They say that life is a series of events that we can neither predict nor control....

And then there is him.
He’s a bit of an enigma.

~*~*~*~

Young CEO Felicity Smoak is just trying to make her mark on the world, yes she's a little high strung and stressed, but it was what is was... until he came along. With eyes a girl could lose herself in and shoulder-tapping hair made for hanging on to Oliver Queen was reckless and carefree.

Also, he rode a bike.

He was everything she wasn't and he was a sucker for those sinful red lips and everything that came with them.

*main story complete, now snapshots*

Or, the Sons of Anarchy--esque AU that I never knew I needed.
So, I wrote this after spiralling with Ash over maniped pictures of Oliver with long hair and just how great a rough around the edges Oliver/Sons of Anarchy-esque fic would be.

I make no apologies.

Instead of a fic war (which was fun, until it wasn't) I'm opting for a simple game of "Yeah or Nah".

Yeah = you want to see more
Nah = it's not really your thing

So hop over to Twitter to vote or drop me a comment to let me know what you think.

Happy to answer questions.

Let's do this, Vroom Vroom.

NB: This is much shorter than future chapters will be, I just wanted to give you a feel for it. I also intend to update this alternating Fridays with Reprisal (and whatever other fic takes its place when that concludes).

See the end of the work for more notes.
They say that life is a series of events that we can neither predict nor control. Some call it fate, some call it karma, but the end result is all the same. Some of these events change our lives for better and some cause immeasurable and irreconcilable changes.

Raining on your wedding day.
Winning the lottery only to die the next day.
Alanis called them ironic.

I call them unfortunate.

Unfortunate events like a stone chip in a flawless windshield that causes you to swerve into oncoming traffic for instance.

And then there is him.
He’s a bit of an enigma.
Perhaps Alanis would label him something of an irony, and some might say he was unfortunate, or still others might say he was just what my high strung self needed.
And what do I say?
Well... how about we start at the beginning....

[June, 2012]

“Curtis!” Felicity called through the open glass door, once again neglecting the perfectly acceptable intercom that sat a few inches from her red nails tapping on the backdrop of a black keyboard.

Curtis skidded into the room, his hair looking more frazzled than it had earlier that morning and his yellow-tartan bowtie now sitting askew around his neck.

“Where is the presentation?” she asked without peeling her eyes from the three different monitors
set up amidst the red liquorice wrappers and Red Bull cans, evidence of an all-nighter.
“Flash drive, laptop,” Curtis replied succinctly, gaining a resolute nod from his slightly high-strung boss.

Felicity wasn’t always like this, in fact in this pairing of boss and assistant it was often Curtis who turned into a frantic mess of sweaty palms and forgotten speeches, but this month had pulled and twisted Felicity's nerves worse than he had ever witnessed since taking this job almost two years ago.

Because this month saw the entire division of Smoak Technologies balance on a knife’s edge of world headline making success OR cataclysmic failure.

Felicity had been a fresh-faced twenty-one year old when Noah Kuttler, her semi-estranged father offered her an olive branch in the shape of her very own start up under his global corporation.

Was it an attempt to apologise for being virtually absent for 74.5% of her life?
Probably.

Did she accept it regardless?
Absolutely.

Since then her parents had cohabitated in some strange mix of what Felicity referred to as dysfunctional bliss. It never made much sense to her, but it was what it was.

And Felicity?
She gathered some of the sharpest and youngest minds from some of the top colleges and set about proving a point.

Every second and every drop of sweat leading to...this...moment...here.

“There specs?”
“Briefcase.”
There was no need or function for politeness between the two as they spoke in decisive bullet points.

“Prototype?”
Curtis tapped a silver sphere on her desk.
It was the culmination of everything. Every failure and every success.

It would turn the spotlight onto Smoak Technologies.
It would answer every naysayer who levelled her as nothing more than a silver-spooned girl who stood on shaky legs under her much more successful father's umbrella.

Felicity finally looked away from the screens as she took a centering breath.

This was her legacy.
A tiny little battery with a lifespan that could eradicate the need for replacements together with a life altering microchip in the form of a bio stimulant that could, once implanted in a spine, help a paralyzed person walk again. In theory. Right now it was a weird little chip that manipulated organic goo in a Petri dish, but with more funding and tests it could be a legacy.

Today Felicity would take the only prototypes of both and pitch them to a board of directors that saw only zeros and ones and ask them to fund the development to the tune of $60million.

“Car?”
Curtis smiled to himself knowing he had an answer for everything. “Already waiting across the road,” he answered proudly. “Traffic?”

Felicity kicked the ballet flats from her feet and stepped into the patent four inch nudes neatly lined up behind her chair. She scowled to her own reflection in the embellished mirror she was now standing in front of before she crouched to obsessively straighten the other four pairs of shoes lined up.

“Traffic is moderate,” he replied, shifting just a single eyebrow up. “Make it less than moderate,” Felicity chipped as she grabbed her gadgets and folded them into her bag before she swung it over her shoulder and shimmied to adjust her “most serious of outfits” – a black pencil skirt that hugged enough of her frame to look attractive but not too attractive and a soft dusty pink satin shirt that showed just enough femininity.

She shook a hand through her tresses and cursed that she hadn't fixed it into a hairstyle that would age her a couple of years, but she didn’t have the time for such trivialities now.

“You know you invented that back door into the roading network to help emergency vehicles right?” Curtis reprimanded as he followed Felicity across her office and out the door.

Felicity smiled as she teetered the prototypes on top of three unmarked manila folders bulging with specs and notes.

“Do you enjoy your job Curtis?” she asked as she knocked the elevator button with her elbow, her hands too crowded for the task. “Very much so,” he answered suspiciously. “If we can’t get the investors to back this then neither of us will have a job, so I think this counts as an emergency,” she paused to flirt a small smile from the corner of her painted lips, “wouldn’t you think?”

The elevator doors opened and Felicity manoeuvred into the cab, precariously juggling everything she needed. “Are you sure you don’t want a hand to the car?” Curtis peeped as the doors started to encase Felicity. “Traffic Curtis, I’ll be fine.”

Curtis nodded through a grimace as the sphere teetered across the papers.

“Both components are in here right?” Felicity asked, her tone verging on an interrogation as she instantly regretted not checking half a dozen times herself. “Absolutely, the chip and the cell battery are in there.”

The doors closed ahead of her leaving Felicity staring at the brushed metal of the inside of the elevator cab. This was her father's building, but this technology could see her buy out all the shares of Smoak Tech and finally stand alone.

Okay so the use of finally might be overstating the struggle, but after she built that first computer all those years ago as a quiet seven year old with a skewed pony tail and glasses that took over half her face, Felicity had been working towards this.

This.
The word repeated as she stepped through the automatic doors and the midday sun wrapped its warmth around her.

This.
The wind caressed her neck like a soft pep talk.

This.
She saw the town car just across the road and headed towards the edge of the sidewalk.

She stepped forward, past the mailbox.
This.
She never even saw the red car hurtling towards her.

~*~*~*~

Oliver stood with his back pressed against the mailbox and a toothpick rolling around his mouth. He wasn’t doing anything in particular and few people paid him much mind which was fine by him.

His bike was parked just behind him and his eyes instinctively tipped back every few seconds to ensure it was still there.

Thea should have been there by now and Oliver couldn’t decide whether to be agitated or worried that she was running late.

His eyes roved through the mindless people walking the sidewalk, their faces buried in the screens of their phones or their mouths moving a mile a minute into them as they walked oblivious paths. Oliver wondered if they even knew that the sky had clouded over somewhat and that, even though the sun was still dancing its warm fingers across the ground, it probably wouldn’t be long till the rain started.

He ran a steady hand through his long hair, the tips of which sat just below his shoulders. It was probably slick with grease and oil seeing as he had made the drive here straight from the shop with little to no effort put in to cleaning the morning’s work from his hands.

Oliver's eyes danced from the face of one stranger to another without giving them much thought until they landed on the soft complexion of a pretty blonde talking to herself. He studied her for a moment, expecting some Bluetooth earpiece to come into view, but no, nothing, her lips were moving and he was certain words, albeit hushed ones, were passing over her sinfully red lips.

He couldn’t help but watch her as she walked with purposeful steps and arms balancing papers that would be better off in a briefcase. She crossed the paths of at least three people without blinking an eye and Oliver couldn’t help but smile.

She was gorgeous but she looked like she was under a trance of some sort; and then she floated right past him and he caught the subtly fragrant scent of lavender and vanilla in her wake.

The notes of it were so soft, so gentle to his senses, and so very different to the usual smell of spent cigarettes and dollar store perfume that assaulted him nightly.

He shouldn’t have let his mind wander, but it did, to a hazy image of her in a bath, wrapped in velvet-smooth bubbles that were the source of the heavenly scent.

A smile had tapered onto his lips as his eyes drove up her body, taking each curve with salacious wonder. There was some guy out there lucky enough to trace those curves with his tongue.

“Lucky bastard,” Oliver hushed with a smile as he tore his eyes away, expecting her to stop at the curb and finally notice the unsolicited attention he was paying her.
He doubted the princess would take too fondly to a grease monkey like himself wandering his eyes over her.

Only she didn’t stop at the curb, in fact she didn’t even register it and as Oliver watched her step out onto the road he realised she didn’t see the red hatchback heading straight for her either.

He moved on nothing but instincts when his arms coiled around her waist and he pulled her with more force than he had intended back towards the curb.

He hadn’t been expecting her to be so light and he stumbled backwards just as the red car blared its horn and the driver waved an indecent finger out the window.

Her papers went flying and the silver ball that had been like a paperweight on top of them cracked open on the ground.

Felicity screamed as she found herself flat on her back staring up at the sky and for just a moment realising that it was probably going to rain soon.

There were heavy weights across her chest, constricting her breathing and it took her a few stunted moments to piece together what had happened and that the snake like weights around her were arms…

Arms that belonged to someone…

The same someone that was making a soft groaning sound into her ear.

“Jesus,” Felicity squeaked as she leapt up and ran her eyes across the scattered remains of all her work.

By some miracle Curtis had put a rubber band around the folders and their contents remained firmly in place, but the sphere…

“Shit, shit, shit,” she cursed as her stumbled around in search on it She found it by the polished black wheel of a motorbike and she breathed a heavy sigh of relief.

“I’m fine by the way,” Oliver coughed as he sat himself up from the curb, his back aching from the way they had fallen together

“Hmmm?” Felicity hummed as she finally looked and saw Oliver sitting on the edge of the sidewalk
“Most people look before they cross the road, but not you princess,” he coughed, brushing a hand through his slick locks

Felicity stiffened her shoulders and felt the sudden urge to tap her foot incredulously.
“If you got yourself hit, you would have gotten blood all over my bike,” Oliver smirked as he folded his arms around his bent knees, “any idea how hard it is to clean blood off my bike?”

Felicity twisted her head briefly to look at the bike before she turned her attention back to the cock-eyed smile of the buff with shoulder-tapping hair.
“Actually most of your bike looks chrome so provided you didn’t let it seep in for a week you could clean blood off with a mixture of ammonia and elbow grease,” the foot started tapping impertinently, “and given the size of your shoulders I suspect that wouldn’t be a problem.”

Felicity watched as the smile at the corner of his soft lips turned up higher with each word she spoke before she decided that it was uncomfortably flirtatious and distracting. He did have nice
“Okay,” she breathed before she turned on her now-scuffed heels and scampered across the road to the waiting town car.

“Hey,” Oliver called across the street
Felicity turned as the driver opened the sedan’s door
“Ammonia is in window cleaner,” Felicity called before she disappeared into the tan leather seat behind the heavily tinted windows.
“You’re welcome,” Oliver huffed with a smile.

Oliver couldn’t wipe the smile off his face if he tried – he just saved that little Princess’ life and she simultaneously manages to insult his intelligence and comment pleasantly on his appearance all while tapping her foot like she had somewhere else to be – without a lick of a lie that was about the sexiest thing he’d ever witnessed.

“Why are you sitting on the curb, are you trying to look homeless?” Thea mocked as she pressed the toe of her boot into Oliver’s side.
“You’re late,” he huffed, the smile dissipating from his lips as he watched the town car speed away and he stood from the curb.
“I was at a job interview Ollie, it’s not like I could just walk out,” she bemoaned as she slipped the helmet from the handle bars and pushed it onto her head.

“Given it’s a shit job and you should be going to college, you could,” Oliver said as he gritted his teeth and stood up from the curb.
“We’re not having this argument again,” Thea sighed indignantly, “you didn’t go to college.” Oliver scoffed loudly, it’s not like he was a symbol of success that his baby sister should be looking up to.

As he opened his mouth to speak something shiny in the gutter by the front wheel of his bike caught his eye. It wasn’t much bigger than his thumb nail and while he had no idea what it actually was, he wasn’t so clueless not to recognise it as some sort of computer chip, emblazoned with the tiny logo of a business that had a petite sign on the front window of the Kuttler Consolidated Tower, the same building Princess had sashayed out of.

His smile returned as he slipped the tiny piece of tech into his pocket.
“Now you’re picking up trash?” Thea laughed.
“Something like that,” Oliver replied as he drew up the zipper on his jacket and brushed off the last remnants of the road dust.
“So, can I drive?” Thea asked, walking two fingers across the seat of Oliver’s one and only prized possession.
Oliver smiled, causing Thea’s eyes to widen expectantly.
“Not a fucking chance in hell. I’m dropping you home and then I have an errand to run.” Oliver slipped onto the bike and kicked up the foot stand.

“You don’t run errands,” Thea said suspiciously as she slipped on the bike behind him and folded down the helmet visor.
“First time for everything,” Oliver remarked before starting the bike in a symphony of revving and bore exhaust before the two siblings took off with a hiss and a roar that made a few unsuspecting pedestrians jolt from their oblivious paths.

First time for everything.
NOW WITH A SPOTIFY PLAYLIST
Thank you to everyone who said "Yeah" ... so here we go. Hope you enjoy it.

Especially Bish ;)

Felicity backed out from under her desk after scouring the polished marble floor in search of something that just wasn’t there as images of her legacy swirling down the porcelain throne of broken dreams flashed vividly in front of her strained eyes.

“It’s not anywhere between here and the front door,” Curtis panted as he arrived back at her door after walking like a sniffer dog across every square inch of the path Felicity must have taken to exit the building.

