicity leaned into, deepening it slowly and proving she was right there with him.

His hand cupped the side of her neck as his thumb teased the tip of her lips before stroking up her cheek.

Felicity keened into his delicate touch as she pushed back into the kiss and slipped her tongue into the enchanting confines of his mouth. Their tongues twisted together in a dance of their own design as Felicity let her fingers traverse the sweeping arch of his back.

His body fell onto hers as she slipped underneath him with one leg tumbling to the floor as the other rose up against the back of the chair.
He felt so heavy atop her as his hips ground into her pelvis sending the most insanely indecent sensation resonating across her body. She bit his lip in response and she felt an unmistakable smile bleed onto his lips before he did it a second time, and then a third.

Felicity didn’t hold back the impish mewl from her lips as Oliver continued to press his growing bulge into the seam of her pants. But the pleasure was short-lived when Oliver grunted at the tiny confines of the car and his limited range of motion as his knee smacked against the door handle before the other got wedged under the front seat.

He huffed as he pulled back from her in an attempt to free his foot. Felicity shuffled up as his foot came free, a smile slapped across her wet lips at just how much taller he was than her.

Oliver sat up and ran a frustrated hand across his scalp but as he blew out a trying sigh Felicity set both of his feet onto the floor and with mischievous eyes set about sitting herself onto his lap.

Her narrow shoulders butted up against the two front seats as she adjusted herself atop him. She writhed a little above him until she was neatly nestled with his clothed erection pressing snugly between her spread legs.

“Is this better?” she asked before she trickled a path of wet kisses down his neck. He was breathing hard. Fanning his hot breath against her shoulders seconds before his hands sunk in around her waist.

Kissing the underside of his jaw she worked towards his chin, her eyes scrutinizing his as they darkened with each subsequent touch of her lips. Her kiss met the corner of his mouth and he growled hungrily before she teased her tongue along the edge of it.

She could see his eyes ruminating, filled with both trepidation and desire, like he was frozen between what he wanted to do and what he thought he should do.

Felicity sat up, using the excuse to buck her hips against his solid erection. “It’s okay Oliver,” she spoke softly, allaying the trepidation in his eyes.

“I want to be here,” she continued as her hands slid under the back of her shirt. They caught the clasp of her bra and she undid it swiftly. “I want to be with you,” she spoke before Felicity peppered his lips with barely felt kisses.

She threaded one arm through her bra strap before she mirrored the same on the other side and seconds later she was tugging the black-lacy-torment from the bottom of her loose-fitting singlet.

She watched Oliver swallow like he had in the bedroom, the illicit look of it making the wings of her lips tip into a knowing smile as she dropped the bra from the pinched tips of her fingers onto the floor of Oliver’s car.

“I want this,” she repeated, cupping his head as she kissed another line across his unshaven jaw.

He hummed his undiluted pleasure as his hands clenched in around her waist. Felicity squeaked at the sudden pressure of his thumbs digging into her before they immediately fell away. “Shit, did I hurt you,” he asked, pulling her face up so he could see her eyes. “No,” she rocked her head slowly in his hands, “I’m not breakable,” she added as she moved his hands from her face and placed them back against her waist.

“You can show me what you like,” she breathed, watching him with heavily-lidded and wanton eyes, “I might like it too.”
Felicity had no idea how her seemingly innocent words spoken with such a thread of lust drove him **absolutely freaking wild.**

Never in his life had he been with someone who could elude both innocence and raw sexuality; and as he felt the caress of her tongue down the thin, sensitive skin of his neck, the thread he had been so carefully hanging onto snapped.

He pushed her back into the shoulders of the seats behind her, relishing the way her eyes lit up and her lips exhaled a playful sigh.

His hands skimmed up her chest, enjoying just how thin the fabric felt under his desperate hands.

*He could rip it clear off her.*

*That would make her gasp.*

*Soft air dripping from wet, aroused lips.*

*His name hung from them like a pendulum.*

*Delectable hummed breaths that would make her breasts lift and fall.*

*Her nipples would darken and coil seconds before he would scoop them into his mouth.*

“Felicity,” he groaned her name as he palmed her chest, twisting the fabric over her nipples.

He thought he heard her say his name as he imagined the sound of it trickling from her lips as she climaxed around him.

And then she was kissing him again.

Ferociously and vivaciously. It was hot and wet and fast.

Their teeth gnawed at each other as their tongues batted each other around.

*He could tear it.*

*So easily.*

He fisted into the fabric and he could feel her nipple hardening underneath.

Before he could entertain any longer just how easy it would be to rip her shirt from her body, Felicity lifted it from the hem and dropped it to the floor of the car on top of the discarded bra.

Oliver’s eyes shot to her chest and he could do nothing to stop his mind from remembering the way of perfectly pink nipples looked in the halogenic lights of the bathroom all those months ago.

He wished the light was brighter in the car as his eyes struggled to see much more than the outline of them. He wanted to see his fingers toy with them to notice the contrasts of colour and texture. He wanted to watch the pleasure fan out from her face and drip like water colours down her chest.

*He wanted to see her.*

“I’m right here,” she smiled, his thoughts clearly echoed in words he didn’t know he spoke.

He opened his mouth to explain before a white light lit up her chest and in a hazy glow he saw his hands cupping her breasts before Felicity screamed and scrambled away from the light. It took him longer than he realised to understand the intrusion of the light as he tipped his head towards the window to see the blinding light of a torch and the very clear shimmer of a badge pressed to the window.

“You folks alright in there?” came a gruff and sharp voice.
Oliver clambered back over the seats, plopping down into the driver’s seat. He took a heavy inhale before the turned the car to aux and opened the window barely two inches.

“Ah, yes, we’re fine,” Oliver spluttered, hating how incredibly guilty he sounded. 
_They were both adults._

_Oh._

His eyes roved the backseat watching as Felicity sat hunched in the corner, frozen. 
_Only, she wasn’t._

He knew that. He’d always known that, but the realisation of it now, at this moment, felt like someone had punched him square the face.

Again the badge was pressed to the window as the officer stooped to peer in through the partially opened window.

“Licence and registration,” he asked without the inflection of a question.

Oliver fumbled in the glovebox for a few seconds before he wound the window down further, over half way, and offered the papers as he anxiously attempted – and failed – to make lasting eye contact.

_Shit, he must have looked guilty as sin._

His eyes looked in the rear view at Felicity.

_Maybe he was._

“How old are you?” the officer asked as he handed Oliver back the papers.

“Oh, no sir,” Oliver replied, this time making the eye contact last for at least four _Mississippis._

It must have worked because the officer with the full moustache and a motorcycle helmet with a lifted visor nodded slowly before he walked the light around the car.

Felicity felt the hot light of the torch even though she doubted it had any actual heat attached to it. She had tried in vain to find her dropped tee in the limited light and was now sitting, squished into the corner, with her arms folded tightly across her bare chest and her knees up as close to her body as she could possibly get them.

“How are you alright miss?” he asked, putting the light, thankfully, just to the side of her face.

“I’m fine,” she peeped, and it suddenly stung Oliver just how young she sounded in that moment.

The officer must have thought along the same lines as he flicked the light onto Oliver’s face before dropping it back to Felicity.

“How old are you?” he asked dubiously.

“Nineteen,” she lied effortlessly.

Oliver watched as the officer showed only a slight snag of expression over his shadowed face. He didn’t believe her, but he had no recourse to question it further.

“You two should be heading home,” he warned.

“Yes sir,” Oliver hurriedly agreed.

“Drive safe.”

He walked away but Oliver could see him pacing along the side of his motorcycle, clearly waiting for them to leave before he did.

Felicity found her top and threw it over her head, pulling the hem down around her with a frustrated puff of air before she climbed back into the passenger seat and silently pulled the seatbelt across
her chest.

He wanted to ask her if she was okay, but he didn’t.

Oliver started the car and switched the headlights on. Felicity wasn’t even looking at him when they pulled out of the parking space and drove through the parking lot and out onto the road.

A few moments later Oliver saw the one headlight of the motorcycle drive through the parking lot and turn the opposite direction.

“Are you okay?” Oliver asked, finally breaking the silence as a light mist of rain started to speckle the windows.
“I’m fine,” she sniffed as she kept her eyes locked to the suburban scenery floating past.

Oliver pulled up to an intersection and tapped his worries out on the steering wheel.
“It’s just you don’t seem alright,” he breathed, anxious about how she might take his insistence

“I said I’m fine,” she snipped, although she didn’t mean to.

She watched as the rain grew heavier and the spots grew larger across the window pane. She didn’t know why she snipped or why she was now trapped watching the rain fall and refusing to offer Oliver an honest answer, but if she was forced to take a punt it would be because she was caught in a juxtaposition of being so completely consumed with the idea of sleeping with Oliver and (equally) terrified of it.

_Terrified_ may not have been the right word, but staring at the raindrops now forming streaks seemed to leave her without enough capacity to think of a better one.

Every fibre of her physical body wanted to sleep with Oliver and yet, the fact that they had come so close in her childhood bedroom where she once imagined marrying Oliver, with her parents downstairs and no lock on the door; or the fact she had been willing to go all the way in the backseat of his car despite knowing in her heart that she wanted so much more…it all seemed so far removed from her usual calculated thinking processes and perhaps it was that which _terrified_ her the most.

“But you’re not,” Oliver lamented as he pulled the car over to the side of the road.
He wasn’t going to let this fester or just let things go unsaid.

“I’m sorry…” he started.
“Please don’t,” she breathed in a strangled voice as she finally tore her eyes away from the mesmerising laces of rain, “you didn’t do anything wrong.”

She offered him a timid smile as she watched the passing headlights show the pain in his expression.
“I meant what I said, I _wanted_ to,” Felicity spoke, her voice calmed and soft.

“But?” he questioned, knowing that there was something more sitting unsaid in the space between them

“I just,” she tried to find a reason for her sudden heavy weight of regret. She couldn't find one, at least not one that made any sense. It just seemed like something hung over them like a heavy cloud.
“You wanted something more?”

Felicity nodded slowly, _maybe that was it?_
“I want to be with you Oliver,” she said, her voice drenched in soft-spoken honesty, “it just feels like we’re hiding, like we’re doing something wrong.”

The words came out from her mouth before she had even processed them herself, but deep down she was almost certain that’s what it was.

_Hiding in her room, sneaking into dimly lit parking lots._

“Maybe we could tell them,” Oliver smiled, the truth was he knew how she felt because he felt exactly the same way.

Felicity considered his words pensively, her mind could offer up half a dozen reasons why she didn’t want to, none of which would stack up particularly well, but it all boiled down to the simple fact that she wasn’t quite ready to yet.

“After the wedding, I want to tell them then,” she looked across the car at him, pressing her palm into the hand that was wrapped around the gearstick, “it’s silly, but I feel like that will be the right time, is that okay?”

Oliver tapped his other hand onto hers.

“Is that what you want?” he asked, for his part he would have shouted it from the rooftops and told anyone willing to listen that he was so far gone for this girl, but in the same breath he understood her reservations.

Like she had said once before, Felicity wanted the time to enjoy the quiet blossoming of their relationship before it was scrutinised and discussed amongst those closest to them. He knew the way her mind worked and how deep down she was a deeply private person. She was never overtly proud even when she had every reason to be. She rarely spoke of her accomplishments and had never enjoyed being under a focused eye.

Oliver knew Felicity.

He couldn’t be mad; and he wasn’t.

She answered him with a nod and a lopsided smile. It was.

“Alright, we’ll tell them then, together,” he assured her as he squeezed her hand, “but I don’t want to hide away like we’re ashamed of this Felicity, so until everything is out in the open we keep everything PG13, agreed?”

He wasn’t going to steal the Kuttler-Smoak candlesticks, nor was he going to take their daughter’s virginity like a thief.

“No more playing footsies with me under the table or pulling your bra off from under your clothes,” he spoke as he instinctively swiped his tongue across his bottom lip, “you have to close your door when you’re getting changed and you can’t sit on my lap.”

He smiled after he had finished laying out his terms, but softly added, “we wanted to keep this between us so we could _figure us out_. To really do that justice we need to keep our clothes on.”

Oliver, the playboy, hated every single word that was coming from his mouth at that moment, but, as he clawed back the thin threads of resistance that he had dropped back in the parking lot, he knew it was right.

“What about partially suggestive text messages?” she smiled, the apples of her cheeks flourished with a peach blush.

“Oh only if I’m not in your vicinity,” Oliver grinned with a chuckle.
The kindness in his voice made her smile, Oliver understood her – faults and all – and that was about the best feeling in the world.
“Okay, agreed,” she nodded.

The wedding was in a little over four weeks.
They could last four weeks.

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They lasted, mostly. There was that one time in the SIT campus library when Oliver was following Felicity around like a book-holding-knight and she crouched down to get a book from the lower shelf.

There was just something about the pretty little sundress (aka kryptonite to Oliver’s restraint) she was wearing and the way skimmed the carpet and slid down her bent legs. In a cruel twist of fate the air-con inside wasn’t set cold enough and a light mist of sweat feathered across her collar bone (aka the Mt Everest of arousals) and before either one of them knew it Oliver had dropped all the books in a heap and replaced them with handfuls of her ass as they shook the bookshelf behind her back.

It had only been when they realised they had drawn quite the crowd of students over like tourists that they broke apart abruptly with shades of embarrassment highlighted across their cheeks.

Thankfully, much of the last four weeks had been crammed full of classes and study groups as the semester wrapped up and the last day of school for both of them had seen them drive straight to the airport and catch a red-eye flight down to Florida with Robert Queen sat next to them.

So now there was just two days.
Two days Felicity reminded herself as Oliver’s muscles strained to carry every single one of their bags in one go, ignoring the trolley that he could have so easily used in the five-star resort when they arrived at this ungodly hour of the morning.

The elevator ride to the sixth floor was excruciatingly long and filled with a chasm of awkwardness when Felicity would turn her head to look at Oliver only to catch the eye of Robert instead. She wasn’t sure what expression she was wearing but the one Oliver’s dad gave her back was a mixture of flattery and perplex.

“This is me,” Felicity said quietly as she stopped in front of Room 605.
“You’re 608,” Robert yawned, the early morning catching up on him, as he handed Oliver the room tag, “your sister has an adjoining room, so keep the noise down.”

Oliver nodded as Robert strode past them and stopped a few doors down in front of Room 612. A few seconds later found Felicity and Oliver in the hallway alone.

Felicity squinted at her watch, 1:15am.
Oliver looked at his door then back at her, a question he shouldn’t ask on the edge of his tongue, did you want to come in?

“Mom and I are sharing a room,” Felicity offered an answer to a question that wasn’t asked.
So I can’t invite you in her eyes finished.
“Okay, agreed,” she nodded.

“Okay, agreed,” she nodded.
rooms before the wedding,” Felicity laughed softly as she coiled a finger around her hair simply to stop its desire to touch his arm.

“I don’t know,” Oliver shrugged absently, “I think that’s kind of cute.”
“Who know you were a big ol’ sook,” Felicity teased as her finger fell from her hair and instinctively stroked the curve of his shoulder.

He was wearing that brushed-leather jacket and it felt like sin under her palm. She wet her lips and stepped just an inch closer.

Oliver swallowed a golf ball of regret before he leaned into her cheek and placed a dusted kiss in the smooth centre of it.
_two more days_ he reminded himself as the coconut scent of her hair tickled and toyed with his senses.

“Good night Felicity,” he whispered like hot gravel in his throat before he took a step back and turned towards his room.

Felicity kept her eyes closed even after she knew he had stepped away just to enjoy the sensation of his soft lips against her cheek a few moments longer before it bled out into nothing.

“Good night Oliver,” she whispered her response with a floated smile across her bare lips.

today, wedding tomorrow, tell people on sunday before they flew back for exams starting tuesday Felicity reassured herself as she slipped quietly into her room, stealing one last look at Oliver as he did the same.

They could absolutely last this weekend without tearing each other’s clothes off.

[7:43am]

Felicity groaned as she smacked out at an alarm clock that wasn’t there as something that sounded like a talkback radio show spilled into her perfectly charming dream.

“Oh good, you’re awake,” Donna cheered as Felicity rolled over in the bed to come face to face with the bright white smile of her mother.

“Mom, go back to sleep,” Felicity groaned as she picked up the nearest pillow and jammed it onto her face.

“Oh come on, I have a whole day for us planned,” Donna chimed excitedly as she tore the pillow away from Felicity’s head.

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“I don’t like plans,” Felicity grumbled, burying her face under the blankets.

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“I need you to go to the airport to pick up Chris at nine, then we have a Zumba class at ten, lunch and a couple’s massage at twelve, acupuncture at two, manicures and pedicures at three, back here for hair and makeup at four and then rehearsal dinner at six.”

Felicity heard her mother’s mile a minute list before she peeled back the covers and sighed obtusely – she wasn’t going to get any more sleep this morning.

“Shouldn’t dad be doing most of those things with you?” Felicity asked amidst a few yawns.

“Oh no, we’re spending the day apart from each other, it’s good luck,” Donna shared cheerfully as she poked at Felicity’s waist under the blankets.

“Wait, why am I going to the airport?” she asked, lulling her head back and forth as her mother’s long list of plans finally started to permeate into her brain.

“Chris’ parents are driving down from Vegas and they’re going to be a bit late so I need you to go
to the airport and pick him up.”
Felicity finally scooted up the bed, still dressed in the clothes she had been wearing the night before.
“I didn’t bring a car mom,” she yawned as she scratched her scalp and smacked her lips together
“How about your dad’s hire car?”
“You know the company won’t let me drive it, I’m seventeen.”
“We won’t tell them,” Donna smiled.
Felicity hitched an eyebrow as she rolled her head towards her mother wearing one very disapproving look.
“No,” she replied as she shook her head.
God she hated it when she sounded like the responsible one.

“What about Oliver?”
“What about him?” she shot back defensively, too defensively
“He’s not seventeen.”
“I don’t keep track of his birthdays.”
Felicity cringed at her own answers – honest to god she would make the worst secret agent if she was ever interrogated.

Donna laughed off Felicity’s response, “I just mean maybe he could go to the airport with you, if he doesn’t have plans.”
“How should I know if he has plans?”

She couldn’t stop herself short of taping her mouth shut.

“Is everything okay Felicity?” Donna asked as she placed a considerate hand on Felicity’s shoulder and tipped her head to look her daughter in the eye.
“Of course, why wouldn’t it be?” Felicity replied, leaving her head low, “I just don’t want to talk about Oliver, because why would I, he’s just a friend.”
“You seem a little on edge and,” she paused, “did he say something mean?”
What was she, five?

Felicity took a breath, and shook the cobwebs from her brain.
“No, it’s nothing,” she sighed, “I just haven’t had coffee this morning.”

She slipped from the bed and padded in a jagged path across to where her suitcase sat.
“You can get a coffee at the airport.”
Felicity ignored the very blatant hurry along her mother was giving her as she slowly peeled back the zipper of her suitcase and rummaged for a good long while looking for something she knew the exact location of as she smiled secretly.

She came up with an orange skater dress and a bag full of toiletries.
“I’m not doing a Zumba class with you mom,” she called over her shoulder before she disappeared into the bathroom, kicking the door closed with her foot.

She took her glorious time in the shower, letting the warm water roll away the late flight and scratch of sleep she managed, before she shook her hair in front of the blow dryer for 10 straight minutes, pulled it up into a ponytail and rubbed a glob of tinted sunscreen across her face while she scrutinized her complexion.

A single coat of mascara and a swipe of cherry lip gloss was all she could muster the energy to apply before she set about dressing only to find she had left a fresh pair of underwear in the other room.

She opened the bathroom door a crack letting the last remnants of steam escape.
“Mom, can you get my underwear please, a white pair or pink, just not black,” she called out through the gap, the towel loosely affixed under her arms.

Silence greeted her even though she had heard the sounds of footsteps barely a minute before. “Mom, honestly, it doesn’t matter which ones,” she continued, tapping impatiently on the doorframe until she heard the stunted sound of a cough.

“Mom…” she spoke as she pulled back the door and stepped around the corner of it. “Hi,” Oliver said awkwardly as he stood like a statue near the door, “I didn’t want to uh, get you your…”

“What are you doing here?” Felicity asked as she held the top of the towel flat against her chest. At least this time she wasn’t completely naked.

“Your mom asked me to take you to the airport, she said I should wait in here for you and then she said I should apologise, only I’m not sure what for,” Oliver trailed off as he looked at her with worried eyes.

“Sorry, I think she thinks we’re fighting or something,” Felicity cringed, “I may have been a little too defensive this morning when she mentioned you.”

“So we’re okay? Because I thought maybe you might have told her and I didn’t know what I was supposed to say because we had a plan right, a plan about when to tell them, and…” Felicity smiled, it seemed her propensity to babble was wearing off on Oliver.

“We’re fine and we’ll tell everyone on Sunday before we leave,” she assured with a kindly smile as she tiptoed towards him.

Oliver smiled as he took a few steps deeper into the room, stopping barely a foot from her. “I just need my, um,” she spoke softly as she leaned around him to her suitcase sat just behind where he was stood.

“Oh, right, of course,” he replied as he stepped to the side and shook his head in a silent self-shaming.

A few minutes later and Felicity was back in the hotel room, fully dressed and gathering her things to leave for the airport.

“Are you sure you’re okay driving me? I could always catch a taxi or something,” Felicity said as Oliver held the room door open.

“It’s fine,” he smiled as she brushed past him.

He stopped her with a gentle stroke of his hand against her arm, “any time I get to spend with you alone of course I’m going to say yes to,” he whispered in her ear, the dulcet tone of it like molten between her legs.

“How long since you’ve seen Chris?” Oliver asked as his hand rested on her knee, the car having taken them far from prying eyes.

“I saw him Christmas before last but we write as often as we can,” Felicity answered as her fingertip idly traced the veins on Oliver’s hand.

“Does he know about us?” Oliver let his finger stroke a delicate circle in the crease of her knee. “Oh god no, Christopher couldn’t keep a secret from my mother to save himself,” she snorted, “there was one time we took the last cookie and shared it, all my mother had to say was the word cookie and Chip was sobbing, taking full responsibility and begging for forgiveness.”
Oliver smiled at her careless laugh, it was infectious and he loved every second of hearing it. “You two were close as kids?” he asked as his mind hawked back to the picture Felicity had shown Oliver together with his own hazy recollection of Chip.

“We were a little outside the norm, so I suppose we both found a measure of comfort in that,” Felicity paused to press a brief kiss into Oliver’s shoulder, “you’re okay with all this right?” she asked dubiously as she pulled away. “Why wouldn’t I be, you said he’s just a friend, right?” Felicity bobbed her head in a soft nod, “absolutely, nothing more than friends.” “So,” he smiled as he squeezed her leg gently, “of course I’m okay with it.”

She kissed his shoulder a second time before laying her head onto it as they pulled into airport parking. “In fact,” Oliver simpered as he pulled into an empty space and tugged up the park brake, “you guys should sit in the back for the drive home and get reacquainted.”

“You’re the best secret boyfriend a girl could have,” Felicity crooned as she snapped her hands to his cheek and kissed him square on the lips with an exaggerated pout. “Until Sunday,” Oliver remarked as he drew lines down her neck and along her shoulders. “And then you’ll be the best completely out in the open boyfriend,” Felicity nodded resolutely.

As he stared at her in that moment three small words almost drifted from his mouth, I love you, but unaware of just how close he was from saying them, Felicity pushed the car door open and slipped from his grasp.

He watched her smiled as she pushed the door closed and poked her tongue out playfully at him. Sunday. On Sunday they would tell people they were together. Sunday. On Sunday Oliver would tell Felicity that he loved her.

“So, will you recognise him, or should we have brought a sign?” Oliver joked as they waited alongside his assumed arrival gate. “I’m sure he hasn’t changed that much, he’s hard to miss,” Felicity replied as her shoulder gently tussled with Oliver’s. “Is it the glasses?” Oliver smirked, remembering the ones that distinctly looked like the bottom of coke bottles.

Felicity smiled as she ritualistically touched a finger to the arm of her own glasses. “He got Lassek through the Air Force, he doesn’t wear glasses anymore.”

There wasn’t a chance for Oliver to say anything more as large arms swooped in around Felicity’s waist and lifted her clean into the air before they threw her over a wide shoulder with a boisterous laugh.
“Woah, what the hell man,” Oliver yelled as he readied himself to take on the guy that probably had less than a foot of height on him and a pretty well matched physique.

Felicity laughed as she tried to keep her skirt from lifting to embarrassing heights. “Oliver, it’s fine,” she chortled as the tree trunk arms set her back down on the ground.

“Oliver, this is Christopher Chance,” she introduced with a broad smile, “Chris, this is Oliver Queen.”

Oliver forced his mouth not to gaped, but as he studied the well-built guy in front of him with soft blue eyes and a chiselled jaw painted with two-day scruff not unlike his own all he wanted to do was gape.

And curse.

Because Fuck.
“Oliver, it’s good to see you again,” Chris said jubilantly as he stretched out a hand attached to a heavily decorated uniformed arm, “you don’t look much different from what I remember.” Oliver took it hesitantly and tried not to show his surprise at the strong grip Felicity’s childhood friend was sporting.

“I can’t say the same for you,” Oliver chuckled awkwardly as their hands fell apart.

“Puberty was good to me,” Chris laughed boisterously before he turned his attention once again to Felicity, enveloping her with his large arms, “I can’t believe it’s been over a year since I saw you Bug.”

“Bug?” Oliver asked as he swallowed down his desire to pull Chris’ arms off Felicity and stake his claim by kissing her right then and there.

But then she’d hate him.
Because Oliver had made a big point about not being jealous, but he was, insanely so.
He also knew Felicity well enough to know that any ‘claim’ on her would be met with a terse pout and a pair of narrowed eyes, although still radiant blue.

Oliver knew Felicity didn’t take too fondly to the idea of being touted as property – it had not been all that long ago when Felicity had, infuriated, thrown a book she had been reading clear across his room because she had become riled up by the “inadequacies” of the brooding leading man and the “pathetic-ness” of the leading woman who was just willing to accept whatever her jealous, controlling, borderline abusive boyfriend told her.

Chris smiled a perfect set of white teeth (noticeably free from braces), “that’s just a nickname I gave her on account of her glasses that made her eyes look huge, like a bug.”

Felicity snorted before whacking the back of her hand across his bicep. “It was the early nineties and I wanted to be an eighties kid,” Felicity pouted.

Oliver pushed down the completely irrational hurt that he felt at not knowing about young Felicity’s obsession with the decade of perms and round glasses. “Do you have all your luggage?” Oliver asked, desperate to float his voice into the air just so he wasn’t forgotten.

Again, irrational.

“This is all I have,” Chris nodded kindly as he jostled the rug sack slung over his shoulder. “To the car then?” Felicity chatted, standing between the pair of 6ft pillars. “Tell me you’re not driving?” Chris mocked with a wink of his utterly charming blue eyes. “No, Oliver drove.”

“Good because I might be Jewish, but you know I would be in the back praying to every God imaginable if you were driving. One near death experience is enough,” Chris laughed before he offered Oliver a thankful smile and Oliver replied with a half-hearted one of his own.

\*Chris was Jewish. Felicity was Jewish. Oliver hadn’t set foot in a religious building in well over a decade.\*

“Near death experience?” Oliver asked, although subconsciously wishing he hadn’t. They had stories. Stories where it was just them. Stories Oliver knew nothing about.

“Felicity hasn’t told you about the time she almost drove us off the road because…” Chris’ words were cut short when Felicity kicked her foot into the back of his knee causing him to stumble forward. “Hint taken,” he laughed as he carefully steadied himself, “do you guys mind if I duck to the bathroom before we leave?” “Not a problem,” Oliver replied with a feigned smile.

\*Chris seemed nice, he hated that.\*

“Are you okay?” Felicity asked once Chris had disappeared into the men’s room. “Of course, why wouldn’t I be?” Oliver could hear the unplanned sarcasm in his voice, and by the look of Felicity’s expression – she could too. “It seems like you’re not.”
Oliver took a slow intake of air and breathed it out through slightly parted lips. “I am,” he tried to honestly reply.

Felicity wasn’t really buying it. She had seen Oliver’s expression and demeanour change the instant he was introduced to Chris. It had been eerily similar to the look Chris’ (ex)girlfriend, Amanda, had given her when Felicity spent the holidays with them in Vegas the year before last.

The end result had seen Felicity caught in the middle of something that was unpleasant at best.

“I can sit in the front with you, if you want?” Felicity offered with a hesitant sigh.

“His your friend, you should catch up.”

Felicity’s lips turned up into a bright smile before she pecked a soft kiss against Oliver’s cheek. “Thank you,” she whispered as she pulled away and blessed him with his favourite little smile.

The drive home was filled with a cacophony of finished sentences and unabashed laughter. Both Chris and Felicity had tried to include Oliver where they could – Chris asking about where he went to college and Felicity relaying that Oliver had gone with her to get the new adornment on her ear.

Oliver smiled where expected and answered where he could, but his eyes couldn’t stop travelling to the rear view mirror to watch as the two acted like the best of friends.

He had seen how easily she talked with Barry, how Tommy had become an easy friend and how her and Camila had found a fast friendship between them. But this was different, she seemed so unguarded, so relaxed and so happy.

And all Oliver heard repeating in his brain was the simple rhetorical question; how can you compete with that?

The group soon found both Felicity and Oliver’s parents in a rented cabana alongside the resort’s expansive and glistening pool.

“Christopher!” Donna shrieked, already two mimosas down, before she totted over to him with open arms, “I’m so glad you could make it.”

“Wouldn’t miss it ma’am, you and Noah give the rest of us hope,” he replied cheerfully as Oliver sulked into the back of the cabana next to Thea.

“Come, let me introduce you to everyone,” Donna grinned as she linked arms and walked him back to the group.

“Robert and Moira Queen are our Starling neighbours and my soon-to-be-husband’s boss,” she started, smiling from ear to ear as Chris offered the same strong handshake to Robert as he had to Oliver and a gentle smile to Moira.

“This is Christopher, he’s Felicity’s BFF,” Donna continued with a snorted giggle.

“Mom, no one says that,” Felicity groaned.

“Oh come on, you two potty trained together, it was adorable.”

“Mom” Felicity grimaced as her cheeks flushed pink.

Oliver grimaced too, but only Thea saw it.

“That’s Felicity’s friend?” she leaned over and whispered near Oliver’s ear.

He grunted in response.

“He’s like you, but younger and probably smarter,” Thea gaped as her eyes barely blinked away.
from Chris.
“Thank you Thea, that’s just great,” Oliver growled as he agitatedly tapped the back of her chair. “And he has a uniform,” her eyes widened before she had to stifle a laugh as Oliver’s lips pursed together like he had sucked a lemon.

“Well, I’m going to steal my daughter away for the day,” Donna announced as she floated a hand through Felicity’s hair before Felicity tapped it away, “you should stay with the boys Chris, keep them in line.”

“It’s alright, I thought I might just head to my room,” Chris replied politely as he jostled the rug sack on his back. “Nonsense Chris, Robert, Oliver and I are playing golf for the afternoon, you should join us,” Noah insisted.

Oliver tensed at the mention of his name as he watched how seamlessly Chris slotted into Felicity’s family. Not that they had ever been rude or dismissive of him – quite the opposite – but it now seemed a little less special.

And yes, he knew that was ridiculous.

“Ah, actually, I was thinking of staying inside today, not one for this heat,” Oliver replied as seven sets of eyes looked at him showing varying degrees of confusion over his words.

It was barely 70° – not exactly sweltering. “Well then take Chris with you, don’t leave him with the old boys,” Donna joked as she pecked the side of Noah’s face. “That’s quite alright ma’am, I’ll be fine…” Chris started. “You don’t mind do you Oliver?” Donna asked kindly.

Oliver looked across at Felicity who was smiling at him like a little lost puppy. Whatever his jealousy was screaming in that moment he could only hear what her eyes were whispering. Chris meant a lot to her and it was clear that she wanted nothing more than to see them get on.

“You play pool Chris?” Oliver asked, pressing a considered smile to his lips. “A little,” Chris nodded with a slight sigh of relief passing across his expression. “We’ll put your bag in you room then play a couple of games if you’re up for it?” “Yeah, that’d be great.”

Oliver looked back across at Felicity, her lips turned up into the sweetest lip-glossed smile before she mouthed the words “Thank you”.

It was an hour later when Oliver found himself in the throes of an equally-matched game of pool in the breezy rec room just a stone’s throw from where Thea had made a home on a lounger beside the pool. Noah and Robert had ventured out into the golf course and Felicity was ensconced in whatever it was Donna had on her agenda.

The smell of salt-licked air blew through the open patio doors and sparked a conversation that had been sitting on the edge of Oliver’s tongue as he watched the quietly reserved Christopher Chip Chance float around the pool table, not missing a single shot.

*God he wanted to hate the guy.*
“So you and Felicity have been friends for a while?” Oliver asked as he lined up his next shot, the number 14 in the corner pocket.
“About 15 years,” Chris replied, thankful for a break in the somewhat awkward silence that was stagnant between them.

He was smart enough to recognise it, it wasn’t exactly well-hidden.

“And you're close?” Oliver continued as his eyes watched the number 14 fall gracefully exactly where he’d intended.
“I think so,” Chris nodded as his eyes walked around the table, eyeing out his best chance at sinking a ball.

Oliver paused the next question at the edge of his lips, holding it back by a strand of trepidation. He knew what Felicity had told him and he should just believe her, because it’s Felicity and she doesn’t lie… and yet

“Have you ever dated?” he asked, failing to hold onto the question a moment longer
Oliver held his breath as he watched Chris lean over the table and line up the number 5. He wasn’t answering, not a smile, not a shake of his head, not even a scowl of disbelief that Oliver would dare to ask the question, nothing.

Chris took a breath and drew back his elbow, making the shot easily into the side pocket before he looked up and brushed Oliver’s question off with a laugh and a soft shake of his head.
“Nah,” he added for clarity.

Oliver should have stopped there.
Only he didn’t.
“I mean I wouldn't blame you if you did,” Oliver shrugged, keeping his eyes peeled to the pool table.
“Sorry?” Chris asked, surprised.

“I'm just saying, she's pretty,” Oliver remarked as his brain screamed obscenities at him.
Chris shrugged his broad shoulders softly, this wasn’t exactly a fun position to be in, nor one he quite understood.
“Yeah, I suppose,” he offered, with a slightly twitched and perplexed brow.

“So why not?” Oliver asked, instantly hating the words that seemed to be spewing from his mouth – *was Felicity’s propensity towards verbal diarrhoea contagious?*

Chris blew out an awkward exhale as he leaned up against the pool cue and waited for Oliver to take a shot.

“I mean her parents like you,” Oliver continued as he lined up a ridiculous shot that required him to bounce the white ball off the rails on just the right angle to strike the number 10 but leave the black ball beside it completely untouched.

“You have history together,” Oliver kept talking even as he leaned over the table and lay his hand on the green felt.

“Felicity and I just aren't like that,” Chris replied, his back stiffening as he stepped from one foot to the other.
“But you must have thought about it,” Oliver remarked as he took the shot and missed it so completely, instead pushing Chris’ number 6 closer to the back corner pocket.
“No, not really,” Chris answered curtly before he chalked the end of his cue and lined up the ball that Oliver had set up.

“Maybe you won’t know unless you try,” Oliver snipped.

He watched as Chris closed his eyes and expelled another heavy breath before he stood up and met Oliver’s eyes across the table.

“Sorry?” he asked, his smile all but disappeared.

Oliver really should have stopped there, but he had gone way too far already and the next words came out like a cascade of idiocies.

“How do you know you're not attracted to someone unless you try? Maybe if you kiss her you'll realise.”

Fuck.

Chris’ head bounced somewhere between a shake and a nod before he turned the pool cue, aimed and shot the black ball into the second back pocket, ending the game.

“Looks like you won Oliver, good game,” Chris spoke briskly, “I’m going to go see if my parents have arrived yet.”

Chris walked from the room without offering a second for Oliver to say anything – or in this case without letting Oliver’s foot sink deeper into his mouth.

He had actually told his girlfriend’s good-looking friend to kiss her.

He had actually done that.

Fuck.

Oliver ran a heavy hand over his cropped hair.

What the hell had he just done?

It was 4pm when Oliver dragged himself lethargically to the door of his hotel room to answer a knock. He had spent the afternoon in self-inflicted solitary confinement trying to come up with some sort of reasonable explanation for what he’d caused to occur in the rec room.

He came up empty, because there was absolutely no reasonable reason for it.

He was jealous.

And that was hardly reasonable.

The look on Chris’ face had said all he needed to hear to know just what kind of monumental fuck up he had made. Chris wasn’t interested in Felicity and Felicity wasn’t interest in Chris.

It wasn’t the smile Oliver had been somewhat expecting – perhaps a clapping of hands and a confession that Chris had been secretly in love with Felicity for years…Although if Oliver gave that pathway any thought he honestly couldn’t see a fathomable reason why that would be something for him to be happy about.

One point for his gut instinct and negative 20 for his good boyfriend ledger.

But that wasn’t what he saw when Chris sunk the black ball and ended the game abruptly, he saw something he hadn’t been expecting – disappointment – and it left him feeling like a misbehaving child.
So he’d spent the best part of the day wallowing in his hotel room.

Oliver looked through the peep hole of the door and sighed, audibly, he had been expecting this and while he could pretend he wasn’t in the room right now, he would have to face it soon enough.

“Hi,” he said sheepishly as he opened the door to the unsmiling face of Felicity, one hand on her hip, the other wrapped around her waist.

She sighed at him too, before he opened the door and she wordlessly walked in. He watched her pace to the centre of the room and touch about three different surfaces with an apprehensive finger as he closed the door with a soft click.

“What the hell?” she quipped as she exaggerated a heavy sigh of her shoulders.

Yep, he deserved this.

“Yes Oliver, he did.”

Oh god, she was using his name and not in a cute way.

She wasn’t mad, not exactly anyway.

“He told you that huh?” Oliver grimaced as he walked a few steps closer but stopped further than an arm’s length away.

“Yes Oliver, he did.”

Not my finest moment,” Oliver lamented as his eyes focused on a small sunspot on the ground in front of his toes.

“That’s an understatement,” she spoke with her head angled towards her shoulders and both arms now coiled around her waist.

She blew out a soft exhale and tried to listen to what Chris had told her about not being too hard on Oliver, despite her desire to do just that.

“What were you thinking?” she asked genuinely, her tone softened.

“I wasn’t.” Oliver groaned, swallowing down a heaping of regret, “but look at him? Look at you, it's not completely unfathomable.”

He watched her sigh again before her lips relaxed and she turned away from him. It was then that Oliver decided he must love her because fuck that hurt.

“I thought you said you were okay,” Felicity spoke, her back turned towards him as she bit back the tears.

Coming between Chris and his ex, Amanda, had been devastating. She had listened through the bedroom wall as Amanda had yelled and torn strips off Chris, calling him a liar and a cheat and that there was no way that Felicity wasn’t trying to sleep with him. It had all culminated into one messy ultimatum that found Chris licking the wounds of a broken heart and Felicity feeling like absolute shit.

And here she was, terrified that Oliver might just be her Amanda.

“You said that you believed me,” Felicity said the words softly as she turned back around, glistening unspent tears lodged in the corner of her eyes.

“I do Felicity, it’s just…” Oliver started, but didn’t have the words to finish.

“What?”
“He doesn't exactly look like you described.”

Felicity scoffed as her hands flew up in the air before the sunk back around her waist. *Wrong move Queen* was all he heard his brain saying. Unhelpful now.

“Maybe you should be the one kissing him then,” she mocked, though her face was anything but joking.

Oliver begged his lips not to open, and for once they listened. “So you're okay with me being friends with Barry because he’s gay or Tommy because he’s your friend, but I can’t be friends with guys that are attractive?” she asked, her brows lifting as she stepped forward one, tiny step, that made the earth feel like it was cracking under Oliver’s feet.

*Shit.*

“I realise how that sounds,” he replied, searching for any justification. “Is there a scale of good looking that I need to work with? Is it just guys that you find good looking or will I need to take a poll and work out averages before I talk to a guy in class or at the coffee shop?”

Oliver swallowed the bricks in his throat. “Are we working on percentages or is it a hierarchy? Is there a voting majority or what?”

There was absolutely no right answer here and Oliver knew it.

He watched her sigh again, and he couldn’t remember when he had seen quite so many rolling sighs. “Oliver, you either believe me or you don't,” she lay the words out flat, pointed, clear.

And Oliver got the message.

“Christopher and I are nothing more than friends, either you chose to believe that and to trust me or I suggest you tell me to walk out of this room now,” there was a slight quiver in her lip as she spoke, but she wouldn’t be the one receiving an ultimatum, even if standing there, suggesting that they walk away, was about the most soul crushing experience of her life.

This pain was worth a thousand “I'm sorry's”.

“You’re right,” Oliver finally spoke, his voice subdued and forlorn. Felicity steadied herself, pulling her shoulders up and her chin raised. *She wouldn’t cry, not here.*

“I fucked up,” Oliver breathed, wishing there was a way that he could repeat those words endlessly until she understood the gravity with which he meant them, “I should have trusted you, believed and Felicity, I do.”

She let his words soak over her before she let go of the breath she had been holding.

“This wasn’t about me not trusting you, but it was about me being a complete and utter fuck head,” he continued, enjoying just the flash of a smile that his words brought to her lips. “This was right up there,” he said as he raised his hand above his head in gesture, “with the stupidest things that I have ever said or ever done.”

Another soft smile peeked across her lips and Oliver took a step towards her. He reached for her hand and half expected her to pull it away, but she didn’t.
He held it gently so that if her mind ever charged she could slip it from his hand and because Oliver didn’t believe he had the right to hold it any tighter just yet.

“I look at you, how smart you are and how pretty you are and I think why the hell are you with me? That a smarter guy is going to come a long and see you for all that you are and he’s going to sweep you off your feet because that’s what you deserve.”

Felicity bit back another set of tears as her lips fell open but nothing more than a soft breath came out.

“I’m sorry I made you feel like I didn’t trust you,” his lips folded over each word and when a single tear rolled from her eye, instinctively his thumb brushed it away.

“You’re really good at this,” Felicity sniffed as another tear leaked from her eye before she could push it away.

“At what?” Oliver asked.

“At apologising.”

Oliver cracked a smile and Felicity followed with her own.

“I’ve had a lot of practice,” he held her hand a little tighter, “I mean it though, I’m sorry Felicity. You did nothing wrong and I understand if you want…”

“Don’t,” she whispered the plea, “don’t finish that sentence the way I think you’re going to.”

Oliver pulled his lips back together.

“And, just kiss me instead,” Felicity concluded.

He didn’t need any further instruction as his lips tipped down onto hers and for just a moment only their lips and their one hands touched before Felicity leaned in, draping her arm over his shoulder as his other hand sunk in around her back.

They kissed while time seemed to stand still around them, but it wouldn’t hold for much longer and there was a rehearsal dinner that Felicity needed to get ready for. She broke softly from the kiss before her lips pressed a secondary peck to his pout.

“I have to go get ready for tonight,” she whispered as her nose lightly skimmed the tip of his.

“I’m still invited?” Oliver asked, breathy and smiling.

“You better be.”

She stepped back, uncoiling her arm from his shoulder and his hand from the small of her back.

“Chris is a good guy Oliver, if you just gave him a chance you would see that.”

“I know, he's seems like a good guy,” Oliver replied – and he meant it too, he genuinely seemed to care about Felicity as a friend and Oliver had no business being jealous of that.

“Jealously is a foolish emotion Oliver. I need to know that you trust me,” Felicity warned, her voice still calmed and kind, but she needed him to know what this meant to her.

“I do,” Oliver replied simply.

I do.

Felicity smiled at the simplicity of the words in the circumstances that they were here to see her parents exchange the same words in an entirely different context.

Either way, the coincidence of the words wasn’t lost on her.
Dinner was pleasant enough and the large private dining room housed the near on two dozen that had come down early for the wedding tomorrow comfortably.

Felicity and Oliver had exchanged looks but that was all, seated too far away from each other to do anything else regardless of the embargo on anything above PG13.

Oliver had given her a lingered smile when he had seen in her in the iridescent white dress that swooped down her body like the whitecaps of a tropical sea, crashing in a soft hem a few inches above her knee.

In Oliver’s mind it was a juxtaposition, a purely innocent fabric wrapped around a decidedly sinful body.

But he managed to keep himself in check, even when she turned and he caught the plunge in the back. It had taken every ounce of control he possessed not to trace her spine with the tip of a finger, but that hadn’t stopped him imagining it.

Felicity too had harboured the most salacious of thoughts when the table candles cast a deliciously wicked shadow across his navy dress shirt which he had rolled the sleeves up to just under his elbow. The shadows looked like fingers dancing across the buttons and Felicity had been busy imagining they were her fingers when another set of fingers came into view, smoothing over the curve of Oliver's shoulder.

Felicity walked her eyes up the intrusive fingers, over half a dozen mismatched bracelets, along a smooth, tanned arm, up slim shoulders, elongated neck, caramel complexion, red wine lips, pouted and full, almond eyes framed in perfect brows and finally a lush head of rich chocolate hair.

All unfamiliar, but not a mirage.

It took Felicity a good twenty seconds to decide that she was a server and dismiss the contact as simply a brush. Only it wasn’t, those slender fingers did more than brush, they squeezed, the trickled, they danced all across Oliver's shoulder as he was ordering a drink.

Felicity’s lips pursed as her blue eyes saw shades of green. She watched as Oliver shifted his shoulder back, a subtle hint to the woman to remove her hand, but it had clearly been too subtle as those devious fingers used the move as an excuse to stroke her bicep.

Okay so said bicep actually belonged to Oliver, not Felicity, but it certainly did not belong to honey highlights across the table. *No siree.*

And the night just went down hill from there.

There were no chances to be alone and when Oliver went to the bar to order a drink for them both, honey highlights swooped in, stealing his attention while he waited for the slowest bartender in the world.

“Look at her, that’s gross, does she not have any manners?” Felicity huffed as she moved from slumping in her chair to sitting upright at least three times during that sentence.

Chris tipped his head back to the bar before his attention returned to Felicity.

“It’s pretty clear he’s not interested honey highlights, scamper on home.”

Felicity could hear every word dripping from her mouth but she had no inclination to ceasefire.
“Why aren’t you telling people?” Chris asked obtusely as he slumped into the chair beside Felicity.
“I don’t know what you mean,” Felicity shrugged as she tried in vain to rip her eyes away from the bar where the server was leaning closer to Oliver despite the fact he instinctively took a step backwards.

“You and Oliver,” Chris said, blowing out a soft laugh, “why aren’t you telling people?”
“We’re not, I don’t know, it’s not…” Felicity stumbled around full sentences, unable to make one stick.
“Bug,” Chris narrowed his eyes as he leaned forward, “come on, it’s me.”

Felicity shifted in her chair and looked up at the ceiling for a few moments before her eyes went back to scrutinizing honey highlights as she fluffed her namesake over her shoulder and acted like everything coming from Oliver’s mouth was both charming and hilarious.

“How did you know?” Felicity finally relented.
“It’s written all across your face,” Chris laughed before he took a long drink, “besides people that get that jealous over a childhood friend or,” he tipped his head backwards, “some waitress at a restaurant that probably just wants a good tip, are clearly more than friends Felicity.”

“I just gave him a lecture about being jealous and here I am…” she left the rest of her sentence unsaid as she dropped her forehead onto the table and groaned.

“How do you trust him?”
“Do you trust him?”
“Then suck it up Felicity, he’s not all that unattractive, girls will probably talk to him.”

Felicity rolled her head on the table to let her eyes stare up at Chris.

“The mutual admiration the two of you have for each other’s good looks is fascinating,” she muttered sarcastically.

Chris laughed as he raised the glass to his lips once again.

“All I know is that you’re here moping when you should be over there laying a claim.”
“I can’t,” she groaned, rolling her head back down so her eyes looked to the carpet.

“And that brings me back to my first question, why aren’t you telling people?”

Felicity huffed loudly as she raised her head like it was made of concrete.

“Because, I wanted to discover who we were as a couple before everybody else stuck their nose into it.”

Chris bellowed out a laugh before Felicity kicked him, hard, under the table.

“For a smart girl, that’s probably the stupidest thing I’ve heard come out of your mouth.”

Felicity pouted indignantly as she kicked him again for good measure.

“You’re mean Chip-opher and you still have big ol’ teeth,” Felicity snarked playfully as she poked out her tongue.

Chris put his drink on the table and sat his impressively large stature up in the chair, silent, before a smile drew up at the corner of his lips.

“And you still have big ol’ bug eyes,” he mocked in turn.

She sighed loudly.

“It’s just until Sunday night, then we’ll tell people,” Felicity vowed.

“Whatever you think is right,” Chris offered before he lifted his glass and finished his drink.

“And do you think?”

“I think everybody probably already knows, but no one is saying a thing.”
Felicity folded her lips together in thought before she blew out the suggestion with a laugh, her mother would have said something by now – probably in skywriting or screen printed handouts.

“You have to promise not to tell anyone,” she ordered, eyeing Chris up with narrow eyes. “It’s a stupid secret, but it’s safe with me.” “I’m serious, this can’t be like the time with the cookies Chris.” “That was how many years ago? Jees Felicity, I’m in the Air Force now, they train me to keep secrets.” “What kind of secrets?” she asked as a smile grew across her lips. “If I told you,” Chris smirked, “they wouldn’t be secrets.”

He stood up from the chair and brushed heavy hands down the sides of his dark pants. “Where are you going?” Felicity asked as she looked around him to notice that Oliver was still stuck talking to the server. “I’m going to cock-block your boyfriend,” Chris nodded resolutely, “and you’re welcome,” he added as he walked away. “Thank you,” Felicity replied to no one.

Oliver returned with the drinks as soon as Chris swooped in and started what Felicity assumed was a charming conversation with honey highlights. She stood just as Oliver was about to sit down.

He looked at her with a half-cocked brow as she took the drinks from his hands and placed them on the table. But Felicity offered no reason, no words in fact, as she grabbed his hand and walked him from the room without looking back.

The instant the two of them were in the empty corridor Felicity pushed Oliver against the wall and claimed his lips as hers. Hard, hot and greedily.

Oliver took it, her lips, her tongue, her hot groans, he took them all until it dawned on him that both of their families were one thin wall and open door away.

“Felicity,” he breathed her name as his palms pushed her back just enough to break their lips apart, “what are you doing?” “Claiming,” she whispered as her lips sought out his before Oliver side stepped them “Everyone is...”

Felicity rolled her eyes just enough to have them land on a supply closet a few feet away.

She dragged him by the shirt placket into the open store room, full of spare tables and chairs and a few other assorted effects. She palmed the wall for only a few seconds once the closed door encased them in darkness before she found the light switch.

A soft white glow flickered in the crowded room as Felicity worked her fingers down Oliver's buttons. Her teeth snagged his bottom lip to stop him talking, but it didn’t have the desired effect as Oliver stopped her hands and spoke anyway.

“I thought we agreed,” he hummed. “Change of plans, I need a little NC17,” Felicity argued as her lips hopped a path down his neck which elicited heavy groans from his chest. “Why?” he grunted, unable to form a full sentence as Felicity guided his hands around her waist and his fingers grazed her naked spine.

“Honey highlights in there,” Felicity huffed before she tugged his unbuttoned shirt from his pants, “touching you.”
Her fingers worked like lightning across his belt and fly; and before he could fully process it his pants were around his knees and Felicity was sitting atop a spare table with his body sandwiched between her smooth legs.

“Felicity, were you jealous?” Oliver smirked as he danced feathered fingers across her collarbone. “Terribly,” Felicity replied with doe eyes and wet lips. “But I thought jealousy was a foolish emotion?” He was smiling ear to ear.

“Do you want to discuss the finer points of irony or do you want to put your hands up my dress and make out with me while my hand gets you off?” Felicity quizzed, stunning Oliver into silence.

“Thought so,” she peeped before her lips kissed that smile right off his face and her hand slipped under the waistband of Oliver's briefs.

And then the door opened.

And they forgot to move, even when both Felicity and Oliver saw a very familiar face.

“Daddy!” Felicity gaped as her hand sprung from Oliver's briefs.

“Sir, this isn’t what it looks like,” Oliver said, flustered, as he stumbled forward in search of the top of his pants.

“It looks like you have your hand up my daughter's dress,” Noah replied, deadpan. He turned only briefly and to Felicity's horror, called her mother over, who was towing along behind her the photographer who had been earning his paycheck all night.

As if it couldn’t be worse, Oliver's parents arrived from the other end of the small corridor in a perfectly timed coincidence. Thea, of course, merely a step behind.

“Take a few photos” Donna encouraged the photographer who shrugged but obliged

“Mom!” Felicity shrieked as she slipped off the table and pulled her dress down while Oliver still struggled with the closure on his pants.

“Son,” Robert sighed, his head shaking in embarrassed disbelief. Oliver could see his mother mouth the inaudible words ‘Oh Oliver’ while Thea smiled widely behind them.

“Pay up Noah,” Donna requested as she held her palm open. Seconds later Moira mirrored the same gesture.

Both Noah and Robert pulled wallets out and folded what looked like $100 into their ladies’ hands.

“What is going on here?” Felicity asked, as her eyes dove between the faces, “you knew?” Oliver, with his pants finally secured but his shirt still flapping open, stared at Thea.

“Don’t look at me, your googly eyes for each other is hardly subtle,” Thea retorted, “I’m a child and I figured it out.”

Moira shot Robert a look, who in turn took the hint and drove Thea away from the group and back into the dining room.

“Oh hun we’ve known since you came back from Cabo, we just took wagers on how we’d all find out, your daddy thought you’d tell us first,” Donna explained as she nudged a few more snaps from the photographer, “but it seems like you are my daughter after all,” she winked, whatever that meant.
“This isn’t how we wanted to tell you, and it’s not what it looks like,” Oliver assured as he managed three shirt buttons, “in that that this isn’t just fooling around, I really love your daughter, Sir.”

Felicity opened her mouth to reiterate what Oliver said, but when the last part of his sentence hit her ears, her mouth clamped shut.

“Wait, what? You love me?” she asked turning Oliver’s shoulders to face her.
“Yeah,” Oliver smiled, somewhat sheepishly.
“Like love, love me?”
“This isn’t exactly how I planned on saying it, but yes.”
The soft blue of his eyes were singing and Felicity heard every word as her smile repeated the sentiment before her words could.
“I love you too,” she breathed, now oblivious to the pictures being taken.

She leaned in to kiss Oliver before Noah cleared his throat loudly, halting the kiss immediately.

“How about we don’t stay in the supply closet,” Noah said stoically.
Donna, smiling like a cat with cream, tugged Felicity into a silent screaming embrace before everyone headed towards the dining room.

The heavy hand on Oliver's shoulder wasn’t a surprise to him.
“A word please son,” Noah requested.

Not a surprise at all.
With a heavy curtain of silence between them Oliver followed two steps behind Noah as he wandered into one of the Resort’s boardrooms that was empty at this time of night. The sound of the door closing behind Oliver echoed off the walls and felt auspiciously like the sound of a jail cell door closing – or at least to Oliver it did.

“Sir, I just want to apologise for what you saw out there, we didn’t mean...” Oliver started, his cheeks still flushed with embarrassment and his eyes barely able to keep a moments worth of eye contact with Felicity’s dad.

It wasn’t so much being caught by *a parent*, Laurel’s father had found them in more than their fair share of compromising situations – which while blush-inducing, it had not made Oliver want to throw up like he did right now.

He couldn’t explain the difference, but if he had to perhaps it had something with how much Oliver respected her parents and just *how much* he cared for Felicity. He didn’t want this to *look* like a hook-up because to him it *wasn’t*.

“Whether you meant for me to see it or not isn’t entirely the point now is it Oliver?” Noah interrupted, his tone was not cruel or sarcastic, but it was one threaded with something that Oliver knew all too well – disappointment – and he would have taking jeeringly cruel over that any day.

Oliver swallowed what felt like nails down his throat as the moment felt ominously like the one
where he had been summoned to the Principal’s Office in High School after he and Tommy were caught smoking.

There wasn’t much he could say.

“I don’t appreciate the clandestine nature of your relationship with Felicity,” Noah continued, his hands settled in front of him, devoid of any gesture which Oliver found eerily terrifying.

But, he was right.

“For that I’m sorry it was...” Oliver started, fully prepared to take the blame like Chris had once done with the cookie.

Noah’s hand finally moved, silencing Oliver with only a finger in mid-air before just the hint of a smile flashed at the very corner seam of his lips.

“I appreciate my daughter had something to do with that decision, she is after all her mother’s daughter.”

The knowing smile grew just a fraction more.

“You’re a good kid Oliver, you come from a good family,” Noah spoke calmly and cautiously as his hand tapped slowly against the back of a leather boardroom chair.

But...

“But Felicity is my daughter.”

There it was

Oliver looked down at his shoes and exhaled just the softest of sighs.

He had never given much thought to whose daughter he had been with in the past, where his other conquests came from or who they had to care for them – he’d never needed to, sex hadn’t been much more than gratification to him. Even with Laurel, their relationship – though long in the scheme of things – never went much below the surface, at least not to him. Perhaps he should have felt guilty about that.

“Do you know how old Donna was when Felicity was born?” Noah asked as he roamed slowly around the room, his eyes affixed intently on Oliver.

“No sir,” Oliver replied with a soft shake of his head.

“Seventeen,” Noah replied without any fanfare, although the correlation was obvious – the same age Felicity is now.

“And do you know where I was Oliver?”

Oliver shook his head a second time and it occurred to him that Felicity never told him much about her early childhood, which only now struck him as a little strange.

“I was scared shitless driving across the country and away from my family,” the trepidation in his expression was easy to see and Oliver began to realise why Felicity didn’t talk that much about it, because she wouldn’t have wanted Oliver to think any less of her dad.

“I left Donna when she was nine months pregnant because I was not much older than you are now and I ran,” he shook his head remembering the moment he decided to leave, it was not a memory he kept to be proud of, but rather a reminder of a selfish decision that he would not see duplicated, “I was scared and I ran.”

Noah continued to pace as Oliver stood quietly and listened.
I decided I wasn’t ready. I was selfish and pathetic and it took me three years to grow up enough and beg Donna for another chance, meanwhile she had dropped out of school and was working two jobs to raise our daughter,” Noah gritted his teeth at the person he had once been and what he had put his family through.

“She should have hated me, they both should have, but by some miracle Donna forgave me, and I will spend the rest of my life being the husband and father they deserve,” he stopped walking, his eyes locking onto Oliver.

“I won’t pretend that I can or should stop you and Felicity seeing each other. I know my daughter and she’s as stubborn and strong as her mother and when she has her heart set on something there is nothing in the world that can change it and she clearly has her heart set on you,” he paused, to allow Oliver to nod and offer a small smile in response – he was just speaking as any father should “but I am going to ask you for something.”

“Yes sir,” Oliver replied, his tone a mixture of cautious and anxious.
“I’m going to ask that you wait until Felicity is eighteen before you take this relationship further, whether you have already or not.”

Oliver didn’t think Noah wanted, or required, a response, but his mouth moved of its own volition and gave him an answer regardless.
“We haven’t,” his voice barely above a whisper.
Noah’s face gave nothing away, but for a moment Oliver imagined seeing a flash of relief.
“Then I ask that you don’t. I don’t expect to check up on that or even know but I’m asking it of you all the same.”

It didn’t need to be clarified, but Oliver knew what this was – it was a test by a father willing to give Oliver a chance to prove himself worth his daughter.
“You have my word,” Oliver answered, this time his words more sure and his tone much more resolute.

Noah offered nothing more than a nod before he walked towards the door. Oliver followed a few steps behind but just as soon as Noah had opened the door, he closed it seconds later.

“One more thing son,” Noah said calmly as he stood barely three inches from Oliver, “if you hurt my baby girl I don’t care how long I’ve known you how much respect I have for your parents…” he took a deep inhale and Oliver knew what was coming, “I will destroy your credit rating, put you on every no fly list, have your face end up on America’s most wanted, have you audited every year, and make your blockbuster fines crippling, do you understand?”

Oliver nodded clearly, he absolutely understood.
“Just so you’re aware these aren’t idle threats, have you seen what my daughter is capable of?”

Oliver nodded once more, he was astutely aware of what Felicity was capable of if such a whimsy took her fancy.
“Yes sir.”
“Imagine what the man who taught her could do?”
Noah said nothing else as he opened the door and stepped from the room.

Point taken.

~*~*~*~*~

“Wait, where is Oliver?” Felicity asked once she realised the group had disbanded and she was
sitting at the table alone with her mother.
“Let your dad do his thing hon,” Donna reassured her with a pat on the back of her hand.

Donna sighed and Felicity could sense what was coming next – in fact she wouldn’t have expected anything less.
“I wish you would have told me, even if that meant me losing the bet,” Donna said sullenly, before her face peached up again – just as quickly as it had gloomed over.
“I’m sorry mom, I just…” Felicity started, but didn’t have the words to finish, or at least any words other than ‘I didn’t want to’.
“It’s ok I understand,” Donna remarked cheerfully – as was her mother’s M.O, “but honey there are a few things we need to talk about.”

Oh No….
Felicity’s bottom lip tensed and her left eye twitched behind her glasses. She knew what was coming.

“Do you want to go on the pill, or get the implant?”
“Mom, no,” Felicity cringed, looking down at the floor in the desperate hope that it might swallow her up.

“You should give it some thought, I didn’t and look what happened,” Donna jested as she leaned in and pinched Felicity’s bright fushia cheeks.

“Have you done it yet?” Donna inquired – and the floor never opened up.
“Mom,” Felicity cringed.

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of Felicity, sex is perfectly natural and it can be very enjoy…”
“This is not ashamed mom, this is mortified,” Felicity interrupted.

Donna sat patiently waiting for an answer that Felicity swore to herself she wasn’t going to give, but her lips opened up and the words came out regardless.
“But no, we haven’t.”

A smile drew across Donna’s lips, whether borne from the fact Felicity gave her an answer or whether it was because she gave the answer Donna wanted to hear, Felicity wasn’t sure.
“You’re waiting then?”

She didn’t need to answer this either, but the compulsion got the better of her.
“Not intentionally,” she sighed, finding a spot on the carpet to stare at as she could feel the weight of her mother’s forever-understanding eyes.
“Well your first time should be memorable,” Donna started, her eyes glazing off for a few moments, “mine was on a mini golf course and I would have a do over if I could.”
“With dad?”
Felicity hated herself for asking that question.

“Your father is my greatest love, but not my only,” her mother replied, forlorn.

Felicity felt her mother shift in the seat beside her, something Donna would always do when the follow up wasn’t particularly cheerful.
“It’s important you know that it’s okay to love more than one person over your lifetime,” she spoke softly as a hand floated through Felicity’s hair, smoothing down tresses that had once been twisted around Oliver’s fingers.

“But you’re about to marry him,” Felicity spoke, she knew her words sounded naïve, but she didn’t
care – despite their turbulence she always wanted to believe that her parents had the greatest love story of all, regardless of just how foolish that notion seemed.

“Oh I know and don’t get me wrong I love him deeply, but I only know that because I’ve tested other waters.”
The inference was clear – love Oliver now, but be okay if it doesn’t last forever.
“I’m all for you and Oliver, I know how much you care about him ever since that first little crush you had and darling I know he cares for you, but I want you to be happy in life and know that your daddy and I will support you whatever you do, you’re my baby girl.”

Felicity caught the glistening of tears at the corner of her mother’s eyes.
“I know mom,” Felicity sighed before she poured herself a glass of water and took a sip as they let the unspoken words sink between them.

“And,” Donna started after a few quiet moments had lapsed, “as much as I want to be a grandma, I’m not ready for that just yet.”

Felicity choked down the water before she spluttered out her reply, “neither am I!”
“So implant?”
Felicity felt the blush settling back into her cheeks.

How was she having this conversation? And why had the ground not yet taken her?
“I guess condoms,” she replied before she had a chance to vet it.

She caught the way Donna’s nose screwed up.
“What is that face?” Felicity asked, pointing a finger at the creases that had once decorated Donna’s expression.
“Nothing, no, it’s good,” Donna assured as she gestured haphazard lines with her hands.
Felicity watched wordlessly, she could tell her mother wanted to say more and it only took a few seconds for her to be proved right.

“A lot of people get those STD checks before they start,” Donna paused to consider her next words, but not long enough, “I mean Oliver’s a nice boy but it wouldn’t be unthinkable to assume…”
“Please just stop,” Felicity urged as she folded a section of her mother’s hair into Donna’s mouth.
“Have you considered getting one?” Donna asked, mouth full of hair be damned.
“Can we not have this conversation please?” Felicity groaned as her head dropped to the table with an expected thump.

“Well I just want you to be happy, are you?” Donna inquired sincerely.
Felicity didn’t need to think about it, but she took her time anyway just so her words were clear and concise before she sat up and for the first time during that conversation truly locked eyes with her mother.
“Yes, very much so.”
Donna brushed away a sprinkle of tears that dotted her cheeks as she nodded through her next words, “that’s all I ever really want for you baby girl.”

“Mom,” Felicity sighed with a question halted at the tip of her tongue.
“Yes?”
“Do you think he meant it?” Felicity asked, a tremble of uncertainty in her words, “the love part, do you really think he means it?”
Donna smiled brightly as she stood from her chair and smoothed down her dress.

“Oh hon, the way he looks at you it’s like you hung the sun and threaded the stars,” she vowed
sweetly.
“Thank you,” Felicity simpered, the words barely audible.

Felicity watched as her mother took one step away from the table.
“Oh and mom,” she said, halting Donna’s steps.
“Yes?”
“You’re going to get rid of the photos right?”
Donna leaned in and placed a gentle kiss at the crown of Felicity’s head just like she did when she was a child.
“Oh no, not a chance.”

Oliver found himself walking the hallway with a purpose in mind but trepidation in his feet. He was going to find Felicity, but there was something so unsure about his path that he didn’t necessarily want to acknowledge.

He was worried.

He knew he didn’t need to be, but a part of him was worried that Felicity didn’t know just how much he had meant the last words he had said to her – or rather about her.

I love her...

The timing hadn’t been perfect and the location and surroundings had been less than ideal, but that aside, whether he said it tonight or whether he had waited until tomorrow night under a blanket of stars with his hand gently caressing her smooth cheek – he meant it all the same.

And he was worried that Felicity might not know that.

“A closet Oliver, really?” Robert Queen sighed from behind Oliver, stopping him dead in his tracks.
This wasn’t a surprise either.

“What your father is trying to say is that perhaps you could have given a little more consideration to your thoughts,” Moira added as he placed a kindly hand on Oliver’s shoulder urging her son to turn around to face them – to face this.

He had considered –
Oliver had considered every curve.
He had considered Felicity’s silken thighs.
Even considered how his lips would feel wrapped around her taut nipple...
Yes, Oliver had considered a lot of things, but he knew that wasn’t what his parents meant.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t want you guys to find out like that, but that aside, I absolutely meant what I said,” Oliver blurted out as he turned to face the expected onslaught of disappointment
I love her
“I’m in love with her,” he added, for no other reason than he wanted to hear himself say it.

Oliver saw his mother’s face relax into his words and it was as though she had been worried that perhaps he hadn’t meant them and with his words came a lifted weight from her shoulders.

But just as quickly as her eyes had softened, her smile dropped just enough to invoke a small amount of sadness about it; and Oliver knew what she was going to say.
“I know she’s young” Oliver started pre-emptively.
“We just want you to be careful,” Moira breathed though gently parted lips and concerned eyes. “You told me that I should mean whatever I said,” Oliver remarked, the inflection of his words asking for a reply which came in the form of a nod from his mother.

“Well I mean this,” he replied resolutely, “I know that it looks like that we’re just two idiots with one thing on our minds, but we’re not and I hope that you can believe me on that.” Oliver bobbed his head as he finished what he needed to say.

“Are you safe?” Moira asked as Robert sunk a step backwards, subconsciously unwilling to hear the answer but needing to know it all the same.

“We’re actually having this discussion?” Oliver wondered out loud. “Oliver,” Moira sighed, listless.

“Yes, when that time comes,” that was the only answer he offered but it appeased them enough to not push it.

Oliver decided there was no need for them to know about his promise to Noah.

Oliver’s demeanour stiffened just a fraction when he saw Felicity walking across the hall with her mother 20 feet away and it was enough that Moira tipped her head over her shoulder to see what Oliver saw.

“We’ll leave you two to talk,” she spoke quietly and Oliver thanked her with a nod. “No closets son,” Robert added before both his parents left.

Oliver watched as Felicity said something to her mother and then walked slow steps towards him, she looked worried, perhaps a little unsure, so Oliver offered her the brightest smile he had and she replied in kind, her face instantly softening.

“Hey,” Felicity peeped, with a slight tremble in her voice. “Hi, are you okay?” Oliver asked, his fingers itching to swamp her hand but holding back as he waited for her answer. “Are we still dating?” Felicity blurted, she had intended to find a much calmer way of asking the same question but she couldn’t stop herself through trying. “Of course,” Oliver assured her, without a thread of hesitation.

He watched as his smile trickled onto her lips. “Then yes, I’m okay,” she spoke through a drawn exhale, “I mean aside from the really awkward conversation with my mother that I will take to my grave. How was my dad? Did he say something all Grrrr?” she added with gritted teeth and exaggeratedly angry eyes. “He may have grr-ed a little bit,” Oliver chuckled, his hand finally able to reach freely for Felicity’s and she took it with a smile, “but it was nothing that I didn’t deserve, you’re his very smart and pretty and talented daughter.” “I’m sorry,” she replied as her nose scrunched and her head dropped a little to the side.

"Probably the most endearing thing he’d ever seen.
“Don’t be,” Oliver soothed as his thumb stroked across her hand and his fingers entwined in hers even tighter. “The keeping it a secret was my idea,” Felicity groaned. “Felicity you don’t need to be sorry,” Oliver remarked as his other palm smoothed down her arm. “And the closet was my idea,” she huffed, blowing air through a section of hair that had dropped across her cheek.
Oliver leaned in and pecked a chaste kiss against her lips, simply to cut her words short. “You don’t need to be sorry,” he added sincerely with a smile to match.

Oliver looked over Felicity’s shoulder to see Donna peeking her head back around the corner before he looked down at his watch and lamented the late hour – it was almost midnight.

“I should probably go,” Felicity spoke remorsefully as she too turned her head to see her mother, “mom wants to spend her last night as a bachelorette with me,” she finished as she looked back at Oliver.

“At least you’re not going to some strip club,” Oliver jested, though the thought of it spiked a wave of regret at even putting that image into his head.

“Honestly,” Felicity laughed, “if she thought I could get in, we would be going.”

“I guess I can kiss you now, without having to keep it secret,” Felicity whispered, anxious to keep quiet words between them alone despite the fact her mother has disappeared around the corner once again.

“I guess you can,” Oliver spoke with a measured smile, the comfort of that fact warming his heart.

“And you owe me at least one dance tomorrow night.”

He could tell by the look on her face saying no wasn’t an option, even if he wanted to.

“Maybe even two,” he replied, blessed with a bright smile of her freshly wet lips in return.

Felicity slipped her arms around his shoulders and took just a moment to let her eyes caress his lips before she allowed her lips to do the same.

The kiss was sweet and charming, slow and considered and when they both broke apart they had matching smiles threaded across their faces.

“Goodnight Oliver,” she ghosted across his lips, her breath fanning over his cheek.

When her smile naturally faded Oliver could tell that Felicity wanted something more than a 

It was nearing noon as Oliver fidgeted in his chair for reasons he didn’t fully appreciate. The way his hands were clammy and his shirt collar seemed to be cutting off circulation to his head, anyone who didn’t know better might have thought he was the anxious groom.

But he wasn’t.

But the dream that had encapsulated him so completely last night had caused him to rouse this morning with an uncanny feeling of whatever the future equivalent of déjà vu was.

Prophetic visions?

Maybe, although that seemed far more religious than he was inclined to offer to his dream.

His dream.

The one where he felt effortlessly happy and fulfilled waiting at the end of an aisle much like this
one for Felicity to meet him in ivory dress and a cascade of luminous blonde curls.

He should have been sweating bullets at the idea but he wasn’t.
His clammy hands and flushed cheeks were a result of knowing just how much he wanted this reality.

It was Chris glancing over from the chair next to him that made Oliver attempt to settle himself down.

“Can I ask you a question?” Oliver enquired, deciding he could do with a little conversation to distract him.
“Shoot,” Chris replied with a shrug of mild apathy.
“Why didn’t you and Felicity ever date?”
Oliver watched as Chris’ lips folded over his answer and for a moment Oliver considered that perhaps he had no right to ask, but it had been something he had been wondering all the same.
“Would you date Thea?” Chris finally replied with a question of his own.
“No, god no,” Oliver grimaced at the idea.

“So that’s pretty much how I feel,” Chris laughed at Oliver's disgust before he shifted in his chair with his hands folded over his lap.

“Felicity and I are only children and to say we were weird back then is possibly an understatement,” Chris continued with a reminiscing smile, “most kids cared about Transformers and Barbie, but instead of a doll house she had a box of spare computer parts and instead of posters of pop stars I had engineering diagrams plastered across my walls.”
Oliver nodded, slowly appreciating what Felicity had meant before.

“We found a solace in each other, that we were both okay and just fine the way we were. I love her like my sister. It’s a concept a lot of people struggle with,” he paused to looked over at his mother who was sitting a few rows ahead, “including my mother who would want for nothing more,” he chuckled light-heartedly before his smile was replaced with an expression that was a little more serious.

“But if you can’t be okay with that explanation and the relationship I have with Felicity then you need to tell me,” he sighed, it was angry nor was it demanding, but rather it was tinged with a sadness Oliver didn’t quite understand.

“I don’t understand,” Oliver remarked.
“I don’t know if Felicity ever told you about what happened the last time we saw each other but the short story is the girl I was with forced me to make a choice between being in a relationship with her or being friends with Felicity,” Chris explained, the rawness of it heard in the thinness of his otherwise deep voice.

“You chose Felicity?” it was half a question that didn’t need an answer.
“I didn’t see any other choice, she’s like my family, and I would always chose them,” Chris said with a slightly pinched brow, it had still hurt.
“But?”
“But Felicity was heartbroken. She begged me to tell my ex that I had changed my mind, Felicity said she would rather be sad herself then see me crushed.”
“That sounds like something she would say,” Oliver noted to which Chris smiled his agreement.

“You can’t ever make her choose Oliver, because that’s just not fair,” he lamented.
“I wouldn’t…”
“You say that now and I appreciate that, but if me being in her life is too difficult for you then I’d
appreciate you telling me now and I’ll pull myself out of it.”

“That would devastate her,” Oliver concluded without a shadow of a doubt. Chris hung his head low, “her and I both, but not as much as it would hurt to make the choice herself and I know how much she cares about you,” he paused to offer a knowing smile, “how long she’s cared about you.”

“What do you mean?” Oliver puzzled.

“Look under her writing desk when you get the chance and you’ll see what I mean,” Chris hinted.

“I know we got off to a rocky start, solely because of me,” Oliver confessed, “but Felicity counts you as a friend and I hope to count you as one too.”

Oliver offered his hand to solidify the gesture.

“That’s the right answer,” Chris commended as he took Oliver's hand and shook it.

“But I just have one more thing to say, that I feel needs to be said,” Chris hushed as he pulled Oliver closer by the handshake.

“If you hurt her I will let her dad do everything he’s already threatened to do to you and then I’m going to bury you in a desert somewhere where no one will find you, understood?”

His words were firm and Oliver saw himself saying the exact same thing to any poor unfortunate soul who wanted to date Thea.

“I wouldn’t expect anything less,” Oliver reckoned.

“Good man,” Chris said with brief wink.

That was all that was needed.

The music started up, a string quartet playing what Oliver thought sounded distinctly like some 80s rock power ballad, which wouldn’t surprise him in the least.

He saw her long seconds before she saw him and Oliver felt the air snatched from his lungs. Felicity looked more amazing than his eyes could ever truly appreciate or his words could do justice.

The colour of her dress reminded him of candyfloss and in black and white photos he was certain it would appear like a stunning ivory. It floated around her and while it stopped well above her knees Oliver could imagine something similar skimming the ground as she walked.

It was madness but Oliver was suddenly jealous she wasn’t walking towards him to utter a vow like no other.

It was preposterous.

They were so young.

But, he felt it all the same.

Felicity had smiled enough and if one more person asked her to say cheese she was going to throttle them with her slowly wilting flowers.

She had felt swamped with being the dutiful daughter and bridesmaid but with a small hug and a peck on her cheek her mother had, moments before, relinquished her of all her duties.

Felicity sought out Oliver and almost fell into his arms when he opened them up on her approach.

“You look exhausted,” Oliver breathed into her temple as her head nestled against his chest.
She was, but there was one more thing to do tonight.
“Will you dance with me Oliver?” she sighed, her eyes at half mast and her lips pouted open.
“Tell you what,” Oliver insisted with a growing smile, “walk to the dance floor and then stand on my feet, I’ll move us both.”

Felicity blew out a sigh much louder than she had anticipated as her entire body absently swooned at the idea, given how tired she was.

They walked hand in hand To the dimly lit dance floor, with just the magical twinkle of fairy lights to lead the way. Oliver's arms slipped around her waist as he whispered the most enchanting of instructions in her ear.

“Hold on,” his voice was as smooth as velvet and as soft as silk and Felicity didn’t hesitate to obey them as she stepped the balls of her feet onto the toes of his and coiled her arms around his neck with her hands draping down his back.

Felicity had always known Oliver was strong, the broadness of his shoulders and the definition of his chest made no secret of that fact, but as he glided them effortlessly around their small area of dance floor it became even more apparent.

He wasn’t flinching or even close to breaking a sweat. His face showed absolutely no sign of exertion and Felicity snuggled her head to his chest outwardly showing just how much she trusted him in return.

She listened to the soft thump of his chest with each slow and considered breath he took. The warm air passing over his lips misted down her neck and made her imagine the most wonderful of thoughts – one day she could wake up to that sensation. Why not tomorrow morning?

Her arms dropped from around his shoulders before her fingers laced with his. Slowly she stepped off his toes and silently led him away from the melodic song and the dotted couples remaining to sway to it.

“Where are we going?” Oliver asked as they stepped into the bright light of the deserted corridor.
“You’ll see,” she replied, her voice tipped with both whimsy and coy.
“No more closets,” Oliver joked.
“Mmm, I know,” she agreed as she pushed the elevator button and the doors, by a fluke, opened immediately, “there’s something I want to show you.”

Oliver raised a questioning brow but she offered him nothing further as they rode the elevator in silence.

Felicity led the way, their fingers still entwined with they palms bled together. She stopped outside room 608, Oliver’s room. Dangerously slow Felicity slid her hand into his pocket and Oliver's breath stagnated as his heart sped.

She found his key card and skimmed it up his leg purposefully as she plucked it from his pocket. With nothing but a smile she scanned the card through the lock and the door, much like the elevator, bowed to her command almost instantly.

“What did you want to show me?” he rasped, the feeling of her hands brushing against his thigh still lingered in his mind.
Felicity kissed him softly at the very tip of his cupid's bow, it was innocent on paper but torturously sinful in action.
“Everyone knows,” she spoke before she teased her tongue across his top lip.
“‘They do,’” Oliver spoke through a heavy exhale that melted into a sigh.
“So we don’t have to wait anymore,” Felicity continued as feathered fingers slipped his jacket from his shoulders.
It fell to the floor, discarded, before her fingers danced down the line of buttons at the front of his shirt.

“I want to have sex with you,” she announced so open and alluringly that Oliver found himself struggling for air.

She kissed him again, her keen sighs filling his lungs. Her fingers trawled his chest and had half of his buttons undone before Oliver thought with enough clarity to stop them, encasing them in his own.

“We can’t,” he cautioned, somewhat reluctantly.
“We can,” she replied with a silvery sigh as her hands wiggled free from his and started undoing her pants.

“Felicity, we can’t,”
He hated every word.

“It’s okay, the door is locked so no one it going to interrupt us,” her teeth snagged her lip after she was done speaking and Oliver traced the indentations she made with the pad of his thumb.

“It’s not that,” he sighed, listless.
Felicity stepped back, her brows tugged together and her blue eyes wearing a puzzled expression.
“Have you changed your mind?” she fretted though his eyes already told her he hadn’t, “aren’t I supposed to be the nervous one?” she joked before she leaned against him and brushed her swollen and hungry lips against his.

“Your father,” he groaned against her mouth.

“Oliver that’s a little weird to be talking about my dad while we kiss,” she mocked.
“He asked me not to,” he admitted.

“Not to what?”
Oliver looked at her with laden eyes.
“Not to have sex?” she quipped, to which Oliver nodded.

“Because I’m not eighteen?”
Oliver nodded a second time but curiously watched as a smile plucked at the corners of Felicity's mouth.
“Well Florida has this law that says as long as you’re not more than four years older than me we’re okay and given it’s not your birthday yet, we’re well within the law,” she spoke resolutely.

Oliver could help but smile when he realised she must have looked that up.
But, that aside, he had given his word.

“Felicity, he asked,” Oliver insisted.
“Then we won’t tell him, it’s not like I intended on having this discussion with him anyway, three months hardly matters,” she shrugged as her fingers played absentmindedly with the collar of his shirt, flipping it up just to fold it down again.

“He didn’t ask me because you being eighteen will suddenly make everything right Felicity, I know that’s just a number and he knows that too.”
“Then what’s the problem?”

Oliver took a few moments to drink in the charming way her bottom lip folded inward before he spoke again.

“He asked me because he wants to be able to trust me,”
She shook her head at the preposterous nature of it, “I trust you.”

And that’s all she could think that mattered.

He took a slow and measure breath inward, “I spent the better part of my youth being an asshole,”
he confessed.

“Oliver...”

“Felicity, it’s true. I cheated on my girlfriend and I treated sex like it was something flippant even though for some of the girls I was with, it wasn’t.”
He saw just a flicker of anguish dance across her irises before she shook it free and pushed her shoulders back resolutely.
“But that’s not you now,” she assured him.
“I know that and you know that, but Felicity they don’t know that,” Oliver jostled with the words hoping the would reach her ears with the honesty he meant them to, “my parents, your parents, they don’t know that. And I want to show them.”

She took his hand and he gratefully accepted it with a gentle squeeze.

“Your dad is testing me and he has every right to, god when I have kids I’m going to be the most protective asshole,”
They both chuckled without truly realising how easily Oliver could imagine being a father.

“Please let me prove that I’m worth you,” he pleaded with both his words and his eyes.
“You already are Oliver because I chose you and I’m very smart apparently,” she grinned before her eyes softened.
“The smartest girl I’ve ever met.”

“I can’t fault you on wanting to try Oliver,” she breathed, enamoured by the way his eyes begged her, “so what’s three more months, technically less even.”
“Just three more months and then it’ll all be worth it,” he concurred.

“You promise?” she asked coyly before she peppered tiny bites across her plump lower lip.
“Absolutely,” he hummed from the pit of his chest.
“Will you show me how good fingers can feel?”

Her words stroked his body in a way no one else had ever managed.
“Twice,” he rasped.
“And will you kiss me here?” she asked eagerly with sweetly tuned words as a single finger drew a wavy line down her neck.
“There won’t be a part of your body that my lips won’t kiss.”
Not a single part.

Felicity stepped back to enjoy the deep spark of desire in his eyes and she didn’t doubt his words for a second.
“Well then, three months it is.”
That was it, just three months.
Orion

Chapter Notes

This is quite long...no pun intended, honest, and I finished writing/editing at midnight after waking up at 5:30am and working a full day at my 9-5 so please kindly excuse any typos, there are bound to be some :) xox

[2 months, 12 days later]
[10 weeks, 3 days later]
[73 days later]
[1752 hours later]
[105,120 minutes later]

Tuesday, 24 July 2007

Oliver was pacing.
The kitchen floor was his track, back and forth in front of the fridge then across to the tap where he filled a glass of water, only to take a sip before he tipped it back out again.
His usual early morning hadn’t worked this morning and he was certain he had looked like a crazed person running through the nearly-deserted apartment-lined streets. The hours and the minutes might not have been exact – it all depended on when you actually counted from, but if Oliver was judging from the night he asked Felicity to help him see through her father’s challenge, then it was accurate enough.

And, here he was, 73 days later pacing like a rabid squirrel.