“Well, it’s not in here either,” she sighed as she dug the pad on her fingers under her glasses and into her eye sockets.

“Did you drop it in the car?” Curtis inquired.

“No,” Felicity bemoaned as she stood from the floor and paced a tight circle at the edge of her desk, “I showed my ass off to a dozen passing motorists on the side of the road when I went back
out and looked there once I realised it was missing during the presentation.”

Felicity rubbed her index finger into her temple and squeezed her eyes closed. There was no coming back from that cataclysmic failure. It couldn’t have gone worse if she had tried.

“They laughed me out of that meeting Curtis,” she sighed, biting back the enormous weight of tears that sat behind her glass blue eyes, “I gave them exactly what they wanted, an excuse to write me off.”

“There will be other meetings,” Curtis tried to console, although he knew as well as Felicity did that all the investors wanted was a reason to liquidate what she had spent two years building up and she had just handed it to them.

“It won’t matter, unless I show them something extraordinary, it won’t matter,” she tipped her head up to the ceiling before letting it fall lithely to her chest as she idly considered her future prospects of working in a Tech Village.

“Maybe you dropped it on the way to the car, did it fall or…” Felicity’s eyes snapped open and her mouth dropped just as suddenly. “Shit,” she cursed “when the guy grabbed me.”

“A guy grabbed you?!” Curtis exclaimed as his dark eyes widened like saucers, “do we need to call the police?”

He scampered from Felicity’s office towards his own desk, intent on calling 911.

“No, no, not like that,” Felicity clarified as her shoeless feet skidded along after him, “he was trying to save me,” she finished just as Curtis was lifting the phone receiver.

“From what?” he asked, perplexed as his mind tried to take in this sudden information download. “The car I walked out in front of,” Felicity explained as she scratched a manicured finger along her hairline. “You walked out in front of a car?”

Curtis’ last two words came out more like a shriek.

“Why are you repeating everything I am saying?” Felicity flustered as she took the phone from his hand and hung it back up. “Probably because you literally just admitted you almost died and that some guy grabbed you and saved you and this only just occurs to you now.”

Felicity hadn’t even had time to digest those few moments. In the town car on the way to the meeting she had been so focused on remembering the pitch that until this very moment now she hadn’t processed just how close she had been to getting hurt.

“I’m fine, it’s fine,” she brushed it off, although she was sure she would have more thoughts on the matter tonight while she nursed a bottle of red wine and sat alone with her take out, “but I did drop all the things I was carrying.”

She didn’t know how such an event had so easily slipped from her mind, but she was sure some old guy with a pipe would tell her it was symptomatic of her refusing to focus on anything she deemed shitty as she sat on a chaise and paid him $500 and hour to repeat quotes he stole from Pinterest.

“How is this fine with you? You could have died?” Felicity shrugged through Curtis’ melodramatics – she couldn’t focus on that right now.

“Go and look for it outside,” she instructed as she folded one hand through her tresses and tucked
the other up under her arm to stop the looming shakes “it was by the mailbox.”

Curtis ran quicker than she had seen him move ever before and she was grateful for the moments to exhale the breath she had been holding in since the realisation came hurtling towards her.

She could have died. Right there – her eyes tracked out to the window at the edge of the building as her mind wandered to the place where she wondered who might actually miss her if she had.

Her mother would, because she was her mother and she cried in Disney movies. Her father might – that wasn’t supposed to sound insulting to him, he was just not particularly emotive. Curtis would be a mess, she was almost certain of that, but when he saw what she nicknamed “bowtie provisions” in her estate planning, she was also pretty sure he’d be alright.

Felicity shook the depressing thoughts from her head, but one lingering one remained, no one at home would miss her, she didn’t even have a cat…

Felicity took a sharp inhale, now was not the time to lament her life choices. Just as the breath left her lips Curtis skidded back around the corner looking like he carried the weight of a doomsday prophecy on his back.

Even before he said the words, she knew.

“It wasn’t there,” Curtis said as simply as he could, despite the fact his eyes added a few expletives.

Shit.

“What about the guy that grabbed you? What was his name?” Curtis asked as he slunk around the side of his desk, readying his hands to find the knight in brown leather.

“I don’t know,” Felicity murmured, having lost most of her usual animated tones.

“You didn’t catch his name? Like, ‘oh thank you for saving me, my name is Felicity’,” Curtis cooed in a feminine voice to mimic Felicity, before he cleared his throat and deepened his voice to conclude, “‘you’re welcome Felicity, I like your legs, my name is Steve’.”

“Steve?” Felicity arched a brow across the desk at Curtis.

“Or Carl or Brian, something manly,” he shrugged, growling the last word.

Felicity shook her head, she would have Curtis up on his idea of manly names some other time.

“I don’t sound like that,” she argued, “and I didn’t stop to chat.”

“But you still said thank you right?” he chortled as he pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

The tip of Felicity’s painted lip twitched as she thought through the last statement.

“No,” she breathed.

“A guy saves you and he doesn’t even get a thank you?”

Felicity paced the path to the window and pressed her head into the glass.

“He called me princess, I got distracted and then the sphere was by his bike, oh god he probably ran over the chip,” she groaned as she banged her head three times successively against the window pane.

“He called you Princess,” Curtis snorted, before his eyes widened with the rest of her sentence, “and had a bike?”

“Focus Curtis,” Felicity implored.

“There were no broken bits in the gutter, a toothpick and like ten cigarette butts, but no broken chip remnants.”

“So he took it? Great, okay, that’s perfect,” she spoke sarcastically as she turned against the glass
and let out a dragged groan.

Curtis’ eyes dropped to one of the monitors on his desk which systematically flicked through the security feed for the building when something caught his eye.

“Was he tall?” Curtis asked as he tapped the command to stop the cycle through of the cameras.
“Probably about six foot,” Felicity shrugged.
“Ruggedly handsome?”
“Sure, I guess.”

She was trying to remember that point in more detail than she probably needed to, but from her recollection his arms weren’t the only thing nice about him.

“Looks good in a leather jacket?”
“I suppose,” she watched Curtis as a smile grew across his face before she started to float around the back of his desk to see what it was that had caught his attention.
“Shoulder length dirty blonde hair?”
“Yes,” she recollected with a pinched brow, “what is with all these questions?”

Curtis stood back as Felicity stopped behind his desk. Her eyes hovered over the monitor trying to see what had stolen Curtis’ attention and started the barrage of seemingly obscure questions.
“Because he’s standing in the foyer,” Curtis remarked as he tapped the monitor and the subconsciously-familiar face came screaming into focus.

Oliver Queen’s blue eyes walked circles around the needlessly expansive foyer of the Kuttler Consolidated Tower. It seemed lavish on the surface but he would take the tiny confines of his grease-scented, oil-stained garage over the soulless echo of this place. It was a pointless thought, but lack of a college degree aside, he was not cut out for this kind of environment.

The air smelt manufactured and the people mulling about seemed like they had lost themselves to tweed suits and laden briefcases. Just standing there made him itch to feel the cold wind of the open road against his face.

He tapped the pocket of his leather jacket as a subconscious reminder of what had found him walking into a place like this. Although, it had taken Oliver a damn sight longer than he had anticipated to get back here, but he was here now…

[An Hour Before]

“Take me to the shop,” Thea called into Oliver’s ear above the thick humming of the Harley’s engine as they stopped at amber lights.
“You’re going home,” Oliver called back, his eyes kept forward as his palm clenched and relaxed against the hand grip.
The two things with him were all he really cared about.

His sister and his bike.
Everything else was nothing short of fodder to pass the time.

“Fine I’ll walk,” Thea chirped before she uncoiled her arms and stepped off the back of his bike. Oliver could feel weight shift before he saw her walking through the traffic, some of which had begun to turn.
“Get back on the bike,” Oliver shouted as he watched the smirk grow across Thea’s face. “Take me to the shop,” she laughed as she raised her hands, stopping in front of an Audi that tooted impatiently. “Fine,” Oliver huffed as he threw his hands up in abandonment of his stance.

Thea skipped back towards him and jumped onto the bike before Oliver took off, somewhat recklessly turning across traffic to change his path.

It was a fifteen minute ride into the heart of The Glades where Verdant Motors stood, sandwiched between Soul Bar and a vacant store that had gone from being an adult bookshop to a donut shop to a salad bar in the last year alone.

The roller door was up when Oliver stopped his bike just outside it, smooth R&B music crooned through the air, leading Oliver to conclude that John Diggle was at work.

Sure enough he found him sat on an old Ford backseat sipping down whatever ghastly concoction his wife had blended into a smoothie for him. He was a strange contradiction, built like a chocolate coated tank with a silent, brooding exterior, but give him the dulcet tones of 90s R&B and allow him to talk about his family and that man was a giant teddy bear. He was also one of the few people Oliver had called a brother in his life.

Thea strode into the home away from home dangling the helmet from her wrist. Her feet took her straight to Roy who was stood next to a work bench completing the arduous task of cleaning a dismantled 1247cc twin cylinder engine lifted from a Harley VRSC that had seen better days.

Her arms folded around Roy’s waist before she turned him and kissed his lips with reckless abandon.

“What the fuck is that?” Oliver scoffed as he took three fast steps forward. “Don’t be a prude Oliver,” Thea mocked as she halted him with her hand against his chest.

Oliver looked around the shop, eyeing the workbench nearby for a few seconds before he reached over and collected a large box wrench.

“You better keep your lips away my sister,” Oliver threatened, his eye matching the dark thread of his voice making Roy scurry five steps backwards.

“We’re friends dude,” Roy expressed, raising his hands in surrender “That won’t stop me kicking your fucking ass.”

Thea was the only one laughing as she tossed a hand through her helmet-flattened hair and tapped the other against Oliver’s shoulder. “Oliver, I’m 17,” she reminded him, although Oliver didn’t need it. “What the fuck is that supposed to mean?” he shot back, his eyes only looking at her for a brief moment before they went back to scowling at Roy.

“The age of consent is 16 here,” she smiled, Oliver could fill in the blanks. “Why the fuck do I need to know that?” Oliver cursed as he looked back and forth between the two of them, Thea was smiling – Roy not so much, “are you telling me you two are having sex?”

Dig looked up from the magazine he had auspiciously buried his face in to watch the verbal standoff happening in front of him.

Thea kept her smile trained on Oliver as Oliver kept his glare pointed only at Roy. “Don’t answer that man,” Dig commented, shaking his head as Roy looked down at him for
support.
“I really care about Thea…” Roy started.

“I’m going to fucking kill you,” Oliver growled as he launched himself forward.
“Wrong answer man,” Dig sighed.

Roy scurried backwards before he found his feet and ran around the shop putting a broken down ivory Chevy between them.

“Get your skinny ass here, so I can kick it,” Oliver warned as Dig put his arm across Oliver’s chest like a clothesline.

“Don’t get blood on my shop floor Oliver, I’m still part owner,” Malcolm Merlyn sniggered as he scuffed his steel capped shoes against the stained concrete floor.

The Lost Souls patriarch placed a brief kiss at the crown of Thea’s head.
“Make yourself scarce, I got something to discuss with your brother.”
“Sure dad,” Thea replied, “come on Roy.”
Roy walked around the other side of the car, keeping his eyes trained on Oliver.

“They need you to drive tonight, are you up for it?” Malcom asked as he slapped a heavy hand against Roy’s chest.
It wasn’t a request.

Roy nodded.
“Good lad, 9pm out front, don’t be late.”
Roy nodded for a second time before he followed Thea outside.

“I’ll fire him if you want the job Oliver,” Malcom advised as his hands idly skimmed the top of the tool trolley
Oliver sneered as he looked into the engine of the car, his calloused fingers skimming over the pistons.
“I don’t,” he replied bluntly.

“You’re one of the best drivers the Souls had,” Malcom flattered, a rear occurrence for the patriarch, but his tongue was forked and flattery never came without conditions.
“Not interested,” Oliver reiterated as eyes stayed locked to his task.
“Straight doesn’t suit you.”

Oliver looked past the raised hood, his face void of any and all expression.
“You want something?” he asked through clenched teeth.
“When will it be ready?” Malcom queried as he tipped a nod towards car.
“Your pistons weren't firing right and your clutch is fucked, try hiring a dipshit that can drive a stick without grinding.”
Oliver threw down the rag he had folded through a belt loop before his palm slammed down on the top of the radiator.
“That didn’t really answer my question now did it?” Malcom said while his eyes narrowed and his lips twisted menacingly.

But Oliver wasn’t 15 anymore, that shit didn’t scare him.
“It won’t be done tonight,” Oliver replied, matching the sneer with one of his own.
“Tomorrow then.”
It wasn’t a question and Malcom didn’t stick around for any answer.
“Why do you stay here Oliver? These guys are fucking low life’s,” Dig spoke as he watched Oliver land three heavy kicks into a stack of tires

“Thea,” Oliver grunted

John Diggle needed no further explanation, he knew the story.

Thea was 5 and Oliver was barely 15 when their parents died in a car accident, shattering their young lives and what came after was another monumental blow.

DNA proved Malcolm Merlyn was Thea’s father, a secret kept hidden from both children, and as such he was granted custody. Oliver found himself bounced between foster homes and youth houses, separated from the only family he had, Thea. After six months of being torn apart Oliver disappeared between the cracks of paperwork and apathy and showed up on Malcom’s doorstep.

At 16 he was initiated into the Lost Souls in a bloody hail of motorbike shoes and fists.

Eleven years later he was still here, watching over Thea, waiting for the law to call her an adult.

“You think she’s going to leave with you?” Dig asked as he leant over the same hood Oliver had been looking into moments before.

“I won’t give her a choice.”

It was an hour before he made the trip back to the Kuttler Consolidated Tower.

~*~*~*~

“Can I help you sir?” a security guard with a belt buckle of Texas asked with a husky southern drawl.

Oliver stopped at the desk where the man was stood, and relaxed into his elbow that he planted there.

“I’m looking for,” Oliver paused when he realised he had absolutely no idea who he was looking for, “...someone.”

He shook his head at the stupidity of the last statement and the security guard blew out an annoyed sigh in response.

“Do you have photos of all the women that work here?” Oliver asked, realising only when the security guard hitched one very bushy eyebrow at him just how ludicrous his statements were sounding.

“Okay that sounds kinda predatory,” he conceded, “she’s young, about my age, blonde,” real nice ass.

“Do you have an appointment?”

Not even a blink of care went into the guard’s tone.

“I’d probably know her name if I had an appointment don’t you think?”

Oliver knew he was been a smartass and he also knew if he intended to get anywhere with Lurch the security guard, he should probably stop that.

But he didn’t.

Instead he chose a mildly condescending smile and added, “come on, a guy like you, you have to know the girl I’m talking about.”

“I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

That was it, no guy to guy knowing nod, just a heavy head nod towards the door Oliver had wandered through minutes before.
“What do you think he’s doing here?” Felicity asked rhetorically, of course she knew what he was doing here. “Looking for that thank you?” Curtis offered with a tempered smile. “Unhelpful Curtis.”

Felicity tapped out a pattern on Curtis’ desk as her mind spun through the most likely possibilities. “Maybe he’s here to return it, like blackmail?”

This. “It’s more extortion than blackmail,” Felicity clarified out loud. That had been the first conclusion her mind had settled on, hearing it from Curtis just made it more solidifying.

“I’ve seen this on a few movies, he goes in high, you low ball him,” Curtis blurted, probably more excited about the romanticized idea than he should be as he followed a barefoot Felicity walk a circuit around his desk.

She twisted her head over her shoulder and raised a single brow at him. “It sounds way more sexual than it should,” he observed as they finished the circuit and ended up back in front of his monitors, “and then you meet in the middle and...”

His last words trailed off as a flashing message box caught his attention. “Oh shit,” he gaped.

“What?” Felicity responded as her eyes stayed focused on the monitor showing her ruffian being stopped by a security guard. “Your dad’s EA just sent me a message, Noah is on his way here.”

Shit.

“He must have heard about the disastrous meeting,” Felicity mused as she took hurried steps back into her office, Curtis a few steps behind. “Stall him,” Felicity instructed as she scooped up a pair of shoes, knocking her perfectly ordered line.

She looked at it with scathing, but her orderly manner would have to take a holiday right now as the impending doom of Noah Kuttler would be landing on this floor any minute.

“How?”

“How can you Curtis,” she called as she slid towards the stairwell, shoes in hand.

Felicity burst through the ground level stairwell door with barely a breath left in her, but there was little time to linger around to catch it as her eyes quickly found Oliver – being escorted out of the building.

“Wait, he’s mine,” Felicity called across the foyer, her throat hoarse and her voice strangled. Both Oliver and Lurch turned to see a very breathless Felicity, with shoes dangling from her hands and her cheeks flushed a sinfully ripe shade of red.

“See,” Oliver nodded to the guard

Told you so his inner pubescent child simpered.
“Ms Smoak, this guy is with you?”
She reached them with not a scratch of a breath left in her lungs. She raised a finger as she folded in half and the other hand sunk in around her waist after she dropped her shoes to the floor.

A minute lapsed before she straightened up, slipped her shoes on and smoothed down her pencil skirt. She ran a controlled hand through her hair before she had enough air in her lungs to answer.

“Yes.”

“Uh, alright,” Lurch replied, perhaps a little mystified with the whole exchange, but he wasn’t paid to care what people who had their name on the board did.

“So, I have…” Oliver started

Some demands…Felicity imagined the next words like they were from Die Hard.

“Okay,” Felicity sighed before she bit back the look of defeat, not today, “just not here.”

Felicity took Oliver down a hall and stopped in front of the supply room closet. This seemed like the appropriate place for some clandestine extortion.

She walked in first and switched on the light before tugging him inside and pushing the door closed. Offering herself a resolute head nod for a pep talk before she tensed her pout and turned to look at his slightly bemused face.

“How much?” Felicity asked, straight shoulders, orotund voice.
She was not a meek fool, and woe to the man in the well fitted leather jacket and scuffed boots if he thought she would be.
“Sorry?” Oliver quipped, a slight chuckle escaping from his lips as he settled on the fact they were indeed in a supply storeroom, surrounded by cleaning solutions and toilet rolls.

“How much do you want?” Felicity demanded, it had sounded much more growly than she had intended it to, but his boyish chuckle and flexed arms that folded over his broad chest were distracting to say the least.

“Wait,” the finger shot up unexpectedly, “I should check you have it first.”

She swallowed the apologetic this is my first extortion and straightened her shoulders.

“Do you have it?”
Oliver pulled the chip out from his pocket and held it out in the space

“Thank goodness,” she squeaked before returning to her rigid stance, “so how much?”

“I don’t understand...” Oliver spoke in an effortlessly smoky tone that was coincidentally very sexual, though he didn’t mean it to be.

“Look,” Felicity relaxed her stance to incidentally mimic the same foot tapping one from earlier today, “I really have to be somewhere so I would be grateful if we could speed this up. So let’s just do this, you aim high and I low ball you and we meet in the middle, so go,” she offered him the simplest of smiles together with a gesture for him to begin the negotiations.

Oliver's amusement grew as he watched her with savagely beautiful eyes, so utterly enthralling that it took Felicity's avid attention to blink away, lest she find herself buried in them.

“You’ve misunderstood,” Oliver spoke kindly, although a gravelled tone still lingered naturally.
He took her hand without resistance, opened it with a gentle caress, smooth against calloused, and placed the chip in the middle of her flattened palm before both his hands enclosed her own, closing fingers around the chip.

“I don’t understand, you don’t want money?” Felicity breathed her soft-spoken surprise.
“No, it looked important, I wanted to see that you got it back,” Oliver replied as those heavenly notes of her perfume tickled his sense.

Felicity wasn’t sure what words to say first, question him why, apologise for his troubles, thank him expressly for everything – but when she finally landed on one, the door was open and Oliver was gone.

She stepped out from the supply room and bounced eyes across heads in search of him, but he was already passing through the front doors when she finally saw him.

She still hadn’t said thank you.

~*~*~*~

Curtis was there waiting for her when Felicity stepped out from the elevator, her mind still wrapped up over the exchange. Everything about him screamed trouble, yet there was an unmistakable depth in his eyes and his touch had been so soft.

“He had it?” Curtis asked the moment her first foot hit the floor.
“He did,” she answered wistfully as she opened her palm, the sensation of his fingers on her hand now beginning to fade.

Felicity walked on auto pilot to her office, he could have asked for millions, even if he wasn’t that greedy a couple of hundred thousand. But he hasn’t asked for that, he hadn’t asked for anything.

“Your father wants to see you” Curtis added with a wince.
“Of course he does,” Felicity noted as she opened the sphere and placed the chip gently inside, finally letting go the breath of trepidation she had been keeping since discovering it was missing.

“Your mother called, she wants a coffee date.”
“Of course she does.”
She took a moment to straighten her shoes, her hands needing a simple task as her mind continued to ruminate on the stranger who had both literally and metaphorically saved her today.

“Cisco has put in a purchase order for red Twizzlers.”
Curtis tapped a pen against a notepad which would have ordinarily made Felicity pluck it unscrupulously from his fingers, but right now she found a calmness in its monotony.
“Sign off on it,” she instructed as she sat and hovered her hands above the keyboard, unsure what, if anything, there was to do next.

“Really?” Curtis challenged.
“If it helps him finish that new polymer Kevlar weave he gets as much red Twizzlers as needed,” she answered without even looking up.

It seemed the day's events were starting to settle and Felicity felt an uneasy depth about them that she needed to distract herself from.
“Next?” she asked Curtis, finally raising her eyes to Look at him.
“Kord was experiencing some rolling security blackouts.”
“Third time this month,” she quietly surmised.
“They want you to take a look.”
She nodded, distraction found.
“Fine, anything else?”

Curtis turned on his polished tan loafers but stopped midway through.
“What was he like?” he quizzed as he turn back towards Felicity's desk.
“Who?”
“The hot biker guy, how much do we owe him? Or do you have to...”
“Don’t finish that sentence,” Felicity ordered with a tautly arched brow.
“He didn’t want anything,” she added as she dropped her brow.
“Nothing?”
“No, he just gave it back.”

“Huh,” Curtis hummed before the pen started again.
“What’s the huh?”
“Well he delivered it by hand,” Curtis pointed out.
“Yes.”
“To you...”
“Yes.”
“For absolutely no reward?”
“Where are you going?”

Curtis shook his head before he turned and headed for the door, stopping a second time.
“What?” Felicity huffed as she lay her hands, palm down, on her desk.
“You don’t think that's...” his hands juggled through words.
“Strange?”
He had been thinking more along the lines of romantic, sweet, charming, but he nodded to her suggestion regardless.
“Probably, but all’s well that ends well,” she shrugged, though it bothered her more than she would admit.
“At least you got to say thank you.”

Felicity opened her mouth to confess, but promptly closed it again.
“You did thank him right?”
“Not exactly,” she confessed, “he had gone by the time I opened my mouth to say it.”

Curtis snorted through a laugh until Felicity shot it down with one look.
“I need to say thank you,” she groaned.
“You need to say thank you,” Curtis repeated.
“How? A lifetime supply of grease and motor oil?” she asked as her memory recalled the musky and somewhat arousing scent of it that had lingered moments after he had left the storeroom.
“Or shampoo?” Curtis offered with a shrug.
Felicity shook her head, whatever he used in his hair made her want to run soft fingers through it.
She was taken aback by her own momentarily salacious thoughts. This drought she was experiencing was playing tricks on her better judgment.

“A sports thing?” she offered, but Curtis looked just as bewildered at the prospect as she did “Basketball?”
Felicity pouted her lips before refuting the suggestion with a soft shake of her head.
“Baseball?”
This suggestion was met with a nod, she could see him sporting a baseball cap and grass-stained pants, not that she expected him to play obviously, it just seemed a better fit.

“Season passes,” she added.
“Okay, two?”
“Do you think that's enough? He probably has like twelve kids.”
They both laughed that slightly awkward chuckle where there was an underlying possibility of it
being altogether possible.

“Okay, while you do that, I’m going to go calm my father and then dive into the Kord thing.” She tapped a staircase of fingers along the lip of her desk. Perhaps she would have a legacy after all.

~*~*~*~

It was after 8pm when Felicity looked up again. Her father was placated, at least momentarily and he would see what strings he could pull to get a second meeting, she hated admitting needing it but they wouldn’t come to her beckoning.

Kord was protected behind at least six firewalls all personally designed by her with a Trojan set amongst them to trace back anyone clever enough to get through the first three. For now, that would do.

“Four season passes,” Curtis announced as he fanned the four tickets in front on his face, “the twelve kids can take turns.”

“Alright,” Felicity stifled a yawn, “give me the tickets I’ll drop them off.”
“Wait, how do you know where he is?” Curtis asked suspiciously.
“I ran facial recognition,” Felicity shrugged, nonchalant over the series of laws she had broken without chipping her nail polish.
“You hacked an FBI satellite?”

Felicity plugged the coordinates into her tablet, he hadn’t moved much in the last 3 hours and she doubted he would move much in the next 30 minutes, but her tablet would update her if he did.
“Give me the tickets Curtis,” she held out her hand expectantly.
“I am not going to jail for you.”
“Tickets.”

With a huff, Curtis surrender his moral high ground and handed over the passes.

“Wait, is this the Glades?” he asked as he caught the blip on her screen.
“And?”
She slipped into black pumps and straightened her ponytail in the mirror while she watched Curtis’ reflection look absolutely horrified.
“Have you seen you? You can’t go wandering through the Glades at this time of night.”

Felicity turned in her heels and called it a night, hibernating her computer before she tottered to the door, her slippers would be a welcome retreat tonight as would the wickedly long bath she was dreaming of sinking in to.

“I have mace,” she finally answered as Curtis grabbed his messenger bag and took one step to match her three.
“Because that will help when you’re shot,” he mocked as he pushed the elevator button four times superfluously.
“So come with me,” she shrugged as the doors opened and then closed with them inside.
“I don’t want to get shot,” he grimaced like a child scared of a spider.
“Then don’t.”
It really didn’t matter to her.

She waved goodbye to the night security who tipped his head in a chivalrous gesture.
“Can’t we send a bike messenger?” Curtis asked as they stepped out into the cool night air, alive with the electricity of Starling’s night life.
“Are you coming or not?” Felicity asked as her eyes searched the curb for a taxi.

Twenty minutes later and Curtis pulled to a rolling stop across from a bar that was spilling patrons and light into the parking lot which was filled with an impressive amount of motorcycles.

This was the place.
Felicity didn’t pay much mind to the light bleeding from the closed garage next door as she was fairly convinced he would be inside the bar.

“Are you sure about this?” Curtis fretted.
“Just stay in the car then, I’ll find Oliver myself,” Felicity vowed as she unbuckled the green Prius’ seatbelt.
“You know his name, how?”
Felicity tipped her head back and offered Curtis an all-knowing smile.
“Never mind,” he lamented, “I don’t want to know.”

Felicity winked as she stepped from the car.
“If you’re not back in fifteen minutes, I’m calling the C-O-P-S.” he called after her in a hushed order which Felicity simply waved a hand at.

Her heels clipped across the tarseal as she deliberately ignored the eyes she could feel watching her. In hindsight perhaps this hadn’t been the best of decisions and it was only as some moved into the glow of the street lights that Felicity realised they were mostly wearing the same jacket, the same patched jacket.

She was about to walk into a gang haunt.

Felicity pulled open the door and was hit in the face with the heavy fog of smoke and raucous voices. It was everything that stereotype movies had lead her to believe. The clunk of pool balls being smacked with pool cues, a jukebox playing some unfamiliar song from a decade Felicity was sure she wasn’t alive in and a sudden, heavy weight of eyes locked on her.

She headed to the left where a huddle of girls sat perched at the bar.
“Excuse me,” Felicity interjected, although she needn’t have as she had gotten their attention from merely walking through the doors.

The caramel-brunette’s eyes scoured Felicity with pursed lips and narrowed eyes. Her distaste was clearly worn.

Felicity decided to ignore it.
“I’m looking for Oliver Queen.”
“I bet you are,” Caramel sneered
“Could you tell me where he is?”
She had looked as best she could from her vantage point, but she couldn’t see him.