Though it was not a conversation he ever intended on having, Oliver had kept his word to Noah. It hadn’t been without almost failure, especially the times they were alone and all he wanted to do was give himself over to her so completely. To take that last step into intimacy…

It hadn’t been easy and Oliver had become wound so tight that Tommy had begun referring to him as the Blue Hulk, the colour on account of the aching blue balls Tommy imagined Oliver carried around.

It wasn’t far from the truth. When Felicity was around he found himself in a euphoric state that made everything she did like some blissful dream he didn’t ever want to wake up from. If she tossed her hair innocently he imagined what it would look like draped over his chest or if she touched a finger to her shoulder he imagined how much enjoyment he could gain from kissing her there.

And when she wasn’t around, he was frustrated and angry and wearing something akin to a scowl at all times.

The only restitution he had was running.
So he ran, a lot.

Every morning he would get up at the crack of dawn and run for about 40 minutes through the deserted streets, doing what he could to run the sexual tension from his body.

It helped, except when it didn’t…

Like the day after his birthday when Felicity had carefully organised a romantic date for the two of them. Oliver had managed to keep his collected cool when she met him on his doorstep in a little red dress that looked like it was made just for her by Satan himself.

If a dress could be labelled a sin, that yard of red silk chiffon lined with cotton and trimmed in satin was it.

He had toyed momentarily with the idea of feigning a very abrupt and sudden stomach cramp, but he couldn’t bear to disappoint her doe eyes and excited lips.

He made it through starters and main but desert saw her innocently licking melted chocolate from his thumb when he brushed it away from the corner of her mouth. The sensation of it made him groan from so far down his chest it felt like an earthquake rumbling only the chair he sat nailed to.

When the two of them realised what was happening instead of breaking apart in a fumbled attempt to douse the heat, they froze in their respective positions – Oliver looking like he was going to explode from the unique concoction of innocence, arousal and hunger; while Felicity looked on slightly mesmerised by the carnal look of absolute desire that hung like a noose around his pupils all wide and dilated, until with the softest of pops she dropped his finger from the warmth of her lips and apologised for her indecency like they were in the middle ages.

And then
There was the time, just a week or so back, when Felicity had snuck Oliver onto her campus’ rec facility well after dark. It was one particularly balmy summer evening and he was walking her back home from a study session between them that had been so rife with sexual tension that it had forced them to sit on opposite sides of his room and shout across it to talk.

Felicity was already wearing hardly anything, although unlike at the gas station Oliver wasn’t having her up on the shorts that needed a few more inches to be counted as such, fashion be damned, but rather he found himself watching them hug her swaying figure as she walked along beside him – it was like perfect torture.

Like his dick was on rack and each sashay she took twisted the wheel and stretched his cock to the most extreme

And then she had whispered that they weren’t going home just yet…

The words just yet were like a Shakespearean sonnet rolled together with the eroticism of Eyes Wide Shut.

Ten minutes and a couple of security lock bypasses later found them in a completely deserted swimming pool in nothing but their underwear coming increasingly close to doing something other than swimming. Oliver’s briefs did little to hide the Pinocchio erection he was sporting that grew every time Felicity even dared look at him.

If it hadn’t have been for the night security guard almost catching them, Oliver wasn’t sure his resolve would have stuck around much longer.

And then there was every drive to and from meatloaf night, of which there had been three because everything she did drove him wild.

Things were becoming so desperate in fact that Felicity had taken to wearing track pants and oversized sweaters just to counteract some of the sexuality that was pulsing between them. She hadn’t mentioned anything of course, but it was pretty clear in the middle of summer she wasn’t exactly cold enough to wear them.

Felicity had, categorically and in no uncertain terms, told Oliver just how obnoxious she thought her father’s request was and that should Oliver ever chose to ignore it, she was ready (after all it was her body and what her father asked was really of no relevance) – But she had also sworn, quite remarkably, that if Oliver wanted to see this thing through then she wouldn’t push him otherwise and she would do whatever was in her power not to tempt him – although even the soft chuckle that fell from her strawberry pink lips after saying it had done just that.

Oliver had run this morning more lethargically than most and it had taken him closer to an hour to finish his normal circuit. There was a lot eating away at him and as he paced the kitchen like a madman, today was clearly one of the days his run did little to help.

He had no classes today and was going to see to the arrangements for the weekend while Felicity was fully immersed in Summer School classes for the next couple of days at least.

Then dinner with her parents at a nearby restaurant, where he had a few surprises up his sleeve. She had tried to pry them from him, but he had managed to stay every vigilant and she didn’t have a clue.

He was nervous about how she might take his plans, but he had spent a lot of time conjuring them up and he was adamant that Felicity deserved plans.
With a frustrated huff he dropped his glass into the dishwasher and started for the stairs. There were not many guys still in the house but there were enough that he could still hear incessant thumping from most corners. As far as he was aware, Oliver was the only one still in the house attending any form of class, while those that remained in the house stayed simply to have somewhere to bang chicks and host parties.

Where that life once appealed to him, the last twelve months had made the whole frat-house life less appealing, which is why he had signed a lease for a nearby one-bedroom apartment.

It was time for Oliver Queen to grow up.

As he rounded the stairs with his mind ticking through the things he needed to tell Felicity this week and when would be the best time for each titbit of information, an adjacent door cracked open and a half naked Tommy Merlyn appeared.

“Tommy,” Oliver greeted, an uneven smile on his lips.

“I need my uh,” Tommy paused winking at Oliver in a code Oliver was not privy to, “adult video stash back,” he finished, titling his head like a dog begging for a bone.

_No pun intended._

“I don’t have them Tommy,” Oliver stated emphatically when he realised the insinuation. Blue Hulk or not, Oliver hadn’t been releasing any sexual tension with a combination of porn, lotion and a hand. In fact, his cock had become like a martyr in all of this or perhaps more aptly a eunuch.

“You do,” Tommy grimaced through an awkward smile, “you probably just don’t realise you have it.”

Oliver’s arms instinctively found their way to cross over his broad chest, his head cocked to the side and his lips folding over one very simple word, “What?”

Tommy shielded his smile with his hands before he combed it through his loose dark hair.

“When I start to get a little more serious with a girl I take precautions to appear a little less, uh,” he paused to clear his throat with a cough, “versed.”

“Tommy…”

Oliver’s biceps tensed.

“I wasn’t sure how Camila would react to them so when she started spending the night I put them under your bed,” Tommy explained with a halfway apologetic smile.

Oliver stayed tight-lipped for long enough that Tommy assumed he wanted further explanation.

“I figured seeing as you and Felicity aren’t,” he threaded one finger through a whole created by his hand in a wholly lewd gesture for sex, “that you wouldn’t mind.”

Tommy cringed, half closing one eye as twisting his face slightly to the side as though he expected Oliver to Hulk out and (rightly) deck him for gross friendship misconduct.

“How long have they been under my bed?” Oliver asked thinly.

“Since January,” Tommy replied sheepishly.

“What if Felicity had found them?” Oliver grunted, the thought of the same now an incidental fantasy that began growing roots in his imagination.

“I would have owned up, I promise,” Tommy chortled in a way that didn’t instil Oliver with any faith.

“So why do you want them back now?”
“Turns out she might be a little freakier than me,” Tommy smirked as his eyes wandered back towards his door.
Oliver shook his head, instantly regretting even asking. He wasn’t naive to it, but he also didn’t need to know everyone else in the world was having sex.

“Fine, come and get them,” he huffed, deciding the shower would need to be extra cold today.

Oliver opened the door and stepped into his room with his eyes raised and two full steps ahead of Tommy who was chattering incessantly like Felicity, however unlike Felicity Oliver found it neither adorable nor attractive.

Like Felicity.
Felicity.

Felicity!

He thought he imagined it – cream skin on rich navy blue, a cascade of blonde and suffocatingly-blue eyes.

But it wasn’t a trick of his cruel mind and when her soft peach lips turned up into a smile Oliver reacted on a mixture of adrenaline and instinct.

His hand swamped Tommy’s unsuspecting face and shoved him without mitigation out of the doorway before he slammed the door shut and shouted for Tommy to come back later.

Oliver stared, blinking like she was some sort of sexual mirage, for what felt like minutes sewn into hours, but in reality it was only a few seconds where he was utterly, completely, unequivocally speechless.

“Jesus fucking Christ Felicity.”
Oliver found words but they came out hurtling out of his mouth with a great rate of knots it sounded like he was choking on them.

And Felicity just smiled.
Her hands were wrapped around a coffee mug from the small coffee station Oliver had thoughtfully installed in his room just for her.

Both her feet were raised, her toes squishing into the seat cushion and her knees tipped onto the arm of the chair. Her hair was loose as though she had just risen from his bed only a few feet away.

Oliver couldn’t tell if she was naked but every inch of her that he could see was nothing more than smooth vanilla skin.

He tried to look away, but it was futility – his eyes weren’t budging.

Felicity placed the coffee cup, still over halfway full and smelling like rich Arabica beans, on the table beside her before she slipped her legs off the seat of the chair and dug her toes into the blissfully soft rug.

As she stood Oliver forgot both how to breathe and almost completely how to balance on two legs.

Felicity wasn’t naked, but she might as well have been. The pure snow lingerie she was wearing did little, if anything to hide her form. The bra looked like Oliver merely had to breath on it and the rice paper material would float away from her body like magic. He could see her nipples, disguised barely by an embroidered design of twisted vines and dainty flowers, like some sort of metaphoric
beanstalk his fingers could climb.

Her panties bore the same pattern and while Oliver wanted to gaze at them so long that they might spontaneously combust, he was hardly... barely ...holding himself together as is without dissecting her body with his eyes a moment longer.

“It’s my birthday,” she whispered with moist lips and a silvery tone that pushed Oliver's cock hard against the jogging shorts which, despite their best endeavours, could do little to contain it.

“It’s 8am,” Oliver rasped, his feet remaining anchored on the hardwood even as she walked nearer.

“I was born at 7:46am,” she retorted his flimsy argument, “I checked.”

“How did you get in here?”

His voice went from deep to prepubescent-high rebelliously and with rampant disregard to just how foolish he sounded.

“You left the door unlocked, I walked right in,” she smiled as she savoured the way Oliver didn’t close his mouth after speaking, letting it gape open without realising it.

“But that doesn’t really matter, surely,” she whispered as she got close enough to drag a crooked finger softly down the side of Oliver's face.

“I wasn’t sure if you wanted to unwrap me yourself or if you want to watch me do it?” Felicity sweetened as her fingers entwined in the bow at the front of her bra; Oliver hadn’t even noticed it tied up at the front until that moment.

His hands were clammy; his mouth dry; his throat hoarse; his lips parched and his appetite swelling, but...

“No,” he spoke, his voice worn and throaty.

“No what?” Felicity replied with a cheeky smile as she tugged the bow free

“No Felicity,” Oliver repeated hastily as he collected blanket from the edge of his bed and threw it around her shoulders.

Felicity looked confused seconds before she looked mad.

“Has my father said nineteen now?” she snapped as she instinctively clutched the blanket to her chest, “because last time I checked this was my body and what I do with it is my choice, he had the nerve to ask you to wait before but this…”

Oliver silenced her words with a peck on her cheek.

“No, that’s not it,” Oliver sighed as his lips slowly broke away from her luminescent skin – there was just something so endearing about her passion when she was angry about something.

“So, what is wrong?” she huffed, her narrowed eyes not entirely believing Oliver’s refute that her father had nothing to do with this, “because honestly you putting a blanket over me wasn’t exactly how I pictured this moment Oliver.”

“I know, I’m sorry,” he soothed in that polar-ice-cap-melting voice of his.

“Do I get any kind of explanation?” Felicity asked, lowering the anguish in her voice to merely a simmering frustration.

“This is a frat house,” Oliver replied in a blunt half-a-sentence.

“I’m aware of that Oliver,” Felicity replied as her eyes wandered his room before returning to his even wider than they were before.

Oliver took a breath to still himself because what he was about to say meant he needed her to hear his sincerity behind his words. Felicity watched as his chest expanded with air before he blew it out...
softly through his parted lips before wetting them with his tongue.

“I don’t want your first time to be in a frat house with rooms on either side and…” and the bed where countless other girls have been, he thought it but he couldn’t bring himself to say it.

Felicity’s eyes followed Oliver’s as they walked absentmindedly to the bed. She could read between the lines, he didn’t even need to say it.

She pushed the thought of Oliver with other girls, Laurel, Sara, the line that probably formed outside his door at every party … she didn’t need, or want, the imagery, even if it was accurate. That wasn’t her Oliver anymore and – insecurities aside – she trusted him implicitly in that.

“I don’t care where we do it Oliver,” Felicity shrugged as her eyes returned to him, softer than they left.

“I do,” Oliver remarked, the words falling like a prayer.

Oliver wanted to make this special, it was cliché and it was teeth-rottingly sweet, but Felicity deserved that. She deserved the romantic movies she watched and she deserved the impassioned stories she read. She didn’t deserve a frat house bed that meant sharing her with deadlines or memories of anyone else.

He wants to linger with her, take his time to love her.

“So we’ll go to a hotel,” Felicity suggested, her eyes becoming more expressively blue as she spoke.

“You have classes today,” Oliver replied while he let his hands smooth down the curve of her shoulders.

“Of sorts,” Felicity replied coyly, “but you’re the teacher and the lesson is sex.”
She bit her lip and raised a brow and the heat of the two combined singed Oliver right between the legs.

“Fe-liss-ci-ty,” he sighed, his tongue craving the way her name felt against it.

“I don’t have a class for another hour, we have time.”

Oliver smiled more devilishly than he had intended to, what he planned to do needed longer than an hour. They had not waited months for an hour.

“I’ve made plans,” he stroked the words across his lips.
Felicity brushed her cheek against his in a salacious passing of smooth against rough, placing tiny, fettered kisses wherever her lips fancied to pause before she reached his ear and whispered, “unmake them.”

“Not for today Felicity,” he growled against her warm cheek, “plans for us, together.”

“Okay,” she hummed deliciously, “let’s go.”

She drew back, still wearing the blanket he’d used to shield her bare skin from his wanton hands.

Thursday,” he sighed with half-draped eyes.

“What?” she smiled, almost a laugh peeking through.

“The plans start on Thursday.”

Felicity pouted with a furrowed brow and puckered lips.

“But today is my birthday.”

Oliver nodded.

“We’ve waited this long,” he offered sincerely, “we can wait three more days and then we’re going
away. I was going to tell you tonight.”

“You’ve made actual plans?” she quipped as her smile grew and she seemed almost surprised by the gesture.
“I told you it would be worth the wait,” Oliver simpered, “my frat house bedroom isn’t right and neither is some last minute hotel rendezvous for forty-five minutes or less.”

Oliver combed a rack of fingers gently through her hair.
“Trust me,” he breathed, the words carried to her atop an entrancing sigh.

Felicity wanted to be mad but the puppy dog look on his face was making her anything but, because Oliver the playboy who once lived next door Queen, had made plans.

How could she be mad at that?
“Okay,” she suffered through a smile for only a moment before it became genuine.
“Okay?” Oliver repeated, his hands now cupping either side of her face just so he could watch the sparkle in her eyes.
“Okay,” Felicity repeated with a single nod.

“I love you,” Oliver breathed, her eyes his only prompt.
Felicity let the words seep into her ears and slowly sink into her heart, she would never tire of hearing them.
“I love you,” she whispered.
She’d never get tired of saying them either.

The dinner went expectedly well. Although Oliver could feel Noah's heated stare across the table neither were prepared to bring the proverbial elephant to the table.

Yes Oliver and Felicity had waited.
Yes today was her birthday.

The truth was uncomfortably apparent for both of them and there was little desire to be found in talking about it. So the pink elephant stayed in the corner of the room and wordlessly they both threw four layers of thick black curtain over it.

It was 8:30pm when Oliver pulled his phone surreptitiously from his pocket and handed it to Felicity as both her parents, well aware what was happening, sat back in their chairs, Donna wearing a bright smile she did little to hide.

“What's this?” Felicity laughed as she turned it around in her fingers.
“Just answer it when it...”
Oliver never finished as the phone sparked to life with an incoming video call.

Felicity answered seconds before her eyes blew open at the realisation of who was on the other end of the call.

“Happy birthday Bug,” Chris cheered through a crackly and static line, but clear enough to bring instant tears to Felicity's eyes.

Chris had returned to base straight after Florida and deployed to a ship in the middle of the Pacific less than 48 hours later to help with some repairs and maintenance on the fighter planes it carried. Felicity hadn’t spoken to him since.

“How did you?” she stammered, her emotions too rampant to control.
Not only was the surprise a great one the fact that Oliver had well and truly buried any jealousy and proved it with this gesture meant the world to her.

“Thank your boyfriend,” Chris winked through the screen, “I’m on speaker so I’m not going to gush about him, but you got a good one.”
“I do,” Felicity sniffed as her hand sought out Oliver’s, holding it tightly when she found it.
“Are you safe?” she asked as she nervously nibbled on her lower lip.
“I’m fine Felicity, it’s just training and maintenance out here, nothing to fret about,” he jested as he leaned closer to the camera.
“How much longer will you be away?”
“Few months,” he guessed as a chattering of noise made him turn away for a few seconds, “I’ll be home for Chanukah.”
“Pinky swear?”
“Stick a feather in my eye,” he laughed at the long since used oath, “I have to go, but have the best birthday Bug, I miss you.”
“Miss you too,” Felicity replied quietly.
“Bye mister and missus Kuttler.”
“Bye Chris,” they answered in unison
“Stay safe,” Donna added.
“Thanks Oliver.”
“No problem,” Oliver smiled.
“Bug, take me off speaker,” Chris instructed.

Felicity did and pressed the phone to her ear, her eyes smiling at Oliver.
“Okay, I will. Thank you. Be safe.”
The call ended and Felicity hung up the phone handing the same back to Oliver.

Her eyes showed her gratitude but she offered him a smiled thank you just to be sure.

“Okay, our turn!” Donna cheered excitedly as she elbowed Noah who dutifully placed a plain white envelope on the table.

“What’s this?” Felicity asked as Donna slid it closer.
“Open it,” Donna clapped excitedly.
Felicity peeled back the seal and shuffled a folded piece of paper from inside. It was a bank statement addressed to a trust that bore her initials. Her eyes walked down the paper and stopped on a figure that had seven figures attached to it, $45,780.95 to be exact.

“I don’t understand,” she puzzled.
“It’s your travel fund, when you finish school or over the holidays, it’s yours to use to discovery the world outside of college,” Donna explained.
“I don’t need this,” Felicity replied, still a little flawed by the gesture.

“It was your mother’s idea,” Noah added as he rubbed Donna’s shoulder.
“I started a little piggy bank the day you were born Felicity Megan Smoak, because I knew that you would grow up to have such a wonderful head on you, that it would be wasted in Vegas. I intended it to be your college fund, but when you no longer needed it for that we decided you should use it to travel.”

Felicity looked at the figure again, imagining how much of it had come from meagre tips her mother had earned.
“I can’t...”
Donna stopped her with a squeeze of Felicity’s hand.
“Felicity you have the most beautiful brain but sometimes I worry that if you don’t stop to see the beauty of the world that you will miss it. You’ve fought tirelessly to stand on your own feet, this scholarship, saving all your money to support yourself and I admire the shit out of that, but I also want you to wake up one morning and decide you want to go to France for a long weekend and you can do that, with this.”

“Most people just buy their kids a car,” Felicity joked as she let an emotional tear weave down her cheek.  
“Would you have let us buy you a car?” Noah asked.
“No,” Felicity laughed, “Zelena is my baby.”
“Your baby is still parked in my garage.”
“Point taken dad,” Felicity smiled.

“I don’t know what to say,” Felicity sighed as she held the paper tight.
“Just say you will see the world away from a computer screen,” Donna lovingly mocked.
“I promise.”

It was a little before 11pm when Oliver and Felicity stopped walking at the crossroads of the front path up to Felicity’s house and the footpath that would carry Oliver back to his. Their fingers were entwined and their palms pressed firmly together and as they stood there silently letting the other’s presence wash over them it seemed like neither was quite prepare the end this night right now.

They both had full days tomorrow and Thursday, Felicity busy with school and some extra tutoring jobs she took up over the summer with Barry which saw them both earn a little extra. Felicity didn’t need the money per se but she had extolled to Oliver the value of tutoring because it kept her mind sharp in the places that it could so easily get fuzzy. He had listened with absolute pride to every word that came from her mouth.

He had always known she was smart – that kind of smart that was quiet and so often underestimated – but the more Oliver took his front row seat in watching her, the word smart just didn’t seem enough anymore.

She was brilliant.
His brilliant Felicity.
The one who challenged him.

The one who had told him to jump at the opportunity his father had given him to spend the next two days working on a few Queen Consolidated projects.

“Dip your feet in the pool of business Oliver,” she had gingerly encouraged when he’d told her about it.
He had admitted that he wasn’t sure he knew what he was doing, but she had just smiled effervescently, kissed his lips ethereally and told him she believed in him.

However it meant they would go almost 48 hours without seeing each other, which didn’t exactly seem like a lot – except if you were them.

“Thank you for Chris,” Felicity spoke up, breaking the pleasant but lingering silence between them.
Oliver stroked back a fallen section of hair, pinning it behind her ear as he saw a certain sadness float into her azure eyes.
“You’re worried about him?” he asked kindly.
Felicity nodded as she snagged her bottom lip between her teeth, dragging it in towards her mouth before she let it go.

“When he’s at the base it’s fine, but just the…” she trailed off, blinking back a renegade tear, “…the words active duty, they always sound so ominous.”

“He’ll be okay,” Oliver soothed as he used his thumb to brush back another tear.

Felicity nodded a second time, slowly and with just a hint of hesitation about it. Oliver’s words were the same slightly-plagiarised ones that Chris had told her time and time again, but they had never really settled that feeling in the pit of her stomach; and even coming from Oliver – as charming and as thoughtful and as handsome as he was – they still couldn’t fully allay those fears.

“So I really won’t see you till Thursday?” she sighed, deciding it best to change the subject.

“I’ll pick you up at four-thirty, we have a bit of a drive ahead of us,” he smiled as his second hand entwined with hers.

Felicity swayed in his arms with a devious smile pressed atop her lips.

“Where are we going?” she grinned before her lips folded into pout.

“It’s a surprise,” Oliver rejected with a smile of his own.

She had half a mind to push him as she wasn’t entirely sure she liked the idea of surprises, but she was much too tired and Oliver was much too good at foiling her attempts to solicit information. She would have to wait until Thursday.

“But,” Oliver continued, his voice breathy and drawn, “you will love it.”

“Promise?” Felicity sighed, watching as his tongue darted between his lips before it retreated back behind him.

“Promise.”

“Oh one more thing,” she refused before she rushed her lips to his cheek, pressing a soft kiss there, “that’s from Chris.”

“Really?” Oliver laughed.

“Well he said handshake but I don’t think he’ll mind me taking a few liberties,” Felicity smiled as she walked away.

“Goodnight,” she called back when she reached the porch.

“Goodnight,” Oliver answered, paired with a simple wave.

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**Thursday, 26 July 2007**

“Is this it?” Oliver asked as he loaded the second of Felicity’s bags into the trunk of his gassed up and ready-to-go car.

Felicity looked down at the overnight case and small duffle and nodded through a smile. She had filled both bags with an array of choices given Oliver had refused to give her much more than the clue that she wouldn’t need to bring a pillow.

Instinctively, and just because the urge took him, Oliver pulled Felicity into a surprise kiss, capturing her lips against his own for a few startled seconds before she keened into it with a stroke of her playful tongue and the soft pepper of her fingers across the back of his neck.
“Where are we going?” she ghosted over his lips as they lay open, drawing in the shared air between them.
“I’m still not telling you,” Oliver smirked.

He walked her around to her side of the car and opened the door with a gentlemanly bow of his head.

He was about to say something charming when one of Felicity’s sorority sisters came running down the front path waving something wildly in the sky.
“Your mail,” she puffed as though the freshman had run a marathon to get the letters into Felicity’s hand.

Felicity took a passing glance at the envelopes, they appeared to be of little consequence, an AT&T bill, a bank statement and two other things that weren’t immediately obvious, nothing that couldn’t have waited until she returned on Sunday. But regardless she thanked the sister with a smile and folded the mail into her bag, instantly forgetting about them.

They were an hour into the drive when Felicity started yawning. They were sporadic at first but as the late afternoon fell into sunset and Felicity struggled to navigate the landmarks to have any idea where they were heading, her eye lids became like heavy weights over her eyes.

At first she had thought they might be heading towards the beach house but Oliver had turned the opposite direction some miles back and if Felicity knew the City she had come to call home well enough, she was fairly certain they were heading out of state.

“Are you tired?” Oliver asked, already knowing the answer by the count of yawns in the last 10 minutes (it was 6 and she was part way through the seventh).
“I was up really late last night, this morning actually,” she spoke through the tail end of her yawn, “just trying to get something finished.”

“You should close your eyes for a little bit,” Oliver suggested. Felicity yawned an eighth time before she smacked her lips together to stall the ninth.
“Maybe I’ll just close my eyes for a little bit,” she sighed, lulling her head against the window pane.

Oliver barely made a sound for the next five minutes and the next time he glanced over at her, she was fast asleep.

Felicity could feel everything, the warm caress of his breath down her neck, the sultry way her name fell from his lips like honey and the burning low within her belly that felt scorching to the touch and sent her brain into a flurry of words in a language that was foreign but all of a sudden she was fluent in.

He was poised above her and his body like the most erotic canvas her fingers had travelled. He smiled when she touched him with nervous but tenacious fingers. His strong palms had caressed her naked breast as he controlled her teetering orgasm in flows and ebbs.

“Felicity,” she heard him whisper, his voice like it was spoken through a bottle or underwater. She hummed as she felt fingers stroke her wet heat.
“Felicity,” a second time, same voice though the water had resided a little, his voice a little clearer.
She bit her lip as the fire pit in her belly became like an inferno that licked flames between her legs.

“We’re here,” he spoke and her eyes twitched, she didn’t understand the correlation.
“Wake up,” he cajoled.

Felicity’s eyes shot open as she simultaneously sucked in an unexpected gasp of air. Her eyes snapped down to her chest, fully clothed, no large hand kneading them with absolutely precision. She was still in Oliver’s car.

She turned her head slowly to see him smiling at her and the harsh reality that she had almost orgasmed to a dream of him while he probably watched sent a furious red blush across her cheeks.

However, if she had completely embarrassed herself, Oliver wasn’t taking advantage of it. He simply smiled and reissued his last few words.
“We’re here.”

Felicity looked around the canopy of pine trees as she stepped from the car into the fresh mountain air. The place wasn’t at all familiar but the heavenly scent of nature played pleasant tricks on her mind making her feel like this had been home all along.

“Where are we?” she quipped as her eyes walked around the space – the pine needles littered across the dry-dirt driveway, the sky so close she was almost sure she could reach up and pluck one of the new stars from the sky – before ending up on the quaint little cottage a short walk away.

“The owner said this cabin was called **Orion’s Gate,**” Oliver smiled as he took her hand.

“Why is it called that?” Felicity asked, as she took in all the details of the cottage, from the rustic log build to the stone stack chimney all nestled in a hug of pine trees, it was about the quaintest little thing Felicity had ever seen.

“You’ll see,” Oliver remarked as they walked up the cobbled path.

“Don’t we need our bags?” Felicity asked as she tipped her head back towards the car but kept walking ahead regardless.

“Already inside,” Oliver reported.

Oliver wrapped his hands around the door, pausing for effect until Felicity playfully jostled his arm, causing him to relent and open the door in front of her.

The rustic charm of the simplistic outside kept hidden a modern and luxurious interior that was illuminated only by less than a handful of lamps and an army of scattered candles.

She didn’t mean to start counting them but as her eyes roved across the room, her feet too shy to step forward, she counted at least twenty-five just from the doorway.

“Go inside,” Oliver urged as he watched an expression of delight dance across her face.

His words urged her forward and she stepped inside. The smell of coconut and vanilla instantly engulfed her, wrapping her body in its comforting smell. She was unsure if it was her mind playing tricks on her or whether the scent was exactly like she would describe Cabo.

There had to be at least a hundred candles littering the studio cabin. A small kitchen to the left of the door was sparsely lit, though the light on the range hood was switched on providing a white glow across the marbled benchtop.

The living area with an unlit stone fireplace sat a shoe's throw from her feet with a hearth decorated in candles of varying heights but all the same lush buttercream colour.
Just beyond the living area was a bed, decorated with more pillows than anyone could possibly need and rich linen in hues of chocolate brown and burgundy.

The back wall was almost entirely glass and as Felicity walked closer, adjusting her glasses to ensure she wasn’t seeing things, the reason for the name of the cottage became abundantly clear, because it looked like if you stepped out onto the floating balcony and reached out your fingers your hand would be amongst the stars.

“On a clear night, once it gets a little darker, you can see Orion’s Belt,” Oliver explained. “It’s beautiful,” Felicity sighed, awestruck.

“I put some books by the couch, I thought you could sit and read while I make dinner,” Oliver continued as he walked her further into the room, closing the door behind them.

Felicity walked on a cloud to where Oliver had placed the books, stacked in a pile five-high next to a lamp on its lowest setting.

She touched the top book with a dreamy finger, as though she wasn’t entirely sure this moment was real and half expecting to wake up any minute in her childhood bedroom, a 12 year old with a crush and a very vivid imagination.

But as Oliver’s hands wrapped around her waist and she caught the familiar scent of his sandalwood musk, she knew she was right there, in that absolutely perfect moment.

“You’re making dinner?” she asked as she turned in his arms to bask in the quiet calm of his sea-blue eyes.

“Just pasta, nothing too fancy,” he smiled as he nodded towards the kitchenette, everything set up on the island ready to begin.

“I don’t want to read,” Felicity replied as her hands snaked around his back.

“I think there are some movies,” Oliver replied as he started to pull away in search of them. Felicity tugged him back and shook her head.

“I don’t want to watch a movie.”

“Do you want to…”

“Oliver,” Felicity interrupted, “I don’t think you’re hearing me.”

She walked backwards past the stack of books and through to the other side of the couch until the back of her knees grazed the foot of the bed.

“I don’t want to wait anymore,” she smiled before she leaned up on her tippy toes and brushed a kiss against his lips.

“We’ve waited long enough,” she breathed as she pulled back and toed off her shoes. She moved around the bed slowly, taking him willingly with her.

“Are you sure?” Oliver asked as he watched the candles beside the bed dance enchanting lines across her beautiful face.

Felicity could think of a million ways to say yes, but in the end she chose the simplest way of all. She kissed him.

“I’m sure,” she assured him as her fingers mimicked the assurance by wrapping around the buttons on her navy smock blouse.

Oliver caught her wrists, stilling her hands.

“Don’t ask me if I’m sure again Oliver,” she lamented with a soft blow of air through her circled
lips.
“I wasn’t going to,” Oliver smiled as a single finger reached out and touched a tiny blue button, “could I?”

Felicity let her hands drop to her sides as she took a soft breath inward and nodded. Oliver’s fingers became like extensions of a robotic arm he didn’t have control over as they trembled and fumbled with the tiny buttons before Felicity leaned up against him and kissed a reassuring kiss against his cheek, calming them almost immediately.

Felicity watched as his fingers moved down her blouse, opening it up until there were no more buttons left. Her eyes fluttered closed as she felt the sensual graze of his fingers against her waist while his hand lingered there.

She didn’t know if it was her own soft shudder or whether it was the heated breath that passed over his lips that did it, but of its own volition her blouse floated to the floor around her feet.

Oliver’s eyes and fingers moved in unison over the scalloped lace edge of her moonless-black bra that sat in stunning contrast to her lightly freckled complexion. He hadn’t noticed them before even though the bra was no more scandalous that any bathing suit he had seen her in. But, there was something about the colour, or perhaps the fact he knew he had the time to spend studying her, that made each little faded brown dot like a magical map that fanned across her chest and down her shoulders. They were sparse and Oliver wanted to memorize every single one.

Felicity breathed in his heated gaze, there were threads of carnality in his eyes but careful consideration in his fingers and she knew, without hesitation, that if she asked him to stop he would do so without complaint.

But she didn’t want to stop.
Not at all.

Her fingers latched to the hem of his faded black Henley and tugged it down an inch before she raised it, fluidly pulling it from his body. Oliver chuckled at her haste but she offered him no apology as her fingertips scouted the grooves and rises of his chest.

Everything felt hard and warm and for lack of any better superlatives, _perfect_.

Felicity drew circles around his chest, dragging a manicured nail along behind an intrepid and curious finger. Air passed over his lips in what sounded like a happy sigh as the same fingers trickled down his core before stopping at the waist of his jeans.

_God_, his face looked so content, like hers was a touch that he had waited a lifetime for. He didn’t hide it or shrink back from expressing it and it was absolutely the sexiest thing she had ever seen.

All this time Felicity had imagined herself as the nervous one keening into his every touch but it was beautifully apparent Oliver shared those same feelings.

Perhaps he was more experienced in many ways and Felicity was not so absent to have a fool’s belief that it was his first time, but there was something Oliver still had left to learn, something he had never mastered, _love_.

Oliver brushed hair back from her face his fingers return to graze across her cheeks and her eyes slowly rose up to meet his. Her lips were parted and he could feel the feathered touch of her breath against his lips before he wet them with a long sweep of his tongue.

Felicity smiled at it, her eyes playfully hungering to taste it as her arm draped around his neck.
She kissed him again. Caressing his bottom lip between hers as her arm fell backwards and her hand pressed against the back of his neck. A rogue thumb drew over his hairline before Oliver lifted her against him and lay her gently down onto the bed.  

The linen encased her like a marshmallow hug before she sat up on her elbows with just her feet dangling from the edge.  

Oliver tugged her leggings over her hips, watching closely for any hesitation or regret in her eyes. But there was none to be found as she raised her bottom off the bed to expedite the process.  

One leg before the other Oliver slipped her pants from her body and dropped them beside the bed. Felicity crawled backwards until her head was lying atop at least three, maybe four, ornately covered pillows.  

“What about yours?” Felicity inquired as her eyes worked over his jeans. “Not yet,” he gushed as knelt between her legs before bracing himself above her on one arm while the other snuck under her back.  

“May I?” he asked as two fingers toyed with the back clasp on her bra. Felicity nodded as she lifted her back just enough for Oliver to pop open the clasp.  

She swallowed a heavy stitch in her throat, aware that after this moment Oliver would have seen her so completely. But the idea didn’t scare her, not even a little, in fact when she stole a moment to dive into his eyes she knew this moment was right.  

She could live in this moment forever.  

As her bra came away, silky smooth between Oliver's fingers, Felicity felt the warm embrace of his eyes and the slow pulse of her heartbeat. In fact the more she stayed exposed to it the hotter her body surged until her blood became like lava coursing through her veins, scorching it red from the inside out.  

She wondered if he sought more assurance from her that this was what she wanted, what she needed as he paused above her, but before she could emphatically offer him a barrage of assurances she felt his lips lightly kiss the tip of her breast bone.  

Every thought, every wonderment and every musing not tied up in this moment dropped from Felicity's mind with that one, simple kiss. She would fail any test given her unless it only contained questions about the infallible pleasure contained behind Oliver's sultry lips.  

She wanted to do more, to make him feel as completely wrapped up in this moment as she did, but as she watched his eyes and lips rise from her chest she realised that wasn’t necessary at all – he was already there.  

Her quiet plea for more contact went answered immediately when Oliver lowered his lips back to her chest and weaved a pattern of his own making down her naked, heaving chest. His kisses were slow and deliberate and his fingers that slalomed down her arms mimicked the same pace.  

His lips avoided her breasts even though they ached to be touched by him and he stopped well early of the her mound, still sheathed behind torturously wet panties.  

“Do you remember what we did in Cabo, how I kissed you?” he asked as he looked up her body.  

*I remember every night when I’m alone in my bed and my body desperately wants you…*  

“Yes,” she sighed.  

“I want to do it again, but without these,” Oliver remarked while his hand snuck under the black
Felicity drew in a breath as she held the moment in silence. “Okay,” she spoke with a slightly hazed voice as he stroked a finger dangerously close to where she desperately wanted him, “but why?” she added without thinking it through. “If your body is ready then it will feel nicer,” Oliver promised. “All I have to do is look at you and my body feels ready,” she prattled before she folded her lips closed and blushed a soft peach.

“I’m sorry sometimes I say things that I should keep unsaid,” she peeped. “Not from me, that’s one of the things I love about you,” Oliver assured her, backing the same up with one thumb stroking over the apple of her cheek. “It is?” “Yes,” he laughed at the surprise in her tone, “when you’re mad you don’t just dwell on it, sometimes you let me have it,” he smiled before he pressed a kiss to the curve of her neck. “When you’re sad, you’re not afraid of it,” he continued, hopping warm kisses down her smooth centre between her breasts while his hands lowered her panties.

“When you’re happy, it is stunning and unashamed,” he hummed the words against her hip. “I love you,” she thought she heard him whisper before she felt his tongue dip between her folds. “I want to see every emotion you have Felicity,” he growled with gravel between his words. His tongue dipped in again, slower and more lingered than the last. Felicity gasped as the wanted intrusion as she felt it fan out to every nerve ending, each second more glorious than the last. Oliver lapped at her sweet sex, taking his time to make sure every stroke was felt by her. One hand steadied her hip, securing it with just enough pressure to the mattress below while the other hand waited patiently at the apex of her thigh.

Cabo had afforded him a few notes of her arousal but to taste it was altogether new and intoxicating. He was consumed by every taste he got and fixated on every tiny, keening movement she made. He could hear her whisper his name between heavenly sighs and it stirred his tongue deeper between her.

When he found her clit with the flat of his tongue, she bucked wildly against it then offered a breathy apology that Oliver simply smiled at while he tightened his grip on her hip. She didn’t fight it and he kept it there. He flicked her swelling nub with the tip of his tongue and relished the immediate response of her writhing hip against the palm of his hand. So many desires coursed through his mind in that moment, every pleasure he wanted them to discover together, but they would wait for now, held for another time.

Felicity gasped, her lungs struggling for air as she momentarily forgot to breathe, her body so wrapped up in the way Oliver commandeered her body.

It was more intense than Cabo, the tightening that surged across her chest, and she whimpered into the quickening compulsion that sat just beneath the surface. She might have chorused his name when she felt his lips encase her clit and suck it gently toward the roof of his mouth as his tongue flicked it lightly.

She might have warned him in heavy pants as her knuckles turned white while she fist ed the linen underneath her clammy hand.
Felicity understood it was all too possible that she had sworn like a sailor at the very moment that tight band across her stomach snapped and she shook through a thunderbolt of release.

Oliver had been waiting, the three consecutive fucks that sprung from her mouth had been the final clue and his mouth sat poised to lap up what she gave him.

Her sweet nectar dripped down his throat and coated his lips as his fingers stroked Felicity through the rolling, vibrant sensation of her fresh orgasm until there was nothing left for him to have.

“I'm so sorry,” she stammered as she pressed her palms over her face.
“Don’t be,” Oliver insisted while he peeled her hands away and pinned them above her head, “you taste delicious.”

His tongue licked across his lips, once, twice, a third time before Felicity tipped up her chin and caught his lips with her own, tasting what little remnants of her release remained there.

Oliver hummed, satisfied, before he slipped from the bed and lay a nearby blanket over her naked body, still trickling with the aftershocks.

“I’ll be right back,” he rasped while he padded across the room to his suitcase.

Felicity sat up in the bed to watch him as he took something from a side pocket and walked the short distance back to the bed.

Oliver’s smile grew as he watched her take her glasses and place them carefully on the nightstand. Her hair was a little messy and her bottom lip wore tiny teeth indentations. Her cheeks were flushed with rose and there was a soft mist of sweat across her forehead.

She had never looked more stunning.

Oliver stripped off his pants after he placed the condom beside her folded glasses. Felicity looked from one to the other and smiled as though she made a joke behind her ethereal blue eyes.

Oliver planned on asking her about it as he started to get into bed, but before he could Felicity spoke up.

“No,” she smirked.

“No?” Oliver quipped.

“Naked only,” she propositioned, “I want to see it.”

“You want to see it?” Oliver keened with a haphazard chuckle.
Felicity knelt on the bed, the blanket still pressed against her naked chest but draping open at the back. She walked a slow and steady finger up the outline of his shaft, enjoying the way his eyes rolled upwards the closer she got to the base of his erection.

Oliver leaned down and placed a kiss on her crown before he placed a second on her forehead, his briefs coming off some time between the two.

He lay down beside her, his body completely open to her ravenous eyes that didn’t hesitate to devour every inch of him before she kicked her blanket down towards her feet and enjoyed the serenity of lying beside each other naked and in love.

Oliver’s fingers ran paths down the slope of her body as they lay face to face, wordless and enamoured, before he gently eased her legs apart and stroked a single finger between her folds.

“What’s that for?” she mused amidst a litter of soft mewls.

“To get you ready,” Oliver explained, his jaw clenching when her hand brushed against his throbbing shaft.
“I’m already ready,” she smiled as she pumped his cock against her stomach, eliciting a guttural growl from the pit of his chest.

And as his digit swam in the warm arousal between her legs, he knew she absolutely was.

He dipped just the tip of his index finger inside her and caught the first gasp to fall from her lips with a heated kiss. He slid in deeper with his lips still swaying against hers. She didn't buck or draw away and her walls were coated with the remnants of her last orgasm together with the new arousal his fingers were eliciting.

Oliver reached behind for the condom just as Felicity broke away from the kiss. “You don’t have to, I’m protected, I won’t get pregnant,” she uttered, still attune with the way his fingers were twisting and stroking inside her.

“Our other girls, you...” she paused, unsure how to phrase her question. “I always wore one and I have regular checks, the last one was less than a year ago, but I haven’t been with anyone since.”

She already knew that to be the truth, but to hear that Oliver had been celibate since he stumbled drunk into her life once more brought a smile to her lips. “So you don’t need it,” she smiled plucking the foil wrapper from his fingers. “I need the condom,” he argued, stealing it back. “Oh,” she simmered.

Oliver smiled at her cute little scrunched nose. “It numbs the sensation a little bit, so I can last longer,” he explained, “I didn’t want it to be over before it began and judging by how long we’ve waited...” “I don’t mind,” she interrupted. “You might when it’s over in two seconds,” he joked, although he worried once he felt himself slide inside her tight, warm body that prediction might be accurate.

Felicity snagged her lip, pressing new indents over old before she spoke up again. “I wanted to feel you, not rubber, the first time,” she admitted with half hung eyes. Oliver nodded, honestly he wanted to feel that too. “I’ll put one on later then,” he compromised.

They kissed again, their lips taking their time to sink deep into it before their tongues mapped out the lines on each other's lips. It was slow, measured but assured, not a moment's reluctance between them. Her tongue passed over his lips and he welcomed it into his mouth, sparring it with his own while their bodies shifted position, Oliver above and Felicity beneath.

His hand smoothed over her breast before cupping it gently and kneading it with the flat of his palm. His fingers circled her budded nipple, teasing it between two fingers to draw out sweetened whips of enjoyment from her mouth.

She felt the form of his cock around the ring of her entrance, holding, waiting and as she deepened the kisses and scratched her nails lightly over his shoulders, Oliver eased his head inside her. Felicity felt her walls stretch around him and her mouth gasped with the encompassing feeling of it. Oliver held himself just a few inches inside her to give her body a moment to swell and adjust.

When her lips found his again with renewed vigour he lowered himself a little deeper inside. Felicity's teeth scraped the inside of his lip as her body conformed and swallowed him tightly in something that was an erotic douse of pleasure with just a dash of pain.
Oliver was only half way in when he slowly eased back an inch before driving back down an inch and a half with his first thrust. He knew what he felt the second time and when he looked to Felicity he knew she felt it too.

She didn’t attempt to still the small tear that formed and then fell from the corner of her eye but when Oliver saw it he stilled himself once more and locked his eyes with her own.

“Do you want me to stop?” he asked before his lips kissed up that small, lonesome tear.
“No,” she answered resolutely as she peppered his lips with furious kisses.

Oliver thrust again, delving a little deeper into her as his tip skimmed over the soft cushions of her walls.

He could feel himself closing in on his release and he knew he needed to pull out of her soon.

Felicity kissed his cheeks lightly as her fingers scraped through the short sides of his hair before meeting at the base of his head.

“It’s okay, we don’t need it,” she offered sincerely. Oliver's head dropped to the crook of her neck as he sunk his cock in deeper, right to the hilt while Felicity wordlessly gaped.

It wasn’t fast or rough, but slow and sensual and it took mere seconds after he felt himself fully entrenched in her, to tip over the edge and spill himself inside her.

Felicity’s eyes lit up with the new but distinctive sensation, a warmth that spiralled inside her without any control, something so foreign and yet utterly welcomed. She could feel his lips kissing her neck as he eased himself through his release with slow and languid thrusts.

She wasn’t sure what did it. Whether it was the old fashioned thrusts.
The way his hand gently kneaded her breast and his thumb stroked her nipple.
Or the way his mouth sunk in around her pulse point, kissing and suckling and breathing.

Perhaps it was the sounds she’d never heard from him before, soft grunts, tapered back sighs, low, guttural moans.
Maybe it was simply the way his eyes sought out hers with the first delve.

Or perhaps it was a culmination of all of those things.

Whatever it was Felicity fell over the ledge shortly after him, in a soft crow of breaths and stunted, pulled apart, syllables of his name.

Her body trembled and shook underneath him and he sealed it with a kiss just as the stars twinkled into view.

Their bodies stilled, lay entwined, doing nothing but savouring the intimacy of the moments they had shared. Neither spoke, neither needed to. Their closely touching bodies and fluttered fingers said it all.

*I love you.*
*I love you too.*
Sarcastically dedicated to a person over in a place that critiques a story they haven’t read a word of.

Side note: this story, and dare I say most stories written fan fiction or otherwise, is not about every person making the right decision every time. Sometimes there are flaws, things said or done that are fallible because that is far more realistic than the alternative. You are reading a work in progress. Sometimes what you read in one chapter will continue to have ramifications in other chapters, that is called cohesion. You may not always get a complete picture in every chapter because that would make them short stories in themselves.

That said, I like debate. I like a hearty discussion about these characters, what you loved, what made you so angry you wanted to tear your hair out. I believe it promotes growth, but show me just a smidge of respect and let’s talk about it openly.

And with that...
Oliver combed a shallow hand through Felicity’s hair while her head lay rested on his chest and slowly moved up and down with his silent breaths. He wasn’t sure how long they had being wrapped up like that, naked bodies entwined and shared heartbeats, but he knew he would never tire of it.

Honestly, Oliver wasn’t even sure she was still awake until he felt a gentle kiss linger in the centre of his ribcage before Felicity stirred in his arms.

She sprinkled a handful of kisses across his chest before she finally drew her head upwards and their eyes met once again. His fingers dropped from her hair, trailing down and up her naked back instead.

Felicity couldn’t stop her smile if she wanted to. Her cheeks hurt and her she was almost certain she probably looked like a deranged person, but when she saw that Oliver was contentedly smiling just as much she gave her smile free reign to reddened the apples of her cheeks even lusher.

“Are you okay?” Oliver asked, finally breaking the serene veil of silence that had blanketed them. “I can’t stop smiling,” she chuckled as she pressed a palm to her warm cheek, “but yes I’m okay, more than okay actually,” she finished, blowing out the last few words like air from her lungs.

He watched her wordlessly, drinking in the way her eyes seemed a few shades bluer even though the light was a soft hue of gold. He was intoxicated by the way his eyes could walk freely across her face and kiss each inch of her if he wanted to and god he wanted to.

“And you?” she asked when his silence grew too heavy, “I mean I’m not asking if you’re okay-okay because it wasn’t exactly new for you,” she prattled as her nails jostled against her scalp, “but like is this, was that...” 
She blew out an exacerbated breath of air, none of her words were working right now and her cheeks grew even hotter with the embarrassment of it.

Oliver plucked her hand that was dancing ribbons through her hair and pulled it to his lips before kissing the back of it softly.
“Perfect,” he ghosted over the dampness his kiss left behind, “you were,” he paused, lost in her eyes moments longer than he realised.
“Please don’t say tight,” Felicity cringed as the nails of her free hand clutched his shoulder, like his answer might subconsciously want to scramble away.
“WHAT!??” Oliver snorted out through a laugh.

“It’s just in books I’ve read the guy says something like that, about how tight the girls was,” Felicity grimaced before her head dropped to his chest and she lolled it back and forth, “and it’s just creepy.”
Felicity’s head shook against Oliver’s chest as she began to laugh almost silently.

“I wasn’t going to say that,” Oliver remarked while he turned onto his side, dropping Felicity off his chest and face down into the mattress, her body still shaking with wordless laughter.

“I wasn’t,” Oliver repeated as he tried in vain to lift her floppy head

“Okay, good,” she snickered, finally lifting her head.
Her entire cheeks were bright red and tears were forming in the corner of her eyes.

“Who would even say that?” Oliver asked, his concern threaded with small jolts of laughter.

“I don’t know, but I’ve read it,” she snorted before a hand cupped over her nose and the wordless laughter turned into hysterical.
“No one should...” Oliver shook his head dumbfounded, “why would someone...”
He couldn’t finish a sentence to save himself.

“And this is in those novels your read?” he asked as Felicity began to steady her breathing and still her laughter.

“It has been in a few,” she shrugged, just the remnants of a giggle remaining.

“That’s probably the weirdest thing I’ve ever encountered,” Oliver spoke as he rocked his head side to side, puzzled.

Felicity flopped onto her back with her head dropping to the pillow and her hair fanning like a crown of gold around her head. The sheet barely covered her breasts and Oliver instantly forgot everything when he remembered she was completely naked underneath that one, tan Egyptian cotton sheet.

“I was going to say perfect,” he breathed, the words coming to him after a few languid moments of silence.

“But you already said that,” she smiled as she watched him scoot closer and she felt his thigh skim against hers, “you can’t use the same word in a sentence twice.”

Her laughter had stopped, replaced instead with just a bright smile and tell tale eyes.

“Who made up that rule?” Oliver jested as he brushed a section of runaway hair back from her face.

“It’s a common rule,” she maintained with a veiled smile.

“But you are perfect,” Oliver cheered, “so it’s the perfect word for you.”

Felicity smiled before Oliver sealed the same with a tender, chaste kiss against her supple lips. “Fine,” she breathed as he slowly retreated from the kiss, “I’ll allow it.”

Oliver skimmed his fingers along the edge of her collarbone and down her exposed shoulder before he couldn’t help but press a second, equally as chaste and innocent kiss to the very corner of her smile.

“Are you sure you’re okay,” he asked softly, his eyes slightly hooded and his lips a little pensive over the answer, “that I made this okay for you?”

Felicity drank in the quiet reservation in his words. He was nervous, more than she had any recollection of seeing him before. Oliver was always cool, calm and collected. He was suave and assured and she loved that about him.

But the slight quiver in his voice and the hint of trepidation caught in the stillness of his eyes, that was hands down, the single most stunning thing she had seen.

“I’m more than okay,” she tipped her lips up to catch his, the next two words spoken through a kiss, “I’m perfect.”

Her body rocked into his while Oliver’s arm sunk around the small of her back, pinning her naked body against his. His free hand brushed through her hair before coming to rest at the back of her neck.

Felicity traced the outside of his top lip with a slow, measured stroke of her tongue. She would memorise every inch of Oliver Queen and she would start with the curious little dip of his cupid’s bow.

It was with the soft air of a lamented breath that the kiss finally ended a few moments after it begun. Oliver had a mind to spend the entire weekend kissing every single part of Felicity’s body if she would let him – he sure hoped she would – but at the same time he didn’t want to overwhelm
her and he was in no rush.

“I’m going to go clean up,” he spoke wistfully, “then you can have a shower or a bath while I make dinner,” he finished as he held her head in the crook of his elbow.

“Can’t we just stay here?” she pouted as she playfully tapped her finger against his lower lip.

“You need to eat,” he smiled coyly as he threw his legs over the edge of the bed and slipped on his briefs, “you need your stamina,” he added as he stood up and kissed the top of her head, a permanent smile affixed to his lips.

*They had all weekend.*

Felicity watched Oliver trance around the foot of the bed heading towards the bathroom with her body sheathed behind the sheet as she sat up against the headboard, a permanent smile mirror on her face.

“Oliver?” she said, stopping him in the doorway of the bathroom.

“Mmmm?” he replied.

She habitually licked her lips as his body stood proudly, almost filling the entire frame of the door where hers would struggle to fill half.

“For the record?” she smiled, leaving the rest of the question unsaid.

Oliver chuckled through a light exhale of breath while his head bobbed twice down and then up again. *He knew.*

“So tight,” he winked before he disappeared into the bathroom and Felicity’s head fell back onto the bed, curling her body as every ounce of it screamed both deliriously and silently.

She heard the shower start soon after followed by the distant sound of her phone ringing. She slipped from the bed, tugging the skewed sheet with her.

The sheet became a makeshift dressed before her fingers scrambled through her bag. *Mail, wallet, keys...*  

She found her phone and answered it.

The broken sound of her mom’s voice with whips of static drove her towards the front door.

“Can you hear me now?” Felicity asked as she stepped out onto the porch hovering around the only light besides the fresh stars that were spilling across the night sky.

The phone was a still a little crackly and she found herself a few feet from the car in the crisp, but not cold, night air before it finally cleared up enough to hear.

“How are you?” Donna asked, the unspoken question between the lines was one Felicity immediately understood.

“I’m fine mom,” Felicity replied as she hugged one arm across her waist, she wasn’t really of the mind to offer her mother anything more than *fine* right now.

“Just wanted to make sure you made it okay. Oliver told me where you were going in case we needed to reach you.”

Felicity smiled at the practicality of the boy who once thought he could use his mother’s black eyeliner to paint out scratches on the front of his father’s car. She saw the lights go on in the cabin
and Oliver appear at the kitchen window where she gave him a wave and pointed at the phone.

Oliver nodded before, she imagined, he set about the task of making dinner.

“Yeah, we made it here fine,” Felicity replied, “it’s beautiful here,” she added softly, her mother at least deserved to know that.
“I’m glad baby girl,” Donna spoke, a smile filtering through her words.

There was a few moments of silence and Felicity counted them down in her head – Donna Smoak didn’t like silence and she would fill it soon enough.
“And you’re happy?”
There it was.

Felicity caught glimpses of Oliver as he passed in front of the window and nodded for no one else’s benefit but her own.
“Very much,” she answered, followed by a fanciful sigh she hadn’t planned on releasing.

“My dad is here, I can put him...”
Felicity straightened her back and took a sharp inhale.
“I still don’t want to talk to him,” she replied bluntly.

Other than meatloaf Thursdays and her birthday dinner the other night Felicity hadn’t spoken to her father since the wedding and if it wasn’t for her wish not for Oliver to somehow feel like this was his fault she wouldn’t have talked to him on those occasions either.

While she was trying not to act like a petulant child and she certainly was not in the throes of a tantrum, Noah was well aware he had overstepped a boundary that Felicity did not easily forgive.

“Hon I understand why you were mad, when I found out what he said I was mad too, but...”
Donna started.

Felicity tried to bite her lip, hold her tongue, keep it civil – but she was mad and frankly, she felt she had every right to be.
“But nothing,” she snapped, before paring back her assault – her mother was not her father and she would give her leniency, “he had no right to talk to Oliver like that, about that,” she continued, her voice calm and collected but stern and direct.

She could almost hear her mother nodding down the phone. This wasn’t the first time the conversation had come up and Felicity knew her mother felt the same way she did, albeit a little more understanding of Noah’s thought process at the time.

“I make my own choices for my body, not Oliver and certainly not dad,” Felicity affirmed.
“He didn’t mean it like that,” Donna offered, trying to repair the fracture between father and daughter as best she could.
“I know,” Felicity shook her head slowly, she did, but it didn’t make a difference to the end result, “he didn’t want me to be another notch in Oliver’s belt but that was conversation better saved for me.”

Felicity didn’t resent her father wanting her to wait, not entirely. He had his reasons – emotional, legal or otherwise, but before they flew home to Starling Felicity had told him in no uncertain terms that he should have spoken to her about them.

They had fought, stubbornly so, and neither had truly recanted or apologised and honestly, Felicity wasn’t sure when they would.
“Hon, your dad found his daughter, his *only* child in a closet being groped by a boy he didn’t even really know you were dating and he just saw our mistakes,” Donna tried to explain, though it was nothing Felicity hadn’t heard before.

“But I’m not you and Oliver isn’t him,” Felicity brushed a tear forming in the corner of her eye, she hated the resentment she felt at her father right now but imperfectly she wasn’t quite ready to let it go, “I’m his daughter and he should have spoken to me.”

“You’re his *baby*,” Donna almost corrected.

“Not anymore, I’ve been old enough to be trusted with everything else in life. He should have trusted me with that.”

Donna sighed, she was fighting a losing battle.

“I supported Oliver because he wanted to prove a point to himself and I respect that, but I’m not okay with what dad said,” Felicity explained, “I played nice at dinner the other night and every first Thursday because I don’t want Oliver thinking he’s at fault here, but right now that’s all I’m offering.”

“You’re his baby,” Donna lamented.

“I don’t doubt that, but I also deserve his trust and his respect, he showed me neither,” Felicity replied with a heavy sigh.

She knew she would come around eventually, she loved her father, but for now she wasn’t quite done been mad.

“Can I at least tell him you said hi?”

Felicity couldn’t help the small smile that fluttered across her lips, her mother the *eternal optimist*.

“You can tell him hi,” she relented.

“And how are you?” a pause, “you know just because you’re there, if you don’t...”

“Mom it’s Oliver, he would never,” Felicity replied, answering the unspoken question.

“I know baby I’m just worrying about you like the mother I am.”

There was a soft chuckle in her mother’s voice that Felicity couldn’t help but mirror.

“Off the record as my mother?” Felicity asked in a hushed voice.

“Absolutely,” Donna perked up.

“It was perfect,” Felicity smiled, her cheeks still aching, “Oliver treated me with respect and he was gentle and sweet.”

She could hear her mom sniffing down the phone line and the blush flared across the apple of her cheeks.

“I love him.”

“I know you do hon, love is a precious thing.”

Donna sounded genuinely happy.

“I have to go now,” Felicity remarked, her arms missing Oliver.

“Okay, are you taking your...”

“Yes mom,” Felicity interrupted, “every day.”

“Good.”

“Love you.”

“Love you too hon.”

Felicity hung up the phone and walked back inside the cabin to find Oliver bouncing between dressing the salad and stirring the pasta sauce. In the twenty minutes she had been outside the inside had filled with the loveliest smell that made Felicity realise just how hungry she actually
“Everything okay?” Oliver asked as Felicity kicked the door closed, both hands holding up her sheet dress.
“Everything’s fine,” she replied simply as she wafted over and pressed her chest against Oliver's back.
He smelled like pine needles and ice bergs and while Felicity understood that was an impossible combination she loved breathing it in all the same. His hair was damp and his heart beat was like a drum echoing through her head.

Felicity didn’t have a lot of experience with love – but with all her heart she knew that was the soundtrack for it.

“Dinner is about 10 minutes away,” he hummed, his words echoing through his body as he spoke, “so even though I love your attire right now.”
He smiled as he turned in her arms and walked his fingers across each shoulder.
“There is time for you to have a shower and get dressed.”

Oliver winked as Felicity tipped him half a smile.
“You want me to get dressed?” she asked before the smile grew across her lips.
He kissed her temple, long and lingered, taking a few stilted breaths there before his lips fell to her ear.
“I like undressing you,” he whispered, the gravel in his voice enough to send a shudder of arousal right to Felicity’s core.

She couldn’t argue with that.

Felicity let the warm water cascade down her back like a waterfall, creating rivers in the grove of her spine and the curves of her shoulders. Her hair was pinned above her crown with just the tips of loose sections darkening as they got wet.

There was only a little pain, a mild niggle at most, probably due mostly to the overall feeling of euphoria that blocked out anything else. She could still feel the tracks Oliver’s hands had taken across her skin and her breasts felt tender and aching as she remembered how his mouth felt around them.

And then, without reason, her imagination turned on her and she saw brief moments of nameless and faceless girls that had once felt this exact same way due to Oliver. She swallowed down the thoughts but they came back with a vengeance.

Felicity shut off the water and stood there braced against the tap, taking shallow breaths before she managed to slowly deepen them.

_It didn’t matter who Oliver had been with before, it mattered who he was with now._
And that was her.

Her words calmed her insecurities while she stepped from the shower and dried herself. She repeated the mantra in her head as she walked the towel up her body until she caught her reflection in the foggy mirror above the sink. She wiped a hand through it and offered herself an assuring smile.
“And that’s you,” she repeated softly.
“Just in time,” Oliver cheered as Felicity walked from the bathroom, fully dressed in jeans and an oversized jumper and trailed by a cloud of steam.

He was just setting the plates on the cleared coffee table which sat next to the stone-built fireplace and on top of a cream faux angora rug. Even though it wasn’t cold the temperature had begun to drop with the night and Oliver had lit the fire, bathing the room in its soft amber glow.

Felicity shook her hair from its bun and sent the damp ends toppling down her back as she took a seat on the rug beside Oliver, facing him.
“It looks delicious, you’ve been hiding this from me,” she smiled as her fingers walked up the knee of his blue jeans.

“Just keeping you interested,” Oliver replied as a smile threaded across his lips and he folded his fingers into hers.

Felicity watched him with hooded eyes and softly pouted lips.
*She was very interested.*

“Eat,” he added as he gestured with a nod down to the plates in front of them. Felicity took her first mouthful of pasta and smiled through a hazy hum, she didn’t even need to fake it – she had no idea what kind of pasta it was or the fancy French name it probably carried, but it was *delicious*.

Oliver, satisfied that Felicity was pleased, began to eat.

“Who was on the phone?” he asked in idle chatter.
Neither of them even realised that they were still holding hands and that at that moment their fingers were dancing a waltz together.

“Just mom making sure we made it safe,” Felicity replied before she took another mouthful and melted into the taste of it on her palate with a unexpected sigh.
*It really was that good.*

“And your parents are okay?”
Felicity could feel Oliver’s eyes on her, his gaze was warm but heavy. She had done her best to hide the rift with her father from him, but there was something about the way that he structured his question, almost like he knew.

“Mom’s fine,” she replied, her eyes keeping watch over her plate.
“And your dad?”
*Fuck.*

“Uh, he’s fine I suppose, I didn’t really talk to him,” she quipped, now stirring her folk through the pasta.
“He was out?”

Oliver was digging.
“Uh nope.”
But Felicity wasn’t biting.

“Felicity are you going to tell me what’s going on or should I just keep asking vague questions until you tell me why you’re not talking to your dad?”
*Yeah, Oliver knew.*
It’s nothing Oliver,” she sighed, unsure what else to say. She hadn’t told him because she knew Oliver would feel guilty about his part in it all. But to Felicity this wasn’t about Oliver and she didn’t want him carrying any burden because of it.

The two of you would spend meatloaf night engrossed in conversations that no one else at the table understood and you would hug him every time we left.” Oliver sighed, tipping his head so he could capture Felicity’s eyes from her plate, “but ever since the wedding you’ve barely spoken with him.”

Felicity sighed as she looked up, finally linking eyes with Oliver. “And after your birthday dinner, you didn’t even say goodbye,” Oliver continued, every word spoken with genuine concern.

Felicity chewed her bottom lip, she hadn’t realised Oliver had been so astute. “We’re just not really talking at the moment,” she offered hoping maybe that would be enough. It wasn’t. “Because of what he asked me?” Oliver put forward with his hand giving hers a gentle squeeze.

“He shouldn’t have spoken to you Oliver, if he had those sort of concerns he should have spoken to me,” Felicity huffed, finally letting the truth of the matter slip from her lips. She watched as Oliver’s face looked saddened before she returned the hand squeeze with one of her own. It wasn’t his problem.

“I understand, he probably should have and maybe I should have told him to,” Oliver spoke with just a hint of regret.

Felicity blew out a soft laugh, she couldn’t imagine Oliver – even cool, calm, confident Oliver – ever refuting her father, it just wasn’t in his nature. “I don’t expect you to have Oliver, you shouldn’t have needed to. I’m his daughter.” “Right, his daughter who was being felt up by the kid next door,” Oliver smiled, breaking the tension in the room.

Felicity laughed a little deeper. “Did I ever tell you I was an asshole in my late teens and early twenties?” Oliver sarcastically asked. “It might have come up,” Felicity replied as she cocked her head to the side and playfully rolled her eyes. “I’m actually surprised your dad didn’t punch me right in the face.” “Oliver,” Felicity chuckled. “It’s true, if you were my daughter and I saw some guy with his hands up your dress…” his words trailed off as he clenched his fist.

“I know what you’re trying to say Oliver,” Felicity quipped as her fingers pranced along his knuckles, “but it doesn’t stop him being wrong. I’m old enough to graduate early, move out of home, go to college” she huffed, “he should have given me the respect to know I’m old enough to make decisions about my body too.”

“Do you remember the first time I kissed you,” Oliver studied the floor before he look up and caught Felicity’s slightly crinkled expression. How could she forget? ‘Sorry, I shouldn’t have done that.’ “I remember,” she replied softly as she rolled her lips over unsaid words.
“What I said afterwards was so wrong and stupid and, ugh,” Oliver lamented with just a hint of a laugh, “I wish I could take that back.”

Felicity nodded as she flashed him a small smile. “But my motives for it were right. I didn’t deserve to kiss you, not then, not like that,” he said softly shaking his head in agreement. “And you think this is the same?” Felicity asked, though a part of her already knew the answer. “Maybe what Noah said was wrong and it was probably a conversation that was better had with you,” Oliver started while his palm soothed down Felicity’s cheek, “but you know he meant well, that his motives weren’t bad.”

Felicity rolled her tongue around her cheeks. He was making a valid point, one she knew and had already told herself before, but – as always – it sounded different from the mouth of someone else.

“When did you get so smart?” Felicity jested as her hand slid up his leg. “It comes and goes,” Oliver laughed as he caught her hand and slipped his fingers between hers, “but you’re still the smarter one,” he added with a wink as he brought her hand to his lips and kissed it softly.

“I’ll think about what you said,” Felicity offered, the kiss against her hand softening her mood, “but can we talk about something else now?”

Oliver nodded as he chowed down another mouthful before taking a deep breath and slapping his hands against his legs. Now was as good a time as any.

“I have some news,” he said coyly. “Is it good news?” Felicity inquired, her eyes thinning. “I think so,” Oliver responded after he finished his last mouthful.

“So, make it better,” Felicity smiled, “tell me naked.” Oliver laughed as he picked up both plates and walked them towards the kitchen. “I’m serious, good news is made better when you’re naked,” Felicity continued as she padded along behind him carrying the glasses, “naked in the bath or the hammock,” she finished as Oliver’s empty arms slung around her waist.

“Or the bed, the couch,” she prattled. “So just naked really?” Oliver smiled as he ghosted the words in a kiss to her cheek. “You catch on fast Oliver.”

“How about I just tell you and if you think its good news, then we’ll get naked,” Oliver offered with a playful smirked as his hands rounded her ass. “I like that idea,” Felicity nodded before she tugged her lip inward and stroked a tongue across it as it flicked out, “and if it’s not good news then just you get naked and dance for me.”

“That’s a thing for you?” Oliver laughed, his eyes watching hers dance with delight at the idea. “If I say yes, will you do it?” Felicity smirked as her fingers walked down his chest. “Let’s save that discussion for another day,” he replied with a deliciously wicked grin as he took her hand and led her back towards the couch.

“Mmm,” she hummed, “okay, news first.” The two sat down, Oliver’s back against the arm of the chair with one leg draped to the floor and Felicity sitting cross-legged, tightly tucked against his thighs, a hand on his knee and her eyes locked on his.
“So as you know I’m hoping to finish out this year with a degree,” Oliver started before Felicity replied to with a nod and a gentle squeeze of his leg. She was proud of him.

“So I thought it was probably about time for me to grow up,” he continued, pausing to garner her response.
“‘I’m listening,’ she quipped through half a smile.

“It starts with me moving out of the frat house,” he nodded resolutely.

_That was the first step._

“Oh,” she replied, surprised but not shocked.

“It’s time you know?”
She nodded, she understood.

“So I’ve signed a lease on a little one-bedroom apartment not far from school. I was going to ask you to come look at places with me, but I wanted it to be a surprise.”

There was a hint of worry in his voice and Felicity wondered if it was due in part to not knowing how she would handle it and how, perhaps, Laurel would have handled it.

Her fingers skimmed the underside of his chin before she feathered a soft kiss across his parted lips. That kiss told him everything he needed to know.

_She didn’t mind._

_She was proud of him._

_She loved him._

“It’s not a fancy place and it’s just until graduation, because,” he paused for effect, “dad has offered me a job at QC.”

Felicity threw her arms around his neck and pressed her body against his chest.

“I’m so happy for you Oliver,” she smiled after she peppered his cheek with innocent kisses, “and proud.”

“I’m not sure you should feel that proud, I’m not sure I deserve it,” he laughed, “he’s my dad after all.”

“Oh-luh-ver,” she dragged out each syllable and Oliver nearly swallowed his tongue because of just how fucking _perfect_ it sounded, “you do deserve it and I’m very smart remember.”

She flicked his nose with her finger as she sat back into the chair.

“So next year I’ll move into the city to be a bit closer to work and maybe…” he paused, running a nervous hand through his lightly damp hair, “we could look at places together.”

Felicity must have worn a very apparent look of surprise on her face, because Oliver quickly annexed, “not together, like you have to move in with me, like just look at places with me.”

Oliver felt the words bubbling up his throat as his hands became desperately clammy. Felicity wasn’t saying anything, just smiling at him while she waited for him to stop speaking – _which wasn’t just yet._

“Though I wouldn’t say,” he paused unsure where he was heading with that sentence, “I just mean.”

He was so nervous and it suddenly felt like his throat was constricting and blocking his windpipe.

“Oliver,” Felicity purred as her hand sunk into the crook of his elbow.

He looked up and barely managed a “Mmm?”
“I would love to look at apartments with you,” she spoke as she leaned in closer, her fingers sinking deeper around his arm, “or if you wanted to, I’d love to move in with you next year.”

“You would?” Oliver swallowed the gravel in his throat.

“If you cook like you did tonight sure,” she laughed, “also yes because I love you, you big idiot,” she added as she grabbed a throw pillow from behind her back and gently whacked his arm with it.

Oliver stole the pillow with a devious smile before his fingers plunged into her waist and instantly found a spot that made her shriek hysterically.

The two fell backwards together, Oliver still delivering a barrage of tickles as Felicity pleaded through her laughter. Finding enough of a lull Felicity pushed her body upwards and caught Oliver’s lips with her own. His assault stopped immediately as his fingers then turned to smoothing delicate lines down her back before he lay her down gently.

“How about we get naked now?” Felicity asked after she nipped his bottom lip, dragging it out before letting it drop away, “I have an idea.”

Oliver smiled, her words and the alluring way she spoke them taking away his ability to speak.

Felicity wiggled free from underneath Oliver despite his soft growls of protest and padded over to an armoire beside the fireplace. She opened it and skimmed the shelves of old DVDs and board games until a double pack of playing cards took her fancy.

“Let’s play cards,” she spoke cheerfully as she sat on the opposite side of the coffee table, her back towards the warm fire.

“What game?” Oliver asked suspiciously before he slunk from the couch to sit across the table from Felicity.

“Snap,” she winked while she split the pack in two.

“Snap?”

“With a few house rules,” she smiled gingerly.

“What are?” Oliver asked as Felicity slid the half deck towards him.

“Play and you’ll see.”

Oliver smiled as he shrugged and turned over his first card laying it slowly on the table between them before he peeled his fingers away. Felicity laid a card on top, folding her lips into a playful frown when it didn’t match.

It took three more back and forth turns before Oliver placed a matching card on the top. Felicity coyly waited while Oliver suspiciously hovered his hand above the small pile.

“Snap,” he laughed as he brought his hand down. Felicity carefully laid her cards on the table and smiled knowingly as he pulled her arms inside her oversized knit sweater.

“What are you doing?” Oliver laughed as he watched the outline of her arms fumble behind the curtain of sweater.

Felicity said nothing as she continued twisting and shifting her arms until she threaded one back through the armhole and passed something underneath the hem before returning her second arm to its place.

She pulled out her black lace bra, suspending it above the table for a few seconds before she dropped it to the side of the cards.

“Strip snap,” she winked before her tongue dragged across her bottom lip wetting it so seductively Oliver found himself instinctively groaning.
He opened his mouth to say something but only a muffled breath came out as he watched Felicity place a fresh card on the table.

“Your turn,” she smiled wickedly drawing up the tips of her lips as her teeth pinched the middle.

The game followed slowly but without a match five more times until Felicity placed the Ace of hearts on top of the Ace of spades. She pulled her hand away dancing a single finger in the air waiting until Oliver snapped his hand in slow motion onto this pile too.

“I’m really very bad at this game,” Felicity frowned coquettishly as she stood up. Her fingers threaded out the button on her jeans before they peeled down the zip.

Oliver watched with his mouth gaped and his eyes widened as Felicity slowly dragged her jeans down her legs before she bent over and plucked them from her feet.

“Most people start with socks,” Oliver joked as his eyes roved unmistakably up and down her legs. “I guess I’m not most people Oliver,” she hushed as she dropped the discarded jeans on the table beside her bra.

She sat back down, relishing the look of absolute delight on Oliver’s face. He wasn’t even attempting to hide it. It was in the soft hood of his eyes, the charmed smirk painted on his lips and in the vivid way his thumb stroked long, slow lines down his chiselled jaw – Oliver was having very scandalously indecent thoughts.

And Felicity loved every minute of it.

Oliver lost the next round and languidly began to lift his shirt away from his body. When he was done he added it to the clothing pile while Felicity smacked her lips together.

He lost the next round too and when he stood up to remove his pants Felicity held up a finger halting him.

“New rule,” she whispered.

“What’s the new rule?” Oliver intoned.

“You can remove one item of your clothing,” she paused and Oliver nodded, “or you can remove one item of mine.”

“Fuck,” Oliver cursed through an exhale, Felicity was determined to utterly and thoroughly destroy him this weekend and he was absolutely, unequivocally ready for it.

He walked slowly around the coffee table, drinking in the way the amber whips of the fire burnt soft orange glows down Felicity’s naked legs. He stopped just in front of her, his lips eager to taste the soft dewy line her tongue had painted over her lower lip.

His fingers played with the hem of her sweater, stretching and tugging the weave apart as their eyes remained firmly entrenched in each other. He groaned softly when his knuckles skimmed against her upper thigh.

He lifted her sweater and Felicity raised her arms in tune with Oliver’s movements. It was knit, a comfortable woven wool, but as it passed through his fingers and up her body it felt like luxuriant silk.

Oliver didn’t know when he let it go but it was beside his feet when his eyes enveloped Felicity as she stood in front of him, motionless but for a smile.

The tight, thin tank top did little to mask her erect nipples as they budded under the taut fabric. The matching black panties drew a beautifully stark contrast against the soft cream of her skin and
Oliver contemplated just how much he would like to press his lips to her flesh, perhaps even marring it just a little with his abrasive stubble.

*But for* right now he had something else in mind.

He took her hand into his, linking their fingers before he walked her towards the bed, his head tipping back frequently to keep contact with her seductive eyes.

“It’s your turn,” she smiled while she nodded back to the cards on the table.

“I forfeit,” Oliver rasped as they reached the bed.

“So I win?” she chuckled as he guided her onto the bed before cuddling up beside her.

“Absolutely.”

“What do I win?”

Her fingers wove down the lines of his chest as she breathed out a contended sigh and ground her hips into his waist, peeping her delight at the unexpected pleasure that action caused.

“Do you remember what I promised to show you?” Oliver grinned as her trickled soft fingerprints across her upper thighs.

“Hmmmm,” she purred against him as her fingers fluttered across his jeans' closure.

Oliver stilled her fingers and threaded her arm around his shoulder before he flattered her second hand onto his chest while he angled his body into hers.

“I'm going to show you what fingers are capable of,” he spoke in a husky and provocative voice, “start to finish.”

His last words he matched with a stroke across her satin panties and Felicity didn’t hide the honeyed ribbon of gasps that fell from her lips.

Oliver skirted just the tip of his pinky finger under the waist of her panties eliciting even more fluid gasps which he captured in a rapacious kiss. When his name floated from her mouth into his, Oliver slide his whole hand under her panties, trapping his it between the soft thatch of her mound and the salaciously soft fabric.

Felicity rocked her hips into Oliver's hand, she could feel his fingers so deliciously close to her lips that she became aroused at the mere expectation of their touch. He was kissing her in sensual, willowy kisses down the inflamed threads of her neck. Every sense was heightened by him, every nerve aching for more, more touch, more kiss, more everything.

She was almost delirious and Oliver had yet to dip a finger between her legs so when he finally outstretched his middle finger and swept it between her folds Felicity almost completely fell apart in a whimpering mess.

“Does it feel good baby?” he asked between hot kisses dragged across her flushed cheeks. Felicity nodded, it was all she could manage.

Oliver pressed his finger deeper between her folds to coat it in her first wave of arousal before her drew it back, sweeping it upwards.

Felicity's eyes had almost closed and her nails were clapping at the tight cords of his stomach muscles when Oliver swooped across her desperately wound clit. She let out a fevered cry before Oliver gently kisses her quivering lip.

“Does it hurt?” Oliver asked softly while the pad of his finger drew tiny figure eights around her nub.
“No,” Felicity replied, her voice a breathy rasp she barely recognised. “Good,” she thought he whispered into her ear.

“The trick is build up,” Oliver schooled, his tone ebbs and flows of rasp and clear Felicity nodded as she struggled to listen through an addled mind, fogged with slow building pleasure.

“Build the desire,” he was whispering the words into her neck, misting the thin, tempered skin there with lingering kisses and the deliberately slow brush of his tongue. Felicity keened into it.

“Build the anticipation because so much of it is in here,” he disclosed, his voice so quiet Felicity had to strain to hear it as Oliver kissed her head, “not just here,” he added as he slipped a second finger into her dripping folds.

“Do you feel that Fe-li-city?” her name caressed his lips as it came out like a sigh. Oliver wiped two heavy strokes between her sex, dipping just the tip on one into the surface of her entrance. Felicity’s body writhed and bucked, instinctively seeking out more. A craving for it falling over her like a blanket.

“Mmmhmm” she trembled before her teeth sunk into her bottom lip turning it rose red.

She lost most of her cognizant reality when his finger dipped into her deeper. Her vocabulary fell away, replaced with heavy breaths and whimpered moans. Her eyes saw only hazed ribbons of orange tinted light as her eyes fluttered closed. Her lungs struggled to steady her ragged breathing. Her breasts ached with a desperation to be touched even as her fingers mirrored her lust skirting around Oliver’s nipple.

“What they want to be touched?” Oliver asked brushing his impossibly tortuous lips across just the tip of one tightly wound nipple. “Yes,” she sobbed. “Soon,” Oliver promised. She nodded, it was all she could conjure.

His teeth plucked her bottom lip from the trap of her own teeth, calming the red marks with the tip of his tongue while his fingers began a slow, rhythmic thrusting. Twisting and teasing her walls in a way his cock never could.

“Oliver please,” she pleaded, her entire body wracked with a empty hollow feeling. Oliver answered with his thumb twisting crop circles over her swollen clit. Felicity slipped her tongue between his lips, frantically kissing him.

The fingers inside her bent and stroked down her walls making Felicity tremble as they glossed over her g-spot deliriously slow.

Her body felt hot, scorching her from the inside out. She could feel her body trembling. Ever sense that had minutes ago being so heightened were now dulled, every bit of her focus now caught up in the swelling between her legs.

She felt his fingers slip in and out of her, driving up towards her clit before penetrating her again, over and over, his speed gathering. Faster.
He may have whispered something into her mouth but Felicity didn’t consciously know what. Everything was black. Every breath she took echoed through her head as though they weren’t hers.

Everything was centred low in her stomach.
Mounting.
Swelling.
Bubbling.

Her nails dented his skin.

*And then,* explosive, rattling, trembling.
Rush.
She can feel the heat fan down her thighs.

Her eyes slowly opened to see Oliver smiling at her, watching the colour flush across her face.

*Snap.*

*She won.*
Felicity groaned whimsically as she felt the warmth of Oliver’s body slip away from beside her. Her eyes were stilled glued shut as she reached blindly across the bed to restrain him before she buried her head into the familiar scent of his pillow while her arms instinctively wrapped around it, tugging it in close to her body.

She heard Oliver chuckle and she was eternally grateful this wasn’t the first time he had seen her in the morning. Oliver knew all too well she wasn’t exactly a morning person.

“How are you going?,” she sighed, yawning partway through, as her eyes slowly fluttered open, “come back to bed.” Her lips smacked softly together and Oliver contemplated bending over and wetting them with her
own lips as he threaded his legs through his briefs and pulled them snugly onto his body.

Even with her hair unkempt and her eyes a half-opened haze of blue, she looked perfect. This wasn’t the first time he’d woken up next to her, but this morning had been different. They were both naked. Her legs had entwined with his and her head was resting atop his chest, her warm breath fanning over him like an ethereal mist of contentment.

He had stayed like that long enough to watch the sunrise through the windows and if he was honest he didn’t feel like moving much either, especially when she woke and called him back to bed. But Oliver didn’t doubt that there would be other mornings just like this morning, other mornings where just the very tip of his fingers would skate lines across her naked back, other mornings where he would bury his nose into her hair and close his eyes just to breathe in every different scented note she gave him and other mornings where he would count her breaths in an effort to memorise each second they spent together.

They would have so many more mornings just like this one and he would gladly wait for them.

“There is a store about ten minutes away,” Oliver explained as he dressed, “I’m going to drive down and get some things for the day.”

Felicity groaned a little louder as she finally stirred from sleep and tugged the sheet up around her chest while she managed to sit half up on her elbow.

“You’re making me breakfast?” she asked coyly as she watched Oliver pull a tee over his head, her mind taking the tangent of reminiscing the path her fingers stroked down his chest mere hours ago and just how much they ached to rediscover it.

Oliver leaned over the bed and placed a lingered, but chaste kiss on the top of her slightly matted crown.

“Of course,” he replied as he pulled back.

Felicity laughed effervescently, the type of laugh that made Oliver’s heart swell.

“Why are you laughing at me?” he asked, feigning a hurt expression.

“This just doesn’t seem real,” she spoke, the laugh tapering off.

“Because?”

“You’re Oliver Queen.”

Oliver chuckled for the second time that morning as he watched her blue eyes float upwards while she shrugged her bare shoulders.

“I know,” he mocked playfully as he bent down, anchoring two fists onto the mattress before he kissed her cheek.

“And you’re making me breakfast and sharing a bed with me and,” she shifted up higher on the bed, tipping her chin upwards to capture his lips with hers, softly kissing him without a stitch of hesitancy, “…kissing me,” she finished her words, ghosting them across his parted lips, freshly wet with her kiss.

“I’m still not seeing the humour,” he spoke after a few seconds of silence to appreciate just how soft her lips felt against his.

“I just never saw this happening,” she admitted, “that the same kid who touched my things when he jumped the fence would…” Felicity paused, squeezing her eyes tightly as a laugh crept from her lips.

She didn’t mean it to sound like a euphemism for something else, but there was no denying that it did.

“That sounded ruder than I intended it to,” she cringed as she ducked her head under the sheet.

Oliver crawled back onto the bed, sitting over the top of her stretched out legs pinning them there.
as he wrestled the sheet from her grasp and pulled it down just enough to expose her charmingly-blushed face.

“I like touching your things Felicity,” he spoke with a cockeyed smile and a throaty rasp, “and jumping your fence.”

“So come back to bed then,” Felicity whispered before she snaked the tip of her tongue between her lips and snagged it with her teeth.

“We still have tonight and tomorrow for fence jumping,” he laughed as his fingers gently brushed back her hair, pinning it behind her ear.

God he loved looking at her.

“Today I thought we could go for a walk around the mountain,” Oliver added as his palm stayed warm against her cheek.

Felicity screwed up her face in jest.

“Come on, it’ll be fun,” Oliver exclaimed.

“I know something that will be more fun,” she smirked as she dropped her hold on the sheet entirely, letting it fall like a dropped curtain between them, exposing those perfectly pink nipples to Oliver’s famished gaze.