“He’s not here.”
The lie wasn’t even well executed.
“Never mind, I’ll ask someone else,” Felicity opined.
“Look, I don’t know where you think you are,” she was on her feet now, shaking a finger of skin and bones in Felicity's face, “but I said he’s not here. Fuck off.”
“Take your own advice Laurel,” Thea mocked with a challenge threaded through her tone, one she knew Laurel would never accept, “isn’t there a stranger you can fuck in a bathroom stall?”

Laurel turned wordlessly back to the bar and ordered another drink.

“That’s what I thought,” Thea smirked before she turned her attention to Felicity, the fairly obvious fish out of water.

“Who are you looking for?”

“Oliver Queen,” Felicity replied, wondering if she might get the same response from this one too.

“Yeah, I know him,” Thea caged her reply, “but bitch for brain there is right, Ollie doesn’t come in here much anymore.”

“Do you know where I could find him?”

Felicity could tell the young girl was debating with herself until she nodded towards an unmarked door in the nearby wall.

“I’ll take you to him.”

Felicity followed the young girl through the door, “I’m Thea.”

“Felicity,” she replied with a smile that Thea returned.

They walked the length of a grey corridor that hummed with the noise from the bar on one side.

“You’re not a cop are you?” Thea asked as she stopped in front of another door, her hand poised on the handle.

“Uh no,” Felicity said as she shook her head to double down on the answer.

“Because you would have to tell me if you were.”

“That’s actually not true, complete urban myth, imagine if that’s all people had to do, ask,” Felicity jested, it probably should have struck her as not the time for a ‘fun fact’.

“So you are a cop?” Thea tensed as her hand fell from the handle and tightened around her waist.

“No, no, I’m not,” Felicity assured.

“I’m just playing,” Thea laughed, “Oliver's in here,” she added with a tipped head towards the door beside her.

“Are you his uh, girlfriend?”

Felicity wasn’t entirely sure why she asked that, but it came out before she had a chance to stop it.

“No, he’s my brother,” Thea smiled as she cracked open the door to a familiar smell if oil and sweat.

Felicity wasn’t sure why she found a level of relief in Thea's reply.

“Shit head?” Thea called into the echo chamber of a workshop.

The sound of castor wheels on concrete gave Thea her answer.

“You have a visitor.”

Thea left before Oliver had wheeled himself out from under the car, leaving just Felicity standing there when he stood up.

Oliver didn’t say anything as he tugged the oil rag from his belt loop. He was shirtless and Felicity found her eyes devouring every inch of it until she forced herself to look away.

He took a few steps forward, stroking the oil rag over his dirty hands as he walked.

“You’re a long way from home princess,” he spoke in a gravelled rasp that resonated down Felicity’s spine.

She swallowed down the tension building in the small space between them as her eyes followed the path of a single drop of sweat that ran a glistening path down the groves of his abs.

“These are for you,” she flung her hand out with the passes gripped between her fingers as she
forced her eyes upwards to his face.

That wasn’t any less distracting. His hair was pulled back, but sections of it had fallen forward and were skimming against his chiselled and unshaven jaw.

“Why?” Oliver asked as he looked at the passes but never moved his hand toward them. “A thank you, I didn’t get a chance to say earlier.”

She jutted her hand out a little further, now brushing the tickets across his taut chest, hard with defined muscle groups, the perfect specimen to study.

“You know,” Oliver caressed the words with his tongue as he walked around the back of her, even amidst all the garage smells he could taste her delicious notes, “if you wanted to sleep with me you could have just asked.”

His words blew like a soft chant against her adorned ear, before he ended up in front of her again. “I probably would have said yes,” he smiled, not a smirk as his words should have been followed with, but a smile, a genuine one that had a definite attraction about it.

“I know you’re trying to get me flustered but it won’t work,” Felicity mirrored his smile.

“Really?” he said, though it came out more as a husky growl “Really.”

“Consider this my thank you,” Felicity maintained as she put the passes down on a nearby trolley and kicked up a heel before she turned her back on him.

“Goodnight,” she heard him breathe behind her. Felicity reached for the door handle, twisted it and tugged the door open before she turned her head, briefly surprised to see Oliver still stood there.

“Oh and one more thing Mister Queen,” she smiled with sinfully red and deliciously wicked lips, “if I asked, there would be no probably about it.”
Felicity didn’t dare look back. She didn’t want to see if Oliver was smiling or looking at her like she was some sort of crazed woman. The second would probably have been pretty accurate and she silently scolded herself for traipsing all the way down here to present him with some thank you present. She didn’t even know him.

Her chastising consisted of the hushed words “really” and “so stupid” until she saw Thea, propped up against the doorframe between the corridor Felicity was currently clopping down, and the bar. She was wearing a smile similar to her brother’s one, just watching Felicity as she approached the door Thea was holding open with her foot (enclosed in a large unlaced combat boot).

“Thank you for your help Thea,” Felicity smiled as she offered her a quick nod of thanks.
Thea said nothing as Felicity walked past, but she was sure *thinking* a lot. She smiled and nodded back and watched as Felicity walked out the bar’s front door. “Fucking idiot,” Thea mumbled as her eyes travelled down the corridor to the door into Oliver’s shop.

~*~*~*~

“Who was she?” Thea asked as she pushed the door open with her boot. Oliver looked up from the tool tray he had been mindlessly staring at since Felicity had left, her passing words still lingered between his ears. “Bible study,” he huffed, he was vividly aware of the tone Thea was projecting and he had no interest in debating his little sister at this time of night.

Hoping she would take the hint, Oliver trudged across the workshop floor back to the car he had been working on earlier. “Shut the fuck up Oliver,” she laughed as she followed him. She wasn’t so easily dissuaded, even with the glare he was clearly sending her way. “She’s probably the only girl that has shown any interest in you that likely has on matching underwear not in an animal print and you let her walk out of here?” Thea mocked, before landing the final blow, “Jesus, Oliver, Mary, and Joseph, did a car drop on your head today?”

Oliver rolled his tongue across the front of his teeth and clenched his jaw, “she just came to drop something off Thea.”

Thea laughed. Thea laughed so hard she almost spilled the half-finished bottle of Corona she was waving around. “Girls like *that* don’t travel to shit holes like *this*” she snorted as she kicked the tire of the car to prove the point, “just to drop something off.” Oliver stared down at the engine, his hands locked to his side but his eyes trapped downward, refusing to take the bait.

Thea sighed and tapped a finger coated in chipped black polish up the hood of the car. “She came to see you Oliver,” she smiled as she leaned down to meet his eyes. He blinked away, losing the unsanctioned staring competition.

“Though I don’t quite understand the attraction,” Thea finished before she took a sip and waited for the expected reply in *four, three, two…* Oliver laughed. *One.*

She knew him better than either of them cared to admit. “Put a fucking tee shirt on and go out at ask her if she wants a drink,” Thea instructed as she picked up his nearby tee and threw it over his shoulder, “ten bucks she says yes.”

Oliver finally looked up and tugged the tee from his shoulder. He never said no to a chance to win ten bucks from his sister, especially when she was wearing a smarmy smile like the one she had on at that moment.

~*~*~*~

“Where you going sweet cheeks,” a slimy voice attempted to croon as Felicity walked through a crowd of revellers unwilling to step aside.
She should have ignored it. Kept walking. What some low life outside a dive bar said was irrelevant, every logical part of Felicity knew that. But when she felt a hand grab her ass Logical! Felicity checked out.

“Are you referring to the ones on my face or the ones on my ass that your skeezy hand just touched like you owned the place?” Felicity snipped as she spun around to meet the owner of the wayward hand.

She was expecting some troll-like creature and she pretty much got a slightly taller, but equally as weedy, representation of the same, only where she expected greasy black hair she was met with a shiny bald head that instantly reminded her of a baby, an ugly man baby.

“You out here waving that fine piece of ass around and you got to expect it to be grabbed bitch,” he spoke through clenched teeth.

Felicity managed to swallow down the desire to correct every grammatical error in his crass display of misogyny.

“I assure you I wasn’t waving it anywhere near you,” Felicity replied fiercely.

“You got a smart mouth, pretty but smart,” Man-baby stepped closer, crowding Felicity’s personal space, “how about I put something in it?”

Felicity's fingers in her bag couldn’t find the pepper spray she had so easily prattled off as a security measure to Curtis.

_Curtis_

She looked down towards where the car was parked but the crowd made getting his attention impossible. Most were taller than her and those that had turned around with the exchange of words seemed to be forming a semi-circle around her.

She stood up tall in her heels – whatever happened, they weren’t going to see her cower.

“Back the fuck away, fucking sewer rats,” Oliver shouted, with a voice that was more charged and gruff than the smooth one he had used speaking with Felicity, “clearly she doesn’t want to slide on a thin dick with a head like a giant man baby.”

Felicity bit her lip to stop from laughing.

Man baby turned and puffed out his chest at Oliver, it was much smaller and only at that time did Felicity actually appreciate the size of Oliver’s when the troll paled in comparison. She watched as Oliver reached under the back of his navy blue tee-shirt, tie-dyed with grease as though he was carrying a concealed weapon there.

Without a word Man baby raised his hands and walked away, circling Oliver in the process. Oliver turned with him, ensuring his back was never to the other player in whatever game this was.

“Whatever,” man baby huffed before he slapped the arm of one of his buddies, “pussy that tight would probably snap a man’s dick.”

Oliver moved much faster than Felicity would have expected and before she could even think about trying to stop him he had the man baby by the throat, bent back, with Oliver’s tightly clenched fist raised above him, lining up a shot that would most likely break the guy’s nose instantly.

“You best apologise,” Oliver scathed as his lips tensed after every word.

The buddies took a few almost military-like steps backwards creating a fight circle around the two and leaving Felicity inside it.
Before she could account for it, Felicity’s hand reached out and touched the bicep of Oliver’s arm, the one that had a very tight grip on the man’s throat. She walked it down a few inches as she stepped closer to Oliver.

The muscle was tight and hard, stretching the material of his tee shirt like it could rip at any second. Felicity watched his jaw unclench just a fraction when she touched him, but his eyes, curtained with a tensed brow, never blinked and never gave any retreat from the target directly in front of him.

“Not on my account,” Felicity said softly but matter-of-factly. She didn’t offer her words because she was invested in what happened to Man Baby’s nose, but because Felicity wasn’t interested in being a damsel in distress who needed to have her fragility and honour defended by a man’s fists.

Oliver finally turned his head to look at her. He looked almost annoyed at her request and while his hand tightened around the throat of the weed, Oliver seemed to consider her ask for much longer than would be deemed necessary.

Oliver loosened his grip and shoved Man baby back towards the circle who were now beginning to jeer. They had wanted a fight.

Oliver lunged forward towards Man baby who was trying to catch his breath after been previously prevented from doing that by Oliver’s hand. The man scuttled backwards, through the crowd and just like that Oliver had made his point.

He was offered a hand by a particularly stoic biker and he took it as expected, folding his arm at a right angle upwards with palm pressed against palm before the man slapped Oliver’s back and smiled.

It was a comradery Felicity didn’t stick around to witness and by the time Oliver had turned back around expecting to see her, she was almost at Curtis’ car.

Oliver ran to catch up and when he was close enough to hear her, Felicity turned around. She wasn’t wearing the face of gratitude that Oliver was expecting.

“I didn’t need you to step in, I had in handled,” she spoke, stopping her feet. “By insulting them?” Oliver laughed. “That’s assuming they have enough mental capacity to know when they’re being insulted,” Felicity shrugged, “and anyway Curtis would have come to my aid if I needed it,” she finished as she looked over to the car a few more feet away.

Oliver stooped to look inside the car when Curtis was grooving away to soulful R&B he had reasonably loud. He didn’t even realise they were there.

“This guy?” Oliver smiled, which only caused Felicity to walk the short distance to the car faster. She banged on the window and Curtis looked up startled.

“Open the door Curtis,” Felicity growled, through the window, the music likely drowning out her voice but not her very tersely mouthed words.

Curtis leaned over and unlocked the doors with a sheepish smile. “Is he your bodyguard?” Oliver asked sarcastically as Felicity opened the door. “My personal assistant,” Felicity retorted sharper than anticipated.

Oliver leaved his back against the car, rocking it once with just his weight alone before he hung his
fingers over the top of the car door, barricading Felicity.

“Your secretary?” Oliver smiled.
Felicity peeled off Oliver’s fingers and his hand dropped to the side, giving up with little resistance.
“Why are you still here Mister Queen?” she turned her face to look at him, but only for a moment until the heat in his eyes became too much.
“Mister Queen was my father and he’s dead,” Oliver replied, somewhat bluntly.
“I’m sorry,” Felicity softened.
Oliver shrugged, “why, did you kill him?”

Felicity blew out an exasperated breath before she went to get in the car.
“I’m sorry, I’m kidding” Oliver apologised.
“If you say so,” she replied, one foot in the car before Oliver’s arm blocked her a second time.

“Do you want a beer?” he asked, with absolutely no fanfare about the request.
“Sorry?” Felicity choke-laughed as she pulled her foot back out of the car and set it down on the ground while Curtis looked on, jumping between being completely enthralled in the conversation and feigning disinterest in a personal matter between his boss and some very large, very good looking biker.

Oliver blew out a slow, steadying breath. He had been shot, stabbed, beaten up with almost every weapon imaginable and he’d been more traffic accidents then he cared to recount, but this moment felt worse than all of those combined; and he had no fucking idea why.

“A beer, do you want to have one?” he finally managed to ask a second time, though it was no more suave than the first.
“With you?” Felicity asked, her tone one of complete perplex.
“That was the general idea.”

Nope, nada, refrain, not at all, don’t be ridiculous.
“Okay,” she replied.
It seemed Logical!Felicity was still on unexplained leave.

Oliver laughed through his nose, not mockingly but simply out of surprise. He actually hadn’t been expecting her to say yes.
“Really?” he asked, dumbfounded.
Felicity shook her head lightly as she blew out the second exacerbated breath in minutes, she really did not need to be having this kind of pointless exchange on the street well after dark. She wasn’t in the mood for games.
“Never mind,” Felicity shook her head as she dipped to get into the small car.

“Wait come on, I’m sorry, I was just surprised you said yes.” Oliver offered with a genuinely apologetic smile.
“I drink beer,” Felicity replied, though there wasn’t exactly a question.
That one time about 2 years ago when that was the only alcohol left in the house and I didn’t want to go outside because I had lived in my track pants for the last four days…

Oliver smiled through a nod like everything was settled. They were going to have a drink together. He owed Thea ten bucks but he wasn’t bothered by losing the bet at all.

“What about him?” Oliver asked, nodding down to Curtis who was currently pretending not to be listening.
Felicity bent down to put her head in the car, “goodnight Curtis.”
“You’re staying here…” Curtis started.
“Goodnight,” she waved as she began to close the door.
“Are you…”
Felicity shut the door before Curtis had a chance to finish.

“He’s chatty for a secretary,” Oliver said as he waved through the window at Curtis before they walked back across the road towards the bar.

Before they reached the path that led inside the bar, Oliver veered off and headed for the closed garage door of the workshop instead.
“Thought we were getting a beer?” Felicity asked, confused but following Oliver’s footsteps regardless.
“You don’t want to sit in that shithole,” Oliver joked, though there was definitely some truth in it, “I have some in the fridge.”

He looked over at Felicity whose steps had slowed. Her face showed a washed out hesitancy.
“I mean if that’s alright,” Oliver added, his voice softening in some natural desire to alleviate the look she was wearing.

Felicity was fairly certain her acceptance would go against every stranger danger teaching she had learned from elementary through to high school, but even with his gruff exterior she wasn’t in the least bit afraid of him. Perhaps that was the most unsettling part.
“Sure, that’s fine,” she replied, wiping the hesitation from her expression.

Oliver smile as they continued walking. He stopped just after passing a row of bikes a few feet from each other. Leaving Felicity standing where he had stopped, Oliver walked back towards the end bike and laid a hard and fast kick into the back wheel.

It toppled like a toy and clanked onto the ground in an awful noise that had Felicity instinctively raising her hands to her ears. Despite the close proximity to the congregated bikers still outside the bar, not a single one of them even bothered to look.

“What did you do that for?” Felicity gaped as she took a few hurried steps towards him, looking over the bike and wondering wordlessly whether Oliver had done anything permanent to the red and black Triumph.
“It belongs to the guy that insulted you,” Oliver smiled, purveying his handiwork as he contemplated doing a little more damage, snapping off the kick stand seemed like a pleasing idea. “It is?” Felicity hummed, but she never waited for confirmation.
She slipped one of her shoes from her foot, idly leaning against Oliver’s shoulder as she did. Balancing on her tippy toes she crouched in front of the fallen bike. A wicked smile walked across her painted lips as she raised her designer heel and brought it back down like a whip onto the chrome exhaust, denting it right in the centre.

“Nicely done,” Oliver laughed as he helped her to her feet and became her balancing pole once again while she slipped her shoe back on.
Felicity brushed down her black skirt and smiled.
Nicely done indeed.

Oliver lifted the garage door and ushered Felicity inside. The familiar smell of it lapped against her nostrils and she found herself breathing it in quite deeply. She didn’t turn around when she heard the door close behind them, but she could feel him as he walked his bulky frame around the back of her. He never touched her, but the air that past between them felt like fingers through the thin fabric of her blouse.
Felicity followed Oliver across the shop floor, admiring the cars as they went. There were four that she counted, three of them were older looking, vintage likely, but the fourth, the one she had seen him working on, that one was more modern, within the last decade at least.

She stopped short of the room he ventured into, choosing to stand against the doorframe instead. Oliver didn’t notice, didn’t care.

Felicity looked around the room as Oliver sought out a small under-desk fridge and crouched down in front of it. The room was pretty sparse, not overly large or small. It had a small double bed pushed up against the wall, a set of drawers in front of it and a large, full length mirror beside that, positioned a stride or two from the foot of the bed. Closer to the door was a desk, a filing cabinet and the small fridge Oliver was still stooped in front of.

It all seemed tidy enough, two drawers weren’t closed completely and the desk was a bit scattered for Felicity’s OCD tendencies, but when her eyes walked back to the bed the strangest thing occurred to her – it was perfectly made.

The word perfectly was not an exaggeration. It was box folded at the foot and both pillows were exactly uniform in size, covering and position. It was a bed made to five-star hotel standards, though the linen definitely wasn’t, the effort completely stole her attention until Oliver held an opened beer in front of her.

“You live here?” she asked, though she knew it was absolutely none of her business.
“Some nights I sleep here,” Oliver replied without hesitating, “but Thea and I have a place not too far from here.”
“You own this place?”
Still not her business and she watched him over the tip of her beer bottle, half expecting him to tell her that was enough prying. He didn’t exactly seem like the small-talk sharing kind of guy.

But he surprised her again by answering fluidly.
“About forty-eight percent owner.”
“Who owns the other fifty-two?”
This question had his jaw tensing.
That was his line.

“No one worth mentioning,” Oliver remarked as he sidestepped her through the doorway and walked towards the car with the hood up.

Felicity perched on the edge of the old backseat.
“How old is Thea?” she asked.
His jaw relaxed when he realised she wasn’t going to push an answer for the other question.
“Seventeen,” Oliver replied.

Felicity coughed down her mouthful out of sheer surprise at his answer.
“I expected her to be older,” she stuttered before she managed to swallow and regain her composure, “given I found her in a bar.”

Oliver ran a tentative thumb down his unshaven jaw and Felicity swore she could hear the sound of the stroke.
“Her dad owns the place so I don’t get much of a say,” he sighed.
“I thought you said your dad was dead?”
She watched as Oliver shifted slightly in his position, switching one leg over the other.

“Different dads,” he said simply.
“Oh, right, I see,” Felicity nodded through her answer, she hadn’t meant to sound like she was prying. She took another drink to show Oliver she wasn’t going to ask anything more about it, but when she looked back over at him he seemed to be a little more relaxed – perhaps she hadn’t pried too much after all.

“Different sperm at least,” he laughed and Felicity quietly mimicked, “we were raised together and my dad treated her like his own daughter so for her early life we never knew any different.”

Felicity knew there was a story there, but she also knew – by the way his large arms were tightly cross over his broad chest – that it was not a story he would tell or she should ask for.

“He taught you to fiddle with cars?” she asked, changing tact. Oliver’s arms relaxed, one falling completely from his chest and onto the radiator of the car, “Fiddle with cars?” he laughed.

Felicity walked over to the car waving her free hand around the general area of the engine. “I don’t know what you call it,” she jested before she came to a stop beside him, shoulder to shoulder. Oliver turned, looking back at the engine, causing his shoulder to brush against hers unintentionally and he looked down to apologise for it before she smiled and shook her head – it wasn’t necessary.

“He taught me a lot of what I know,” Oliver confirmed, “he rode as well.” “Rode what?” Felicity asked innocently. Then she heard it on repeat in her head and she squeezed her eyes closed, silently hoping he hadn’t picked up on the innuendo. But judging by the way he laughed, Felicity concluded Oliver definitely had. “He rode bikes.”

“And what about your kids, are your teaching them?” Felicity asked before she grimaced at the question that had the same subtlety as being hit in the face with a fresh fish. *Subtle Felicity, real subtle.*

“I don’t have any,” Oliver replied, kindly ignoring the fact-finding nature of the question. “Are you sure?” Felicity didn’t know why she was still talking, “not even one little scamp causing mischief in kindergarten?” Oliver didn’t let that question pass without a jostled laugh. “Yea, I’m pretty sure,” he answered, “I have no interest in setting down roots like that here.” His last words seemed more direct than Felicity expected or needed, but she ignored it given she had asked more than her fair share of private questions and Oliver hadn’t asked a single one. “So no wife then either?” *She was still talking, why was she still talking?*

“If I did, she’d be pretty pissed I asked you here don’t you think?” Oliver winked, dark lashes against slightly olive complexion – *or maybe it was just dirt.*

Felicity realised she couldn’t really tell. The lighting in here wasn’t exactly bright – it was actually quite dull apart from the two car lights that were hung over the hood of the car, but their white light spilled almost directly downward. There was light coming from the bedroom but that wasn’t exactly bright either.

“No wife,” Oliver added, even though Felicity hadn’t asked for clarification.
“See now that wasn’t so hard was it?” she quipped.
“What wasn’t?”
“Answering a question without being a smart ass about it,” Felicity winked before she pressed the bottle to her lips and took a long drink, well aware that Oliver was absolutely not blinking away from her.

Until he finally did almost 30 Mississippi’s later.
“How is it that you know my name but I don’t know yours?” Oliver asked, his first question of the night.
“Felicity,” she answered.

Even though that wasn’t the question, Oliver accepted it with a nod. That was a pretty name.

“And you knew mine how?” he re-asked, taking a more direct route.
“Trade secret,” Felicity said with a wide smile.
“The thing you dropped,” Oliver began, pausing to take a drink, “was that a trade secret too?”

Felicity took another swig, finishing the last of her beer, at least three mouthfuls ahead of Oliver. She nodded in answer to his question before she placed the empty bottle on the corner of a nearby trolley.

“It would take at least five more bottles for me to tell you anything,” she announced, “I’m like a trade secret vault.”

~*~*~*~

[Five Beers Later]

“Keep twisting,” Oliver instructed and he held Felicity in place, one large hand against her waist, the other a hair’s breadth away from her hand working down the hard shaft.
“Like this?” Felicity asked before she snagged her bottom lip between her teeth and concentrated her hands on the smooth shaft, damp with her clammy hands.
“More,” Oliver rasped, his lips dangerous close to her ear.
“Did you feel it come loose?” he growled, brushing his fingertips over her knuckles.

“Mmhmm,” she hummed as her eyes fluttered, “I feel it.” Her voice was breathy but fluid, like the words were simply falling from her mouth without her controlling them.
“Tug it out,” Oliver’s lips nearly nipped her ear as he spoke he was that close.

“Just tug it?” she queried softly, her face turning so that her lips were now where her ear had been, which happened to be right next to Oliver’s lips.
“What are you afraid of?” he asked, watching her.

Felicity could feel him crowding her but she didn’t dare to move in case he stepped away. She didn’t want to try and count how long it had been since a man had been this close to her, and even if she did feel inclined to try and calculate it, she doubted if her slightly hazed mind would be up for the challenge.

The weight of his body pressed her pelvis into the fender of the car. Felicity couldn’t be certain what part of the car was sitting flush with her apex, but it was smooth and hard and it felt like some salacious pleasure built just for her. It took every restraint she had to hold back the urge to moan.

Oliver had one hand braced on the radiator and the other hovered over Felicity’s hands which were
Felicity was painfully aware of not only the delectable pressure between her legs but also of the very apparent erection that Oliver had. Granted she couldn’t see it, but there was absolutely something thick and hard pressed up against her ass and the last time she had rolled her hips ever so slowly Oliver had growled directly into her neck.

Following his earlier instructions, Felicity pulled on the wrench and felt the plug come loose. Oliver's hand appeared seconds later holding it.

“You just removed one of the spark plugs,” he spoke proudly, their faces still turned toward each other.

Oliver stepped away to put the plug in a nearby rubbish bin. Felicity felt the release of pressure immediately and she stumbled out a tiny whimper at its loss.

“Can I be your apprentice?” she asked as Oliver took a long stride back towards her, closing the gap almost immediately.

“No,” he grunted like something was struck in the back of his throat. Felicity pouted.

“Can we talk about this later?” Oliver swallowed.

“I’d never get any work done,” he finished, the heavy rasped remained. “Oh,” the word passed through Felicity’s lips more like a breath. She felt his eyes walk down her body, ashamed of studying her and, surprisingly, Felicity didn't feel the need to turn away from it either.

“Can I be your apprentice?” she asked as Oliver took a long stride back towards her, closing the gap almost immediately.

“No,” he grunted like something was struck in the back of his throat. Felicity pouted. Oliver swallowed.

“I’d never get any work done,” he finished, the heavy rasped remained. “Oh,” the word passed through Felicity’s lips more like a breath. She felt his eyes walk down her body, ashamed of studying her and, surprisingly, Felicity didn't feel the need to turn away from it either.

“Can I be your apprentice?” she asked as Oliver took a long stride back towards her, closing the gap almost immediately.

“No,” he grunted like something was struck in the back of his throat. Felicity pouted. Oliver swallowed.

“I think that would violate a few health and safety rules,” he growl primitively

Violate.

And then he did something he certainly hadn't planned to do.

He kissed her.

His hands cupped her face gently while his thumbs stroked the hollow of her cheeks.

Felicity teetered on one foot and even sober she knew she should be falling off balance right about now. But there was something unexplainable about the way his hands cradled her face, as though they anchored her in that moment until his lips fell from hers and was left breathless.

Felicity could feel her hair draped over her face and she considered brushing it away, only her hands wouldn't move, or at least wouldn't move under her guidance and all she saw was a blur of white out of the corner of her eye before she heard the whack of her hand coming down on Oliver's cheek.

She had slapped him and it had been hard enough for her palm to be stinging. But Oliver didn’t flinch, he didn’t even blink. His hands slowly retracted from her face leaving only the heat of them to scold her cheeks.
It seemed like three cumulative life sentences of silence until Felicity did something even more unexpected than the last.

She kissed him.
With her fingers tightly wound around the scruff of his tee Felicity pulled him down to her level and kissed him like she was suffocating and he was air.

It was deep, hard and frantically and Felicity hadn’t kissed anyone like this since her college days.

The next thing she knew her body was perched on the edge of the radiator where Oliver’s hand had once been. The chill of it careened up her spine and Felicity soon realised that her skirt was now pushed almost all the way up her thighs.

Oliver was stood between her legs, the width of his hips pushing them further apart and making her skirt rise even more indecently. But Felicity didn't stop it, she didn’t want to.

She grabbed a fist full of his hair, letting his surprisingly silky locks titillate the soft skin between her fingers before she tugged, hard.

Oliver responded with a bite to her lower lip, snatching it briefly between his teeth before soothing it with the edge of his tongue. Felicity released some of the tension she had wound up in his hair but it made no difference.

He bit her lip a second time, a little harder than the first, before he again ran the tip of his tongue over it like a salve seconds later.

She relinquished her grip in his hair completely, letting his locks float through her spread fingers instead. It was soft, ridiculously soft. *Impossibly* soft.

Oliver clamped her lip a third time and they fell open on the verge of rebuking him when his tongue swarmed her mouth.

That was what he had been waiting for.

*He tasted like beer, or maybe she did?*
His tongue was strong and thick and it made itself at home inside her mouth, sliding down the inside of her cheek and coiling around her tongue.