“You’re not playing fair,” he growled, the gravel growing thicker in his voice.

“Punish me then,” Felicity replied, a sensually-mischievous glint in her eye.

Fuck

“You know how I feel about these,” Oliver hummed while his fingers stroked over her pert nipples, watching raptly as they budded underneath his attentions.

They were still as perfectly pink as he remembered them from the morning he had so carelessly walked in on her in the bathroom. This was the first time seeing them without hindrance and in natural daylight and Oliver couldn’t tug his eyes away even if he wanted to – which of course he did not.

“The first time I saw these,” he sighed before he leaned over a kissed the crest of her breast, “I wanted to know just how soft they were.”

His lips dragged down towards her coiled nipple, now painted a rich red.

“When was that?” Felicity sighed as her head dropped back in his palm while his lips closed in around her sensitive nipple and his other hand massaged the opposite breast.

Oliver hummed his pleasure against the tight nub while the tip of his tongue figure skated over it before he let it drop softly from his lip’s grasp.

“That morning I walked in on you in the bathroom,” he admitted, watching as her lips parted into a surprised O and her brows pinched inward at his confession.

“You told me you never saw anything,” she remarked before her lips folded into a smirk.

“Felicity,” he hummed and she tipped her head to the side in response, “I lied.”

“Well then,” she smiled coyly, “I guess you’re the one that needs to be punished.”

Felicity shook the towel through her damp hair as she padded across the cabin floor. The smile she was wearing hadn’t faded for the last hour and honestly she wasn’t sure it ever would. Her body was still warmed with the remnants of his touch, both in the bed and what followed in the shower afterwards.

There was still a level of discomfort when they made love as her body stretched around him, but the way his eyes softened and his lips caressed her skin made sure the pleasure outweighed anything else.
The shower had been about something else, about discovering a comfort that was growing between them. She had never felt more vulnerable or exposed as she had in that moment with the warm water cascading down her body and spilling onto his; but she had also never felt so utterly safe.

Their fingers, hands, lips and eyes explored each other until not a single part remained untouched.

Oliver was with her, so completely.
She had no reason to ever doubt him.

Oliver had finally left about five minutes ago to get some food for the day and Felicity couldn’t help but miss him.

It was on her third circuit of the cabin that she stopped beside her bag on the chair and saw her phone peeking out from the side pocket. She plucked it out and bit the corner of her thumbnail as she ruminated over her next move.

She needed to make a call.
Felicity dialled the number she knew off by heart as she walked out the front door and pressed the phone to her ear.

“Hello?” the familiar voice simpered down the phone line.
Felicity took a slow, silent inhale.
“Hi dad.”
“Felicity,” Noah sighed and she could hear a sense of relief in his voice, “your mother isn’t here right now. She’s at Pilates or something.”
He spoke slowly, as though he was biding his time just to keep her on the phone a little longer.
“Actually, I wanted to talk to you.”

“I’m sorry,” both of them announced in almost perfect unison.
“I’m not sorry for calling you out on what you said dad,” Felicity continued.
“I know,” he lamented, “you shouldn’t be.”
“But I am sorry for letting it fester so long,” she paused to blow out a short breath, that didn’t seem so hard to say after all, “I don’t want to rehash it, but I know you didn’t have bad motives, so let’s just move on from this.”

Felicity took a steady intake of air when her sentence was finally finished. She knew the two of them could talk about this for hours, but in the end what was done was done and all she needed from now was his assurance that it wouldn’t be repeated.

“I would like that, a lot,” Noah agreed.
“Okay then,” Felicity remarked with a resolute nod of her head.
That was that.

“Felicity?”
“Yeah dad?”
“I’m so proud of you, of who you are, of what you’re capable of and,” he paused to consider his words, “I’m sorry that I ever had you doubting that.”
Felicity smiled down the phone and hoped he could sense it.
“Thank you.”
“It was never about you,” Noah reasoned.
“I know,” Felicity replied.
And she did, deep down Felicity knew his request to Oliver was never about her and while that knowledge didn’t negate the way she felt, it did mitigate it.
And it was time to move on.
“I love you Felicity,” Noah said sincerely. 
“I love you too dad,” she assured with a smile, “we’ll talk later okay?”

After a short goodbye Felicity strolled back inside, kicking her feet lazily as she watched the clock and wondered how much longer Oliver might be.

She was incorrigibly happy. 
Unmistakably.
Deliriously. 
Completely.
There wasn’t a thing in this world that could wipe the smile from her face regardless of how foolish she felt permanently wearing it.

Not a thing.

Felicity dropped her phone in her bag, knocking the side of it open enough to see the corner of a white envelope she had completely forgotten she had shoved in there before their trip to the cabin.

She pulled the four, almost identical, envelopes from her bag and tore open the first; a bank statement. It wasn’t as bad as she thought it might. She tossed it aside with a shrug.

The second was an inconsequential advertisement for a new credit card dressed up to be something other than unsolicited junk mail. She tore that one up and walked it to the trash can.

The third was postmarked international and the stamps carried the bust of Queen Elizabeth, the first time she had skimmed the front of it she hadn’t noticed the return address in the top left hand side of the envelope.

But there, standing beside the trash can with it firmly in her grip and her eyes focused down on it, she definitely saw it now.

**Oxford University.**

She turned it over with an ominous soundtrack playing in her mind. 
*It was far too small to be anything other than a ‘Sorry, but Thanks’ letter.*

She shouldn’t be surprised and she would need to temper her disappointment.

She lifted the letter from the envelope and took a steadying breath before she blinked down and began reading;

*Dear Miss Smoak,*

*We are pleased….*

Felicity read the letter three times. The words never changed.
She had been accepted into Oxford for the semester starting in September. 
*Less than two months away.*

They apologised for the delay in writing to her and that the necessary paperwork would follow once she confirmed her attendance.

Felicity swallowed the overwhelming sense of foreboding as she gently slipped the letter back into the envelope and pushed down on the seal, hoping in some way that doing so would buy her a few
more hours of never knowing this letter existed.

But it didn’t.
It was still there.
*How was she going to tell Oliver?*

She knew how the conversation would go. She would tug on the sleeves of her sweater, twisting it around her thumb as she nervously told him. He would ask when she applied and she would struggle to tell him it had been *months* ago.

And then Oliver would stand up, pace a small circle nodding his head during a silent conversation with himself before he sat down again, scooped her hand into his and told her to go.
*He would tell her to go.*

Felicity sucked back the vision as she clutched the letter to her chest.
Tears welled up inside, threatening to breach the corners of her shell-shocked eyes.

There was a brief, flickering moment where she allowed herself to imagine Oliver coming with her, *but how could he?* He graduated this year, he had pushed himself so hard to achieve that. He had a job lined up.

Oliver finally saw in himself what Felicity had seen all along and he couldn’t, and shouldn’t, uproot that for her.

*He would make her go.*  
*She didn’t want to.*

She heard the distinctive sound of gravel being crushed under tires before she saw Oliver ease his car to a stop a short walk from the open front door. Without forethought she ran to her bag and buried the envelope along with the unopened AT&T letter into her bag before zipping it closed.

*For now it would wait.*

Oliver walked through the door carrying a paper bag tucked into in each arm before he kicked off his shoes and pushed them to the side.

Felicity looked up and him, almost startled as he watched her step away from the chair with her arms folded over each other. Oliver couldn’t be certain but it almost looked as though she was on the brink of tears.
“Is everything okay?” he asked as he set the bags down on the kitchen island.

Felicity took a moment to repress the nausea that was building inside her. She knew she had to tell him but as soon as she did she knew that stunning smile Oliver wore with such clarity and openness would be wiped from his face.

*Because he would tell her to go.*

“Yeah,” she forced a smile as she nodded twice, “I was just talking to dad.”
“And?” Oliver inquired, the worry clearly scribbled in his expression.
“And we’re good,” her smile relaxed into a more natural one as she watched him cross the small distance between them.
She would enjoy what was left of this weekend, the rest could wait.

Oliver leaned in and brushed a gentle kiss against her cheek before sealing it with the smiled word, “good.”
He pulled back and watched Felicity’s eyes as they fluttered softly, black lashes fanning down against milky skin. She was thinking about something, about something her lips stayed silent over. “Are you sure you’re okay?” he asked a second time as his fingers stroked through her damp hair. Felicity turned to look at him with blue eyes that carried weights around them. Her lips parted before she bit the inside of her lip, closing it before it gave anything away.

“Yes,” she nodded believably before she pecked his lips with a smiled kiss, “so, what’s to eat?”

Breakfast of eggs and Turkey bacon had taken a ridiculously long period of time to finish, due in part to the dispersed bouts of unrestrained ‘making out’ they equally initiated and were willing participants in – against the fridge, perched on the edge of the kitchen island and after a playful dishwater suds verses kitchen towel fight.

It was nearing mid afternoon when the two, finally, walked hand and hand along one of the tracks that ran around the mountain, gradually winding up to the summit at the top. They had been walking for about thirty minutes at a leisurely pace when they reached one of the lower summit platforms jutted out to overlook the sweeping forest down the valley.

Oliver led a subdued Felicity to the balcony and watched as she wordlessly took in the great expanse below them. He could tell there was something caught in that beautiful mind of hers, because as much as she could easily read his expression Oliver had come to learn hers also.

“You’re being awfully quiet,” he offered with a gentle squeeze of her hand.

“Sorry,” she apologised with a subtle shake of her head, “just thinking.”

“What about?”

Oliver watched as Felicity's lips folded over the answer and he realised he had seen that look at least once before when they were children walking home from school. It had taken a solid ten minutes of him pestering her until she finally spilled the cause of her furrowed brow and pensive lip chewing. There had been an older boy at school who had taken exception to Felicity starting High School early and he had spent the last month relentlessly tormenting her.

When Oliver had asked her why she hadn’t told him sooner she had shrugged her narrow shoulders before her saucer eyes painted vivid blue looked up at him and she said something Oliver, to this day, remembered.

“I knew what you would do and Oliver,” she had clutched his arm, “I don't want you to do something silly. He's not worth it.”

Felicity had kept the bullying quiet because she knew precisely how Oliver would react. He had sworn he wouldn’t, a promise he felt validated in not keeping when he pinned the fifteen year old to a locker the next day and warned him that if he so much as looked at Felicity funny he’d get a matching pair of black eyes.

The look Felicity was wearing now was almost an exact replica. Whatever held her attention Oliver was almost certain it involved him.

“Are you sure you and your dad are okay?” Oliver asked, watching as her tongue pushed out her lip before her teeth dragged it in again.

“Yes, it’s fine,” she mustered up an authentic smile before she gave his hand a reassuring squeeze.

He was about to ask a question not too different from the last when Felicity turned to stare at him with eyes he would never forget and a brow that was undoubtedly furrowed.
“Would you ever leave Starling?” Felicity asked hesitantly as she sunk her hands into her cut off pockets and rocked absently heel to toe in her sneakers.

“Permanently?” Oliver clarified.

“Yeah,” she spoke with a light shrug, “if the opportunity arose?”

“I’m not sure, I’ve never really thought about it,” Oliver considered. He studied the crisp, usually telling blue of her eyes but they gave him nothing more.

“I don’t think Thea would let me,” he joked with a crooked smile, “she had me up the other day about how much college had kept me away from them, that was until you.”

His last two words were echoed in the trickle of his fingers down her bare arm as the white clouds above them were replaced with ones tinged ominous grey.

“Me?” Felicity blushed under his attention.

“You brought me back Felicity,” he admitted, drawing her name out like a whispered prayer, “I mean I wanted to before then, I really did but it just felt like a dark tunnel that I couldn’t make sense of how to come out of until you gave me a chance. You shined your light and you gave me a chance,” he paused with a depreciating sigh, “something I probably didn’t deserve.”

“Oliver, don’t say that,” she ordered with a tiny, almost imperceptible stamp of her foot. “But it’s true, you’ve always seen better in me than I deserve Felicity.”

He would make her go.

Because if the tables were turned, she would make him go.

She pushed down Oxford and everything that came with it. Not forever, but just to bask in his smile a little while longer.

“So why are we talking about leaving?” Oliver probed.

“No reason,” it would wait, “I just thought maybe we could go away together again,” her arms threaded around his neck, fingers wrapping around shorts of hair, “a little further abroad.”

“Bali?” Oliver contributed.

“Morocco,” Felicity peeped before smacking her lips with a playful pop against his cheek. “Alright, let’s do it,” Oliver announced soon after the word left Felicity’s mouth. “Just like that?”

“Just like that.”

A single raindrop fell on her nose and dipped to the left before Oliver brushed it away. They both looked skyward to see the ash-grey clouds closing in.

“Should we head back?” Oliver asked as a group of walkers felt the same rain-infused air changed and scurried down the path.

Felicity nodded as she felt a chill spread down her arms, her tie dye top now a poor choice of attire. She followed Oliver back to the path, her mind entrenched in the promise of Morocco with Oliver so much so that she didn’t notice the uneven ground just before the paved track.

She didn’t fall, her body at least staying upright as her ankle twisted and rolled and she blew out a painful yelp. Oliver spun around and caught her elbow with remarkable accuracy.

“Are you okay?” Oliver asked, his eyes jumping around her to check for any sign she wasn’t. “I’m fine, I think I just rolled my ankle,” she grimaced as she lowered the offending foot to the ground. Oliver kept hold of her as they took two short steps forward before Felicity yelped again and jerked her foot back into the air.

Oliver gently released her elbow before he positioned himself in front of her and crouched a few
“Come on,” he insisted as his hand tapped the curve of his shoulder. “What?” she laughed. “I’ll carry you back to the cabin.” “Oliver, nooo,” Felicity snorted. “Hey, at least this time you’re not drunk,” Oliver said with a wink.

With his help Felicity clambered onto Oliver’s back and he straightened with not so much as a heavy exhale. She didn’t believe she was as weightless as Oliver's eased expression was leading her to think, but she gave him a lingered kiss to his neck in thanks for his gallantry all the same.

They only made it five minutes down the path before the heavens opened up and raindrops the size of dimes battered them.

By the time they reached the cabin their clothes were soaked through and their skin was slick with torrents of water. Oliver set Felicity down gently on the front porch before he turned to face her and they both broke out into fits of laughter at just how drowned they looked.

Felicity shivered in her soaked singlet and squelching shorts as Oliver shook himself like a dog after a bath. “I don’t think we should track all this water inside,” Oliver remarked as he slipped off his trainers now covered in mud kicked up from the last stretch of the track that led them back to the cabin. “You’re probably right,” Felicity replied while her teeth absently chattered before she peeled down the zip of her shorts and shimmied out of them.

Oliver caught himself staring but as he started to lambast himself for the same he saw the coy smile Felicity was throwing his way. She wanted him to watch.

He mimicked her actions as he stripped off his tee shirt and dropped it with a splosh to the wooden decking. Felicity kicked off her shorts to land not far from his shirt. Oliver didn’t restrain the smile that floated across his lips as he stared salaciously at her glistening legs, weaving all the way from her silken calves up to her smooth upper thighs, framed by red lace panties.

He could feel his cock straining behind the weave of his briefs and the heavy wet fabric of his shorts. It was throbbing for release and the teasing glint in her eye said she wanted the same thing.

He yanked down his shorts and Felicity laughed at the completely unabashed nature of it before she slowly lifted her singlet from her body and chucked it at Oliver's feet.

They both stood anchored in place, Felicity admiring the way his muscles, strained from the long walk back carrying her, twitched to themselves and set tiny droplets down the crevices of his chest and stomach. His hair looked hazy with a film of water that hadn’t managed to penetrate to the roots yet and his face was wet with a mix of perspiration and rain and honestly she wouldn’t mind weaving her tongue through it.

Oliver too was harbouring similar thoughts as he watched water pool in the dip of her collarbone before spilling over the edge and making tiny, taunting paths down her heaving chest before disappearing behind a curtain of red – the matching bra of her delicious lingerie.

Neither of them considered just how odd they would look staring at each other half naked on a porch in the late afternoon as the rain pelted down only a few feet away. They didn’t care.
It was only when a gust of wind stole them from their own delirious thoughts did they finally scamper inside, Oliver kicking the door closed behind them.

He headed to the fireplace first, sparking it up before stepping back to admired the gas-ignited flames as they began to grow up the sides.

His eyes lulled closed when Felicity pressed her damp chest to his back while her fingers drew patterns across his shoulders. He turned slowly and was met with her lips when he finally faced her.

She kissed him hard and deep and long, her tongue swelling against his lips before he parted them to let her inside. Oliver hummed from low in his chest as he let her tongue swarm and explore every corner of his mouth.

It was sexual, undeniably so, but much more than that it was comforting, natural and real. This wasn’t falling in love anymore. It was in love.

He loved her. Knowing that didn’t scare him. Rather, it gave him peace. He was happy.

Her lips broke from his before scattering slow, languid kissing across his cheek. Oliver didn’t move, he didn’t dare, in case it shifted her warm lips from his aching skin. Her breath was warm against his neck as Felicity slowly worked her lips down before her teeth lightly grazed the fine cords that hung between his neck and shoulder.

He didn’t mean to, but he couldn’t have stopped it if he tried – that low, guttural growl that bubble from the pit of his stomach and out through his barely parted lips. She was tempting, teasing, toying with him and he, for his part, was enjoying every, single second.

“Are you okay?” Felicity laughed into his shoulder as her nails raked lines down his back. “I’m sorry,” he mumbled, stifling a second growl before it had time to pass between his lips. “Don’t be,” Felicity whispered as she hopped three, closed-lip kisses across the length of his shoulder before she dragged her tongue back towards his neck and up to his ear, “I like it,” she finished, sealing the sensual words with a kiss at the seam of his ear.

Felicity was keen to see what other noises she would elicit from Oliver when the sound of her phone ringing echoed through the silence. She shook her head softly as she felt Oliver’s chest shake with a light chuckle.

It was like they were secret dating again and something always inevitably interrupted them. “I’m ignoring it,” she smiled as her fingers continued to streak down his back, “you should to.” It stopped shortly after only to ring again a few seconds later. “Ignore. It,” Felicity sighed before Oliver had a chance to speak. “It could be important,” Oliver said as he sunk his palms into the curve of Felicity’s shoulders and gently eased her back. “It could also not be important at all,” she replied with a laugh. “Go and answer it.” “Nope.” She shook her head as she smiled in playful disobedience. “I will then,” Oliver laughed as he moved towards her bag.

Felicity braced her body against his, knowing full well he was only letting her have a fighting chance of holding him there.
The phone stopped ringing and Felicity slapped her hands together jovially. “See, not important,” she smirked. No sooner had she said the words then the phone rung again.

She squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head, damp hair flinging water drops against Oliver’s naked chest before she huffed out a sigh and tramped over to her bag.

“Hello?” she answered as she raised an annoyed brow at Oliver. She could barely hear anything other than static and broken words but when she looked at the display it was her mom calling.

“Mom? I can’t hear you very well,” she adopted a slow and careful speech. No clear words came back, but she heard the broken sound of her name and the definite panic in her mother’s voice. “I’ll call you back in a second,” Felicity replied, hoping the words made it back to her mom before she cut the call.

“Everything alright?” Oliver asked as he watched Felicity stare wordlessly at her phone. There was something about her mother’s voice, albeit cracked and echoing, that didn’t sound right.

“I’m sure it is, she probably just lost a shoe or something,” Felicity lifted the corner of her lips into a tempered smile. “I’m going to get dressed and call her back,” she added as she tapped the phone against her palm. She couldn’t fight the feeling that the call was due to something more than just a shoe.

“Okay,” Oliver smiled, nodding his head in agreement, “I’ll start dinner. Maybe call her from the car.” Felicity smiled thankfully at the suggestion before she threw on a pair of track pants and a sweater. The back of her bra was still damp as was her skin, but she figured they would rectifying that once she got back.

Felicity ran quickly to car through the pelting rain and practically fell into the driver’s seat before she stopped to catch her breath. She shook off the fresh rain from her head and pulled the phone out from the inside of her sleeve.

She pressed redial and waited. It only rang the once.

“Felicity?” Donna’s voice quaked. “Yeah mom, it’s me, is everything okay?”

Oliver looked out the kitchen window, smiling as he watched Felicity fall into the car and take a few moments to compose herself before she put the phone to her ear.

He couldn’t see much more than silhouettes so he figured he wouldn’t watch for long. Even in silhouette form Felicity made him think of future moments with her. Lazy Sundays spent lying in bed, draped over him with her laptop perched on a pillow as she chatted away to herself and he watched on, simply engrossed at just how fortunate he was that she gave him a chance.

He could see himself opening his closet and seeing her clothes squashed in next to his in the cupboard that was far too small for the both of them if they were honest.

He wanted to build a life with Felicity.
His eyes widened when she stepped out of the car only a few minutes after she had fallen into it. Her arms were set down at her side rather than making a shield over her face like she had when she ran out there; and, most telling of all, Felicity wasn’t moving.

Oliver threw on a coat hung beside the door and yanked the front door open just in time to see Felicity slink down into a puddle beside the front wheel.

He ran out into the rain, skidding through the gravel before he sunk down beside her. “Felicity, what’s wrong?” he pleaded with his hand pressed to her sodden cheek.

She looked up at him, tears mixing with rain down her pale cheeks. Her lips were shivering and her eyes were dull and laden with anguish. “It’s Chris,” she whispered.
“What’s wrong, what happened?” Oliver asked as the rain soaked the two of them. Felicity looked up, wordless, the rain still bleeding with tears in winding tracks down her cheeks.

“Felicity, there’s been an accident. The plane Chris was in…”

She had heard her mother’s words the first time like an echo and now they were repeating in her head like scratching nails down a chalkboard in a room she couldn’t escape from.

Felicity couldn’t recall the words that followed or the moment she stepped out of the car. Everything between that moment and this was a blur. A haze of echoed voices and cold, biting rain.

There’s been an accident.
The plane.
Crashed.
Is he dead? No.
But it’s not looking good.

There’s been an accident.
It’s not looking good.

The rain had stopped and Felicity found herself inside the cabin with a soft white towel wrapped around her shoulders as she sat in an armchair in front of the fire. She wasn’t exactly sure how she
got there but as Oliver crouched in front of her, his palms on her sodden knees, it was pretty clear he’d guided her even though she couldn’t recount the journey.

“There was an accident during a training flight,” Felicity whispered, finally finding enough voice to answer the question he had asked a time jump ago. “Is he alright?” Oliver asked, the concern apparent in each of the three words he spoke and the gently squeeze of his fingers around her knee.

“I don’t know,” she paused to consider her words as she struggled not only to form them but to make sense of them as she heard them, “they don’t know what kind of shape he’s in, they’re flying him into Starling now.”

Oliver didn’t say a word as he stayed anchored there, crouched in front of her, waiting as her beautiful mind processed through the information she had to hand.

“His parents rung mom and dad to see if they would go meet the medevac at the hospital while they try to get a flight up, in case…” Felicity dropped her head into her hands and let the tears burn the corner of her eyes, she couldn’t finish the words, in case he doesn’t make it, he shouldn’t be alone.

“I’m going to lose him,” she whispered, dreading the words as she spoke them. Oliver pressed his chest against her legs and wrapped his arms as much around her hunched back as he could. Her svelte body shivered beneath his touch before he released her.

“Chris is strong,” he whispered as he brushed back the hair that had fallen onto her face. Felicity nodded slowly with her bottom lip snagged between her teeth and her brow pinched inward.

“So you know he’s going to fight,” Oliver continued as his thumb stroked a tear from her cheek. Felicity nodded a second time, words stuck with tears in the back of her throat. She had to believe that was right.

“His parents are in Vegas right?” Oliver asked as he maintained eye contact with her, the blue of his eyes like a calm sea to float in. Felicity replied with yet another nod.

“Do you have their number?”

“I think so,” Felicity answered, her mind was so foggy she would have answered the same way if Oliver had asked her if her name was Felicity.

“Let me make a call, okay?”

She smiled a troubled smile. It was the best she could offer.

Oliver stepped away watching as she sat back into the chair shell-shocked and trembling probably without even knowing it. Chris was like her brother, Oliver knew that now, and he could only imagine how wrecked he would be if presented with the same news about Thea.

He walked across the cabin and out the front door with the hope that he could get enough cell service from the porch to make the call and keep an eye on Felicity through the partially opened door.

He dialled his father’s number and pressed the phone to his ear as he waited for the call to connect. “Oliver?” his father answered, the sound of slot machines spilling down the phone line. Perhaps it was fortuitous, although not the circumstances, that his parents had flown to Vegas that weekend on Queen Consolidated’s private jet. “Hi dad, I need a favour,” Oliver began.
Oliver returned to Felicity’s side about ten minutes later with her phone in his hand, though she couldn’t remember where she had even left it.

“Ring Chris’ parents and tell them there is a private jet waiting for them at the airport and it’s ready to leave the minute they’re ready. A town car will be waiting at the airport to pick them up and take them to the hospital,” Oliver explained with a calming and gentle voice that instantly eased Felicity racing heart.

“I don’t understand how,” Felicity breathed, as she tried to fit together what Oliver was telling her. “My parents are there this weekend and they want Chris’ parents to take the plane to Starling.”

It had taken very little more than Oliver simply asking for his dad to agree to it. Oliver had spent the next few minutes on the phone to the car service QC use to arrange a car to be waiting at the other end for them.

“Are you sure?”

Oliver leaned in and placed a brief kiss onto the top of her head, “of course.”

Felicity had made the call on the porch, closing the door behind her. Oliver sporadically checked on her through the windows as he set about packing their things.

It was about twenty minutes later when Felicity walked back through the door. Her face was pale and drained, but the tears had finally subsided, though they had left her eyes puffy and red.

“They went right away, I spoke with her in the cab ride to the airport, she said to say thank you,” Felicity commented, her voice shallow and stretched.

She still had a faint hope that she would wake up from this in Oliver's strong and naked arms and it would have been nothing more than a horrible dream.

“Any news on Chris?” Oliver asked as he zipped up his suitcase.

“He’s alive but in really bad shape, she didn’t know much more than that. Some sort of engine failure, the plane got to the end of the carrier runway and just didn’t take off. The plane hit the water with so much speed that it broke apart instantly. The other guy in the plane didn’t make it,” Felicity sniffed back new tears as she thought about the call his family would have received.

Oliver wasn’t sure what to say, or even if words would help, so he embraced her instead, holding Felicity tight against his chest with one arm braced across her back and the other hand combed through her hair, just wishing he could somehow make her not hurt as much as she was.

“You’ve packed?” she noted with a strained voice as her eyes roamed the room with her ear to his chest counting the heartbeats.

“I left your suitcase open in case you wanted to change and I’ll put it in the car soon,” Oliver remarked as he rocked her gently in his arms.

Felicity didn’t thank him with words, but when her hands dug in a little bit tighter into his back he heard it loud and clear.

Thank you.

“Thank you,” Felicity spoke as the car sped down the open road, already an hour into their journey, night well and truly settled now.

“About?” Oliver asked quietly.

“You had this weekend planned and I know we still had tonight and tomorrow,” she sighed, “I’m just sorry.”
Oliver reached a hand across the centre and lowered it lightly onto her leg before stroking his thumb across the dark denim of her jeans.
“There will be other weekends,” he consoled gently.

Felicity looked down at Oliver’s hand resting on her leg, it was a sight that she would never tire of seeing, though her body felt almost too exhausted to even feel it.
“I don’t know what I’ll do if he… if I…” she couldn’t finish the sentence for fear speaking the words might make them come true.
“He’s strong Felicity,” Oliver urged as his fingers curved around her leg, “he would want you to remember that.”

Felicity nodded as she lay her head against the cool glass, it felt strangely refreshing against the heat of her cheek, still burnt with spent tears.

Honestly, she wasn’t sure when she fell asleep, but her eyes must have just become too heavy and sodden to keep them open a moment longer. She woke sometime later to Oliver’s gently telling her they were there.

Felicity looked up at the hospital, frozen in fear at the idea that if she walked through those doors reality would cave in around her and she might walk out some time later trapped in a world where her best friend was gone.

But, she couldn’t sit in the car and pretend like it was yesterday and none of this was real either. No, she had to face whatever outcome was through those automatic glass doors.

Felicity found both her parents and Chris’ in a secluded corner of the waiting room. His father was pacing and her father standing silently nearby should he need to talk. The women were sat only a few seats away.

It was Chris’ mom that saw Felicity first and she wasted only a second before she rushed over to embrace her.

Felicity choked as she felt the reality starting to bend and shake around her

Did this embrace mean Chris had left this world? Or was it one of extreme relief that he was okay? She didn’t want to ask because she wasn’t prepared for the first to be the reality.

“He’s in surgery now,” his mom explained, answering the question Felicity needed to ask but couldn’t.

She barely took in the rest, but her mind filtered through words. Hurt. Crash. Hope. Strong. Know soon.

Felicity spent the next hour huddled into Oliver's shoulder wondering if these feelings of hopelessness and helplessness would ever pass and when the a doctor stepped through the doors and made a direct path towards them Felicity didn’t know what to think.

“The surgery went well and he’ll be moved to a ward soon.”
He may have said more, but that was all Felicity heard, all she needed to hear. His mother cried as happily as she could into an embrace with Chris’ father. It was not much information to work with, but it was enough. It was enough to see hope.

It was not long after that Felicity’s parents excused themselves with the promise of returning first thing in the morning after Chris’ parents insisted they leave, promising to call with any news.

“Do you want me to drive you home?” Oliver asked as Felicity walked back to where he hovered, slightly back from the moment that felt too personal for him to be in the midst of.

“No,” Felicity smiled sadly, but thankful for the thought, “I think I’m going to stay with his mom at least until he’s moved. I’ll come back in the morning so let me know if you want me to bring anything, okay?” Oliver smiled, masking the helplessness he felt and that he couldn’t cradle her tonight in hopes it would help.

“Thank you,” she offered honestly before lightly pecking the corner crease of his lip. “For?” “For understanding,” she sighed as her fingers trickled down his arm, “and for this weekend,” she added quietly, holding on to just a moment of how wonderful it had been up until that phone call.

He wanted to ask her questions, perhaps revisit the moment he felt there was something just beneath her surface that she was holding back from him and ask her again if she was okay with them. But now wasn’t the time and all of that would wait for now.

It was just less than an hour after both her parents and Oliver had left when the doctor remerged from behind the sterile white doors.

He offered them a soft smile. 
_That had to be a good sign, didn’t it?_

Chris’ mother clung to Felicity’s hand as his father stood back, overcome with a grief he seemed too afraid to show. He was the typical man afraid to appear weak, but struggling all the same.

“How is he?” his father asked, he knew it was his job to ask the question that his wife feared to. The doctor gestured them to have a seat and dutifully the three of them did.

“There was a lot of internal bleeding, likely due to the impact and his broken ribs,” the doctor began, his voice was a practiced calm that was as reassuring as it was heart breaking.

A part of Felicity didn’t want to hear any more, she wanted to bury her head in the sand and hide from whatever else the doctor had to say, but as Chris’ mother’s hand grew tighter around her own she knew that was a luxury none of them had.

“We do believe that we have been able to repair and stop the majority of it. Your son is very strong Mr and Mrs Chance.” He sounded like Oliver.

“He is stable and all going well we believe those injuries will heal well,”

But… Felicity could hear one coming.

“Unfortunately…” That was a more refined ‘but’ but a ‘but’ all the same.
“Chris has sustained a substantial spinal injury to the lower lumbar area. We can’t know the full extent of the damage until the swelling goes down,” he paused, almost expertly to slowly let this information sink in, “unfortunately there doesn’t seem to be any response in his legs.”

“Which means?” his mother asked.

Felicity already knew before the doctor answered.

“It means that there is a chance your son won’t walk again.”

There is was.

[2:09am]

Felicity couldn’t sleep. The halls all looked the same and her shoes made a squeaked echo down the corridor as she walked, but it was better than sitting in Chris’ room listening to the hauntingly repetitive sounds of the machines surrounding Chris’ eerily still body.

The letter in her bag weighed heavy on her thoughts. Oxford had been a dream for years but now it toyed with her like an unwinnable trial.

She found a secluded row of chairs and sunk down into them with a heavy sigh. She found the letter, opened it and held it out like it was an omen for the last 48 hours. So good to so bad. Logically she knew it was nothing more than black letters on white paper but it was also so much more.

It was change.
But between being so completely in love with Oliver and Chris’ life balancing on a figurative cliff edge, Felicity didn’t want anything more to change for fear one of those two would topple under the strain.

She pulled her phone from her pocket, took a slow and steadied breath and made a choice. She dialled the number under Dean Simmons’ signature and pressed the phone to her ear.

London was 8 hours ahead, maybe he wouldn’t be there and she could just leave a message.

The sound of her own breathing was all she heard in the silence as she waited for the call to connect.
Breathe in.
Breathe out.
This was the right choice.

“Dean Simmons speaking,” a thick English accent cheered down the phone.
Felicity swallowed, so much for just leaving a message.
“Good morning Dean, my name is Felicity Smoak, I don’t expect you to know who I am,” she started as she tried to steady the quiver that was beginning to shape around her words.
“Ms Smoak, I know exactly who you are and can I just say I am looking forward to having such a sharp mind to teach,” he calmly spoke, instinctively slower to make allowances for his thick accent.

He knew her. Great.
“I’m very flattered, thank you,” she spoke quietly, in almost a timid voice she didn’t recognise.
“I sense a but.”
Felicity steadied her voice.
This was the right decision.
“With Oliver.
With Chris.
Status Quo.

“Unfortunately I won’t be attending Oxford this coming semester,” she exhaled the breath she had been keep in the back of her throat.

There was a pause. A long one that made Felicity wonder if the line had been dropped or if she needed to repeat herself. Until, finally, the Dean let out an audible sigh.
“I am frightfully disappointed to hear that Ms Smoak, I must say you were one of our brightest applicants,” he sighed, the disappointment unveiled in his tone.

Felicity dropped her head into her palm and snaked her left shoe across the lines of the polished floor.

*It was the right decision.*

“May I ask why?”

No.
To say her reasons out loud might make her doubt them.

“Again, thank you, I truly appreciate the offer, but my circumstances have changed since I applied earlier this year and I just feel that my place is in Starling right now.”

That was diplomatic enough – and she almost believed it herself.

“Can I be frank?”

Felicity didn’t think her answer to this question mattered all that much.

“Starling Institute of Technology is a fine school. One of the top fifty worldwide, but Ms Smoak,” he paused and she knew what was coming, “Oxford is one of the top five.”

A fact she knew.

“If this is due to financial changes I can assure you a student of your calibre would undoubtedly be offered a scholarship should you apply for one.”

“No,” Felicity answered softly, “it’s not monetary.”

*It was the right decision.*

If she kept telling herself that, she just might believe it.

“And I’m so sorry to mess you around like this Dean. Please know that when I applied, I applied with the hope that I would be accepted, but my circumstances have changed over the last few months.”

Her resolve was wavering, but she was young and scared and unprepared to lose what she had only just gained. Felicity was in love and Oliver would tell her to go.

“Thank you for the opportunity,” she couldn’t say that enough, “I’m sure that another student will be glad for my change of heart.”

“I hand pick my students because I want only the best. Your seat will remain unfilled Ms Smoak.”

Felicity wanted the floor to swallow her up as she tried to force down the lump in her throat.

*It was the right decision.*

There was another few thank yous and apologies from Felicity before they said goodbye and she hung up the phone with a sinking feeling deep in the pit of her stomach as she brushed a hand through her hair.

*It was the right decision.*
Felicity was staying in Starling.

*Status Quo.*
One Week Later

The last week had tested her.
Oxford felt like a noose around her neck – or rather the fact she had still not told Oliver about it.
She never intended to keep it secret but Felicity needed a few days to lapse so that when she told
Oliver about turning it down, he might actually believe that was what she wanted.

Because it was.
Wasn’t it?

She ran an exacerbated hand through her hair.
It was.

Chris’ health had deteriorated shortly after Felicity had finished the call to Dean Simmons. His
spleen had perforated, an injury that had not been apparent the first time they opened him up. But
his strength had seen him fight back against the odds and a few days after that surgery he had
woken up, confused and sore – but alive; and in the end that was all that mattered.

His face was battered and bruised and his arm was broken along with his ribs, but he was coherent
and alert and despite the enormity of the accident, Chris was okay. There was also a glimmer of
hope that once the swelling had gone down and with intense physical therapy, he could regain
some movement. Only time at this stage would tell.

He took the news of his paralysis as Felicity expected him to – quietly listening, offering
thoughtful nods where the doctor paused to see if he understood, then cracking a joke about great
parking spaces at the end of it all. That was his reflective nature and she was familiar with it.

Oliver was back at school and had moved into his new apartment. Felicity hadn’t yet managed to
visit there, seeing it only the photos he showed her. Chris’ parents weren’t exactly coping all that
well so Felicity had stayed in a hotel with them across the road and they had taken turns keeping
Chris company.

Felicity didn’t need the summer semester grades and had decided her time was better spent at the
hospital.

This particular morning, shortly after breakfast, Felicity and Chris were watching mindless
morning talk shows, neither paying much attention as they sat in a comfortable but wordless slump.

It was a soft knock on the door that finally broke them from the silent trance before Oliver
appeared in the room with a coffee for Felicity and a few magazines tucked under his arm for
Chris.

Felicity practically pounced on the coffee as Oliver handed it over before he placed the two
sporting magazines and a single car one on the bed beside Chris.
“Sorry Chris they don’t sell Playboy downstairs,” Oliver joked as he waved his phone in the air
showing the text message he had received from Chris that morning.
Felicity needs coffee. Bring dirty magazines for me.

Felicity shot Chris an appalled look as she clung to her coffee.
“Can’t blame a guy for trying,” Chris smirked.

“I’m sorry I can’t stay long,” Oliver spoke to Felicity, “I have class starting soon.”
He paused to kiss her cheek and she swooned into it before relinquishing her hold on the coffee cup
to the table, it’s extra hot contents far too hot to continue holding it between her palms.
“Unless you want me to stay?”
“No, it’s okay, don’t miss your classes,” Felicity smiled as she smoothed her hands down his arms,
“you’re graduating this year and we’re going to Morocco to celebrate remember?”
Her fingers walked back up the arms they had just slide down.

“You still want to do that?” Oliver asked, offering her an out in case the time they had spent apart
while she was here and he was keeping status quo had seen her change her mind.
“Of course,” she laughed, kissing the smile onto his slightly pouted lips, “a beautiful location with
you, of course I want to.”
“I can stop by after class if you need anything,” Oliver commented looking from Felicity to Chris,
“do you need anything Chris?”
“Fancy sneaking some beer in?” Chris asked, his face still and serious.
“Uh,” Oliver juggled with a diplomatic answer.

“I’m kidding, I’m fine, thanks,” Chris laughed boisterously, “Felicity has me covered.”
Oliver blew out a dramatized sigh as he chuckled alongside Chris.
“Hey, I didn’t get a chance to thank you before,” Chris remarked as he attempted to straighten his
back against the headboard.
“For what?” Oliver asked.
“Felicity told me about the private plane and I appreciate it,” Chris replied with a slight quiver in
his voice as one hand gripped the edge of the blanket and the other extended towards Oliver.

“It’s the least I could do after that shitty game of pool,” Oliver joked as he took Chris’ hand a
shook it. A display of comradery between friends.

“I would settle for a rematch,” Chris remarked, one side of his mouth hitched up into a smirk, “one
where you weren’t trying to get me to kiss your girlfriend.”
Oliver swallowed and Felicity cringed.
“Too soon?” Oliver asked.
“A rematch it is then,” Oliver agreed as he slapped Chris’ shoulder.

“I’ll walk you out,” Felicity smiled as her fingers entwined with Oliver’s, “I’ll be back in a
minute,” she offered to Chris who waved her out of the room.

“How is he?” Oliver asked as he and Felicity walked the corridor.
“He’s Chris so he’s going to pretend he’s fine until he’s not,” Felicity lamented.
The jokes, the cheerful attitude and the taking it in his stride was symptomatic of the Christopher
she knew.

“Are you sure you’re not related?” Oliver joked as he held Felicity’s just a little tighter.
“Haha, funny Queen, real funny guy,” Felicity mocked as she stopped and leaned against the wall,
kicking one sneaker gently against it.
“And you, how are you?” Oliver enquired, dipping his head to watch the sigh leak from her lips.
“I’m not the one being told I probably won’t walk again,” she answered before letting her eyes
roam down the hall back towards Chris’ room.
“That’s not what I asked,” Oliver insisted.
“I’m okay Oliver,” Felicity mused, his name poised on her lips as she considered something.
It was time to tell him.

“Actually,” she started, kicking off from the wall to press her stomach against his pelvis just long
enough to see his eyes momentarily roll up towards the ceiling, “could we do dinner tonight?”
Oliver smiled, probably wider than he should, but he had missed her. Missed her closeness, missed going to bed beside her and waking up next to her. He missed what they had started and he felt a moment of hope that they might rediscover some of that tonight.

“Do you want to go out somewhere?” he asked as his hands sunk in around the small of her back making sure she stayed this deliciously close.
“No, I’ll come by your apartment and we just order take out,” she smiled longingly, her voice a languid sigh.
She missed him too.

“I don’t have a couch yet,” he hummed, any excuse to continue talking so he could continue feeling her body against his rising erection.
“I’m fine with pillows on the floor,” she breathed huskily before rolling her body against his to elicit an guttural moan from him, “or your lap.”
“Alright,” he rasped, afraid if he stayed here much longer he might end up sporting a full-fledged boner, “I’ll see you at seven?”
Her answer came as a smiled kiss against his puckered lips.

She would tell him tonight.

“God you guys are sickly cute,” Chris cringed as Felicity strolled back into his room, her sneakers squeaking across the linoleum.
“Aww are you jealous,” she mocked as she walked to the foot of his bed.
“Super jealous,” Chris grinned, “he’s a good looking guy so you’re very lucky.”
“Shut up,” she jeered playfully.

Chris shifted his upper body in an effort to sit higher on the bed. His legs didn’t feel like his own anymore. He could see them and he could touch them but they were foreign.

He reached out a hand towards the water jug, but he was an inch short. An inch that his legs would have bolstered and tipped with little effort once.

He saw Felicity move towards him and his jaw tensed.
“Don’t Felicity,” he warned, straining to move that extra inch.
“Chris you have to let people help,” Felicity countered.
“And people need to let me help myself.”
He sighed gruffly as that inch became a mile.
“Do you want to go for a walk?” Felicity offered.
“You walk, I'll commando crawl behind you,” Chris teased, falling to his tried and tested humour disguise.
“I’m sorry,” Felicity whispered.
“Don’t,” Chris spotted through gritted teeth.
“What? Felicity sighed as she sat into a chair near his bed.
“Don’t do that.”
“Sit?”

Chris shook his head, just a glimpse of a smile before it retracted.
“Don’t give into me like you’re scared I’m too fragile,” he stated pointedly.
“Chris, I...”
“Mom comes in and cries, dad paces and you don’t give me half the shit you would normally,” he interrupted.
“We're worried,” Felicity apologised.
“No,” he huffed, her placate tone infuriating him, “you’re walking eggshells.”
“What would you like me to do?”
“Treat me normally for god’s sake Felicity, you would have laughed at the crawling joke.”
“No I wouldn’t,” she argued, finally giving him a little of the bite back he needed, “it wasn’t funny, this isn’t funny Chris.”
“I need it to be,” he sighed.
Silence hung after his last words.

“God felicity, I need it to be funny because otherwise it’s pretty fucking sad and I don’t want to be pretty fucking sad,” his hands clasped the bed covers, his frustration pouring down his arms and filtering through his whitening knuckles.

Felicity understood.
“Could we wrap your legs like a mermaid tail?” she joked with a half smile, the best she could offer in the moment.
Chris laughed, his grip on the taut covers loosening.
“See, that’s funny,” he smiled, “thank you.”
“You’re welcome.”

“Do you have any gum?” he asked as he relaxed into the pillow behind him
Felicity mindlessly tossed him her bag. The one she still hadn’t cleared.

Chris rummaged in search of the illusive gum but his eye caught something else.
“What’s this?” he asked as he pulled an envelope from her bag.
“Felicity, why are you getting letters from Oxford University?”

Felicity had nothing.
Nothing but wide eyes and a slightly parted mouth.
“Did you apply to Oxford? Shit, all these years later you actually did it,” Chris cheered as he waved the envelope fanatically in front of his face.
“Chris stop,” Felicity huffed as she reached for the envelope a moment too late to grab it.
“What? This is great, are you kidding me?” Chris smiled as he gushed questions, “how long ago did you write Oxford on your list and you finally did it, when did you apply?”
“Earlier this year,” Felicity sighed as she internally debated whether to clamber onto the bed to take the letter back by force, “February.”
“What is with the face...” he started with a chuckle before his laughter stopped and his mouth stayed gaped, “oh, shit is this a sorry but no dice letter?”
He cringed apologetically as he studied the envelope.

“Dammit Felicity you let me prattle on like a fool, I’m sorry,” he apologised as he held it out and Felicity took it from his hands.
“It’s not,” Felicity shrugged nervously, “I got in.”
Chris slapped his hands together.

“So why aren’t we celebrating?” he announced before his left brow raised. “I’m pissed you didn’t tell me but I’m going to guess you thought they’d say no, because you always under sell yourself and you didn’t want to disappoint anyone,” he finished with a knowing nod.

“You know me so well,” Felicity lamented as she folded the envelope back into her bag. “So, I’ll be mad at you later about that,” he warned, although the warning came with a kind smile attached, “but today well celebrate with extra jello cups, I think the nurse here likes me enough,” he winked as he leaned for the call button.

“Hold the jello Chris,” Felicity insisted.

“Why?”

As Chris retreated his hand from the call button both his brows pinched inward and his lower lip grew pensively taut. He knew that face.

“I’m not going,” Felicity admitted as confidently as she could muster.

“What?”

“I’m not going to Oxford,” she repeated as Chris crossed his arms.

“Yes you are.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Yes, you are,” he argued pointedly.

“Chris I’m not,” Felicity asserted, “I already rung the Dean and turned them down.”

“Why would you do that?”

Chris carded a frustrated hand through his cropped hair. This is a moment he would have paced and he couldn’t, not a single infuriated step.

Felicity bit the inside of her lower lip, she could read the frustration on Chris’ face. Each line that marked his face showed his anguish.

“When I applied it was what I thought I wanted, it isn’t anymore, it’s that simple,” she offered with the distant hope that it would be enough.

“No it’s not, you’ve wanted to go to this school for years and now you just don’t want to?” his voice was raised but he wasn’t yelling. Not yet at least.

“I don’t know what you want me to say.”

“The truth!”

“That is the truth Chris,” her voice was raising to match his own, “I know you think you have this insight because we’ve known each other for years and I love that about you, but this time you’re wrong.”

He shook his head, disgruntled at her answer, but he couldn’t force a better one. He took a slow breath in as Felicity scratched nails across the back of her neck.

“What does Oliver have to say about it?” Chris finally broke the silent tension between them, his voice now lowered and calmed.

Felicity took a sharp intake of air, holding it while the silence drifted around them.

“You haven’t told him, have you?” Chris spoke, his tone a thinly veiled mix of disappointment and annoyance.

“No,” Felicity retorted, “but before you get all judge and jury on me, I’m seeing him tonight and I was going to tell him then.”

It was the absolute truth and her words echoed her confidence in that fact.

“And will you spout him the same bullshit you told me?” he sniped.

“Chris, don’t,” Felicity gritted.
“Then tell me the truth, why did you say no?”
He was pushing her and she knew why. For the most part it was clearly because he didn’t believe her but it was also because he wanted her to put up a fight like she would any other time if it wasn’t for his current predicament.

Normal for them was bickering like siblings and teasing like best friends. Chris wanted normal.

“I already told you, it’s not what I want anymore,” she huffed with a purposefully dramatized stamp of her petulant foot which made him smile just a crack.
He sighed like the weight of the world sat on his shoulders before he beckoned her closer and held out his hands which she took without question.

“And this has nothing to do with the fact the boy you’ve been in love with for years finally loves you back, or anything to do with me lying here?”
Felicity looked down at his large hands holding hers.

“That’s what I thought,” he lamented.
“I made up my own mind, my own decision,” Felicity countered with a soft shake of her head.
“For the wrong reasons.”
“It doesn’t matter what my reasons are, they’re mine.”
She bit back her slightly quivering lip.
“And are you going to tell Oliver the real reason you said no?” Chris queried.
“Are you?” she challenged.
“You know I wouldn’t.”
“Good,” Felicity expressed, “because this was my choice to make and I made it.”
“If that’s what you want to believe.”
His lips folded into pensive smile.
“It’s the truth.”

A timid knock on the door severed the discussion where it sat before Donna walked slowly into the room.
“Everything okay?” she asked looking between Chris and Felicity.
“Fine,” Felicity replied and Chris seconded with a languid nod.
“Your parents are just downstairs, they won’t be long,” Donna a spoke with a smile at Chris.
“Thanks missus S,” he paused, “uhh missus K now I suppose.”
Donna shrugged off his dilemma with a chuckle, “as long as it’s not old woman, I’m fine with either.”
“Noted,” he agreed.
“Felicity, hon, can I have a word?” Donna asked as she tipped her head back towards the door.
“Ah, sure,” Felicity replied as she offered Chris an apologetic smile before he waved her off with a smile of his own.
They would finish their argument another time.

“Everything okay?” Felicity asked as the mother-daughter duo stepped out into the corridor.
“Yea hun, firstly tomorrow I was thinking you and Oliver could come over for meatloaf,” Donna offered as her hands wrung together.
Felicity did a quick date check in her head, tomorrow was the second Thursday, not the first.

“You missed last week with everything going on,” Donna added, picking up on the confused expression Felicity was wearing.
“Uh, I’ll ask Oliver tonight, but I’m sure it’ll be fine,” Felicity replied, it would give her a chance to tell them about Oxford too, although whether Oliver was with her would, she supposed, depend on how telling him went.
“Is there something else?” Felicity asked, noting her mother's unusually reserved demeanour.
“I need to tell you something but I don’t want you to get upset,” Donna answered.
“That sounds ominous.”
Felicity shifted her weight from one foot to the other as she absently tipped her head.

“Your father and I were going to wait until you got back from your trip away to tell you and then this thing with Chris, but I don’t want to leave it...and tomorrow you’ll notice,” Donna prattled and Felicity understood where she got it from.
“Mom, you’re not getting a divorce are you?” she asked awkwardly, with a pensive smile that was begging to be way off the mark.
“Oh heavens no,” Donna snort-laughed, “your father has his faults but I love him all the same.”
“Then what is it?”
“We’re selling the house,” Donna announced with a half-grimaced smile.
“What?” Felicity gasped.
“Actually, we’ve sold the house.”

“I’m sorry, what?”
“Ever since you’ve been at college it just seems so big and empty. I found this cute little house closer to the City and I fell in love with it so...”
“So you don’t even talk to me about it?”
Felicity wasn’t oblivious to the fact she had kept her fair share of details from her parents, but she was a teenager, it was to be expected.
Why was everything changing? She couldn’t keep things from changing.

“You’re not home all that much and you’ll still have a room at the new house, it even has a little flat out the back if you’d prefer a little privacy for you and Oliver, your father will be a little weirded out by sleepovers but it’s okay he won’t say anything I’ll make sure.”
Once all the words had come barrelling out of her mouth, Donna smiled, expecting – or rather hoping – Felicity would offer one back.

“No,” Felicity replied, more defiantly than she meant to but the point remained.
“No what?”
“You can’t move.”
Felicity didn’t actually mean it, she knew she had no reason or right to put her figurative, or literal, foot down. It was just a house. Only this wasn’t just about the house.

She had tried her hardest to stop things from changing, status quo, but it didn’t matter. The universe had other plans.

“Well hon it’s already done, we move out the end of September, all according to plan.”
“I have to go,” Felicity choked down the feeling that was crawling up her throat, “tell Chris I'm sorry.”

She walked quickly down the hall, barely holding her tears at bay. She didn’t know why she was crying and if someone had stopped her and asked her she would have nothing but a blank stare in reply, but she was on the brink of them all the same.

“Felicity wait,” Donna called.
She didn’t.

Felicity spent the next two hours wandering through the streets of the City, listlessly walked in and
out of quaint shops and small boutiques looking for absolutely nothing, but needed something to try move her feet while thoughts of Starling, Oxford, Oliver, Chris and her parents occupied her mind.

Turning down Oxford had been her attempt at stopping the passage of time and change, her parents move showed such a thing wasn’t possible.

She knew it was only a house, but she couldn’t shake the feeling that it symbolised so much more.

She ignored every call she got until she found herself sitting on unfamiliar stairs outside a simple and unassuming four-storey apartment block with a heavy heart and eyes filled with dry tears and a potted fern sitting beside her.

“Felicity?” Oliver remarked as he balanced two brown paper bags under his arms.
“Hi,” she spoke softly as she smiled at just how *domesticated* he looked.
“You’re early, I didn’t know, did you call?” he blabbed before he put the bags down beside the fern and dug into his pockets in search of both his phone and his keys.
“No, I just found myself here,” Felicity sighed as she stood up and brushed the stair dust from her black shorts.
“How long have you been here?”
“I’m not sure,” she shrugged, *an hour*, “but I bought you a fern, happy housewarming.”

“You should have called,” Oliver smiled as he looked down at the fern then pecked a kiss against her softly-blushed cheek, “I would have come back earlier.”
“It’s alright, the wait was nice,” Felicity replied.
That was the truth, it had given her enough pause to realise her freak out at the hospital wasn’t about a house.

“Is everything okay, is Chris okay?”
“Yeah he’s fine, his parents are with him,” Felicity answered, a heavy curtain of melancholy in her voice that she couldn’t disguise.
“And you, are you fine?” Oliver asked pointedly.
“Can we go inside?” Felicity replied with a question of her own as she collected the fern around the base of the white pot.
Oliver nodded as he opened the foyer door, propping it open with his foot as Felicity walked in.

It was cute, clean and with little more than white tiles and an elevator. While it wasn’t far from campus and Oliver would have people believing it was a fairly *simple* apartment, Felicity was certain most students couldn’t afford a place like this.

His apartment was on the fourth floor, Apartment 4A, and Felicity couldn’t help the small chuckle that fell from her lips when he opened the door into a virtually empty loft apartment.
“Were you robbed?” she smiled as he kicked the door closed with his foot.
“I told you it was,” he paused to put the paper bags down on the rustic wood benchtop, “*sparse.”*

Sparse it was, with nothing more than an entertainment unit and a low coffee table to the left of the door in the corner of the room that was likely supposed to be the living room. Behind that was the staircase that went up to the lofted bedroom. To the right of the entrance was, Felicity assumed, the bathroom and beyond that, the kitchen. The last corner of the room was empty but bathed in late afternoon sun and would be the perfect place to curl up with a book in hand on the old, wide windowsill.

It was clear the building was built some decades ago but had been given a facelift that, even though it stood virtually empty, gave it a warmth in the rich hardwood floors and warm ivory walls.
“Does that need to be near a window?” Oliver asked as he nodded down towards the fern hugged against Felicity’s chest.
“No, it thrives in low light,” she remarked as her eyes travelled up to the stunning exposed beam ceilings – this was definitely not student accommodation, “when you said it was a basic apartment, I expected something a little less chic,” she added with a soft laugh as she toed off her shoes and roamed deeper into the apartment.

It wasn’t large but it didn’t feel cramped either.
“I suppose that might have been my upbringing rearing its head,” Oliver mocked with a playful shrug. Camila had said basically the same thing when her and Tommy had helped him move.

The view probably wasn’t much, overlooking other buildings towards the river and just beyond that, the City, but Felicity could only imagine how much more stunning it would look at night.

“So,” Oliver hummed as he took the plant from her hands and read the staked sign, “our love fern?”
Felicity grinned as she nodded, it was probably something completely lost on Oliver, but she would give him a few moments to try and remember.
“Wait, is this from the movie you made me watch a couple of months back?”
“During the dreaded no sex embargo?” she snorted, “yes.”
“We watched every romantic comedy from the last decade like some cruel taunt,” Oliver kissed a smile into her neck.
“Didn’t work though did it?” she smirked.
Oliver opened his mouth in an attempt to refute her last statement, but she kissed it closed before he could utter a single word.

“But, it was worth the wait,” she breathed as she pulled away from the kiss, he lips ghosting the words across his, “you made it worth the wait.”
Oliver sighed contentedly as his arms sunk in around her waist and his hands smoothed down the curve of her ass.

“At the risk of ruining this perfect moment, I have to ask are you okay?” Oliver inquired as his nose nudged hers, “you’re about two hours early and you look like you’ve been crying.”
“My parents are moving,” Felicity heaved out a sigh before she pressed her forehead into Oliver’s shoulder.
“Oh,” he replied softly, “I didn't know.”
“Neither did I,” she lamented, “I just found out.”
“Where are they going?”
Felicity rolled her eyes, though Oliver couldn’t see them, when she told him it was barely a twenty minute drive from their current house he was going to laugh and she couldn’t blame him.
“A little closer to the City,” she replied before her lips folded inward and she looked up at him with puppy eyes.

He did well to hide his amusement.
“And them moving upsets you?”
She blew out an exacerbated breath.
“It shouldn’t,” that was her logical side, “but I just feel like things are changing too much,” that was her irrational side, and to round her off her emotive side added, “and we won’t be neighbours anymore.”

Oliver smiled before he pecked a kiss to her forehead, everyday he saw, and fell in love with, a new facet of her and the slightly melodramatic cute puppy face she was pulling at that moment was no exception.
“But I don’t live there anymore Felicity and neither do you,” he laughed as he folded back her hair and lay another kiss against her temple, lingering it just long enough to let the notes of her shampoo dance across his senses.
“But it is where we met,” she pouted adorably.

“And selling it won’t undo that.”
She lulled her head from shoulder to shoulder, “I know.”
“God I know I’m being irrational and I snapped at her like a child which I had to ring and apologise for while I was waiting for you,” she added with a second roll of her eyes, “it just felt like too much was changing and I couldn’t control it, you know?”

“And here you are being all sensible,” she finished as she playfully slapped his arm.
“If this was two years ago I would have been sobbing in the corner if I was you Felicity,” he joked, although he was absolutely certain it was the truth, “sometimes I’m glad I didn’t come home much then, I’m fairly certain you would have hated douchebag Ollie.”
“I could never,” she smiled before snapping her lip between her teeth.
“I dunno, the hair was pretty tragic,” he mocked.
“Yeah, it really was,” she laughed as she screwed up her nose and Oliver kissed the tip of it.
“What did you call it again?”
“Serial killer meets boyband chic,” Felicity snorted out a laugh.

“So some change is good,” Oliver winked as he carded two fingers through his cropped hair.
“This look is much better,” Felicity hummed as her fingers met with his before scratching a slow path down behind his ears and along his neck.

“Oliver?” she whispered, her lips writing the syllables of his name against his ear lobe.
“Mmmm?” he hummed, his voice trancelike.
“Show me the bedroom,” she ordered seductively.

He didn’t hesitate as he led her up the floating stairs with her fingers trailing along the glass bannister.

The lofted bedroom was the perfect amount of room, with little of it wasted, but there was something else Felicity noticed immediately.
“You bought a new bed?” she gaped as her eyes walked over the very grownup looking mattress sunk into the lux black leather base.
“See, change can be good,” he smiled as he walked her deeper into the room of white painted brick and the same rich chocolate floors.

“Are the windows mirrored?” Felicity asked as she looked out the bi-fold doors that ran across one wall and opened out onto a ludicrously small patio.
“Mmmhmm,” Oliver hummed, “I’m told you can see out but no one can see in.”
“Good,” she smiled wickedly as her hands made light work of his jean’s zipper, dropping them – before he even had time to react – to his ankles.

“Do you want me naked for this?” she simpered as she pushed Oliver down onto the bed seconds before hoisting him into a sitting position of the edge of it.
“For what?” Oliver grinned as he watched her fingers dance along the hem of her tee.

She didn’t wait for an answer nor did she give him one, before she pulled her t-shirt over her head and dropped it unceremoniously to the floor next to her feet.

Oliver licked his lower lip slowly as his eyes walked along the plunging lace of her ivory bra. It looked soft and silky and his fingers were dying to touch it. He hadn’t meant to but Oliver gasped
when she shimmied her shorts down her legs and revealed a racy pair of lace panties that were in matching ivory.

It didn’t matter how many times he saw it, Oliver was 100% certain he would never tire of the sight of Felicity naked – or even nearly so.

He was lost for words and he couldn’t be certain that he wasn’t drooling even as he instinctively ran a finger across the corner of his mouth when she sunk to her knees and wracked her nails down his inner thighs.

Felicity wasn’t saying a word but her eyes danced with a ferocity that made Oliver swallow heavily even before her fingers folded under the elastic of his brief and tugged down, hard.

His semi-hard cock sprung from behind the briefs and bounced twice before Felicity caught it in her slightly trembling hand. So much of her eluded a sexuality she didn’t even know she possessed yet but at times, like this one, her nerves were threaded through her beautifully expressive face.

Her lips feathered a kiss just under the head, the salty sweetness of his skin bleeding into her lips as she pressed more kisses gradually up the shaft.

“Felicity,” he moaned, his voice strangled and taut, “you don't have to.”
His words trailed off as her tongue circled the tip of his cock, wiping through the tiny drops of precum.
“I want to,” she cooed as her hand twisted around his base, pumping two stingingly slow times while Oliver's reactive moans coated the air.

She took just the tip into the warm, wet confines of her mouth, letting it simmer there while she took in this new sensation. Oliver’s hands absently combed through her hair as his body ached to feel more.

Her tongue scouted across the tip, guiding him upwards until it skimmed the roof of her mouth. The feeling sent a jolt of pleasure up Oliver's spine and out of his mouth in heavy, breathy moans.

Her lips concaved around his shaft as she slowly eased him out before gently taking him back in. The rhythm was torturously slow but Oliver wouldn’t have sped it up for the world. His fingers linked in her hair and she moaned at his slight accidental tug. His eyes lowered to apologise but when they met with her smiling ones, plump pink lips around his swollen cock, he sensed that wasn’t necessary.

Felicity’s hand continued to pump short, sharp beats at the base if his cock in contrast to the deliriously slow workings of her tongue and lips around the head. His whole body twitched as her tongue swarmed in tight circles around his tip, gathering whatever salty slickness it found there.

After stretched and satisfying minutes of the same, salaciously repetitive patterns, her lips purred around him and he felt the tendons that ran like threads down his thighs constrict and throb. The silkiness of the roof of her mouth felt like a raging fire of pleasure across his tip while her tongue soothed the underside and her hand worked the base.

It was a symphony of sensations that Oliver lost himself in with heavy eyelids and tendrils of smoky moans until one final sensation broke through.

Felicity felt the rush of ribbons of come coat her mouth with a dewy warmth unlike any other. She eased his cock from her mouth, though her hand stayed leisurely playing with it, before she looked up at him with wide, smiling eyes and bloated cheeks.
Oliver got the message and, failing anything else in his direct line of sight, he tore his t-shirt over his head and bashfully handed it to her.

Felicity took it and delicately spat his spill into the black cotton before folding it up with a short chuckle.
“I’m sorry,” she shrugged lightly as her lashes fluttered and the apples of her cheeks blushed red.
“You,” Oliver sighed, surprisingly breathless, “never need to apologise.”

He pulled her into an embrace, her barely covered chest pressing tightly against his broad and naked one.
“I’d really like to repay in kind,” Oliver continued as he rolled her over, his impressive body concaving around hers before he kissed a cascade of kisses down between her breasts.
“I won’t say no to that,” she hummed as his lips met with the waist of her panties.
“Perfect,” Oliver grinned mischievously.

Felicity awoke from her nap a little before 6pm and stretched out across the empty king size bed. She could hear the soft tunes of faint music and the clatter of dishes in the kitchen. The lights from the ceiling danced with the failing light just outside the patio doors as Felicity contemplated just how nice this all felt.

She slipped from the bed, her naked body still tinged with the sensation of his lips and fingers during the languid moments he spent exploring her.

God, it felt fantastic.
Her toes kicked over her discarded clothes before she decided against them and moved quietly to Oliver’s drawers instead.

She found a simple white cotton tee and shrugged it onto her body before pulling her hair up into a top knot and securing it with an elastic that had been around her wrist.

Felicity tiptoed down the stairs and was already at the corner of the breakfast bar when Oliver noticed her.

“Wow,” he gaped as she turned half circles with his tee skimming the tops of her thighs.
“You like?”
Oliver grinned stupidly as he bobbed his head in a repeating nod.
“I love.”
Felicity smiled as she swooped in closer, pleased that she could elicit such a response from him as her fingers traversed the muscles of his naked chest.
“You’re making dinner?” she asked as she dipped her pinky into the sauce simmering away on the stove before blowing on it in a way that made Oliver salivate with the memory of her mouth around his cock.
“Sure,” he swallowed down the lump forming at the back of his throat, “I like cooking for you, are you hungry?”
“Starving,” she moaned as she sucked the sauce from her pinky and her eye fluttered with enjoyment.
“It’s almost ready,” he replied, his voice a husky rasp as he tried his best to keep his salacious thoughts at bay.

Felicity hopped up on the bench beside him and slipped her legs either side of his naked torso, balancing her toes on the island in front.
“Why don’t I move in now?” she spoke nonchalantly as she lifted just one shoulder up in a little shrug.

Her words were met with deafening silence as Oliver stood anchored to the spot, his knuckles whitening around the wooden spook he was gripping.

“I’m sorry,” Felicity backtracked, “it’s not my place to be saying that, just forget it.”
Her eyes pleaded for leniency as her lips folded into a grimace.

“Felicity it’s not that,” Oliver replied, finally sucking in enough air to form words, “I would love you to. In fact I’ve wanted to ask you for days but I didn’t want to put pressure and I know you wanted to do the whole sorority thing.”
His eyes lit up and his cheeks glowed a gingery shade of rose.

“I don’t think I’m cut out for that,” Felicity offered, “they’re nice girls and all but I don’t see this being lifelong friendships, you know?”
“You’re serious?”
She couldn’t tell if Oliver was choking with excitement or disbelief, or both.
“Yeah,” she replied timidly, “I mean I would say yes if you wanted to.”
Her lips coiled around a soft exhale of air.

_Felicity Smoak could do domesticated too._

“Wait here,” Oliver grinned before he raised her leg like a drawbridge and disappeared towards the front door.

He came back within a minute and skidded in front of her before he took a knee and smiled up at her, holding out a key pinched between his thumb and forefinger.

“Felicity Smoak, will you move in with me?” he asked without the smile fading for a second.
“I would love to,” Felicity laughed as he lay the key in her palm.
“Yes?”
“Yes.”
He pulled himself up off the floor and immediately captured her lips with his own. She chortled his name into the kiss as his palms cupped her face.

And then she realised she still hadn’t told him about Oxford.
“Wait,” she breathed as her lips pulled away just enough to speak.
Oliver pulled back, his expression worried she had just as quickly change her mind.
“Before anything else, there is something I need to tell you,” she added as her hand gripped his shoulder, the other hand fisting around the key, absently guarding it in case he asked for it back.
“Okay,” Oliver said cautiously.
“Just,” Felicity pleaded as she gripped him just a little tighter, “I hope that you can try to see it from where I’m looking.”
Oliver nodded, somewhat ominously. The last time he’d had a chat that started similar to this one Laurel told him that she had slept with her professor, she wasn’t sorry and it was his fault, so even though he was trying his best not to tarnish Felicity with the same brush, his heart felt like it was doing a death march.

“When we weren’t together, in February, I applied to another college,” she confessed, her eyes showing vivid lines of anguish.
“Oh,” Oliver replied, _so far it didn’t sound all that bad._
“In England.”
She snagged the corner of her lower lip with her teeth and waited for the penny to drop.
“Oh,” Oliver stepped half a foot back. 

_It just dropped._

“I didn’t tell you or anyone because I thought nothing would come of it and I didn’t want people to be disappointed when the rejection came in,” she continued, still holding him tightly even as the other arm slunk in around her waist.

“Nobody would...” he offered kindly, though his mind was a wreck of _what does this mean?_  

“All the same, I kept it to myself even after we got together, I didn’t tell you or anyone else and I’m sorry, maybe I should have told you sooner,” she surmised before she slipped from the counter and padded towards her bag sat on the edge of the breakfast bar.

“I got this the other week,” she sighed as she held out the Oxford letter to him, her eyes a woven circle of sorrow and regret, “the morning before we came home from Orion.”

Oliver looked down as he took the slightly crumpled letter from her hands.  

_That had been what she was worried about._

“You got in,” he reacted as he read the words across the paper.  

“I was surprised too.”

“I’m not surprised Felicity,” he said seriously as his eyes locked onto hers, “one day you’ll realise just how smart you are. The world sees it, you should too.”

She smiled reluctantly under the kind gaze of his eyes.

“That had been what she was worried about.”

“It’s for September,” he continued, as he read the words over and over again.

“Yeah, but I’m not going,” she nodded her head adamantly.

After noting the worry on his face she realised perhaps she should have led with that fact. But she had been so consumed with the guilt over not telling him sooner that she had neglected to realise he might actually think she was leaving.

“You’re not?”

“No,” she shook her head with fervour, “when I applied I thought it was what I wanted. That I wanted to leave Starling and go far away but it's not anymore. I’m happy here and school is good. I don’t want to leave.”

_You…._ She never said the word but it was there, unspoken but true all the same.

“You’re turning it down?”

He couldn’t tear his eyes away from the paper.

“I already turned it down.”

She saw his face grimace before she took a step forward to close the gap that had opened between them.

“I know I should have told you but I didn't want you to say what I knew you would. I didn't want you to tell me to go, because I don’t want to go,” she explained as her hands slipped around his neck and her thumbs stroked lines up his cheeks.

“Are you sure this is what you want?” Oliver asked, afraid of the answer but needing it all the same.

“Look at me,” she breathed as her thumbs tipped his head.

When she was certain his eyes were swallowed in hers, she smiled softly and said, “yes, it is.”

Oliver kissed her abruptly, sinking his lips into hers in a haste moment of need and want. Felicity melted into the kiss, keening soft moans against his lips as the passion engulfed them. It was desperate and impulsive and tipped in anguish as a river of emotions ran over them.

He was happy, immeasurably so. For the briefest of moments he had thought he was going to lose her and the pain had been so intense it had felt like his lungs were being strangled and his chest
compounded under a heavy weight.

But she wasn’t going. 
She wasn’t leaving. 
He was happy. 
Only...there was something buried in the back of his mind, something he was doing his best to ignore because facing it was something he didn’t want to face. 
*She should go.*

“You’re not mad I didn’t tell you sooner?” Felicity asked with her forehead pressed to his. 
“I wish you would have,” he spoke as his head rolled slowly over hers, “but like you said we weren’t together and I’ve known you long enough to know you keep things close to your heart because you’re scared of losing or disappointing people, but you don’t have to be scared of that with me okay, you won’t lose me and you could never disappoint me.”

“You’ve changed Oliver Queen,” she smiled whimsically.

It wasn’t so much that he was *domesticated*. Rather, he was mature, he was happy.

“The Italian-style meatballs with fresh pasta sat half-eaten on the coffee table and the red wine Oliver had purveyed sat ‘breathing’ but un-poured alongside it. Unsurprisingly they were back in the bedroom as 9:00pm rolled around.

“Are you sure?” Oliver asked, interrupting the peaceful silence that had settled between them as they lay naked underneath the charcoal sheet. 
“About what part?” Felicity smiled, her hair a halo around her head as she pecked tiny kisses into the curve of Oliver’s shoulder.

“Both,” Oliver lamented with a drawn exhale of air, “not going to Oxford, moving in…” His words trailed off as he watched Felicity shift onto her elbow beside him. 

Her chin sunk into his chest as her fingers ran smooth lines across his cheek.

“I am sure, about both,” she smiled as the glow from the bedside lamp shimmered in her blue eyes.

“I have to go home,” she sighed as she sat up, pulling the sheet away from Oliver’s chest as her legs tented underneath. 

“Stay,” Oliver bemoaned before his lips kissed a slow path up her spine.

“I can’t,” Felicity giggled as Oliver’s bristled jaw tickled against her soft skin, “my stuff is at the house.”

“What stuff?” Felicity turned, severing Oliver’s kiss from her skin and making him groan indignantly.

“My clothes, my shampoo and conditioner, my cleanser, my toothbrush, my eye drops…” she laughed while she listed off her nightly routines.

“Clothes are overrated,” Oliver growled a kiss into her neck, “I have shampoo, your hair is soft enough you can skip the conditioner and water is a great cleanser.”

“Oliver,” Felicity whimpered as her whole body felt overcome with goose bumps from his kiss, “what about the other things?”

Oliver sighed dramatically before a smile broke across his lips. 

“Stay here,” he pleaded as he stood off the bed.

“Where are you going?” Felicity chortled as she watched Oliver hurriedly throw pants on, so hastily that he forgot his briefs.

“Just,” he leaned over and kissed her cheek, “stay here.”
It was about twenty minutes later that Oliver returned. A subtle red blush across his cheeks and a glisten of sweat across his brow showed wherever he had gone he had done so in a hurry.

He found Felicity, sheathed in a sheet, sitting on the floor in front of the coffee table scrutinising something on her tablet.
“Good you stayed,” he puffed as he kicked the door closed behind him, a plastic bag rustling in his hands.
“I was beginning to wonder if you were coming back,” she laughed as she stood up and tugged up the front of her sheet-toga.

He took her hand and led her towards the bathroom, her bare feet shuffling across the floor with her other hand clutching the hem of the sheet to her chest.
“Close your eyes,” he smiled as he hid the plastic bag behind his back.

She smiled at him coyly before she wordlessly closed her eyes. Oliver walked her a few steps until her feet hit the slate tiles of the bathroom. She heard the rustle of plastic and Oliver take a long, considered breath.

“Okay, open them,” he spoke eagerly, she could almost hear the anticipation in his voice. She opened one eye, then the other and looked down at what he was holding out to her.

“You bought me a toothbrush,” she beamed as her eyes travelled over the red toothbrush sat in his palms.
“It can be the first thing you move in,” Oliver remarked, a smile still brightly plastered on his face. She took it slowly from his hands, her heart thumping through her chest as she thought about just how perfectly right this moment felt.
“I hope you like the colour,” Oliver added with just a hint of nervousness.
“It’s red, I love it,” Felicity gushed before she tore open the packet and dropped the toothbrush next to Oliver’s green one, “they look perfect together.”

She hummed as he embraced her and dragged a languid trail of warm kisses down the length of her shoulder.
“Felicity?”
“Yes?” she whispered as she swayed in his arms.
“I love you.”

Felicity sucked in a breath of air as the words sunk into her. They were pure, honest and she believed it completely. Her younger self would have never believed this moment, but here it was – Oliver Queen loved her; and she loved him right back.
“We’re going to have to tell my parents,” Felicity smiled as they finally broke for air from the kiss that had stretched into minutes. Oliver smiled awkwardly as his forehead rolled over hers while she sat perched on the edge of the bathroom vanity. “Your father is going to kill me,” he laughed nervously. “No he won’t,” Felicity remarked before her lips pressed a soft kiss to the tip of Oliver’s nose while her legs tightened around his waist.

Oliver looked at her with one eyebrow hooked up and his head cocked to the left, his expression saying word he didn’t need to speak, ‘are you sure about that?’.

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“Well not literally,” Felicity chuckled as she touched her palms to his cheeks and gentle straightened his head, “virtually maybe,” she added amused. Oliver looked on the verge of breaking into cold sweats. “You don’t have a video rental card or anything do you?” He went to open his mouth to speak but nothing more than a sigh came out.

Felicity laughed effervescently as she patted his cheeks. “It’s fine Oliver,” she winked, “he’ll be fine.” “Tomorrow is Thursday,” she added with a lamenting recount of her earlier discussion with Donna.
“I know,” Oliver replied with a perplexed smile popping up across his lips. “Mom wants to do a makeup meatloaf night,” she explained with her fingers threaded through the strands of his hair and her blue eyes dipping into his, “so, in the interests of talking openly and not keeping secrets,” she sighed, pausing while Oliver nodded, he knew where this was going, “we can tell them then.”

She sealed their fate with a kiss onto Oliver’s soft, pillowed lips. “I better enjoy tonight then,” he hummed against her kiss. “Why?” she smiled, the word ghosted with a hot breath. “Because tomorrow I’ll be arrested for unpaid video hire fines.” “It’s alright Oliver,” she effused, her voice wrapped with soft enamour, “I’m sure I can undo anything he tries.”

They kissed again, with his chest pressed to hers and his hands sunk tightly around her back. Her legs squeezed in around his waist while her hands slipped from his face in slow, winding tracks before they snaked over his shoulders and around his neck.

“Let’s go back to bed,” she whispered, her lips still touching his. “Eye drops,” he replied, his words like a soft moan. Felicity pulled back from the kiss and laughed, her brow pinched in with confusion.

Oliver shook the love-induced daze from his eyes before he reached for the discarded drug store bag. “I got you eye drops as well,” he smiled as he dangled the bag to the side of them.

Felicity snipped the bag from his fingers and tucked it in against his back. “Bed,” she paused to let her lips peck his, “room.”

Oliver didn’t need another instruction before he lifted Felicity from the vanity and carried her from the bathroom. Their lips tussled with each other as he walked blindly but carefully through the apartment, thankful now that there was very little furniture to crash into, given his lips had no intention of leaving off hers.

She laughed into the kiss as Oliver stumbled up the first step towards the loft bedroom. “I can walk,” she smiled against his lips. “No,” he argued, snapping her lips back with his as his tongue stroked a long line across her lower one, “you stay here.”

Felicity knew what he meant, what he was saying, but to her his words meant so much more. *Stay here...with him.*

Chris had been right about her reasons for staying, he had seen right through her attempt at lessening the desires she had about attending Oxford.

It wasn’t Oliver’s fault that he didn’t know. The years she had spent talking about attending, he had spent in an addled haze of college, colleges, and as far as Felicity was concerned he didn’t need to know.

Her mind was made up. She sunk her pelvis deeper into her chest, anchoring her body even more into his. *She was staying right here.*

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[Thursday 9 August 2007]
Felicity walked the corridor of the hospital with a smile she couldn’t disguise written across her lips. Her fingers traced slow and wispy lines down the threads of her neck. It was like Oliver’s lips were still there, caressing every inch as they lay in bed – their bed – together while the sun filtered in through the blinds and their bodies stayed entangled, neither willing to move.

It had felt surreal.
Knowing that every morning she could wake up beside him.
Knowing that every night she could fall asleep with his warm body pressed to hers.

They had been a few hours apart from each other and she could still feel his warm, languid kisses and she could still hear his softly enchanted whispers of love and, when she took a deep breath in, Felicity swore she could still smell the cool, almost peppermint-y, scent of his freshly showered skin.

She had sat through a morning lecture without really hearing a word of it and she had floated to the subway station and journeyed to the hospital walking at least three inches off the ground.

Felicity was smitten.

She took a slow breath outside Chris’ door and dampened down her smile just enough so that she wasn’t beaming quite so stupidly.

She felt guilty about her happiness and while she knew Chris would hate to think that his circumstance had also played a part in her decision to stay in Starling, it didn’t make it any less true.

She stepped into his room and found him slumped into his pillow, the TV was on but his eyes were affixed to the ceiling. He didn’t even look towards the door as she closed it with a soft click.

“What’s on TV?” Felicity asked as she kicked her feet across the linoleum floor.
“Wouldn’t know,” Chris muttered in response.

Felicity had been expecting this day. One can only keep up the walls of everything is fine for a limited time and she knew Chris well enough to know what she had told Oliver was true; ‘He’s going to pretend he’s fine until he’s not’.

“How about we go for a trip around the floor?” she asked, ignoring the morose in his voice as she gently nudged his shoulder.
“Pass,” he answered, the word a shallow sigh.
“Oliver is coming around after class in about an hour, do you need any more magazines?”
“So you told him?” Chris’ head rolled to look Felicity in the eye. She couldn’t help but notice they weren’t smiling and it made her breath tremble in her throat.

“Did,” she answered quietly as her head bobbed in a soft nod.
“And?”
His question perked him up a little as his hands pressed deep into the mattress to shuffle his back up against the pillows.
“And…” she paused, unable to stop the smile from floating up to her lips, “we’re moving in together.”

“What?” Chris gasped, his eyes now doubly wider than they had been moments before.
“What?” she chuckled, in hopes her nonchalant would downplay his surprise.
“You know exactly what?”
His words were more cutting than she had expected, though they still were said with a warmth that he couldn’t repress.

“It just felt right,” Felicity answered as she casually readjusted the stack of magazines that sat on the drawers beside the bed.
“I don’t doubt your feelings Felicity, or his, but you can’t possibly...” Felicity looked at him with a sharp smile and his words trailed off as he sighed, mildly frustrated how easily she could still shut him up with a single look.

“You’re 18,” he finally offered.
“I’m aware,” Felicity retorted before she crossed one arm across her waist and absently shifted from one foot to the other.
“And you just decided to move in with a guy you’ve been dating for what five months?”
“She just known him for years.”
She swapped feet again before anchoring her stance as Chris’ lips pensively tightened and relaxed.

They stood there, just like that, wordlessly engaging in a form of stare off that anyone walking into the room would have been made to feel ostracised by, but it was just them. Her eyebrow hooked up and Chris’ matched. His lips furrowed into a pout and hers would undoubtedly do the same.

“You’re giving yourself reasons to stay,” Chris spoke bluntly, breaking the silent that hung between them.
“No I’m not,” Felicity bit back.
“Yes you are. You want to go so you’re making all these anchoring decisions to keep you here,” Chris wasn’t pulling his punches even though his voice never raised.
“That’s not why,” she argued, Felicity wasn’t retreating either.

Chris shuffled up the mattress, all the while keeping his eyes locked on Felicity as if the longer he stared the deeper he searched.

“You’re shit scared that if you go then when you come back he won’t care about you anymore.” Felicity took a step back, words hitched in the back of her throat. She didn’t want to hear what Chris was saying.

“Chris stop,” she replied, her voice barely above a whisper.
“No, someone has to say it,” he warred, “if you really thought he loved you, then you’d leave knowing you could come back and he’d wait for you just like you waited for him.”
“I was a child.”
“You don’t believe he loves you enough.”
“Chris stop it.”
“You’re scared. You’re a scared little girl.”

Felicity took another step back, her eyes still tunnelling through Chris’. In all the years she had known him he had never been cruel, but this moment right now sure felt like it.

“I get it,” she sniffed, “you’re having a bad fucking day but you don’t get to say that shit Christopher and expect me to take it.”

Every word stung.
_Maybe because he was right._
Felicity didn’t wait for Chris to reply, her black converse sneakers carried her barrelling from the room and down the hall as the tears behind her eyes begged to be let loose.
It was nearly an hour later when Felicity walked wordlessly back into Chris’ room. This wasn’t the first time they had engaged in a rip-roar of an argument and it probably wouldn’t be the last, but this was the first time Felicity wasn’t sure what to say next.

There was a tray of untouched food sitting in front of him and the TV volume had been turned down so low Felicity doubted Chris could even hear it.

It seems Chris was just as equally at a loss.

“I’m sorry,” Chris said softly as his eyes stayed glue to the tray ahead of him, watching the slight wobble in the green jello.
“You should be,” Felicity spoke gently as she took a few more steps into the room and gently pushed the door closed with her foot.
“That doesn’t mean I was wrong,” Chris added as his eyes finally lifted.

Felicity bit her lip as she pushed the tray table aside and perched on the edge of his bed. Chris sighed as he beckoned her closer, shifting his legs to the side so she could sit cross-legged in front of him.

“You’re scared Felicity,” Chris said with eerie accuracy, “he left for college and you stayed around hoping one day he would come back to you. That he would finally see you.”
Felicity’s lip trembled as her teeth gnawed on the lower one. Her eyes blinked black lashes like a fan across her slightly blushed cheeks. 
Every word Chris was speaking was true.

“And he did, he came back to you better and he finally saw you and I know you think that that means the world,” he continued, his sea-blue eyes wetting with pools of tears, “but you’re scared that if you leave he won’t wait around.”

Felicity took a shuddering breath inward.
“I don’t want to lose him Chris,” she whispered, her voice strained with emotions she had forced down before.
“You think you love him more than he loves you.”

Felicity blinked down as her slender pink-tipped fingers toyed with a loose thread on the hospital blanket and her thoughts scattered around in the tempest of her mind.
“I’m just the girl from next door with the big glasses and the panda shoes. I’m the girl he called kiddo and kissed her cheek. What if that’s all I was ever meant to be?”