Felicity knew that she might be a touch inebriated, but she also knew for a fact that absolutely no one has ever kissed her like this. So hungry, so carnal, so...primal.

Her lips closed in around his tongue and Oliver growled.
He actually growled.
Not angry or annoyed but guttural and animalistic.
*Fact. Felicity Smoak just made a big muscle bound biker growl.*
And it felt amazing reverberating through his tongue onto hers.

Her hands were scattered and disorganised, eager to touch everything Oliver Queen had on offer. One skimmed his chiselled and unshaven jaw with the pads of her fingers while the other disappeared under his tee, racking manicured nails over washboard abs. They were hot and silky with sweat and her breasts ached to be rubbed across them.

She tore the tee up his chest and pulled it freely from his body without any resistance from him. Her eyes feasted on him as she wet her lips, tasting his kiss still bled into the lines there.
Her body shifted and arched toward him, desperate to feel some friction that this position just didn’t allow for.

It didn't matter how she moved, angled or how close she pulled him, she found no relief from the desperation between her legs.

She wanted friction, delicious, delirious friction. Those dirty, oil stained jeans with a missing back pocket and a tear across the left knee, she wanted the rough denim of them to rub against her perfectly practical pink satin panties, like two sticks in the hands of a boy scout desperate for his fire starting merit badge.

But this position didn’t afford her that and she was left with a hollow feeling and painful ache.

And then his hands, those giant rough, calloused hands, hitched under her skirt and sunk into the flesh of her ass, lifting her from her makeshift seat.

Felicity gasped when the change finally blessed her with what she craved – friction. Her heat now scolding against those delectable abs. The sweat from his bare skin permeated her panties mixing with the fresh arousal that dripped between her folds.

It was sinful and she was the Preacher's Daughter keening for more. More. More.

Her hips bucked against him, rampant and determined to feel each ridge his stomach had to offer her. She was so focused on her primal need that she didn’t even notice Oliver was carrying her across the shop floor.

But her mouth grew lonely.
She didn’t know when or why they had stopped kissing but within seconds of the realisation, she kissed him again.
There was nothing fragile or timid about it. It was a kiss that spoke to the frantic need that was consuming, controlling and spurring her.

She nipped his top lip but her adoption of this new way of asking for entrance found her biting him much harder then she had intended and his whole body shook with a low growl.

However his lips parted regardless and Felicity dove her tongue between them to discover all realms of his mouth – his teeth, roof, tongue, cheeks – she wanted them all.

Their tongues wrestled, fighting for position and dominance, each one giving and taking but neither fully relinquishing the war.

Oliver kicked open the bedroom door left ajar and Felicity startled against him causing his grip on her ass to tighten in compensation.

She would wear bruises on the flesh of her ass tomorrow, but tonight with her veins coursing with liquid courage and adrenaline, she didn’t feel a thing other than pleasure.

Then his hands retreated and Felicity dropped a few inches onto the firm mattress below. She shuffled closer to the centre as Oliver crawled over the top of her like a lion studying his prey seconds before he devours it.

Felicity soon realised that his pause was for another, non-predatory reason when his eyes showed just a fleck of hesitation twitched at the corner. He was waiting for her consent to be devoured.

Felicity pushed herself up onto her elbows, gaining enough height to press her lips to his before she
folded one arm around his neck.

He followed in kind, snaking a strong arm around the small of her back before he lifted her fluidly without breaking free from their lip entanglement.

His body rocked back as she came up, moving together like a seesaw that found Felicity perched on the edge of his lap, finally feeling that denim verses silk friction she had lustfully sought.

Her skirt rose completely and became a belt around her waist but Felicity had no mind to fix it. Her blouse had buttons but her fingers couldn’t function well enough to undo them in the haste she wanted it gone, so she pulled it up her body and over her head, her glasses coming off in the process.

Oliver leaned over and collected them, holding them out to her.
“I don’t need them,” Felicity managed to say, her voice a little thin and hoarse.
Oliver nodded and, still holding her balanced on the edge of his knees, he leaned forward and placed them gently on the table beside the bed.

The gesture was surprisingly soft, a fact that didn’t go unnoticed by her.

The moment Oliver sat back on his feet Felicity’s fingers attacked the fly of his jeans. She wanted to stay in this moment, this moment where she didn’t think about consequences or pros and cons.

Felicity wanted something foolish and crazy.
Felicity wanted a one night stand.
Felicity wanted Oliver.

She didn’t know his social security number and she didn’t want to.
His thoughts on whether pineapple belonged on pizza were irrelevant.
She didn’t need to know if he had any allergies and she didn’t care about how many speeding tickets he probably had.

She now understood the attraction of them, those one night stands.
No awkward conversations across a table at a crowded restaurant.
No wondering if they were attracted to you or when you should kiss them.

It was liberating to know she could have this freeness, this give and take and not care about whether they wanted more than just a drawer in your apartment.

And when Felicity kissed him and Oliver kissed her right back she knew he wanted the same thing. Nothing more, nothing less. Just one night.

Oliver stood off the bed leaving Felicity to lament the loss of pressure his knees had delivered between her legs. He peeled off his pants without a stitch of shyness and she couldn’t hold back a smile.

Her eyes travelled like wanton tourists across his form, her eyes widening as they halted at the outline of his cock behind grey spandex-cotton. His briefs tented and did little to hide his massive erection, but from the smile threaded through his expression Felicity figured that was entirely his intention.

Her tongue absently wiped across her swollen bottom lip as her sex thrummed at the prospect of been filled with that.

_Fuck she hoped he knew how to use it._
Oliver climbed back onto the bed, slotting himself between her legs. His fingers trickled like tumbleweed down her back until they reached the clasp of her bra. He unclipped it with the one-handed precision of a surgeon. Felicity walked the straps of the dusky pink bra down her slender arms.

It was an intimate moment that broke the hurriedness of the ones that had come before but not enough of a lull that Felicity even contemplated putting a stop to this delicious nonsense. The time for backing out had well and truly passed. She was doing this.

Oliver stooped to kiss her neck. Gentle ribbons of kisses passing over silken skin. Felicity hummed at the enticing nature of it as he made his way up to her ear, delivering one final, deep kiss just below the join of it.

“Is this you asking Princess?” he whispered before he pulled back to await her answer.

Those had been the first words he’d spoken since he kissed her what seemed like a life time ago and he hadn’t wasted them, the sultry growl of them like music to Felicity's arousal.

She matched his wicked grin with one of her own as she ferried her hand under the waistband of his briefs and grabbed the centre of his thick, pulsing shaft. Her fingers barely met as she gave him three sharp tugs, “and this is your probably?”

Oliver smiled, that was all the answer he needed. He kissed her warm lips, encasing her swollen bottom one with a gentle caresses to ease it. He wanted to bite it, to feel her body writhe in pleasure, but for now he would soothe it with his lips and calm it with his tongue.

Felicity lay onto the bed as Oliver dropped her lip from his. His fingers spilled down her chest, drawing with invisible ink the path his kiss would take.

He started at the tip of her breast bone before veering right. His teeth grazed the round of her pert breast and an aching sigh leaked from her mouth. His hand cupped her lonely breast causing Felicity to arch her back in reply.

His tongue skirted the rim of her coiled nipple, stroking over the lines of her deepening-red areola. Felicity didn’t hold back her whimpered moans of appreciation and Oliver's ears drunk in each one as his mouth happily assisted in creating them.

Oliver pressed his knee between her legs and Felicity tipped her head back with an impulsive and hungry cry. She couldn’t remember if she had ever made such a sound before, but she was fairly certain no one had ever given her reason to.

The pressure of his knee forging between her folds felt amazing and Felicity could feel her ass lifting off the bed to try and ride that sensation longer. His lips never left her breast but she could feel him smiling against her skin as he thrust his knee into her causing a vivid and gratifying tremble through her sex.

He feasted on her hardened nipple, batting it around his mouth as his lips caress her breast and his chin kneaded at the underside. His teeth nipped at her lightly to gauge her reaction and when she mewled salaciously Oliver bit her again, a little harder, before the flat of his tongue smoothed across it.

Eager to taste the other parts of her body he dropped her breast from his mouth, sealing with a kiss and an unspoken promise to return there later.

His lips travelled down her svelte body. Her skin so soft and her body supple. Her scent was like
flowers he couldn’t name and her skin was awash with a veil of sweat. Oliver could have spent hours discovering her but the closer he got to the intoxicating scent of her arousal the closer he became to needing his own release, the aching down the underside of his cock a clear indicator he would not last hours.

His teeth scouted the rim of her panties and he couldn't help but smile at the realisation they were part of a matching set without the slightest hint of an animal print.

Her scent permeated through Oliver's body and tugged him further down hers until his lips impulsively danced a kiss over the top of her panties. She whimpered and keened into it because she was as achingly ready for this as he was.

Oliver stilled himself just a few moments longer as he imagined sinking himself into her, feeling her body swell and encase him while he discovered her soft walls...

_Holy shit, he’s never wanted anything more._

It's desire wrapped in want and baked in need.

Her foot dove under the waistband of his briefs, trawling them down his ass while her legs encased him. He replied by kicking his briefs down his legs and shaking them onto the floor, his body now completely naked.

Oliver leaned down onto her, walking his lips back up to the breast he had neglected the first time. The tip of his cock rubbed across the soft silk panties and he groaned instinctively at the contact.

Those perfectly presentable panties suddenly became like fire against Felicity's skin as she felt his long, hard cock skimming against her in the most erotic torture her body has ever endured. She snagged her lip between her teeth, biting it to the point of leaving deep indentations along the rim of it.

Oliver spent his time teasing her nipple, toying it between teeth and tongue and sinking his mouth around it until Felicity’s body was wracked with explosive longing and her breath dripping with impassioned pleas.

His mouth left off her as he sat back onto his knees. He touched a finger under the curtain of her panties, lightly skimming it between her folds. She was soaked, ready, and so was he _almost_.

His eyes walked up her body, noticing the way her lips were puckered, her breath was ragged and her chest was rising and falling in a haphazardly.

Oliver guided her feet onto his knees and he couldn’t help but notice how fucking delicious they looked. Manicured and tipped with a deep red polish, they're smooth and soft and when her slender toes dug into his thighs he could suddenly think of at least 10 things he would like to do with those feet given half the chance.

_But for now..._

His fingers folded over the waist of her panties as he eased them down and over her mound. He dragged them slowly up her legs like the incline of a rollercoaster while his fingers skated the inside of her thighs. He found devilish delight in watching as her lips fell open and her eyes closed with heavy blinks.

He paused at the rise of her knees, teetering the panties on the edge before, with a magician's _whoosh_, he swept them down her calves and off her feet.

Aside from the black skirt that now resembled a belt pushed up above her hips, she was completely
naked and Oliver’s eyes drunk in each inch of it as he hovered above. His arm stretched out and
rummaged blindly in the drawer beside the bed until it returned with a condom.

Felicity watched him as he sat back on his heels, taking the wordless moment to study the tattoos
she hadn’t paid much mind too. His left shoulder and bicep were covered almost completely in a
sleeve of tattoos that ran together. The same emblem she had seen on the bikers’ jackets outside
was emblazoned on his upper chest, symbolically she presumed, where his heart was.

Her fingertips drew around it, discovering the skin underneath was not as smooth as she had once
thought it was. She felt wounds her eyes had glossed over in the heat of the moment but when she
saw him tense at her touch she lay her palm flat against his shoulder, now was not the time for
stories.

Oliver smiled as his eyes stayed locked to hers and he clasped the corner of the condom packet
between his teeth. His head dropped towards her navel with his lips stopping two inches from
kissing it.

He weaved his head up her form, dragging the edge of the foil packet along her body. Felicity
writhed and arched underneath it as the corner pricked at her skin. He lifted the packet over her
rolled up skirt before lowering it back down between her breasts. He snaked it across her breast and
Felicity moaned hot slithers of air as it grazed the very tip of her sensitive nipple.

Oliver finished the trail where he had once started kissing all those drawn minutes ago and he
dropped the condom between her breasts.

“Your move Princess,” he rasped with a voice that was as gravelly as it was thick.

If sex had a voice, that was it.

Without breaking from their entrenched stare Felicity retrieved the packet and lifted her back from
the bed. Her sinful lips now swollen and faded red encased the edge of the packet before her teeth
tore it open.

Oliver's cock twitched excitedly as his eyes devoured the very sight of it. With her eyes never
staving off course Felicity sat up higher and took his cock in both hands. A coy smile drew up the
corner of her lips as she rolled the on the condom, deliciously slow.

Fuck yes.

Oliver scooped his arm around her waist lifting her onto his lap before he angled her just above the
tip of his cock then slid his head inside her.

Felicity gasped with a heavy, thick breath of misty, hot air as her back arched downwards with her
curtain of golden hair brushing against the bed.

He slid her further down his shaft while his free hand rolled finger tracks down her taut chest.

She tilted her hips as she took another inch of him inside her, reacting with soft and yearning
moans to every movement.

She was wet and slick and tight and even through the condom Oliver could feel every second of it
and then she clenched.

She fucking clench like she was doing Kegel exercises around his cock.

The shockwave was instant and glorious and Oliver had to hold himself back from coming right
then, because he wanted. But he needed to be buried inside her, completely, when that happened.
He dropped her body to the mattress and with at least half his cock still inside her clenched walls, he took only a second to adjust his angle before he pounded deeper inside her.

Felicity took him completely with ravenous, unfettered cries of pleasure. She squeezed around him, her walls constricting and retracting as Oliver began to thrust.

Her toes curved around his thighs as her nails dug into his back and _fuck_ if he doesn’t enjoy the shit out of that – because she was all perfectly preened, proper and presentable on the outside, but get her naked and underneath and she was an _animal_.

Oliver's lips devoured her neck with a barrage of hot, wet kisses as he quickly lost his mind, to the point he couldn’t remember his date of birth if anyone asked.

He had one of her hands pinned against the headboard though he didn't know when that had happened. Her clean hands looked tiny against his large, foreboding and oil-stained ones.

He plunged in harder, completely filling her to the hilt and Felicity retaliated by sinking her teeth into his shoulder. He growled predatorily while she lathed her tongue across the marks that he was sure to wear tomorrow, not that he minded because he didn’t, her ferocity simply added to the attraction.