Chris grasped her hand between his and squeezed it tightly.
“Felicity, you are so much more than that,” he replied, his words spoken without a flicker of doubt.
“But what if I’m not?”
Her question hung in the air, it didn’t need to be answered – she probably wouldn’t have listened anyway.

“And then there’s you,” Felicity added with a soft smile as she brushed back a spent tear.
“What about me?” Chris questioned, his hands still tightly holding hers.
“As selfish as this sounds, I almost lost you Chris, You’re my best friend and I almost lost you.”
“And you think that means you should be stuck in this bed with me?”
Felicity breathed out a lamenting sigh.
His question didn’t need to be answered either.

“Stop living your life around other people,” Chris urged with an extra squeeze. “you owe that to yourself.”
“I want to stay,” Felicity breathed, fears and thoughts aside her heart still wanted to stay in Starling. “I’m not going to change your mind am I?”
“No.”

~*~*~*~

Oliver was one step ahead, walking past the window of Chris’ room when Tommy tugged on his arm and pulled him three steps backwards. Oliver gestured a confused hand in the air as he studied Tommy's wide, worried eyes.
“What are you doing?” Oliver laughed as he jostled his arm free from Tommy's grip.
“I just...” Tommy's eyes darted to the window he'd pulled Oliver away from, before they blinked back at Oliver.

Oliver tipped his head to see what had Tommy so rattled, bobbing an understanding nod when he saw Felicity tucked up on the bed in front of Chris, their hands entrenched in each other.

“You think that bothers me, don’t you?” Oliver smiled as he pointed his thumb towards the scene.
“Are you saying it doesn’t bother you?” Tommy asked suspiciously.
“It shouldn’t, so it doesn’t,” Oliver replied astutely.

“They look close,” Tommy continued as he kept one very watchful eye on his best friend.
“They are,” Oliver chuckled, fully aware that Tommy was on the verge of ‘fight mode’ should Oliver call him to arms.
“And you’re not jealous?”
Tommy’s voice said he didn’t believe Oliver's calm front.

“They’re friends,” Oliver remarked as calmly as he could to allay at least a little of Tommy's fears and when his friend's shoulders relaxed, he knew it had worked.
“I’ve never had a friend like that,” Tommy maintained as he tipped his chin at them.
“Just because neither you or I have ever been able to have a friend that was a girl, doesn’t mean everyone is like us.”
“You can see the guy though right?”

Oliver chuckled, Tommy seemed just as taken with Chris’ looks as Thea had been.
“Yes,” Oliver smiled with a quick roll of his eyes.
“So you can see he could pass as your stunt double and now he’s got this injury...” Tommy trailed off but his inference was clear, girls fell for guys like him.

“Chris is a good guy,” Oliver explained, mirroring the same words Felicity had once said to him, “they were only children who grew up together.”
“So this doesn’t make you jealous?”

Oliver couldn't help but laugh at his friend's confused insistence.
“No.”
“Not even a little bit?”
“Tommy,” Oliver groaned.
“Well shit,” Tommy cheered as hands clapped twice together.
“What?”
“I wouldn’t have believed it if I didn’t see it myself.”

Tommy’s head swayed side to side as a smile grew across her lips, bending up his cheeks shaded in stubble.
“What?” Oliver asked a second time.
“She has tamed the jealous Oliver,” Tommy congratulated, “because I’m fairly certain last year you would have decked the guy.”
Oliver couldn’t argue with Tommy’s assessment.
*If this was a year ago, if it wasn’t Felicity...*
“It helps when you have someone worth your trust,” Oliver said, his voice a soft but assured coo.

Felicity was worth his trust and he would spend his days making damn sure he was worth hers.

The rest of the afternoon had been spent lounging around in Chris’ room until his mother forlornly took him to the start of his physiotherapy for his paralysis as a two-fold treatment of the muscles that still worked and ensuring the ones that didn’t, didn’t atrophy and also in the hopes that he might regain some, any, movement.

Felicity had asked if he wanted her to go with him, but his mother had, somewhat bluntly insisted that it was her responsibility. Felicity took no offense, his mother was still adapting and, right now, just barely existing.

After leaving the hospital, the trio had set about moving Felicity’s meagre amount of personal items from the Sorority House into Oliver’s – their – apartment.
“I can’t believe you guys live together now,” Tommy remarked as he dropped the last of the boxes on the floor of the forth storey apartment, “it’s like your adults.”
“Technically Merlyn we are *all* adults, you included,” Felicity laughed as she opened the box.

It was just books and she folded the lid closed again, for now they could wait.

Tommy playfully shuddered at Felicity’s suggestion that he was an adult.
“I’m a trust fund baby, I don’t need to be an adult,” Tommy joked, although there was a distinctive thread of honesty in his words.
“So is Oliver,” Felicity smiled as she ruffled her hand through his hair while he stooped to look in the box she had just closed, “and he’s graduating this year.”

Oliver smiled widely as he bobbed his head in a dramatized nod.
“You two are so sickly sweet,” Tommy laughed teasingly.
“And what about you and Camila?” Felicity asked, realising that she had been so caught up in Chris and Oliver that she hadn’t seen her in some time.
“Uh, that...” Tommy sighed as he began to walk away.
“What, what am I missing?” Felicity asked, sensing the frost in the air.
“They broke up,” Oliver remarked before he stood and tapped Tommy’s shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” Felicity replied while she smiled apologetically at Tommy, “I didn’t know,” she added, raising a brow at Oliver.
“I didn’t tell you because of everything else going on and...” Oliver started.
“And I told him not to,” Tommy finished.

Felicity’s arms threaded over each other as they settled across her chest.
“Why?”

Tommy walked a few lumbered feet, kicking his shoes across the polished wood with a decidedly sheepish look on his face.
“Because you’re going to tell me I’m an idiot.”
“Are you are idiot?” Felicity asked Tommy, but her eyes looked at Oliver for confirmation.
“He’s a complete idiot,” Oliver replied to which Tommy groaned dramatically. “I’m a complete idiot.”

His head flopped to the kitchen counter and lolled side to side a few times as he groaned. “What did you do?” Felicity asked, her voice tracking a little higher at the end. “It’s more like what he didn’t do,” Oliver said as he picked up the book-laden box.

“What didn’t you do?” Felicity asked, her eyes narrowing as Tommy slowly raised his head off the counter. “She said she loved me,” Tommy began, “and I said ‘cool’.” He huffed out the last word and dropped his head back onto the counter with a thud.

“Wait, you actually said the word cool?” Felicity asked before her horrified gape turned into a soft chuckle. “You’re laughing at my misery?” “Thomas Merlyn, that’s the worst thing you could say.” “I know, she left all angry and I haven’t heard from her since.”

Felicity unravelled her arms and placed them on the countertop. “When was this?” “A couple of days okay,” Tommy sighed. “And you haven’t spoken to her?” “Nope,” Oliver answered for him as he was carrying the box halfway across the room.

“Oliver Queen, what is wrong with you?” Felicity yelped and Oliver stopped dead in his tracks. “Wait, what? What did I do?” Oliver asked as a distressed look came across his face from the abrupt scolding. “You didn’t talk some sense into your best friend,” Felicity said as her head shook in playful disbelief a number of times.

“Tommy,” Felicity sighed, waiting for his head to lift off the counter before she began speaking again, “do you miss Camila?” He nodded slowly. “Do you love Camila?” He nodded again, a little faster. “Then take this,” she handed him his phone from a nearby counter, “go upstairs and out onto the patio and call her.” “What am I supposed to say?” he asked, his face like a little lost puppy. “What you just told me you idiot,” Felicity laughed, “tell her you’re sorry, you miss her and you love her. It’s really not that complicated.”

Tommy tapped his phone into the palm of his hand as if to egg himself on. “Thomas,” Felicity snapped, “love doesn’t have to be complicated, it just has to be honest.” “What if it’s too late?” “You won’t know till you try.”

Tommy nodded as his grip around his phone tightened. “Do you think she’ll...” he started, afraid to finish the sentence. “Go,” Felicity barked with a smile.

The lost puppy jumped a fraction before he ran up the stairs and disappeared from sight.

Felicity walked towards Oliver with her head softly shaking from side to side and her eyes locked on him.
“Should I have told you?” he asked with a slightly cringed lip.
“Not if Tommy asked you not to,” she smiled, her smile instantly relaxing his stance, “but…”
He stiffened.
“You should have talked some sense into him.”
She pecked Oliver’s cheek and he relaxed once more.
_Boys, even 22 year old ones, were still kind of stupid sometimes._

“What are you doing with those, they’re just books, I can put them into storage,” Felicity said,
changing the topic.
“I thought we could get a bookcase and put it here,” Oliver remarked as he nodded to the corner of
the room that was bathed in warm afternoon sun before he placed the box at his feet, “put some
pillows up on that windowsill, it might be a nice…”

Felicity’s lips captured his, instantly stopping his words as they came from his mouth. Her lips
caressed his, slowly building on the tempo as Oliver, finally, sunk into the surprise kiss. His
thumbs stroked her cheek as her hands rolled over the curve of his shoulder.

He had read her mind and a talent like that deserved to be rewarded.

She pulled away from the kiss slowly before pecking three short ones back against his still-pouted
lips.
“What was that for?” Oliver asked as his lidded eyes slowly opened, “not that I mind,” he added
with a soft drawl.
“Just _because_,” she answered while her fingers combed along his hairline.
“I’m okay with ‘_just because_’,” Oliver sighed, content.

“I have to go,” Tommy announced as he barrelled down the stairs.
“Everything alright?” Felicity asked as he walked quick strides towards them.
“Oliver, you are one lucky man,” Tommy announced with a slap to Oliver’s back which was
enough to jolt him forward a step, “and Felicity, you’re unbelievably smart, I am coming to you for
all of my problems from now on,” he finished before he pulled her into an embrace that squeezed
the air from her lungs.
“Um, you’re welcome and thanks?” she laughed, her voice strained as she struggled to breath.
“I have to go kiss my girlfriend now,” Tommy declared after he released Felicity from the bear
hug.

He skipped to the door with a smile indelibly written on his face.

Felicity sucked in a slow breath of air.
_Tommy had faced his fears._
Her eyes wandered over to Oliver who was moving the books a little closer to the wall as she blew
out the same breath.
_She was still scared._

It was a little after 5pm when Felicity felt the tug of Oliver’s arm as he stopped at the bottom step
of the Kuttler house. She turned to see him frozen there, his eyes as wide as saucers as he stared
past her and up and the _McMansion_.

“You look terrified,” Felicity laughed as she retreated down a step to make less of a pull on her
arm.
“Probably because I am,” Oliver replied, swallowing a lump that felt like nails down his throat.
“Oliver you’ve been coming to my parents’ house for years,” Felicity teased before she ran a
soothing palm down his arm.
“Yes but never to tell them that I’m cohabitating with their daughter.”
The hand not clutching Felicity's hand, carded through his short hair.

“Cohabiting?” Felicity laughed as her voice deepened to imitate Oliver.
“Are you teasing me?”
“No, you just sound so smart my almost-graduate.”
“I’m just trying to keep up with you,” Oliver countered while his finger pointed to her head.

Chris’ words still sat like a cloud just above Felicity's head darkening every moment.
You’re scared.
She managed a smile as Oliver looked for one.
You’re scared you love him more than he loves you.

“I love you,” Felicity whispered, a response to the thoughts cycling through her head.
Oliver stayed on the step below her as his finger slipped under her chin and edged her closer. He
kissed her softly, gently caressing her lower lip between his while his tongue skimmed across it as
if to write out the words I love you too.

The door opened and Donna attempted to stifle a squeal that broke the kiss apart. No one said
anything as Felicity walked Oliver, his hand clammy and almost trembling, into the house.

“Hi mom,” Felicity smiled as she dropped Oliver’s hand to embrace an open-armed Donna.
Oliver drove his hand into his pocket in an attempt to get some control over both the sweatiness
and the tremble of it.
“Where’s dad?”
No sooner had the question left Felicity's lips, Noah appeared from down the hall with what could
only be described as a grimace in his expression.

“Felicity, a word,” he spoke stoically, barely registering Oliver’s presence with more than a nod.
“I’ll be back,” Felicity assured Oliver, who simply smiled as they left.

Felicity followed her father down the hall into his office where he paced a small circle waiting for
her to enter.

“Dad, that was rude,” Felicity remarked as his circle led him around the back of her.
“I needed to ask you something and I don’t know what you have or haven’t told Oliver,” Noah
replied after he closed the door.

She could see it written across his face, her father knew.
“This is about Oxford isn’t it?” she asked quietly while her hands instinctively sunk around her
waist.
She watched as Noah nodded, almost sadly, like he had hoped it wasn’t true.
“How did you know?” she asked, her eyes tracking to the floor for a moment.
“The colleague in Central City, the one that wrote you a glowing recommendation called, imagine
my surprise at first learning that you applied and then my disappointment at learning that you also
turned it down.”

He walked the length of the room with a finger stroking his brow.
“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you,” Felicity sympathised.
“About which part Felicity?”
He stopped walking to tap his fingers along the edge of his desk.
“About applying, I was afraid that I wouldn’t get in and…” she trailed off with a soft shrug.
“And the rest?”
“I was going to tell you about that tonight,” she paused as one arm fell loose before she hung it from her neck, “and Oliver knows about it,” she added.

“I see,” Noah sighed. “If there is something else you want to say, just say it,” Felicity urged. She knew that there was and it would hang between them until they were spoken.

“Why? Why would you turn this opportunity down?” he asked, his words woven with a mix of disappointment and confusion. “Because it’s not one I want anymore.” It was the same line she would continue to use.

“And what does Oliver think?” he asked, somewhat gruffly, although his eyes carried more of a sadness. “He respects my decision,” Felicity responded gently.

“Well I can’t.” Felicity would have laughed if she wasn’t so frustrated. He was just as stubborn as she was. “With all due respect, I don’t need you to,” she quipped, her voice bordering on biting. “Felicity this has been your…” “I made my decision,” she interrupted, “all I’m hoping is that you can accept that, but even if you don’t it remains the same.”

“Felicity, this is your future.” His voice was beginning to raise and hers grew louder in kind. “Dad, it’s not like I’m leaving school, Starling IT is a good school.” “It’s not Oxford.” “So what?”

~*~*~*~

Oliver and Donna sat quietly in the lounge on opposite couches, listening as the rising voices cut through the silence in the room.

“Peas in a pod those two,” Donna remarked as her head tipped towards the wall that was leaking the conversation. Oliver smiled and bobbed his head in a nod. He imagined people would probably say the same about him and his father, for the most part.

“Do you love her Oliver?” He was surprised by the bluntness, but where the question would once have made his spine shiver, it didn’t, not even a slight tremble. He knew the answer, even before she finished asking the question.

“Absolutely,” he answered, without a shadow of a doubt. “Good, I believe that,” Donna smiled. “Does Noah believe that?” Oliver asked hesitantly, unsure if it was his place to ask. Donna nodded slowly as she kept her lips smiling, “he knows.”

Those two words brought a smile of relief to Oliver’s face. “Love is hard Oliver,” Donna began as she shifted her body to the edge of the sofa, “love
sometimes means making a decision that hurts but you know it’s the right one.”

“This is your future,” Noah continued, his voice raising a fraction more.
“I know, it’s MY future,” Felicity huffed, “you’re acting like I’m quitting school to work at a strip club. I’m still in school, I will still graduate with two degrees,” she continued, her hands jostling out gestures in front of her.

“There are other options too, I can apply to other schools, Caltech, MIT,” she added, her words echoing thoughts she had had previously, if Oliver relocated for work..., “staying here and moving in with Oliver is what I want.”
She realised what she had said the moment the information left her lips but it was too late to stop it.
“You moved in together?”
His voice wasn’t raised, but it was loudly surprised.

“You moved in together?” Donna echoed, her light blue eyes widening.
Oliver shifted uncomfortably, his dark jeans sinking deeper into the plush white couch, silently hoping it would swallow him up.

“I didn’t mean to tell you quite so bluntly but yes,” Felicity reasoned, hers arms falling to her side before one feathered a hand through her hair.
“You’re too young,” Noah replied, he wasn’t angry although his voice was still raised, but rather his voice trembled to the point Felicity thought he might even be scared.
“That’s not really up for debate,” Felicity cautioned.
“You’re eighteen.”
Felicity blew out a laugh.
“You say that like I don’t know,” she replied.
“You’re throwing away your life for Oli...”
“Don’t say it or I walk out here right now,” Felicity interjected.

“Donna, I’m sorry,” Oliver apologised, noting that using her name finally didn’t feel strange.
“Don’t be,” Donna almost laughed off his apology, “Felicity’s father is all hot air and bluster, he’ll come around and I’m happy for you.”
Oliver was silently thankful he was with this parent and not the other.

“He’s just having a hard time seeing her life change,” Donna added.
“Do you think she should go to Oxford?”
It was Oliver’s turn to be blunt.
“I think Felicity should make a choice that makes her happy and that she won’t regret,” Donna answered with a soft sigh.
“Which is?”
Oliver half wished he could take that question back, unsure he wanted to hear the answer.
“I don’t know,” she simpered with a shrug.
“I just want to see you excel Felicity,” Noah lamented, his voice finally dropping the angry facade. His bluster was waning.
“I can do that here,” Felicity effused, hoping he would note her excitement even if it was hiding her fear.
“I just want you to be happy,” he offered her a smile as his hand rested on her shoulder.
“I am.”

*The more she said it...*
The more she said it...
...The more she might believe it.

The words had been rolling over in her head for the last two hours as she ploughed food around her plate and attempted to hold some sort of conversation.

Felicity could feel Oliver's eyes trained on her and the few times she looked up, they looked pensive and worried, but all she could offer was a smile that barely raised the corner of her lips and did little allay the concerned crinkled across his forehead.

She was happy.
Felicity loved Oliver.
Nothing about her decision to stay in Starling meant she couldn’t achieve her goals.

She wasn’t so much giving something up as she was just not changing, and yet, there was still something gnawing at her gut and rumbling through her chest.

Chris was right.

Felicity blinked up and looked across the table at Oliver as he tried singlehandedly to converse with her parents.
Did she love him more than he ...
She didn’t want to finish the thought.

“I’m full,” she announced, her plate still almost full, “I’m just going to grab some things from upstairs,” she added as she stood straight up from the table.

Oliver looked pained, but she was trying not to meet his eyes with her own.

Felicity walked with purpose to the kitchen and around into the back hall, hoping to escape having to walk through the dining room again. She was on the third step upstairs when Oliver caught up to her.

“Is everything alright?” he asked as his palm caught her hand on the balustrade. Felicity turned and released a heavy sigh.

“I love you,” she breathed after her eyes hung closed for a few moments. Oliver smiled thankfully before his smile drifted away after a few seconds.

“But?”

“There is no but,” Felicity assured, “I just feel like I have so many voices in my head and whichever way I turn I’m disappointing someone.”

Oliver stepped onto the first step so his eyes could entwine with hers.

“You,” he started, sliding his hand against her cheek, “could never disappoint anyone.”

He pecked a kiss near his hand, lingering his lips there well after they needed to be, before he pulled away and swiped his thumb over the warmed apple of her cheek.

“All anyone wants is for you to be happy,” Oliver continued.

“I am,” Felicity answered a question he had only asked with his eyes.

“I was going to go see my family, but I can stay if you...” Oliver started.

“No,” Felicity sighed with a growing smile threaded across her lips, “I’m just going to collect a few things from my room. Go see your family.”

She stretched up onto her tiptoes and pressed a kiss between Oliver's concerned brows.

“I’ll come over in a little bit,” she added before adding a second kiss.

When Oliver entered his parents’ house he followed the sounds of idle chatter coming from the formal lounge where he knew they often retired to in the early evening.

Like clockwork he found them chatting absently away to each other while they both engaged in separate activities. His father skimming the pages of a magazine and his mother sat in her favourite wing-back chair thumbing through a paper diary that no doubt held engagements they needed to attend.

Everything about the scene was typical and it made Oliver long for something similar with Felicity. He stood in the doorway and watched with adoration for a few moments more before his mother turned and smiled kindly at his impromptu but welcomed arrival.

“We didn’t expect to see you tonight Oliver?” she spoke fluidly as she waved him into the room. “Change in meatloaf night, it was a last minute thing. Sorry I didn’t call,” Oliver expressed as he walked deeper into the room, stopping at the side of Moira’s chair.

“We’re always happy to see you.”

She left it unsaid, but Oliver couldn’t help but add the words “especially as you went so many years barely coming home.”
He knew his parents would never resent him for that, they loved him irrespective of his previous poor choices, but he still maintained a level of guilt about it all the same. That said, Oliver was certain, whatever happened, he wouldn’t do that ever again.

“Hey does QC still have any control of the London branch?” Oliver asked casually as he tapped a mindless finger across the back of his mother's chair.

Robert Queen looked up from his Wall Street Journal with an almost quizzical look tacked to his brow.

Oliver just smiled, mildly amused by his father’s response. He couldn’t blame him, year-ago-Oliver probably wouldn’t have even known they once had a London branch.

“No,” Robert replied studiously, “we were bought out of the two European branches because they just weren’t viable for us.”

“So they don’t have the same management?”

Robert closed the Journal with his thumb embedded in the page.

“Completely different, if I ventured there I couldn’t even use the employee bathrooms.”

Robert chuckled to himself, Moira offering a pleasant smile no doubt to appease him.

“Why do you ask?” Moira asked, gently probing the son who had finally ‘come into himself’.

“No reason,” Oliver shrugged, slapping the top of the chair twice lightly before he straightened himself.

“Everything okay Oliver?” his mother queried inquisitively.

“Yeah, fine,” Oliver brushed off her concern, “is Thea upstairs?”

“She should be, she's grounded.”

Oliver snorted out a laugh. It was nice that it wasn’t him for once.

He headed for the doorway but paused just inside the room as he wandered a finger down the wood framing.

Without turning back to face his parents, he sucked in a breath of softly scented air.

“Oh and Felicity moved in with me,” he said quickly, expelling the single breath in one go before he slipped from the room.

“Oliver!”

His mother's exclamation stopped him in his tracks, a few feet from the stairs. He hadn’t made it.

“Dammit.”

He turned to find his mother rounding the corner into the hall.

“Before you say anything it was spur of the moment but that doesn’t mean I’m not a hundred percent committed and...”

She was still walking and Oliver was preparing himself for a barrage.

But, instead, he got a hug. A long, tight hug like ones she would give him when he was a child. It took him about five seconds to even register it before he hugged her back.

“What was that for?” Oliver inquired as they pulled apart and his mother smoothed an unnecessary line along the hairline of his forehead.

“My baby boy, he’s growing up,” she answered, her voice trembled like she just might cry.

“Mom,” Oliver blushed.

“And her parents know?” Moira asked, switching back to concerned parent mode.

“They do,” Oliver answered simply.

“And everyone is happy?”

Oliver shifted uncomfortably on the spot, inching himself closer to the escape of the stairs.
“Donna is happy,” his smile cracked, it was hardly authentic. “Well, your father would be the same with Thea,” Moira nodded. Oliver grimaced at the idea of his baby sister dating let alone moving in with someone. His knuckles were whitening at the mere thought of it. “Just, treat her well and a father will come around.” Oliver nodded, he wasn’t sure that held any truth, but it was a nice idea.

“I love her,” Oliver admitted, though he wasn’t entirely sure why the words had left his mouth. She hadn’t asked. Oliver watched his mother smile, a genuine, full smile. He wasn’t sure when he had last seen such a thing. It wasn’t that she wasn’t warm, she was in her own way and she always had a string of excellent advice for him. But Moira Queen kept her emotions dampened down. He remembered vividly when he had said something similar about Laurel. She certainly hadn’t smile. She had cringed. But this was a full, wide, beaming smile. “I know,” she said coyly as she tapped his cheek, “go see your sister.”

And with that she left.

Felicity blew out a long breath as she stepped into her room and fell against the back of the door. Her mind was in turmoil and the nausea that sat somewhere around the middle of her throat was certainly not making all this any easier.

Deciding to distract herself she walked further into the room and dragged her finger along the edge of her white bookshelf. She picked through a few books she hadn’t touched in years and thumbed through their pages, one after the other, desperately searching for something other than thoughts of Oxford and Oliver to occupy her mind with. But nothing worked.

The letters fell from the pages and none of them seemed to coherently process through her brain. All she heard were the words of other people.

She dragged an exhausted hand through her hair and fell backwards onto her childhood bed. Her eyes blinked slowly as she stared up to the ceiling and remembered all the times she had done the exact same thing with thoughts of the boy next door tumbling through her head.

Tonight was no different. Although her thoughts were.

Felicity closed her eyes and steeled her breath. She had made her decision. She was staying in Starling.

Oliver knocked twice on Thea’s door before he pushed it open. Thea turned around from her desk with a face like thunder, expecting her mother, but her face softened when she saw Oliver traipsing into her room.

Jonas looked up from his spot on Thea’s bed, yawned but decided the effort just wasn’t worth it before he rolled over and went back to sleep.

“Hey big brother,” Thea said with half a smile before she turned back around to the workbooks
open on her desk.
“What did you do?” Oliver smirked as he walked over and leaned against her desk.
Thea sighed dramatically as she dropped her pen and rolled her eyes.
“It’s not even that big of a deal,” she mumbled.
“What did you do?” Oliver repeated, his smile growing as he began to enjoy his sister’s turmoil.
“I snuck out of school to meet a friend at the mall. Mom’s acting like I started a world war or something.”
“School is very important Thea,” Oliver replied, though the smile he was trying to control said otherwise.
“He just took me to a movie. It’s not a big deal.”

Oliver stood up straight, shoulders back, eyes wide as the smile fell instantly from his lips.
“He?”
“Sure,” Thea shrugged followed by a second eye roll, “his name is…”
“I don’t care what his name is, you’re twelve, you shouldn’t be talking to boys,” Oliver exclaimed sternly.
“Relax Oliver, it’s not a big deal,” Thea groaned before she picked up the pen and started back on her homework.
“It is a big deal, boys are bad news.”
“You were a boy once,” she scoffed.
“And I was bad news!” Oliver declared indignantly.

“Is Felicity around?” Thea asked, side-eyeing her brother as he continued to stare her down.
“You can’t just change the subject,” Oliver snipped.
“I have math homework that I can’t figure out, so while you’re lecturing me maybe she can help, unless you can?”
Thea shifted the paper towards Oliver who took a moment to stoop down and read the equation of fractions, letters and numbers before he backed away slowly with a grimace on his face.

“Is that math?” he asked, confused.
“Yes,” she mocked with her laugh, “so is Felicity here?”
“No but she’s next door. Give her a call.”
“I can’t mom took my phone as part of being grounded and I’m not speaking to her right now.”
Oliver fumbled in his pocket for a moment before he pulled out his phone.
“Give her a call, but it has to be our little secret,” he advised as he tapped the black phone onto his palm before holding the same out to Thea.
Thea smiled as she took it from his hand and unlocked it without even asking for the pin, an action that reminded Oliver he still needed to change it.

“Thanks Oliver,” she grinned as she found Felicity’s number and dialled.
“Stay away from boys,” Oliver called out before he walked from the room, leaving the door just slightly ajar.

Oliver sauntered into his room and kicked the door closed. He wasn’t looking for anything in particular but found a satchel and filled it with a few things all the same. He rummaged through the top drawer intent on finding some socks when he stumbled across a little black book that was exactly what the tacky name implied.

It held a raft of girls’ numbers along with some rating system he honestly didn’t want to recount. He hadn’t seen it in almost two years and looking at it now, he only felt disgust and embarrassment.
Oliver smiled as he threw it into the trash can without a second thought. *Ollie was well and truly gone.*

He lumbered out of the room with the satchel slung over his shoulder. His eye’s walked towards his parents’ library and his mind wandered to the beach house.

He looked around like a thief before he hurried into the library and headed for the wall that held his mother’s books, bypassing his father’s collection of Tom Clancy novels and Wall Street Journals.

He tapped a thoughtful finger against his temple as he tried to remember anything about the book she had been reading that night – the night that whips of warm orange light from the fireplace caressed her face and his body swelled with intimate thoughts of her.

*Adison* that was the name of the girl from the book and the “rebel” was called *Oliver*; that much he could remember, *but what was the name*…

“Lake…” he mumbled to himself as his eyes roamed across the four shelves.

“I never thought I’d find you in here Oliver,” his mother marvelled from behind. Oliver shot up, catching his head on the corner of one of the shelves before stifling the litany of swear words he was on the brink of saying.

He steadied himself against the shelf and casually ran his hand over the spot on his head that would no doubt sport a bump tomorrow as he deftly tried to downplay how much it hurt.

“I was just looking for something for Felicity,” Oliver started. “I see,” his mother raised one brow as she walked a little closer. “I mean she asked me to come and get one,” he corrected.

Moira continued to smile, like she didn’t believe a word her son was saying but she was of no mind to challenge him. “Of course.”

They stood looking at each other for an awkward few seconds. “Did you find what you were looking for?” Moira asked, “what Felicity was looking for?” she self-corrected with a painted smile. “I forgot the name,” Oliver admitted as he awkwardly tried to avoid eye contact. “You could call…” “It’s one of a series, the girl in it is the preacher’s daughter,” Oliver interrupted to explain. *She fucks a guy called Oliver.*

Oliver swallowed the last thought as he tried to stagnant his burgeoning smile. “The series is something about a Lake,” he added as he buried memory of Felicity’s thin top spread across her breasts…

“This one,” Moira replied as she slipped one of the books from the third shelf, “but I think she’s already read it.” “No idea,” Oliver lied. Moira nodded as she handed Oliver the book. He thanked her with a slight smile before he slid the book into his bag and patted it closed.

Oliver watched as his mother slipped another book from the same shelf and held it out to him. He looked down at the cover models and blinked rapidly. “I recommend this one,” she simpered before Oliver reluctantly took it from her hands. “For Felicity,” Oliver added.
Moira walked towards the door with a broad smile. “Sure,” she answered before she slipped from the room just as silently as she had entered it.

Oliver took another moment to look down at the book. A man with dirty-blond hair with tips that swept over his shoulders and a shirt marred with what seemed to be grease and motor oil wrapped tight, large arms around a girl that could mistakenly be Felicity in a few years if she swapped her oversized sweaters and skinny jeans for a vivid red corporate-killer dress. Oliver read the title and chuckled, *Ride or Die.*

He folded the book into his bag beside the other and walked the short distance to Thea’s room still chuckling to himself.

He opened the door and Thea pounced, wrapping her arms around him as she squealed in absolute delight.

“YOU MOVED IN TOGETHER!” she screamed, making Oliver’s ears ring. “She told you?” Oliver said, surprised, while he peeled his sister off him.

Thea shrugged as she bounced happily around the room. “Not exactly, she thought it was you when I rung her and she asked if there was enough *shared closet space* for her to bring some clothes *home* tonight,” Thea smiled, jubilantly rubbing her palms together, “then she prattled on about how strange it was to say home and it means the same as home for me, uh, you. She talked for like five minutes before she took a breath and I told her it was me.”

Oliver ran a finger across his brow, he hadn’t even considered that when he’d handed Thea his phone. “Shit,” he sighed. “Yeah, anyway,” Thea threw her arms around his neck again, almost strangling him, “O. M. Gee, I’m so happy.”

She dropped his neck and proceeded, once again, to skip around the room. “You finally got a clue, it’s like a late Christmas miracle,” she laughed. “It’s August, so that would make it early,” Oliver corrected with a single, point-proved nod. “Yeah but it took how many years? Therefore, it’s late.” She smirked with pursed lips. *Point proved.*

“And now you’re going to get married and I’m going to be an aunt,” Thea cheered while she settled into a spot on the bed beside Jonas who had perked up at all the commotion. “Woah, woah, woah,” Oliver breathed, his hands shooting up reactively into the air. “What?” “That’s a little...” he paused, “fast.” “But you love her.” Thea spoke like someone had just asked her what humans breathe. There was nothing more simple an answer to her.

“Yes,” Oliver replied. “So, it’s a natural progression,” she spoke like it was psychology 101 and she knew it all, “my god you’re kids are going to be adorable, I hope they’re smart like her. Nothing personal.”

“Is it hot in here?” Oliver asked as the collar of his tee became suffocatingly-tight. “No,” Thea chortled. She ran and hand across Jonas’ head before she flopped down onto her bed, her wide, young eyes
staring up at the ceiling with a proud smile on her lips.

“When you propose it should be really intimate, just the two of you,” she sighed, “no wait, you should have someone video it. Can I be there?” she corrected loudly while she sat bolt upright again.
“Ther stop,” Oliver pleaded, the idea of getting married wasn’t really something he had considered.

They were still young.
Painfully young.

“What?” Thea looked at him befuddled.
“It’s just not…”
He didn’t even finish his sentence before he collected his phone and walked like a zombie from Thea’s room.

It wasn’t that he didn’t want to marry Felicity.
In fact, the more time he spent thinking about it the more he realised he would happily spend the rest of his life with her.

His reservation wasn’t about him.
He’d seen the world, or at least most of it. He dated and screwed around and had his heart broken.
He was on the cusp of moving to the next level in life, the fulltime job, the responsibilities, the...family.

But she hadn’t.

He wandered down the stairs in a daze and straight out the front door after mumbling a goodbye he doubted any one heard. He was almost at the gate when he practically ran into Felicity.

“Hey,” she smiled as he took two steps past her.
Oliver stopped and shook himself free from his daze.
“Hey, are you ready to go?”

Felicity nodded, “I’ve put a few things in the car, to save me having to come back and pack them later, I hope that’s okay.”
Oliver took two steps back and slunk his arms around her waist before pulling her into an embrace that was unexpected but appreciated.

Her head fell against his chest and she sighed quietly at its familiar warmth while she breathed in the memorised notes of his musk.

Oliver pressed his lips onto the top of her head and lingered a chaste kiss there for a few languid moments.
“I love you,” he whispered, the soft words carried on the silent night air.

And he did.

Felicity smiled against his chest as she linked her arms a little tighter around his waist.
“I love you too,” she replied as a curious hand slipped under the waistband of his jeans.

And she did.
“You should be in London,” Chris gritted as his bent arms pushed against Felicity’s straight ones. “And you should be pushing against me, come on Chris put some effort into it, I’m tiny,” Felicity mocked, taunting him to straighten his arms.

It was an exercise to continue using and building his arm muscles and while Chris had first laughed at tiny little Felicity trash talking him into trying to beat her, he had to admit she was much stronger than she looked and with his legs an almost dead weight, relying solely on his upper body strength was proving an arduous task.

His parents had returned to Vegas to make arrangements for his move back there in a few weeks on the proviso that his recovery for his next scheduled surgery went well, a last ditch attempt to see if fusing bone from his hip and placing rods either side of fracture might see Chris regain some mobility and although the odds were short, perhaps even walk again.

His left leg felt a jolt of pain that he ignored until another three identical jolts stabbed through him in quick succession.

“Shit,” he groaned as he dropped Felicity’s hands. “Are you okay?” she asked, concerned as she dropped to her knees in front of the chair where he sat, “is it the phantom pain?”

Chris buckled over in the chair as his hands tried to ward off what could only be described as a debilitating cramp.

Felicity slipped her hands under his and gently began to massage the spot that had caused his face to twist up in pain.

“Try and breathe through it like the therapist suggested,” Felicity encouraged as her fingers continued to manipulate the rogue muscle.

Chris managed a smile as he puffed like a labouring woman on a romantic comedy. “Is this good?” he panted.

“That’s perfect, you can do it, push this baby out,” Felicity laughed, the lift in the tone of the room almost immediate.

“I sure hope Chris Junior has your eyes,” Chris played, wiping invisible eyes from his cheeks. “And your big eyebrows,” Felicity mocked.

“And your baby girl afro.” “And your chipmunk teeth.” “Oh honey, our child sounds awful,” Chris cackled.

“Just awful.”

They both laughed as Felicity still her hands on his thigh just as the door opened and young student nurse holding two tubs of jello stepped in the room.

“Oh, sorry,” she gaped as she first looked to Chris then at Felicity crouched in front of him before her stare landed on Felicity’s eyes around Chris’ leg.

She stumbled towards the door that had already closed.

“Wait, this...” Chris began as he swatted Felicity's hand away from his leg, “it’s not, this, it’s, my Felicity.”

Felicity stood up from the floor and looked back and forth between the two. She didn’t know the
young nurse but she had never seen Chris turn that shade of red before.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know you had a Felicity,” the young woman stammered as she looked, horrified and apologetic, at Felicity.

“No, she’s Oliver’s Felicity not mine,” Chris corrected, his grimace a clear indicator he was reprimanding himself internally as he spoke.

Felicity smiled, this was a car wreck.

“I’ll just go,” the nurse bumbled before she practically ran from the room.

“Christopher,” Felicity started as Chris dropped his head into his palms and shook it, “Christopher Chance, what was that?”

Chris rolled his head between his hands and groaned.

“Is that the extra jello nurse?” Felicity grinned.

His face rose an inch as he blinked up at her.

“Oh my god, you like her,” she cheered with her hands clapping together.

“Felicity, wipe that look off your face,” Chris warned as Felicity inched towards the door.

Felicity laughed with utter abandonment as she walked quicker to the door.

“No, come back,” Chris called.

Felicity winked as she swung the door open.

“Aww, make me.”

Felicity's tennis shoes slid along the corridor in a chorus of squeaks as she tried to catch up to the flustered nurse.

“Wait, wait up,” Felicity urged as they rounded a corner.

“I’m so sorry, I just...” the nurse grimaced, her hazel eyes filled with trepidation.

“What’s your name?” Felicity asked, stooping slightly to catch her breath.

“Caitlyn,” she answered wearily.

“I’m Felicity.”

Caitlyn took the hand Felicity offered and shook it dubiously.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know Chris had a Felicity,” Caitlyn smiled meekly, “or an Oliver.”

“He doesn’t, we’re just friends. He apparently forgot how to form coherent sentences when you walked it. And Oliver is my boyfriend.”

“But your hands,” Caitlyn didn’t finish her sentence, it wasn’t her business.

“His muscle had a spasm and I was just trying to help it. I promise you I am not in any way, shape or form competition, but I can be an excellent ally.”

“Oh,” she paused to consider Felicity's explanation, “why are you telling me this?”

Felicity beamed brightly.

“I’m glad you asked.”

Chris looked up slowly with half lidded eyes when he heard the sound of Felicity's shoes on his hospital room floor.

“I have a lecture to get to,” Felicity lied without blinking, “but Caitlyn is on a break so she offered to finish your PT,” she finished as Caitlyn stepped into the room behind Felicity and waved timidly.

“Felicity,” Chris started.

“Bye,” Felicity saluted before she grabbed her bag, kissed the top of Chris’ head and winked at Caitlyn, “see you tomorrow Chip.”
It was nearing six when Felicity slipped the key into the apartment door with a bag of groceries swinging from her wrist. After the hospital she had spent some time at campus before texting Oliver on her way home. His reply had included a request to pick a few things up from the corner store. Honestly she wasn’t sure why black peppercorns, lite mayo and five rolls of toilet paper couldn’t wait, but she didn’t mind the jaunt.

She stepped into the apartment and immediately felt the warm caress of flickering orange candlelight. The scent was almost identical to the one that had played with her senses at Orion’s Gate less the surrounding touch of pine.

The candles snaked a path across the floor and up the stairs case.

“Oliver,” Felicity beckoned as she walked deeper into the apartment, dropping the groceries on the kitchen counter as she passed by.

“Upstairs,” came his distinctively low grow.

Felicity slipped off her shoes and shrugged down her jacket, dropping it carelessly on the first step and she made her way up them.

She found Oliver standing, dressed in charcoal jeans, a white crew neck and a brushed leather jacket in a worn shade of brown, amidst a crescent of pillar candles in a rainbow of colours all flickering light-amber hues.

“What are you doing?” she asked coyly as she dropped her bag on a nearby armchair.

“We never got a Sunday,” Oliver replied smoothly, “and I’ve been reading something,” his eyes glanced towards the bed where a copy of Lake Tryst Series: Forbidden sat beside a single rose.

“I’ve read that one,” she breathed, her words like a whisper as she struggled to believe if this moment was even real.

His clothes, the candles and the half-open ruby-red rose were all part of the book – one particular part.

“I know, you were reading it at the beach house,” Oliver reminisced, his eyes a vibrant blue despite the dim lighting.

Felicity’s lips fell open, “you remembered,” she whispered, her tone threaded with disbelief.

“I remember that night because I wanted to desperately to kiss you.” Felicity blushed at his candour, despite the intimacy they had already shared.

“I wanted to touch you,” he stepped forward as he spoke and grazed his fingers down her bare arm, stopping just under her elbow, “I wanted you to touch me.”

She watched him swallow heavily as though his words were choking him to come out.

“You should have,” Felicity breathed, her words barely heard, “touched me,” she finished before her tongue wet her pillowed lips.

Oliver blinked down to stare at her lips for a moment before his eyes became enraptured in hers once more.

“I wasn’t good enough for you then,” he replied softly, but sure, “but now I hope I am.”

His lips lightly brushed against hers, warm, soft and inviting. A hand combed through her hair and nestled at the nape of her neck. Her fingers slalomed down his chest before her nails drove back up.

Oliver moaned into the kiss, his tone a thick, guttural rasp that shuddered against Felicity’s lips before his tongue swept across them.
They stumbled together around the room until Felicity’s back was against the mirrored door of the closet a few feet from the bed. His lips dropped hers reluctantly, ghosting a breath over them before he pulled a further inch away.

His nose swept against her cheek before he kissed her intimately in the same spot.

“Knowing you read that book; that your eyes travelled across the words,” he growled as he pressed his burgeoning erection against her hips, “I heard you in your room.”

Felicity sucked in a sharp breath of air as her eyes opened wide.

“I, I’m sor…”

“Don’t say sorry,” Oliver smiled after he kissed the words from her mouth, “I’ve never been more turned on in my life.”

Felicity blinked up at him as her cheeks blushed pink. She wasn’t sure what to think or what to say, but knowing that Oliver heard her intimacy was equally as mortifying as it was sensual.

Oliver threaded his fingers into Felicity’s and walked her the short distance to the bed. “I thought we could recreate the scene from that book, the part you were reading,” he whispered the words into her neck before his tongue skated along her jaw.

Felicity’s eyes lulled closed as she listened to his heavy breathing against her prickled skin. Her whole body ached to be touched by him. When her eyes fluttered open Oliver was looking at her with lust filled eyes of his own and a lopsided smile that hooked one side of his mouth higher than the other.

It was then that she noticed the items he had placed so carefully on the table beside the bed. They were all there and she didn’t try to stop the smile that leaked across her lips at seeing them.

Felicity stepped away from him, their arms stretching till their fingers fell apart. Her eyes stayed closely guarding his as she lifted her black scoop singlet from her body. The thin layered top floated gently to the floor when she dropped it from her slender fingers.

She smiled with pouted lips as she watched Oliver’s chest expand and collapse with each drawn and heavy breath he took.

Her fingers walked slowly down her sides, rolling over her lacy black bra before they slipped under the waistband of the faded grey skinny jeans she was wearing. Oliver watched with a salacious lick of his lips as the tips of her fingers disappeared between her legs and her eyes slowly rolled up towards the ceiling.

She was teasing him and he didn’t mind one little bit.

With her bottom lip stapled between her teeth she slowly withdrew her fingers and walked them down the zipper, dragging the tab down with them. She shimmied from her pants and kicked them to the side revealing tiny matching panties.

Oliver’s eyes roved across her semi-naked body, taking in every inch of her with wanton sighs of desire dripping from his parted lips.

In her final move Felicity slipped the straps of her bra from her shoulders before her fingers walked treacherously slow around to the back clasp. With their eyes locked she pulled the clasp free and dropped the bra from her body.

“Okay,” she said amorously in a bewitching response to the words he had spoken minutes ago
before she sat down on the edge of the bed. “Let’s recreate it,” she added with a coy smile as she shuffled towards the centre of the bed.

She lay back with her head between the pillows as Oliver stripped the jacket and tee from his body. He climbed onto the bed and sat on his knees between her legs as he pinched the stem of the rose between his thick fingers.

He dragged the petals of the rose between her breasts before swooping it around to circle one of her dusky pink nipples. A breath floated from her lips as her back arched off the bed. Holding the rose to the side of her breast, Oliver leaned over her body before he smoothed a gentle kiss atop the peak of her nipple.

Felicity writhed underneath him, her breathing now like stilted rasps.

He kissed her breast harder before his lips encased her budded nipple. She keened passionately as her fingers slipped into his hair and dug down into his scalp.

“Felicity,” he hummed her name as he pulled back, drawing circles with the rose where his lips had once been, “I need you to stay still or I’m going to have to tie you up,” he added with a soft chuckle.

“Okay,” Felicity replied before her lip snagged between her teeth, the tips of it still drawn up into a smile.

His smiled brimmed across his stubble.

“That’s not in the book.”

“I know,” she remarked as she sat up on her elbows, “we could have some creative licence with it.”

Oliver didn’t know what to say but the throbbing between his legs that started the instant she suggested being tied up gave him a clear indication of how his body felt on the matter.

“Have you ever done it before?” Felicity asked quietly as her fingers swept uneven paths down his chest.

“No,” Oliver replied truthfully.

Sex before Felicity hadn’t ever been about intimacy and trust, it had been about thrusting and finishing.

“So I can be your first,” she blinked doe-soft eyes at him, her voice a sultry mix of innocence and lust.

Oliver’s lips smiled longingly as he brushed the rose head across her blushed cheek.

“You really want to?” he asked, wanting to ensure that this wasn’t something she might come to regret.

“I love you and I trust you,” she smiled before she pecked a soft kiss against his lips, “I want to do this.”

His mouth opened to speak but only a hot breath of air passed over his lips.

Felicity held his head between her palms, kissed both cheeks before locking eyes with him.

“We can have a first together.”
I really like this chapter.
Like I really do.
;

We can have a first together...
Those were the words that had bled so seductively from Felicity's mouth and as her wrists strained against a silk tie woven around them, she didn’t regret them at all.

Oliver led her hands above her head and gently laid them on a satin pillow. Felicity let out soft sigh as she settled into the position. He kissed the underside of her wrists languidly before he tied the tail of the tie to one of the slats on the bed’s base.

“We can stop anytime Felicity,” Oliver breathed into the amber-hued air.
“Kiss me,” Felicity encouraged as her body writhed, naked, beside him.
Oliver’s lips caressed the sweep of her neck, delicately weaving his tongue across the thin cords of it and relishing the pleasant moans that fluttered from her pillowed lips.

Their eyes met as she turned her head on the black sheets. The contrast of her pale complexion and halo of golden hair was magical and Oliver’s eyes grew with desire at simply seeing it.

“What’s first?” Oliver prompted, an answer he already knew but he wanted her to say it. He wanted to watch as she enjoyed every torturously languid moment of it.

“Soft,” Felicity answered, her voice like warm oil to his ears. Silken. Slow. Warm.

Oliver settled his naked body alongside hers, ensuring they only touched if she moved her body in search of it. He took the peacock feather from beside the bed. It’s vibrant colours were muted by the dim light but when the first stroke landed between her pert breasts the vivid blues became like a beacon against her milky skin.

With a steady hand Oliver dragged the tips of the feather down the centre of Felicity’s body, memorizing the way her willowy body rolled like a soft-peaking wave beside him. He stopped at her mound and paused there to let her body settle back into the mattress, cream on midnight black. Silk on satin.

Oliver brushed only the very tip of the feather across her sex, the sensation causing Felicity to pant out tiny mewls.

“What do you feel?” Oliver asked, lifting the question straight from the Forbidden pages. Felicity's eyes blinked rapidly as she tried to answer but Oliver diverted her attention with the feather weaving around her thighs.

“Soft, slow, light,” Felicity mumbled through trembling lips. Her wrists pulled against her binds as her eyes lulled closed. The feeling was something on the edge of pleasure and tantric torture. The slow sweeps of her upper thighs felt like a breath that didn’t quite reach her sweltering sex. Her hands ached to touch herself to still the growing hunger between her folds.

And then the feeling was gone.
Felicity's eyes snapped open to find Oliver smiling intently at her, as if every twitch of pleasure her face made was fuel to him.

He lifted the feather above her, so close but not a wisp of it touched her fiery skin. He drew figures above her body and Felicity tugged her lower lip into her mouth as she waited anxiously for the feather to land.

It finally did, on her left nipple.
A glittering of low curse words fell from Felicity's lips and Oliver chuckled in response.

Her breasts were exquisite and Oliver often found himself desperate to tell her just how much the tightly wound nipple in a dusted pink drove him crazy.

“I want to kiss you here Felicity,” Oliver asked, breaking character to enjoy some creative licence of his own as he wove the feather around her nipple, “is that...”

“Yes,” Felicity quipped without waiting for Oliver to finish asking.

He tickled the feather around the other breast while his tongue lapped across the first before his warm lips hungrily encased her and his chin kneaded the underside. His tongue toyed and teased the tiny bud until his teeth nipped at the same and his ears drunk in the gravelled moans of pleasure that action elicited.
But they still had two more sensations to experience.

Oliver pulled away before he pecked a stolen kiss atop the round of her breast.

“What’s next Felicity?” Oliver asked as he laid the feather beside her. “Warm,” she answered with a strangled voice.

Oliver smiled before he placed an unexpected kiss on the top of her knee. He took the warming massage oil from the bedside table and held it like a pendulum for a few moments so Felicity was fully aware of what was next. His fingers snaked feather strokes along the inside of her bound wrists before he kissed a wingtip of her smiling lips.

“Are you still okay?” he asked, carefully studying her eyes to gauge her response. Felicity’s doe eyes raised a little higher with a smile that bled from her cheeks into the sapphire blue of her irises. “Yes,” she simpered, the same smile threaded across her lips that had been there when they had started.

Oliver shifted on the bed making Felicity hum with approval at the passing sensation of his cock brushing against her tented leg. He slotted himself between her legs and popped the cap with a sound that echoed in the still night air before he poured a heaping of the Strawberry scented, edible elixir into the palm of his hand.

He warmed it first between two slow hands before he sunk the same in around her waist. Felicity keened into the feel of it, deliciously, deliriously, warm, and it was slowly melting into her skin and fanning out across her body.

Oliver leaned forward and place a dusted kiss around her navel. “Do you know what the best part of this oil is Felicity?”

The way he spoke her name trembled down her spine and settled between her aching folds. Her hands fought for just a moment against her restraints desperate to feel some sort of pressure at her sex. Oliver read the desire scribbled across her expression and he jutted himself forward on his knees so that the tip of his hardening shaft made just enough contact with her pulsing arousal to stem the call.

Felicity shook her head against the dark sheets with her lip trapped between her teeth. She couldn’t speak even if she wanted to, every ounce of her concentration was focused on the warm weaving patterns across her stomach as Oliver rubbed the oil across her.

“If I blow on it,” he whispered before pursing his lips into the perfect ‘o’ and pushing out a steady breath across the glistening oil down her core, “it gets hotter.” Felicity felt it immediately, it was like that moment when you open the oven door while something is cooking inside and there is a sudden, encompassing swell of warmness around you.

It was like that, just like that, and her skin prickled immediately as the lower part of her back rose at least two inches off the back in arched pleasure.

Oliver smoothed the oil up the inside of her legs, purposely avoiding her thrumming sex as he dipped his cock just a fraction further between her folds. “Actually,” he smiled, waiting till her body had lowered once more to the embrace of the sheets, “I lied, that’s not the best part,” he added before he blew down the inside of her leg, heating the oil to an insatiable temperature.
Felicity panted, breathless and wordless, her mind a fog of nothing but heat and touch and how much she needed, craved, them both. She bucked her hips against him, sliding his cock further down her folds and making silent cries fall from her lips.

“The best part is,” he lowered his face so close to the inside of her upper thigh that she could feel his nose brush against her, “it’s edible.”

He didn’t leave any time for the words he was saying to sink into Felicity’s sexually-dazed mind before his the flat of his tongue was sliding from the inside of her knee all the way down to her apex.

Felicity gaped and writhed and rolled her body in ways she was no longer in control of. Her eyes shot to the ceiling as sweat beaded across her décolletage.

The binds were becoming burdensome now, now that she wanted to touch his face and comb his hair as his tongue replaced the sensation of his cock between her folds. But they also heightened it – forced Felicity to focus only on that touch, that sensation as all others were taken from her.

Her nipples ached to be touch and her lips desperate to be kissed; and for one delirious moment Felicity considered just how fucking wonderful it would be to have multiple Oliver’s in the bed with her right now.

Oliver retreated his tongue from between her folds and promised to return soon enough, sealing the same with a kiss at her hood.

He drunk in the sight of her strangled moans as he added more oil to his palms and slowly rubbed it together.

His hands cupped her breast, bleeding the warm oil into her fiery skin. “Oliver!” she screamed, her voice dripping with unbearable lust before she stapled her lips closed between her teeth and blinked at him sheepishly.

“Good thing we don’t live in shared houses,” Oliver chuckled as his thumbs massaged the underside of her breasts, “or at home,” he added with a mischievous grin.

With her lips still firmly trapped between her teeth just a hint of a smile drew across Felicity’s lips. Oliver leaned over her, one hand slipping from her breast to hold himself above her before he kissed her lips free, “don’t be shy Felicity, this is our house, be as loud as you want.”

Felicity blew out an exhale between her pillowed lips as Oliver finished his words with a wink. “We have neighbours,” she smiled before lifting her chin to peck his lips. “I think most of them are deaf,” Oliver replied with a soft joviality.

Oliver sat back onto his knees and swept his hands back across her chest, smearing the warming oil wherever they travelled. Felicity keened against him, finding some friction as her sex brushed against his taut thigh.

He swirled across her breasts, ensuring every inch of her glistened in the candle light with the shimmering oil, before his fists nestled either side of her svelte body and his lips walked a deliriously slow path over her twisting body.

Oliver stopped the trail between her breasts and cocked his head to the left before blowing a long, steady exhale over her coiled nipple. Felicity bucked as her nipple felt like an explosion of pleasure, the oil heating to a temperature that felt like nothing she had ever experienced, nor could use that ludicrously high IQ to formulate enough words to explain.
And when Oliver repeated the exact action on her other breast, Felicity shuddered through a sudden and unstoppable orgasm. Oliver’s stance almost toppled as he felt a sudden surge of warmth against the tip of his cock.

He mumbled her name, desperate and strangled as he tried to stem his own release.

_jfc he hadn’t even dipped inside her and he was about to fall right over the cliff after her._

His eyes searched out hers, but that made the quelling even harder as her eyes were blown wide and hungrily devouring every inch she could see of him. In search of something to stem him, Oliver’s eyes walked up her pale, silken arms to see his navy neck tie twisted and wound around her wrists.

That didn’t help.
If anything that made him want to bury himself inside her and finish in two _and a half_ brutal thrusts. Seeing the trust she had in him, the way she wanted to try something new, _with him_, was a pinnacle he knew could never be replicated.

His eyes fell back down to her breasts as the pain of stilling his release sent tendrils of electricity down the back of his thighs. They were rising and falling, _rising and falling_ and without considering himself Oliver’s mouth sunk in around one.

His mouth suckled, his lips caressed and his tongue stroked over her strawberry flavoured breast. He could hear the languid moans Felicity made as she rolled through her surprise orgasm and full-throttled right onto the cusp of another.

There was no way he could survive seeing her do that again and not blow his load like a teenager watching his first porno. Oliver dropped her breast like a soft plop and sat back on his heels, severing all contact between their bodies.

“Are you okay?” Felicity asked, her words stunted as she hummed through the last remnants of her surprise orgasm.

“I almost followed you over,” Oliver remarked, his words decoded as Felicity smiled.

“You could have,” she smiled, lifting her foot so it grazed against his inner thigh.

“We have three parts Felicity,” he growled, as he took her foot and gently massaged the underside of it.

“Mmmm,” she hummed, enjoying the slow strokes of his hand on the arch of her foot.

“Do you remember what the last sensation is Felicity?”

Her head lolled from side to side before her eyes perked up.

“Wet,” she answered, her eyes a rambunctious blue, “but I think I already did that,” she added with a beaming smile.

“Still,” Oliver rasped, “are you ready to move on?”

Felicity nestled her body into the bed shifted her restrained hands back to the centre and jostled her shoulders gently.

“I’m ready.”

Oliver reached his hand into a stainless steel dish beside the bed, his fingers dipping and swimming in the frigid water until he found what he was after, a smooth pebble of ice, about the size of a nectarine stone.

“Tell me if it’s too much,” Oliver instructed as he held the ice between two fingers above her, waiting for her consent.
Felicity wriggled as the first drop fell from above and slipped down between her breasts. The sensation was in such contrast to the warm oil that still lingered on her skin, that she gasped at the change.

“Yes, yes, mmhmm,” she prattled with sporadic head nodding to accompany. Oliver placed the melting ice onto her skin and watched as it slipped down her chest before slowing to a stop in the dip at the bottom of her ribcage.

He took another, almost identical, sphere of ice from the dish and placed it in the same spot, watching as it slid a similar path leaving a trail of water behind it.

The second pebble knocked the first from its delicate balance and they both slid further down Felicity's stomach. She reacted in stilted breaths and dripping moans as each movement made them slip further down her naked body.

Oliver took a third, larger cube and reached and arm across her body before the ice came to touch the inside of her wrist.

Felicity tried to still her body but it twitched underneath him despite her attempts, making the two melting pebbles of ice to sink another inch, into her navel.

Oliver wrote down her arm with the cube, imagining each letter as it travelled across her skin.

L. O. V. E.

He wasn’t sure if she noticed as her body was wracked with compounding sensations, but honestly, he didn’t write it for her sweet praise, but rather because it was true. He was in love with her.

Undeniably.
Irrevocably.
Absolutely.

Moments later he placed the ice to her lips and swung slowly back and forth over the lower one. He watched as her lip trembled underneath but her eyes stayed soft and calm. Oliver fed the ice into his own mouth and devoured the sweet notes of strawberry that must have tainted it from his hands.

He leaned down and kissed her chilled lips before her tongue instantly swarmed his mouth, glad for even just a fleeting moment of control. Her tongue batted his and twisted around the ice as they fought lips against lips, crashing, smushing, devouring.

“Oliver, please,” Felicity moaned into his mouth, her knuckles turning white as she struggled against the binds.

It took Oliver a few moments for his mind to catch up, as his body held the reins, before he noted the desperation in her eyes.

“Enough?” he asked, the one word carrying a million questions.

“My hands, I want them free,” Felicity pleaded, her words tapered with the need she felt.

She needed to touch him, to feel his body under her fingertips, to hold him tight and to have the intimacy that she craved and that could only be stemmed by touching her hands to the warm familiarity of Oliver.

Oliver moved with tenacity and freed her hands immediately. His thumb circled her wrist where just a slight red mark stained her porcelain skin.

“Does it hurt?” he asked anxiously, his brow threaded with a concern that was equal parts
endearing and provoking.

“Not at all,” Felicity smiled as she slipped her hands away from his grip and laid them softly around the base of his neck, “I just need to touch you.”

She pulled his head down, pressing her lips to his own while her thumbs brushed through his stubble. It was a kiss meant to linger, to savour, to enjoy and they both took their time with it. His tongue painted her bottom lip and her tongue drew an outline of his cupid’s bow.

It was a transient moment, where time stood still and ambient noises faded into nothing as all they heard were the slow, measured keens and breaths shared between them.

The ice melted, sandwiched between them, but neither noticed nor pulled away from it until tiny streams of water glided down between Felicity’s legs and she bucked up against Oliver’s pelvis in response.

He growled salaciously, his cock sliding between her warm folds just as another stream of ice cold water circled his base. Felicity felt his body tremble above her and she took the momentary lapse to catch Oliver off guard.

The next thing he knew it was his back that was feeling the silky embrace of the dark sheets and Felicity was straddling him, holding his rigid cock between two teasing hands.

“Perhaps I should tie you up to the bed and repeat everything you just did,” Felicity smiled as her hands moved long measured strokes up his shaft.

“That’s not in the book,” Oliver grinned as he let his palms slid up her silken legs.

“Creative licence,” Felicity hummed before she kissed a set of six kisses down his sternum, relishing with quiet keening the way his hard body twitched under her featherweight touch, “remember,” she finished as she licked a path over her kisses.

“Do you want to tie me up Felicity?” Oliver enquired, with one brow hitched and a smirk wrapped over his lips. Felicity nodded with a twinkle in her eye and her lower lip snapped between her teeth.

“But not tonight,” she added as her fingers cascaded down his chest, ducking a weaving over the gullies and rises his muscles made.

“What do you want toni…”

Oliver didn’t finish his sentence. All words were sudden stolen from him the instance Felicity leaned her body forward and slipped the tip of his cock into her entrance.

He was certain he moaned, loudly and he was positive he gripped her thighs a little tighter, but speak he did not.

The heels of Felicity’s palms sunk into Oliver’s shoulders as she rode him softly, enjoying the satisfaction of her body stretching around him and filling with him. She watched him with hooded eyes as Oliver lips’s stayed parted, still left with the last words hanging from his tongue.

She kissed his lower lip, finally sparking them to close and kiss her back before Oliver lifted off the bed, holding a strong arm around the small of her back. She whimpered at the change but hummed her approval as he nestled her onto his lap and thrust his cock a little deeper inside her thrumming walls.

Felicity lifted her body up onto her knees to gain a little height above Oliver while his lips chased hers, eventually settling for the warm crevice of her neck.
She dropped back down on Oliver suddenly, causing a purge of hot air to fan where his lips had kissed. They gripped each other tighter – his arms folded around her back, fingers entrenched in her waist and her, elbows locked into the dip of his shoulders and her fingers combed into the back of his hair.

They dotted kisses wherever they could place them, breasts, neck, forehead, temple, every one tipped with subtle moans and pleasured sighs while they created a delicious rhythm of thrust and sweep.

Oliver’s banked release from before drew him closer and closer to the edge as the momentum quickened and the thrusting became more desperate and deep.

Sweat glistened where oil had once been and heavy breaths of stifling air hung like a thick curtain around them until finally Oliver found his release, with his cock buried deep within her soft, smooth walls and his lips lazily kissing the slope of her shoulder.

It was only moments later that Felicity came too, her warm release coating Oliver’s embedded shaft as they slowed their synced thrusting to languid rocking.

They stayed in their embrace for what seemed like an eternity but it was in reality only a few minutes before Felicity finally spoke, “I love you too,” she whispered into his sweat-glistened cheek.

Oliver looked at her with a mix of wonderment and question. Had she…

“I know what you wrote on my arm,” she smiled, wiping her thumb across his plump lower lip, “I’m a genius remember,” she finished with a wink.

[Late September 2007]

“Do you want to stay while he’s in surgery?” Oliver asked as he and Felicity walked the familiar hospital corridors with their entwined hands swaying between them.

“I’ll stay until it’s time for him to go, then head to mom and dad's to pack,” Felicity sighed the last few words. She had been putting off packing up her bedroom for long enough but that didn’t mean she had to be okay with it.

“I can go and pack if you want to stay,” Oliver remarked before stealing a moment to kiss the top of her head.

“While I would love to not have to pack, there is something a little strange about you doing it,” she laughed gingerly, “a lady has her secrets,” she finished with a wink.

“You,” Oliver said aghast, “have secrets,” he paused for dramatic effect, “from me?” His face twisted as his hand beat against his chest.

“A really unflattering mathletics uniform and about three years of bad yearbook photos,” Felicity laughed.

“I don’t believe you,” Oliver stopped them both mid stride.

“About what part?”


“Oh trust me Oliver, they’re bad. My glasses were too big for my face, I’m wearing this god awful sweater in one of them, my hair was…"

“Stop,” Oliver interrupted, “none of that matters.”
“Maybe not now.”
“You’ve always been beautiful.”
“You’re just saying that, because you’re a good boyfriend,” Felicity swooned with a smile.

Oliver stole a quick kiss before he took both her hands and settled his eyes onto hers.
“You’re not an ugly duckling Felicity, you’ve always been the swan.”
She felt the air fall from her lungs and a smile tremble across her lips.
“All the same,” she started, her eyes dropping to the floor when his gaze became too much, “I
should do the packing, but you can help.”
“Deal,” Oliver agreed as they started their journey again.
“I’ll come back to the hospital while he’s in recovery,” she continued with a smile.

Oliver nodded as they stopped outside Chris’ room. His hand wiped a small tear she didn’t even
know she had shed from her cheek.
“He’s going to be okay Felicity,” Oliver soothed, giving Felicity a moment to collect herself before
he opened the door.

Felicity stepped into the room first, her eyes landing on Caitlin who was sitting on the edge of the
bed, her hands entrenched in Chris’ much larger ones.

Registering the visitors seconds later, Caitlin leapt off the bed and brushed her hands down her
clothes as if she was trying to wipe away some sort of evidence.

“It’s alright, it’s just us, go back to being all cute,” Felicity remarked while she winked at Chris,
“unless you could get fired for that? can you get fired for that?”
Felicity posed the question at Caitlin who was blushing bright red.
“I’m a student nurse so no…” Caitlin answered, a little unsure of her own answer.

“Caitlin this is Oliver, Oliver this is Caitlin, Chris’ friend,” Felicity introduced, winking at Oliver
with the last word.
“Nice to meet you,” Oliver chuckled as he held out a hand for her to shake.
“Oh, you’re the Oliver, you’re really very handsome, thank god,” Caitlin prattled.
“Uh…”
Oliver blinked between the two girls.
“I just mean, um, that Felicity’s boyfriend is good looking, and that’s you,” Caitlin continued, her
words getting jumbled together as she got more flustered.
“Okay,” Oliver grimaced.
“Maybe a part of me was worried you wouldn’t be and then I’d be like, ‘why is Felicity with him
when her friend Chris is really handsome?’ and then I would be worried that maybe they might…
okey I’m going to shut up.”
Chris patted the hand that she rested on his pillow.
“I don’t really understand what’s going on here,” Oliver remarked.
“Just say thank you,” Felicity smiled as she rubbed his shoulder, “she called you handsome.”
“Uh, thank you.”
“You’re welcome,” Caitlin shrugged.

“How is the patient?” Felicity asked as she walked alongside the bed.
“I’m fine,” Chris replied as he watched Felicity teasingly fluff his pillow, “I can’t feel my legs
though, is that normal?”
“Oh Chip, hon,” Felicity sympathised, “you’ve never really been normal now have you?”
“Takes one to know one.”
“I’m going to paint your toenails pink while you’re in recovery,” Felicity threatened.
“I’ll take all the good parts out of those dirty novels you read,” Chris shot back.

“Are they always like this?” Caitlin asked quietly as she took a side step towards Oliver. “Yes, pretty much,” Oliver shrugged as he watched the two effortlessly banter. “Do you think they would notice if we left the room?” “Probably not.”

“Do you think I could ask you something?” Caitlin asked, nervously plucking as her lips with her fingers.

Oliver nodded before he walked a few steps towards the door. The two slipped out of the room with neither Felicity or Chris noticing.

“You want to know if they ever dated?” Oliver asked, reading the question written in Caitlin's expression. “How did you know?” Oliver chuckled. “It was the same question I asked him.” “And did they?” “No,” Oliver confirmed without a moment's hesitation, “and really you have nothing to worry about.” “Because she's your girlfriend?” Caitlin rocked nervously in her shoes. “Because they're not like that. Take it from me, the guy who played the terribly jealous boyfriend really well,” Oliver explained with an understanding smile, “when it comes to each other they are as platonic as it comes. From what they've told me and from what I've seen they relied a lot on each other as kids and that’s a rare but beautiful thing.”

Oliver kept his feet anchored and his hands tethered to his sides. He wanted Caitlin to see just how sure he was about what he was saying. “They need to be in each other's lives, but its not something we need to be jealous about,” he added resolutely. “You're much more okay about this than most guys would be,” Caitlin smiled as she took it all in. “I wasn’t for a time and it almost cost me the woman I love, learn from my mistakes. Felicity and Chris might as well be related.” Oliver looked through the window before he nodded to the two of them still bickering.

“Do you think they’ve noticed us missing yet?” Oliver watched as Felicity poked her tongue out like a petulant child. “I bet we could slip back in there and they would never know we even left.” “Thanks Oliver,” Caitlin enthused. “You're welcome. Chris is a good guy because despite me being a complete idiot, he gave me a chance. He deserves some happy.”

Oliver opened the door and the two filed silently back into the room, like they had never left.

“I’m going to braid your hair,” Felicity snipped as she grabbed a section of Chris’ slightly overgrown hair. “My hair isn’t long enough,” Chris mocked, mimicking a five year old with his wobbling head. “I have very nimble fingers.” “Not that nimble.” “Oliver, do I have nimble fingers?” Felicity asked, tipping her head over her shoulder to wait for an answer.
“Sure honey,” Oliver replied. Felicity turned back to Chris with a victorious smile on her face while Oliver turned and winked at Caitlin, who simply nodded.

She understood.

Chapter End Notes

It's called Emotion Lotion btw (I know you wanted to ask) and it comes in a variety of flavours.

You're welcome.
Oliver pulled into the driveway of his parents’ house and idled the car near the front gate. “Do you need any boxes?” he asked as Felicity opened the passenger side door. “Mom said there was enough in my room, so it should be fine.” Felicity smiled as she braced one foot out of the car. “I’ll just be the good son and say hi, then I’ll come around,” Oliver spoke as his hands brushed down her arm.

Felicity leaned over the centre of the car and blew a warm kiss just above his cheek, a move that left Oliver craving more. When she pulled away she was wearing a devious smile that announced she knew what she was doing.

[30 Minutes Later]

Oliver took the front stairs of the Kuttler house like hurdles, doing two at once with a skip in his step. His mother had been pleasantly surprised by his visit and had only managed to hint at asking
Oliver how his reading was coming along without actually mentioning it.

Oliver had just shrugged like he didn’t know what she was referring to at all.

He knocked on the door and idly swung his hands together while he waited.

He didn’t have to wait long.
“Who is it?” came Felicity’s muffled voice through the door
“Felicity it’s me,” Oliver laughed.
“Just you?”
“Yes,” he answered, his interest piqued, “just me.”
The door opened a foot and Oliver waited, expecting it to open more, but it didn’t. Instead a hand from around the door beckoned him inside, blindly flailing until Oliver stepped forward and took it.

Felicity dragged him inside and slammed the door shut much louder than she had intended and causing Oliver to startle, still a little confused at what was happening.

He slowly turned towards where Felicity was stood, braced against the back of the door. When he saw her his eyes flung open and his mouth gaped so much so that it looked like he had dislocated his jaw.

Felicity was naked.
Completely naked.

“Fucking hell Felicity,” Oliver choked as he lost his footing and stumbled backwards.
Felicity caught his arm and smiled, her lips a sensuous shade of pink, not unlike the colour of her rose-tipped nipples.
The ones he couldn't stop staring at.

“Where are your clothes?” he coughed while he dragged his eyes from her naked form to bounce around the room before they snapped back to her like a boomerang.
“Not exactly the response I was aiming for,” Felicity jested as she tousled her blonde hair over her shoulder in a cascade of natural waves.
“Your parents…” Oliver gulped, wide-eyed.

“In the kitchen, but they’re fine with this, we’re naturalists,” Felicity answered sarcastically, “Oliver, they’re not here,” she finished with her head shaking softly.

She took a step towards him and Oliver instinctive took one back before she pounced and pushed him against the wall at the base of the stairs. Her lips tackled his greedily as she pressed her naked body against his.

Oliver moaned, deep and carnal, against her warming lips as his hands couldn't help but drag fingers down the side of her waist.

“See nimble fingers,” she hummed after she had deftly undone Oliver’s fly without him even realising it.
Oliver couldn’t do anything other than push his lips together to stop from drooling and breathe in staggered breaths as Felicity slipped a hand into his pants and lowered her body to the ground.

“Wait, wait, wait,” Oliver chanted as he scrambled away from the wall.
“Again,” Felicity mused as she straightened herself back up, “not the response I was expecting.”
“What are you doing?”

“Standing naked in front of my boyfriend hoping to give him a blow job but he looks like he’s
stuck in an old horror movie,” Felicity prattled as she tapped her foot on the floor and sunk her arms around her waist.

“In your parents’ house,” Oliver mumbled, though he realised he didn’t need to point out the obvious.

“They aren’t home,” Felicity sighed, pushing out a breathy laugh as she did.

“Are you sure?”

Her brows raised and her head dropped towards one shoulder.

“Yes I’m sure, jees Oliver, I checked. They’re out for the whole day.”

“This is still their foyer.”

“For another week,” she clarified.

“I just think…”

Felicity sashayed up to him, “Well there is your problem, stop thinking.”

She lifted her body onto her tip toes and wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him closer,

before she littered a handful of kisses atop his lips.

“I thought it might be fun to give this place a send-off,” she hummed, refusing to let Oliver, the unexpected prude, to put a damper on her salacious idea.

“What if they come home?” Oliver asked, his hands reluctantly pinned to his side through he could think of a raft of different places he would like to put them

“They won’t.”

“What if someone knocks on the door?”

“We’ll ignore it”

“What if…”

Felicity huffed purposefully before she padded over to the coat hook and took an oversized cardigan from there to wrap around herself.

“I didn’t think when I was standing naked in front of you prepared to do something I am told a lot of guys like, that I would be discussing door knocking sales people with you Oliver,” she lamented as she tied the cardigan closed around her waist.

“I’m sorry,” Oliver apologised, his eyes mimicking the same sentiment, “you just surprised me.”

“That was kind of the point, I thought it would be a good surprise though, not a surprise that makes you look terrified,” Felicity confided.

“I guess this is still their space and you’re their daughter and I’m invading…” Oliver observed.

“They know you’ve been invading Oliver, you’ve been invading for months. You invaded last night,” Felicity quietly reminded with a smile that instantly broke the tension that had begun to build.

Oliver chuckled softly with a shake of his head and a jostle of his shoulders.

“Can we maybe go upstairs?” he asked before he floated a feathered kiss across the apple of her cheek.

She threaded her fingers into his hand and nodded before Oliver led her upstairs, past the walls that once held photos but were now completely bare.

Oliver closed her bedroom door once they were both inside and Felicity looked at him with laughing eyes.

“Just in case,” Oliver shrugged.

Felicity gestured Oliver towards the bed with a sensual smile and a wicked glint in her eyes before Oliver dutifully slid the short distance towards her. His arms enveloped her and they toppled together onto the bed.
Felicity straddled Oliver’s pelvis and even though she was now somewhat covered that didn’t mean Oliver couldn’t imagine her naked sex rubbing against his exposed cotton briefs. Her lips caressed his lips deliberately slow, amused at the low, guttural sighs that were falling from them.

She broke away from the kiss to Oliver’s pouted dismay, but the pout was quickly replaced by a delighted smile as Felicity peeled off the cardigan and chucked it over her shoulder. She took one of his large hands and gently wrestled it between her palms before she spread his fingers and lay them against her breast.

“Wow,” Oliver gaped as his hand nestled into her breast, cupping it gently while she swayed on top of him.

“See,” she whispered as she collected his other hand and repeated the action on the opposite side, “that’s the response I was looking for.”

Her eyes softly closed as she placed a hand atop each of his and gently began to massage his hands into her breasts. Oliver watched with utter wonderment as tiny, keening sighs left her mouth and her head tipped backwards just enough to pull the muscles on her stomach taut.

Scandalous ideas involving those taut muscles and his tongue floated into his brain as Oliver’s erection doubled in size underneath her. He pressed it between her folds and Felicity snapped her head forward and opened her piercing blue eyes.

“Do it again,” she asked, though it came across more like an order. Oliver liked that.

He lifted his ass off the bed and jutted his sheathed shaft against her apex a little harder making her shoulders roll forward and an almost-silent bleat spring from her mouth.

Felicity could feel it like beautiful torture – the hard, long rod of his cock bearing into her arousal and striking a momentary graze against her clit. She pressed his hands into claws around her breast in response and drunk up the grunted reply Oliver gave.

“Again,” she pleaded desperately.

Oliver obeyed, pressing his cock against her, harder this time to elicit a panted cry from her lips, the ones that matched her nipples.

It was only when Oliver’s head lazily rolled to the side he saw the familiar face of a pretty little girl staring back at him. The photo of Felicity with her mom gave Oliver such a startle that he choked on the words he had been about to say.

“Oliver, what’s wrong?” Felicity asked as his hands pulled away from her body and his ass dropped back down into the mattress, severing the delicious friction that.

“The picture, it just gave me a fright,” he joked as he pulled his head straight again.

“Hmmm,” she hummed as she took his hand and slid it under her body, “just keep your eyes on me then,” she added as two fingers tweaked her own nipple and a soft hiss rained from her painted lips.

Oliver blinked rapidly to refocus himself at the intoxicating sight – Felicity sitting completely naked on top of him, one of her hands toying with her breast, getting herself wet so his fingers could feel the same.

But his peripheral vision betrayed him. He knew that picture was there now…

“How old were you?” he asked, trying to not make the question as predatory as it sounded in his head.

“Um, like thirteen I suppose,” Felicity answered after her hand fell away from her breast and rested at her side.
“So I was seventeen?”
“I guess so,” she chuckled.

Oliver cringed, he couldn’t disregard the thought of that even though he desperately, desperately wanted to.

Felicity leaned over and put the frame face down on the table so the picture couldn’t be seen.
“Better?” she smiled, settling her body back into his groin.
“Better,” he nodded.
“Okay good, because you’re wearing too many clothes,” Felicity decided as she started to tug him up.

Oliver submitted, sitting up underneath her to allow Felicity to slip both his sweater and the simple crew neck tee underneath off his body in one swoop.

When his clothes were discarded on the floor, Felicity smiled playfully before she pushed him back onto the bed and shuffled her body into his pelvis.

Anchoring her palms into the mattress either side of Oliver’s neck, Felicity leaned down and started kissing a hopped trail from the slope of his neck down the centre of his chest. Her tongue swirled after every second kiss, soaking up the salty notes of his skin.

Oliver’s eyes were beginning to roll back towards the ceiling as soft hums fell like a symphony of delight from his lips. Every inch of his chest was on fire with electric shots of pleasure sparking down his spine.

Her hair tipped over her shoulder, spilling like a soft, golden curtain onto his chest while her nipples grazed parallel lines down the sides of his ribs.

It was fucking heaven.

Oliver forced his eyes back towards her, desperate to drink in the side of her straddling him and creeping down his chest. He had a sudden intake of air when her tongue flounced around his navel and she slipped one hand down his pants – warm, strong, slender fingers gripping his hard shaft.

And then he saw something else that stole the air from his lungs.

Another picture.

She was even younger in this one, maybe eight if Oliver had to guess. She had a single braid of long mousey blonde hair wrapped over her shoulder, it was the same little girl he hopped the fence to meet.
The little girl he called kiddo.
The little girl who was just a bright little bubble of sweet.

The same one that was now naked on top of him with her tongue just dipped under the waistband of his pants while her hands shimmied them down.

Oliver pulled her up by the shoulders with eyes the size of dinner plates and his heart thumping through his chest.

“Oliver what’s wrong?” she asked, steadying herself with two hands on his chest.

His eyes twitched towards the photo on her bookshelf.

Felicity’s eyes followed his and it didn’t take long before she found the culprit. She slipped off him and sauntered over to the bookcase in a trance-inducing walk of swayed hips and perfect ass.

Oliver clenched his thighs together when she turned to the side, stretched up on her tip toes, elongating and defining every-single-fucking-curve she owned, and turned the picture frame
“Better?” she inquired, her nose a little crinkled as she found this all much too amusing. Oliver nodded quickly, his eyes ravaging her body. It really didn’t matter how many times he had seen it now that they lived together, he would never not be mesmerised by it.

“Is there anything else you need me to hide?” She tugged on lock of hair and twisted it slowly around her finger as she waited for Oliver to scout the room. There were trophies he remembered her winning and some he didn’t lined up across a floating shelf, hallmarks of just how smart Felicity was. The ones he remembered are linked with memories of her young, vivacious smile, gushing to tell him the news, or the one time he went along to the math competition to see her win and he applauded alongside her mother – he couldn’t forget those things.

He pointed a finger towards the shelf of trophies. “Really Oliver?” Felicity chuckled, her tone an enthrallingly breathy rasp. “I remember you winning that one,” he pointed to the one he had cheered her on for, “and the big one, I remember how happy you were when you brought it home.” Felicity walked the short distance to the shelf dragging her desk chair along behind her. After the chair was in position, Felicity climbed onto it and roved her eyes across the line of trophies and awards she hadn’t looked at in years.

She touched a hesitant finger to the larger one, she remembered this one. Felicity remembered pulling into the driveway with it sitting proudly on her small lap just as Oliver, Tommy and Laurel were walking up the sidewalk. She remembered how enthused she was to show Oliver that she didn’t consider anything else. She was 12, he was 16 and all she wanted was to get a fleeting smile and a proud wink. Oliver hadn’t disappointed her. “I told you you’d win,” he chatted as he made her feel invincible with his smile. Tommy had said something too, something kind, but Felicity couldn’t remember what exactly. Laurel had called her a nerd under her breath. It was probably meant as an insult, but the word had never bothered Felicity so she took it as a compliment. Both Tommy and Oliver glared at Laurel after her comment, something Felicity had taken an unruly amount of personal satisfaction from if she was being honest.

Felicity placed the trophy into a half packed box nearby before she picked up another and carried it to the bed. She perched on the edge of the bed and looked slowly around her room as tears began to form in the corners of her eyes. “Shit,” Oliver cursed as he crawled up beside her, “Felicity, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to upset you.” “No, it’s not you,” she cry-laughed as she brushed back a few tears, “this is so stupid, I’m sitting on the edge of the bed completely naked next to my half naked boyfriend in my childhood bedroom holding a trophy from some pointless competition, sobbing like I need a padded room.” Oliver handed her the cardigan that had been discarded at the end of the bed. She smiled thankfully as she handed him the trinket and redressed herself with the clothes she had hung over the foot of the bed.

“I’m sorry,” she sighed as she flicked her hair out from under the neck of her top, “I thought this would be a cute idea,” she continued as she habitually combed her hair into a ponytail and secured it there with a band from her desk.
“It was a very sexy idea Felicity,” Oliver remarked as he nodded his eyes down towards his prominent bulge, “it’s just hard to make out with my very, very, very attractive girlfriend when mementos of her childhood are staring me in the face.”
“I mean I suppose that’s good,” she smiled as she brushed back the last of the stray tears.

Oliver stood up and offered Felicity his hand, “come on.”
“What are we doing?” she chuckled, taking his hand all the same.
“We’re going to pack some of this away and then we’re going to make out on the flowery bedspread of your king single bed,” Oliver winked cheerfully.
“Are you going to do it shirtless?”
Felicity rolled her lip under her teeth as she trickled her free hand down his hard, God-like physique.
“Do you want me to do it shirtless?”
Felicity nodded in slow motion as her nails raked down his chest.
“Then I’ll do it shirtless.”

[Two Hours Later]

Oliver was wearing a Donald Duck cap and three medals around his neck while Felicity was sporting Minnie mouse ears and a tiara, the latter of which had been part of her 15 year old self’s Halloween costume – a zombie hacker bride.

“I wish I had come back and seen you dressed up” Oliver laughed as his finger tapped the tiara while Felicity swished the long black wig in the air.
“You would have been nineteen,” Felicity laughed as she straightened Donald’s beak, “and you probably wouldn’t have recognised me.”
Oliver pinned back a few strands of hair that had fallen over her face when she laughed and pressed a chaste kiss at the corner of her eye.
“I would have known those eyes the minute I saw them,” he hummed as he slowly pulled his lips away.

Her arms wrapped over his shoulders and her fingers toyed with the back of his hair, tugging it gently to enjoy the wicked smile that came with each tug. His arms snaked around her waist and pulled her tight against his chest so that not even air could pass through them.

They kissed, a flurry of short, fast kisses before they stumbled a few steps backwards and crashed into her desk, which resulted in her pen-caddy spilling an array of pens around and under the desk.

Oliver picked up the ones around him and placed them into Felicity’s hands before he crawled under her desk on his stooped hands and knees.

“What is…” Oliver mumbled from under the desk as something in the far right corner caught his sight.
Felicity’s eyes widen and she opens her mouth to tell him to come out, but it’s too late.
“I hate that I love Oliver Queen, 1 January 2000,” he read verbatim from the scrawl underneath her desk.
“Oh god,” she groaned as her hand covered her eyes.
“January 2000,” he repeated, his soft sigh like he couldn’t quite believe it.
“Oliver, just come out,” Felicity pleaded, tapping his foot with hers
“That was seven years ago.”
“I know,” she chuckled.
Oliver slid out from under the desk, his face wasn’t laughing or smirking or any of the expressions Felicity expected. He looked confused.
“You felt that way back then?” he asked as he stood up and brushed himself off.
“It was a silly crush, that was New Year’s Eve,” she started.
“I remember, you were wearing panda shoes and a dress.”
“It was a skirt and top actually, but close enough,” she shrugged.

“Why did you?” Oliver asked, shades of blue glistening in his thoughtful eyes.
“Why did I what?” Felicity queried, “love you? I didn’t, I was a child with a crush.”
“Why did you hate that you loved me?”

Felicity drew in protracted breath of air before her shoulders slumped down.
“You kissed me on the cheek, and Laurel…” she paused, cringing at the memory of her young heart being crushed, “on the lips,” she finished with a sigh.
“I guess I just realised that you weren’t going to see me as anything other than a little kid,” she added while her arms instinctively wrapped around her slender frame.

“I guess I was wrong in the end right?” Felicity smiled, desperate to fill the silence as Oliver’s eyes rolled back and forth across the ground, something taxing in his thoughts.
“You’ve had these feelings for that long?” Oliver finally spoke again before his eyes blinked up to watch Felicity’s response.
“It was a silly, childish crush.”

Perhaps on some level younger Oliver knew that the cute little genius next door had a crush on him, he wasn’t completely thick, but seeing it written in her own hand after he had unintentionally hurt her really tugged at his heart.
“I’m sorry,” he sighed as he warmed his palm into the crook of her neck.
“You don’t need to apologise Oliver,” Felicity whispered, the sincerity in his words making her throat tremble.

“All the same,” he paused to peck a light kiss to her temple, “this year when the clock strikes midnight, I’ll do my best to make up for it.”
“This year you’ll be a graduate,” Felicity cooed as her hands wrapped around his waist and her fingers toyed with the belt loop at the back of his jeans.
“Hopefully,” Oliver sighed.
“Mmmm,” Felicity hummed, “I know so.”

[28 October 2007]

The weather was unseasonable warm as October began to roll to a close and the stores started to fill their shelves with both Thanksgiving and Christmas paraphernalia.

Chris was recuperating well, much more so that his Doctors had hoped or projected. While it was never going to be a magical fix that would see him running from the hospital with his surgical gown billowing open in the wind, it was a beacon of hope.

His injury was now classified as an incomplete spinal cord injury and the last surgery had resulted in his right leg gaining a tiny amount sporadic movements. He had little control over the movement, but the fact it was there was progress enough to hold out hope he could one day walk.

“You’re doing really well,” Felicity encouraged as Chris hung virtually leg-less from the parallel bars, his biceps trembling under the weight as he tried to bear some weight onto his legs.
“What’s the weather like?” he asked randomly before his face twisted in tight concentration.
“You can see out the window Chris,” Felicity teased, flicking his nose playfully, enjoying the fact he couldn’t flick her back right now and they both knew it.
“I mean in London,” he shot back with a cocked brow.
Felicity’s brow furrowed as her arms snapped around her waist.

“Not this again,” she warred.
“Humour me,” he huffed as he inched his hands forward, ‘walking’ the bars.
He turned to his therapist and nodded back towards Felicity, “tell her to humour me.”
“You should humour him,” the colossus of a man with deep caramel features smiled.
“You have Carl in on this too?” Felicity growled as her eyes narrowed at the muscle-bound Carl.

“Carl thinks you should have gone,” Chris spoke, his voice strained as he tried to move another inch, stumbling the moment he laid any weight on his left leg.
“Easy Chris, take your time, you want to sit?” Carl encouraged as he wheeled the chair in behind Chris.

“No,” he grimaced as he fought to regain and hold his balance, every muscle in his arms screaming for leniency, “I want you to tell her she should have gone to Oxford.”
“It sounded like it was a really good opportunity,” Carl offered, despite his obvious discomfort at being caught in the crossfire.
“That’s what I said,” Chris grunted.

Carl looked apologetically over the rails at Felicity.
“I haven’t met Oliver, but it seems like he’s a good guy if you told him…”
“I swear to God Christopher if you weren’t hanging between two beams right now and you didn’t have rods in your back I would punch you so hard,” Felicity interrupted.

Enough was enough.

“What?” Chris argued, “Caitlin said the same thing.”
“You told Caitlin?” Felicity asked, aghast.
Another inch and his hands started trembling.
“She’s my girlfriend.”
“How does my life have any relevance to that?”
“I needed,” he paused, his sentence stunted as he tried to gather some more strength from deep in his recesses, “a topic.”
“Okay, Chris, that’s enough for today, you’re going to strain your arm muscles and that’s the last thing you want,” Carl interjected as his stern face ordered Chris back into the chair.

“I’m not a topic Chris,” Felicity spoke as she ran a frustrated finger across her brow, “please, just drop this.”

“The weather in London is cold, but low chance of rain,” a voice from the far side of the room peeped.
It was Lisa, a vivacious 15 year old who had broken her hip riding a horse in a competition and had synced therapy times with Chris in the open-space room.

“You told Lisa?” Felicity scowled at Chris, unable to rebuke the sweet teenager with a softly southern accent.
“Topic?” Chris shrugged, knowing from the face like thunder that Felicity was wearing he had taken it one – or ten – steps too far.

Felicity shook her head before she wordlessly headed towards the door. What she wanted to say shouldn’t be said where there were children – of that much she was sure.
“Felicity wait, I’m sorry,” Chris apologised as he wheeled to a stop alongside her. “Chris this has to stop, you have to stop doing this,” Felicity warned, tears forming in the corners of her eyes, she couldn’t keep fighting him on this – because some days she was already fighting herself, “I made my choice and anyway classes have already started. Oliver graduates this year, I am happy.”

It was true. Felicity was happy. But you could be happy and live with a swallowing pit in your stomach all the same.

“If I believed you…”
“Stop,” she interrupted, “I need you to stop.”
Felicity took in a steady breath to calm the tremble in her voice before she breathed it out with a drawn sigh.
“I need to stop being a topic and I need you to stop trying to change my mind. I made the choice, it’s done.”
She spoke with a clarity that couldn’t be mistaken.

“But the place is still open for you,” Chris added, instantly regretting his words.
“How did you know that?” Felicity asked calmly, she already knew the answer.
“Uh, you told me,” he lied, his eyes scanning the floor below his feet.
“No, Chris, I didn’t. How did you know?”

He sighed as his eyes travelled upwards. The answer was written all over his face.
“I made a call.”
Felicity took a step back as she sucked in a sudden breath of air. She knew, but the answer shocked her all the same.
“You rung the Dean, why would you do that?”
She could feel the tears pooling in her eyes as she desperate fought them back.

“Because I was worried about you.”
“No,” she stammered, “Chris that is stepping way, way over the line and there is no excuse for it.”
“But it’s right isn’t it, the place is staying open for you?”
Felicity swallowed back the impending tears.
She couldn’t do this backwards and forwards fight anymore. It was too much.

“Stay out of my business Christopher. That’s it.”
She turned on her heels and paced towards the door and before Chris could offer anything else, she was gone.

[Wednesday, 31 October 2007]

“Done?” Felicity asked as Oliver appeared from behind the glass doors of the administration block and started down the stairs towards her.
“Done,” Oliver nodded resolutely when he reached the bottom step.

Felicity ran and jumped into his waiting arms before frantically kissing his neck, public displays of affection be damned.

“You’re going to graduate,” she squealed excitedly between her onslaught of kisses.
“Well I’ve applied to graduate, I still need to turn in my thesis, which is a mess, and pass my last exams.”
“And I will help you with both,” she smiled as her legs wrapped tighter around his waist.

“But,” she hummed, kissing a trail across his cheek to his ear, paying no mind to the students on Oliver’s campus that flocked past them, “first we should go home and celebrate.”
“Like open a bottle of wine and I’ll watch you get dressed into your costume for tonight?”
“I was thinking more you take me out of it and we don’t go to any party, we just…” she winked as she rocked her hips against his core.

Oliver smiled as his hands sunk around her waist and he lowered her down off him.
“You love Halloween,” he remarked as his hand slipped into hers as they began walking.
“I love you more,” she casually replied.

Oliver offered her a smile in return, but it glossed over thoughts that he had been battling with for some time. He didn’t doubt her comment was nothing more than a passing one, but the fact remained, it felt like Felicity was giving up things to be with him. It was a thought he couldn’t shake. One that he had tried to express at least half a dozen times in the last two months, but Felicity would just smile behind her bright blue eyes, touch her silky soft hands to his cheek and tell him he was imagining it. _She was happy._

Only, Oliver didn’t doubt that she was happy, right now, at this moment. He just wondered if the time would come when she would wake up and _not be._

“Did you want to go to the hospital today?” Oliver asked, changing the subject as they reached the parking lot, “we can go together or…”
“Nope, just home,” Felicity replied abruptly.

Oliver stopped beside his car and slumped against the side of the hood while Felicity drew lazy lines along the top of the door frame and refused to meet his questioning eyes.

“You haven’t been to see Chris in three days Felicity,” Oliver sighed, another topic that had been running through his head the last few days.
“He’s got Caitlin and I’ve been busy,” she shrugged, firing off the first excuses she could think of, “I’ll see him tomorrow,” she added, probably a lie.
For now she needed to not see Chris. It wouldn’t last long – their spats seldom ever did – but for right now, they were _on a break._

“No you won’t.”
Felicity blew out a frustrated exhale.
“You two had a fight, only for some reason you won’t tell me about it,” he added as his fingers gently stroked her arm.
“Because it doesn’t matter,” she offered, turning to lean against the door as her picked polish at the side of her nail.
“You’re my girlfriend,” he sighed, brushing back her hair to expose her neck, “my very special girlfriend who I love,” he hummed before kissing the crook of her neck, “and you’re fighting with your best friend.”

“It’s nothing Oliver, we’re just having some time apart,” she offered him a placating smile, “sometimes we just need a little time out from each other.”
“Because?”
“Because we have differing ideas about what constitutes concern and what constitutes invasion of privacy and overstepping a bunch of lines.”
“I’m going to assume he did the latter.”
Felicity turned to face Oliver with the side of her body pressed against his car and her left foot crossed over her right while she kicked invisible rocks.

“He rung the Dean at Oxford,” she explained, her face about as angry as Oliver had ever seen it.

“I see,” Oliver grimaced, he understood why she was mad.

Not a great idea Chris.

“Imagine if you had done that, I would be furious.”

“It’s a very good thing I didn’t then isn’t it?”

“You wouldn’t because you have some common sense, Chris however…”

“I’m sure he meant well,” Oliver offered, though it really wasn’t looking good.

“You would say that,” she jested, before she straightened her stance and kissed his cheek.

“Chris knows although unscrupulously so, so you should know too,” she started as her fingers toyed with the hem of Oliver’s sweater, “when I rung to turn down the transfer to Oxford the Dean let me know that my seat would be open should I change my mind.”

“Oh,” Oliver remarked.

“I didn’t tell you, because it didn’t matter at the time and I really don’t think it matters now,” she shrugged, “my decision hasn’t changed and it won’t.”

“If it did,” Oliver started, “I would understand.”

Felicity leaned over and briefly kissed his lips.

“I love you for that, but it hasn’t. Now can we go home and…” her lower lip snagged between her teeth as her hands delved into his pants before she very deliberately winked at him.

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[Early November]

The chill in the air synonymous with November had returned in the last week as the calendar turned a page.

They had managed to make the Halloween parties across both campuses but the night had been less about drinking from red solo cups and Oliver carrying Felicity home again and more about finding secluded spots to engage in some very heavy petting, groping and on one occasion, sex against a fence behind a hedge.

But with the twig jabbing into his ass now a distant memory and the leaves well and truly plucked from Felicity’s hair they had finally settled in on a particularly chilly Sunday to finally go through some of Felicity’s boxes brought over from her parents’ house.

“I can’t believe it’s already November and I haven’t even unpacked this stuff,” Felicity laughed as she organised a handful of books on the bookshelf that sat right where Oliver promised it would.

“Tootle the Train,” Oliver read the cover aloud as he pulled the Golden Book from the box in front of him.

“That can go in the donate pile,” Felicity laughed as she plucked the book from Oliver’s hands and dropped it into another box behind her.

“Poor Tootle,” Oliver laughed as he continued sifting through the box of books that had come from her parents’ house.

“He’ll get to teach other children about going off the rails and driving through meadows,” Felicity remarked as she stood, dusted herself off and headed towards the kitchen.

“Do you want a drink?” she called behind her as she reached the fridge.

“Please,” Oliver replied before he pulled a notebook from the box and started to thumb through it,
“what is this?”
Felicity peered through her glasses across the living room, quietly trying to provide him with an answer.

“Boys are stupid. Oliver is the stupidest one of all” Oliver read aloud.
“Oh my god,” Felicity shrieked as she left the two glasses of juice on the table and ran across the room.

Oliver jumped to his feet with a deliriously wicked smile across his face as he held the journal above his head and out of her reach.
“You had a diary,” he said as the wicked smile on his face grew larger.
“Give it back,” she pouted.
“Let me read it.”
“No,” she laughed with a very deliberate shake of her head, “not happening.”
“I will give you anything if you let me read them.”
“Do you have any childhood journals for me to read Oliver?”
“No, I was far too stupid,” he laughed with a wide smirk.
“Give it back.”
Felicity held out her hand and expectantly tapped her palm with her other index finger.
“Did you write about me a lot Felicity?” he hummed, enjoying the way her cheeks for flushing a bright pink.

When he pulled it down a little to turn the pages Felicity snatched it from his hand and clutched it to her chest.

Oliver blinked down at the box beside her feet.
There were more in there.

“Don’t even think about it,” she warned with her eyes narrowing and her stance slightly hunching, but a smile still brightly drawn across her lips.
Oliver tackled her playfully, spilling the two of them onto the beanbag that they had drunkenly purchased online a week ago in an effort to “fill their space.”

Felicity laughed hysterically as Oliver peppered kisses across the frame of her scoop neck thermal before he pushed down one shoulder of her chunky-knit sweater. He lavished his kisses there while simultaneously tickling the side of her waist under her clothes.

As her effervescent laugh filled the room Oliver leapt off the beanbag and skidded towards the books. He pulled out anything that looked like a note book and stuck them down his top.

“Oliver Jonas Queen, give them back,” she laughed as she tried to compose herself.
She rolled in the depth of the beanbag as she struggled to get to her feet.
“Oh come on, let me read some of the brilliant workings of your childhood brain.”
“If you put them all back where you found them and help me out of this ridiculous thing we can go get in the shower and I will let you do that thing you like.”

Oliver halted immediately.
“Really?” he asked with a single raised brow.
“Really, and I’ll throw in a little something extra,” she teased before her tongue slipped around the circumference of her mouth.

Oliver walked with purpose over to the beanbag and shot his hand out immediately to help her up. She took with and within seconds Oliver hoisted her onto her feet.
“Put the journals back Oliver,” she hummed as she dragged a lazy finger around the neckline of her
top.
Oliver instinctively wet his lips as he walked backwards towards the box and one by one he pulled
the journals out from under his sweater and dropped them back into the box where he’d found
them.

When he had only one left he held it above his head and smiled.
“You won’t let me keep this one?” he queried playfully.
Felicity peeled off her sweater and dropped it to the ground before she traced a slow circle around
where her nipple would be.
“Put the book down Oliver,” she sung as her eyes fluttered suggestively.
Oliver sighed wistful as he teetered the last book at the edge of his fingers. When he was about to
surrender it to the box a folded piece of paper fluttered to the floor.

Oliver relinquished the book before collecting the stowaway paper from the floor. He picked it up
and opened it before Felicity had even registered what it could be.

His eyes scanned the paper as he unfolded it.
It was a list.
Neatly written in Felicity’s handwriting.
Dated July 2006.

College to-do List.
1. Get into Oxford....

Chapter End Notes

Quick note... we are gearing up to the time where I can't answer a lot of questions left
in comments bc spoilers lol. But know that I am reading them all and I love all your
different takes. But my answer may be super vague lol.

Second... I've never enjoyed writing infallible people. They're dull. In this occasion I
absolutely agree with those who think Chris overstepped his boundaries. As much as
both me and Felicity adore him, he shouldn't have involved other people and certainly
not rung the Dean. I'm sure he has some apologising to do... :)


There were other things there, things that caught his eye and made him smile, things that drew his lips up into a smirk when he thought about what must have gone through Felicity’s mind as she wrote it and then there were things that just weren’t possible – *not with him.*

10. **Learn the most obscure language you can think of.**

14. **Have a one night stand in Ibiza – be safe, not stupid**

23. **Share a pint with someone in an English pub who you don’t go home with, but occasionally imagine what might have happened if you did.**

27. **Blow a wish from the top of the Eiffel Tower.**

28. **Make love at night with salty sea air drifting in through an open patio door.**

There were more.

More that his eyes just glossed over.

“Oliver, please…” Felicity spoke, breaking the wall of silence that had stacked up, “please,” she repeated with her hand held open.

Oliver folded it back up and wordlessly placed it into her waiting hand. He swallowed down, at least for now, every other question he had – there was just one that he needed an answer to right
“How long?” he asked calmly as Felicity stared down at the folded paper now crumpled in her fist, too afraid to hold it closer but not willing to let it go, “how long have you wanted to go?”

“Oliver, it’s just a stupid list,” she retorted as her fingers grew tighter around it, “people change, lists change. What I wanted then, it’s different to what I want now.”

He watched a sigh pass over her lips and her eyes glisten as they veiled over with unspent tears.

He closed the gap that felt like the Grand Canyon between them before his hand rested just above her elbow.

“What’s on it now?” Oliver questioned, his other hand ready to brush away any tear that escaped from her eyes.

He watched her gnaw at her lower lip even while it trembled beneath the strain of her words. “I don’t know,” she whispered, blinking away from the eyes she had so easily become lost in, “you, college, Morocco,” she rattled off words that were some semblance of a list.

His hand lingered on her shoulder while his eyes searched hers. He didn’t doubt her words and he was in no position to demand an explanation for something she wrote before they were even back in each other’s orbits.

“I don’t want to fight,” she spoke, the trepidation clear in her voice. Felicity was scared. Scared that he would want to be some sort of martyr. Scared that he would push her away in some misguided effort to get her to leave.

She knew Oliver and she could see the guilt written in his expression as clear as it would be if she had taken a marker and written “I feel guilty” across his forehead.

“Neither do I,” Oliver agreed, his fingers slowly closing around her arm.

“I wrote this list before you, before us. I wrote it when I thought I wanted to escape Starling, that my life had become predictable and dull and that I’d fallen into a trap of living under a rock. But I don’t feel that way anymore.”

“Because of me?”

“Because of me.”

It was true for most things on that list – maybe not all.

“It’s just a stupid list,” she added before she walked to the kitchen and threw the crumpled paper in the trash, “we have dinner plans with your parents tonight, I’m going to go shower,” she continued stoically.

Oliver didn’t have the words to make her stay.

Dinner was that strange balance of pleasant verses awkward. The car ride to the restaurant and back was filled with unasked questions. The dinner itself was sparked with restaurant ambiance and idle chatter.

“I’m quite tired,” Felicity yawned as she stepped into the darkened apartment. She could almost hear Oliver’s brain ticking behind her but all she could think was not tonight.

She just couldn’t tonight.

“I’m going to go see Chris in the morning before class so I’ll leave around seven-thirty,” she
added, as though she felt the need to offer a reason.

She turned as Oliver switched on the lights and filled their space with a white glow from the pendulum lights.  
“I can take you, or go with you…” Oliver remarked.  
The truth was he couldn’t tonight either.

Felicity smiled softly as she leaned in and placed a measured kiss against his bristled jaw.  
“You have a thesis to write,” she reminded him gently.  
“That I do,” he chuckled in a brief moment of brevity.  
“I’m going to head to bed,” she offered as they drifted apart.  
“I might stay up and write a little,” he replied.  
She smiled, almost thankful that tonight they would both pretend there weren’t things to be said.  
“I love you,” she sighed before they reached the stairs.  
“I love you too,” Oliver breathed before he placed a languid kiss against her forehead.

All the words could wait until tomorrow.

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Felicity woke the next morning to Oliver fast asleep in the bed beside her, his sleeping face a sweet mixture of a soft smile and a crinkled forehead, with his laptop tented over his feet.  

Unwilling to risk it falling to the ground Felicity gently picked the laptop up and quietly placed it on the bedside table before leaving a note on top of it.

*I’ll bring dinner home tonight, we’ll talk then.*  
*I love you.*  
~*Felicity*

Not that she knew what she was going to say, she really didn’t. Her mind felt like a whirlpool of emotions that just kept swirling round and around with no foreseeable hope of stopping. She knew she hadn’t been completely upfront with Oliver – she hadn’t even being upfront with herself – and somehow she needed to find a way to clear away the debris of the shipwrecks in her mind and find a way to speak, because they couldn’t keep up the pretence of acting like there wasn’t anything to be said.

She sat on the subway in quiet reflection, her mind skipping through all the moments of time that found her at this junction.

*She loved Oliver.*  
She may have been young and somewhat inexperienced in the ways of love – but when you love someone you’re just *supposed to know* and by that reasoning – *she knew.*

*Oliver loved her.*  
There were times her young mind might question it, not because he gave her any reason to but because he was *him* and she was *her* and sometimes that’s as far as her insecurities took her.  
*But,* insecurities aside, she knew he did.

*Starling wasn’t a waste.*  
Her father might have thought otherwise and he might have argued the point that there were schools and then there were schools and Oxford was the latter (undoubtedly SIT being the former); and while one degree might appear shinier than the other on a CV, it didn’t make that one more
valid.

Plans change.
A year ago she hadn’t planned on any of this.
She hadn’t planned on Chris being partially and possibly permanently paralysed.
She hadn’t planned on Oliver.
She hadn’t planned on any of this because you can’t always plan life. Life is full of ebbs and flows and you either chose to move with it or you fight against it. One leads to new experiences the other leads to exhaustion.

This isn’t a forever decision.
While the path remained open to her now to go to Oxford at a later time, she knew she shouldn’t bank on the Dean’s good graces. The next Felicity Smoak might send in an application and all of a sudden she’s not the best candidate – but that didn’t mean the door was closed forever or that another door, window or cat flap wouldn’t open again.
Life was always changing after all.

But when her feet touched the ground at the hospital subway station, the vortex chose to spit out one last truth.
Felicity wanted to go to Oxford.

When Chris’ eyes walked to the opening door he let out an audible sigh that carried a week’s worth of sorrys.

The silence that enveloped the two friends felt like it stretched on for hours as Felicity closed the door and stepped further into the room. Her fingers dragged along the foot of the hospital bed as Chris muted the football game he had been half watching.

“I’m so sorry,” he finally spoke as Felicity kept a distance between them while she stayed at the foot of the bed.
Her lips folded over each other as she acknowledged his words with a soft nod.

“You should be,” she replied as she combed her fingers across her scalp.
“I know I broke a thousand rules of friendship,” Chris winced as he longed to make his legs move to cross the distance that felt so cavernous between them.
“Probably.”
Felicity kicked her foot across the linoleum floor.
“You should probably hate me,” he challenged with his head half-cocked towards his shoulder.
“That’s a given,” Felicity smirked.
“Is this worse than the time I spilled soda on that motherboard you were building?”
Felicity blew out a soft chuckle at the memory of her seven year old self swearing to cut him out of her Will when she was old enough to make one.

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to rewrite my Will again,” she sighed dramatically.
“So I don’t get your collection of useless computer bits?”
“Oh Chris, you were never going to get that.”
“Damnit,” he chuckled, thankful for the moment of joviality even though it was still subdued.

“This has to stop,” Felicity said pointedly, idle chatter aside, “we can’t keep having this same dialogue, this same argument over and over again Chris. I can’t keep doing this with you.”
“I understand and I’m sorry,” he repeated, straining to sit straighter in the bed.
“I can’t stay on this roundabout of you thinking you need to tell me what to do.”
She walked around the bed as she spoke, her hand casually laying on his ankle.

“I know,” he lamented as his chin dropped to his chest, “I guess focusing on you, it stopped…”
He took a deep inhale through his nose and pushed it out between his teeth while Felicity waited, wordless, for him to continue.
“…it stopped me focusing on myself, on this,” he waved his hand down the bed and she knew what he meant.

“I’m stuck here, but you’re not,” he spoke as he brushed back a tear.
“I know I’m not and maybe I’ll fly, maybe I won’t. But it has to be my choice.”
Chris nodded.
“You’re right, you’re always right,” he smiled as he reached his hand out to hers.
She shrugged, “ninety-two point three percent of the time,” she said as she took his hand.

As her other hand glided up the blanket on top of his leg she felt her hand jolt. She looked down to see movement underneath the covers.

“Chris are you?” she startled as her eyes blinked from him to a second jolt, “are you doing that?”
A muscle spasm was nothing new, but there seemed to be control – focus – in this.

She watched a smile take over his entire face, the only exception was his nose as it crinkled under his focus.

His foot moved again, almost an entire circle.
“Chris,” Felicity startled his eyes up to hers, “are you doing that?”
He nodded, “I think so,” he mumbled, almost unsure.

“I think I’m doing that,” he repeated as the emotion sprung from his eyes in the shape of tears.
“Touch my hand,” she encouraged as she placed her hand just below his foot, “you can do it.”
He squeezed her other hand, tightly embedding it into his palm.

He stared down at the tiny space between his foot and her hand that right now felt like a universe and then he did it – with every fibre of his being and every thread of his brain, he moved his foot – only an inch – but it felt like a mile.

Felicity squealed as she fell forward to embrace him.

_Ebbs and flows._
 Phú ns change.

A loud knock on the door startled Oliver awake and before he could dig his hands into his eyes enough to realise most of the morning had disappeared, there was a second, louder knock.

He stumbled from the bed, his limbs a rebellion of muscles, as he tried to focus enough to dress. But after he spent a few moments searching for his discarded clothing the reality hit that he was still dressed from the night before.

He had been up until the earlier hours of the morning trying to piece words together while simultaneously trying to win a war in his head about Felicity before he succumb to his exhaustion and fell into bed beside her.

A third knock spurred him down the stairs and stumbling towards the door. He opened it just as he
stifled a yawn.
“Hi handsome, long time no see,” Laurel chortled as she tapped her palm on the entranceway.
“What are you doing here? How did you even know where here was?” Oliver mumbled as his fingers rubbed his temple.
“I asked Tommy, Jesus Oliver, it’s not like you’re in the witness protection programme,” she laughed, her lips a pop of red.

Oliver just blinked at her like perhaps she was a mirage.
“So can I come in or is your apartment an ex-girlfriend free zone?”
He didn’t answer.
“I just want to talk Oliver, I won’t bite,” she huffed.
He opened the door hesitantly and invited her in with little more than a shrug.
“Although I remember you enjoying that,” she added with a laugh he hadn’t missed.

She put her bag on the counter and wandered somewhat aimlessly around the open plan room.
“This is a cute place Oliver, nice little bachelor pad.”

He smiled as he looked at the distinctly feminine touches around the room, including but not limited to flowers, Felicity’s hairbrush, three lip glosses and the heels in the middle of the living room that Felicity had kicked off last night before heading to bed.
Laurel wasn’t exactly observant.

“It’s a nice apartment, which I share,” he said bluntly as he watched Laurel flop down into one of the couch cushions.
“Tommy insinuated the same, but it probably won’t last. We both know it’s not in your nature,” Laurel shrugged as she patted the seat beside her.

Oliver walked the long way around the living room to avoid walking past her and propped himself up against the opposite arm of the couch, creating enough distance to make his point.

Laurel shrugged, point duly noted.

“What do you want Laurel?”
“Tommy wouldn’t tell me who the girl was, is it someone I know?” she asked as she settled back into the couch, draping her arm over the arm to signify she was getting comfortable.
“Does it matter?”
“I’m curious is all Oliver,” she chuckled.
“Sara didn’t tell you?”
“My sister,” Laurel spat, “slept with my boyfriend, twice, that I’m aware of, so no we don’t really chat. Least of all about you.”

Oliver could hear the venom in her voice, even more than a year apart hadn’t made him forget what it sounded like.

“That was years ago Laurel and I don’t know how many more times I can apologise.”
“Whatever,” she brushed him off, “if you don’t want to tell me who she is, I can’t exactly make you. It just seems strange that you would be ashamed of the girl you live with.”

He recognised that tone too.
Classic Laurel manipulation, and he found himself falling for it.
“It’s Felicity,” he spoke calmly.
He knew he owed her no explanation but he wasn’t ashamed of living with Felicity, not now, not ever.
“You’re kidding,” she said drolly. Oliver said nothing as he counted to ten in his head. He wouldn’t let this turn into a fight.

“The little nerd that lived next door to your parents?” she laughed. “If you mean the brilliant, kind, stunning woman that I have known for years than yes, her.” Oliver could feel his temperature rising and he took a deep breath in through his nose to dampen it down.

“Apologies, I didn’t know you liked them so young.”

“Why are you here?” he asked briskly.

Laurel offered a timid smile as she folded her arms around her waist. “We were good once, weren’t we?” Oliver offered nothing more than a single shoulder shrug. “We could be good again,” she crooned as she shuffled a little closer.

“I just told you I was with someone,” Oliver rebuked as he stood up, his head shaking in disbelief. “That didn’t stop you before Oliver,” she remarked, “it might be nice to be the other woman for…” “Stop,” Oliver pleaded as his hand clasped across his brow. Laurel’s mouth closed as she pursed her lips and straightened her back.

“I am sorry,” he started as he stood at a distance she couldn’t easily close, “I am sorry for all the shit and the pain and the hurt that I put you through. We were wrong. We were so wrong for each other Laurel.”

“You say that now…” she sniffed, brushing back a tear she was trying not to shed. “Because I was too stupid and selfish to say it then, but we were wrong for each other and you know it.” She chewed her lip as she blinked away from his truth.

“We both deserved better than what we gave each other,” he continued. “So we can change, we could be better. We could have this,” her hand gestured around the room. “No, this was never on our cards.” “What makes her so different to me?” Oliver breathed out a heavy sigh, he knew the truth and there was no sugar-coated way to put it. “Because I love her.” He watched as Laurel sucked in a shaky breath. “That hurt,” she softly gasped. “I’m sorry, I don’t mean to hurt you. But what we had wasn’t love.” “How do you know?” “Because neither of us was willing to bend or change or become better for the other. Neither of us was willing to look beyond what we wanted.” “And this is what you have now?”

Oliver nodded, softly but without a shadow of a doubt. *Love is making the choice to put them above you.*

“I’m jealous,” Laurel whispered, fiercely brushing back the tears. “You can find that too.” She nodded as she stood and walked a path towards her bag. “I’m sorry we wasted so much time on something that wasn’t right Laurel,” Oliver offered as he watched her collect her bag while he opened the door.
“For what it’s worth,” she sighed as she stopped in the doorway, “I hope she makes you happy.”

Oliver knew that was the closest thing to an apology that he was ever going to get, but honestly, he didn’t need it; and his own words had made him realise something.

*Love makes you bend.*

Felicity needed to go to Oxford.

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Oliver almost fell through the door of Chris’ room to find him and Caitlin quietly talking beside the window.

“I’m sorry,” he apologised when both sets of eyes looked equally surprised to see him.

“It’s okay,” Chris smiled as he wheeled himself closer.

Oliver looked reluctantly at Chris before he looked back towards the door, but he took a deep, steadying breath and anchored his feet to the floor.

“Felicity text me about the movement, that’s fantastic,” he mumbled.

“Baby steps,” Chris shrugged, “not technically steps, but the fact the muscles are firing is a good sign.”

“I’m really happy for you,” Oliver spoke quickly, his heart speeding through his chest.

Chris wheeled a fraction closer, he didn’t know Oliver all that well but he could tell there was something else he was itching to talk about.

“Felicity isn’t here,” Chris remarked, “she left about ten minutes ago for a double lecture.”

“I know,” Oliver agreed, “I wanted to see you.”

Oliver looked over Chris’ shoulder to Caitlin who smiled, silently understanding.

“I’m going to get some lunch, I’ll be back in a little bit,” Caitlin spoke as she crossed the room and placed a brief kiss on Chris’ forehead before she left.

“What is it?” Chris asked as he nodded Oliver towards the chairs in the room.

Oliver turned down the offer with a soft shake of his head. He couldn’t sit – standing would help.

“How long?” he asked.

The question was stunted but Chris didn’t need it explained.

“I promised her I wouldn’t get involved anymore Oliver,” Chris answered dubiously.

“I understand, I just, I need to know how long, how long has she wanted to go to Oxford?”

“You found her list didn’t you?” Chris sighed, his eyes softening as he felt Oliver’s dilemma.

Oliver looked up, surprised, “you knew about it?”

“Not directly, but it’s Felicity,” Chris chuckled.

Oliver’s smile appeared seconds later.

“She always has a list,” they remarked in unison.

Oliver carded his fingers through the shorts of his hair as he blew out another exhale.

“Just tell me she’s not staying for me,” he begged.

“You want me to lie to you?”

Chris’ poignant remark said all Oliver needed, but feared, to hear.

“Come on man, you know the truth,” Chris said, his shoulders slumping forward with the weight
of his words, “but that’s a question for you to ask her.”
“I know, I just…” Oliver paused, words hanging from the tip of his tongue, words he didn’t want to say but he knew them all the same.

“Thanks,” Oliver remarked as he walked backwards towards the door.
“Oliver,” Chris called as he watched Oliver pause at the open door, “I’m glad you didn’t stay the idiot from next door.”

Oliver smiled as a low chuckle fell from his lips.
“I’m glad for that too,” he winked.

Oliver closed the door to Chris' room with a clear head. He knew what he needed to do.

Felicity kicked the door closed as Oliver almost leapt off the couch to meet her. He took the takeout bags from her hands and ferried them quickly into the kitchen before he skidded back to meet her just as she was shrugging off her coat.

He had spent the last few hours looking up everything and anything he could think of that would help and now that she was finally home, Oliver was bursting at the seams to tell her.

She went to step around him to head towards the kitchen but he slid in front of her path.
“Everything okay?” she asked, offering him a bemused smile.
He looked like a child that was on some sort of sugar high.

“Laurel came to see me today,” he spoke like unfettered word vomit.
“Oh,” Felicity replied, shocked as she took an unintentional step backwards.
“I’m telling you because I don’t want any secrets between us,” he babbled as he reached for her hand even though she didn’t offer it.

She had been having discussions with herself the entire way home about how she would tell Oliver what she needed to say, but none of those imagined conversations began – or at all featured – his ex-girlfriend.
“Okay,” she remarked, just because something needed to be said, as she let only her fingertips brush against his hand.

“I love you,” he remarked as he took her somewhat hesitant hand and led her towards the living room, “nothing happened,” he added as he stood her beside the arm of the couch.
“I don’t understand,” she breathed, unsure why he was telling her this – besides the not keeping secrets thing.

“Talking to her, it made me realise that I’m different now,” he started. Her hand brushed across his cheek, “I know.”
“It made me realise that I love you and just what that means.”

She still wasn’t following his train of thought and Oliver could see the confusion beginning to settle in her expression.
“I need to ask you a question and I want you to tell me the truth, please, no matter what you think I want you to say,” his eyes lulled closed for a moment, “just trust me enough to be honest.”
His plea was open and vulnerable.
“Okay,” she whispered in agreement.

“If we weren’t together, if we weren’t us,” he started, trepidation framing each word, “would you
have gone to Oxford?”
She dropped her head towards her shoulder and let her eyes flutter closed for only a few short seconds. *He wanted the truth…*

“Yes,” she said with absolute clarity, complete truth.
She heard Oliver sigh, like a foggy day had instantly cleared and even though his eyes looked troubled, he wore a smile on his face.
“Then you should go,” he spoke, pride tipped from his expression.
She opened her mouth to protest but it hung open and vacant.
“And I’ll go with you,” he added while his hand smoothed down her arm.

She slumped down onto the arm of the chair – for a brief moment wondering if that’s why he had stood her there. *She hadn’t expected that.*
“What?” she managed to mumble.
Perhaps she misheard or misunderstood.

“I’ll go with you,” he beamed, his face fully aglow with a smile, “I tried to see if I could somehow get a job at the QC branch in London but I’m afraid my last name holds no clout over there, in fact it might be held in negative, so that’s out, but it doesn’t matter.”
The child on the sugar high had returned and he was speaking so quickly she could barely keep up.
“Oliver, I…” she stumbled over her surprise.

“I will get whatever visa I need to go with you. I will work whatever job will have me, I’ll even pour pitchers of beer,” he paused realising his error in the circumstance, “I mean pints,” he chuckled.

Felicity was still speechless, words tumbled through her brain but nothing she could form into sentences.
“I’ll graduate in December, we’ll fly to Morocco, tour Europe, cross some of these off,” he rambled before he pulled her crumpled list from his pocket.
“I will follow you to the ends of the earth just to watch you fly Felicity.”

And then the words came.
“No,” she whispered as she stood back up, “you can’t come with me.”
It was Oliver’s turn to look confused.
“If you come with me then we have this same feeling of one of us holding back the other. You worked hard for this Oliver, you can’t put your life on hold for me, just like you don’t want me to for you,” her voice trembled as she spoke while tears welled in the corners of her eyes.
*But he wanted the truth.*

“It doesn’t matter,” Oliver retorted, his fingers clutching to her arm.
Felicity smoothed a hand down his cheek, trying to memorize each second that it lingered there.
“But it does,” she quivered, “you don’t want me to wake up and regret my choices and I don’t want you to either.”
He closed his eyes in the palm of her hand.
“You deserve to make your mark on the world too Oliver.”

She watched as he choked back what she was saying, letting it seep into his thoughts before his eyes sprung open and he stared at her with eyes like wide reflect pools of crystal blue.
“Then we make this work,” he determined as his hands took up hers and squeezed.
His palms were clammy and he was certain his breath sounded like he’d run a marathon, but it made sense. *If anyone could…*

“We make us work,” he continued, his eyes growing clearer by the second, “you show me how to
FaceTime and I will stay up until the early morning just to be the first person you see when you wake up. I have annual leave, you have semester breaks,” he cheered as his voice grew more excited, “religious holidays, mental health days, if you have a cold I’ll fly to London to make you soup.”

*Love means you bend.*

The words had left Felicity again, replaced instead by trembling hands and a soft stream of tears rolling down her peached cheeks.

“I love you,” he kissed the words into her cheek, tasting the salty tinge of her tears.
“I love you too, so much,” she wept.
“Then we can do this. You there, me here.”

His hands held hers just a little tighter.
“I mean if you want to,” he clarified, the blue starting to dull in his eyes when he realised she hadn’t said as much, “I guess I didn’t consider that you might not...”

Felicity pressed their coupled hands to his chest, rose onto her toes and kissed his square in his confused little mouth.
“Shut up,” she laughed as she drew back from the kiss, leaving Oliver still stunned by it, “of course I want to, we can make this work.”

Oliver breathed a happy sigh of relief, rejoicing at her words. He reached into her pocket and took her phone from inside it.
“‘You have a call to make,” he effused as he handed her the phone.

Felicity slid it onto the coffee table with a flirtatous wink.
“I think that can wait,” she whispered, her tone a sultry song to his ears.
“You want to eat first?”

She smiled as her fingers combed through his hair before her nails locked into the back of his head.
“Not,” she leaned closer, her mouth barely touching his, “exactly,” she finished before her lips encased his lower lip, swarming around him in a kiss filled with hope, with promise.

A kiss for now and whatever came next
The last day of the college year was done. Oliver had sat through his last lecture and there was an air of freedom about walking out of those classroom doors that afternoon.

Felicity’s experience was somewhat different – it was the end of her time at Starling Institute of Technology and the beginning of being a sophomore (at least on paper for the moment) at Oxford University. It was akin to a boxing match for her emotions; sad to close one door, but growing more excited to open another.

Over the last few weeks she had allowed herself to settle on it, to make choices about what dorm house she would prefer (although reality meant she took whichever had a room available), she familiarised herself with the Underground (for any trips into London she might take) and studied up on some ‘Britainese’ in an attempt to not to stick out like some wide-eyed American (even though she absolutely was, which was strange because the two countries weren’t all that dissimilar in nature). She practiced spelling colour with a U and eliminating and replacing Z’s from words such as realise, familiarise and advise.
If Felicity was turning British, she was going to embrace it quite wholeheartedly. But, that said, their Stateside education wasn’t completely finished just yet. There were still some very pesky exams to be taken; and it was that undertaking that found them pulling into the driveway of his parents’ beach house.

He was thankful his mother had passed on good genes and his hair didn’t seem to be thinning at all, because with the weight of his fingers constantly dragging through it as he spent the last few weeks finishing up his thesis entitled *Distinguishing Leadership from Management: Encouraging Synergy* and trying to make up for two years of coasting on his charm and wit to pass the coming exams and graduate as *planned*, he was still sporting a full head of hair.

He wasn’t going to be Valedictorian or anything remotely similar, but if he held that degree in his hands, he would be proud.

After watching him agonise over it for the last couple of weeks, Felicity, on a whim, threw some clothes into a bag and told Oliver to get in the car, they were taking a trip.

They drove towards the coast with little idea of where they were actually heading until Oliver mentioned that they weren’t far from the beach house and they could just go there.

And there, *here*, they were.

Oliver took a deep breath in as he closed his car door, letting the salty air brush against his worn face. He was tired, they both were, but the instant hit of frigid air was invigorating to say the least.

“And you’re sure your parents won’t mind?” Felicity asked as she balanced a bag of groceries she had made Oliver stop for on her hip.

“When I spoke to Thea on Wednesday she said they were going away, but I can ring them to ask.” “Oliver it’s nearly midnight, don’t ring them,” Felicity laughed softly as she looked around the row of blackened houses.

Oliver glanced at the garage door as he walked past, he didn’t have a clicker for it so would have to open it from the inside if he wanted to park his car inside, but – if he was being honest – that was the last thing he cared about doing.

“Where were your parents going?” Felicity asked casually as she navigated the path along the side of the house behind Oliver.

“Something about some Girl Scout thing.,” Oliver shrugged, his head was too foggy to try and remember the exact conversation.

“Thea isn’t in the Girl Scouts,” Felicity replied as she playfully patted his ass.

“I honestly wasn’t listening.” Oliver admitted with a chuckle as he unlocked the door.

He switched on a nearby lamp that cast a dimly muted-orange glow across the open-plan living, dining and kitchen, like fingers spreading out into the dark although not quite reaching its corners, before he disarmed the house alarm without on instinct.

Felicity kept her eyes on Oliver as she wandered into the house before he closed and locked the door behind them.

They fell into a familiar kiss that found their bodies pressed together and their hands lazily exploring each other.

“This was a fabulous last minute decision coming here again after Thanksgiving weekend and your no sex policy that I was certainly not consulted on,” Oliver hummed as his lips stayed pressed to
hers, lingering the kiss for as long as they could.
“We’re not having sex while both sets of our parents are in the house, and your sister and Tommy and Camila,” Felicity started, reigniting the back and forth they had had only two weekends before in the bedroom downstairs.
“They had sex you know,” Oliver pouted.

Felicity shook her head as she breathed out a laugh and leaned back into Oliver’s arms clasped around her lower back.
“Did he tell you that? Because you shouldn’t always believe what Tommy says,” she said with a grin that lifted one corner of her mouth higher than the other.
“That’s not important,” Oliver huffed, “they do know we live together.”
His feigned pout was growing more charming and Felicity couldn’t help but press a quick kiss atop it.
“What’s your point?” she jested as her hands slipped down the back of his waistband.
“They know we have sex.”
“Still,” she winked as she retracted her hands, skimming her nails across his skin, “not going to happen.”
“Then we’re never having another Thanksgiving with our parents,” Oliver declared, like he was pledging allegiance.
Her nose brushed across his, back and forth twice, as their eyes stayed locked on each other.
“We can make up for it now,” she whispered as her hands cupped his jaw and her fingers toyed with the shorts of his hair before they weaved down his chest and twisted around the hem of his long sleeve crew neck.

A smile hugged her face and her eyes twinkled expressively in the ambient light of the nearby Tiffany lamp.

She reached up and took his lips into hers, swarming his bottom lip with the soft caress of her mouth. His pleasured sighs pulled her smile tighter at the corners of her lips as his hands chased the edge of her jersey to slip underneath it.

“We,” he breathed, still the kiss for just a second, “should,” his tongue ran over the tip of her top lip, “bedroom.”
“Mmmm,” she sighed as she rammed her hips against his growing erection, “or we could not.”
Her teeth snagged his lip and gently tugged it until it pulled free before she padded over to the table where she had placed the bag of groceries. With a smile still dancing across her cheeks she pulled out a can of whipped cream and dangled it in front of Oliver’s beaming face.
“Is that what you went in the shop to buy?” Oliver laughed as a million fantasies filled his head.
“And some coffee and milk because I’m not a savage, but yeah, mostly this,” she answered with a wink as she tapped a pink nail on the lid.
“And what do you propose to do with it?”
Oliver face was lit up brighter than a Christmas tree and he wasn’t even attempting to hide his very prominent arousal – both in his smile and between his legs.

Felicity walked backwards into the kitchen, gesturing Oliver to follow her with a single ‘come hither’ finger which he obediently followed.

She positioned him with his back against the island in the centre of the kitchen and raked her nails down his taut chest, humming quietly to herself at the feel of his smooth skin gliding underneath the pads of her fingers.

The air was cool, but his skin was warm to her touch as his chest rose and fell with deep, hungering breaths. Her name fluttered from his lips like the end of a silent prayer while his eyes lingered
towards the ceiling, drawn up in his moment of piqued pleasure.

Felicity hovered the nozzle above his chest, silently trying to decide where to begin. The left side won, the prize a chilled swirl of spray cream that resembled a snail spire between his shoulder and pec. She stepped half a foot back to admire her work before she dipped her finger into the peak and licked the spoils from her fingertip, humming delightfully as Oliver just watched with an embedded smile and a glint in eyes.

“It’s midnight,” Felicity whispered as she stole back that half a foot, their bodies as close as you can get without actually touching, “you can be my midnight snack.” She didn’t wait for any comeback from him before she dragged her tongue slowly around the underside of the small cream mountain she had made.

She couldn’t help but smile as she watched his fingers dig into the inflexible countertop, turning his knuckles white, while muted curse words dripped like heated glass from his lips.

When every inch of the cream was devoured Felicity stepped a few feet back and leaned up against the under-counter dishwasher while she watched Oliver slowly return from his lucid state. Once his eyes had focused on her again she stripped off her clothing, bit by bit, throwing each item on top of the last until she was left in only her white and navy striped panties.

“Fuck,” Oliver stuttered, his voice ragged and pulled like it took copious amount of energy to speak even that single word.

His eyes didn’t know where to focus – her smooth stomach that was always soft and warm to his touch? Her pert breasts that curved like hills that blended seamlessly into their surroundings? Her tightly budded nipples that were a succulent shade of wine-red that made his mouth water just by the sight of them? Or her slender arms that stayed dangling beside her curvy waist until one touched a finger to her kiss-ravished lips?

Every part of her was something stunning to be discovered, appreciated, enjoyed, but in the end his eyes settled on the part of her that he found the most beautiful, her eyes.

“Do you want a taste?” she asked, her eyes as innocent as a doe but her words spoken with the focus of an eagle. Felicity dragged the can's nozzle down the centre of her chest, slowing as she passed it between her breasts.

Oliver stopped her hand as she reached the start of her mound.

“Not there,” he whispered, his voice rough and almost growled. She tipped her eyes up towards his, searching the deep blue for a reason for his request.

“I like the taste of you just as you are,” he answered before his tongue grazed the edge of his lower lip.

If it wasn’t for the bench behind her Felicity was sure she would have melted to the floor at his words. She loved every aspect of the Oliver Queen she had come to know; his humour when he tried to teach her to cook, his childlike inability to focus on anything else when a football game was on TV, his moments of vulnerability that were rare but pure, his random acts of kindness, his perseverance to be better and his quiet, but caring, moments of romance that belonged in books – but, every so often, there was another side of Oliver, a raw sexuality that made his eyes deepen into a shade not unlike the rich blue of the ocean below the surface, it made his voice growly like gravel plagued his throat and etched heavy lines across his forehead; and there was nothing quite like awakening that beast.
He took the can from her hands and buried one nipple beneath a curled ribbon of cream. Felicity took a sharp inhale through her mouth as her head tumbled backwards and her eyes sprung open.

He lifted her up, sending her feet scrambling against the smooth brushed metal of the dishwasher before he put her down gently onto the cold granite countertop. Her breath hitched in the back of her throat as a shiver ran up her bare spine.

Oliver encased the tiny mountain of cream with his lips as Felicity’s back arched into his palm. Her hair brushed over the counter while her skin appeared luminescent against the dark backdrop. Oliver’s tongue swirled and lapped her coiled nipple enjoying the way her body rose and fell in his palm like a rolling ocean wave. He gently nipped her with his teeth, eliciting a keened cry to tumble from her lips and a fresh spread of pink to blush across her cheeks.

His other hand cupped and massaged her other breast, skirting the rough pad of his thumb around her aroused nipple. When she rose up her fingers dove for the closure of Oliver’s khaki green cargo pants, making light work of the button and zip before her feet pushed them down his legs and he kicked them free from his feet.

His lips travelled across her naked chest chasing the delicious taste of her skin melded with the remnants of cream still around his mouth. Her fingers lolled across his scalp as their breathing became hurried and their words became nothing more than moans draped in lust. Her legs folded around his waist while she bucked her hips against his firm chest, now dusted in sweat despite the cool late autumn temperature.

Neither said the actual words but their bodies grinding into each other chanted their wants so expressively, here, now, don’t wait.

Felicity pushed his briefs down his legs, scraping her nails into his thighs as she hurried to release his bulging cock. It sprung out from behind the black spandex-cotton briefs like a salute and Felicity couldn’t help but smile as Oliver groaned a muffled fuck into the curve of her neck.

He awkwardly wiggled his briefs to sit just below his knees as her hand wrapped around his pulsing shaft, neither of them taking stock of where they actually were.

Her back lowered to the counter as Oliver used his body to shadow her. She writhed as he drew a line down towards her core and then giggled out a breathy laugh when he circled her navel. Her arms flailed as she tried to ignore the tickling sensation of his unshaven jaw against her smooth stomach. A fruit basket crashed to the floor but neither of them stopped, or even paused.

The air became heavy with their warm breaths as their bodies became sticky veils of cream and sweat. Her lower body teetered on the edge of the counter, allowing her to rub and gyrate her thinly-clothed sex against Oliver’s pounding cock.

And then the room flooded with light.
Bright, assaulting light that made everything screech to a halt.

Felicity scrambled from the counter and hid behind Oliver’s much larger stature, pulling her body in tight until only her eyes and above could be see peeking out from behind his arm.

Robert Queen was standing rather menacingly in the doorway opposite them in a white, monogrammed bathrobe, which hung a little open to show his upper chest, with one of Oliver’s Little League baseball bats poised over his shoulder. Moira was a step or two behind him with a cordless phone pressed to her ear.
“Never mind,” she sighed into the receiver, “it’s just my son, naked in the kitchen with his
girlfriend. My apologies,” she added with a tone tipped in disbelief before she hung up the phone.

Oliver braced his arms against the counter behind them, heroically shielding Felicity from all and any eyes as she buried her face into his back.

This was not happening.

“What are you doing?” Robert asked as the bat rolled from his shoulder and hung alongside his leg, “we thought someone was robbing the place. We checked on the girls before we came down…”

“With 911 on the line,” Moira added.

“The girls?” Oliver asked, dreading the answer that came a literal second after he asked it.

“Are we all dead yet?” Thea chortled as she tiptoed, out of sight, down the stairs from the upper level.

She only saw a flash of skin before Moira thrust her hand around her daughter’s eyes and marched her back towards the stairs.

“Son,” Robert sighed as his eyes looked up at the ceiling, “while I appreciate you covering Felicity, perhaps,” he reached down and scooped up Oliver’s discarded pants, “you could put some pants on,” he finished as he chucked them to Oliver who caught them the same instant he realised he was naked.

“What were you two doing, were you having se…” Thea called out, unseen.

“Thea, go back upstairs,” came Moira’s curt response.

“I’m so sorry, I thought you were away,” Oliver said, his face speckled red and his hands trembling his crumpled pants in front of his crotch.

“We were,” Robert replied, monotone, “we went away here.”

“Thea said,” Oliver started, his mind running a mile a minute until it settled on what was obviously the truth, “oh shit, you were going away here,” he said with a sigh.

“That’s what I said son.”

Felicity pressed herself deeper into Oliver’s back, hoping that if she squeezed closed her eyes tight enough she could open them and this would somehow have been all some very vivid nightmare.

But it wasn’t.
Not even close.

“Could you maybe leave so we can, uh…” Oliver cringed as he looked around at the splattering of clothes on the kitchen floor.

Both Robert and Moira turned around and headed back towards the staircase.

“The rooms downstairs are empty,” Robert called over his shoulder.

“Thanks dad,” Oliver replied before he dropped the breath he had been holding tight across his chest.

“Goodnight son,” came his father’s faint response before the house fell quiet again.

“So, great,” Felicity mumbled into Oliver’s warm, naked back, “your parents have now caught us in a closet and in their beach house kitchen, covering in whipped…”

Oliver turned around to comfort her and her eyes immediately fell to the cream around his mouth and smeared up the bristles of his jaw.

“Oh my god,” she said, her eyes welling up and she began to cry-laugh.

“Wait, does this mean another sex embargo?” Oliver asked as he dragged his forearm across his face, still missing most of the cream.
“Yes, Oliver,” she said, smiling as her head shook side to side “most definitely yes.”
“Shit,” he grumbled.

[12 December 2007]

It was the morning of Oliver’s final exam and even though he’d only hopped out of the shower less than thirty minutes ago he felt drenched in sweat as he poured over books, the text of which had bled into unintelligible scribbles – at least to his eyes.

He ran a hand through his damp hair, tugging it at its roots just to feel something other than stress-laced panic.
“You’ll be fine, you got this,” Felicity cheered as she placed a freshly made coffee on the desk beside him.
“How are you so calm you still have two exams left?” Oliver pondered as he spun around in the chair while she walked away.
She shuffled a few magazines on the coffee table and collected the mug she had left there earlier, taking it back to the kitchen via a path that allowed to her wink at Oliver as she strutted.

“Oh I’m pretty sure it’s the five coffees I’ve had this morning,” she laughed placing the mug in the sink, “I have reached maximum zen.”
Oliver spun a full circle in the chair as Felicity wandered back up to him. She stopped him midway through his second spin with her hands anchoring on his shoulders.
“I’m not ready for this,” he groaned, wishing he could simply slip back into Ollie who didn’t give a crap about college or graduating or making his amazing girlfriend proud…

“You are,” Felicity assured, affixing her gaze to his, “you just need to relax.”
She squeezed his shoulders gently, massaging her fingertips into the tight muscles banded across the back of them.
“You’ve handed in your thesis, which was amazing by the way,” she said as a proud smile broke across her lips and filtered up into her cheeks.
“Thanks to you,” Oliver remarked, mimicking her smile.
“No, Oliver, this is your time to shine, take it,” she corrected, her voice verging on stern but still heaped with her trademark kindness.

Oliver sighed while he tapped a finger relentlessly into his temple.
“My head is just a mess of information all crammed in there.”
“Then you need to relax and let it just come out,” Felicity sung as one hand travelled from his shoulder to his cheek.
He closed his eyes calmly to relax into the warmth of her palm.
“How?” he mumbled.

Felicity grazed her thumb along his jaw before reaching behind him and collecting the book he had been staring at moments before.
“I want you to talk business to me,” she declared as she stood back and thumbed through the pages. Complex codes and script she could understand – this was something entirely different; and the management of people over digital files wasn’t exactly her forte, but she had an idea.

“What?” Oliver chuckled as he stretched out his long legs to relax his back into the a chair. Felicity closed the book and jostled it from one hand to the other as one eyebrow hitched up mischievously.
“Just talk management and human resources and CEO roles…” she purred before she dropped the
book with a loud thud that had Oliver bounding up off his seat.
“I don’t underst…”
“…And then I’ll slowly take off my clothes,” she finished before her tongue lapped her lower lip and her teeth gently bit the same.

The sharp breath of air Oliver took in almost choked him as his eyes widened at her proposal.
“You’re going to striptease to me talking consumer algorithms and…”
Felicity let a sigh drip from her lips before she chewed at the corner.
“God that’s hot Oliver, keep going,” she mewed as her fingertip brushed across her breasts.

Oliver had next to no idea what was even happening right now, but lord help him, he was aroused by it.
“Middle management can be a powerful tool,” he started, his voice low and growly with almost no correlation to the words he was speaking, “it can bridge the gap between upper management and employees,”
Felicity’s eyes lidded over as her shoulders rolled back and quiet little hums peppered her breathing.
He stepped closer so that there was barely two feet between them, “it can give them a sounding board for their concerns.”

Felicity slipped her hand down her shirt and teased her nipple through her satin bra.
“Oh, sounding board, say it again,” she crooned, her voice smouldering with sexuality.
“This is so weird,” Oliver quipped as he reached out a finger but kept it back from actually touching her, “but I’m so very okay with weird.”

She smiled at him with her heavily lidded eyes as her head lolled from one shoulder to the next, causing Oliver to absentmindedly do the same.
“Sounding board,” he growled, his breath blowing back tiny strands of her hair as he leaned forward to say it.

Felicity unbuttoned her cardigan and kicked off her UGG boots, her eyes barely open slithers now. Oliver leaned closer still, so that his lips were only a hair’s breadth away from her lips.
“A CEO should be approachable in order to garner respect from his or her employees,” he whispered, ghosting some of the words over her pouted, pillowed lips that looked fresh with the gloss of her tongue.
“Fuck Oliver,” she groaned, letting his voice, and not so much his words, channel her arousal, “more.”
Oliver found the weight from his shoulders melting away and his mind gaining a clarity that he had been unable to find all morning.

“A CEO that has the respect of his or her employees,”
Felicity squeaked in pleasure as his voice dropped an octave before she wriggled the cardigan from her shoulders and tore her black ribbed tee-shirt from her body.

“Speak jargon to me,” Felicity moaned before she pushed her finger between her lips and sucked it for just a moment before she dragged it around the lace hem of her bra.
“Annual general meeting,” Oliver rasped.
Felicity hummed her approval as her damp finger dipped into her bra and skimmed across her nipple.
“Blue chip corporations.”
He watched her fingers trickle down her body and slowly peel down the fly of her jeans.
“Capital gains.”
She slithered from her jeans as her eyes fluttered open.
“Keep going,” she encouraged with a smoky, sultry tone as her thumbs hooked into the waist of her panties.
Oliver couldn’t stop his lips from dropping to her neck, roughly kissing her until they fell backwards together onto the bean bag.

“Microeconomics,” he kissed into her skin, intimate, longing.
Her nails combed across his scalp, “what does that mean?”
“It’s the decisions taken by companies or individuals,” he paused to nibble the pulse point on her neck, “without worrying about the wider economy.”
She hummed her approval at his answer as she guided his hand down between her legs.
“Fuck Felicity,” he growled as he buried his face into her neck and enjoyed the wetness now coating his fingers.

“Tell me more Oliver, please,” she coaxed as she ran his fingers between her folds.
“A profit and loss account shows a Company’s trading over the last financial year and can…”
He stopped when honeyed moans dripped from her parted lips.

She turned him quickly, straddling him for just a moment before she stood up and stroked a finger down the curve of her waist, stopping it at her hip.
“Keep talking,” she urged as she slowly wiggled the panties down her legs.
“Eco-friendly and paperless companies are the way of the future,” Oliver rambled.

Felicity snagged her lip and groaned, “Oh god, digital filing systems.”
She kicked her panties free and unclipped her bra letting it drop carelessly to her feet before she swept it away.

She bent in half, her breasts so close to his face he wondered if he could poke out his tongue and touch them. She pulled his sweat pants, together with his cotton briefs unceremoniously down to his knees.

The air brushed against the head of his cock in a way that made him groan quite deliriously. He watched as she turned and stroked her ass down his chest. A litany of mumbled expletives hailed from his mouth as he lightly tapped her ass cheek and she raised an eyebrow at him over her shoulder.

She rubbed his shaft between her legs before she turned around to face him and dropped her body onto his lap.

She rubbed his head between her folds, humming to herself as she held his neck with her free hand. Her knees buried into the beanbag making it rustle beneath their weight. She pushed her chest in towards his face letting him scoop one of her breasts into his mouth as his hands caressed the rounds of her perfect ass.

“What is a quarterly report?” Felicity whispered, the question almost lost on Oliver, as she skirted his cock around her wet entrance.
“Financial reports,” he mumbled, his mouth still devouring her breast, “every three months here, British companies registered here, twice a year.”
Felicity smiled as she sunk her body down onto his cock.

Her body stretched around him as she gently rocked him deeper. His eyes tripped into the back of his head as his grip on her ass tightened. He felt his arousal tip towards orgasm almost immediately as she rode him slowly. He could barely contain himself and when she bent down and kissed his lips longingly, Oliver felt the tightening across the back of his thighs and down through his balls.
He didn’t need speed and he didn’t need hours, his body was so tightly wound that just the sheer pleasure of her cushiony soft walls stroking over the head of his cock was perfectly erotic.

They kissed and explored as she continued to ride him slowly until every knot in his body and every concern in his head melted away.

And then he let go, ribbons of pleasure chorused with her namely gently falling from his lips.

Her head dropped to his shoulder as she chased his orgasm with her own moments later.

They stayed there, glossed in their own and each other’s sweat, gently milking the last of their spends with slow, lingered bucks until they both stilled in blissful silence.

“Are you relaxed now?” she whispered in his ear after her lips kissed a trail there.

“Mmmmm,” Oliver sighed happily.

“You have two and a half hours before your exam, go have a shower and we’ll have lunch at our café before the exam,” she spoke as she stood off his lap.

Her eyes wandered down towards his cock and smiled before she licked her lips, “and if there is time, maybe I can help you relax in the car.”

Oliver grinned like a fool and he really couldn’t care less.

[Sunday, 16 December 2007: Graduation Day]

“Oliver Jonas Queen.”

His name was met with raucous cheering that came mostly from Thea, Tommy (who was taking a leaf out of Oliver’s playbook and planning to graduate next year), Chris who had (at least for now) decided to move into the Kuttler pool house to stay close to Caitlin and carry on his rigorous therapy, and, of course, cheering so loudly her throat was beginning to constrict, Felicity.

His mother wiped a happy tear from her eye and Robert applauded with thunderous claps.

This was Oliver’s day, and when he walked across the stage clutching that seemingly simple bit of paper he felt something he wasn’t really sure he’d ever felt before – accomplishment.

Felicity leapt into his arms as the graduates were finally freed from the civilities of the ceremony. Oliver caught her with one hand as the other, still clutching his achievement, pressed her body tight against his.

“I’m so proud of you,” she gushed before she covered his face in scattered kisses.

“We all are,” Robert added.

Oliver had never felt belittled by his father, neither had Robert ever led him to believe he was disappointed in him before, but Oliver had always sensed his father wanted Oliver to strive, to achieve, to work and in his grey-blue eyes, under weathered but strong brows, Oliver saw pride clearly emblazoned there.

“My brother, the college graduate,” Thea smirked as she trotted alongside Chris, to whom she had taken an interest in a non romantic, more of an injured bird type, way, “honestly, I never would have thought it.”

She playfully jumped to flick the corner of his cap before Moira huddled everyone together for a photo Chris offered to take it, joking that everyone looked better from the angle he would take it at.
Felicity wrapped her arms around Oliver's shoulders with her body sideways to the camera as she popped a foot and kissed his cheek just as Chris took the photo.

Oliver grasped Felicity's hand and without explanation led her quickly away from the tribe of family and friends. They manoeuvred through the crowds, Oliver leading the way as Felicity’s laugh chorused through the cold but clear afternoon, until they reached a quiet spot, free from mulling crowds and idle chatter beneath some bleachers.

Before she could question what they were doing there Oliver took his cap and placed it gently on her head, sweeping back the golden hair that fell over her shoulders. “This is as much for you as it is for me,” he remarked before the corners of his lips curved into an appreciative smile.

“No it’s not Oliver, you did this,” she argued while toying with the tassel. “You believed me, you always have, and for that I’m forever grateful,” he praised, the honesty of his words charging down his arms and into his palms as he cupped her face.

With his back to the wall he kissed her, small, meaningful, a kiss to be cherished before it grew needy and intense. His lips devoured hers, tasting the sweet notes of her strawberry lip gloss that he swore silently to never forget. Her hands grappled up his chest before they broke apart to the sounds of passers by.

“Maybe we shouldn’t, here,” Felicity said as a finger traced the line of her lips, gathering smeared gloss.

Oliver smiled in agreement, they didn’t need to be caught by his parents yet again.

“Whatever happens, wherever it is, I’ll be at your graduation in two years,” Oliver swore with his eyes melded to hers. “You promise?” she teased as she threaded her arms around the back of his neck. “I promise,” he enthused, “I’ll be there to cheer you on and to see you be amazing.” Felicity blushed under the heat of his gaze. “Be excited for Oxford Felicity,” Oliver cooed as his thumbs stroked up her cheeks, “you’re going to do great things.”

*Whatever happens.*

Chapter End Notes

This story has about 5 chapters left to give so heads up, I will remain somewhat tightlipped when replying to comments; and... prepare yourself ;) (na it's not that bad, honest)
“Happy New Year,” Oliver mouthed.  
His voice was lost above the celebrating crowds that swarmed the Champs-Elysees as the night sky erupted into an extravagant light show.  

Neon colours took over the night and there was nothing to be heard but the raucous chants of the revellers and the thunderous booms that ignited the fireworks – and yet, Felicity heard him all the same.  

They kissed, melting the crowds around them into nothing. The chill of their lips from the frigid night air warmed as they shared breaths and pressed their bodies closer together so that not even air could pass between them.
Time halted for them as they rung the first two minutes of the 2008 with their lips locked and their bodies woven together.

When they finally parted, neither could speak – only smile, not only because of the deafening sounds, but also because they were both scared to face the reality that this wasn’t a moment they could live in forever.

No matter how hard they wished it, time wouldn’t stand still. The moon would fall and the sun would rise and then another, and another, and another until this moment – for all its trappings and beauty – would become just a distant memory to add to the ones that came before it.

Like the memories they had been making after the flew out from Starling the day after Oliver’s graduation, with little more than a few bags of luggage between them and the horizon at their backs.

They had spent the last few days of Hanukkah and Christmas in Marrakesh, Morocco, drinking in the sights and sounds of a place so rich and charming. Felicity had gone from one stall to the other in the Djemaa El Fna marketplace, desperate to learn everything there was to know about the ‘assembly of the dead’ – the snake charmers by day and the exotic foods and musicians by night.

She had called it magical and deemed that there was no place on earth that would trump such an experience – that was until they travelled to Tarragona, Spain.

Felicity was taken with the coastal city seeped in so much history, history that she devoured by reading every pamphlet and travel book she could lay her hands on. They visited the Amphitheatre, spent an entire day roaming the ruins at Circ Roma (The Roman Circus) and, despite the dropping temperatures of the winter months, they simply enjoyed their company walking the beaches and coastline together.

It was in a quaint little villa room nestled between identical buildings, a stone’s throw from the Mediterranean Ocean where they made love in the moments before the sun fell behind the horizon with the wind gently blowing in through an open patio door.

A short bus trip where Felicity traded bracelets with a young girl no older than five later and they were flying out from Barcelona for Paris, France to ring in the New Year.

They only had a couple more days in the City of Light before they would fly to London and take the train to Oxford, where Felicity would acquaint herself with the University that she would call home for the next however long.

Oliver would return to Starling a week before she started on 14 January 2008.

But for now, they would just enjoy tonight.

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**[3 January 2008]**

“Can we cross that one off?” Oliver smiled as Felicity leaned against his chest, stealing his warmth for herself as a cool air whipped across the viewing platform atop the Eiffel Tower.

“What one?” Felicity laughed as her eyes drunk in the magnificent sights that such a vantage point had to offer.

“The make a wish from the Eiffel Tower,” Oliver replied, his body swaying ever so slightly with hers.
“It’s blow a wish,” she corrected while she turned in his arms and presented him with a cheeky smile, “and I didn’t.”

Not yet.

Oliver dipped his hand into the pocket of his thick fleece-lined plaid coat that had him looking like a farmer from some southern state more than the business major he was, before he presented Felicity with a hand full of seeds.

Her brow pinched inward as she studied them carefully, “what are those?”

“Dandelion seeds, I wasn’t sure about bringing an actual dandelion up here so I hope this is okay,” he smiled as he turned her towards the railing and held out his hand.

“Make a wish,” he whispered.

Felicity let her eyes close softly, dark lashes splayed over slightly chilled cheeks, as she made her wish.

She wished to always know when something felt right
To always see the what if
To always imagine the possibilities
And to always let her heart speak, even if she can’t always follow it.

Her pink lips coiled into an ‘O’ before she softly blew the small seeds from Oliver’s hand, opened her eyes and imagined the wind taking them to some place magical.

When she turned back to face Oliver she saw the sadness in the pools of his blue eyes, the same one that had been growing deeper the closer they drew to London.

She would ignore it a little longer.

“What did you wish for?” Oliver asked as he pinned back the hair that the wind was carelessly sweeping across her face despite the woollen hat she wore.

She teased him with a coy smile.

“I can’t tell you.”

“I bet it was a terrible one,” Oliver winked, even though his voice was trying to give off an air of seriousness.

Felicity touched her gloved hand to his cheek and tapped it twice.

“I know what you’re doing?” she chimed with her eyes throwing smiles his way in an attempt to play this off like she had all the other times.

The time in Morocco when he mentioned Ibiza.
The time in Spain where he took a solitary walk only to come back looking drawn and sad.

“What?” Oliver feigned ignorance.

And even though he smiled – looking at her, he couldn’t not – his heart was growing heavier by the moment.

Oliver’s heart hurt.
More than he would let on and probably more than he would ever admit.
The decision, the choice, the path that was bouncing around his head wasn’t an easy one and it wasn’t one he wanted to make, but no matter how hard he battled himself, to him it seemed like the inevitable one.

“Trying to make me break up with you because you think that’s what I want,” Felicity answered.

It was the first time the words had passed over her lips, but not the first time she had thought them.
“I just want you to…”
Felicity held a finger against Oliver’s trembling lips.
“Not here, not now,” she interrupted, “we promised we wouldn’t talk about this, remember?”
Her voice was cracking as she blinked back tears.
*Not here.*
*Not now.*

“I remember,” Oliver sighed, before doing the only thing he knew to do.
He pulled her tightly to his chest.

They had made a pact at the airport in Starling to just enjoy their holiday and to forget what would
become of them when they parted at the end of it.

But as the holiday grew to a close, it was becoming apparent that they needed to pull the blanket
off the elephant in the room.

Because they both knew it was still there.


[8 January 2008, Oxford]

It was their last night together.
Everything was set in stone now.
Felicity’s dorm room was compact but comfortable and was already starting to feel a little more
like home after she carefully arranged a few purchases on her side. It would certainly do for now,
at least until she was familiar enough with her surroundings to find something a little less *compact.*

Tonight, it all just felt too real.
They sat through dinner like a void sat between them.
There was so much they both had to say, but neither could – *neither would.*
They couldn’t ignore it anymore.

Falling into his arms in the hotel room where Oliver had been staying felt like falling into an abyss.
He held her tight and she could hear the sadness in his breath.

*She would ignore it a little longer.*

She kissed him, her lips quivering as she was frightened he would push her away, but he didn’t and
the longer their lips caressed each other the more his body weighed upon hers. He was crumbling
like rubble.

She could taste the tears on his lips that had traversed his cheeks.
She could feel the hopelessness in the tips of his fingers as they trickled down her back.

*Call it out to me, I'm holding on*
*But my body's caving in*
*Call it out to me, I know I've won,*
*But it don't mean anything*
*It's blinding me,*
It's fighting me
So I wait 'till morning comes
And dance in all we could have done

She could ignore it a little longer.

She stepped back, she could see it in his eyes.
A little longer.

Felicity feathered her fingers down the zip at the side of her dress. She peeled it down slowly before letting it float to the floor.

Oliver blinked away.

Until the morning time
I'm scared here in the night
Don't show the best of me
I know the end already

Felicity gently cupped his face between her palms, making him look at her, making him see her.

His words are choked, his eyes pools of regret.
“Felicity, we shouldn’t…”
He shouldn’t.
Not with what he knew.

“He shouldn’t,” she begged, she can ignore it a little longer.
Felicity unclipped her bra and slowly slid it from her body before she placed his hand against her breast.
They would have tonight.

She led him wordlessly toward the bed and once the edge of it brushed against the back of her knees she slid onto it, kneeling in front of him. She took her time undressing him, stealing the moments.

The sky stays black tonight
As I take your hand and close my eyes

They tumbled together onto the bed, his body hovering about hers as she drew absent lines down his chest, making permanent but invisible scars.

They kissed in silence and without sharing a breath between them. Sadness shaded the kiss, like this was it, this was all they had.

His briefs and her panties fell together onto the warm cocoa carpet as they explored each other slowly, afraid to miss something, scared to forget.

Oliver’s lips trembled against her chest, as the silence was finally replaced with the sound of smoky, whimpered breaths.

They would have now.

Oliver raised himself higher above her, his eyes caressing every inch she laid bare to him. He
wanted to memorize it all – the sweet notes of her skin, the trail the tiny spheres of sweat made between her breasts, the shade her nipples grew when his lips leave off them or the way they coil when his fingers gently pinch them. The way her hips peak up from under her skin, the way her stomach rolls into her mound and the way all of that feels under his hands.

He needed to taste her on his lips, to feel her release coating his throat. He need her, every last bit.

He leaned over and kissed the tip of her mound as his eyes walked up her body until they met with hers and she smiled, please.

He kissed her nether lips, listening as soft mewls fluttered from her mouth. His tongue slipped between her folds, just the tip licking the nectar of her arousal.

Oliver went down on her with a flourish, even though he wished to savour each second, the desire that flowed through his body was too much for him to fight.

A hand slipped around to her ass, raising it a few inches off the bed as his elbows kept her legs close together, barely enough room for his chin to sink between her thighs. He gropped her gently before she pushed her ass up, trying to deepen the pressure of his lips around her clit.

Felicity moaned as her hips bucked gently in a rhythm that neither of them controlled. Her toes dug into the bedspread as one hand sought for him, her fingers desperate to feel him even as her lids grew heavy.

His name floated from her lips and Oliver stilled to hear it a few moments longer, scared it might never pass over them again.

His tongue spread her lips apart as his thumb came to draw tiny, uneven circles around her clit, before his feather-light licks skirted back around her tightly coiled nub.

When he could hear her breath quicken and her grip on him grew tighter he flattened her knees to the bed, spreading her wide as she gasped.

He took her clit whole, sucking it with just enough pressure that Felicity’s trembled moans became haphazard and broken.

She couldn’t catch her breath, the intensity of his face buried deep between her legs was her only focus, the only thing her mind could cope with.

Oliver eased his thumb inside her, relishing the hurried cries that resembled his name, bleating from her.

Felicity could feel it like electricity as Oliver’s thumb stroked heavy lines down her walls and pressed against her g-spot. Her body trembled and writhed – both so completely out of her control, as she fought to close her legs around him. Oliver’s elbows held her down, not giving her an inch as he continued the sweet onslaught.

He could feel her thighs desperately trying to ride his face as her cries became more desperate and in one move he stayed his head and released his anchor on her legs.

Felicity’s hips bucked upwards the instant the pressure was released, riding her sex against his face with uncontrolled and delirious freedom. She thrust herself into him to feel the whiskers of his stubbled-beard grazing between her folds before dropping her hips to enjoy the should-be-illicit sensation of his mouth holding onto her clit with nothing but suction.
He let her go, wildly taking and feeling and seeking each sensation that tore through her body. She took his hand and cupped it to her breast, massaging over the top of it.

It was those free moments of wild liberation that took Felicity to the edge and it was the new thrill of Oliver’s middle finger tracing her puckered hole before dipping just the tip inside that booted her completely over this *edge* into a cataclysmic release.

Her whole body rocked with the force of her climax as her nails dug deep into his scalp. But Oliver didn’t resent them, despite the pain that wracked him.

His large hands held her at the waist, keep her open and placed for him as her body writhed through each wave. His tongue beat against her clit as he devoured her until he looked up her body laced in sweat and found the visions of pleasure painted across her stunning features, her bottom lip red and swollen from where her teeth held it captive and blonde tendrils of hair pasted to her temples

As her orgasm was thundering through her core and bleeding out towards her thighs she twisted, flipping them both. Her lips caught his unawares, the taste of her salty spend still glistening against the.

Felicity slipped him inside her quaking walls – desperate to feel him fill and stretch her. Each inch felt better than the one before, until he was completely seated inside her thrumming sex.

Her fingers wove down his chest, now veiled in a layer of slick sweat as she began to gently rock him inside her. His thumbs drew circles over her knees as they locked in tight against his hips, keeping her balanced above him.

Felicity stooped over and gently kissed the ridges of his stomach, letting the salty drizzle of his sweat bleed into her swollen lips to instantly soften them.

Tipping her hips upwards, his head skimmed the soft back wall making them both moan in unison before her lips broke away from his stomach and she rose back up again.

Her fingers entwined with Oliver’s as they kept their eyes focused on each other, almost terrified of ending this too soon lest one of them blink away.

With Felicity’s hands guiding him, Oliver walked his palms up her warm thighs, stilling at her waist. His fingers clamped around the soft, sloping curve of her waist, staying there even when her hands dropped away and anchored behind her body, gripping into Oliver’s thighs.

She rolled her hips, taking his hands on the voyage as her eyes begged him to steer. He didn’t need the words, their bodies so attune now that he knew what she wanted, what she *needed*.

But, she said it all the same.

“Move me Oliver,” she whispered, as her back arched and her breasts tightened against her chest.

Oliver kept the same rhythm she had started as Felicity tipped her head backwards, allowing his cock to sink further inside her. But he missed her eyes, he wanted, needed, to see them, so with a gentle persuasion his hands rolled her forward again, snapping her head back and locking her eyes onto his.

“Stay,” he breathed as he marvelled at the sight of her on top of him. Felicity offered him a lopsided smile of her red lips as she softly nodded just the once.

The pace grew a little faster as Oliver steered her hips back and forth, intermittently lifting her a
little off him before easing her back down.

There was something about the finality that neither of them could speak to that had Felicity desperate to both have this time together linger but also to have Oliver thrust himself deep inside her to pummel all other thoughts away; and Oliver desperate to give her both.

All they could do was meet somewhere in the middle.

She rode him deep, so that not even a quarter inch sat between them where their bodies merged, holding her core tightly wound to keep her body upright above him, until she couldn't do it a moment more.

Her body dropped atop his, his shaft still buried inside her while they continued to move together, back and forth, up and down, side to side, until every part of her warm interior had been touched by him.

They rolled together, switching their positions, neither sure who initiated the move but both glad for it. Oliver shadowed her body as her legs wrapped around the back of his thighs. He brought himself up on his knees and stilled his cock half way in and half way out.

Her lips quaked with words that she refused to speak until only his name floated from within a strangled gasp.

This wasn’t done, not yet, not until she felt him so complete.

But Oliver had stilled, teetering on his precipice because he needed to see her, every plane and curve and feature of her face. He needed this moment to take it all in, to bury it deep within his soul to make sure the memory would last him a lifetime.

He loved her.

He saw the same fight in her eyes.

Felicity took his head and pulled it down to meet with hers. Their lips crumbled together, trembling as they kissed and Oliver sunk into her.

Their lips never left off as Oliver moved himself in and out, slowly building the rhythm back up until he felt her walls constricting around him, gripping his shaft and surrounding his tip.

With a soft, shaking moan Felicity climaxed once more, encasing Oliver with her release which made his own orgasm follow like a domino, sending currents down the threads of his thighs and tightening his balls until nothing was left.

Everything he had was inside her.

Their kiss fell apart and Oliver buried his head against her neck.

He could relish it just a little longer.

When their bodies finally parted as the moon sat at its highest point, Felicity rolled, naked, against him. He held her close, tight, afraid of what was to come but knowing it had to all the same.

That’s what love meant – always wanting what’s best for someone, even if that didn’t include you.

“Oliver don’t do it,” Felicity whispered as she saw the words from his mind leaking out into his expression.

A tear formed in the corner of his eye, holding there for only a moment before it slid down his
cheek.

Felicity sat up, pulling the crumpled blanket tight against her chest – her wall, her protection, her shield for a heart about to be broken.

His words choked him, until he could finally push them out, “you have a life to live.”
He hated himself, hated every word, but that didn’t stop them being true.
“Those things on your list, I’ve done so many,” he added, the pain of this realisation scarring his expression.
Felicity shook her head, the best argument she had for now.
“It’s just a stupid list,” she whispered, though she wanted to scream it.
“Nothing you do is stupid Felicity, you and I both know that.”

The tears came without notice before Felicity could brush them aside.
“This is the end isn’t it?” she breathed, shaky, cracked.
His eyes gave her the answer his lips couldn’t, though his heart begged for her to stay a little longer with him.

**Until morning came**

*Dance in all they could have been.*

Felicity dressed as quickly as she could, hot tears burning valleys down her cheeks. Oliver slumped to the edge of the bed. If someone were to listen close enough, Oliver wondered if they would hear the moment he shattered her.

He would live infamously in her memory as the one who broke her heart.

“I don’t want to hold you back, I want you to discover the world,” he offered, even though his words felt so meaningless in that moment.

For everyone that would have said he was wrong, that he was foolish, that he had made the wrong choice and given up, he would have offered his heart as proof. As real as it beat, Oliver believed this was the right choice.

“I know that I love you,” he continued, his head buried in his palms, he couldn’t watch her leave, “and I know that you love me, but you deserve a chance to experience life, to do the things that we cant.”

A list.
A stupid list.
Felicity walked to her backpack and pulled the list from the small pocket that had been its home as they travelled, blissfully ignoring the coming of this moment.

It was so fragile, so pathetically flimsy in her hands and she tore it easily through the middle.
“No, this isn’t about a piece of paper anymore Oliver,” she argued, her tears turning from anguish to bitter though she wanted neither, “I won’t let you do this because you think it’s what I want, or what I need.”

Oliver stood and walked towards her, stopping as his feet brushed the torn paper, now discarded on the floor.

Felicity retreated from him. He deserved the mistrust she was giving him.
He was the one who broke her heart.
“If you walk away tomorrow, then you might as well walk away tonight and that, that choice is on you,” she spat, the last she had to give as she collected her bag and clutched it tightly to her chest.

“I’m sorry,” Oliver whispered, his heart in shreds.  
*What had he done?*

“I always knew you’d break my heart with those two words.”

And with the slam of the hotel room door, Felicity was gone.

Oliver looked down at the two halves of paper before his knees gave way and he folded onto the edge of the bed with his head falling between his knees.  
He didn’t know if it was the right decision or even if it was a good one. He didn’t know if he would live to regret or whether one day they would both understand it.

*But he did know he was sorry.*

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Oliver was sitting at Heathrow airport watching the commuters swarm past him, all with some place to go and some with someone to go with.

He hadn’t slept a wink and the dark patches that blotted the skin under his eyes were testament to that fact.

The moment Felicity left he considered following her, falling to his knees and begging for forgiveness and pleading for another chance, but in his heart he still considered this decision to be the right one. Felicity deserved to fly in whatever way she chose, being with him right now only weighed her down.

As the clock beside the bed taunted 1am at him Oliver desperately craved to call her phone just to hear her voice again, *had he forgotten it already?*

By 2am he stared at the blackness of his screen, willing it to ring, praying it might be her refusing to let him off that easily. But it stayed silent, stayed black.

He took the train alone, watching nothing but the floor beneath his feet as he thought about returning to the apartment to the smell of her hair on the pillow or a lip gloss lost down the back of the couch.

He moved through security with no emotion and he wandered aimlessly towards the gate knowing he still had time before the plane would board and carry him away, away from her.