With her still impaled on him, Oliver fell back onto his knees and lifted her easily into the air. He didn’t want to withdraw from inside her, _but..._.

With lightning speed he flipped her and she landed perfectly on the palms of her hands. Her back was like a smooth wave and his fingers rode it from the base of her neck down to that perfect ass.

His mouth began to salivate as he thought about sinking his teeth into her naked fleshy cheek or tapping it sharply with four fingers if she would let him – _maybe she would_, but in case she wouldn't Oliver wasn’t of the mind to risk it.

His hand combed into her tousled hair before gently lifting her head. His other arm wrapped across her shoulders before he entered her again with a wet moan dripping from her lips until the base of his cock pressed against her smooth cheeks.

And then she saw it.

Her face reflected in the mirror, red and misted with sweat.
Her hair stuck in sections down the side of her face.
Her breasts bouncing as Oliver began to lunge himself inside her.

One hand gripped the edge of bed turning her knuckles white.

Oliver wasn’t as deep as he had been moments before but in this position his cock was hitting a spot Felicity was not sure anyone had ever found before.

Her eyes were anchored to the reflection, her lips parted and swollen. It was as though she knew the reflection belonged to her but the face was so foreign all the same.

Her walls were wet with arousal and her whole body brimming with pleasure. She was close, dangerously so when Oliver tugged her upwards, lifting her hands off the bed and making her view even more erotic.

She sat with her ass against his curved stomach and her thighs tightly pressed against his. Her nails dug into his knees for balance as he thrust them both skywards.

Her eyes travelled further up the mirror stopping only when they caught his face.
Oliver was watching her closely with deep blue eyes and when their eyes met he dipped his head and lightly kissed her shoulder. It was soft and delicate and Felicity knew had she not seen it for herself she would have thought it imagined.

One of his arms stayed banded around her waist as the other cupped her breast. “Touch yourself,” he whispered roughly before his lips caressed the edge of her jaw while his eyes stayed locked on the reflection of hers. Felicity didn’t hesitate as she pressed two fingers between her legs skimming her clit in fast, uneven circles. She could hear his breath quicken in her ear and it’s warmth fan out across her cheeks.

She swore he grunted the word faster but she couldn’t be sure as her mind was screaming the same command at her. She listened without question as her fingers toyed and pinched her nub before dipping between her folds where she found the base of Oliver’s cock spreading her open and moving up and down inside her.

And that was the last little push she needed to topple over edge.

Her eyes fell close, too heavy for her to hold up a moment longer. She knew she cried out words that weren’t real and in a fogged moment of absolute, mind altering euphoria she may have even uttered something in Hebrew.

And she came.

Hard.

A climax that shook her body like an earthquake.

Her body curled in towards itself as she tried to fold inward, but Oliver’s arms wouldn’t let her as they stayed banded around her, making herself watch herself.

She could almost see the breath passing over her lips as her orgasm rolled over her like crashing waves along the shoreline.

Oliver continued thrusting with his eyes locked even more intently on hers until he blew the hair away from the back of her neck and kissed her right there in the centre. A hard kiss, one that doesn’t break or step away for air.

He kissed her like that until his thrusts slowed and his thighs tightened underneath her. He kissed her again in the same spot before he breathed a ragged fuck into her inferno skin. Oliver came seconds later spilling every drop he had built up into the condom.

He kissed a trail crossed her shoulder but Felicity was frozen by the reflection she painted. Her chest was flushed a light pink, the apples of her cheeks wore a ferocious red blush. Her hair was messy where it once was smooth and her eye makeup had darkened under her eyes a soft charcoal grey.

Oliver didn’t say anything as he slowly withdrew and stepped off the bed. His fingers swerved gently down her back as a smile rose over his face.

“I’ll be back,” Oliver spoke to her reflection before he left the room, closing the door a little over half way.

Felicity stumbled off the bed and wasted no time in finding her clothes. As she replaced them one piece at a time she caught her reflection once again and slowly shook her head. “You just fucked a stranger,” she grimaced before she nodded as if to say we’ll talk about this later
young lady.

Fully dressed she combed her fingers through her hair and collected her glasses from the bedside table just as Oliver walked back through the door.

He was still completely naked and she was unsure why she expected any different, although he was sans the condom, disposed of in a trashcan somewhere she assumed.

You just fucked a complete stranger – but at least he was gorgeous.

“There is a shower, but the guys use it so it’s kind of a shit house,” Oliver explained apologetically, “but I found a clean towel and some wet wipes,” he added holding them both out to her.

“It’s fine, thank you,” Felicity replied, she would wash this night off at home.

“You’re leaving?” Oliver asked.

“Yes, uh thank you for that,” Felicity said as she awkwardly looked back towards the bed, “that was lovely.”

Lovely

She just called it lovely.

And he smiled at lovely.

Oliver’s lips held back a laugh, releasing only a smile.

Lovely.

“Do you need a ride home?” he inquired as he moved to let her through the door.

“No, thank you, I’m fine, I’ll just call a taxi,” she chatted as she plucked her handbag from the seat where she had left it.

Oliver followed her, still completely devoid of any clothing.

“Shit,” she cursed as she rummaged through her bag.

“Everything okay?”

“My wallet must have fallen out in Curtis’ car,” she sighed.

That was all she needed.

“I can take you home,” he offered again.

“I don’t want to be any trouble.”

“You’re not,” he assured her with a smile.

Oliver walked back into his room and returned just over a minute later fully dressed, a long sleeve stretch cotton tee to replace the one Felicity had tossed somewhere in the workshop.

He handed her a leather jacket and nodded for her to take it.

“I’m not cold,” Felicity responded.

“Outside in the wind driving at forty you will be,” Oliver smiled.

“We’re going on your bike?”

She took in a sudden gape of air.

“Is that okay?” Oliver queried, “I don’t have a car.”

“Sure, that’s fine,” she smiled nervously.

She wasn’t left with a lot of options.

~*~*~*~

Felicity rode the whole way with her eyes tightly closed and her cheek smushed into his back. In
fact, she only opened her eyes when Oliver tapped her leg and told her they were there.

She uncoiled her arms from around his waist and watched as Oliver sucked in a long breath like she had been holding him so tightly that he hadn’t been able to before.

He lifted her chin and undid the helmet before she slipped it from her head and shook her wind swept tresses back from her face.

“Thank you,” she simpered politely.
“You’re welcome,” Oliver smirked.

She nodded and smiled briefly before her heels tapped a path up towards her two storey townhouse, nestled in a row of six identical ones. He was going to wait until she made it safely inside.

Felicity stopped midway up the path, turned on her feet and hurried back towards him. She closed her eyes when she reached him and blew out a nervous exhale.

She just wanted to know something and the chances were extremely high that they would never cross paths again so she didn’t have anything to lose by asking it ...right?

“Why did you flip me?” she asked in one hurried breath.

Oliver gripped the handlebars and sat back into the seat with a smile trapped on his lips.

“You seem like someone who hasn’t been given the chance to see herself come apart,” he paused intuitively licking his lips, “and that was a view worth sharing,” he hummed, his voice returning to that deep guttural tone that had her knees quivering again.

“Oh.”

She could feel a blush rising and she decided he had seen quite enough of that tonight so she turned and walked quickly away.

“Did you enjoy it?” Oliver called out, his words echoing down the quiet street. Felicity turned around and waved.

“Goodnight Mister Queen,” she smiled before she unlocked her door and disappeared inside.

Oliver watched a succession of lights go on until the porch light went off. That was his signal to leave.

“Goodnight,” he said to no one before he started the bike and took off down the street with a thundering roar.

That was definitely the best one night stand he’d ever had.
Chapter Notes

As you may or may not know, I took a short break from writing and fandom, I'm not back-back, but I had this up my sleeve so decided to post it.

Hope you enjoy it, xox.

[Next day: June 2012]

“You’re late,” Curtis said without looking up from his desk, the hurried tap of Felicity’s heels on the polished tile floors announcement enough that it was her.

“No I’m not,” Felicity retorted as she practically slid alongside Curtis’ desk.

Curtis looked up, cocked his head to the side, opened his mouth to speak then promptly closed it again before he ran his tongue across the front of his top teeth.

Felicity pushed back her shoulders and shook a hand through her loose hair. She knew she looked a mess and the expression that was like a billboard across Curtis’ face said he knew it too.
She had barely slept last night. While her body was exhausted her mind was addled with a long list of regrets that were dispersed with moments of “wow”. It was a juxtaposition that didn’t allow her to fall asleep until around 4am and when her alarm went off two hours later she missed it.

“Are you alright?” Curtis asked, finally – it seemed – gathering enough courage to ask about the pink elephant in the room.
“I’m fine, why?” Felicity coughed as she walked briskly into her office with Curtis trailing behind. “Well it looks like you had a hard night, did you stay with the…” Felicity grabbed Curtis by the tail of his shirt and yanked him into her office before kicking the door closed with her foot.

“People don’t need to know my business Curtis, why are you talking so loudly?” she huffed while she trudged over to her desk. “I’m not,” Curtis practically whispered but it sounded like a freight train to her, “are you hungover?” “No,” she was quick to refute the allegation.

Although she might have been. Not enough to fog her memory of the night – that was very, very vivid. It was more that level of inebriation where you think all your jokes are funny and you decisions are sound.

Sound decisions – like sleeping with a guy you don’t know.

“I was worried this morning,” Curtis sighed, he had been close to ringing hospitals and Police stations looking for her, “I shouldn’t have left you there last night.” “Curtis, it’s fine. I just missed my alarm and slept in,” she didn’t need to give him a reason, “it’s fine,” she repeated. If she said it enough, he might believe it.

“You slept at home?” Felicity gaped, feigning absolute insult by the insinuation of his question, even though there was some merit behind him asking it.

“Yes, I slept at home.” It wasn’t entirely false.

“I look like this because I haven’t had coffee or a chance to sit down,” she continued folding her hand under her arm to stop herself from running it anxiously down her neck. That was her tell that she wasn’t being entirely truthful and she knew that Curtis was looking for it.

“So that’s why you’re late?” he asked, raising an eyebrow while his head cocked a little to the left. “I’m not late. I’m on time or your clock is slow.” “The world clock is slow,” Curtis said sarcastically.

“Curtis, you like your job right?” He nodded resolutely. “So,” she smiled, “I’m not late.” Curtis returned her smiled with one of his own as he moved back towards the door. “Absolutely, you’re not late,” he started while he opened the door behind his back, “the world just moved a little faster this morning.” Bingo

He left her office but returned a few moments later with her wallet clutched in his hand. “You left this in my car,” he spoke as he handed it over the desk to her.
“Thank you,” she simpered – she wasn’t going to offer him anything more, even though it was fairly apparent the question of *how* she got home was hanging off his tongue by a thread.

She let out a barely audible sigh as she readied herself to sit down. It felt like the first time her butt had seen a cushion today and she was greatly looking forward to it. Most of the car ride into work had seen her fumbling around with her shoes and the zip on her dress while she patted the floor looking for an earring she had dropped. *Perched* was an accurate descriptor.

But Felicity wanted to *sit* and *slouch* and *relax*.

“So, what’s on the agenda today?” she asked, reverting to their normal routine as she lined up her ass with the chair. She almost fell into it, eager to feel the cushiony goodness – but as soon as the round of it touched faux leather with her weight behind it there was a surge of pain that started from her left cheek and splintered through her entire body before she shot up out of the chair.

*Holy crap.*

It felt like she had sat *full cheek* on a thumb tack but when she looked down her chair was free from anything of the sort.

“Are you okay?” Curtis asked as his body shunted forward, a little confused by what had just happened.

“Fine,” she blinked, shaking off the seconds that had just rushed by, “what were you saying?”

“You have team meeting at ten,” Curtis continued, though one eye remained attached to Felicity as she went to sit down again.

She sat down slowly this time, her palms bracing against the arms and taking most of the weight as she eased into the chair. She held her breath for a good, slow count of twenty seconds before the pain became too much and she stood back up, a grimace tacked to her expression.

“Are you sure you’re okay? Because…”

“I’m fine,” Felicity said pressing a less than authentic smile to her face, “I’m just standing because it’s good for my posture,” she added as she tapped the lip of the desk with her index finger.

Her lips folded over as her and Curtis stared silently at each other across the expanse of her desk. Actually, I need to go to the ladies,” she quipped as she scuttled around her desk, “I’ll be right back,” she finished, calling the words over her shoulder.

She didn’t bother to reply to the very confused look Curtis was giving her even as she skated past the windowed-wall on her way to the bathroom.

She threw open the door and checked the three other stalls before she locked the main door and stood in front of the mirror staring at her reflection, looking away only where it threw up the heated memories of last night and her mouth began to feel nauseously dry.

She didn’t regret last night. There was absolutely no benefit in regretting the best sex you’ve ever had. Ever. Period. No comparison. But that didn’t make the lapse in judgement any less frightening.

She turned in the mirror and lifted up her skirt. She had dressed this morning like a the Tasmanian Devil and it was only at that moment did she realise she had never actually looked in a full length mirror once.

She wasn’t surprised, but she let out a peeped gasped all the same, when a large, fresh bruise came into view on her left butt cheek. As the skirt rose a little higher the picture became even clearer – three almost perfectly-round bruises that were unmistakably fingers made by three thick, calloused,
fingers of a Brad-Pitt-Achilles-Level hot mechanic who rode a bike. 

Shit.

She rubbed a finger across her brow before she dropped her head into her splayed palms. 

Just shit.

~*~*~*~

“Don’t you have somewhere to be?” Oliver grunted from under the 1976 Chevy he had up on blocks as he listened to Thea’s heavy boots scuff backwards and forwards across the concrete floor. 

“Nope,” came the simplified response, complete with a smack of lips and a playful kick to his leg. 

“Someone else to annoy then?” Oliver replied as he wheeled out from under the car. 

“Nope.”

“What do you want?” he grunted as he stood and wiped a hand across his forehead, smearing a line of grease there.

Thea smiled as she held out her hand expectantly.

Oliver walked wordlessly to the petty cash box under the register and counted out ten dollars in singles before handing the same to Thea.

“I knew it,” she laughed as she made a fan out of the money and brushed it across her face.

“Okay,” Oliver shrugged as he walked back towards the car.

“So?” Thea winked as she jumped up on a workbench near where John was busy pulling apart what was left of the engine from a road-grazed Kawasaki.