And then a message popped up on his phone, it was simple, direct and he could feel the pain in each little word.  
*Please don’t answer your phone.*

It was Felicity and it was without any of her usual bubbly charm and yet, somehow, she still remained polite.

His phone rung a minute later and he smiled at the photo of them grinning stupidly in front of a camel that lit up his screen. Somewhere in their journey she must have changed it without him knowing and the idea of it being like a final parting gift made his heart sink.

It took everything he had not to answer it, and maybe he should have sent the call straight to
voicemail, but holding his phone between both palms as it rung, and rung, and rung, was somewhat cathartic and he felt empty when it stopped.

He closed his eyes as he pressed the phone to his chest. Imagining the words she might be speaking right now felt like a heavy weight that was swinging from his heart.

A few minutes later he received the voicemail notification. 
This was it, this was her goodbye.
And no matter how hard Oliver knew it would be to hear – he owed it to her to listen.

With his phone to his ear, his body slumped forward and his head balancing on his palm, Oliver just listened.

Hi
Her voice was shaky, unsure. Not unlike how he imagined his own would sound right now.
Thank you, for not answering he imagined her teeth gnawing at her lip, I was afraid that if I heard your voice I might crumble and beg you to stay.
A pause.
With me the whisper was almost lost completely.
So thank you for giving me this. This final say. To say what I couldn’t last night.

I understand why you did she paused what you did
He heard a soft sigh and he imagined her thumb brushing back a tear.

I know that you think that me discovering life is what I want, what I need and that by walking away from us you were giving me that.

She stopped talking and for a moment Oliver thought that was all there was, but as he listened closer he could hear her crying and he knew he had done that. As right as he believed it was to let her go, he would never recover from hearing her cry because of him.

You didn’t give me, us, a chance.
Her voice was cracked and shaky.

I want to hate you. I want to scream and yell and tell you how wrong you are. But I can’t, because I don’t hate you. I can’t be bitter or angry because spending the last year in love with you was the best choice I ever made and I only hope that maybe you could say the same thing.

He could. It was.

I loved you Oliver. I can’t unlove you and I don’t want to.
But as hard as it is to let something you love go, it’s impossible to make it stay.

He heard her bite back more tears, she wanted clarity, strength for what she was about to say.
I’ll only ask one other thing of you, please don’t come back in a week, or a month or six months and tell me you made a mistake, that you want me again because I can’t survive living in the hopes that you’ll come back to me.

My heart won’t take losing you a third time.

So goodbye.
Be safe, don’t walk away from your family again Oliver, they love you and you need them.
Don’t be sorry for love and don’t be afraid of it.
As much as you wanted me to fly, don’t be scared of letting the wind touch your wings too.
The message cut off, ending with a beep that broke him.

It was done.

\[
\begin{align*}
  & Don't rescue me, \\
  & Don't rescue me \\
  & Take what's left of me \\
  & This grey reality \\
  & And the moon shines red tonight \\
  & As I break your heart and sever mine
\end{align*}
\]

Chapter End Notes

I expect Steph to want to kick me and Val will berate me with Cersei gifs.

I also fully expect that this is not what some may want (tissue anyone) but this has always been the story I wanted to tell.

Please don't hate me ;)
Xox
I thought, probably naively, that that would likely be the last time I saw Oliver, over two years ago now.

I threw myself into college the day I started. One focus, one goal, no distractions. When mom came to visit that first week I buried myself under a mountain of books and papers and ‘things that needed to take priority’ and then I cracked two weeks later.

I fell into a dark hole where I finally let myself grieve.
I loved Oliver and I lost him.
I won’t lie, it wasn’t pleasant. I dyed my hair black, I swore off love (and men in general, that experimentation is for another page) and I hid my crippling desire to just hear his voice under my bravado of not needing to.

Eventually I found my place, somewhere between THAT and THIS (over two years later). I’m not sure I ever really agreed with Oliver or his choice to walk away from us – and perhaps in hindsight my choice to let him (although I couldn’t be the only one fighting and I know that) – but I did grow to understand it; and in the end, I couldn’t change it.

I did my best to keep in contact with Thea. I’ll admit, it wasn’t easy, but we put an embargo on Oliver-related topics and I knew it was important not to walk away from her despite the
circumstance. Also, if I was being completely honest – for the few months she was unrepentantly livid at Oliver and the way she would growl the word ‘him’ did make me smile (she refused to refer to him by name, bless her young teen heart). I wonder if that makes me a terrible person? Oh well, our little secret. We still chat on Skype at least once a month and she’s a little less growly now.

But, that wasn’t the last time I saw Oliver.

There were two more times.

That she knew of.
And one that she didn’t.

Felicity tapped the white tube of her black pen on the edge of the reclaimed wood table as she breathed in the aroma of the black coffee sitting within arm’s reach.

The warming spring sun was starting to filter in through the patio doors of the tiny flat Felicity shared with three other Oxford graduates. She wouldn’t say they were close friends, but they all appreciated their own space and even in tight living quarters, they managed not to fall over each other too often.

Plus it wasn’t indefinite.

She took a deep breath, listening to it bounce off the shabby white walls before she hovered the pen just above the new fresh page in her journal.

The first time I saw Oliver after the break up I was expecting it, and yet it still took my breath away.

The wheels were set in motion in July 2008….

[July 2008]

“Hello?” Felicity puffed into her phone as the Pilates teacher scolded her with his amber-wood eyes.

“Felicity, are you running a marathon?” Chris laughed as he squinted to hear more than her heavy breaths through the receiver.

She took the instructor’s glare and skipped backwards from the studio while she flashed the eyes that watched her an apologetic smile.

“Pilates,” she groaned as she found the nearest chair in the foyer and fell into it.

“Since when do you…” Chris trailed off, the surprise in his tone already apparent.

Felicity took a few minutes to catch her breath – it really was quite a damning indicator of her level of fitness that it took her at least two minutes to breathe like a normal person again.

“When Mom visited, we started going to this one just down the road from college, University,” she corrected, high fiving herself mentally at her immergence into the British lingo, “I met some great girls that go here from Oxford, so I just kept going.”

“I’m proud of you Bug,” she could hear the genuine relief in his voice.

Chris had religiously called her every Sunday night, her time, since the breakup – she always heard that word with a drum crash backing it – and he had indulged her self-wallowing for about two months before he told her she looked like trash and she needed to throw the tracksuit pants she was wearing in the bin and go outside before she turned to dust.
After she was done pouting through her computer screen at him, she understood that it came from genuine concern. She was living her dream in Oxford – she ought to actually TRY and live it.

“Mmm, and there is nothing like looking like a complete wack job as I try to strengthen my core,” she paused to brush loose hair back from her face – now a gleaming blonde again, “anyway, what can I do for you?”

“Caitlin and I have something to ask,” Chris cleared his throat as he waited for her reply.
“Caitlin’s there?” Felicity gleamed with an exuberant burst of energy.
“Hi Felicity,” Caitlin peeped once Chris put the phone on speaker.
“Oh my god, those shoes you posted a pic of yesterday, were adorable.” Felicity gushed her praise as she balanced the phone between her ear and her shoulder to free her hands enough to tighten the ponytail that had come loose.
“I know right,” Caitlin replied, laughing.

“Did you get them?” Felicity clutched the phone back into her hand as she swished her shorter ponytail across the back of her neck. After the four months of deep black hair, as well as returning it to a honey blonde, Felicity lopped at least half of it off.

“Of course.”

Chris could be heard sighing in the background.
“Argh, I’m jealous,” Felicity groaned playfully.
“Okay, can we focus here?” Chris finally interrupted.
“Woah, grumpy Chris,” Felicity mocked with a smile locked to her lips, “but okay, we’ll discuss shoes later.”

“So, what’s up, what do you need to ask me?” she continued as she settled herself into the leather chair that she didn’t care to think about how many sweat buts had sat on before hers, “Is it weird? Will I be able to look at you guys the same after? Or is it just like, hey can you send us some English toffee, or…”

Chris interjected “Felicity, focus.”

“Okay, shoot. I’m listening.”

“We’re getting married.”

It was a good twenty seconds of complete pin-drop silence before Felicity screamed so loudly that half a dozen of the women in the studio through the doors turned around to look at her and the receptionist, parked across the other side of the room, jumped up from her chair, but Felicity didn’t care.

“Oh my god, you finally asked?” She had known his intention for some time and had even helped him pick between two rings he had sent her pictures of, but Chris had been tight lipped about when he intended to ask.

“He did, last night,” Caitlin swooned, the emotion carried in the slight tremble of her voice.

“And clearly you said yes?” Felicity couldn’t stop the smile that was taking over half of her face if she had tried. Despite her own thoughts on love – it wasn’t for her right now – she was so happy her best friend had found it, and, even better, with someone who shared her love affair with nice shoes.

“Of course.”

Felicity heard the soft sound of a pecked kiss and she bit back the emotion.

“I’m about to start crying,” she mumbled as she fanned her hand in front of her face.

“So, my question is will you be my best man, woman, friend…” Chris stumbled over the words.
Another twenty seconds of absolute silence. 
“Are you for real?” Felicity gasped, hand half an inch from her gaped mouth. 
“Yeah, I couldn’t imagine having anyone else.”

The hand fanning hadn’t worked and tears sprung from both eyes simultaneously in a flood that no amount of cheek brushing was going to hide. 
“I, just, I, can’t, I, you, we,” she sobbed. 
“Felicity are you okay?”

She whimpered unintelligible words before she cleared her throat and tried to make sense of her thoughts. 
“I just really love weddings guys and that you want me,” she sniffed, “wait, who is the bridesmaid? and I don’t have to find a closet with them or anything do I because while I’m considering…” she trailed off, forgetting for a moment the question she was actually asking. “Uh, quirky choice probably,” Caitlin spoke softly, “but it’s my dog, Pepe.”

Felicity managed to stem the tears. 
“I’m walking down the aisle with a dog?” 
“Is that okay?”
She could hear Caitlin nervously chewing on the corner of her thumb. 
“Are you kidding? That is the best thing ever,” Felicity exclaimed, because honestly – it was. 
“So that’s a yes?” Chris chimed in. 
“Yes, yes, of course, but when?”
“Well with everything that we’ve been through over the last year, we don’t want to wait because life is short.”

Felicity smiled, she understood. Almost losing Chris had brought the fragility of life screaming to the forefront of her mind, and even now she considered it in most decisions – including when she tried to find a way to understand Oliver’s choice.

She could only imagine how the same experience coloured Chris’ outlook. 
“So it’s in two months. It’s on a weekend, you can fly in and fly out, if you can spare the…” 
“I’ll be there, a hundred percent.”

There was never any other choice to be made. This was Chris, her best friend, she would have found a way whenever or wherever it was.

“Yes, thank you Felicity,” Caitlin sniffed, her own emotions apparent, “for everything.”

“You’re welcome. Thanks for putting up with him,” she jested with a soft chuckle, “I swear to god I was worried we were going to end up grumpy and alone sharing an apartment in a retirement village, bitching about the youth of the day.”

Her spot on impersonation of a ‘grumpy old person’ caught a laugh.

“I have to go to work, but we’ll see you soon. Oh and you don’t have to wear a suit or anything ugly, promise, Pepe will be in a suit and you’ll be in a dress,” Caitlin explained without stopping to take a breath.

“If your taste in shoes is anything to go by, I trust you,” Felicity reassured her. 
“I’ll send you through some ideas.”

“Perfect.”

Felicity heard a quiet, “you need to ask her” and the sound of Chris blowing out a soft sigh. 
“There is something else,” he spoke, his tone altered from the jovial one minutes before. 
“Okay, that sounds ominous.”

Felicity bit her lip in expectation of some troubling news although she really wasn’t sure what it
"It’s just us now bug, so you can be honest,” he assured her, his tone calm but with threads of worry, which in turn made her even more anxious.

“Now it sounds really ominous.”

“I was thinking of inviting Oliver.”

She sucked in her gasp but he heard it anyway.

“Shit, sorry, I knew it was a bad idea, but it’s just he’s been really good and…” Chris prattled, though most of his words sounded like Felicity was underwater and she didn’t catch the end at all.

She hadn’t really thought about the people she’d left in Starling, whether they still had relationships and what their own lives had looked like.

“I didn’t know you two were close,” she breathed, finally managing to come up with something that resembled words.

“I didn’t want to hurt you, but we’ve been hanging out.”

She could tell he was trying to play it down, likely for her benefit, but it only made her wonder more.

“Why would that hurt me?” she asked while trying to dull down the pain stabbing in her chest.

“At first I was pissed with him for what he did and how he did it. I don’t think it was…”

“Chris, please,” she interrupted, she didn’t want to hear it.

“I just thought he could have done better, intentions aside.”

He wasn’t wrong.

“But his family through him, they did a lot,” Felicity could hear the reservation in his voice, she didn’t know if this was because he wasn’t sure what to tell her or because he felt bad about only telling her this now, “he helped pay some of the medical bills I was left with.”

She hadn’t known that.

“And he helped me find a place that was wheelchair accessible.”

She hadn’t known that either.

“I know I should have hated him because…”

“No,” she refuted, she never wanted anyone to hate Oliver. Not Thea, not her mom and even though she hadn’t expected it, not Chris either.

Oliver wasn’t a bad person, even in her lowest moment, she had always believed that.

“I wouldn’t have wanted that. I’m not upset, I’m just surprised. You didn’t tell me any of that, so finding out, while I’m glad you two have a broship, it just took me by surprise,” she carefully explained as she offered him a soothing smile even though he couldn’t see it.

She never wanted anyone to hate Oliver – not even her.

Chris blew out a sigh – of relief Felicity surmised.

“Caitlyn said I should have told you then.”

Felicity laughed, “she was right again.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t, I just,” he paused with an almost silent sigh, “I felt like I was betraying you.”

“The only time you’ve ever betrayed me was when you told mom we ditched school to go to the museum.”

“She was mad,” he chuckled.

“I actually think she was madder we went to the trouble of ditching school only to waste it on the museum, but it was the last day of the Egyptian exhibition.”

“Worth it,” they exclaimed in unison.

“So,” he took an audible breath inward, “taking all that into consideration, I was thinking of inviting him, but if you don’t want me to, I understand and he understands and it’s not…”
“Wait, he understands?”

Had she heard that right?

“He helped me pick out the rings that I sent you and asked your opinion on,” there was a distinctive cringe in his voice.

Another audible intake of air.

Oliver had helped pick those two stunning white gold bands, one with a simple princess cut diamond, the other with a row of three smaller ones set in the band – she didn’t know why that seemed so – she couldn’t put her finger on the word, but it was making her breathing hard to still and her lips purse together in a futile attempt to stop quivering.

“But, shit, I really…”

Fucked up? – Probably.

“I’m happy you had someone with you in Starling to help out,” she offered kindly, because deep down that was how she actually felt.

“That’s how he knows and obviously he knew you would come,” Chris started to explain, somewhat anxiously, “so he understand if you don’t want him there.”

“But you want him there,” she whispered, she hadn’t actually meant to say it out loud at all.

“But I want you there and happy more.”

Felicity closed her eyes and calmed her thumping heart.

“Chip, its fine,” she answered with the calmest tone she could offer (only a hint of a quiver), “he’s been a good friend to you and I’m glad for that. It’s also been like seven months, it’ll be nine by the time the wedding rolls around. I’m okay.”

It sounded like she was trying to convince herself, and maybe she was.

“Really?”

“Yes, really, I’m fine,” another steadying breath, “we broke up. People break up all the time.”

Even ones who were your first love.

“You’re not just saying this because you think you should?”

*Maybe she was, but that didn’t matter. Not now.*

“Of course not. I mean it Chris, invite Oliver. I’ll be fine, he can bring his girlfriend as his plus one.”

She couldn’t stop the verbal vomit before it projectile spewed from her mouth.

*God why did she say that?*

*She didn’t want to know?*

*Wait, why did she care?* It wasn’t unfathomable to think that Oliver would have a girlfriend.

She didn’t have a boyfriend, but still, it was fine, she should be fine – *only she wasn’t.*

She could hear the trepidation in Chris’ breathing

*Oh god, Oliver had a girlfriend.*

“I didn’t need to know that, I must be overheated from all the Pilates, I’m saying stupid things. It doesn’t matter if he brings a plus one, or two even,” she needed to stop talking, “or none because you’re trying to keep costs down.”

“He doesn’t have a girlfriend,” Chris remarked, his hesitation in his answer simply because he really wasn’t sure whether she wanted one, “that I’m aware of.”

She held her lips tightly together because there was no way she was going to sigh in relief.

“So okay, no plus one, but again, that’s up to you.”

“Felicity, are you sure you’re okay with this because he and I both …”
She straightened her back in the chair that had become warm with her body heat. “I’m absolutely fine with it,” or she would be by the time September rolled around, “but I should go and finish my work out, can’t let my core get all lazy now can I,” she finished with a little laugh, because that would cement just how okay she was with this – she hoped.

“Felicity…”
It wasn’t working.
“Shoot, I got to go,” she lied, “love you Chip.”
She heard his audible sigh – not that he was trying to hide it.
“Love you too Bug.”

Felicity hung up the phone and stared at it for almost a minute, 60 painfully long seconds, before she finally took a breath.

It wasn’t unthinkable that she would run into Oliver again one day. Logically she understood how closely their families were still entwined. Her dad still worked for his. She still spoke with his sister and she had considered, on her next trip back home, catching up with his mom. She kept in contact with Camilla, who was still dating Oliver’s best friend.

No matter where they sat, their lives were always going to be somewhat woven together.

Felicity had known that. Also, it had been seven months and she didn’t spend her time pining about the stupid boy next door with his polar ice cap melting smile – she really didn’t.

So she should have been okay at the prospect of seeing him.
So why wasn’t she?

[26 September 2008]

Felicity had always loved Starling in September. The leaves that lined the suburban streets were starting to change colour and the temperature was lowering just enough to make her growing array of chunky knit sweaters an acceptable spend.

The wedding was being held at an old hunting lodge about two hours from the airport. The entire lodged had been booked out and Felicity had taken the opportunity to take one of the 12 rooms available despite her parents offering to drive her back to their place to stay with them.

It would be a whirlwind trip at the tail end of a break from school spent holidaying with friends in Crete. She was surprisingly tan and her blonde hair had a stunning honey glow to it. The wedding was tomorrow and she was on a flight back to the UK early Sunday morning for her classes to start up again on Monday.

It wasn’t ideal, or so she apologised profusely, but she would spend tonight celebrating with Caitlin and Chris and be at the wedding tomorrow. Her dress had been purchased and shipped to her for tailoring last month and was now safely situated in her luggage beside her. Her speech was prepared and while she would probably get too drunk on champagne to give it, it was the thought that counted.

And then there was Oliver.
The last two months she had tried her best to decide what it was she was afraid of.

Was she scared that seeing him would cause her to want to crawl into a corner and cry? – No, while she occasionally missed him – especially telling him things that she knew he would want to hear – she had moved on from that stage of crying into her pillow at night a long time ago.

Was she worried that seeing him would make her so furious that she would slap him clear across the cheek and spit on his, probably really nice, shoes? – No, she had meant what she’d said in her letter to him, her final words, she wasn’t bitter or angry at him for how it ended because the journey had meant so much to her. When she thought about Oliver, she had a lot of emotions, but hate wasn’t one of them.

Was she terrified the awkwardness between them would make her realise just how much had changed and how she would never get Oliver her friend back again? – Maybe. There had always been this passing distant hope that, even though she wouldn’t change the year they spent as more than friends, one day they could get the friends part back again. Sometimes she missed that more than she missed the intimacy of his arms around her body.

And that thought led her to one last one…

Was she afraid that seeing Oliver, his broad shoulders, his tight chest, his startling blue eyes and that perfect smile would make her heart skip and her body ache? – very likely.

Because it had been nine months since she’d had sex with Oliver – with anyone.

It wasn’t from lack of opportunity, there were guys that had asked her out, some of them even pretty decent, and it hadn’t been because she held her body in some sort of esteem now that she didn’t before – in other words, she hadn’t made a conscious choice out of it, not really.

But school had been so busy and what free time she had she went out with friends, she learned Greek – not the most obscure she could think of, but it was a start – she met new people and immersed herself in life, for the last nine (okay, seven if you discount the dark period after the breakup) months, Felicity lived.

At least that’s what she originally thought, but then a very real opportunity presented itself exactly 65 days ago. Her 19th birthday in a rowdy nightclub and a guy with a mop of brown hair had asked her to dance. After two more shots and the wild encouragement of her friends, Felicity found herself grinding on the dance floor with him.

He had kissed her and instantly she had thought of Oliver – his lips were smoother, his tongue less prodding. She forced thoughts of him away because seven months and you shouldn’t still remember the way your ex kisses you, right?

She tried to ignore it all the way home in the taxi cab when his hands traversed her body. His name was Ryan and he studied nearby, but his hands were small and a little coarse – they weren’t Oliver’s hands.

She tried to ignore it when the cab stopped and he looked expectantly up at her dorm. She even tried to ignore it as she opened her mouth to invite him up. “Thanks for the fun night, maybe I’ll see you around,” came out instead before she slammed the cab door and fled.

Oliver had been the first and the last person she had sex with. The idea of losing that, she hadn’t even realised how unprepared to face that she was.
So yes, Felicity was scared that seeing Oliver would ignite a whole lot of physical feelings that she would struggle with.

She sunk further down into the backseat.

“About another thirty minutes away Miss,” the cabbie replied – reading the entire situation wrong – she wasn’t anxious to get there soon, she was secretly wishing for a delay.

“You’re such a fucking idiot.”
Even all these months later, Oliver could still recall the exact way his little sister sounded when she spat those words at him.

He had only just walked through the door, his bags still in his hands, he hadn’t even had time to tell them himself, but he wasn’t surprised they knew. He had rung Donna the instant he’d hung up the phone after listening to Felicity’s voicemail and asked, begged, her to call Felicity and make sure he was okay.

So in the twelve hours it took him to get from London to walking through the front door of his parents’ house, he wasn’t surprised they already knew.

Moira had tried to calm Thea, but honestly Oliver needed the barrage. He needed someone to outwardly taunt him with the words he was inwardly saying to himself.

In the days and weeks that followed he tried to honour Felicity’s wishes not to call her, even when his fingers, heart, mind, soul ached to.

It wasn’t that he thought he’d made a mistake – or maybe that was just him being kind – but he missed her, he missed every part of her and he desperately wanted to take it all back again – but he couldn’t, and he probably shouldn’t.

Nine months on and Thea’s voice was still echoing in his mind, accompanied by the multitude of other times she said something similar. He wasn’t sure, even now, if Thea had forgiven him, but that wasn't who he was most scared of facing anymore.

This weekend he would see Felicity.

He had secretly hoped that she would tell Chris that she couldn’t bear to see him and then Chris wouldn’t invite him and he wouldn’t be sitting on the edge of his four poster bed in this idyllic lodge sweating bricks at the thought of seeing her again.

H had he hurt her irrevocably?
He hoped not.

In some ways it would have been better for him if she were to show up with someone new, because at least then he would have known he hadn’t scarred her too deep.

Whatever she said to him this weekend, he would probably deserve.

He pulled himself from the edge of the bed and trudged around his room for a few minutes longer before he headed towards the door, checking his watch one final time.

It was 7:03pm and all the guests that had already arrived were meeting for drinks in the bar downstairs. At least he could get a few in him before Felicity arrived, that might make whatever
look she would present him with all the more bearable.

He closed his door behind him and pulled his phone from his pocket. The phone service was dicey up here but trying to access his work emails gave him something to do while he trudged down the stairs.

*Vanilla and Coconut.*

He recognised the scent that hung in the air before he even registered he was smelling something. Half way down the sweeping carved-wood staircase Oliver looked up and saw her.

Tresses of honey blonde swept across her shoulders and while he couldn’t see her face with her back towards him, there was no doubt in his mind that was his Felicity. He caught the word *his* and buried it beneath nine months of *you’re a fucking idiot.* She wasn’t his anymore.

His knuckles turned while around the railing as he steadied himself. He watched her, somewhat guiltily, as she hugged Chris and Caitlin before they headed away from the door and towards the bar.

And then she turned around.

She saw him; and he was stuck, unsure if he should venture forwards or fall back. Her expression gave him nothing.

She blinked, severing the bridge between their eyes as she balanced a dress bag over her forearm while she reached for the handle of her suitcase.

Without thinking Oliver ran down the stairs to help her.

“Let me,” he said as he stopped just in front of her.

She saw the blue tinge of his eyes dance around the deep pool of black in the centre. She hadn’t expected his eyes to change any, but they were so vividly familiar that for the few moments she spent staring into them she forget how to speak.

“It has wheels,” she finally mumbled.

And that was it, nine months apart and those were their first words they said to each other?

“The check in desk is uh,” he looked around – it hadn’t been that long since he had checked in, but for the life of him he couldn’t remember where.

“It’s okay,” she spoke quietly as she dangled a room key from her finger, “Caitlyn checked me in.”

*Shit*

“Room five,” he swallowed.

“Is it haunted?”

She tried to laugh but it came out so weak.

“Uh no, I don’t, no I’m sure it’s not,” he fumbled for words, tripping over the light reflecting in her eyes, “it’s just next to mine.”

“Oh,” she took half a step back, “I can probably change.”

“No,” Oliver replied, all too loudly in the circumstance and Felicity looked a little startled, “I just mean, no, don’t do that, it’s probably a nice room.”

She nodded slowly.

“It’s been a long flight, so I think I’ll go freshen up,” she remarked hesitantly – *could she see him swallow air just so he didn’t say something stupid?*

“I’ll take…” he reached for her bag.
“It’s fine, I have it.”
She plucked it from his advancing grasp and started towards the stairs.

Oliver bowed his head.
She was mad at him.
He deserved that.

Felicity managed to reach the top of the stairs in record time and without puffing like a maniac (thank you Pilates after all). She dare not look around to see if he was watching, even though she wanted to.

Like a desperate pulsing through her entire fucking body she wanted to turn around to see if Oliver was looking her, but she couldn’t, because then he would undoubtedly recognise the look on her face right now.

_Desire._
Desire because, Felicity really wanted to have sex with Oliver.

She almost ran to her room, opened it and stumbled inside. She kicked the door closed and fell onto the quilted blanket with a loud groan that was somewhat muffled in the stitching.

She had expected to be a little sad to see him.
She had envisioned being a little angry.
She had even realised there would be a part of her that might be a little _attracted_ to see him – nine months without might have that effect.

What Felicity had not counted on was that her panties would be damp and her chest tight and her sex thrumming like a fucking freight train at the very sight of him.

Nope, she hadn’t expected that _at all._
Yet, here she was, trying to recount how amazing his cock felt buried inside her and that time he put his finger….

Felicity sat bolt upright and huffed obtusely.
“Keep it in your pants,” she curtly told herself.
Because she was not, _not, NOT_, going to sleep with Oliver Queen this weekend.

Felicity changed out of her clothes and freshened up in the quaint little bathroom. She flattened down the sides of her black jeans as she scrutinised the floaty mushroom pink fabric of her top in the full length mirror, trying to decide if the colour washed her out, despite her fresh sun-kissed glow.

She shrugged deciding it didn’t really matter anyway, she was there to support her best friend getting married, that was all.

So with an extra swipe of lipstick she was good to go.

She stuck her head cautiously out from her room and did a precursory glance up and down the hallway. Once she was certain Oliver wasn’t going to appear and startle her into saying something stupid, like the thoughts currently swarming around her head, she walked from her room and made her way to the bar.

She checked the watch that hung around her wrist, 8:15pm, she could do this; a couple of hours
tonight and all day tomorrow, that was it. She could keep this feeling stemmed until then.

She found Chris’ parents in the bar first and embraced them for an exhaustive amount of time. Even though his mother brushed tears away from her eyes when she mentioned the wedding tomorrow, Felicity didn’t doubt that they were happy for Chris; and it finally seemed like his mother had put to rest the notion that one day he and Felicity would get married. She genuinely, and thankfully, liked Caitlyn.

Felicity followed them from the bar to the patio where the rest of the guests were enjoying the stunning views of redwoods and the clearest night sky she had ever seen – well except for the one that she saw at Orion’s Gate.

Her eyes weighed heavily against her cheeks as she tried not to think about that, because thinking about that wouldn’t help.

Chris greeted her with his second smile that night as she took a seat beside him. He was still, for the most part, in a wheelchair but his mobility had improved to the point where he could rest weight on his legs and balance with the help of a cane. While he couldn’t take unaided steps, his legs did respond mostly to his will and his prognosis look bright that one day he would.

It wasn’t until a glass of champagne was deposited into her hand by Caitlin that Felicity realised two things:

One, she had come in the middle of a slightly awkward disagreement between Caitlin and Chris about just how long he could stand with only his cane for support; and

Two, that Oliver was sitting directly across the table from her, looking just as, ruggedly handsome as before, maybe even a little more so.

“Chris honey, I don’t want you to fall, what if your legs give out on you again,” Caitlin sighed as she took the seat on the other side of Chris.

“They won’t.”
He was adamant and Felicity already recognised the stubbornness of his resolve.

“But what if they do?”

“Maybe just have your chair there too, just in case,” Felicity offered as she tried to keep her gaze away from Oliver – he was like the sun, she wasn’t supposed to look straight at him.

“I don’t need it,” Chris snapped, although still with a smile on his face, so typically him, “and are you two ganging up on me?”

Felicity sipped her drink, “it’s concern Chris.”

“I’ll be fine, I managed to stand for twenty minutes last week with just my cane.”
Caitlin blew out a worried sigh and Felicity decided she would speak to Chris about it tomorrow if he was still being a stubborn prick.

“Now, can we all just get drunk?” he added as he tapped his finger on the side of his glass. The milling crowd hushed as he raised it in the air.

“To my beautiful soon to be wife,” he started, tipping his head over to look at Caitlin, “thank you for bringing me extra jello cups.”

Chris was verging on twenty-one and Caitlin was barely a scratch younger, but they saw what they wanted and they were going for that, Felicity couldn’t help but admired that.

Glasses raised to meet the height of Chris’ while everyone cheered as loud as they could, the still evening air providing almost perfect acoustics to make it sound like a stadium sized crowd, and then it happened – like electricity – Oliver’s hand brushed against Felicity’s.
Oliver pressed his legs tightly together in a valiant attempt to disguise the throbbing that he swore could almost be heard coming from between his legs. It was so apparent to him that if the room was on fire and they had to evacuate right now, he would have to stay put because heaven forbid Felicity saw the insane erection he was sporting right now.

*Nine months without sex will do that to you.*

Oliver hadn’t even entertained the idea.

Tommy had on Oliver’s behalf, on numerous occasions, once even suggesting to Oliver that he needed to get out of his “fuckless funk” but Oliver didn’t see the point.

He had tasted years of mindless sex before Felicity but the idea held absolutely no temptation for him after her.

Work was his woman now.

Long hours and short trips away; and he was okay with that.

Granted, he was a man so sometimes the urges came, admittedly whenever he found something that reminded him of Felicity they were especially intense urges, but a quick fuck with someone he barely knew held no appeal and the idea of trying to get to know someone, held even less.

His return home was especially hard. The linen on the bed still smelled like her, that red toothbrush stared at him every time he went to the bathroom (but he didn’t have the heart to discard it), the fern she left with its tiny white placard seemed to wave at him whenever a breeze blew through a window (and even when one didn’t) and once, when he found a lost lip gloss down the back of the couch, he almost completely caved and flew to England in some wild idea that he could play music outside her dorm room window and beg her to take him back.

But then he remembered what she had asked.

*Please don’t call me…*  
And he at least owed her that.

But right now, that moment when his knuckles brushed across hers and he felt her skin, a little more sun kissed but still just as soft as he remembered it, he wanted to pounce on her lips and kiss her, every word he couldn’t say and every emotion he didn’t know how to express tied up in that kiss.

He just wanted to kiss her.

Felicity saw him lick his lips.  
A slow and measured swipe over his plump bottom lip paired with a light trickle across the underside of his top on.

Flashes of his tongue disappearing between her folds before his lips encased her clit bounced around her head and she groaned, softly, but enough that she heard it herself.

Her eyes darted around the table, had anyone else heard it?

Only Oliver was looking at her with wide eyes and slightly parted lips like he was on the verge of saying something – had he heard her?

Oliver knew his mouth was open, he just had no idea how to close it. Not with what he had just heard.

*Had she just?*  
*Had she just groaned?*

He decided it had to be his mind playing tricks on him. *Right?*

Because if not, that would mean when their hands touched she felt the same way he did – electric.
Felicity stood up and brushed a flustered hand down the side of her body. Oliver couldn’t help but notice the pink flush fanning across her cheeks and, as his eyes dropped a little lower, he noticed something else, something very distinctive, something he knew well.

There was a soft pink glow spreading down her chest. It started at the crevice just below her neck, her sternum, and it continued like delicate and stretched fingers down beneath the hem of her top. He had seen that blush before, he had even traced its path with his tongue, it always slipped between her breasts and warmed the colour of her stomach to a soft, radiant peach. It was almost an identical colour to the one the folds of her sex grew when she was….

Shit,
She was ...
No, he shook the thought from his head, he was definitely imagining it.
Until he saw her breasts, he wasn’t imagining them.

The top she was wearing pulled tight across them, she wasn’t wearing a bra and her nipples were rock hard.
He wanted to taste them, to cut his tongue on them.

“I’m sorry, I forgot I have to make a call,” she said, flustered, feeling the heat dripping down to her core despite the chilled temperature of the night.
She made an excuse that no one asked for before she tipped back her drink in one go and almost ran for the door.

Oliver watched her and when she reached it, she turned around and looked at him.
Not just at him, but AT him.

He sat there stunned even as she disappeared from sight. His finger ran around the rim of his glass like a racetrack as his mind drove it equally as fast. Everything he had witnessed in the last few minutes nine months ago would have had Oliver following her without question.

It would have them entangled in bed together, naked. Touching each other softly, or in some cases, not so softly. It would have had their lips woven together and their breaths mingled.

Nine months ago that look that Felicity just gave him meant that she wanted to have sex.
But that couldn’t be what it meant now, could it?

“I think, I, my room, left,” Oliver stuttered, his excuse was worse than hers but no one seemed to notice, let alone care.

Five minutes later and he found himself outside her door, hand up, mouth dry, poised.
Had he read it wrong? That was very possible.
But with the blood rushing down between his legs he was finding it hard to think straight.

And then he knocked.
Shit he knocked.
There was no time to hide and nowhere to hide in the sparsely decorated hallway.

The door opened, she was still wearing the same blush, but now that he was even closer he could see how it started in the centre of her plump red lip and he could see the marks where she had been chewing on its heat.

Just like someone who had abandoned all common sense, Oliver leaned in through the doorway and kissed her. It was soft, unsure but hungry and as the seconds past it began to feel like cool
water to his desert-parched lips.

It felt perfect
Creamy.
Pillowed.
Safe.

Only he had no right to do that.

Oliver pulled away and opened his mouth to speak.
“If you say it so help me I will kick you harder than you’ve ever been kicked before,” Felicity warned, because another I’m sorry would cripple her.
She didn’t linger waiting for a response, in fact she didn’t even let his lips close before she pulled him inside her room and slammed the door with him against it.

The door knob jammed into his side but Oliver was less bothered by that than by the line he had stepped over.
“You asked me to stay away and I ...”
She stopped him with her finger pressed to his lips, still wet and sticky from hers.

“Tonight I’m going to ask you something different,” she breathed, her tone smoky and her words tipped with so much temptation that Oliver felt his body growing beneath his slate-grey jeans.
She stepped back, took a breath and slipped her top from her body. It floated in slow motion to the ground around her feet.

Oliver was right, no bra and her nipples as hard as tiny pebbles. The blush that had led him to her door was spread between them, leading his eyes down as her fingers drew down a weaving line down her centre.

He followed her lead, as she paused her fingers at the closure of her jeans, tearing off his sweater and tee in one go.

He threw them and they landed haphazardly on the night stand.
She laughed and Oliver realised just how much he had truly missed that laugh.

He pushed his body off the back of the door, locking it at the same time, as Felicity shimmied out of her skin tight jeans.

“Are we...”
He thought he should ask as he took a large step towards her before his pants fell to the floor and he kicked them away.
Her fingers streaked down the muscles of his chest.
“Shut up and kiss me.”

He wasn’t going to argue with that.
That was not his mind playing tricks on him.

They tumbled, nearly naked, together onto the puffy quilt of navy diamonds and hatched love hearts as their lips made up for nine months apart.

Their kiss went from delicate to crushing and everything in between. It was movie perfect and haphazardly messy. It was deliberately slow as their bodies writhed against each other and it was frantic when their hands clutched at any part of the other person they could.

Until Oliver, with his firm erection tenting his briefs, pulled just a fraction away to study her rosy
red, swollen lips. He didn’t have any protection.

“I don’t have a condom,” he spoke frankly. Felicity tapped her arm with a smile threaded across her lips, “it’s okay, I have the implant.” It had been Donna’s idea, something about rebound sex which, well Felicity wasn’t interested in the notion of, she understood the wisdom in her mother's advice.

But there were still other reasons to use a condom and there was a question that needed answering no matter how hard it might be to hear the answer. “Have you been with anyone?” she asked, preparing herself that he might have returned to his playboy ways. 

*Would there be a list of women – plural?*

He answered before she could think about how she would take there being a list. “I haven’t been with anyone,” his palm folded gently in around her cheek, he was telling the absolute truth, “not since you. Have....” He couldn’t ask, *had there been that one night in Ibiza?* “No one,” she breathed.

He brushed his lips slowly across hers, savouring the taste and simmering the pace. She tipped her head up, pressing her pillowed lips deeper against his before he pulled away another inch and let his breath melt into her moist lips.

Her head dropped back onto the pillow, splaying her golden hair like a halo around her head. Oliver wrapped a finger through it, it was as soft as he remembered. 

“Are you,” she paused her breasts rising and falling with deep, uncertain breaths, “unsure?” “No,” he smiled without hesitating before his lips fell to her chest.

Slowly he feathered kisses down between her breasts with a hand of trickled fingers close behind. He let the salty notes of her skin linger on his lips as he swirled his tongue over the silky wave of her stomach.

So much of her was familiar, exactly how he remembered it, how he dreamed it. But there was also new things to discover – her skin a little firmer across her core, her colouring a shade or two darker and then something else took his attention.

She lifted her arm to stroke a hand through his tumble of hair when he saw it, no bigger than his thumb, a little tattoo of a hummingbird.

“This is new,” he remarked while her delicately drew his finger around the outline of it. Felicity smiled, somewhat wistfully, as she remember getting in the months following the *breakup.*

It had been an object lesson. Oliver, when he left, told her to fly. The tattoo, both in its pain at getting it branded on her skin and it’s symbolic imagery reminded her of that.

But suddenly having to find a way to explain that to Oliver felt like more than she was able to do right now. “It’s not...” she started, unsure what more to say. Oliver could sense her reluctance and he knew there was a story there she didn’t want to tell. “It’s beautiful,” he whispered with one final sweep across it.

Felicity perched on her elbows, her breasts brushing against his chest as she captured his mouth with hers. They fell down again, his body weight crushing atop her and bringing a pleasured hum
to their kiss.

He tasted just as she remembered him and the deliciously heavy weight of his body pushing her down into the mattress conjured up all the nights they had spent just like that.

So many nights, but room for one more.

Oliver kissed along her jaw and devoured her neck. His kisses scattered between the thin cords of her elongated neck and the smooth slopes of her shoulders. He wanted to kiss every inch of her body and slip each of her fingers between his lips.

His body was straddling hers by the time his mouth reached her breast. She sighed wantonly with a sound that echoed right through the shaft of his cock. Her skin tasted like vanilla with hints of coconut as he swirled his tongue over her tightly wound nipple.

His lips swarmed, capturing and caressing her breast while her body writhed in pleasure underneath him. His name, sounding more perfect than ever before, dripped freely from her mouth like she was having the most decadently sexual dream.

His tongue was like a whirlpool around her breast while his free hand massaged the other. Every time he deepened the pressure she keened responsively, forming silent words with her lips.

She rose her ass up from the cushioning arms of the blanket and brushed her sex against his thigh, relishing with a rasped cry the undulated pleasure she got from it.

They were both afraid to say how much they had missed this, but it was written in their eyes when they met, desperate and carnal.

Oliver skimmed his sheathed erection between her legs and she arched immediately into it and whimpered at the friction she yearned for.

Her nails skated across his shoulders, delighting in the way his muscles tightened at her touch. His body seems firmer, stronger even a little larger, although she wasn’t sure how. She wanted to explored each sweat glistened crevice and each rippled peak but the truth was that they could both regain their senses at any minute and Felicity knew that if she didn’t orgasm with Oliver buried deep inside her on the cusp of his own release, her entire body would be wracked with unsatisfied pain, and that just wasn’t an option.

She released his cock from behind his cotton briefs and smoothed her thumb over the slit, gathering the slick of pre-cum leaking from it until Oliver stopped her hand by the wrist.

She looked confused before he offered her a tapered smile. “Felicity,” he rasped, as he leaned down, sandwiching her hand and his cock between their bodies “it’s been nine months, if you tug on me any longer I’m going to make a mess.” She kissed the smile at the seam of his lips, “then let’s not delay it any longer.”

She lifted her ass and slipped her panties down as far as she could until Oliver sat up and tore them the rest of the way down, his briefs following mere seconds later.

He could smell her, the sweet aroma of her arousal was beating off her blossoming nether lips, teasing his senses and making his tongue lick the circumference of his mouth.

“I’m afraid if you put that anywhere near me it’ll be over just as quick,” she whispered before her smile plucked up the corners of her lips while her finger wiped across his tongue.
They were both on the verge.

He pressed his shaft between her folds, nestling it there. Her juices warmed and coated him as she slowly rocked her body, pressing her clit into his base.

Neither of them could wait this out.

His fingers entwined with hers before sliding them up above her head, pulling her breasts taut.

Then he slid into her, his cock weaving through her entrance as she swallowed him inside with each pulse of her walls.

Their fingers tightened around each other with sweaty palms pushed together as the room filled with gravelled breaths blown through circled lips

He let her adjust before he edged in further, enjoying the tight confines, warm, soft, familiar. She gasped as he sunk himself deeper until the hilt of his rod skimmed against her swollen clit.

Their lips fought and their tongues wrestled in a game of give and take as they began moving together, shifting his cock inside her to brush against every part of her walls they could reach

Their movements morphed into slow, tiny thrusts before they gathered both momentum and pace until he was thrusting inside her with quick, long strides.

“Oliver,” she cried as he pulled all but the head of his cock out from inside her.

He watched her for stolen minutes as her body bucked and rocked, seeking out what she wanted.

He wanted to say a million words but all he could manage was her name, spoken like a whisper carried in from a distant breeze, “Felicity.”

Are you sure? Is this what you want? Are you Okay?

A smile leaked across Felicity’s lips before she wrapped her leg around his waist and nudged him deeper with her heel into the small of his back.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

He plunged forward, rocking the bed against the wall, not that they noticed or cared. He kept the pace, her slickness making it frictionless, like moving through water.

Her nails buried into the back of his shoulders as their lips smacked haplessly together. It was a cacophony of noises and sounds as they continued the moments of reckless abandonment until they both felt the closing in of their releases.

Oliver kept it up even as her walls tightened around him. His pace was uneven, perfectly so, meaning her body never settled into monotony.

Her climax swept over her like a sudden wave that pummelled the shore with tiny breaths like seashells falling from her lips as her legs wrapped around his waist like kelp, all while she shuddered through the intense orgasm.

Oliver came in the midst of her climax, his threads of seed spilling into her and mixing with her own fresh release.

He littered more kisses against her neck, now veiled with a thin film of sweat as they gently rocked through their shared, explosive climaxes, nine months in the making.
He kissed the tip of her chin before their eyes met. Silently they were both asking the same question when they finally fell apart, Oliver collapsing onto the mattress beside her.

*What the hell just happened?*
Felicity stared at the ceiling like it held some sort of magical answer as Oliver lay almost deathly still beside her. She dared not look at him, because if how she was feeling was anything like he was feeling his face would look twisted with confusion and threaded with a whole heap of regret.

Maybe regret was a too strong of word. Felicity didn’t regret what they had just done – having sex with Oliver was hardly something to regret, because it was always pretty fucking great if you asked her (regardless of her lack of a yard stick to measure it against) – but she did regret this, this right here, the awkward silence of lying naked under fresh linen and dim ceiling lights having just fallen into bed with you ex-boyfriend – knowing that you had to…

“So we should talk,” Oliver finally spoke, taking the words right from Felicity’s mouth. She sat up with the sheet firmly taut across her chest while the cool breeze from the air-conditioner above the bed whipped up a line of goose bumps down her spine – or perhaps it had been Oliver’s ominous words.

“About the weather? Because I hear it’s been quite mild,” she jested, although her voice barely went above a whisper.

“Felicity,” he breathed while his fingers traced the bumps on her skin as they cascaded down her back.

“This can’t be a thing,” she said quietly, the words stung her throat but she needed to say them all
the same.
She felt Oliver move in the bed beside her but she still couldn’t look at him, so she couldn’t see the silent, sharp intake he took in when the words left her mouth.

“So this weather huh?” he remarked, falling back to the same joke she had made moments before. Stilling herself Felicity turned in the sheet, twisting it around her body until her eyes found his.

“If this was nine months ago and we were lying in a hotel room in England, would you still say what you said?” she asked pointedly, her blue eyes not showing him any mercy.

It was a question that needed to be answered.
Oliver thought about it with two imagined voices on his shoulder. He knew that one answer might see her stay in his arms a little longer and maybe he could repair the cracks – but that answer would be a lie; and when he caught sight of the tiny hummingbird against her milky skin, he knew what the truth was.

“Yes,” he breathed regrettably, “I would hope to have maybe said it better or tried to offer you more explanation that I did, but I still would have wanted the same for you Felicity.”

There is was, but she wasn’t surprised.
“So this…” she started as she slipped off the bed, pulling the crumpled sheet with her, “can’t be a thing.”
“I shouldn’t have…”
“Stop,” she cut him off with a pinched voice and a furrowed brow, “stop acting like this is all some mistake you have to apologise for. Oliver, I’m not some fool of a girl. I knew what I was doing when I stopped and looked back at you downstairs. I knew what I was doing when I opened the door, and I knew what I was doing when we had sex. I don’t regret that.”

She padded around the room collecting her clothes.
“You always think that you have to make up for something, that you have some sort of blame that you have to carry around,” she shook her head frustrated, “you don’t. I made the decision to sleep with you tonight knowing the exact same things you did.”

“But our lives are still the same as they were nine months ago and I can’t hear another sorry from you,” she breathed out slowly, there was more she wanted to say and maybe she should have, but it would all end up the same way – they weren’t getting back together.

“So what this was,” she looked over to the bed where Oliver was balancing the blanket over his lap, “it was fun and nice and I’m glad we did it, but that’s all it was, right?”
She searched his eyes for assurance because she honestly believed he felt the same way.
Oliver pushed a smile to his lips. That was her choice, and he would respect it.
“Yeah I understand,” he spoke with a gentle nod accompanying it, “is it a little creepy if I say I’m glad we did it too?”
His smile leaked into his cheeks and flourished into his eyes when he saw a breathy laugh pass over her lips.
“That’s not creepy,” she answered with a smile hooking up the edges of her lips, “and, hey, sleeping with your ex is a rite of passage so I can cross that one off.”
She squinted when she realised how that sounded, “metaphorically speaking because it wasn’t actually on my list,” she corrected.
Oliver smiled, trying his best to offer her the consideration she deserved and then when he looked at her again, really looked, he saw something different – maybe he imagined it, but in the nine months apart she looked older, maybe worldlier. He couldn’t quite put his finger on it.
“Your hair is shorter,” he remarked, filling the void of silence.

“It is,” Felicity nodded as her fingers lightly feathered the ends of it, her other arm still holding the sheet against her body.

“It looks nice.”

She offered him a thankful smile, as strange as it felt having a conversation almost like strangers given what they had just done, Felicity couldn’t help but feel a little warmed by it too.

Long before she loved him, she liked him and sometimes it was that which she missed the most.

“We should probably…” Felicity started as she nodded towards the door.

Oliver looked down at himself suitably naked and comfortable in the bed and laughed, “yeah they will probably be wondering where we went.”

He stood up and took the blanket with him but not before Felicity caught a very nice view of that ass he carried around. She folded her lips into her mouth to stop herself from smiling and tried her best to avert her attention to her feet.

He looked at his clothes once he had made a pile of them on the bed, then across the room at the door before circling back around to Felicity and then his clothes again as he tried to think of a way to make this as least awkward as possible.

“I’ll go in the bathroom, you can just get changed out here,” Felicity offered and Oliver nodded in agreement.

“Ohay, well,” Felicity breathed as she gathered her clothes and walked towards the bathroom.

The walkway seemed to shrink between the bed where Oliver was standing and the door where she wanted to go and while she could have shimmied across the wall she found herself brushing against Oliver instead.

They both swallowed at the same time as they passed silently like ships in a calm night. She watched his lips and he studied her breathing and for a moment they both considered repeating what had them naked in the first place.

He wanted to kiss her, slower this time, savour it, relish it. It didn’t have to go further than that, but god what he wouldn’t give to kiss her right now.

“Can we just keep this to ourselves?” Felicity asked quietly when she finally reached the doorway.

“Of course,” Oliver replied, he had never considered the opposite, but his assurance made a smile of relief pass over her face.

It was probably better that way.

“You should probably go down before me. It’ll make it less obvious.”

“That makes sense.”

She lingered a few moments longer before she took the last remaining steps into the bathroom, rolling her fingers down the doorframe for no reason other than there were dying to touch something and it shouldn’t be Oliver.

“Felicity?” Oliver bleated just as she reached for the door handle.

She turned and leaned her body against the glossy white door jamb.

“Yes?”

“For the record and just so I say it, you look good, and I don’t just mean that physically,” he stumbled over his words, but she knew what he meant all the same.

She blew out a soft smile, “I know, thank you. You look good too.”
She closed herself inside the bathroom and took a long, silent breath. Having sex with Oliver certainly hadn’t been on her itinerary for this trip, but she would be lying if she said she didn’t enjoy it.

She dropped the sheet and traced a line down between her breasts where his lips had travelled. *She had most definitely enjoyed it.*

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Oliver cleaned himself up with a couple of tissues before he dressed quickly and spent a few extra moments straightening the cover on the bed before he ducked, unspotted, out of her room.

He straightened his clothes, tried his best to remove the smile from his face and trotted down the steps with a spring in his feet he couldn’t disguise.

He found Chris ordering a drink from the bar and Oliver took the opportunity to order his own. “Did you make the phone call?” Chris asked as the bartender slid him a decidedly pink cocktail. “Uh yup,” Oliver shrugged as he tried to remember what excuse he had mumbled when he’d left. Chris smiled, “Felicity needed to make the phone call, you left something on in your room.”

*Shit. How was this guy not a fucking detective?*

Oliver shrugged nonchalantly. “I mean, I did both,” he spoke casually.

“Yeah, okay,” Chris chuckled as he turned in his chair with one hand.

“Chris I –,” Oliver started, although he had no idea what to actually say.

“No,” Chris shook his head slowly, “I’m not getting involved.”

He waved Caitlin over as he held up the cocktail that was obviously for her. She smiled as she excused herself from a group and started walking towards them.

Chris turned back to Oliver and gave him a knowing smile.

“Just maybe no getting caught in closets this time.”

He wheeled away before Caitlin met him, leaned down and kissed him lovingly. Oliver smiled. He wanted that.

He looked around the room at the small touches, the engagement photos, the strings of fairy lights, the fresh flowers – it was a wedding venue starting to take shape and he wanted *all of that.*

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It was almost 1am and she couldn’t sleep. She had returned to the bar about 30 minutes after Oliver and while she stayed till about midnight, they had managed to keep their distance.

But now it was 1am and Felicity was wide awake, staring at the ceiling which was lit only by the white of the moon shining in through the window.

There were a lot of thoughts running through her head, ones that no matter how hard she tried she couldn’t put them into logical order.

*She cared above Oliver.*

*Oliver left.*

*They had sex.*

*Oliver left.*

*She loved Oliver.*

*Oliver left.*
It was a vicious circle that had her smiling at the memory of them together and grimacing at the way it ended.

Finally it was all too much.

Felicity huffed loudly as she got out of bed and wrapped a dressing gown tightly around her nesting doll pyjamas pants and her ribbed cotton top. *Perhaps*, she considered, *a walk on the wrap around porch would help lull her to sleep.*

She headed quietly down the stairs. The lodge was still and quiet but a skeleton of lights left on at least meant it wasn’t dark.

She reached the patio doors and walked through them without considering what might greet her there. When she finally looked up from the ground she saw Oliver’s familiar eyes looking at her. She opened her mouth to say something but when no words were forthcoming she turned to go back out the same door she had just wandered through.

“Wait, I can go,” Oliver remarked, standing straight up from the large wooden bench.
“No, no, it’s fine, I just wanted some fresh air.”
She brushed him off with a shrug and a half smile.
“This bench is big enough for the two of us,” he smiled as he tapped his palm to the hand-carved seat.

“I suppose it is.”
She smiled thankfully as she took up one end of the bench, curling her legs tight into her body. It was a little colder than she had expected it to be, although the chill was refreshing.
“Blanket?” he asked, offering the one on his lap.
“It’s fine, you keep it,” she replied, glancing just briefly down the bench at him before her eyes roamed out into the darkened trees that surrounded the driveway.

Oliver slid a little closer, just enough to stretch the blanket out across both of them.

“Can’t sleep?” he asked, watching as she idly adjusted the blanket on her lap.
“Time differences have me a little mixed up,” she answered, keeping her eyes still trained on the shadows.
“It’s a long flight from England to Starling.”

“Actually my journey back started from Greece,” Felicity commented, finally looking across at Oliver who kept a gentlemanly distance.
“You’ve been in Greece?”
He didn’t seem shocked, maybe just a little surprised.
Felicity nodded, “Crete. I went with some friends for the school break.”
Oliver smiled, he was glad to hear it.
“Just a group of girls,” she added, although she didn’t know why she clarified the point, but she just felt the need to.

“And you had fun?”
She chuckled, the moon illuminating the curves of her face.
“A lot,” she replied.
“Good, I’m glad and that explains the tan,” Oliver jutted his elbow out to playfully knock her arm. Felicity blew out a breathy laugh, “you noticed?”
“That came out creepy,” Oliver gushed as he felt an embarrassed blush spread across his face, “I’m sorry”
“It’s okay,” she couldn’t help the smile blossoming across her face, “yes, that’s why I’m a little
Oliver never saw any tan lines and the thought had him blowing out deep exhales of warm air into the brisk night.

“And how is Starling for you, your job?” Felicity asked, glad for the lapse in awkward tension that had enveloped them earlier.
“It’s good, I split my time a lot between here and New York.”
“Oh?”
Her eyes asked him to continue.
“Yeah, I’m hoping a few business deals will take off over there, so it’s early days nursing them along at the moment.”
She smiled proudly, “that’s great news. You’re taking the business world by storm.”
She pouted her lips into a smile while her hand instinctively brushed down his arm.
“I wouldn’t say that,” Oliver blushed, blinking down for only a second until his eyes wrapped back around hers.
“One day you might,” she spoke softly, her larger smile softening into a more intimate one.

They didn’t speak for what seemed like hours, but barely a minute went by.
“How’s school?” Oliver asked, noticing the brief way the corner of her lips hook upward, Felicity had always loved school and no matter how hard she tried to hide it, it had always made her smile.

“It’s going good, I think I’m going to move out of the dorms soon though, so I’m hoping to find some people to flat with,” she explained, her body instinctively inching a little close to Oliver.
“Too many parties for you?”
She laughed with her head tipping to one side and her hair brushing across his shoulder.
“Yeah, I dance on so many coffee tables and still no one carries me home,” she sighed with a playful roll of her eyes, “honestly, English parties just aren’t the same.”

Oliver drunk in her smile, seeing it had always been a thing of beauty, but seeing it now, knowing that he hadn’t stolen it from her – it meant the world to him.

“So are we okay Oliver? I didn’t want to give you the wrong idea or…” she paused to chew on her bottom lip, unsure where she was actually going with this.
Oliver couldn’t help but smile – that sounded like something he would say.
“You didn’t and you’re right,” he reassured her while his hand brushed away a few strands of hair that were covering her face, he had never forgotten how soft her skin was, and yet it still amazed him, “we both knew what it was.”
She took the hair from his fingers and tucked it behind her ear as she softly smiled to herself.
“Like a final hurrah,” she breathed, her eyes dancing with the words as her lips drew them out.
Oliver chuckled with smiled lips as he bobbed his head in a gentle nod.

Another minute lapsed before their eyes fell into each other’s again. Neither said anything because nothing needed to be said. A gentle wind blew across them, pushing their bodies fractionally closer.

Felicity smiled when she saw it, a tiny bit of fluff from the woollen blanket that was keeping their legs toasty and warm caught in the scruff alongside Oliver’s mouth, right above the little mole that had always had her transfixed.

Felicity didn’t know what came over her but the instant the thought popped into her mind she was
acting on it impulsively.

She was kissing him. Slow and gentle with her lips quivering against his, hesitantly waiting for him to kiss her back. And he did. With his hand splaying out across her back holding her tight against his chest, Oliver kissed her back with his eyes open, staring into hers.

It was deep and longing, slower than the crazed ones they had shared in the bedroom. Her fingers carded through the shorts of his hair above his neck while his fingers anchored into her back. He didn’t want her to leave.

They broke apart at the same time, both breathless and silent. *Because what could you say?*

“What we had was pretty intense once,” Felicity finally spoke, her words quiet, barely above a whisper.

“Right,” Oliver replied, the word drifting from his lips like a sigh in the midst of a dream.

“And so maybe,” she wet her lips nervously, “our last hurrah needs to match that, to really get it out of our system.”

Her words were left hanging and for a moment she thought he might laugh, but he didn’t – *not even a chuckle.*

“What are you suggesting?” he asked with his hand falling down her back.

“Maybe this whole weekend could be our last hurrah, a fitting end to a pretty great thing,” she offered with a slight, one shoulder shrug.

Felicity knew what she was suggesting and by the expressive glint and the subtle twitch of Oliver’s eyes – he knew too.

“And you would be okay with that?” he asked, intently studying her reaction to his question.

She smiled to allay his concern, “I suggested it didn’t I?” she laughed softly, “I mean if you were okay with too?”

Oliver wasn’t sure he was, but right now he just wanted to hold her, listen to the words she spoke, feel her warmth, be near her and kiss her and if this was the path he had to take to get that, then maybe he was okay with this proposal indecent or otherwise, after all.

“We’ve known each other for almost a decade, so it’s just good math that our hurrah is longer than others,” he explained, his mouth so close to hers now that she could feel his breath bleeding onto her moistened lips.

“I don’t think that’s how math works,” she whispered, brushing her lips even closer to his, “but it does sound logical.”

Oliver sunk his teeth into his bottom lip before pulling it free, “so how would we do this?”

“I don’t know. I’m not exactly an expert,” her cheeks blushed pink in the glowing white light, “but I suppose we just see what happens…” her last words turned almost silent as she tipped her lips closer and kissed him like a feather dancing across his lips while her nose skimmed against his, “see what we both want.”

Oliver caught her lips almost forcefully, but Felicity played into his, egging him on with a smoky mewl threaded through a gasp.

She leaned backwards, her back almost flat to the bench as Oliver hovered above her with his body between her legs. She smiled as she sought out the hard length of his cock pressing into her thigh. She tiptoed her fingers down between their bodies and stroked up the long, hard shaft, making an
“We’re both adults here and neither of us are drunk right?” she whispered, her thumb pressing into his cock head and eliciting an excited moan.
“Completely sober,” Oliver rasped.
“Neither of us are with anyone.”
“No,” he leaned down and kissed her neck deliciously slow.
Her fingers floated down the nape of his neck, twisting in the tiny hairs.
“So as long as we’re both okay with it.”

He hummed against the thin, warm curve of her neck when she took his hand and slid it underneath her top. She felt his sigh, his hot breath sticky against her skin, when his thumb grazed over her budding nipple.

He pressed his sheathed cock against her sex as Felicity keened into the salacious friction of his slow and measured rub. Even fully clothed and blinded, with his head buried in her neck, Oliver could find just the right fucking spot.

She groaned, not loudly, but enough that it echoed in the still early morning air.
“But not here,” she whispered as she stopped his hand from massaging her breast, “think about it tonight.”

She slipped out from underneath him and tightened the tie on her dressing gown before she leaned down and kissed his cheek
“Tell me your answer tomorrow,” she whispered as her hand brushed his cheek, “you already know mine.”

[The Next Morning]

Felicity watched the digital alarm clock tick over to 10:20am as she plucked another hair pin from the dresser and plugged it into her loosely treselled locks, pulling sections onto the crown of her head. The wedding was due to start in 40 minutes and despite his cool exterior she could tell Chris was sweating bullets even as his father told ridiculously lame dad jokes and some story about fishing that Felicity didn’t quite understand, but laughed along with regardless.

When there was a tiny knock on the door Chris’ eyes shot up like lasers.
“It’s okay Chip, she’ll be there,” Felicity smiled as she secured the last pin in her hair and walked barefoot to the door.

Opening it a foot, Felicity saw Oliver’s nervously smiling face.
“I’ll be back in a few minutes,” Felicity called into the room behind her before exiting without waiting for a response.

“Do you have a minute?” Oliver asked as they stepped out into the hall
The wedding guests were mulling around in the foyer downstairs and it didn’t take long for Felicity to spot her parents in the crowd. She didn’t want to risk her mother seeing her talking to Oliver because one of two things would happen.

One, she would assume they were back together and squeal excitedly; or
Two, she would assume Felicity was heartbroken at seeing him and rush to hug her.
Neither of those things were true and neither of those things was what Felicity wanted to happen right now.
“This way,” she whispered, afraid of her mother’s super hearing, as she lead Oliver out of sight down the other end of the hall.

“You look gorgeous,” Oliver breathed, his eyes finally taking in the flowy, mushroom pink Grecian dress that perfectly hung and nipped her body.
“Thank you,” she blushed as she ran a delicate hand down the soft chiffon fabric.

“About last night…” Oliver started, his hands rolling anxiously over each other as his palms became clammy.

_He had given this a lot of thought – he thought._

“Have you decided?”
She looked a little worried and that seemed to bring a smile to his face.

Until it was replaced with a look of concern.

“Are you sure this is…”

“Oliver,” she sighed his name so perfectly it made him weak at the knees, “like I said last night, I suggested this, but it’s okay if you don’t want to muddy the waters, if you don’t want to…”

“I do,” Oliver interrupted, “I want to, I just don’t want to hurt you.”

Felicity stroked the hair at the side of his head, her wrist gently skimming his ear,

“I’ll be fine Oliver. I have no confusion as to what this is. Do you?”

_Maybe_

“No,” he asserted.

Felicity took his hand and walked the short distance to his room, she pulled him inside and pressed him against the door to close it.

“You told them you’d be back in a few minutes,” Oliver beamed as his body relaxed into her hands against his chest, “I’ll need longer than that.”

His tongue poked out through his smile just enough for her to notice it before it retreated back.

Felicity’s brow hitched up and a smile bled across her pinky-beige lips before her fingers peeled down the zipper on Oliver’s black suit pants.

“I won’t,” she whispered before she seductively licked her lips.

_Not for what she had in mind._

Ten minutes later with Oliver still leaning against the door, Felicity got to her feet and wiped his release from the corners of her mouth.

“I’ll see you later Oliver,” she winked as she patted his cheek and rubbed the other cheeky across his spent cock.

She leaned into his ear and kissed it like smoke.

“Find a closet, one that locks from the inside.”

And then she was gone, leaving Oliver with his pants still around his ankles and his body awash with what just happened.

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The wedding was adorable. Chris took everyone’s rational advice and had his wheelchair nearby, but – determined as he was – he never used it, instead he stood the entire time next to Caitlin after tearfully watching her walk down the aisle from his own legs.

Oliver and Felicity made eyes at each other that seemed so apparently obvious to them, but if anyone else noticed, they weren’t saying anything.
Pepe the pug was the best date Felicity could have hoped down and he became quite affectionate with her during the photographs a short walk away from the reception area nestled at the foot of some breath taking scenery and a man-made duck pond.

“Should I be jealous of you and the bridesmaid?” Oliver whispered as he stood behind Felicity and offered her a glass of champagne over her shoulder. “He’s not really my type,” she smiled, lowering Pepe to the ground before she slid her ass back up Oliver’s body and took the glass from his hand, “I like them a little taller.”

Her eyes blinked over at Chris and Caitlin in the distance as a photographer caught the intimacy of the moments they shared, blissfully unaware of anyone else around them, before she turned in Oliver’s hovered arms.

“I meant what I said before, you look beautiful,” he remarked softly as a single finger pinned back a lose tendril of hair from her face. “Thank you, you scrub up pretty well yourself Oliver,” she smiled graciously, “but then again you have always being able to fill out a suit.”

She tugged on the lapels of his jacket, surprising even herself at how insanely sensuous the action felt, to the point that she felt a wave of arousal start to pool in her panties. “Did you find a closet?” she asked, her voice like a strained whisper. 

*Nine months, and one time just wasn’t enough.*

Oliver nodded towards the photographer, “I think they’ll notice you’re missing,” he chuckled. Felicity groaned, the aching between her legs become a little more tormenting. *She was fucking horny.*

“But did you find one?” she asked before she eagerly folded her lips inward waiting for an answer. “I did,” he admitted, “although given we have rooms upstairs I’m not sure why a closet is necessary.”

She leaned into his ear and pecked a kiss to it “it’s the adventure.”

“Don’t you remember what happened last time we were in a closet at a wedding?” “Are you chickening out on me?” she mocked.

“No,” he chided.

“So?”

Oliver blew out a playful sigh. “There is a shed over by the pond, it’s unlocked, but it has a sliding lock in the inside. It’s close, but far enough away that no one will pay it any attention.”

Felicity chewed the inside of her lip until it broke out into a smile. “Good. Give me twenty minutes, I’ll meet you there.”

“Sorry I’m late,” Felicity panted as she almost stumbled into the shed thirty minutes later.

She shook off the rush as she bolted the door and turned around to find Oliver pacing a small circle in the tiny little shed full of work benches, tools and the familiar scent of cut grass.

“It’s okay,” he started as he tapped his palms against the side of his legs, “I was just thinking,” he paused to consider his words –*maybe this wasn’t a good idea* “You’re having second thoughts?” she asked, only half surprised, Oliver may have once been Playboy Ollie, but never with her.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he breathed, his hand brushing down her bare arm and gently catching
her wrist.
“Unless you plan on giving me splinters on my ass against this wall, or that bench,” she smiled as she spoke and nodded towards the wall then the bench, “you won’t.”

She took a steadying intake of air, knowing just what she needed to say.
“This time you can’t make it about me Oliver. If you don’t want this, then just say that. Let me make myself clear,” she leaned in closer, shoulders back, eyes fixed, “I want to have sex with you. No strings, no confusing talks, just sex,” she nodded as she spoke, “this is my Ibiza.”

She opened up his hand and put her balled up panties that she had been secretly holding behind her back into it before she closed his fingers around them.
“So, the ball is in your court,” her words finished with a wicked smile, “balls,” she added as she blinked down to his pants.

She reached for the lock on the door, but before she could move it Oliver spun her back around to face him and drove his lips wildly onto hers.

He pushed her shoulders back against the wall and she nipped his lower lip in response. They spun again, this time with Oliver slamming hard against the slatted wall. A pair of pruning shears and a rake toppled off their pins and clanged to the floor.
The wall wasn’t going to work.

Oliver cleared down the cleanest looking bench, scattering everything that had been on top of it onto the floor with reckless abandonment, before he hoisted her into the air and planted her roughly onto the tired wooden bench.

He clenched his hands at her knees, locking his fingers tightly into her flesh before she kissed him just as roughly as he had kissed her moments before.

His hands rode up her legs, exposing inch by glorious inch of her smooth, creamy legs. He found himself cursing at the sight of them as his cock strained against his inseam.

His hands didn’t stop sliding further up, and up, and up, until Felicity raised her ass off the bench just enough for the dress to pass under it and the soft chiffon to hang around her waist. Oliver’s breath raged as he looked at her with utter, carnal desire. She was completely naked from the waist down and his mind was full of things he wanted to do with that.

She forced his chin upward and, squeezing her fingers either side of his face, she kissed him again. Deep, hard, crazed.

Oliver flung her legs open causing Felicity to gasp into their heated kiss before he stroked long, lazy fingers up her silken thighs until he reached her apex.

He paused to relish the heat he could feel radiating from her sex before he dipped a finger between her folds.
“You’re wet,” he ghosted across her lips.
“You still have that effect on me,” she whispered back. Despite the fury of their kisses his fingers moved slowly between her nether lips, enjoying the way her arousal coated his fingers.
“We’re doing this?” he asked, breaking from the kiss to ensure he could see her eyes. Felicity kept her eyes focused on Oliver as she draped one arm over his shoulder and pressed the other palm flat to the bench.
“We are,” she replied before a lopsided smile graced her lips and she bucked her hips towards him, sinking his fingers deeper into her folds.
He found her tight entrance and watched the gasp slip over her lips as he slowly eased two fingers inside her. Her teeth snapped her lips closed as her head tipped back and her body arched to pull him in deeper.

Her walls pulsed around his fingers while the tip of his thumb teased her clit. He watched the pleasure roll over her expression as it was illuminated by the swinging yellow bulb above them.

His fingers sunk deeper as her body opened up to him until his two digits were completely inside her. He could feel every clench, every tiny little movement she made and it made him achingly hard.

Her head flipped back, her eyes taking a moment to enjoy the way his entire hand cupped her mound before the hand on his shoulder slipped down his chest, heading for the zipper on his pants. “No,” he spoke softly and her hand stopped at his belt, “just my fingers. Just you.”

She swallowed, the breath rolling down under her skin and making her chest rise, pulling the strapless dress tight across as her breast which strained against the fabric. “Okay,” she hummed as she began to sway her body, moving her body around his still fingers.

He hooked his fingers inside her and spread them apart to see a moaned gasp fall from her lips. He started a slow rhythm, easing out as he skimmed her walls before thrusting back inside her as deep as he could.

When a thin veil of perspiration glistened across her chest Oliver quickened his pace and deepened the swirl of his thumb over her fiery clit.

When her nails dug into his shoulder he moved even faster, relentlessly thrusting his fingers in and out of her, twisting and grazing them against her walls. The circles across her clit grew more haphazard as she began to whimper soft, engaging cries that Oliver knew all too well.

When her walls began to tremble around him he moved even faster as he pulled her to the edge of the bench and closer to him.

And when she was just about to let go, Oliver dropped his lips to the line of her jaw, breathed in her flowery scent and whispered, “fall,” against her dewy skin.

And she did, with her forehead dropped to his shoulder and her cries muffled against his jacket, Felicity came apart around his pumping fingers.

He held her tight against him as she jerked and shuddered through her orgasm while he slowed his fingers down before finally pulling them clear.

Felicity watched him with blown eyes as he threaded the same fingers between his lips and hummed, kicking her juices from them like he was preening.

“I see you haven’t lost your touch,” she panted as she slowly lowered her dress. Oliver opened his mouth to speak, but Felicity tapped it closed. “I’ll see you tonight, after dinner.”
They made suggestive eyes at each other all evening. At the bar Felicity brazenly brushed a hand across the front of his pants, smiling as she noted his growing erection. It was reckless and foolish but god it was fun.

They barely spoke, that wasn’t part of the deal, but they danced like friends to the rousing, foot stomping hits, at least until Felicity leaned in and blew against his ear. No words, just one warm, long breath.

That move found them back in the shed with the top of her dress folded down and his mouth utterly devouring her breasts while her hand jerked his cock underneath his briefs. They stopped just before he came in her hand, because that time it wasn’t about crossing the line but rather running the race. They would finish it later.

Before he had left with the typical tin cans tied to the bumper of their wedding car, Chris asked Felicity if she was okay – she knew what he was asking and her answer came in the simple form of a kiss to his forehead.

This wasn’t about feelings or emotions – at least it wasn’t to her. What better person to have a one night stand with was there than your ex boyfriend? The one you can trust to respect you and the one who knows you well enough to make pseudo Ibiza (aka Starling) a roaring success.

It was now close to midnight and Oliver was propped up against the hard mocha wood bar nursing another drink, bourbon he thought, though he wasn’t entirely sure, as he watched Felicity across the room.

She was so happy, actually, really happy, dancing with her mother. Beautiful, ethereal, happy. That was all he had ever really wanted for her.

He continued to watch her even as the song finished and flowed into another. His cock still ached from her hand and he knew underneath that dress, across her breasts lay half a dozen love bites he had put there. The knowledge of both those things made him smile as he finished that drink, probably his thirteenth one of the night – lucky number 13. He wasn’t drunk – at least he didn’t consider himself so.

She looked perfect.
Happy and perfect and he wanted to hold her and kiss her and tell her the truth.
The truth that he still loved her.

In his slightly intoxicated haze, Oliver wanted to take England back, he wanted to tell Felicity that he wanted a do over, a change, he wanted to try again. He wanted to fight where he had once been scared. He loved her.

He ordered another drink to bury the thoughts because Felicity made it clear that wasn’t what she wanted, and he had no right to ask for it.

Thirty minutes and two more drinks later found Oliver watching her talk to a guy he didn’t know – or maybe he did and in this state he just didn’t recognise him?

He was a little jealous.
Who the fuck was he kidding? He was insanely jealous, to the point he considered exposing just the top of her breast to show Mr Fancy Quaff hair that it was Oliver who had done that. But that was insane, so fucking insane.
The next thing Oliver knew he was standing beside them with his hand outstretched to the stranger, he didn’t even know what he had said but Felicity was looking at him with one hitched brow, shit, what had he said?

“I think you mean Queen,” Felicity corrected as she tried to hide her smile.
“What the fuck did I say?” Oliver said out loud, **wow hard spirits made him crass**
“You said your name was Oliver Smoak, I think you mean Queen.”
He tried to shake himself sober, “I did, I meant Queen.”
“Michael Hall,” the apparent stranger introduced kindly.
“Who the fuck are you Mike and can I call you Mike?” he jested.

Okay maybe he was a little drunk.

“Oliver, Michael is Chris’ uncle,” Felicity explained as she touched a delicate hand to the crest of his shoulder.
“So you two know each other? Good friends?” Oliver blabbed as he bobbed his head so much he was getting dizzy.
“Sure,” Felicity answered with an engaging laugh, “I was the flower girl at his wedding, what twelve years ago?”

Oliver blinked rapidly and soon realised the guy was actually closer to 50 and didn’t have a single hair on his head that wasn’t grey, **apparently beer goggles were a thing.**
“That's about right, it was nice to see you again Felicity, I’m going to find your parents to say goodbye.”
“You too Uncle Mike, say hi to Frieda, I’m sorry she couldn’t make it.”
She waved goodbye to the man only a few years older than her father before she turned to Oliver with a smile pressed to her lips.

“Wow, he looked a lot younger when I was by the bar,” Oliver grimaced as he went to take a drink. Felicity put her hand over the top of the glass, “are you drunk?”
“Nope,” Oliver protested.
“Yes you are.”
He shrugged his shoulders loosely.
“Maybe a little.”
Felicity took the tumbler from his hands and sniffed the contents, **bourbon.**
“Reminds me of that night you fell on top of me on the couch,” Felicity teased.
“Ah,” Oliver offered his hands in surrender, “the drunk, prodigal son returns.”

She sipped back his drink as she watched him over the glass lip.
“Do you want to go upstairs or back to the shed?” he asked, his hands aching to feel her skin.
“Maybe you should sleep this one off,” she offered him a gentle smile.
“I’m fine, I promise.”
Oliver put his hand to his heart.

She considered his words and she finished the bitter drink, sucking back air as the dregs glazed her throat.

“Upstairs,” she replied as she placed the empty glass on a nearby leaner, “I think we’re done for the night.”

In his room they barely made it in the door before their clothes started coming off. Felicity didn’t even waste time on the zip of her dress, opting to pull it more awkwardly over her head in the false economy that it would be faster and Oliver threw down his pants and briefs in one sweep, kicking
them off at the same time he removed his shoes.

The marks across Felicity's chest were like beacons to Oliver's hungry eyes.
“Quite proud of yourself aren’t you,” she laughed as she fluffed a hand through his cropped hair. “Yes,” he growled into her neck.

“Here’s to our last hurrah,” she hummed as her fingers loosened his tie before moving down the buttons of his shirt. “Hurrah,” he spoke, his voice gravelled and guttural.

They tumbled onto the bed in their haphazard state of undress and immediately their lips battled while their tongues waged war.

*Here’s to Ibiza.*

Sometime just before dawn Felicity woke in Oliver's embrace, tiny snores reverberating across the back of her neck as his face stayed buried there.

His body felt warm, protecting and she smiled reminiscing, but Felicity knew she should go before anyone found them in the same room together. It was easier that way.

“Oliver?” she whispered into the quiet room.
He grunted in response.
“I’m going to go,” she twisted her head just enough to see the side of his face.
He grunted again.
Felicity lifted his heavy arm that was banded across her naked chest, his hand cupping her breast. “Stay,” he grumbled, his mouth dropping to the pillow as she shuffled towards the edge of the bed. “I can’t, I should go,” she breathed after she finally got free of his weighty arm. “I want you to stay,” he mumbled, his disturbed hand searching the empty bed once she stood clear of it.

She smiled down at him as she tried to stifle a laugh, he sounded half drunk or dreaming and he had a line of drool coming from his mouth. “I’ll see you before I leave for the airport.”
She gathered her clothes and replaced only the necessary at this stage, her dress. “Felicity, I love you.”

She stopped the underarm zip halfway up. “I made a mistake,” he spoke again, his eyes still closed but his words as clear as they would be if he was wide awake.
“Oliver don’t,” she pleaded.
No complications.
“I love you, I want to be with you,” his hand was still searching for her, “I made a mistake, I want to...be...with...you.”

Felicity cupped a hand to her mouth as she bit back the tears. *How did she not see this coming?*

“Goodbye Oliver,” she whispered as she back towards the door. “I love you Felicity.”
Oliver woke with a startle though he wasn’t sure what exactly it was that had woken him up as the mid morning sun pierced through the curtains.

His head was foggy, but clear enough to remember how it felt to be with Felicity last night, how much he was ready to ask for a second chance.

He turned, imagining her in the bed beside him asleep but all he found was a note

Oliver,

I’ve put two aspirin and a bottle of water on the nightstand, I hope that helps with the hangover you probably have.

Thank you for the moments we shared this weekend. I am glad for the time I got to spend with you.

I will have left already by the time you read this and I think it’s better this way. This morning you told me you loved me. Perhaps it was the alcohol, or perhaps it was a remnant memory of us when we were a couple, but either way, I didn’t want to make this worse in case you meant it.

I will always care about you Oliver. You were my first crush, my first love, my first many things, so your place in my heart is sealed.

But I can’t be in love with you. Not again, not right now.

I have tried my best to understand why you left me in England like you did, and I have made my peace with it (I know you just thought you were doing what was right, what you thought I needed), but you took my choice, my voice away, and you made the decision yourself, like you were making it for me, and I realise that I can’t forgive you for that right now.

I thought we could have this weekend without strings, but I was wrong. We aren’t made for last hurrahs.

I guess it’s my turn to say that I’m sorry. I’m sorry if I let you think that we could get back what we lost, that we could start again, because we can’t. I’m sorry.

I’m so proud of your accomplishments and I know that you will do great things. Know that I will always be your greatest supporter, even if you don’t see me cheering you on.

Be happy. Don’t feel bad. You didn’t hurt what time can’t heal. You showed me a great many things and I wish you nothing but happiness. Please don’t worry about me or feel any more guilt. You don’t need to. You are a remarkable man Oliver Queen, and I am glad to have known you.

Goodbye, ~Felicity

Oliver read it twice. He couldn’t read it a third time.
The second time I saw Oliver was January 2009, 4 months later. It didn't work out the same, Not at all. I had missed coming home for Christmas, mostly because I knew after Christmas followed New Years and as far as I was aware the Queens continued to host the New Year festivities and a part of me was terrified of trying to come up with an excuse not to go. I had left Oliver with a final note, which as I sobered up in life I realised perhaps it was more final than I intended it to be, or maybe that’s just me finally realising that Felicity Smoak – me – runs away from things that seem too hard, too taxing, too emotional – too, too… it has taken me years to learn that, but regardless, I didn’t want to make things more complicated back then. I took shifts over the holidays at a nearby bar and I made arrangements to move into a new flat despite the 6 inches of snow. I don’t think mom bought it, but when I promised to spend a week with her before school went back in mid-January all was forgiven.

I could blame jet lag, or exhaustion from pushing myself at school. I could blame fate playing a cruel joke, or I could realise that maybe I was trying to tell myself something.
Either way, once I slipped into the backseat of the cab and thumbed through my phone to see if I missed anything important while in airplane mode (I had not), I gave him an address…

[January 2009]

“We’re here Miss,” the cabby said before Felicity, for the first time since sliding into the typically yellow cab, looked up from her screen.

She looked around, wondering what looked so different about her parents’ street. It took her almost 73 Mississippi’s to realise her mistake.

She wasn’t in her parents’ tree-lined street where at least three of the houses were bound to still have Christmas decorations up.

*Oh no, she wasn’t there.*

She was at Oliver’s apartment.

The one where they had spent months pretending to be domesticated.

The one where he bought her a toothbrush and she organised his vinyl collection.

The apartment where they had a shopping list on the fridge and half of her clothes spread onto his side of the closet.

*She was at the place she once called home.*

“Miss?” the cabby spoke up again and Felicity shook the past from her head.

“Sorry, I gave you the wrong address, let me just…” she paused to scroll through her contacts, not trusting herself to remember the right address anymore, but when she looked up once more she noticed a familiar car pulling into the drive.

“Just a minute,” she mumbled, though the tightening in her chest should have been an indicator that she shouldn’t linger there any longer.

*But she was never particularly good at listening to that feeling.*

The driver’s door opened and even in the late afternoon light Felicity recognised Oliver immediately – he hadn’t gone and made any drastic changes in the last four months.

He was dressed in a suit – steel grey, thin black tie, deep grey shirt.

She tried to remember if it was one she had seen before or if it was new.

He walked around to the passenger side of the car and opened the door.

The thoughts regarding the age of his suit were quickly flushed from her mind, replaced with screaming sirens she couldn’t shut off.

A woman with legs that resembled a Victoria Secret model’s and a head of chocolate brown hair which looked like she walked around with a perfectly situated wind *machine*, stepped out from the car wearing a tight, grey button down knit dress that sat an inch below obscene.

Even at a distance, she looked gorgeous.

Oliver never touched her, at least not as far as Felicity could tell, but they were chatting and walking in step.

When she had time to process the brunette’s existence, Felicity realised they were walking together. Unless she lived in the *same* building (possible but not probable) that meant they were going to the *same* place.

*Their place.*
She shook the last two words from her brain, it wasn’t anymore. *His place.*

She must have gasped, or whimpered, because something made the cabby turn around in his seat with a concerned look on his face.

“Are you alright Miss?”

She blinked rapidly as her only hope of keeping the tears at bay. *She really had no right to cry.*

“Sorry, the address,” she muttered, showing him the correct destination which he quickly plugged into his GPS, “please just go.”

“I’m sorry, I can’t believe I left the documents at home,” Oliver sighed, the late nights at the office and crawling into bed sometime around 2am for the last month had really knocked him for six.

He would be glad when this merger was over and he could move onto the next big project to occupy his mind, because that’s how he lived now.

“I’ll get them and you can take them back to New York in the morning,” he continued as he unlocked his apartment door and gestured her inside.

“You’ve worked very hard on this merger Oliver,” she preened as she floated into the loft and let her eyes roam around the four walls, “your father should give you a pay rise.”

Oliver was glad for the distraction of work, to the point where he would probably pay his father for the privilege. But he didn’t say that, he simply smiled, “Thank you Ms Rochev.”

“Isabel,” she corrected.

Oliver didn’t reply as he trotted with purpose over to the desk near the window, in search of the final set of merger documents.

“This apartment is quaint,” Isabel spoke as she wafted around the room.

Oliver didn’t look up, “I had it at the end of college and I never had the heart to move,” it reminds me of her, “it suits me.”

“Eligible bachelor like you,” she chortled softly, her red lips bouncing through the laugh, “I would have thought a downtown penthouse was more your style.”

“Not everything is as it seems on paper,” Oliver replied simply while he carefully lifted document after document in search of one elusive one.

“Do you mind if I use your bathroom?”

He pointed blindly back towards the bathroom, “that’s fine.”

He could hear the tap of her heels on the wooden floor getting further away when he found the document and slid it from the pile. His eyes hovered over it slowly but carefully to ensure he was looking at the right one before he heard the bathroom door open again.

He didn’t move and his back was still facing the door.

“I found them,” he said as he read the last few lines.

“Excellent,” she purred close to his ear as her finger slid down his spine. Instantly Oliver’s back stiffened.

“Why don’t you show me the bedroom?”

He turned around sharply and clipped his elbow on the desk, toppling a pen holder in the corner.
The buttons at the front of her dress were completely undone showing a deep violet lace bra set against milky-caramel skin.

“If the companies we work for are going to merge,” she hummed, rolling her tongue across those thickly painted lips, “maybe we should too.”

She grabbed his jacket but Oliver pulled it free.
“Isabel, I, no,” he shook his head as he tried to focus on being diplomatic in his utter distaste for the idea.

It wasn’t personal.
But he wasn’t Ollie anymore, he was Oliver.
And Oliver loved Felicity, even if right now she didn’t love him back.

“I guess that explains the extra toothbrush in the bathroom, I didn’t realise you had a girlfriend Oliver, you’ve never mentioned her,” Isabel stepped back but ran a decidedly slow finger down between her breasts.
“I don’t,” Oliver sighed.
He had a Felicity.

“So you just have two toothbrushes?” a coy laugh brushed across her lips as she moved closer again.
“Oh, no, I just have the one, the other belonged to an ex.”
He hated the way that word sounded. He had never used it before and he didn’t want to use it again.
“So you aren’t currently with someone?”
“No, I’m not,” his own words hurt.

“But you’re clearly still hung up on her?” she replied as she walked over to the fern on the breakfast bar, teasing the ends of it with her blood-red nails.

Oliver didn’t know what to say, she was right, he was.
“So she broke your heart?”
The finger moved off the fern and back between her breasts.

“No, it wasn’t like that,” Oliver said, his face pinching as he thought about it.
“You broke hers?”

He cleared his throat, this had gone on long enough, “look I have the papers. I can drop you back to your hotel or call you a cab.”
He held the papers out and Isabel took them only to promptly discard them onto the counter, next to the fern.
“You know,” she spoke in a honeyed smoky tone, “the best way to get over someone is to get underneath someone else. Hell I’ll even let you call me her name if that’ll help.”

Oliver took at least three large steps backwards.
Ollie Queen would have jumped at the idea of a casual fuck, damn the consequences. But that wasn’t him anymore, that wasn’t what he wanted.

“I’m not interested,” his voice was calm but stern.
She could offer him all the trappings the Karma Sutra had to offer, he still wouldn’t be interested. It had only been four months since the wedding, in some respects Oliver still wanted to believe his skin smelled like her.
Isabel pressed her lips together as she raised a single eyebrow, watching to see if Oliver would blink. But he didn’t.
“I don’t get turned down a lot, actually ever,” she spoke with a bleak smile as she buttoned up her dress, “she must have been pretty special.”
“She is.”
He didn’t say was.

“She’s a lucky girl.”
“No, I’m the lucky one.”
*Lucky to have known her.*

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**[March 2010]**

I’m still not sure whether Oliver and the brunette were ever a thing. I considered asking Thea, but that really wasn’t fair to her.

I saw a newspaper article online a few months later about the merger between Queen Consolidated and a smaller New York based company, Slade Industries. At the helm of the merger was Oliver and beside him was the same woman, a Ms Isabel Rochev. She looked even prettier in high resolution colour and to say I was jealous was an understatement, but whatever their relationship was, or wasn’t, I was proud of Oliver. He was making a name for himself in the business world. *How could I not be?*

I continued to follow his successes, his philanthropy and his growth into the man I knew he could be. He took his family’s legacy company and he grew it. In fact just a few months ago, before my graduation, I heard rumours that there was a massive deal in the pipelines to do with Queen Consolidated’s London Branch. Analysts were dissecting it and a lot of the tech based students were a buzz around campus about it. I’m told it would be a deal worth billions, although no announcement has been forthcoming.

So that’s that.
*This is where my story ends, at least for now.*

“Felicity are you ready to go? Our flight leaves in three hours and we need to get to the airport in enough time,” a voice called out from the front door of her apartment.

“You can go down to the cab, I’ll finish up and lock the door,” she replied as she heard the heavy footsteps getting a little closer.

“You keep a journal?” he asked, a smile peeling across his lips.

“Of sorts,” Felicity offered him a soft smile over her shoulder before he stooped down to collect her bags.

“Alright, I’ll take your bags down to the taxi, don’t be long,” he spoke before he leaned down and pecked a quick kiss against her cheek.

“I won’t.”

Felicity stared out the window and took a long, measured breath before she wrote the final two lines that sat in her head.

*Or maybe not.*
She put down her pen and closed the journal. Years of thoughts, emotions and feelings were encapsulated there. She hadn’t meant to write so much, to spill so many words onto its blank pages but what had started out as an exercise to clear her clouded mind had turned into something quite thorough.

Her entire relationship with Oliver Queen laid bare like a Nicholas Sparks’ romance novel, except it was missing something – an ending.

That was what she was in search of in a quest that started a week ago at a dinner that was not easily forgotten.

[A Week Prior]

“Happy two month anniversary,” Ted said to fill the silence.
Felicity smiled half heartedly.
“My parents are looking forward to meeting you,” he continued, lapses in conversation made him uneasy.
Another half hearted smile.
It wasn’t his fault. Lord help him he was trying, but Felicity wasn’t feeling up to dinner tonight, she really should have just said no.
Something was bothering her.
She couldn’t pinpoint what but ever since graduating three months ago and no longer having a work load that would sink a battleship, she had allowed herself more time to think – about things.

Things like Oliver.
The day of her graduation she had held out some semblance of hope that he would appear and some stupid series of events ripped from the script of a RomCom movie would see them together again.

But it didn’t happen and Felicity soon realised just how far apart their paths had taken them.

She couldn’t be mad
Well she could – but she wasn’t really sure she should be.
She had closed the door – because for her, then, it had been the right thing to do.

Having Oliver waiting in the wings would only hurt them both.
She didn’t want to fall back into his arms only for one of them to walk away again.

That was the night she met Ted Hunt.
An altogether unassuming guy a couple of years older than her who had graduated with a Policing Foundation Degree from a college nearby on the same night and the rest was history, of sorts.

He asked her out that night, right there in the typically English pub on Park Street as they waited at the bar for their drinks. He seemed nice enough but Felicity said no. But he had managed to make her laugh despite her cloudy mood at Oliver’s absence so they exchanged numbers.
A week later he asked again.
She still said no.

When he called her a third time to ask her out she was out with some friends. All five of them asked her why her life was still on hold for a guy that wasn’t calling when there was a perfectly nice guy that was.
She finally said yes.
Two months later, here they were, in a tiny restaurant on a rainy winter’s night, nursing mostly silence between them as they prepared to take a trip to his home state of Wyoming for a relative’s wedding.

“What’s going on in your head, Felicity?”
She dug her spork into the decadent chocolate cake, stabbing her thoughts away, “yeah, I’m just tired.”

That had some ring of truth to it, she had spent some late nights trying to decide what job offer to take. There were two in London and one in New York. They were all great positions, but she wasn’t sure which would be the better fit.

She fed another spork full of the chocolate ganache into her mouth.
“I love you,” Ted casually said.
Felicity choked on her mouthful of cake.
Sputtering, coughing, cake down her windpipe, the whole nine yards.

“You should have some of this cake,” she declared as she fed more into her mouth, “I feel bad being the only one eating cake.”

She grabbed the arm of a nearby waiter.
“Can we get some more cake?”
“Felicity I don’t want any,” Ted retorted.
“He does,” she winked at the waiter, “it’s really good cake.”
Another mouth full.
“I don’t,” he shook his head at the waiter who looked utterly confused at what he had been dragged into.

“I shouldn’t have said that. Can we just ignore it?” he looked as uncomfortable as Felicity felt shovelling cake into her mouth.

The spork clanged on the empty plate.
“I need to go home,” Felicity said abruptly.
“Like now, to your flat?”
He stood when she did.

“No, home,” she finished her cider and collected her bag from the back of the chair, “I need to go home, home. To Starling.”

That’s how they ended up flying into Starling for two nights tacked on to the start of their trip last minute.
Because Felicity needed to see Oliver.
*She needed to know if she still loved him.*
Oliver held out the drawer on his desk like opening it caused the world around him to freeze. The same thing happened every day that he looked in that same drawer for the last three months but he could never bring himself to get rid of it.

So it sat there.
A small black box with a white ribbon tied around it.
Mocking him.

He touched the satin ribbon and smiled before a familiar flood of memories washed over him.

[December 2009, Oxford Graduation]

It was cold.
The knit sweater he wore underneath the thick woollen-blend jacket hadn’t even been enough to keep him warm, and the Burberry scarf Thea had given him for his birthday that year was doing little to keep the chill at bay.

But, the day wasn’t a bleak, not in the slightest, with the sun high in the sky and even though it felt cold enough for an early snowfall, it didn’t.

The old trees that dotted around the campus were almost bare and the grass had lost most of its green, but even as he stood in the crowds at the back of the seating, Oliver was glad he went.

Whatever happens, wherever it is, I'll be at your graduation
That’s what he had promised her and here he was.

He had toyed with the idea of calling her to ask but he found himself trapped under the fear that she might say no.

Sitting in a Hotel room in London the night before as he sifted through mountains of paperwork, he knew he had to make the trip an hour’s drive away. Because, truth be told, he would have made the trip even if he was somewhere in the North China Sea.

A promise was a promise.

“Felicity Smoak.”
Her name sounded like an angel’s epiphany and it made him smile from ear to ear at hearing it. Felicity had done this and he never felt that any credit was due him, but as she walked across that stage and took what was hers, Oliver felt an overwhelming sense of pride – not necessarily for the woman that he loved, but for the little girl over the fence that was hands down the most resilient, smartest, kindest and best person he knew.

He cheered for her.
For the little girl who was territorial over her box of old computer parts and whose laugh could instantly lift his mood.

Two small tears slid from his eyes as he watched her parents, Chris and Caitlin cheer her on from a row of white lawn chairs near the front.

This was her moment and she had earned it.

Once the procession was finished he slipped away and checked into a nearby Hotel. He had considered taking the trip back to London with the gift he bought for her still in his pocket, but he
He sat motionless on the edge of his bed contemplating what he might say when a message sparked his phone to life in his hands.

**Chris: If you came, we’re the corner of 29th and park. She would want to see you.**
He stared at it for a long time, so long that his eyes got dry because he forgot how to blink.

*Maybe he could…*

He walked the short distance in the early evening, though the sun had long since fallen behind the horizon. White street lamps lit his path as a light sprinkling of snow began to fall. He brushed it from his face as he stopped outside a large window.

And that’s where he saw her, her cap was gone but her cloak remained. Her hair was longer again, sweeping down her back in a cascade of honey blonde that trapped the twinkling lights above the old oak bar.

She looked happy. A bright smile visible across her cherry red lips. She was laughing and Oliver hoped that the people fortunate to be hearing it knew how lucky they.

And then he saw a guy, another graduate, take the spot next to her at the bar. Her smile dropped a little but something he said made her laugh.

**Number 23, the guy you meet and share a drink with.**

Oliver stepped away from the window and into the shadows. His eyes tugged downward towards the little black box.

*He didn’t have a right to be in her life.*

_Saw you walk inside a bar
He said something to make you laugh
I saw that both your smiles were twice as wide as ours
Yeah, you look happier, you do*

_Ain’t nobody hurt you like I hurt you
But ain’t nobody love you like I do
Promise that I will not take it personal, baby
If you’re moving on with someone new_

Knowing he would regret it, but still believing he had to – Oliver walked away.

~*~*~*~

Oliver closed the drawer with a pained tightness in his jaw.
It would be there tomorrow to haunt him too.
“While I always love seeing you, I wasn’t expecting you to visit this trip,” Donna smiled as Felicity did little more than stir the sauce simmering on the cooktop.

Felicity sighed as she tipped her head towards the living room, three walls away, where her father and Ted were sitting in deathly silence watching a sports highlight show that she doubted either of them actually cared about.

“He told me he loved me,” she peeped as her brows pulled inward and her nose crinkled at the bridge.
“Oh,” Donna replied as she set the paring knife on the counter and turned to Felicity, “and you didn’t say it back?”

Felicity felt ten again as her mother’s hand grazed down her arm.
“No,” she breathed while she shook her head gently, “I offered him cake, quite forcefully.”

“Is that a double entendre?”
A soft chuckle bounced between them.
“No, actual cake, but to be fair it was really good cake.”

“Maybe there is a reason you couldn’t say it back.”
“What’s wrong with me? He’s a great guy, he’s smart and funny and he’s there, he even resembles a Disney Prince, so why can’t I?”
“Because,” Donna drew one shoulder up into a shrug, “you still love Oliver.”

Felicity’s eye squeezed closed as her chin dropped to her chest.
“Why? It was years ago and he doesn’t love me, not anymore”
“Are you sure?” Donna sighed as she lifted Felicity’s chin with her finger.

“Oliver was your first, a heart holds onto to things like that.”
“Even when it shouldn’t?”
“Who’s to say it shouldn’t?”

Felicity felt the air drain from her lungs as her mother’s last words hung in the air.
“You owe it to yourself to find out Felicity.”
A small nod was all she could answer with as she chewed the inside of her lip.

“He’s in Starling, same building,”
Felicity’s glassy eyes looked at her mother.
“You can't start a new book unless you’re sure you've finished the last.”

Felicity needed an ending.

[Thursday, 1 April 2010]

He wouldn’t look in that drawer today.
Not today.
There had to be one day where it didn’t consume him.

“Mister Queen?” the intercom on his desk sparked to life.
“Yes Tildy?” Oliver answered the kindly older woman who had been his PA for the last year and
hadn’t once commented on the fact he spent countless minutes staring into his drawer at a black box with a white ribbon.

“There is a visitor for you in reception.”
Oliver scrolled through his calendar but saw nothing on his board. If it was either Chris or Tommy, he was certain Tildy would have told him and neither Thea nor his mother ever stopped at the front desk.
“I’m not expecting anyone,” he replied as he quickly checked his phone – nothing.

“A Miss Smoak the front desk said, shall I tell them to turn her away…”
Oliver’s hand went numb and the phone almost slipped from between his fingers.

_Had he heard that right, or was he in the midst of a crack in reality?_
_Felicity was downstairs._
_Wanting to see him._
_She was here._

“Mister Queen?”
Oliver startled back to reality.
“Shall I get them to turn her away?”
“No,” he replied abruptly.

He wasn’t even sure what he did next, but by the time he gained his faculties back he was stepping out of the elevator into the foyer when his eyes touched hers.

At least twenty people walked their paths across his but there were all invisible to him as he made his way across the grand and bustling foyer.

Every sound grew silent.
Every light grew dim.
Every person turned to statues.

_Because all Oliver saw was her._

“Hi,” the smoky word left her lips first, his seconds after.
“What are-“
“I’m sorry-”
Their words overlapped and they both smiled as they took equally nervous breaths.

“You go,” Oliver smiled graciously.
Felicity’s mouth opened but only spent air came out until she forced her shoulders back and blinked away from Oliver’s enchanting blue eyes.
“I’m sorry for just showing up, but I thought maybe we could talk,” she spoke quietly before her eyes walked back up to his, snared in those bottomless pools of crystal blue.
“I think I know a place,” Oliver remarked, his own eyes lost in hers.

Twenty minutes later found them sitting at a small table in Verdant, the quaint little coffee shop that had still refused to grow into a Starbucks. Even though it felt like decades since she had walked through its dainty glass door with the vintage bell above it, nothing looked any different.

This could have been 2008 and Oliver could have been holding her hand across the table. But he wasn’t, instead his fingers tightly gripped the sides of his white ceramic mug like the fate of the world depended on it.
“So, how is everything?” Felicity asked, hating herself for starting with the question that acquaintances did.
“I don’t know about everything,” he answered with a wink, instantly breaking the awkwardness that had lingered between them from the short walk there “but most things are good.”

“How are your parents?” Felicity refined her question with a playful smile.
“They’re good, and yours?”
“The same.”
“How is work?”
“I haven’t been fired, although they are sending me to New York tomorrow.”
“How’s Thea?”
Felicity had called her just after her birthday, but it felt comforting to asking about the known before she delved into the unknown.
“Fifteen,” Oliver grimaced and Felicity laughed.
“And Jonas?”
“Getting lazy,” he chuckled, pausing while a smile drifted over his lips, “I’m sure he’d love to see you.”

Felicity smiled thankfully, Thea often sent her photos, but it wasn’t the same thing, so the idea, set apart from the reality of the same, was one that warmed her heart.
“Maybe next time,” she answered softly, “I’m only in Starling the night. I fly out tomorrow.”
“Oh,” Oliver looked surprised.
“A whirlwind visit I’m afraid. Flew in yesterday and leave tomorrow.”
“Back to England?”
“Wyoming actually.”
His surprise was still visible and she wondered how much information she would need to give him.

“Why the stop over?” he asked, his eyes twitching just a fraction as if he was wondering whether that was a question he had any right to ask.
Felicity stared down at the mug between her hands and watched the waves of the coffee rise against the sides as her hands trembled involuntarily.

“I just had to see something,” she spoke barely above a whisper and a sigh followed her final words before she toyed with the tip of her ponytail, “find something.”
An ending or a new beginning.

His eyes caught hers and the locked like magnets trapped in an ocean of stormy blue waves.
“I hope you find it,” he whispered, his hand loosening from the mug and pressing palm down into the lightly stained wood.

His fingers splayed like fishing hooks in search of one thing.
Felicity could feel her hand wanting to lie on top of his.
To feel the warmth from his hand bleed into hers.

“How, I met someone,” she breathed the words into her coffee as she managed to pull her eyes from his.
She couldn’t see his face, but she heard his throat tighten and his breath stumble for just a moment.

His eyes pinned closer and his hand retracted from the table.
“Oh,”
“It’s new, only a couple of months,” she offered, though he hadn’t asked.
“I see,”
He shouldn’t be surprised, Felicity was perfect in at least 25 different ways and she deserved a
chance to move on.

The truth was even he had tried, two blind dates courtesy of Tommy (who was now banned from setting up any future ones) and he had even found himself roped into a speed dating event once—just the once, but none of it was right. None of it felt half as good as been with Felicity.

He was looking for something he had already had once before and it was irreplaceable.

“I just wanted you to know,” she spoke softly, watching as his eyes stayed drawn to a spot on the table, “before you heard it from someone else.”

Felicity wasn’t sure what she was searching for in that moment but the surprise was easily read on his face and she knew he was trying his hardest to hide tiny pangs of pain there too.

It had been a mistake to come.

“I should go,” Felicity said, abandoning her half-finished drink as she stood, “I’ve kept you long enough.”

He wanted to stop her, but the words failed him.

“I’ll see you around,” she added as she blinked back tears.

This had been a mistake.

She took her bag and jacket and headed for the door.

“Felicity,” he called after her.

She stopped and turned around slowly, her eyes almost grey as tears grew behind them.

I love you.

He thought it but he couldn’t say it.

“I want you to be happy,” he whispered, losing some words in the space between them.

She pressed her lips together and offered him a quivered smile before she mouthed the words, “I know,” and then she left.

Oliver didn’t feel like being alone so he felt a sense of comfort walking through the front door of his parents’ house that night.

“Are you going?” Thea sprung on him almost the instantly he closed the front door.

“Going where Thea?” Oliver feigned ignorance as he toed off his shoes and headed towards the soulful jazz music at least one of his parents had playing in the living room.

“To meatloaf night,” she replied with eyes Oliver could feel burning holes in the back of his head.

Oliver sighed, “not tonight.”

“But you’ve hardly missed a night.”

“I don’t think we’re invited tonight,” he sighed wistfully.

“It’s a long standing arrangement,” she bit back pointedly.

“Not tonight.”

“It’s because she’s there isn’t it?” Thea asked as she followed him down the hall, yapping at his back like one of those adorable but vicious ankle bitter dogs.

“If you know, why are you asking?” Oliver called over his shoulder in a futile attempt at ‘sit’

“But you’ve hardly missed a night.”

“Because,” she blew out an exacerbated huff, “I was trying to decide if you’re scared or just really dumb.”
He was about to get a lecture from his teenage sister.
“I saw her today and she told me that she is with someone. I missed my chance,” he spoke freely, honestly – probably the first time he’d ever said something similar to someone other than himself.

“No, you blew your chance,” Thea argued, still following as Oliver stepped into the living room to find just his mother thumbing through a book, “does she even know you went to her graduation?”
“No Thea and I told you why,” Oliver gritted as he looked around at the places to sit, but opted to stand where he could punch his fist lightly onto the back of the couch.

“Because you thought she looked happier without you?” she scoffed, “that’s a raft of B.S.”
“Thea,” Moira warned as she folded a bookmark into the page.

Thea was probably right Oliver decided.

“She is with someone,” Oliver reiterated, loathing his mouth for saying it.
“So what?”
“So that’s it.”
“Oliver she came here she found you. That wasn’t about some other guy.”

He looked from Thea to his mother, who simply smiled.

_Could there be a semblance of truth in what Thea was saying?

“I don’t know what to do,” he mumbled, his head now awash with possibilities – _did she tell him because she wanted him to fight for her? Like he hadn’t done all those years ago?_

“Get in your car, drive over there and for once in this ridiculous time apart tell her how you feel!” Thea exclaimed as bluntly as a butter knife.
“I can’t,” he stammered.
_Could he?
““You can,” Thea huffed as she poked her slender finger into his arm.
“But what if she doesn’t want to hear it?”_

Thea’s face softened and she offered her brother a wise, all-knowing smile, “then at least you will know.”

“And do you think I should?” he asked, turning to his mother who had remained quiet until now. “Oliver,” she started with a comforting smile wrapped around her lips, “I’ve never seen you happier than when you were with Felicity. So yes, I think that deserves a shot.”

_Felicity had wanted to see him fight and he hadn’t.
But he would now.
He had to now._

“Okay,” he said resolutely as he walked back towards the door, his breath psyching himself up.
“I’m coming,” Thea added.
He didn’t argue. It wasn’t like he would have won it.

They had just sat down for dinner when the doorbell rung. Felicity went to move but Donna waved her down before she traipsed off to the door herself.

There were muffled voices that Felicity couldn’t make out but they did sound familiar....

“Sorry, are we intruding?” Thea chirped as she strolled into the dining room, Oliver and Donna trailing along behind.
Felicity looked up to see Oliver, who promptly mouthed that he was “sorry”. Felicity offered him a warm smile and an “it’s alright”.

“Oliver said you were in town and it’s been so long,” Thea quipped as Felicity rose from the chair to embrace the teenager that was swiftly growing taller than her. “It’s fine of course, it’s always nice to see you,” Felicity smiled as she felt Oliver’s gaze fall on her. It was different than it was this afternoon. She couldn’t pinpoint why, but for the first time in a long time there was a distinctive air of confidence back in his smile. One that hadn’t been there when they first saw each other at Chris’ wedding, and one that wasn’t there today over coffee.

But it was there now and she wasn’t quite sure what to make of it.

“Oh M Gee that smells delicious ,” Thea hummed as she leaned over the table and took an exaggerated inhale, “I’m so hungry. Oliver was going to take me for burgers, but wow Mrs K, you have outdone yourself.”

Felicity laughed, Thea was about as subtle as a Mack Truck. It was clear she was fishing for an invitation to stay.

“Well why don’t you stay, there is always plenty,” Donna said, giving Thea precisely what she was looking for.

Felicity wasn’t sure exactly how it happened, but once Thea had fluttered around the table Felicity was now on the same side as Ted, sitting opposite Oliver.

“Hi, I’m Thea,” her eyes honed in on Ted like lasers. “Sorry, this is Ted, Ted this is Thea and her brother Oliver,” Felicity introduced, her voice slightly cracked when she said Oliver’s name.

It didn’t take long for the name to register and it showed across Ted’s pulled smile.

“Ted, is that short for something or were your parents stuffed bear aficionados?” Thea’s smile never left her lips, even when Oliver kicked her under the table.

A breathy laugh fell from Ted’s mouth, “it’s short for Theodore, but only my grandmother calls me that.”

“You know I think I had a great-great grandfather called Theodore Queen,” she spoke as she pressed a finger to her lips, “didn’t we Oliver?”

He shrugged, his eyes still caught up in Felicity’s.

“Wait, your last name is Queen?”

Thea leaned forward onto her elbows. “Have you heard of us Teddy?” she grinned.

Oliver kicked her a second time, but she didn’t react, not even a little.

“Uh, just Ted,” he smiled, Thea shrugged, “as in Queen Consolidated?”

Felicity shifted in her seat.

While she had told Ted about her last boyfriend, a guy called Oliver, she had not divulged everything about him, including his name and his family’s place on the Forbes’ rich list.

“Technically that Mr Queen would be my father, but yes,” Oliver remarked, turning only briefly to Ted before his gaze wandered back to Felicity.

“Shall we eat?” Noah finally piped in and Donna nodded like a bobble head.

“Anyway, Thea, how’s school?” Felicity asked as the dishes of food passed around the table.

“It’s a square building and I go to it, it’s fine” Thea shrugged.
“What do you do Ted?” she asked, her interrogation only missing the bright lamp shining in his eyes.
“I’m a police officer.”
Thea’s lips pursed as she searched for some way to make that a bad thing.

But she quickly dropped it when she watched him pass along the meatloaf without taking any before he put some chicken pasta on his plate.

“No meatloaf?” Thea asked, watching Ted with hawk eyes as she took a slice almost as big as her plate.
“Ah no,” he answered quietly, fully aware of what the smiling teen was doing, and frankly he was under no illusion that he wasn’t utterly losing right now, despite his Police training.

“Felicity’s mom makes the best meatloaf.”
“I’m sure she does, but I’m not really a fan,” he watched his plate as he added some green beans.
“Who doesn’t like meatloaf?” Thea scoffed.

He listened as both Donna and Felicity cleared their throats in unison.

“What courses were you taking again this year Thea, I can’t quite remember?” Felicity asked, doing her best to divert the conversation.
“English, Math, Science, same same,” Thea prattled, no fucks given, before she turned her attention back to Ted and his neck started to sweat.

“But seriously, how can you not like meatloaf? It’s just meat in the shape of a loaf.”

He couldn’t do anything but shrug.

Oliver’s plate was empty, his attention fully settled on Felicity, to the point where she almost found herself entangled in it.

“Do you like meatballs?” Thea asked, the Pitbull had latched.
“Sure,” Ted attempted to chuckle.
“Well that’s just another shape, it’s the same basic premise of sausage meat,”

“Thea... “ Felicity kindly warned as she blinked away from Oliver, realising that she couldn’t stay in his eyes tonight, even as her heart twisted knots at seeing him.

“I just don’t understand how you don’t like the shape,”

Felicity tracked Oliver’s eyes, they were smiling even as he wet his lips purposefully.

“Well there is a little more to it,” Ted continued to shift uncomfortably under the machinegun questioning.
“Thea...” Felicity pleaded.

“I love you,” Oliver said, brightly and clearly and like no one else was in the room.

It was just them.

Him looking at her, cards on the table, heart on his sleeve.

Felicity’s fork fell from her hand and clanged onto the floor, but no one stooped to pick it up, the entire room was silent and still, except for Thea who sat back in her chair and smiled.

“What?” Felicity muttered.

It was so simple, for so long he had struggled with what to say to her, but it was so simple.

“I love you,” he repeated, sitting up straighter in his chair, his eyes never wavering from hers, “I never stopped loving you.”
He watched her lips tremble as they balanced somewhere between a smile and a gape.

“I made a mistake not holding onto you with both hands,” there wasn’t a thread of uncertainty in his voice, “I made a mistake not fighting for you, for us. But I won’t do that again.”

Felicity watched as Oliver laid it all bare.

“I love you,” he breathed, his words softer, reminding her of the times he would whisper it before they fell asleep.

He wasn’t looking for an answer, and she couldn’t find the words to give him one. He just needed her to know.

“I’m in love with you Felicity.”

Chapter End Notes

Woah... Okay, how was That? :/

Oliver dropping some honesty.

As you may or may not be aware I will be putting ROD on hold this week so all going to plan the final chapter of this story will be up this week (and the following encore / epilogue shortly thereafter).

Wish me luck.
Friday

Chapter Notes

So this is bittersweet but I hope you all like it.

The conclusion of a story is like setting it free into the world and it's always a little scary <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I’m in love with you Felicity.
That’s what he had said, with all the simplicity of saying the words like they were as easy as breathing, like they were the clearest, most obvious thing in the world to him. A simple truth.

Felicity wasn’t sure how long the silence had gone on for but when the clock on the wall behind them became the only source of noise it was obvious it was becoming awkward.
She should say something.

“I think dinner is getting cold,” Felicity remarked into the stale silence.
That was really the best she could do?
She looked down at the floor and took a sharp breath in.
“I dropped my fork,” she said as she abruptly pushed her chair back and stood, “I need a new one.” She walked from the dining, across the foyer and into the kitchen where she took such a heavy breath inward that she fell back against the fridge.

_I’m in love with you Felicity._

*~*~*~*~*

Both Oliver and Ted stood up almost in sync, Oliver a mere second ahead, before the both blurted out “I’ll go,” in unison.

The frosty stare bounced across the table between them.

“She left because of what you said,” Ted remarked.

“Because you’re still here,” Oliver bit back.

“Okay,” Donna cleared her throat as she stood, “you two sit down and put something in your mouths before you say something stupid. I need to go talk to my daughter.”

Both men stayed standing, one refusing to break before the other until Noah too cleared his throat while Donna left the room making them slump back into their chairs. Thea, for her part, ate a fork full of meatloaf and hummed quite happily to herself.

*~*~*~*~*

“I’m sorry, I’m just getting a fork,” Felicity mumbled while she tried to inconspicuously wipe away fresh tears that were pooling in the corners of her eyes.

“Felicity,” Donna soothed, “put the fork down and come here.”

Felicity dropped the fork that was hanging from her fingers like a pendulum and fell into her mother’s embrace, pressing her sodden cheek into Donna’s shoulder.

“I should be mad at him right?” Felicity sniffed, “for saying that, like he did, just blurting it out like it was simple and easy and…” she paused to let out a whimpered sigh, “I should be mad?” Donna combed her fingers through Felicity’s golden tresses, “do you want to be mad?”

“No,” Felicity whispered, “because it was sweet and honest and…” she bit back more fresh tears as she stumbled over the words, “and he just said it, he didn’t know if I felt the same or how I would react, he just said it.”

She sighed listless as she stepped back from the embrace, Donna’s hands still tacked to her arms.

“But then there is Ted, he’s done nothing wrong,” she breathed, “and he doesn’t deserve to get hurt.”

Donna’s fingers coiled around a loose tendril of Felicity’s hair before she pulled it back and smiled. “Felicity, you are one of the kindest people I know,” she reassured, “I suspect that even when you’re breaking up with someone they would thank you for it.”

“You have to say that, you’re my mother,” Felicity blew out a soft laugh.

“That doesn’t make it any less true.”

“I have to make a choice don’t I?”

A sigh bled from Felicity’s lips as Donna softly nodded. “I’m afraid so sweetheart.”

Felicity turned a circle in the kitchen as her shoulders grew heavy and slumped forward.

“I don’t know what to do,” she lamented with threads of anguish weaved through her words. “The decisions that matters the most, are sometimes the hardest to make,” Donna offered with a knowing smile.
“I’ve loved Oliver in one form or another for as long as I can remember,” Felicity spoke, her voice trembled and strained as she sat on the brink of tears once more, “but he broke my heart,” the word cracked in her throat, “how do I know it’s safe again with him?”

“You don’t,” Donna answered with a sympathetic smile, “not with any mathematical certainty. A heart that is truly safe is locked behind stone walls. But when you love someone you give them your heart, unguarded and honest so there is always a risk to it, otherwise you’re not really in love.”

“How did you forgive dad when he left?” she asked softly while she brushed away escaping tears.
“I took his head in my hands,” Donna started as she pressed Felicity’s cheeks between her palms, “and I made him look me in the eyes and boy did I look. Hon it felt like hours I stared into those grey blue eyes of his in absolute silence until I asked him why he wanted to be with me.”
“And what did he say?” Felicity asked, her face slightly squished between her mother’s hands. Donna threw her hands up and shrugged, “I don’t remember because what his mouth said wasn’t important,” she lowered a hand to Felicity’s shoulder and gently rubbed the curve of it, “it was what his eyes said that mattered, and boy did they sing. That was what I needed to hear.”

Felicity offered a thankful half-smile.
“Do you want to hang out in the kitchen a little longer?” Donna asked, giving Felicity’s shoulder a squeeze.
“Just a few more minutes,” came her whispered reply before Donna brushed hair back from her face and pecked a kiss to her forehead.
A mother’s kiss, the type that promised everything would work out just as it’s supposed to.

Donna left Felicity with her thoughts a moment later. Those thoughts swelled and rocked like a tempest ocean in her brain, rolling around words spoken like breathing, I love you.

Swirling.
Rolling.
Diving.

I’m in love with you Felicity.

Felicity wasn’t sure how long she had spent in the kitchen staring out into the failing light as night overtook the sky with a blanket of deep blue.

She had to make a choice.
It wasn’t whether or not she loved Oliver, her heart had already made that decision the moment the words had fluttered from his pillowed lips.

She had never stopped loving him.
Love wasn’t the problem here. Fear was.
Fear that even if you try again, try to fit the pieces back together, that time will eventually break them apart.

Felicity knew to love meant to risk, but losing Oliver again – well, she just didn’t know if she could come back from that.

The first crush is always the hardest – her mother had said those words all those years ago and they were still true today.
She took a steadying breath as she pushed off from the kitchen counter. She had to talk to Oliver, she needed to see his eyes sing.

There wasn’t much noise happening in the dining room when Felicity walked in, but what little Noah produced trying to ask Thea questions about school fell into a hush the moment they saw her.

Not wanting to be cruel because of what she was about to say, Felicity gently laid her hand on the very cusp of Ted’s shoulders just for a calming moment before she pulled it back. She saw Oliver’s eye twitch even though he tried to hide it with a finger across his brow.

“Oliver,” she said quietly, though it sounded like a shout echoing around the nearly silent room, “can we please talk?”

He pushed his chair away from his still empty plate and then followed Felicity from the room. Everywhere inside the house still felt like what they had to say would carry but what needed to be said was for them alone.

She opened the front door and without question Oliver passed through it, with her following and closing the door behind them.

The chilled night air whipped up against Felicity’s bare arms, the temperature quite a change to the mild one enjoyed inside.

“Do you want…” he started to ask as he unzipped his jacket. Felicity shook her head. She imagined it smelled like him and that would only distract her from what she needed to see.

“I’m sorry.” Oliver almost smiled, predicting her reaction of a single raised brow and pursed lips, which came seconds later.

“Those two words again,” she blew out a half annoyed sigh. “I’m not saying I’m sorry for telling you I love you,” he started, the smile still caught in the tips of his lips and fanning up into his cheeks, “because I’m not, I do love you,” his hand twitched at his side, eager to touch her.

Tonight wasn’t about holding back...

His fingers stretched across the dead wasteland of air between them until they danced across the back of her hand.

Felicity didn’t retreat. “But I am sorry if I ruined your dinner.”

His fingers felt so familiar, maybe because she had never really forgotten how they felt. “I’m sorry if I embarrassed you. I was just watching you across the table, thinking about all the big grandiose words that I’ve wanted to say to you,” their fingers entwined without them even really noticing. Their bodies doing what they had once been accustomed to.

“Did you mean it?” Felicity asked after she finally uncoiled her fingers, but one stayed, hooked to his, unwilling to sever that connection.

“Yes, I love you, I never stopped loving you.” They took identical breaths inward, brisk air filling their lungs.

“I realise now that I let you go, I pushed you away, because I was scared,” his eyes glassed over as the weight of his admittance bowed his head, “I was scared that if you went still tied to me that the time would come when you would resent me, resent us, that I would lose you slowly so I thought that it would be better to lose you quickly,” his eyes blinked heavily, spilling a tear, “in some
deluded hope that it would hurt us both less.”
“And?” she whispered.
“I couldn’t be more wrong.”

His thumb touched her wrist, counting the beats as he steadied his eyes on hers.
“I know now that wasn’t my decision to make without you,” he sucked in the air around him, “when you left the morning after Chris’ wedding I understood how painful it must have been to have your voice muted, taken.”

Felicity spent a tear thinking about the words she had written what felt like a lifetime ago. She hadn’t forgiven him then, but now, what about now?

“I never meant to hurt you Felicity. I know I did, but I never meant to,” his eyes welled, tiny blue puddles overflowing with regret.
“I know, Oliver I know, but,” her words stumbled as a shaky, silent sob fell from her body, “but it’s been over a year since I saw you, longer since we broke up, why now?”
She stepped half a foot back, but it felt like a cavern.
“My graduation,” she blew out a silent, stilling breath, “I thought, maybe,” a freefall tear, “you might,” a subtle shake of her head, “I thought you might have come.”
I wanted you there, as my friend.

“I did,” he spoke with breathy reverence, with just a hint of a smile.
“What?”
“It was cold, I don’t know how you lasted that long in that climate,” he jested as his memory walked back to the time so vivid, “but the sun was shining and your mom stood up and screamed when they called your name.”

Felicity swallowed a hitch in the back of her throat as she tried to focus on his words.

“You had drinks at a little place on the corner of 29th and Park where you met him at the bar,” his glazed eyes rolled towards the front door, the first time they had left off hers, “and he made you laugh.”
The pained regret twisted his lips.

“You were there?” words floated with breaths from between her parted lips.
“I made you a promise, whatever happened, I would be there.”
He answered like there had never been another choice in his mind, which there hadn’t.

Her arms cradled her body as a helix of air twisted strands of hair across her face.
“Why didn’t you say anything, why didn’t you come?”
“I wasn’t sure I deserved to. I kept hiding behind this idea that I was just trying to give you space and a life,” he paused as his words pulled like raps from his throat, “but really I was hiding behind my own fears that might never be part of your world again.”

His eyes tracked hers as they reacted to his every word.
“You should have come in,” a soft whisper, shaking and cracked.
Tears pooled in her eyes.
She had wanted him there.

“I should have,” he agreed with a stretched laughed, “god I should have.”
Ted might not have had a hope in hell. Never got that first date or that second...never be the one sitting next to her, free to call her his girlfriend Oliver’s lips grew pensive.

“I wish I was Superman and I could fly so fast around that world that I could turn back time, and
walk through that little stain glass door,” he paused to catch her smile, “because I would alter time
to get a chance to make this right.”
“You know that is never a good idea Oliver, altering the course of time is a dangerous and…” she
let go out a soft laugh that lifted the corner of her lips in a moment that just felt so them, “aside
from it not being possible.”
“Yeah, aside from that,” Oliver returned her words with a smile before he let his eye burrow back
into hers.

“Every word I said in there, I meant,” he spoke softly, his fingers dancing in empty space again
until he took a step closer and caught her hand. It was warm, soft, everything Oliver remembered it
was.

“I love you,” he continued, his fingers squeezing around hers, “you are the face that I want to see in
the mornings and the only one I want to see at night. You are the one that I want hold in my arms
and I want to fall into yours. You are everything I have ever wanted and everything I’m willing to
fight for,” each word he spoke clearly and without hesitation, until “I love you,” drifted from his
lips like a prayer.

Felicity stole her hand back from his but before a weighty sigh could bleed from his lips she
wrapped her hands either side of his face and took a step closer.

Their chests almost touched as they shared breaths for a few silent moments.

Her eyes latched onto his, blue swimming in blue, she needed them to sing....
“Say it again,” she pleaded, holding his head and watching his eyes.
“You are everything I have ever wanted and I will spend a lifetime showing you that, if you’d
have me,” he paused, swallowed, watched, “I love you.”
There were those three words, harnessed like they were his every breath.

But Felicity didn't need to hear them this time, because this time she wasn’t listening, she was
watching and when he spoke those last few words his eyes, like pools of motionless water, showed
her something. Her face, her eyes, reflected in his.

She blinked away first, the emotion too strong of a pull right now.
“I can’t do this tonight,” she apologised, her tone strained and trembled.
“I know,” and he did.
“I have a flight at nine that I’m supposed to... Wyoming,” her hands shook as they fell from his
face, she wasn’t running but she needed time, “I’m supposed to go to Wyoming.”
“And I have one at eleven to New York,” he took her hand to sooth the tremble, “it’s okay, my
words they won’t change Felicity. I know that I love you and that you need time to trust that.”

She nodded along with him.
“I will wait until you give me your choice. I will fight to be by your side and to have you trust that
again. I don’t need any answer tonight, I just needed you to know that you’re it for me. You’re
what I want, you’re my always and I just want the chance to be yours.”

Felicity heard every word that time and when he was done she leaned forward and brushed her lips
against his warn cheek.
“Thank you,” she said as she pulled away.
You’re welcome his smile replied.

“I should go,” Oliver offered, he had left her with a lot.
He had never professed his love on the proviso she would offer hers back, he just needed her to
know.
“I’ll tell Thea,” Felicity spoke with a muted smile as she tipped her head back towards the door.

Felicity stepped back towards the door, her hand circling the handle as Oliver took a few lazy steps towards the stairs before he stopped and fished something from his pocket.

He held the little black box with the white ribbon out to her in the palm of his hand. “This is for you,” he nodded down towards the box before she plucked it from his hand, “open it later because it’s corny and silly but I found it in a market and I couldn’t stop laughing,” he watched as her fingers gently stroked the ribbon, “I thought you might like it.”

She gave him a thankful smile. “Okay.”

Felicity watched as he took the porch steps two at a time until he reached the last one where he turned around to watch her as he stepped from the last one.

His lips wore a smile that even with only the porch light above her, she could tell it worked its way up through his cheeks and into his eyes.

He wasn’t leaving sad, or diminished or hurt – he was leaving hopeful, and willing, and ready. He raised his hand and gently waved it while his plush lips formed around the word goodbye.

She matched the gesture with her own before he slipped into the shadows towards his car.

________________________________________________________________________

When Felicity walked back inside she found dinner finished and her mother clearing the plates.

“Oliver’s waiting in the car for you Thea,” Felicity relayed. The young Queen’s brow grew pensive but Felicity tried to allay it with a smile that said it wasn’t final.

“Thank you for dinner,” Thea said, manners her mother no doubt would insist on. She sized up Ted as she walked past before she feigned a typically-teenage smile (head cocked to the side and lips folded into a smirk). “See ya Ted,” she peeped.

“Don’t stay in England too long,” Thea said quietly as she threw her arms around Felicity, “I miss you.” “I miss you too,” Felicity replied, hugging the wisp of a girl back.

________________________________________________________________________

When Felicity heard Thea leave through the front door, she turned to Ted and offered him an apologetic smile – this was hardly the Thursday night dinner the boy with two accents had probably planned on.

“I think we should talk,” Felicity said, for once no one was taking her choice away from her and while the weight of it was heavy, that’s what life was about. Choices.

“So that was Oliver, your ex-boyfriend,” Ted spoke with a breath held in his throat as he followed Felicity into the living room. “Yes, that was Oliver.” “You should have told me I was up against Oliver Queen,” he smiled to disperse some of the
tension that had settled in the air, “I would have upped my game.”

“IT wasn’t a competition,” she replied while the tips of her lips smiled. “I know,” he answered with a wink that crinkled his nose, “just let me have this so I feel a little better about whatever all that was.”

She mirrored his soft breathy laugh until the room fell quiet again. “He’s the reason why you tried to force me to eat when I said the L word isn’t he?” Felicity drew in a breath of air before she blew it out through rounded lips and nodded. “He’s the reason why we’re here right now?” his question never needed an answer, it was written on her face. “I’m sorry, it just wasn’t fair to move on with you unless I knew how I felt about him.” She saw the tinged pain in his eyes but he wasn’t surprised.

“And how do you feel about him?” he asked as he carded his fingers through his chestnut hair, “because he made it pretty clear how he felt about you.” “I’m sorry about that Ted, I didn’t know he would come, or that he would…” she trailed off with her thoughts. “You don’t have to apologise for that,” he offered her a genuine smile, “can’t hate a guy for putting his heart on the line like that.”

Felicity’s arms hugged around her waist as she tried to even out her breathing. “You deserve to be happy Felicity.” A soft and thankful smile passed across her expression.

“The plane leaves tomorrow at nine, so the cab will be here at seven. Take tonight,” he reasoned, “whatever choice you make, I’ll understand.” “You’re a good man.” “Not every love interest has to be villain right? This isn’t a cable TV show,” he cracked a smile across his pleasant face.

She watched as his hands stayed anchored to his sides, so different to how Oliver’s had been. “Right,” she answered a little above a whisper. “I’m going to go the pool house, I’ll see you in the morning.”

Even when her hand moved into the space between them, his never came to meet her. Instead they sunk into his pockets before he walked away.

“Felicity,” he sighed, their backs facing each other. She turned slowly just as he did. “If I wasn’t sitting beside you tonight when he said he loved you, would you have said it back?” Felicity’s eyes grew pensive as she chewed on her bottom lip.

Ted nodded as he blew out a sigh. That was the answer he expected.

Felicity sat alone in the living room with only the corner lamp for company and a pillow hugged tight against her chest when Donna swung in from the doorway.

“You okay hon?” Felicity looked up from her trance, her bottom lip red and swollen where she had absently grazed on it.
“Yeah,” she breathed, “no, I don’t know.”
Donna floated into the room and sunk into the couch beside Felicity.
“That was all quite exciting for a Thursday,” she smiled as she wrapped her arm around Felicity’s shoulders and pulled her into a soothing embrace.

“I’m sorry,” Felicity pouted after she nestled her head into her mother’s shoulder.
“Don’t be, I just want you to be okay.”
Felicity felt a sigh slip from between her weathered lips, “I don’t know what to do. I’m scared of making the wrong choice.”
“I know baby.”

Felicity looked up with pleading eyes, “can’t you tell me what to do?”
Donna leaned down and opened the drawer of the nearby coffee table, fumbling around for a moment until she found a palm-sized mirror.

“Okay,” she started, laying the mirror on her lap, “you should go to Wyoming with Ted and move on from Oliver.”
Felicity took a sharp breath inward, that hadn’t been what she’d expected her mother to say.
Then Donna held up the mirror in front of Felicity’s face.
“There is your answer,” she smiled as Felicity looked at her reflection.
Her brows were pulled inward, her eyes distraught and her lips taut thin lines.

“Suppose I tell you to start again with Oliver, to be in love with the boy you never stop loving,” Donna spoke softly as she brushed hair back from Felicity’s face.
The reflection was another altogether.
Her eyes, though stained with tears, were wide and hopeful and her cheeks were hiding a smile.

“I think you do know what you do.”
Donna slipped the mirror into Felicity’s hand before she stood. Silently she pulled the little black box Felicity had left by the front door from her pocket and set in on the arm of the chair.

“I know you think we got rid of them all, but if it helps there in an encyclopaedia in the bookshelf,” Donna cajoled with a wink.

“I’m surprised Oliver even remembered about meatloaf night, it’s been so long,” Felicity quietly pondered as Donna walked from the room.
“Oliver never stopped coming when you left, he’s been to almost every one for the last two years.”

Felicity’s head snapped back towards her mother, confused.
“He has?”
Donna nodded, “I think he still wanted to be a part of your life, even if that meant hanging out with your father and I. It’s funny, the two of them actually drew quite close.”

Donna tapped a painted nail against the varnished door frame.
“I don’t think that boy is going anywhere without you again Felicity.”

She watched her mother leave as questions stayed on the tip of her tongue.
*Her father and Oliver, friends?*
*When did he start coming back?*
*Why did no one tell her?*
*Would she have wanted to know?*
So many questions that maybe she wanted the answers for or maybe she truly didn’t care. Felicity
couldn’t decide.

Then her eyes fell to the box, the ends of the ribbon waving softly at her. She pulled them open and sat a little longer in the silence of the dim room until she took the plunge and plucked the top off.

A little handwritten note sat inside.

*I hope you find this as amusing as I did*
~ Oliver

Felicity lifted the note and an instant smile lit up her face. It was a key chain, silver and basic with a pendulum the size of a half dollar at the end. In the centre of that was a cartoon toaster with blushing cheeks and laughing eyes.

She lifted it from the box, her entire body shaking with silent sobs of laughter.

Oliver was right, it was silly and corny but it was also about the sweetest thing she had ever seen.

She turned it in her palm and her laughter turned to a single tear, shed not out of sadness, but just because the inscription on the back was *everything*.

*Made you laugh.*

The exact words he had said to her that first New Year’s eve they shared as children.

He remembered.
Just like she remembered.

*Because that’s what love means.*

[The Next Morning]

“Are you sure about this?” Ted asked as he placed Felicity’s suitcase into the boot of the car.
“*I am,*” she nodded before she blew out a steadying breath.
She had made her choice.

He opened the door for her and Felicity slipped into the backseat and placed her nervous hands onto her lap while Ted slid in next to her.
“Airport please.”
The driver acknowledged them with a nod and pulled away from the kerb without the any fanfare as butterflies, avalanches and fireworks competed in a crazy death match down in Felicity’s stomach.

*This was her choice*

“So this is it,” Ted smiled as they reached the gate on his boarding pass, “and it’s really what you want?”
“Yes, it is.”
She offered him a subdued smile and he gently knocked his fist against her shoulder.

“Have fun at the wedding,” she effused before she leaned in and gave him a warming hug, “if it helps you can tell them I was an awful person and I snored and I’m messy and I hated whatever it is people in Wyoming like,” she finished with a chuckle.
“I mean, I might downplay just how pretty you are, if that’s okay with you.”
“Just warts, all over,” she laughed as her hand gestured in front of her face.
“Big nasty ones,” he added with measured laugh.

“I was glad to have met you Theodore Hunt,” Felicity remarked as she held her suitcase close to her leg, her fingers whitening around the handle as she tried to steady a heart that was taking a chance.
“And I was glad to have met you Felicity Smoak. You deserve a happy hallmark ending.”
“Thank you and you do too.”
“You know seeing the two of you and hearing your story on the cab ride here, it reminded me of a girl I used to know back in high school. Maybe I could get an ending like you,” he smiled freshly, with thoughts of a *may be*.

“I hope you do.”
“It probably won’t involve meatloaf but I seem to recall her liking chicken wings,” he smiled as he looked down at the floor for a moment, “hey and tell Thea that she would make an excellent cop.” Felicity laughed softly, “I’ll be sure to tell her.”

His seat row was called and he began to step away.
“Goodbye Ted.”
“Goodbye Felicity, go get your happy ending.”
“I hope so.”
“For what it’s worth,” he smiled as raised his left hand, “I think you will.”
He pointed over her shoulder before he turned and walked away.

Felicity’s eyes travelled the same way and stopped when they landed on what he had seen – Oliver, sitting on one of the far seats a few rows away, looking down at a piece of paper clasped in his hands as his legs shook nervously.

She walked towards him dragging her suitcase behind her as her eyes stayed pinned to him so she didn’t miss the moment he looked up and saw her.

He smiled, wide and bright, but a thread of trepidation stayed rooted in the azure of his eyes. Oliver Queen was nervous, a rare but beautiful sight.

He stood up and hoisted a bag over his shoulder before he walked a straight path towards her,
stepping over every obstacle in his way until they met in the middle of another row, stopping just inches from each other.

“What are you doing here?” Felicity spoke up first, “your plane doesn’t leave for hours.”
“Actually,” Oliver held his breath, his large chest expanding even more, “it’s boarding now.”

He turned the paper, which he had moments ago been so absorbed in, towards her and waited with a stalled breath for her to read it.

His ticket was to Wyoming.
“I told you, I would fight for us Felicity and if that means following you and crashing some poor girl’s wedding to make a fool of myself then so be it,” he prattled, his brow getting more furrowed, “I realise just how crazy stalker that sounds as I’m speaking it,” he gestured with his hands before he folded them under his arms, “but I just want to be where you are, I don’t want to be without you anymore.”

Felicity cupped a hand across her mouth and started laughing, shallow at first until it grew into one that shook her shoulders and made the deep blue flecks in her eyes sparkle.

“I expected a different response,” Oliver puzzled.
Felicity pulled her own ticket from the front pocket of her handbag and held it out to him.

She was holding a ticket to New York.
“I was planning on fighting for us too Oliver,” she breathed as a smile blanched her lips.

“So I’m going to...” he paused to assess the situation, “and you’re going to...”

Her arm wrapped around his neck pulling him down as she rose onto her tip toes before her lips crashed onto his like thunder clapping against stormy night.

It was a sudden ambush of lips and it took Oliver a moment to realise what was happening before his hands swamped her back, pushing her body tighter against his, as he joined the kiss.

His lips formed around hers, crushing her lower lip between them while the very tip of her tongue traced his outline.

Long, thick fingers coursed down her back, riding the curve of her body as they shared breaths between them. Every moment was hungry and carnal and when his teeth lightly nipped her lip her they parted and their tongues met in the warm confines of her mouth, rolling and tumbling together like waves caressing the shoreline.

They paused for a moment, nose brushing against nose, dewy breaths panted between wet lips.

He kissed her again, desperate to know if he could.
*And he could.*

A third and a fourth time their lips hastily met, brushing, bruising and then falling apart until they stillled, forehead tipped against forehead, eyes drifted open and the taste of each other in their mouths.

“Wyoming or New York?” Oliver asked, the words ghosting over her lips, still wet from his kiss. “How about home?” she purred as her fingers toyed with hair along his neckline, “take me home Oliver.”

Oliver smiled as he jostled the strap of the bag slung over his shoulder before he bent down and coiled his arm around her svelte waist.
She squealed as he lifted her feet off the ground and slumped her body over one of his broad shoulders.

He clutched the handle of her suitcase and in front of an audience of bemused onlookers, they left.

Just like that.
Together.
On a Friday.

*Because that's what love was.*

**THE END.**

Chapter End Notes

So...that happened.
That been I finished.
Done, complete, finito.

Thank you to everyone who supported this fic from the beginning and to those that have joined along the way.

Special thanks to Kylie, Nat & Ash, and anyone else team meatloaf.

PROBABLE FAQs:

YES THERE WILL BE AN EPILOGUE
But I am taking some time with my family over this break so I don't have an date to offer. I can say it'll be worth it. Hopefully.

YES I have another story waiting in the wings. As for what, well... that's a secret.
Special Thanks to Emms who read over this for me late last night while I complained about being tired and hating it, you're a champ ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

15 Months Later, July 2011

Felicity dangled the toaster keyring from her middle finger before she kicked the door closed in the high rise apartment that overlooked downtown New York.

The skyline danced with florescent lights of almost every colour imaginable and Felicity took a moment to watch it through the naked windows in the dark of the spacious one bedroom apartment.

She toed off her shoes and listened to the echoing sound of them clunking onto the polished wood floors as her eyes scanned the silent evening. It never ceased to amaze her how the noise outside never seemed to bleed through the soundproofed glass.

She shook her hair free from the elastic that had tirelessly kept it in a low ponytail all day at the
office as she ventured deeper into the dark and quiet apartment.

After switching on a single lamp in the living room Felicity slipped the Wayne Enterprises lanyard from around her neck and rolled her ankles, stiff from the unapologetically fashionable but not sensible heels she had trundled home in from the thriving New York technical branch. Ordinarily she would have taken a cab or the subway the few blocks home but today she wanted the walk.

She wanted the smells and the sights of New York in the balmy summer evening, because where else could you get a mixture of hot dogs and churros, the latter of which she couldn’t resist and ate four of on the way home. Where else could you clip down the sidewalk and hear a busker singing 80s classics only a short walk from where another busker was beatboxing?

She loved it.
Every part of it.

She shimmied her magenta dress up around her waist and let out an unrepentant sigh as she worked her sheer pantyhose down her legs.

Her eyes glanced at the clock and she let out another audible sigh after reading it, *7:38pm*.

The pantyhose stayed where she hung them over the back of an embossed armchair as she reached a hand around the back of her a-line dress, scrambling for a few moments until she managed to grip the zipper tag.

With an uneven tug Felicity released the zipper and stood like a statue to allow the dress to float down around her ankles. She kicked it free of her feet and left it where it sat in a crumpled heap. She’d collect that later.

There was something so remarkably freeing about strutting around a dimly lit apartment in nothing but your matching lingerie and Felicity for one *loved* the sensation.

Cool air from the vent above brushed down Felicity's body sparking a smattering of goosebumps down her stomach and across her back as she made her sloth-like way to the fridge.

She opened it and sighed at its stark contents.
Hummus.
A head of broccoli from God knows when.
A single take out container of Chinese food that had been there since Monday.
A half drunk bottle of wine.
No one could *master chef* something out of that.

She hummed a song she didn’t know the name of as she poured herself a glass of wine before managing to discover a packet of crackers lurking almost forgotten in the pantry.

She discarded the first two from the opened packet and took a bite from the third.
With hummus she probably wouldn’t notice they were a touch stale.

Three crackers and hummus washed down with half a glass of wine later Felicity rolled her neck and let out a sigh she had held in most of the afternoon before she unclipped her bra and hung it on the corner of one of the bar chairs nearby.

The wine glass became her companion as she walked into the bathroom and turned on the shower.

The modern room of slate rock and black tile accents almost immediately became engulfed in a rich steam that seemed to melt away the long day of running tests on some interesting
developmental phase designs. An actual dream job.

After placing the empty glass on the vanity Felicity shed the last scrap of clothing, a pair of lace and chiffon bone ivory panties, worn to be shown, but the empty apartment wasn’t interested.

Seconds after stepping into the shower Felicity was drenched in the warm, caressing trails of water that slalomed down her curves. Her eyes lulled closed as she dipped her face into the streams from the showerhead and let the tiny beads massage her tired eyes.

A hand absently stroked down the conclave of her chest before passing between her breasts. She hummed with closed lips at the contact, her body craving something more but making do with the slow trance of fingers over skin.

Her thumb traced circles around both nipples before it dropped listless to her side.

It wasn’t the same.
Even with her eyes closed her hands could never replicate his.
Soft at the palm and the pads of his fingers sometimes a little rough. Thick and assured of every movement they never wasted moments.

With his fingers alone Oliver Queen could have Felicity trembling and speaking in tongues, her own just couldn’t compare.

Where she would ordinarily linger in the shower Felicity lathered, washed, rinsed and conditioned in about ten minutes before she stepped out and wrapped a fluffy white towel around her body, a complete one and a half times because this towel was the epitome of huge.

A few minutes under the blow dryer and her once soaking tresses became more like damp tendrils over her shoulders which she swept back behind her ear.

Silently she walked to the bedroom and, after a rudimentary pat down with the towel for giants, she shed it and replaced it with a chocolate brown kimono robe made with a heavenly silk that melted against her form.

Her eyes wandered to the clock beside the bed, 8:43pm.

She sunk into the chair at the desk and balanced her feet on a rung at the side before she opened her laptop and watched it spark to life.

A few minutes later found her returned to the same chair with the remainder of the wine in her glass and Facebook on her screen.

She smiled at the pictures that filled her timeline; her parents playing scrabble where every word her mother played was something dirty, Thea taking selfies at a beach in the bright Starling sunshine, there were even two posts from Ted and his girlfriend in a chicken wing eating competition.

Felicity felt her breath hitch when the clock finally ticked over to 9pm. She settled herself deeper into the seat of the chair just as an answer icon flashed up on her screen. Her reaction was immediate, she didn’t need another breath to answer it.

“You look like my boyfriend but...” she purred, “I haven’t seen him in a week so I might be forgetting what he looks like.”

Oliver shook out a soft chuckle.
“Take your shirt off, that’s the only way I’ll know it’s you,” Felicity ordered with a smile that pulled up one side of her naturally pink lips and her arms playfully wrapped around her chest.

Oliver laughed a second time, but when that one pensive brow remained arched at him he loosened the Windsor knot on his tie and lifted it from his body.

Felicity watched him with playfully scrutinizing eyes when he slipped his navy suit jacket down his arms and placed it on the table beside him before his fingers moved adeptly down his shirt’s placket, unbuttoning it.

He shrugged the charcoal shirt from his body, exposing his wide shoulders and the slopes of his arm muscles that wove down from them.

“Better?” he asked, as he bowed his head in servitude. Felicity tapped a finger to her lip and hummed. “Not quite, I still can’t be sure,” she pointed the same finger to the white singlet he was still wearing.

Oliver moved quickly and in a flash the white spandex cotton was thrown to the floor beside the chair and he was completely void of clothing on his upper half.

Felicity smacked her lips together as she leaned in close to the screen, studying the familiar rises and dips of his chest muscles, the tiny dusty pink nipples that instantly stood to attention and the faint dusting of blond hair between his pecs. She sighed as she reminisced dragging her tongue across those places, feeling the warmth of his body bleed into her and the taste of his salty skin tickle her taste buds.

Just the thought of it was making her wet between the legs, heating the tops of her thighs where they touched.

“Hello Oh-luh-ver,” she whispered, smoky tones touching each syllable of his name. She watched him adjust in his seat and she would place money on that being because he was already sporting a growing erection.

“When did you get home from work?” he asked, rolling out the same sort of question he had asked every other day they had talked this way, which was every day he’d been away. “About an hour and half,” Felicity sighed as she slid a wayward hand up the inside of her thigh, halting it before it could feel any of the heat radiating off her, “the apartment misses you.” Her lips folded into a pout. “I miss the apartment,” Oliver replied, his voice creamy and the words falling together melodically as he adjust again, shifting the fabric of his pants out of the camera view to allow his throbbing erection more room to grow.

“The shower misses you too.”

He watched, gulping air, as a single digit ran down the neckline of her robe, exposing the soft curve of her breasts. She was absolutely naked under that chocolatey silk wrapping. Her skin looked so smooth and luminous and Oliver could almost feel his fingers tingling at the phantom feel of it under his pads.

His lips smacked together and his tongue wet them slowly as his eyes grew hungry for her and his cock grew desperate. It may have only been a week, but if it wasn’t for the reason he was out here, he would have flown back on day two to sink inside of her and feel every inch of that perfect body with his tongue.
He missed her voice whispering anything into his ear. Even the times when they sat huddled up on the couch watching something stupid and she would lean up and whisper a random movie quote with absolutely no context.

He missed the smell of her fresh from the shower. He could live a euphoric life based on the sensations of her lying on his chest with her damp hair dancing fresh notes of her fruity shampoo into his nose.

He missed the taste of her mouth when they spent so long kissing that her lips were left red and her skin blotched with a rash from his stubble.

He missed making her orgasm.
He couldn’t even find words to explain how much he missed the sights, the sounds, the smells and the tastes of making that happen.

He shifted again in the dining room chair of their Starling apartment, his erection was now becoming torturous.

“Anything else?” his voice was becoming strained and he knew she could tell by the smile that grew across her pillowed lips.

“The kitchen island misses you,” her finger dipped under the fabric of her robe and Oliver almost choked as he watched the fabric shift, she was absolutely touching her nipple, “and the couch and of course the bed.”

She pinched her nipple between her thumb and forefinger and breathed out a long, drawn sigh as she watched Oliver breathe deep.

He knew exactly what she was doing and her smile grew almost wicked.

“The bed misses me?” he asked, absently stroking a hand down his pants, over the ridge of his hard erection that if he stood up right now you could hang a towel from it like a clothesline.

“Very much so,” her thumb circled her budded nipple.

“Well tell them I miss them too.”

She watched the threads of his throat constrict when he swallowed.

“How was work?” she asked, still with her hand hidden behind her robe.

“Long,” he sighed.

“Are you home now?”

“Just walked in the door.”

She swapped hands, giving the other breast some attention, a move which caused Oliver to hum loud enough that she heard it through the speakers.

“Are you finished what you went to do?”

Oliver cleared his throat, it was hard to concentrate on her words when all the blood had rushed between his legs.

“Almost, I just have a little to do tomorrow, which means...”

Felicity sighed, a sixth sense told her she knew what he was going to say.

“...I won’t be coming to the airport to get you,” he finished with an apologetic smile.

“O-li-veeeer,” she breathed before her lips formed a pout.

“I’m sorry baby, but mom is going to collect you and I’ll meet you back at their place.”

Her hand pulled out from her robe and slid along the lip of her desk.

“I wanted to have car sex on the way home,” she answered softly before rolling her teeth across her lower lip.
“You did?”
“I had it all planned, I was going to wear a cute sundress take my panties off while you were driving and see how long it took before you pulled over and I was going to sit on your lap and we were going to fuck like crazy college co-eds,” she explained, disappointment furrowing in her brows.

“Damn,” Oliver choked, “I promise I’ll make it up to you.”
“How?” she asked, her brow perking up.
“Any way you want,” it was Oliver’s turn to purr with a husky rasp added. Felicity smirked, “I suppose I can think of something.”

“How was work?” he asked, hoping the change in discussion might stem the thumping around his groin.
“I don’t want to talk about work,” Felicity answered, listless.
“Okay baby what do you want to talk about?”
He shuffled, rolling his naked shoulders into the back of the chair.

Felicity stood up, her torso the only thing caught on Oliver's screen. He watched her take either side of the tie that fastened her robe closed and, with one pull, she released it, filling his screen with her creamy, very naked body.
“Jesus fucking Christ Felicity,” Oliver sputtered, so loud was the groan that followed he was pretty sure even Mrs Grant, the deaf lady next door, would have heard him.
“I don’t want to talk at all,” she remarked, quite precisely and calmly as she sat back down.

Oliver's eyes were unmistakably glued to her breasts to the point where he even leaned in, smacking his lips and leaving them parted, as his eyes devoured the lush pink of her nipples to the soft shadows that cupped the underside of the curves.

“Something wrong?” she asked as she casually picked the underside of her fingernail.
“No, no,” he coughed, trying to dampen the rasp in his voice, “nothing’s wrong.”

“Good because I need you to keep a clear head for a few moments longer, I have an idea.”
The fantastic smile she beamed was enough to steal his attention from her chest.
“What’s the idea?”

Felicity stood up and walked across the room, sashaying her ass until he elicited a guttural “oh fuck,” from Oliver.

She took something from the drawer beside the bed but even squinting and leaning in Oliver couldn’t tell what it was before she laid it beside her pillow. She then walked slow, undoubtedly on purpose, to the chair she had been sitting on.

Oliver watched silently as she moved it closer to the bed. He groaned into his fist to try and stifle it when she bent over to line up the angle before she walked the laptop to the chair and placed it down.

He now had an almost perfect, slightly angled view of the bed they shared, almost like he was sitting at the foot of it on his usual side. It was a view he’d had in real time, many times. It also afforded him a clearer view of what she had placed on the bed.

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between her thighs.

“It’s not the same thing as you, but I’ll make do,” she peeped, lifting one leg at the knee. “And I’m watching?” Oliver cracked, suddenly and unreasonably jealous at the highlighter pink toy she was walking across her sex. “Yes, and take off your pants.”

Oliver surprised himself at just how quickly he moved to complete that task. He wasn’t even sure if she meant for him to leave on his briefs, but in less than it would take a person to spell his name, both his pants and his briefs were around his ankles.

“Is it hard?” she asked, dipping the head between her folds, feeling the bunny ears brush against her clit. “Yes,” Oliver croaked, there was no way he was playing this cool and honestly he didn’t care, his girlfriend was naked on a bed in front of him with a sex toy in her hands asking about the condition of his cock, there wasn’t any cool to be played. “Show me,”

He didn’t hesitate that time either, standing up just enough to show her just what she had done. When he heard her soft, breathy laugh echo through his speakers he sat back down.

She was smiling, wide and he heard the click of the on button. The toy sprang to life and Oliver saw the instant the buzz hit her clit – her free hand fisted in the blanket and her head tipped back against the white leather bedhead.

“Is it wet Oliver,” she huffed, as her eyes snapped to the laptop screen. Oliver skimmed his thumb over his leaking head.

“Yes.”

“Are you touching it?” she asked in stunted breaths.

“No,” Oliver admitted, “do you want me to?”

“Yes, yes please.”

He took his thick cock at the base and slowly worked his grip up and down the shaft, three times, enough to make him groan.

“Fuck Oliver,” she cursed almost breathless as she fed the tip inside her. Her body, as though knowing it was artificial, fought it for a moment but when Oliver mumbled a heated “Fuck baby,” her body opened up to it and she eased it, breathlessly inside. She pushed the vibrator deeper allowing the rotating pearls to stroke internal spots before she crooned his name in one long sound while the three different feelings took her body. He moaned her name when she bucked against the toy that was teasing her walls. He wanted to be there, he wanted to smell her arousal.

His hand rubbed up and down his shaft on impulse, he wasn’t even watching, his eyes were glued to her, watching her body writhe and the sight of a blush spreading over her chest.

More curse words fell without pause from his mouth when Felicity unplugged her hand from the twisted bedspread and danced a light touch across her nipple.

“Are you gripping it hard?” she asked, her voice warm and low, as she tweaked just the tip of her nipple. “Yes,” he huffed, nearly breathless. “Is it warm in your hands?”

Her eyes struggled to stay wide as she watched him, watching her. “Yes.”

“Faster,” she coaxed.
His lips tightened and twisted and his eyes began to fall back into his head. *He was close* and she knew it.

“Baby you first,” he spoke, almost pleaded.  
“Not this time,” she hummed as she cupped and kneaded her breast.

Oliver reached for his singlet and managed to pluck it from the floor with two shaking hands as he worked himself close to climax.

Listening to her moan as she thrust the entire shaft of the vibrator inside her, while her clit was treated to a stimulant like no other pushed Oliver right to the edge as he wrapped his cock in the white cotton and exploded between its weave.

“She, Felicity, fuck,” his shoulders shook as he panted and scraped the words up his throat.

She watched him with a smile, watching as the trail of sweat beaded across his forehead. He would kiss her normally, slow and hard while his hand ravished her body and the thought of that – tight pinches, slowing and deep thrusts and her lip nipped between his teeth was enough for Felicity feel the shudder of her own release, slicking the shaft that wasn’t Oliver was wasn’t a bad fill in.

She could only imagine what fun they could have together with this, *and it was 100% waterproof*.

Oliver cleaned himself off and bundled the singlet together as a smile grew over his face. He didn’t make a habit of going away of business but next time he did they were definitely doing this again.

“Fuck I love you,” he growled, near delirious.  
“I know,” Felicity smiled as she placed the toy beside her, letting the last tingles from her orgasm wash over her, “I love you too.”

“You look tired.”

Felicity looked over to the clock, it was only 9:50pm but a week of tight deadlines made it seem much later.

“I’m exhausted.”

“Did you eat?”

She laughed at the caring, almost parental nature of his tone, especially given they were both naked and still wearing the afterglows of climax.

“No,” she replied sheepishly, “well I had stale crackers and hummus.”

She nodded like she was proud of the achievement but Oliver looked about ready to laugh.

“Put your robe back on,” he insisted, chuckling only a little.

“Why?”

“Because,” he looked down at his watch, “you’re about to have a visitor.”

Felicity slipped off the bed and, out of view of the camera, she wrapped the robe back around her body, moments before there was a knock on the door.

She bundled the laptop in her hands and walked it to the kitchen where she placed it on the island and gave Oliver as curious look before she trundled to the front door and opened it.

It was a young guy in a busboy uniform from their favourite Italian restaurant a block away. He didn’t say anything but offered her a smile as he handed her a tray that resembled one used for room service in a posh hotel.

He walked away before she could offer anything more than a thank you.

“Did you do this?” she squealed as she placed the tray down on the kitchen island, “and was I
supposed to give him a tip?”
“All taken care of,” Oliver smiled through the screen, so warm she could almost feel it, “I wanted you to have a good meal tonight.”
“Why?” she asked, her mouth already half stuffed with Alfredo pasta.
“Because I’ve been a week without you, tomorrow night, the instant we’re alone...” his voice grew thick and growly and Felicity knew exactly what he was insinuating.

“I’ll be sure to fill up on airplane crackers so I’m ready for the fuckening.”
Oliver hummed as he smacked his lips together.
“God this food is so good,” she added, table manners thrown officially out the window as she crammed her mouth full.

“Eat, sleep, I’ll see you tomorrow,” he chuckled.
“You’re still working?”
“Just a little tonight and tomorrow morning.”

Felicity swallowed her mouthful.
“I hope your client appreciates the extra work you’ve been putting in,” she said with slightly pursed lips.
“You know,” Oliver started with a wide smile, “I think when they see the results tomorrow, they will.”

She shot him a look that stated categorically that they better be or they might be hearing from her.
“I can stay if you want me to watch you fall asleep again tonight,” Oliver added, as it had become their custom.
“No it’s okay,” she started to yawn, the idea of sleep a pleasing one, “finish your work so you can be all mine tomorrow, the sooner the better.”
“I love you,” Oliver remarked, touching the screen in front of him at the place where her nose was.
“I love you too,” she bopped his nose in return.
“Goodnight.”
She blew him a pouted kiss.
“Goodnight.”

[The Next Day]

“So, have you found time to read anything worthwhile?” Moira asked, another sporadic question like the others that had been peppered through the trip from airport.

It was a pleasant drive, Felicity had always found Oliver's mom quite an enjoyable car companion, she talked just enough so the journey wasn’t laced with awkward silences, but not so much that you wondered if she was intending to breathe during the twenty questions a minute she threw up...like her mother would.

Felicity tugged absently on the hem of her denim shorts, this was the first time she realised that it was actually a little odd her own mother hadn’t picked her up.

Donna wouldn't ordinarily miss an opportunity to interrogate her daughter.

“Oh,” Felicity finally spoke up when she realised the silence had ticked on a little longer than usual, “I just started one called Take a Memo, it’s quite scandalous.”
She watched the tree lined streets grow fancier as she thought about the last few conversations with her mom.
Felicity wouldn’t have thought for a minute that they were strained, but looking back they hadn’t been typical either. The calls were short, which at the time hadn’t bothered a work-tired Felicity, in fact she had been thankful for the excuses her mother had prattled off, but now, looking back, they hadn’t even been good excuses:

*I have to yoga before bed.*
It was 8pm her time.
*Your father needs the phone.*
It was a cellphone call.

*Her mother was ghosting her.*
Felicity scowled at the growing McMansions.
For the last month her mother had been ghosting her and she was only realising this now!

“I’ll have to look that up,” Moira smiled as they turned into the gated drive.
Felicity nodded with a soft smile, her mind still mostly engage at the words she would share with her mother at some stage this weekend.

The next turn found them pulling up to the gate of the Queen mansion and while Moira uncharacteristically fumbled around for the gate opener Felicity found herself staring nostalgically at the house next door.

She blinked up at her old window as a flood of memories washed over her, a mixture of happy, angsty, sad and every feeling in between.

Each moment, now a memory, valuable in its own right.
Even the ones that hurt.

Because life wasn’t about making perfect moments.
Although she still had much to learn, Felicity understood that life was about taking something from each moment. Choosing the ones to learn from, the ones to cherish, and the ones to try and understand as best you could.

They were all something.
All worth their place.

“Must have left the clicker inside,” Moira remarked as Felicity barely registered.
If she had, she might have realised just how unlike Moira Queen such a thing was.

But Felicity wasn’t paying much attention when her eyes stumbled upon a little boy and girl playing in the front yard. He wore glasses and stood just a foot taller than the girl with a mess of dark blonde hair and a bright smile.

They were running through a sprinkler toy, laughing with that sound that no adult could ever replicate but you knew it all the same.

Felicity looked across the car only momentarily to Moira who was pushing the call button on the gate.
“Thea, can you open the gate please,” Moira spoke clearly as she waved a smile at Felicity.

Felicity kept her mouth closed, but her brows did pinch together for just a second when she tried to understand why Moira didn’t just enter the code that would have opened the gate. The call to the house seemed so unnecessary.

Moira pulled the car in front of the house that never ceased to amaze Felicity.
“Oliver won’t be too long,” Moira chatted as they walked from the car and into the house. Felicity was fleetingly surprised when Thea didn’t rush to greet them, but she decided the young teen had probably absconded back upstairs after opening the gate.

She folded down the handle on her overnight bag which, if she was honest, was mostly full of slutty lingerie she intended to parade around in, in front of Oliver back at their apartment.

“You can just leave your bag there, it’s fine,” Moira noted as Felicity went to start up the stairs.

“Oh, it’s fine, I’ll just squirrel it away in Oliver’s old bedroom,” Felicity said with her head cocked a little to the right.

She knew Moira hated clutter left in the foyer of the house.

“It’s fine dear, no sense in taking it upstairs.”

Felicity considered arguing the point, but as she released the handle of the suitcase and started to follow Moira towards the kitchen she decided it would be wholly counterproductive.

“Oliver has been working so hard, you’ve probably barely seen him,” Felicity casually talked as she watched Moira pour a glass of something that definitely smelled alcoholic.

Felicity glanced up at the clock, it was 2pm.

She took the blood red sangria and smiled.

“Oh he’s managed to be around.”

Felicity opened her mouth to ask why the storm covers were on the kitchen windows but before she could Moira had threaded an arm through the crook of her elbow and walked her towards the conservatory.

“It’s such a nice afternoon why don’t we take our drinks out by the pool,” Moira offered.

The air con in the house must have been set pretty chilly because it felt like a beer fridge in there, 

*but maybe* Felicity supposed, *Moira was menopausal...*

“Sure, that sounds like...”

Felicity didn’t finish her sentence once Moira pulled back the patio door curtains and Felicity saw something that stole the words right from her mouth and the air from her lungs.

What looked to be the entire backyard of the Queen property was covered in a heavy duty tent and every inch of the lawn was thick with snow, blanketing it in luminous white.

And standing amidst it was Oliver in a perfect blue peacoat and black slacks, wearing a smile that was even more dazzling than the picture before her.

In a haze Felicity stepped out into it and was dusted with fine white powder that had almost every characteristic of snow, bar one – *the smell.*

Maybe it was the fact it fell at the same time that houses were filled with the scent of woody pines, or whether the snow always smelled just a little glossed in smoke from the fires that burned through those particularly cold nights.

Whatever it was, that was the only reminder that it wasn’t December, it was July.

Before she registered anyone else's presence, Camila was holding her drink and Caitlin was wrapping a warm jacket around her body.

She should have been cold, the temperature was brisk and the air breathed goosebumps up the back of her legs, but as Felicity’s eyes roved around the crowd of bystanders, each one a vividly important face, she saw only one that lit the fire in her core.
“Oliver,” she breathed, her warm breath like a smoke stack from her mouth as she stopped just ahead of him, her fingers toying with the edge of his black woolen scarf, “what is going on?”

“When we were apart for two years, I missed two New Year's with you, two times I should have been there to tell you we'd start another year together, two times I should have held you tight and kissed you on the stroke of midnight,” he breathed deeply, his hands nervously rolling over each other, “I want to make up for lost time.”

Felicity couldn't rein in the smile that was taking over her face even as a dusting of snow chilled her cheeks and nose.

“So you made it snow in July?” she chuckled, patting the sides of his peacoat before dancing her fingertips down the lapels.

“I wanted to ask you something,” he said, his voice cracking at the end, barely enough to be noticed by anyone but her.

It was then Felicity's eyes finally took a moment to really look around the yard, her parents, his parents, Thea, Chris, Caitlin, Camila, Tommy, John, Lyla, Tildy, Barry and his boyfriend Curtis and of course Jonas.

“Wait...” she breathed, her eyes widening as her brain caught up.

Before she could finish her thoughts aloud Oliver was holding her hand between his, warming it between his trembling palms.

“Felicity, being with you has made me realise the person that I want to be. I want to be a man you're proud of, a friend you can always rely on and a person worthy of your trust,” Oliver spoke with his blue eyes like a calm, still ocean pooling into hers, “I want to wake up with you every morning and see you to sleep every night,” a soft chuckle bled from his lips and made one pass over hers, “I want to laugh with you, smile with you, cry with you and dream with you.”

One of his hands dipped into his pocket and Felicity realised her own hand was trembling.

“I want to spend the rest of my life with you...”

He dropped to one knee, her hand still folded into one of his.

“...If you'll have me.”

His eyes shone like crystals, clear and honest, not a cloud set inside them.

“Oliver...” she sighed, her voice barely working.

“Felicity,” he took a deep breath in, his chest expanding, “will you marry me?”

Felicity knelt down in front of him, her bare knees digging into the snow and sending a shiver up her body, “God this is cold,” she laughed, “but yes, yes I will.”

She kissed him quickly, his warm lips quivering against hers as her fingers smoothed up his cheeks and carded through his hair.

They stood up together, their lips still dancing hasty kisses before Oliver's arms surrounded Felicity and lifted her into the air. A laugh broke their kiss apart while Oliver twirled her in a circle, his feet making scuffs in the snow.

The crowd around them cheered, her mother cheering the loudest, but Felicity could only see Oliver and the brilliant smile he wore so openly.
“This is what you've been doing?” she asked as he lowered her to the ground but kept his hands locked at the small of her back.
“I'm sorry,” he smiled coyly, “but it was a good lie.”
“So every night you called me in a suit?”
Her eyebrow hitched up accusatorily.
“I'd put it on just for you.”
His smile pulled up one side of his mouth.
“And Tildy? I would ring you at the office.”
Felicity found the lovely older woman's smiling face in the crowd as she waved timidly.
“I made her lie,” Oliver admitted.

Felicity slapped his arm and he playfully flinched.
“Still a yes?” he asked cautiously.
She pursed her lips together as her eyes wove through his.
“Still a yes.”
Her hands cupped the side of his face and she trickled a kiss down to his lips.

He watched as she drew in a breath and blew it out between a smiled.
“But also why wait?”
His lips mouthed the word what but nothing came out.

A light shrug of her shoulders as her eyes bounced around the room before anchoring back in his. “You went to all this trouble and everyone we love and would invite is here,” her voice quivered like his had moments ago, “I’m just saying, if you wanted to, why wait,” she watched him blink methodically, “we could get married now.”

His eyes brightened as the smile he was wearing took over his face and plumped his rosy cheeks. “Yes,” his head nodded almost frantically, “yes I want to, here, now,” his lips were moving as quick as he could get the words out, until his eyes pulled back and his breath hitched, reality hitting, “but we don't have anyone that can.”

Felicity looked over at Chris and in a secret language only they knew she cocked her head to the side and raised her left eyebrow twice before curling the right side of her mouth up into a smile.

Chris nodded, understanding every word before he wheeled forward.
“Yes we do,” Felicity beamed, her fingers looping through Oliver's.
“Funny story,” Chris started with a grin, “I’m a marriage celebrant and I’m Jewish so win-win.”
The friends and family who had been cheering only moments ago were now silent.
“You want to get married now Oliver?”
There wasn’t a touch of hesitation in her question, nor in his instant answer.
“Yes.”
Felicity looked down at her denim shorts and blew out a chuckle, “who knew I’d be wearing denim shorts on my wedding day and it not be in Vegas.”

The laugh shook her shoulders even as Oliver captured her lips with his, kissing her long and languid, letting the joviality pass between them before their lips broke apart and their foreheads pressed together, having them share the same air.

“Not that I want to interrupt this perfect moment,” Moira spoke softly as her eyes smiled at the two of them, “but I think I have something a little more befitting the occasion upstairs,” she turned more towards Felicity, showing only kind adoration in her expression, “if you would like.”

Donna clapped her hands together as she edged her way closer, “I know you only plan on doing
this once Hon, so maybe a couple of hours and we could have you impromptu wedding ready.”

Felicity's fingers tightened around Oliver's hand. She would marry him now, in a heartbeat, no wardrobe change and the stench of a 6 hour flight still leaking from her pores. What she wore and how her hair was sitting on top of her head in a messy bun with tendrils spilling down either side of her face didn’t matter.

But she would also marry him tomorrow or the next day or in 5 years time if that’s what they both wanted. There was no time limit on her love and no expiry date to her yes.

They didn’t need to say I do that very moment for fear they would never have another.

“A few hours?” she asked in a whisper just for him.
“I'd wait a lifetime for you,” he answered just a quietly.
She smiled and he matched.
“Yeah?”
His fingers brushed back some of those wayward tendrils of hair.
“Yeah.”

They separated their fingers as Felicity backed away, waiting until they couldn’t stretch their arms any longer before their hands floated to their sides.
“See you soon,” she mouthed, her eyes staying affixed to his.
He nodded, just the once. Definitive.

“Oliver,” Moira leaned in, her hand on his shoulder, “make this place magic.”
She winked as she walked away and Oliver watched the three of them disappear into the house.

“Tommy,” Oliver threw him keys from his pocket, “get a cake.”
Tommy caught the keys and nodded before him and Camila disappeared.

“We'll sort out some chairs,” Robert offered as him and Noah started towards the pool shed where the excessive amount of white slatted chairs his mother had bought last year were stored and would finally have a purpose.

“I'll see if I can rustle up some flowers around town,” Caitlin offered and Oliver accepted with a smile.
“I'll work on getting the paperwork so this wedding is valid,” Chris remarked before he too disappeared inside.

Tildy told Oliver that she would get a caterer here and John advised he knew a bartender that would happily come last minute.

Oliver looked down at his brown loafers in the white snow and reminded himself to breathe. This was happening. He was going to marry Felicity.

“What should I do?” he muttered to no one in particular.
A hand touched his shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze.
“Go get ready, I have this,” Thea said as she walked around the front of him.
“But I should be doing something here to get this ready.”
Thea's lips pursed together in a smile, “Big brother, I'm on the Prom Committee and our mother has an entire craft room at my disposal. Trust me, I have this.”
Oliver blew out a breath he didn't notice had stalled in his throat. “I don't have a suit,” Oliver realised as he looked down. Thea smiled, “yes you do, it's in the guest bedroom downstairs.” “Do I want to know how you got that, or why?” Her smile grew as she shook her head softly, “probably not. Go, get dressed Oliver, write your vows, take a minute, we have this.”

Felicity could hear herself breathing. It was a surreal feeling. She heard every breath, in, out, in, out but it was as though they weren't hers because as she stared at her reflection in the mirror everything about the face staring back at her was familiar and yet, she smoothed two hands down the side of the brand new ivory white lace dress that had been hiding in Moira's closet, unworn, it was so unfamiliar.

She was in a wedding dress, of sorts, it wasn't typical or expected but as her mother stood behind her and finished primping the last of the freshly coiled waves that framed her face she saw a bride.

*Her.*

*In and out.*

*Breathe.*

Like clockwork she forced herself to breathe, fearful that any deviation would find the tremble in her hands take over her entire body.

She didn't know why she was nervous. Marrying Oliver was the easiest decision to make. She had never in her life being so sure about a decision, but here, now, she was reminding herself to breathe.

*In and out.*

“It's normal to be nervous,” Donna said softly into Felicity's ear. Felicity turned away from her reflection to face her mother. She folded her lips together to halt the tremble that had spread to them. “But I shouldn't be, I love Oliver,” it was even the easiest thing to admit.

Donna fussed a little more over the ends of Felicity's hair, “oh hon, nerves aren't about love. But I'm telling you the minute you see him and he sees you, all these nerves will melt away.” “You promise?” “Have I ever steered you wrong before?” Donna smiled as she shook her head gently. “You and your father may be the geniuses in the family,” Donna chortled as she handed Felicity her lip gloss, the final touch, “but when it comes to matters of the heart I beat you both out.”

Felicity turned back towards the mirror and swiped the gloss over her lush rose lips.

*In, out, in out.*

*Breathe in, breathe out* Oliver reminded himself as his eyes walked around the transformed winter wonderland.
Chairs now stood either side of an aisle lined in yellow rose petals that stood out radiantly against the stark white. He kept still as Caitlin pinned a boutonniere to his jacket before smoothing down the lapel.

In the less than two hours that Felicity had been gone something as surprising as snow in July had been, unbelievably, turned into something even more magical – *a winter wedding in July*.

He walked to the table where Tommy placed the cake. “Tommy, is this a baby shower cake?” Oliver asked, even though the answer was pretty obvious in the blue frosting and the little baby in the corner. *Congratulations, it’s a boy.*

“It was this or a phallic shaped one,” Tommy shrugged, “but she gave me this,” he smiled as he held up a bag of frosting.

He leaned over the cake and after a few moments stepped back, “now it reads 'congratulations, it's a wedding’”

The baby in the corner was now wearing a bowtie and a stick figure in a dress was standing beside him.

“Perfect,” Oliver laughed, “you up for one more job?”

Tommy popped the collar on his jacket and smiled.

“Want to be my best man?”

Oliver held out his hand and Tommy threw his arms around Oliver’s back, pulling him into an embrace.

“That reminds me,” Tommy started as he pulled away and dipped his hand in his pocket, retrieving a plastic egg which he placed in Oliver's hand.

“Don't ask how many coins I had to spend to get those, and you'll probably want to buy proper ones.”

Oliver looked down at the egg and the two rings set inside it as a smile broached his lips.

“You had one job Thomas,” Thea sighed as she walked up to the table and laughed.

Oliver looked across at Thea who was now dressed in a dusty pink dress that floated like air down her frame with a scalloped hem around her knees.

“Speedy, you actually look really nice,” Oliver remarked.

“She's ready.”

And with those two words Oliver forgot how to breathe again.

*In, out, in, out.*

*Just breathe.*

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Felicity didn’t need words to recognise the song that floated through the outdoor speakers as she took her first step into the backyard winter wonderland.

*What day is it* 
*And in what month*
This clock never seemed so alive
I can't keep up and I can't back down
I've been losing so much time

She shook her head to the jacket offered her before her eyes travelled down the aisle to find Oliver, lips slightly parted, eyes glossed over, black suit, yellow bowtie and a smile that in all her years she had never seen replicated on anyone else.

She let go of the breath she had been holding and every last bit of nervous energy melted off her, the butterflies doing karate in her stomach disappeared and the words to the song carried her one step closer.

Thea walked on ahead as Noah scooped Felicity's arm into his.

Cause there's you and me
And of all people with nothing to do
Nothing to lose
And there's you and me
And of all other people
And I don't know why
I can't keep my eyes off of you

Thea reached the end of the aisle first and smiled as she leaned in towards Oliver.
“Close your mouth big brother, you're gaping.”

Oliver’s mouth didn’t move, he might have been catching flies with how dislocated his jaw appeared, but Felicity deserved to see just how much she meant to him.

Felicity finished the walk and Noah placed a kind kiss against her cheek before he extended his hand to Oliver. They shook hands in a silent show of respect before Noah took his seat beside Donna in the front row.

Something about you now
That I can't quite figure out
Everything she does is beautiful
Everything she does is right

“Hi,” he breathed, barely above a whisper.
“Hi,” she mirrored.
“You look beautiful.”
She watched as his eyes glossed over.

Her hand absently touched his face, smoothing her thumb over his cheek.
“Are you sure you want to do this?”
He leaned in and kissed the side of her face, just above her smile, “Absolutely.”

“So this is where I come in,” Chris smiled as he stood from his chair and balanced on his cane.
“Chris, you don't need to...” Felicity started, but he stopped her words with a smile.
“I'm officiating my best friend's wedding, it's worth standing for.”

Chris cleared his throat and looked around the seated guests.
“Dearly beloved, I don’t know about you, but I am so glad that we are finally gathered here today to join these two idiots together in holy matrimony,” Felicity eyes narrowed in jest at Chris while Thea's cheer sounded out the loudest.
“I’ve known you...” Chris continued with his attention tipped towards Felicity, an unmistakable smile of unwavering affection like that of a brother cast across his mouth, “…since we shared a potty and you shamed me out of diapers and you,” he turned to Oliver with a knowing nod, “I’ve known you since that game of pool you still owe me a rematch for.”

Oliver’s hand held Felicity’s just a little tighter.
“For most of us here today we’ve watched you both grow as people and as a couple and I’m comfortable in saying we all saw this coming and we couldn’t be happier.”

The small crowd burst out into applause.

“But now I’ve said enough. So I’ll let you take it from here,” he looked towards Felicity and grinned, “the floor is yours Bug.”

Felicity turned to look at Oliver, his two hands in hers, her thumbs smoothing over the veins at the top of his hands, she wasn’t sure whose heartbeat her fingertips could feel on the underside of his wrists, but either way it calmed her counting the beats in her head.

“Oliver,” his name drifted through a smoky sigh, “from the day you climbed over my fence, and I swear that isn’t a double entendre,” she chuckled as she glanced back at her dad sitting in the front row, before her attention drew back to Oliver “I knew that you would always be an important part of my life. You saw me as more than the weird girl with a crooked ponytail and big glasses. You saw me as your friend and even in the moments when I desperately wanted you to see me for more, it was always just enough to know you and to have you know me.”

She took a shallow breath and swallowed back the tears forming behind her eyes.
“And when you finally got clue,” a blink followed a gentle laugh shared by them both, “I finally understood what all those romance novels were talking about. You are my always. You are my choice that will continue to be right. You are my home. My safe place and the wind that helps me soar,” another breath, another count of a heartbeat, “you are my love and I can’t wait to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Oliver watched her lips tremble through the last few words before, instinctively, he leaned forward to kiss them.

“Not yet,” Chris warned with a wink before Oliver sulked back a little embarrassed.

Felicity brushed back a sole escapee tear.
“Oliver, I hope you got some good follow up,” Chris remarked before he nodded for him to continue.

“I love you,” Oliver rasped, the grit in his throat making his voice crack. Felicity’s thumbs calmed the centre of his palms, “I love you too,” she whispered in return.

“What you didn’t know was that for about ten minutes before that I stood on the other side of the
fence listening to you as you chatted away to the computer bits spread across your table. You even had voices and I still remember what you said,” Felicity drew back a silent and surprised gasp, she had never known that, never even considered.

“Before I even saw your face you had me smiling,” he watched her smile blossom across her face, there it was, “and through every turn and twist and hill and slide that our lives have taken you can still make me smile, even in moments where you don’t realise I'm there.”

A tear slipped from her eye and for a second Oliver's hand left hers to wipe it away.

“You trust me, you believe in me, you laid a towel out in front of the couch for me when I was drunk and even when I might not have deserved it, you smiled at me,” his thumb grazed over her lips, “and I could live forever in that smile.”

His hands folded back into hers.

“You are the hands that hold mine, you are light that brightens my soul, you’re the hope that keeps me walking and you’re the only one that will ever own my heart.”

He took a step closer so barely a foot stood between them.

“You’re my everything. My always. My forever,” his words grew softer as he spoke them, the last two barely more than a whisper.

He leaned in to kiss her again but stopped a hair’s breadth away, turned his head towards Chris and chuckled, “I know, still not yet.”

“So now to the formalities,” Chris beamed as he wobbled only a fraction on his cane before righting himself, “do we have rings?”

Oliver nodded as he pulled the egg from his pocket, took off the top and plucked the smaller ‘diamond’ one from the foam before handing the rest to Tommy to hold.

“Felicity Megan Smoak, my very best friend do you take the boy next door Oliver Jonas...”

Jonas the dog leapt up from his blanket, barking to answer to his name before Thea settled him back down.

Felicity blushed as Oliver smirked through a breathy laugh.

“Where was I?” Chris grinned, “do you take him, Oliver Jonas Queen,” he whispered the second name, “to be your lawfully wedded husband for better, for worse, in sickness and in health for richer or slightly less richer, let’s be realistic,” he winked, “in this life and if you so wish it, into the next?”

“I do,” she breathed her eyes focused on Oliver.

Oliver slipped the ring onto her finger and pushed the metal tighter around it.

“Oliver Jonas Queen, do you take Bug, Felicity Megan Smoak to be your lawfully wedded wife, to buy her coffee when she needs it, to tell her she’s pretty and accept she will probably always beat you at scrabble, in this life and if you so wish it, into the next?”

“I do, absolutely.”

She pushed the ring onto his finger but it wouldn’t pass over the second knuckle. Oliver took it off and pried it open before handing it back to Felicity who clipped it onto his finger.

“Then by the powers vested in me and because your mother approves of my Jewish lineage, I now pronounce you the very best of companions, friends and above all else, husband and wife.”

Donna slipped a glass wrapped in a linen napkin beside Oliver’s foot in the snow. He broke it without question and the words “Mazel tov,” echoed through the tent.
“Now,” Chris smiled, “you may kiss the Bride.”

Oliver’s lips walked closer to Felicity, his eyes watching as her mouth softened and parted, ready and waiting for him. It was a moment that moved in slow motion, infinitesimal moments strung together in a stop motion film, a blink, a breath, a tongue to wet the seam and a smile hooking up just the corner.

He wanted this moment, to savour it, to hold it forever in his memory so that at any given time he could recall it in every single detail.

Years passed within the blink of his eye; from the moment he leaned against a fence listening to the quiet confidence of a girl that was playing with computer parts like his sister played with dolls to this moment, right here, where that same girl was a woman he loved, his wife.

His fingers grazed up her soft cheek, slightly damp with the trail of a few fallen tears before they brushed back her hair, pinning it to her temple and then, when the image of her was safely inside his memory, he took the space and sunk his lips onto hers.

He caught the sigh that dripped from her mouth and when he felt her body tremble his other hand reached around her waist and held her gently at the small of her back.

As they pulled away Felicity took the moment, her eyes opened as his remained closed. She noted every lash that fanned out across his skin and the way he dropped air from between his lips as they parted.

It was in that moment she saw them, a few years older, her stomach rounded with a child and another on his shoulders, the warm embrace of an ocean breeze around them as the sun set in the distance.

Her friend, her lover, her husband and, one day, the father of her children.

_I found a love for me_  
_Darling just dive right in_  
_And follow my lead_  
_Well I found a girl beautiful and sweet_  
_I never knew you were the someone waiting for me_  
_'Cause we were just kids when we fell in love_  
_Not knowing what it was_  
_I will not give you up this time_  
_But darling, just kiss me slow, your heart is all I own_  
_And in your eyes you’re holding mine_

Evening had fallen and the tent was lit up with fairy lights that twisted like vines around every pole inside it. The slate deck around the pool had been cleared of snow and floating candles littered the pool that was glowing a vivid blue from the underwater lights.

Music softly played through the chatter of those mulling around as Oliver moved Felicity slowly in
his arms, dancing no particular step or rhythm, just content on feeling her body against his.

“You really listened to me behind the fence?” she asked, shrugging his jacket up her shoulders as her head rose from his chest. Oliver smiled, a soft blush forming at the apples of his cheeks, “for about ten minutes,” he answered with a subtle shake of his head at the memory, “I was going to ring the doorbell like a normal person, but I heard you, putting on voices and quoting lines from Star Wars, it was a moment of genuine amusement on my part. There was just,” he breathed out an exhale that clouded the cold air around his lips, “just something about you and I knew I needed to know you.”

Felicity blinked, taking in each word and the smile he wore when speaking them. “I never thought we would end up here,” his eyes travelled around the space, “married and dancing in fake snow, but there is no other place I'd rather be.”

Felicity tipped her body onto her tiptoes and pecked a soft kiss against his lips. “You continue to surprise me Oliver,” she whispered as she lowered back to the ground, “you know it’s a wedding, we have a tradition,” she grinned, wondering if he would pick up the hint she was putting down. A single brow raised on his face. 

He certainly did.

He leaned his lips close to her ear, despite no one around them to hear anyway, “you want me to find a closet?” he chuckled. “We don't need one,” she spoke before she idly chewed her lower lip, blinking bright blue eyes at him, “your bedroom is upstairs.”

His mouth didn't release words, but his eyes bounced between really, are you sure, yes please and the logistics of the entire thing. “Do you think anyone would notice if we left?” Felicity asked quietly, as though plucking the question straight from Oliver's furrowed brow.

A smile took over his face, “I've missed you,” he breathed just above her ear, his breath misting over her cheek. “Show me how much.”

Their fingers entwined before they took a few hesitant steps towards the door. If anyone noticed they didn't draw attention to it and Felicity and Oliver slipped away from the party without a raised eyebrow or wink.

They took the stairs like experienced ninjas and before they had time to catch their breaths they were locked behind Oliver's old bedroom door.

Felicity slipped his jacket from her shoulders and hung it over the back of a desk chair nearby. “All this time we've been together and we haven't made out in this room,” she hummed as she walked around, dragging her finger along the edge of his desk.

There wasn't much to be seen, two framed movie posters, Die Hard and The Godfather, both made her smile. A small cork board had half a dozen photos pinned to it and she touched the edge of one with a smile waking across her lips, it was them in Cabo.

“I didn't know you hung this,” she spoke in quiet reverence as Oliver's arms wrapped around her
waist from behind and his head lowered to her shoulder.
“The moment I realised I could have you in my life,” he whispered as they swayed to silent music, “of course I hung it.”

Felicity turned in his embrace and slung her arms over his shoulders, her fingers dancing slow circles around his back.

She felt the air hitch in her throat as her eyes slowly moved around the room. It was a time capsule of High School and College Oliver, the one she had harboured a crazy crush for. She laughed, almost giddy, until her hand clapped over her mouth.

“You want me to hide some of this stuff?” Oliver asked, assuming her laugh was for the same reasons he had met with trouble in her childhood bedroom.
“No,” she quipped with a smirk folding up the corners of her lips, “I was actually hoping you might...” she paused as she pulled free from his embrace and walked towards his wardrobe.

There wasn’t much in there now, so she found what she was looking for within seconds.
“I was wondering if you might indulge me,” she cooed as she dangled Oliver's High School football jersey in front of her body.

A smile took over Oliver's face as he walked half a step back and blew out a laugh.
“You want to wear it?”
Felicity snagged her lower lip with her teeth as her fingers slid down the arm of the jersey.
“Actually, I want you to,” her eyes lit up with a mischievous glint.

Oliver took the jersey from her hands, “You want me to...?”
Felicity nodded deliciously slow.
He held it against his chest and watched as Felicity took a deep breath and blew it out like a smoky growl.

“I'm not sure it still fits...” he spoke as he removed his bowtie and slowly undid his cuff links. Felicity sighed impatiently as she stepped forward and made short work of the buttons on his shirt. With a smile he worked it down his arms and took his time to lay it over his jacket on the back of the chair.

“Oliver,” she growled his name.
With a chuckle he sped up his process and slipped the jersey over his head before threading his arms through it. It was tighter than he remembered but when he looked at Felicity idly licking her lips and devouring him with her eyes he decided that was clearly a good thing for her.

“This is really a thing for you?” he smiled, lifting her chin so his eyes found hers.
“Yes,” she almost purred as her fingers hovered an inch from his chest, “please don't make me explain it.”

“So,” he crooned as his fingers threaded through a section of loose hair, “if I'm the star quarterback, who are you, my cheerleader girlfriend?”
Felicity tapped a finger to her lips before the same finger worked around the back of her dress and pulled the zip sharply down.

The vintage lace dress fell to the floor and she kicked it free.
Oliver hummed as his eyes took in the beautiful slopes and curves of Felicity's body, wearing only a thin wisp of fabric masquerading as panties.
“No,” she smiled as she loosened his pants.

When they were in a pile beside her dress, Felicity walked towards his bed, Oliver following a step behind.

“How about you take me like a girl at a party,” she climbed on his bed and curved her fingers around his burgeoning erection, “like a girl who flirted with you over the rim of a red solo cup of cheap beer we think we’re dangerous for drinking.”

She leaned forward and took the head of his cock into her mouth, her warm lips surrounding it as her tongue licked the tip.

“Fuck,” Oliver groaned as his eyes rolled back towards the ceiling.

“Like a girl who won't remember your name in the morning,” she continued licking her lips as she pulled back from his firm cock, “but you want me to scream it tonight.”

Her eyes blinked slowly as her fingers weaved under his jersey, tracing the lines of his taut muscles.

“I'd rather,” he started in a whisper as his fingers traced the curve of her breasts, “love you like my wife, slow and languid.”

“We can do that tomorrow,” she frowned playfully before she pulled him closer by the neck of his jersey so their lips almost touched, “tonight I want this.”

She kissed him, her fingers fisted in the fabric, hard and deep with her tongue delving between his lips and rolling through the warm confines of his mouth.

He pushed her to the mattress and Felicity blew out an enchanting laugh while she stretched out underneath him. His knees sunk either side of her body before he lowered his lips to her chest and sucked her breast into his mouth.

Groans of pleasure melted into the air as Felicity's breast caved around his mouth. He nipped at her budded nipple, his ears drinking in the soft moans she gave in response.

His hand slipped underneath the flimsy fabric of her panties, roughly plunging between her folds to feel her wetness soak into his skin.

He slipped a digit into her entrance, adding a second moments later and plunging them both deep inside, making Felicity bite back a salacious moan that threatened to rock those framed posters off the wall. His lips traced the flush that fanned down her chest, a luscious pink like the inside of a freshly bloomed rose, dropping kiss wherever the desire took him to.

Felicity watched as his fingers, now coated in her juices, floated near his lips. With a grin he threaded them between his lips and hummed.

Her fingers laced together above her head and Oliver caught them with his free hand and pressed them against the headboard, pinning them there.

Leaning down, balancing his weight on one hand, his teeth tugged gently on her lobe.

“Do you know my name?” his roughly sensual voice tickled the skin of her neck.

“Oliver,” she breathed with her eyes hung almost closed.

“Good, that's the only word you need to know tonight.”
His kisses melted into her neck as his breath warmed every inch.

The hands he pinned to the headboard stayed just as he’d stapled them while Oliver hopped languid kisses down the centre of her body. With little fanfare his hands slid her panties down her legs and from her feet without pause.

With a smile he sat up, saddled across her waist. He twisted her panties loosely around her wrists and Felicity caught her smile with her teeth.

“Oliver Queen, you dirty fucker,” she laughed as her eyes traced the lines of his jersey number and the idea of it made wetness pool between her legs.

Dropping back down he kissed her nether lips, smiling against her clit and flicking it in circles. Her toes curled as her breath hitched in her throat. Oliver didn't give her any time to focus before he was sucking on her clit, fast, deep, flicking his tongue around and over it in fragmented circles and figures.

Her moans filled the room before she stapled her lips closed with her teeth.

His fingers dipped inside her, stroking her walls until he buried them to the knuckle. Felicity inhaled sharply as a thin sheen of sweat misted across her chest.

She tightened around his fingers while her body writhed underneath him. His mouth continued to suckle her sensitive nub, making it coil before he grazed it with his teeth while his fingers pumped in and out.

He felt her body tremble around his fingers, waves of shivers massaging and clenching as she rose up towards and orgasm and moments later, with an electric shock rippling down her limbs, Felicity climaxed, her release coating Oliver's fingers and bleeding into his lips.

He hummed as he lapped up her spoil and while her body quaked through it Oliver lifted himself up above her and sunk his cock into her warm, trembling walls.

Felicity snapped her lips closed as her sensitive sex swallowed his length. He pushed through her tightness letting each wave roll over his head like slender fingers gripping tightly around his shaft.

His hand moved back to hers, covering the panties that loosely bound her at the wrists.

“Oliver,” she hummed, her voice breathless and strangled.

He leaned down, dragging his lips from her chin to the seam of her ear.

“Say it again.”

“Oliver,” his name passed over her lips like a slow breath.

He thrust his shaft slowly but deep inside, to mimic the drawn way she had said his name.

“Oliver,” her voice quickened a pace and his next thrust mirrored it.

“Oliver,” she spoke it again, this time it was needy, desperate and stretched.

He pushed deeper, rolling his pelvis against her clit and just as her mouth opened to cry out Oliver stole the sound from her lips.

“Oli-ver.”

He thrust twice when she broke his name into syllables.

“Fuck Oliver, Oliver, Oli---ver,” his name shook from her lips as her breath splintered.

He pumped, in, out, in, out pressing his tip against her cushioned walls.
The back of her head sunk into his pillow, her breath ragged but still pulsing out his name, like an almost silent hypnotising chant.

His cock pummelled her and she took every thrust with her legs wrapped around his waist and her heels locked into the small of his back.

Her head hit the headboard as he thrust her upwards, her teeth snagged her lip. “OliverOliverOliver,” she spoke without a breath in between.

He thrust deeper and harder until the threads of his thighs tightened and his balls swelled.

With almost impeccable timing they climaxed together, in strained breaths and ragged fractures of their names.

He kissed her neck tenderly, tasting the light gloss of sweet pooled there.

“Tomorrow night I take my time,” he whispered, dragging a trail of kisses up the warm threads of her neck.

“Yes Mister Queen,” she smiled, carding her fingers through his hair.

He fell down beside her and sighed while his fingers drew lazy circles across her chest.

“I love you Mrs Smoak,” he paused to watch her expression, “Mrs Queen, Mrs Smoak-Queen?” Felicity laughed softly.

“Ms Smoak professionally, Mrs Queen personally and in the bedroom,” she hummed, her eyes trawling through his, “that will depend on the mood.”

He kissed her quickly, a smack of lips and a pop of air.

“I love you,” he charmed while his large fingers played with her ring.

Their fingers interlinked, their fake rings pressing together with a soft clink of metal on metal.

“I love you too,” she breathed, content, “always will.”

The end.

Author Note:

So, that is it my lovelies...

I really can’t believe I’m closing the door on this universe but wow, I have loved every moment I spent writing it.

To those that supported me from the beginning I owe you the biggest thank you. This story would not have come to fruition without you.

To those that joined along the way, thank you for taking a chance on a little College AU with a name that was really just a placeholder name that stuck.

To everyone that left comments, kudos or dropped me a note on Twitter or Tumblr, you’re awesome and it truly does mean a great deal to me to interact with a reader, so thank you.

Thank you to everyone that has sent me fan art, that’s beyond awesome.

I owe a special thank you to Kylie and Nat #OTM (Original Team Meatloaf) xox

And another very special thank you to my Bish, Ash, for this....
In an act that once again found me messy crying (sobbing may be a more apt descriptor), she organised for this poster to be signed and then surprised me with as I finished this fic. Thank you to Val, who even though you tapped out of this fic, you helped Ash in getting this signed and made me squeal and swear when you told me Emily actually read her line aloud before she wrote it *faints again*... so again, THANK YOU you are amazing and I am so thankful for you xox. Bish, I love you. I continue to write because of the support you give me, both in extreme ways like this *still crying* and in simple moments of DM spiralling. You are my MVB.

Olicity Through the Years
Chapter End Notes

The toy: https://www.lovehoney.com/product.cfm?p=14099&SSAID=312581

You're welcome.
Songs:
You and Me ~ Lifehouse
Perfect ~ Ed Sheeran (because if this song didn't feature in this fic, what are we even here for?!)

September is my birthday month so I’m just writing what I want and I wanted this, umkay.

Oliver trudged like his shoes were weighted into the foyer of the Westin Hotel sometime around 8am. It was Saturday morning and his eyes were bloodshot and his mouth was dry; as though he’d spent hours bar hopping around Starling, drinking to excess and living the debauched life of a singleton.

The truth was anything but.

In reality he had been holed up in the office working through the night and into the earlier hours of
the morning, managing a measly two hours sleep on a couch in the staffroom that wasn’t made for sleeping on, sometime around 3am, only to take another conference call at 6am. It was something of an insanity when he realised that he has spent longer at the office than he had at frat parties in college, but the rewards were worth it.

The sooner he finished up this job, the sooner he could fly home to New York and that was really all he wanted to do.

They had sold the little apartment not long after the wedding, deciding to forgo the upkeep of it, and when visiting now they either stayed with family or, as in this case, booked a hotel.

Oliver preferred the latter.

Splitting their time between New York and Starling wasn’t ideal but it was infrequent enough that they made it work. This had been the first time since they got married that he’d been away longer than a week and the effects were beginning to show. *It was funny how you just can’t sleep alone anymore.*

They had spent their anniversary in the Maldives just last month and when he took a deep breath inward, Oliver could almost taste the crystal blue ocean dancing across his senses.

He smiled absently as he thought about the languid moments spent there and how amazing it was that after two years of marriage and 2,328 days (give or take) of being in love with Felicity, Oliver still had things to discover about her; for instance she had somewhat of a weird, yet ultimately adorable, adoration of manta rays and crabs and they had spent much of their holiday snorkelling to indulge it.

The brushed chrome doors of the elevator started to close in front of him before a voice called out to “hold the elevator please.” Despite his body aching to fall into bed and sleep for at least eight hours, Oliver held out his hand and stopped the doors from closing before a little girl and her slightly frazzled father got into the cab.

“That everyone?” Oliver asked, his palm still locking the doors open. “Yes, thanks,” the man a few years older than him sighed, out of relief Oliver assumed. “No problem,” he remarked as the door closed them in and the elevator cab started its ascent.

Oliver could feel the big brown doe eyes of the little girl staring up at him before she pushed her tightly curled brown hair back from her face and gave him a sheepish smile. “You’re tall,” she hummed as she swung her skirt to and fro.

Oliver couldn’t help but smile, he was about average, maybe a little above, but the way her mouth gaped you would have thought him a giant.

“Allie,” her father sighed, the bags under his eyes looked deeper and more permanent than the ones Oliver was carrying around. “She’s fine,” Oliver remarked and he saw the other man’s face soften, again in relief, before he turned to the little girl and smiled. “I had a friend that used to say the same thing,” he said with a soft laugh as he thought about Felicity who he had always overshadowed at least in the physical height sense.

The little girl chewed on her lips with a slightly furrowed brow. “She’s not your friend anymore?” she quizzed, quiet concern lining her expression.
Oliver chuckled, he hadn’t considered she would come to that conclusion. “Oh she is,” he corrected, “but now she’s also my wife.”
The girl sighed and tipped her head to one shoulder, honestly Oliver wasn’t sure if she was
enamoured with the idea or saddened by it. “Is she pretty?” she asked, her little voice barely above a whisper and ever-so-slightly lisped.

“The prettiest,” he answered, wide-eyed and smiling.
“Is she smart?” the next question came just as fast, but with one slightly raised brow.
Oliver nodded fervently, “the smartest.”
Little Ally tapped her fingertip to her dark-raspberry lips, “Do you have kids?”
“Not yet,” Oliver answered without pause.
She tweaked the end of one of her spiral curls. “Do you want kids?”
He wasn’t sure why that question made him pause, he did – but did they? He couldn’t recall a time they had ever actually talked about it, at least not seriously.

When Chris and Caitlyn had the twins a little over a year ago there had been a slight natter about a one day but Felicity had smiled and said she was happy being a godmother and they hadn’t ever revisited it. To him the answer was a simple yes but he couldn’t honestly answer the same for Felicity and know it was accurate. **He should know that though? Did Felicity want children?**

He felt a tug on his jacket and he followed it down to a little mocha hand. He’d left her without an answer.

“Ally, leave the man alone,” the father offered with a warm smile across the cab at Oliver, who was still lost in thought.
But Ally wasn’t listening. “You’d probably make a good dad,” she nattered.
Oliver, shaking the thoughts from his head, smiled and asked, “Why is that?”
The little girl laughed enthusiastically, as though Oliver had told a hilarious joke. “You have big shoulders,” she answered matter-of-factly, bothered at how the obviousness of that statement alluded Oliver. “Kids love to be carried on big shoulders.”

The doors opened on their floor and the little girl shrugged one shoulder like she had made her point before she folded her hand into her dad’s and walked out. She turned just as the doors closed Oliver inside the elevator to give him a happy wave and a chirpy, “Bye.”
Oliver managed to wave goodbye before the doors closed. “Bye,” he chortled softly to himself.

The next 5 floors didn’t allow him much time to think about anything, and the smile from his little banter with Ally stayed with him as he stepped from the elevator at the top floor and took the short walk down the hall to his room.

It took three swipes of his hotel key card before he finally managed to open the door, by which time his energy levels had plummeted and his smile had worn off.

He toed off his shoes and kicked them towards the wall before he dropped his briefcase on the kitchen counter. The Presidential Suite was stunning, with its harbour views and lush furnishings in crisp whites and brushed greys, but it wasn’t home. He walked towards the bedroom, dropping his wallet, key card and tie on the glass and marble coffee table.

He watched a few boats move around the harbour from the vantage point of the living room window as he shrugged off his jacket, lay it over the arm of the suede sofa and started to unbutton his shirt.

**He should know.**

With his shirt unbuttoned, Oliver felt the drag on his eyelids and he yawned into the quiet hotel room. He made a mental note to ask Felicity that night when they kept their usual skype date.

Watching his feet, afraid he might fall if he didn’t concentrate on lifting each one, Oliver lumbered towards the bedroom and pushed open the slightly ajar door.
“Hi.”
The noise didn’t register as real at first and a few seconds passed before Oliver’s brain caught up and realised the sound hadn’t been a figment of his imagination after all. His eyes shot up and found Felicity sitting on the edge of the California King bed looking like something pulled from the pages of a romance novel.

She was dressed in lingerie. It was ivory and flowy and in his state Oliver couldn’t even think of what one might call it, but delicate lace cupped her breasts, showing her erect nipples through the thin fabric, while the rest of it fell like a cascading waterfall of sheer ivory from below the bust. A ribbon held it closed between the breasts and when she stood up from the bed he noticed she was wearing matching panties that looked smaller than his palm.

He swallowed and his eyes became dry because he just couldn’t bring himself to blink. Two years and she could still absolutely render him speechless and verging on catatonic.

Shit

Before he even really understood what was happening, he was on the bed, his body half propped up against the bedhead with his legs stretched out in front of him. Felicity was in between them stroking his shaft in her warm palm while her thumb circled the tip and her other hand gently kneaded his balls. He didn’t even remember sucking off his pants and his shirt was splayed open so he could see the heavy breaths he was taking.

He’s hard within a minute. Unsurprising given that he hadn’t seen his wife in the flesh for almost 10 days. As she crouched on her knees, the white curtain of fabric splayed out and her thicket of golden hair was a tumble of untamed curls.

Her face was almost clear from make-up except for the candy pink lipstick that brightened her pout. She kissed him, long and hard on his shaft and when she pulled back there was a perfect stamp of pink lips left on his skin.

For a moment, Oliver wondered if he was dreaming, but he soon decided that if in fact he was, he would rather not wake up. So he stayed still despite the urge to comb his fingers through her hair, grasping at the bed linen instead; and instead of cooing her name, his mouth simply gaped open. Wordless.

“Welcome back baby,” she purred and he swallowed a second time, then a third, his mouth making more saliva than he knew what to do with. The next moment it was bone dry and he realised he’d been mouth-breathing for over 30 seconds.

He captured the slightly puzzled looked on her face before he managed a smile, it was goofy and dopey looking, but she smiled back and her bemusement dissipated.

Then he’s inside her, the warmth of her mouth enveloped him and the tightness of her puckered lips around his shaft felt fucking amazing and for a moment all he could think about doing was easing himself a little deeper. But instead, his knuckles whitened in the linen as he held himself almost completely still, aside from his erratic breathing, just in case it all vanished into a dream.

Her tongue teased his slit and he’s almost certain she could taste some early release there, because he knew he wasn’t going to be a marathon runner in this race.

Her hand worked his shaft deeper into the confines of her mouth, with her candy-coloured lips stretching around his throbbing cock. Her azure eyes watched him playfully as her cheeks swelled and hollowed around him. His tip rolled against her soft palate and Oliver gritted his teeth in pleasure as his cock skimmed the back of her throat.
Stars in the corners of his eyes started to steal his view as his entire body twitched from the inside out. He wanted to say something – anything – but he couldn’t formulate words, let alone a sentence. As though she could read his rapid blinking or his fitful breathing, Felicity started to speed up, her head bobbing as tendrils of her hair fell over her shoulders and tickled his thighs quite deliciously.

With the back of his thighs tensing and the tight pull through his core, Oliver knew he was going to come any moment. He tried to pull away, but her fingertips anchored him there like tiny nails in the seam of his apex.

Oliver’s body jerked forward with an eruption before he watched her eyes blow wide while her throat constricted around him, taking him in completely.

And then she smiled. Her hand tight around his base and her mouth still wrapped around his cock, so it was only the tips of her smile he could see, but there was a flush across her cheeks and a dancing light in her eyes and he knew her entire face was smiling at him.

She took it all, every last drop and Oliver slumped down the bed before she finally dropped his softening cock from her mouth with a scandalous pop.

“Hi,” she whispered, her voice a little husky.

“Did I just dream that?” he asked sleepily.

“No,” she effused before she leaned over and nipped his hip. He bucked at the fleeting pain. “See, not dreaming,” she added before she soothed the same spot with a feathery kiss.

“What are you…,” he started, his head was foggy and his eyelids got heavier by the second. “You’re here…” again his eyes drooped before he could snap them open again.

Felicity climbed off the bed and brushed a hand through his hair. “Get some sleep Oliver, we’ll talk after.” She kissed his cheek and the sensation had him smiling like a fool.

He wanted to argue. He wanted to pleasure her and fuck her till she was seeing stars – that’s what he wanted to do; that’s what he was going to do….

He fell asleep to the thoughts of what he wanted to do.

After what only felt like a few minutes, but in reality was about three hours, a droopy-eyed Oliver roused. The bed was empty beside him and the curtains were closed. The thought ping-ponged around his head that in his sleep-deprived state he had somehow imagined scenario where his wife had shown up, given him head and then tucked him into bed.

He threw the covers off his naked body and smiled, at least if he had dreamt it he’d made it exceptionally realistic. He scanned the floor for any of his clothes but all he saw was the pair of shoes he’d toed off just inside the hotel room door sitting by an armchair in the corner of the bedroom.

He walked slowly over to the curtains and cracked one open to reveal a bright sun sitting high in the sky and giving the impression it was some time in the early afternoon. He found a pair of briefs in the top drawer and lazily fed one leg after the other into them, pulling them up as he yawned and slapping the elastic band against his chest when he pinged it.

Rubbing his tongue across his teeth he could taste the late night tacos on his breath and he wandered into the bathroom to brush his mouth clean. On the last rinse he heard the warm tones of a voice he knew well.
“Hi sleepyhead,” Felicity said as she leaned up against the doorway. Oliver patted a fluffy mink-grey face towel against his face before he turned and saw Felicity dressed in a pair of denim short-shorts and a loose-fitted top that hung off one shoulder. *God, he loved her like that.*

He loved her in the little sun dresses she liked to wear on Sundays and he loved her in the form-fitted dresses and skirts that she wore to work – the ones that he always had a hard time not ripping off her first thing in the morning – but when she was dressed like she was there, leaning up against the doorway, it reminded Oliver of how lucky he was that he had come home drunk that night seven years ago and that she didn’t turn the sprinklers on him.

“I thought I dreamed you,” he sighed as he dropped the face towel onto the marble vanity and walked towards her. She walked in on the balls of her feet, a habit she didn’t seem inclined to break and honestly, one that Oliver found ludicrously sensual, and met him halfway.

Her arms slipped around his waist and her fingers entwined at the small of his naked back where just a touch of sweat had gathered. “This isn’t *a* dream,” she spoke before she pecked his lips with a tender kiss. “*It’s the* dream, but *not a* dream,” she added warmly while her fingers drew tiny circles through the fine wisp of hair just above the waistline of his briefs.

He thought about kissing her hard and fast or slow and longingly but before he could settle on one or the other, his lips were on hers tasting, licking, exploring as they both hummed happily.

“I want to swim,” she whispered as their lips fell away. She ghosted another kiss over his lips as her nose batted the side of his. “Then we swim,” he decreed as he brushed back loose wisps of her hair. “But first, why are you here? I thought you had a project.”

Holding herself around his unmovable frame, she arched her back and flipped her head up towards the ceiling, sighing dramatically. “They said I was getting crabby at work because you were away,” she admitted as one of her hands slid into his briefs and cupped his naked ass.

“And?” he laughed.

She dropped her head to one shoulder and gave him a wicked smile. “They gave me a plane ticket and told me to get some this weekend. I arrived earlier this morning, an hour or so before you got back.”

“I was at work,” he offered apologetically.

She tickled his cheek and smiled. “I know Oliver, I trust you.”

Felicity was the only woman to have ever said that to him; but if he was going to be honest, she was also the only woman he’d ever been 100% faithful to. “I was going to pounce on you when you got home so we could go at it like rabbits, but,” the fingers on her free hand brushed the edges of his hair. “You looked so tired. I thought you should sleep and,” she smacked her lips together salaciously, “I thought I might be able to help.”

He kissed her again, short but bursting with feeling. “You gave me the best sleep,” he breathed happily.

She grabbed a fistful of his ass and squeezed while her lip was snagged between her teeth. “Get in your swimming trunks and take me swimming,” she playfully demanded.

“Are you getting in yours?”

Her arms unravelled from him and she took a step back. “I got a new pair, just for you,” she said with a smirk as she wiggled out of her short-shorts.
The bikini bottom was yellow and the colour popped beautifully against her alabaster skin. His tongue wet his lips as he followed her finger while it drew a line up her thigh, over her hip and along her waist…*fuck, fuck, fuck.*

She slowly peeled off her tee and he was rock hard by the time she dropped it to the floor. The bandeau top was the same bright colour and hugged her breasts in a way that was reminiscent of his hands palming them. With a rush of excitement, Oliver scooped her up and ran her to the bed.

She dropped onto it laughing before he pounced on top of her and begun kissing her neck. Her laugh soon evolved into a moan as his hand slipped under the little triangle of fabric covering her sex and a finger gently teased its way between her folds.

“Sex first, then swimming,” he mumbled against her neck as she pressed her heat into his explorative finger.
She sighed as her hands rolled over his taut shoulders. “I love that idea.”

It was over an hour later when they finally emerged outside into the bright mid-afternoon day with drinks and towels in hand. Felicity has used the elevator ride down to tell Oliver that she had accidentally offered to babysit Chris and Caitlin’s twins for the night as an anniversary gift to them. It hadn’t really surprised her that Oliver immediately smiled at the idea.

Using one of Oliver’s casual shirts as a loose-fitting cover-up of sorts, Felicity sashayed around the pool looking for a perfect spot while Oliver practiced the art of not getting a boner in public.

They found two loungers side by side at the far end of the glistening pool and claimed them as their own, dрапing towels over them.

“Hi,” a little voice startled Felicity but not Oliver, who smiled broadly at the little girl.
“Hi Ally,” he said happily as the same girl from the elevator stopped in front of their loungers with a bright pink pool floaty around her waist.
“Is this your wife?” she quizzed as she splashed her feet in a puddle she’d made on the flagstone surround.
Oliver nodded proudly. “This is the one I was telling you about.”
“You were right,” she giggled knowingly before she skipped off abruptly to the sound of her name being called.

“What was that about?” Felicity asked as she toed off her sandals.
“She’s my new friend,” he replied, tight-lipped but smiling.
“I see,” she hummed, “and you've been talking about me?”
Oliver settled into the chair and smiled before Felicity leaned over and pinched his waist, provocingly. “What did you say about me?”
“It’s a secret,” he laughed gingerly before she pinched him a second time. “Alright, I said that you were the prettiest and smartest woman I know.”
“Oh,” she gaped. It still always took her breath away when Oliver Queen was so open about his affection for her; sometimes that little kid in her just couldn’t believe that the boy next door was talking about her.

Oliver stood up and gently grazed his hand across her cheek. “It’s the truth,” he whispered as his lips moved closer to hers.
And then Oliver opened his mouth and something neither of them were expecting came out. “I want to have a baby with you.”
“Are we going to talk about this?” Oliver said as he followed Felicity into the hotel room.
“Talk about what?” she remarked, her voice a little breathless and her entire demeanour closed off to him. “I needed a different book, you didn’t need to follow me up,” she continued, talking at the speed of light and refusing to look back at him.
“Felicity, I said the b-word and you bolted, babbling something about forgetting your book,” he sighed before he took the book from under her arm and placed it heavily on the counter.
She looked down at the book and shrugged, still refusing to make eye contact with Oliver. “I took the wrong book down, that’s all,” she said before she chewed anxiously on the inside of her lip.
“So your sudden need to change it has nothing to do with what I said?” he asked as he followed her into the bedroom.

She finally turned to face him, opened her mouth to speak and then promptly closed it. Seconds of silence lapsed before she tried again, finally making words, albeit soft, almost whispered ones, “I don’t.”
He studied her face carefully; from the crinkle across her nose to the slight tug in her brow and the watery glaze over her eyes. “Don’t what?” he asked softly, even though he was certain he knew what she meant.
“I don’t know if I want kids,” she spoke each word slowly and quietly as though she watched his lips crack behind his smiled. 
_He wasn’t expecting that._

He felt a weight on his chest before he reached out his hands and grasped her fingers with his.
“Ever?” he asked softly.
Her head shook a little before her teeth released her lip as she answered him quietly, “I can’t say ever, never say never right, but…” she raised a shoulder slowly, unable to finish her sentence.
Oliver’s hand moved up to her elbow and stroked soothing lines down the back of her arm. “But what?” he coached softly.
She swallowed the heavy weight in her throat as she looked down at his hand, wordlessly telling him that whatever she said, he would listen. “Babies make people leave.” The words left her lips trembled and fragile, they were the words of a child in some respects, a child that had lived that truth.

“Is this because of your dad?”
His question was warm, his tone empathetic and his eyes completely without judgement.
“I love him Oliver, I do,” she quivered, struggling to keep her emotions level. “But he left me.” She shrugged her shoulder just as a tear slipped from her eye. “What if you leave me too?”
He pulled her tight against his chest, so tight that he could feel her body pushing against him as she breathed. “Felicity, I would never, ever, leave you,” he assured her as he swayed gently with her. She pulled back and nestled her chin into his chest before his hands cupped her face. “I made that mistake once and I’m never going to repeat it.”
She offered him a weary smile before she pressed her ear to his chest and listened to the calming thump of his beating chest. She knew that.
“I’m tired,” she said softly as she pulled away from the embrace. She lifted her body onto tip toes and kissed his cheek languidly. “I might have a rest before we babysit tonight.”

There might have been more that needed to be said but Oliver just offered her a smile and a small nod. It could wait.

They were subdued in the elevator ride down but before it reached the ground floor Oliver sighed into the void, “I’m sorry.”
She turned and graced him with a smile, albeit a fleeting one. “You have nothing to be sorry about,” she answered. Her insecurities weren’t his doing and she knew he had every reason to want a family.

The doors opened and she stepped out. She walked a whole stride ahead of him before Oliver gently pulled her back and held her at the elbows in front of him.

“I shouldn’t have brought it up like that and I’m okay if you’re not ready to have kids right now Felicity, with work and our lives, I understand that,” he admitted. “But I just want us to be able to talk about it, about what we want, when we’re ready,” he added thoughtfully with gentle thumb strokes brushing her skin.

“What if I can’t give you what you want?” she asked, a sullen shadow darkening her pale eyes. He gave her elbows a gentle squeeze before a smile lit up his extraordinary handsome face. “If you’re in my life then I have what I want, what I’ve always wanted, you,” he beamed as the world moved around them.

“But you want kids and I’m not sure,” she shrugged, hapless.

“I want kids with you, if I can’t have both but I still have the ‘you’ part then that’s all I need,” he assured her, his words echoed in his smile.

“I’m not saying no.”

“I know.”

“I’m just saying I’m not sure.”

His smile broadened, “I know.”

“And you’re okay with that, with me not knowing?” she asked as her teeth fretted with her lower lip.

He nodded astutely, “Absolutely.”

She leaned in and kissed him, smiling against his mouth. “Thank you.”

“Now let’s go get our asses handed to us by a couple of one year olds.”

Caitlin was already in the car ten minutes after the cab arrived at their doorstep and a fresh faced Oliver and Felicity knocked on the door of the rowdy house. It was in fact Chris, who now managed to get around reasonable well without aid, who was anxiously standing on the doorstep rattling off emergency numbers while Felicity pretended to memorize them all.

“We’ll be fine,” Felicity chirped as she began to shoo her life-long friend from his porch. 

*How hard could it be?* Harry and Michael were 15 months old, and there were two of them.

*How hard could it be?*  
Famous last words.

The three hours before bedtime saw the two rambunctious toddlers tearing around the house in fits of animated laughter and using Oliver as a living jungle gym while Felicity plied them with spoonfuls of mashed vegetables and fish-shaped crackers.

Bath time saw more water on the coral tiles than in the bath while getting them changed should have been classed as an Olympic sport and reading a story to the energetic twosome did little to calm them into a state ready for slumber.

So Felicity was downstairs carefully making two bottles of warmed formula, remembering enough of what Chris had told her to check the temperature against the inside of her wrist. She sighed at the perfectly tepid temperature before she headed back to Oliver, who had been left sole charge for
a little over 10 minutes.

Walking up the stairs, Felicity became suddenly aware of something – it was quiet.

It hadn't been quiet for the last three hours, but the closer she got to the bedroom, the more deafening the silence became. Her heart shuddered behind her chest as she imagined every worse case scenario she possible could in the short walk to the playroom door.

It was open a crack and she peeked in, expecting perhaps to see Oliver gagged and tied to a chair while the boys played with matches in the corner. But there was no bound husband and no stench of smoke. All Felicity found was Oliver conked out on the brown couch with his feet spilling off the end and a tuckered out toddler under each arm.

She watched for a few moments with a smile threaded across her lips. She had watched Oliver the whole night, naturally caring for two kids that weren’t even his and she could only imagine how wonderful a father he would be to his own kids. *Their kids.*

Quietly she left the playroom and went next door to ready the boys' room. Everything smelled so innocent and sweet with a lingering hint of baby powder. Her eyes studied the row of soft toys lined up on the dresser to the neatly folded basket of quilts. Carefully she lowered the side of each crib and pulled back the identical blankets, letting the softness of them float through her fingertips.

Making sure to follow Chris’ instructions, she got the green panda for Harry and the orange one for Michael and nestled each into a crib. She pulled the blinds and felt her heart sigh as the room got swallowed up in shadows before, lastly, she pushed play on the 90s power ballads CD that Chris mentioned the boys liked to fall asleep to.

In the room alone as *Aerosmith I Don’t Want to Miss a Thing* started up, Felicity allowed herself to imagine what quirks their baby might have, what soft toy they might cuddle with or what music might lull them to sleep.

She was fairly certain they would have blue eyes and she hoped for Oliver’s lighter ones, but it would be anyone’s guess on hair colour, although her wager would say blonde. *A girl or a boy first?* She didn't think it would matter but her heart skipped thinking about the relationship that Oliver and Thea enjoyed and maybe she wanted that – a boy to grow into a big brother. But she smiled as her eyes took one last look around the darkened room because she knew if they had a girl first, no doubt Michael and Harry would adopt her as their little sister and protect her just the same. *Their baby.*

Felicity tiptoed back to the playroom and found everyone just as she had left them. She collected Michael first and he smacked his pouted lips together as she soothed him against her chest, swaying to the faint sound of Steven Tyler. Carefully she lowered him into his bed, tucked him up and raised the side of his crib before she went back for Harry.

Harry had a tighter grip on Oliver’s shirt that he didn’t give up without a little fight but once she wrestled it free, his finger latched around hers instead. He roused a little as she placed him in bed but when she started to sing softly along with the chorus his eyelids fell heavy again and he didn't wake. With the side of his crib lifted and his panda gathering drool under his chin, Felicity sneaked out of the room and closed the door gently behind her.

Back in the playroom she took a blanket from the back of the couch and spread it out over Oliver before she slipped into the small space beside him. She nestled her head into his chest and listened to him breathing.
“Everything okay?” he asked, drowsily patting his lips together. She looked up his chest at him and watched as his eyes blinked down at her. “Oliver?” she whispered. He reached up and strummed his thumb over her full bottom lip. “Yeah?” he answered after a silent yawn. Her fingers skated down the centre of his chest as she rested her chin in the dip of his shoulder. “I’m ready to have a baby with you?” “Now?!” he gaped as his eyes sprung open. She laughed. “Not right now, but when we get home I want to get my implant removed,” she said gingerly as she sat up and dug her toes into the rug beneath the couch. “Are you sure?” he asked as he tried to rein in a smile. 

She was. Absolutely.

“Yes, I am,” she breathed, tiny, nervous bubbles popped in her stomach, but she wasn't afraid, more excited at the prospect. They were a team. “That is if you still…” “I do,” he answered rapidly as he sat up a little and grinned. “But only if you’re ready.” She kissed the worry from his lips as her fingers ruffled through his hair. “It might not happen straight away,” she added as their fingers instinctive entwined. “I know,” his head nodded along, “but it could, so I want us to be sure, especially you Felicity, considering you grow it,” he said with a pleasant smile. She tried to find any hesitation in her own mind, but Oliver wasn’t Noah circa 1989, he was never going to leave her pregnant and alone. “I’m sure Oliver.” She held his hands tight and squeezed. “I want to have a baby with you. It could take six months, a year, maybe longer, but I’m ready to start trying.” “We can have fun practicing,” he winked. They kissed, lips caressing and tongue tracing. “We will,” she whispered against his mouth. They would.

[Three Months Later]

Felicity stared down at the positive pregnancy test in her hands, with her mouth still aghast in the empty bathroom of their apartment. “Well, that didn’t take long,” she remarked before a smile took over her entire face. They were going to have a baby. And she would get to tell him the good news.
FlashFic : Firsts

Chapter Summary

Flash fic in celebration of being around on AO3 for 3 years. Eep.
DAY 5 // Final

It's the final day of my week long ficversary, and once again thank you to everyone who has taken this 3 year (or 3 month, 3 day, 3 minute) journey with me. Xox

It's time to revisit Thursday, set just a week or so after the end of Epilogue 2.

Side note: that pregnancy reveal was underwhelming, anticlimactic and, honestly, lacked heart imho. So, it's a different universe and a different couple, but here is what, in a perfect TV world is something like what they deserved.

Enjoy ❤️
Her lips parted as breathy sighs spilled out from between them. He caught what he could with his hungry mouth as he drove himself further into her.

The room was sunken in dark shadows with only the hall light edging around the frame of the slightly ajar door to cast thin spindles of light. Her moans of pleasure ricocheted off the walls and shivered down his spine until they reached the backs of his throbbing thighs.

Her heady aroma teased his nostrils and he could taste it's familiarity on his tongue as he continued to rear inside her, so close.

Fingers cruised up his shoulders and were soon knotted in his hair. Legs coiled around his waist. A film of perspiration between their bodies had them gliding against each other.

Her walls crushed.
His cock ached.

His hand steady him against the wall.
He was so close.

So was she.
She purred his name.
 Whispered as best as she could.

_Thrust._
His lips devoured her neck.
_Thrust._
Her ass reared off the mattress.
_Thrust._

The room flooded with light but he didn't stop.

Her palms slapped against his chest.

He _couldn't_ stop.

He turned his head, squinting into the light. A baby sat on the floor looking up at him. Cherub cheeks and wide eyes.

Just watching.

Oliver awoke with a start, taking a moment to realise it had been nothing more than a dream.

An entirely strange dream.

He squinted at the clock next to him, _2am_. His head fell back to the pillow as the air spilled out from his lungs.

It was a weird dream; no doubt one brought on by the fact he and Felicity were trying for a baby. Granted, they had really only just begun to start and they hadn't gone so far as to make ovulation charts and study the optimal positions for procreation. She'd simply ditched her birth control and started talking a multi vitamin with folic acid.
But regardless, Oliver (it would seem subconsciously) knew things would change from here on out. There was a strong possibility that within a year Felicity would be pregnant.

*Pregnant*, he smiled the word to himself in the hazy greys of the witching hour.

He’d never really considered how much he wanted that life; a house in the suburbs, a few kids running around their legs, scribbled drawings of who knows what on the fridge, toys strewn across the yard; because it had only been since Felicity. He only wanted that life with her, happy, at his side.

As he settled into a state of lucidness, Oliver felt the tingle of something else and he smirked against the shadows. His hand dipped under the covers and found exactly what he was expecting; an unsated erection.

For the first time since startling awake, Oliver rolled over and tried to make out her figure in the bed beside him.

He blinked. Fisted his hand into his eye next.

And then, lastly, he reached out a hand to touch where her silky hair should be spilling over the pillow.

Her side of the bed was empty.

Oliver sat up, bewildered, and scouted the room with his eyes. There was no shadowy figure around the walls or in her favourite ‘nook’ chair, and the bathroom light was off.

He threw off the covers and planted his feet on the floor. His brawny body was a little uneven as he stood, still waking.

He found himself in the living room/kitchen, searching places he thought she might be; the fridge, sitting atop the granite counter eating a cheeky snack, watching the city that never slept from a patio chair... but Felicity wasn’t any of the those places.

“Felicity?” He croaked as his throat was the last thing to wake up.

Silence.

He checked her office; twice. And even the hallway of their apartment building, as if she might be skulking around in it. But nothing.

Back in the bedroom Oliver switched on the light and it was then that he saw a note on her nightstand; propped up like a tent with his name in cursive on the front. Oliver reached over and grabbed it, the bed buckling under the weight of his knee. The paper was thick, cardstock, and he soon realised his name wasn’t handwritten at all, it was embossed. He sat back against the headboard and stared at it for a few moments, completely unsure of what he would find when he opened it.

He stole a few moments more to just breathe before he opened the card and read the inside text:

*Your bag is packed.*
Your ticket is booked.

Meet me where it all started.
Don’t forget to look for the sign.

Forever yours,
Felicity

Oliver’s read the words a second, and then a third time, until the delirium of waking at 2am to an empty bed finally started to wear off.

“Your bag is packed,” he puzzled to himself before he looked across their bedroom at the small walk-in. With trepidation in each footstep, Oliver walked over to the walk-in and flicked on the light. There was a sort of racing in his chest that sent a bubbling sensation up his throat as he half expected her to jump out from behind the oak door and laugh hysterically at his face. But it wasn’t Halloween, that had been and gone weeks before; and he hadn’t played any tricks on her this year that would warrant a need to get back at him for. All the same, he used his foot to kick open the door and only released the breath he was holding when he came face to face with an perfectly-ordinary closet.

Ordinary but for the small carry-on in the centre of the aisle. He walked over to it and checked the tag. It was his. A precursory look of the shelves above Felicity’s line of dresses and coats, where they usually kept the luggage, seemed to indicate her carry-on was missing.

He carried the small navy blue suitcase to their bed and sat it on top of the skewered covers. With an eyebrow hitched towards his hairline, Oliver stooped over and unzipped the suitcase. Inside it were some neatly folded clothes he recognised as his and an card-sized envelope – also embossed with his name.

He opened the small envelope and found a simple note no larger than his palm.

Your plane leaves at 8am.
Don’t be late.

You’ll need these.
xox

Something else rattled in the envelope and Oliver tipped its contents onto the bed beside him. They were scrabble tiles, three of them; R, N and E.

He smiled before he tucked the tiles into his bag and laughed. *What was she up to?*

2:30pm // Starling

Oliver stepped out into the brisk Starling air and looked around the bustling airport. He wasn’t sure what he was looking for until it hit him; *Don’t forget to look for the sign.*
He scanned the taxi terminal looking for something, *anything*, until he saw a familiar face holding a sign with his name on it.

Thea waved at him with her whole arm as Oliver rushed over to the 18 year old. They embraced with a gaggle of laughter as it had been a few months since he’d seen his little sister.

“What are you doing here?” Oliver cheered as he put Thea’s feet back on the sidewalk. Thea set her sign on the roof of her car before she passed Oliver the keys. “Felicity asked me to come and get you.”

“Did she say why?” Oliver asked while he put his suitcase on the backseat. The younger Queen smirked as she slapped his shoulder. “Telling you would be cheating, but…,” she hummed as she dove her hand into the back pocket of her black jeans, “I am supposed to give you these.”

Oliver opened his hand and Thea dropped two scrabble tiles there, *G* and *W*.

“What is she up to?” he chuckled to himself before he put those tiles with the others in the front pocket of his bag.

“So where are we going?” he asked as he stepped off the curb. “You’re supposed to know that, and you’re driving. I’m not getting a lecture from you about my driving,” Thea jested as she made herself at home in the passenger seat.

“Meet me where it all started,” he said to himself before his lips turned up into a lopsided smile. He knew exactly where she meant.

3:13pm // Queen Residence

Oliver pulled the car to an abrupt stop at the end of his parents’ drive, barely putting the car in park before he jumped out of the driver’s seat. Leaving his door open, he headed towards the back yard, and as he rounded the side of the house, through the little white gate, he expected to find her there, much like he’d done to her the day they got married.

But he didn’t.

He found his father sitting on the patio with a coffee mug in one hand and the newspaper propped up in front of him. His mother was taking a call in the conservatory.

She waved nonchalantly through the window at him and Robert Queen barely looked up from his newspaper. “Hello son,” he remarked, as though there was nothing odd in the least about Oliver being there.

“Is she here?” Oliver enquired while his eyes darted around the backyard. Robert folded his newspaper and set it down on the glass table. “Is who here?” “Felicity,” Oliver blurted, “Is she here?” “Now son,” Robert started before he paused to take a drink. “That would be cheating,” he concluded with only the smallest of smiles flickering across his lips before he picked up his paper and began reading it again.

She’d gotten them in on it too.

Oliver couldn’t help but smile as he huffed out a laugh, then he made the short walk to the exact spot where he’d climbed that fence way back in November 1999.

The Smoak-Kuttlers weren’t their neighbours anymore and Oliver caught a brief glimpse of an
older lady next door furrowing her brow at him as she cautiously watched him hovering around the fence. Oliver waved before he bent down and found what he was looking for. Another envelope, identical to the one he’d found in his suitcase.

You remembered xox

Remember our first kiss?
Go there.

I love you.
-Felicity

There was also another scrabble tile, just the one, the letter R again.

As Oliver walked back to the car he thought about the passionate kiss they’d shared outside his hotel room in Cabo, the way she mewled, the way she’d tasted, the way his lips quivered against hers; and the way she’d pulled back with tiny threads of reservation in her eyes.

He paused by the hood of the car and took a sharp inhale.
That hadn’t been their first kiss.

“Waiting for you to say you’re sorry…”
The animal shelter.

The first time they kissed was at the animal shelter where she volunteered on Sundays.

“Good luck Oliver,” Thea waved at him from the front door. “Remember never to fuck this up because she is way too good for you.”
Oliver laughed as he waved back.
Isn’t that the truth.

3:34pm // Starling Animal Rescue, Starling

John Diggle said nothing as he looked up from the front desk at the animal shelter, but his thumb pointed towards a door to the back left of the room and Oliver thanked him with a quick nod and a big smile.

Felicity was here, at the place where he’d realised how much she meant to him; and where he was too stupid to go for it.

He didn’t know what would have changed if, when he kissed her that night, he never said those two stupid little words, I’m sorry, but the truth was whatever happened led him to that very moment and he couldn’t guarantee that any ‘do over’ would. So he would take his missteps and his mistakes because in the end they led him to his perfect.

The exact pen where he’d first felt how soft her lips were was empty except for a brown paper bag with another note, just like the others, stapled to the top of it.

He opened the note first.
I really hope you didn’t fly to Cabo first (or your old dorm room because that doesn’t count, I don’t remember it).

I’m waiting at another first.
Where you can touch the stars.

Don’t forget to eat something.

Xox
Felicity

Oliver looked in the bag and found an apple, some trail mix and a bottle of OJ, with a scrabble tile taped to the lid, the letter T.

Keeping the brown bag bundled under his arm Oliver walked out the way he’d come, stopping to thank John on his way.

He settled back into the driver’s seat and took a large bite from the apple before he turned the car on. He knew where she was, and it was a long drive away.

Orion’s Gate; where you could reach out and touch the stars, and the first place they’d made love.

6:49pm // Orion’s Gate

Oliver pulled along the cabin, the tyres of his car crushing the gravel underneath them. The curtains were drawn but there was another car just ahead of his and there was a hazy orange glow coming from the two windows he could see at the front, and a chimney stack puffing out smoke; someone was here.

This had to be the place.

He’d used the drive up there to try and figure out what Felicity was spelling with the letters she had given him, writing them on a scrap of paper he’d taped to the steering wheel; W, R, N, T, E, G, R. But even as he stepped out from the car and took his suitcase from the backseat, he had no idea what the word, or words, could be.

Scuffing his shoes through the gravel and with spirals of warm breath fogging the frigid air around him, Oliver walked to the front door, stopped, and knocked.

When the door opened a curtain of warm air spilled out and brushed against his ruddy cheeks, but what warmed him the most was her smile.

“You came,” she whispered as she stood with one knee bent and a nervous smile across her beige-pink lips.
“I would have walked if I needed to,” Oliver breathed as he dropped his suitcase to his feet, took her head in his hands and kissed her. Slow, passionate, intensely engulfing. It was a kiss that said I missed you, I love you, I’m with you. The type of kiss that fate grants to those meant to be together.

A perfect kiss.
Felicity broke away slowly, letting her lips ghost his for moments afterwards as they shared the same air. Wordlessly she took his hand and led him inside, Oliver dragging his suitcase along behind him.

The door closing behind them encased them in the warmth from the fire and when Oliver finally looked away from Felicity’s perfect face, he saw a room swarming with lit candles, not unlike it had the first time they’d gone there.

She opened Oliver’s palm and he sighed at her touch, as though he’d gone without it for years, despite seeing her less than 24 hours ago. She pushed something into his palms and ravelled his fingers around it.

Felicity stepped back and hugged the ivory knit sweater around her slim frame with one arm while she feathered her fingers through the loose tendrils of hair that were falling from her messy top knot with the other.

He only just notice then that she wasn’t wearing pants, or at least any he could see, beneath the shaggy sweater that grazed her silken legs, mid-thighs. He went to step forward, to close the gap she had opened up between them, but Felicity stopped him with a coy shake of her head while she pointed down at his closed fist. Oliver blossomed out his fingers and sitting, face up, in his palm was the letter N.

“I have no idea what you’re trying to spell,” Oliver chuckled as his fingers shuffled through his hair. “That’s because you don’t have all the pieces yet,” Felicity quipped before she nodded towards the roaring fire.

Oliver’s eyes followed hers and fell on the laid out scrabble board with three tiles placed carefully on it. P A E, laid out in a sideways L shape with letters missing inbetween.

Oliver walked towards it after he retrieved the rest of the tiles from his suitcase and Felicity followed like a shadow behind him.

He stared down at the three letters placed and then at the jumble of letters in his hand. He had no idea.

“A clue?” he pleaded with an impish smile. “Kiss me.”

His knuckle lifted her chin and his lips melted against hers as the fire licked warm strokes up their cheeks. She hummed as they broke away before Felicity found the W in his hand and placed it next to the E.

“We?” Oliver read.

Felicity nodded. “Kiss me again.”

He did, much like he had a moment before, but this time his tongue dipped between her lips and swirlled around her mouth, tumbling over her tongue, while his fingers caressed her neck.

With a grazing of their noses, they parted again and Felicity took the R from his hands, placing it
between the A and the E; spelling the word ARE.

“Are,” Oliver sighed, his voice fading away at the end as he stared fastidiously at the board and the remaining letters he held.

R G N N T E
R E N
R E G
N N T
P A on the board.

P R E
A N T
G N

Shit. His mouth gaped and his knees buckled; he barely kept himself upright.

“Pregnant?” he stumbled, breathless over the word before he finally looked up at Felicity, “We are pregnant?”

In front of her Felicity was holding a small picture, black and white; almost like a Polaroid. It was a blurry sonogram and Oliver had no idea what he was looking at, except to say somewhere in that image was their baby.

“We’re pregnant,” she smiled as Oliver’s shaking hand took the photo from her fingers.

He dropped the tiles and they pattered like wooden raindrops to the floor before he swept his arms around Felicity and lifted her clear into the air, with a cacophony of happy sounds bounding off the walls.

He set her back down with tears in his eyes, before he took her lips for the third time that night and kissed her. It was shaky and soft and Felicity felt a single salty tear bleed between them before he pulled away, but left his hand cupping her cheek.

“We’re having a baby?”

She nodded, her bottom lip caught between her teeth. “Are you happy?” she asked nervously.

He took her hand and squeezed it while his eyes stayed glued to hers. “I am,” he answered simply.

“I’m beyond happy. Are you happy?”

Her head bobbed against his palm. “I’m happy.”

“How far along are you?” His hand hesitated over her stomach before she guided him the rest of the way, smiling as his hand shook against her belly.

“Eight weeks, I found out a week ago.” Felicity pinched her lips together in a pouting smile. “Don’t be mad, I just thought for once I could be the romantic one.”

Oliver lifted her again, making he squeal out a laugh as her feet treaded air.

“I love you,” he sighed, blissfully enamoured with the woman in his arms.

Felicity kissed his bristled jaw as he lowered her down his chest and by the time she was stood in front of him, the whimsy and nervousness in her expression had vanished; replaced with another he knew well; softly parted lips, lidded eyes, rosy cheeks, and the warmest peach glow glistening down her throat.

Her fingers entwined with his before she towed him to the bed, with linen in a soft avocado colour.
Felicity clinched her fingers around the hem of her sweater, toying with it for a few cheeky moments before she lifted it off her body and dropped it, unceremoniously, to their feet.

“Kiss me again,” she whispered as she sat down on the edge of the bed, pulling Oliver with her.

His body shadowed hers and he kissed her softly as she lay back into the luxuriant cloud of blankets. Hovering above her, Oliver’s eyes rode down the soft curves of her body before his lips kissed a replicate path from her warm throat down to her supple belly.

When she sighed happily as his lips met her skin, Oliver glanced up her body while she smiled down at him, and in that moment he truly couldn’t believe how lucky he was.

*How lucky indeed.*
Felicity grimaced as she blinked down at the porcelain bowl she was beginning to think herself permanently chained to.

She had expected morning sickness. In fact, she had tried to remind herself of the adage that having morning sickness was a good indication that the pregnancy was progressing well.

But this wasn't morning sickness.
This was death.
Purgatory.
Hell.

She groaned as her stomach knotted and her feet twisted in the bathmat.

Exhausted, Felicity pulled a new toilet roll from the holder and balanced it on the edge of the toilet seat before she rested her head on the pillowy roll.

Her eye lids were heavy and she allowed them to drift closed in the hopes she might find even a few minutes of reprieve.

That was how Oliver found her 20 minutes later, at 4:25 am using a roll of toilet paper as a pillow with her legs splayed on the tiled floor and a tiny whimpered snore coming from her parted lips.

He stood for a moment in the doorway with a sad smile lifting the edges of his lips. She'd looked like this once before, but dressed like Daisy Duke and for a very different reason. After a few moments, he sunk back into their dark bedroom and retrieved a throw blanket from the end of their bed. He carried the knitted green blanket back into the bathroom and carefully placed it over Felicity's shoulders.

She hadn't slept well for the last two weeks or so as she suffered through the awful bout of morning sickness that her OB/GYN could offer her little to no relief from, but to say that it would pass as she neared her second trimester; she was currently sitting around 13 weeks.

He'd contemplated picking her and putting her into bed, but he didn't want to risk waking her in a rare moment where she might actually manage a few minutes' rest, albeit in a position that looked anything but comfortable.

But as he drew his hands away, Felicity roused.
“Sorry did I wake you?” she asked, her voice thin and brittle as her throat ached and her mouth was dry.
He leaned in and kissed her forehead tenderly. “No sweetheart.”

He kissed her cheek next and she sighed softly. “My breath probably stinks,” she whispered with a faint laugh.
“Wouldn't matter to me,” Oliver remarked as he sat on the cold tiled floor beside her. “I wish I could help.”
She winked, even exhausted and nauseated, she retained her humour. “You'd never survive it,” she teased with a chuckle.
Oliver laughed warmly before he brushed a few tendrils of her hair back behind her ear. “You're absolutely right.”

Felicity yawned. “What time is it?”
“Half four,” Oliver answered as his hand absently stroked her back.
“We leave for the airport in a few hours,” she remarked as she considered her half-packed suitcase with a frown.

“Maybe we shouldn't go,” Oliver commented softly.
He tried to smile and Felicity appreciated the gesture, but she knew him better than that. “You've gone home every Christmas since you promised you would,” Felicity spoke softly, pausing twice to yawn.
“They would understand,” Oliver soothed.
“But you love Christmas.” She started to cry harder.
Oliver brushed his fingertips over her smooth cheek which was damp with tears. “Felicity you and the baby are the most important thing for me and you haven't managed to sleep in weeks or keep anything down.”

“But Christmas,” she whimpered.
Oliver smirked. “You're Jewish.”
“But you love Christmas.”
“So,” he said with a smirk, “we'll do Christmas here. Just you and me and that little strawberry in your stomach.”

She noted his eyes, and every tiny crease seemed to be smiling. “It's the 24th, how could we even?”

Oliver soothed her crinkled brow with a short pecked kiss. “Leave it all to me.” He stood up and offered Felicity, his wife, his hand and she took it with a gracious smile. “How about we get you back into bed?”

She nodded as she swayed on her small, bare feet. But, Felicity only made it two steps before an overwhelming sensation washed over her and she ended up kneeling in front on that porcelain prison again.

“Go on without me,” she groaned without looking up.
“I'll get you some water,” Oliver cooed softly, knowing sadly there was little else he could do for her.

//

It was around 7 am when Oliver left Felicity who had finally succumbed to exhaustion and was sleeping in bed with five pillows propping her head up and embracing an old bowl... just in case.

He looked around the tastefully modern living room of their apartment. There was little in the way of festive decorations as they had been planning to spend Christmas with his folks and Oliver had made surprise plans for New Years.

There were a few Jewish holiday items that Donna had brought out on her last visit but with work and Felicity's terrible morning sickness, decorating an apartment that would sit vacant for the holidays didn't seem important.

And honestly, it still wasn't. But Oliver knew his wife and if she didn't come downstairs to something that might resemble his mother's over the top Christmas ensemble with colour-coordinated decorations and presents, then she would feel like she had made him miss out on something.

Of course, Oliver wouldn't have felt that way, but along with her dreadful morning sickness, Felicity was... emotional. She needed to see Christmas to not imagined she had 'ruined' it.

So, Oliver would give her Christmas.

He left a note on the kitchen counter in case she woke before he returned and then he left on his hunt at the 11th hour to make something happen.

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Driving his car out of the parking garage Oliver pulled onto the road with very little clue where he was going, but as he drove down the busy streets he realised all great Christmas decorations started
with a tree. He needed a tree.

Unfortunately, most everyone already had a tree, and his search took him well out of the city limits, over an hour's drive away. There was just one snag; their delivery guy was unavailable. If Oliver wanted this tree, he'd have to transport it himself.

For Felicity, so be it.

With some weathered rope and a "good idea" Oliver tied the 6ft tree to the roof of his black BMW and set off home.

About halfway home the rain started. It wasn’t anything to be concerned about but to avoid the highways, Oliver had taken the old backroads and as the rain kept coming down, growing heavier by the minute, the drains on either side of the road, clogged with leaf decay and litter, began to overflow and the surface of the road itself became like a thin river.

Oliver turned off the stereo and gripped the leather wheel with two white-knuckled hands as he concentrated on the drive with sharp, careful focus. The day grew dark and the clouds grew ominously grey, but he was only 25 minutes from home; he could make it.

Another few miles and the rain had become relentless. He squinted through the rapid beat of the window wipers (which were barely keeping up with the rain) and guessed he was maybe 10 minutes away.

It would be fine.

No sooner had he thought that, then a large truck and trailer unit passed on the other side of the road and a tidal wave of dirty, sludge-like water came crashing down onto Oliver's car.

A nervous 10 minutes later Oliver pulled into their parking garage and rested his head on the top of the steering wheel as he let out a deep sigh.

When he finally stepped out of the car, he didn't need to survey the damage particularly close; the tree was a shambles, limbs were bent back and fronds were completely shaved off. It had bald patches everywhere and what was left was covered in dirty road water, rubbish, and a half dozen cigarettes that must have been kicked up from the road.

The sludge on the side of his car would wash off after a pass (or two) through the car wash... but the tree was unsalvageable.

His phone rang in his pocket and when he saw it was Felicity, Oliver put on his very cheeriest voice to disguise his disappointment.

“How is the search for Christmas going?” she laughed softly. She sounded exhausted and his heart sank as he blinked at the ruined tree.

“Really great,” he lied. But it was convincing enough that Felicity didn't question him.

“Do you think you could pick up some iced tea?” Felicity asked before a tiny yawn left her mouth.

“You want to try and keep something down?” Oliver asked kindly.

“Mmmhmm,” she said weakly and he could imagine the faint smile she was no doubt trying to keep on her face.

That was one of the things Oliver loved most about Felicity, always had. She always tried to smile, even in the worst of times, in her utter exhaustion, she would always try to smile... and not out of compulsion or fakeness, but because Felicity genuinely tried to see the good in every situation.
That had always been her.
He’d loved that light from the first time he had discovered it.
“I’ll be home soon, rest up,” Oliver said warmly.
“I love you,” she declared, simple. Perfect.
“I love you too.”
Absolute.

//

Oliver untied the tree and dragged the remains of it to the dumpster before he got in his car and drove off. He would not be bested. He would deliver Christmas.

He ended up in a packed department store. It was a hive of stress and panic and he stood by the entrance for a good 5 minutes just trying to decide where to start in the chaos of last minutes and forgotten necessities.

He took a breath.
He gripped the trolley handle.
He stared straight ahead.

Another breath; deep and foreboding.

Then he merged into the mayhem.

Or perhaps the mayhem engulfed him.

The only trees left were ostentatiously large or gaudy and Oliver hated every single one he had found from their sparse stock. He knew he’d left things far too late to be picky, but none of them would bring a smile to Felicity’s face.

And that was all he really wanted to do.

With a trolley filled with other decorations that had some semblance of theme, Oliver was almost ready to call it.

Then he remembered her iced tea so he scooted down another aisle to double back to get it.

It was there, alongside pool toys and curiosities that Oliver found something that... just... might... work.

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Felicity woke up with a long and lazy yawn and she was surprised to see that it was nearly 5 pm; she’d slept more that day than she had managed in the last few weeks.

*Bless the curtains*, she thought to herself as she blinked lovingly at the blackout curtains hung in their bedroom. Wherever they moved to, she would insist on the curtains going with them.

She slowly slid out from the covers of the bed and sighed happily as the warm air brushed against her cheeks; Oliver had turned the air conditioner on while she was sleeping to keep her toasty and warm...so she would insist on him coming when they moved too.

Felicity laughed lightly to herself as she stood up. She waited a few tentative moments to decide if her first stop needed to be the bathroom, but she felt surprisingly okay, albeit actually a little hungry.
She hadn't felt hungry in so long, she was almost not sure if that was, in fact, the knot in her stomach. She dressed slowly... she did most things slowly now as sudden movements made her nauseous, but again, she found herself surprisingly unaffected by the usual wash of nausea.

After she was dressed in jeans and a cable knit cardigan, Felicity made her way (slowly) down the stairs. It was warm and cosy and she let her cardigan slip off her shoulders.

A familiar smell dappled through the air and the closer she got to the bottom of the stairs, the more engulfing the aroma became.

She knew that smell.
She'd grown up with the smell.
Meatloaf.

She prepared herself for the expected wave of nausea that came every time she smelled cooked meat, but, surprisingly, it never came.

“Oliver?” Felicity hummed as she took the last few stairs.
But then something else completely stole her focus.

In the living room area on the first floor of their apartment sat a large, 6ft at least, inflatable Christmas tree. She barely noticed the wreaths, the tinsel, and the baubles that also decorated the room, because of the hilariously large tree.

“Happy Holidays,” Oliver whispered from behind her and she startled with a laugh.
“Christmas threw up in this room,” Felicity teased as she spun in his arms. “But I love it.”

He pointed to the Hanukah decorations along the mantle of the lit, gas fireplace. “I even got you covered.”

Felicity looked back at the bright green tree and started laughing again. “Where did you find that?”
Oliver kissed her flushed cheek and smiled at the sound of her effervescent laugh; she had been so sick lately that he hadn't heard it for a while, and fuck he had missed it.
“Do you like it?” he asked with a hitched brow.
“Oliver Queen,” she began, humming his name like it warmed her lips, “that is about the best thing I have ever seen.”

She pecked his lips tenderly before she remembered the aroma that had taken her attention on the stairs.
“That smell,” she said, pausing to float a few steps towards the open plan kitchen, “Is that...?”
Her eyes widened and her mouth watered.

“Meatloaf,” Oliver answered proudly.
“My meatloaf?” Felicity squeaked.
Oliver nodded proudly. “When I told your mom that you were feeling terrible with morning sickness, she said that she was the same with you and that the only thing she managed to eat was,” he paused to spread his hand towards the kitchen, “meatloaf.”

“You learned how to make it?” Felicity wondered aloud.
“I doubt it's as good as Donna's, but I tried,” Oliver answered with a hapless shrug.

Felicity threw her arms around Oliver's neck and hugged him as tightly as she could.
“That smells delicious,” she sobbed, actual tears streaming down her face - hormones – “Nothing
has smelled good in so long,” she added, each word dispersed with a sniff.

//

Felicity managed to eat (and more importantly keep down) a whole plate of meatloaf. Nothing had ever tasted so damn good and she was almost tempted to lick her plate clean of its saucy goodness.

After dinner, they sat together on the couch, with Felicity resting her head in Oliver's lap, enjoying the warmth the fireplace put out and the light pattering of rain against the window panes.

“I'm going to miss this apartment,” Felicity commented with a sigh as she brushed her hands over her (barely) pregnant stomach.

“Well we don't have to move right away, we still have time,” Oliver remarked as he laced his fingers into hers.

“If it’s a boy, I hope he gets your height,” Felicity laughed softly as she blinked up at Oliver.

“I hope they get everything from you,” Oliver laughed back.

“Maybe not my eyesight,” she mused.

After a few moments of peaceful silence, Felicity sat up and pressed her body against Oliver's arm.

“Can we open presents?” she peeped happily.

Oliver smiled as he unravelled her arm from around his and wandered over to the inflatable tree. He picked up a box from underneath it but an envelope that had been caught below it fluttered to the ground.

“Oooh, what's that one?” Felicity cheered as she excitedly clapped her hands together.

Oliver looked at the envelope and grimaced. “That one I was supposed to put away,” he huffed. Felicity cocked her head to the side and blinked curiously at him, “because why?”

He picked the envelope up and gently ran his fingers along the seam of the flap.

“It was just a couple of plane tickets for a trip I planned for new years, but it was before you were feeling sick.” He tapped the paper onto his palm. “It's nothing that can't be done another time.”

“You planned a trip?” Felicity asked as she scooched to the edge of her seat. “Sure,” he played it off with another shrug. “But it doesn't matter.”

She held out her hand. “Show me please.”

Oliver placed the envelope in her hand before he offered another soft shrug. “We'll do it another time.”

Felicity opened the envelope carefully and unfolded the itinerary. Oliver had booked them a flight to Cabo on the 31st, and a room at the same hotel resort where they'd stayed on spring break. Her eyes widened as she read the suite number.

“The same room?” she said with a growing smile.

“I thought a little nostalgia might be fun,” Oliver offered slyly.

“And we could have all the sex I was thinking about when we stayed there the first time?” Felicity coyly added.

Oliver held his hands up in surrender. “Your words.”

Felicity's smile softened as she delicately touched the edges of the paper, and then she started crying.

Oliver sunk down onto the couch beside her and pulled her into a tight embrace. “Hey, it's nothing we can't do in four or six months' time.”
She wiped her nose with the back of her hand. “We can just turn the heat up real high here and pretend we're there,” he offered.

“Or,” she sniffed, as she looked up at him with glassy eyes. “I could just have morning sickness in a different bathroom and sit by the pool for the rest of the time.”

She clutched the paper tightly before she nodded. “I don't want to be so pregnant that you can't flip me and fuck me five ways sidewards,” she remarked, and Oliver gaped.

“Let's just go,” Felicity announced. “If I'm sick then so be it, we'll just raid the snack bar and watch badly dubbed movies, like old times.”

Oliver held her hand and smoothed his thumb over her knuckles. “Are you sure Felicity?” he asked and his voice was almost a purr.

“You know?” Felicity said gingerly, “I think I might be moving onto the next phase of pregnancy.”

“Which is?” Oliver asked warily.

“Horny. Incredibly horny.”

She leaned over and kissed Oliver deeply.

He hummed against her mouth before he responded softly. “Now that I think I can help with.”

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Chapter End Notes

Okay but seriously, that's it for me for 2019 xox
Thanks for all your support as readers and a massive thank you to Bish for all that you do ILYSM

End Notes

As always, kudos are greatly appreciated and I'm always up for reading your thoughts in the comments.

My OCD tendencies require me to answer every comment, so there is that.

Thanks,
@someonesaidcake

PLEASE DO NOT UPLOAD THIS FIC TO ANY THIRD PARTY WEBSITE.

Respect what I've spent so long creating. Thank you.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!