“So what?” Oliver mumbled as he kicked the mechanic’s creeper to the front of the Chevy, a stone’s throw from where Thea had perched herself.

“How was it?” she rolled her eyes.

“It was a beer Thea it wasn’t a theatre date,” Oliver shot back.

“We will circle back around to you saying theatre shortly,” Thea mocked, “but first, who is she, what does she do, when are you seeing her again?”

Oliver huffed at the barrage of unsolicited questions as he changed heads on the socket wrench with his back now to Thea.

“Just a girl who works at a job and I’m not,” he replied, ending his words with a hefty shrug.

“What do you mean you’re not? What did you do?” Thea asked, threads of annoyance and disbelief throughout her words.

“Why would you assume I did something?” Oliver grunted as he turned to face her and her pursed lips.

Thea elbowed John who down-tooled and tipped his head back towards Oliver.

“She makes a valid point,” John confirmed as Thea nodded along with him.

“You too?” Oliver groaned before dropping the wrench into a toolbox and taking a few lazy steps towards them to plead his innocence.

“I didn’t do anything and it was just a beer,” Oliver explained tightly, “that’s all.”

His eyes scanned from Thea to John and back to Thea – neither of them believed him.

Thea flicked his shoulder as a sign of her disbelief and Oliver winced immediately – like he had this morning when he got dressed and saw the teeth trenches in his skin.

“You’re going to act like that hurt?” Thea laughed mockingly as Oliver tried to regain his composure.

Thea watched him with narrowed eyes before she tugged down the neck of his t-shirt,
simultaneously choking him and exposing the big, deep, completely-recognisable, marks a few inches from the crook of his neck.

“Holy shit are those teeth marks?” Thea shrieked as she clapped her hands together thunderously. Oliver shrugged his shoulder away at the same moment John crossed two large, bulging biceps across an equally humongous chest.

This he had to hear.

“How bit you?” Thea pestered despite Oliver abruptly walking the way in stoic silence. There was no way she was dropping this and Oliver knew he could walk to Texas and she would follow him asking alliterations of the same question the entire way.

“Who bit you?” Thea’s voice raised a good few decibels. She watched Oliver like a hawk for his tell tale sign. In 3...2...

Oliver licked his bottom lip inward, stapled it with his teeth before he tugged, just the once, on his right earlobe.

She was absolutely right.

“OH MY GOD YOU HAD SEX!” she screamed, making even solidly anchored John startle a fraction.

“You want to scream it a little louder, I don’t think the coffee shop down the road heard you,” Oliver gritted as he ran a hand across his scalp.

“YOU HAD DIRTY NASTY SEX WITH HER,” Thea couldn’t lower her voice even if she wanted to, “she bit you because she enjoyed it right? Like the cops aren’t going to...”

“Thea,” Oliver interrupted with a heavy shake of his head.

“Right... of course not, just checking,” she piped.

His sister was literally the only person who could have asked him that question and not end up unconscious on the floor.

“Did her underwear match?”
She was altogether, utterly too excited about that question even with the clear cease and desist plastered on Oliver's terse expression.

“In what world would I tell you that?” he huffed, it was rhetoric and met with a feisty shrug from Thea.

But it barely deferred her.

“It did,” she smirked knowingly, “I bet it was real pretty, maybe pink, lace and satin.”

“Shut up,” he grunted, reverting to middle-school Oliver after nothing else seemed to dissuade her.

“Oh my god, I’m right!” Thea squealed.

“Thea!”

His teeth were clenched and bared.

“Fine, fine,” she dusted him off, “but why aren’t you seeing her again?”

Oliver decided he would reinstate his wall of stoic silence as he idly, and pointlessly, looked through the appointment book, if only to be seen to be doing something.

“Was it bad?”

Wall of silence.

“It was great?”

Just a sigh slipped over the wall.

Thea nodded knowingly, “now we’re getting somewhere.”
The wall wasn’t working.
“It was one night, that’s it,” Oliver finally relinquished words.
Thea didn’t speak immediately after and for a brief minute Oliver considered that the case might be closed.

“What are we talking about?” Roy innocently asked as he strolled into the shop, a good fifteen minutes late – a fact Oliver made a mental note to have him up on.
“Oliver bagged himself a pretty high street girl, brains and all. Super cute, very put together, way out of his league and he manages to...” Thea started.
“Thea...” Oliver halted.

Thea shrugged, she figured she would discuss the finer points of her brother's sexual escapades with Roy later.

Oliver looked up from the logbook just as Roy twisted to say his hello to John. It was then that Oliver saw it. Black vest, white wording, *Prospect*.

Mother fucker.
“What the fuck is that?” Oliver hissed, nought to one hundred in ten seconds.
Thea stepped between Roy and Oliver almost instantly. There was no mistaking the look Oliver was wearing, but she happened to like Roy's nose *unbroken*.

“Oliver it’s not up to you,” she interjected with a hand lodged firmly on his thumping chest.
“What the fuck is that?” Oliver repeated, slowly enunciating every word as though they were each a sentence.
“It's a Prospect jacket,” Roy replied, shifting the same on his shoulders as his fingers gripped each side of the open zip.

Oliver slammed the logbook closed.
“Get the fuck out of my shop,” he gritted, his voice not raised but enough to be heard without mistake.
“Oliver...” Thea pleaded even as he walked away.
“Get the fuck out,” Oliver was yelling now as he kicked a tool trolley, spilling the top shelf onto the floor in a hail of noise, “I told you if you went down that path I would fire your ass.”

Oliver's eyes were wild and his fists clenched. He was ready for war until John Diggle dragged him back to his senses with a firm grip on his right shoulder.

Roy looked at John who simply shook his head, telepathically hoping he got the message. *Leave now, come back later.*
Roy did not.
“That’s a bit hypocritical, you’re patched,” Roy huffed, puffing up his shoulders like the kid who still had *so much* more to learn.

“You think maybe that gives me more fucking insight than you?” Oliver spat, his eyes like dark pools of blue-tipped fire.
His shoulder fought against John's grip, but it stayed anchored with John readying his other arm to hold Oliver back if needs be.

“This is the shithhead you want to spend time with?” Oliver continued, his harsh words a warning to Thea, “you want to be an old lady to some fuckwit sitting in Ironside, because that’s where this shithhead will end up.”
His words were a bitter pill to swallow and both Thea and John knew in part Oliver was directing them at himself as well.
“Oliver, dad offered him the jacket,” Thea spoke in an attempted to dampen down the heat. “So he wants to be a thug?” Oliver jeered as he broke his shoulder free from John's grip, “then go find another job.”

He stormed over to his room and slammed the door so heavily that the a few tools hung up nearby toppled from their pins.

“Dig will you talk to him,” Thea protested, “he’s been unreasonable.” Roy threw his hands up in the air before stomping out of the shop. “He told him Thea, he wanted to help the kid but not like that,” John spoke with a heavy shake of his head. “Oliver knows what it's like,” Thea sighed, her hands crossed over her waist as she balanced her weight from one foot to the other, “you have to pick a side.” “You and I both know why Oliver sunk in with this crowd, and your smart lipped puppy better show some respect for that,” John warned, “I didn’t need to pick,” he added.

Thea blew out a languid sigh, John may not be patched but not everyone on these streets was the size of a small tanker.

“Roy just wanted to make a name,” she shrugged, the wind well and truly falling from her sails. “That’s why Oliver fired him. You know why Oliver patched. He didn’t have a choice,” John reiterated, “but Roy had a choice.” “Oliver can’t just fire him.” Thea rolled her shoulders back and folded her lips inward. John tapped her shoulder lightly, “give him some time to calm down. Then I'll talk to him.”

~*~*~*~

Felicity had spent the last twenty minutes bouncing between varying emotions, from disbelief to embarrassment over to dismay, arousal and longing before circling back around to disbelief but as her shoes clipped out short, sharp steps back to her office, there would be no more thoughts of any kind over the wickedly sinful Oliver Queen.

“Everything...” Curtis started to ask before Felicity hushed him with a single glance. “For the third time, everything is fine,” she spoke resolutely, “now what’s on the agenda today?” Felicity hovered above her seat before giving up on the idea altogether. Her shoes weren’t that uncomfortable, today she would stand. “Are you not going to sit down?” “Nope,” her head shook, “I’m fine standing.” Curtis eyed her up suspiciously, but with a short nod he reluctantly accepted what Felicity was telling him. “Okay well, team meeting then you need to meet with Cisco,” Curtis started. “Why?” Curtis shrugged. “He won’t tell me.” “Fine,” Felicity ran a slow finger across her brow, geniuses were like children sometimes, “then?” “Kord want to talk?” “About?” “They,” Curtis paused to tap his finger inconsequentially on his tablet, “also wouldn’t tell me.” Felicity's finger dug into the corner of her eye. “Anything else?” she asked as her other hand splayed fingers onto her glass desk.
“You have a meeting with your dad”
“Okay, can we...”
It was Curtis turn to interrupt, “no we can’t put it off.”

He looked up and met Felicity's pensive stare with a vivid smile.
“Also your mom is coming in,” he added.
“Why?” Felicity moaned.

God she wanted to sit down.

“Now she would tell me, something about a dress for the charity gala in next Saturday.”
“I don’t have time for that,” she groaned.
She needed to sit, but her ass barely touched the seat before she stood back up.

“Does this desk stand?” she asked as she tapped the edge of it.
“Uh yes I think so,” Curtis offered.
“Okay let’s lift this up,” she shot him a glance that actually insinuated the task was his alone, “I’m going to swing past Cisco before the team meeting, please have my coffee delivered there.”

It was boss lady time.

“Sure thing boss,” Curtis acknowledged as he hugged his tablet to his chest.
“ That's everything?”
Curtis nodded, it was.
“Great,” Felicity exhaled.
She could do this, she could absolutely get through today without recounting how he flipped her like a rag doll.

And then fucked her like a ....

“So can we talk like friends?” Curtis asked, as was their custom.
“I’m not answering anything about last night Curtis,” she quipped as she walked towards the door.
“Okay,” Curtis lamented, “but are you going to see him again?”
“No.”

That was definite.

~*_~*_~*_~

Roy’s hand came down hard against the side of the ‘mostly for aesthetics’ jukebox in Soul Bar after it ate his quarter and didn’t repay him with some old vinyl song that was recorded before he was born but seemed fitting for his morose all the same.

“Shouldn’t you be next door at work?” Malcolm jeered as he walked out from a second hallway that led ‘members’ only areas.
“Oliver fired me,” Roy gritted, his eyes starring daggers at the thieving machine.
Malcolm’s laughter roared through the nearly empty bar.
“Well fuck,” Malcolm add as he booted the side of the jukebox and a b-side Meatloaf track started up, “the jacket?”
It was only half a question but Roy understood it all the same as he nodded in response.
“He’ll get over it,” Malcolm shrugged.

Or he wouldn’t – honestly Malcolm didn’t give two shits.

“He’s a fucking hypocrite,” Roy sneered.
He wasn’t sure what hurt more, the fact the guy he looked up to had just tossed him to the curb like he was shit, or the fact that Roy had bought the reaction upon himself. It was that hurt that he buried behind a tough exterior of pissed off.
“You say that to his face?” Malcolm asked as a waitress handed him an opened beer without the request even needing to leave his mouth.

“Mostly,” Roy shrugged, his voice quieting.

Malcolm laughed again, although a little more subdued this time. Seconds later his smile had vanished and his eyes had darkened.

“He may have gone soft but watch your mouth around him,” he warned as he took a sip of the cold beer before wiping his sleeve across his mouth, “I’m pretty sure given the right motivation he could break your neck without breaking a sweat.”

Roy took a moment to let the warning settle in the air between them before he brushed it off with a sharp blow out of air, like he didn’t believe it – even though he didn’t doubt it for a second. He had seen Oliver fight and he knew what his fists were capable of.

“Not even getting laid can cheer him up,” Roy mocked under his breath to add more weight behind his ‘no-care’ attitude.

Malcolm took another swig before he sat the half-drunk beer on top of the jukebox.

“Oliver has an old lady?” he asked.

If he did, that was news to him, and Malcolm Merlyn didn’t like being the last to know something.

“No,” Roy replied, shaking his head, oblivious to how interested Malcolm had become, “just some chick last night.”

“From here?”

Roy shook his head a second time before he looked up and met the patriarch’s stare.

“Don’t think so,” he replied somewhat timidly, “Thea said she was a real classy girl, straight from High Street.”

Malcolm smiled to ease the stiff air between them.

“Well isn’t that interesting,” he remarked as he gestured the waitress over who arrived in less than half a minute with a cold beer in hand.

“Get a name?” Malcolm asked handing the fresh beer to Roy.

Roy took it without hesitation and thanked Malcolm with a nod.

“Nah, I don’t know her name,” he answered before he took a drink.

“Do me a favour prospect?”

Malcolm’s eyes darkened and narrowed in on Roy’s. He didn’t wait for an answer – it wasn’t really a question that required one.

“Keep an eye on the new bird and let me know if you hear anything.”

Malcolm collected his beer and started to walk away.

“Why?” Roy asked. Though he really had no place to ask, the question had simply slipped out. Malcolm turned and smiled with his head tipped a little to the side.

“Family interest,” he grinned before he chuckled and walked away.

~*~*~*~

“What exactly do you want me to design a security algorithm for?” Felicity asked down the phone as she ran an exhausted finger across her brow.

It had been a long day and it was finally nearing the end run as time slipped down towards 3pm. Her ass was finally bearable enough to sit on, or in the least she had found a slightly lopsided position that allowed the more bruised side to be lifted enough off the cushion so as to not cause unbearable discomfort, that or the five cups of coffee she had drunk that day had pumped her blood so full of caffeine she no longer cared. Either way, she was glad to be sitting at her desk.
Although not so glad to be having this present conversation with a Kord Executive that was like getting blood from a stone.

They wanted something from her but she knew that they weren’t being completely honest about why and Felicity never enjoyed the feeling she got in the pit of her stomach when someone wasn’t exactly being truthful.

“That’s classified information,” came the response, and it wasn’t the first time during this conversation she had heard it.

But then he sighed, it seemed this cloak and dagger phone call was grating on his last nerves too.

“To be honest Ms Smoak, we’re not even sure,” he finally relented and Felicity drew an imaginary line on the chalkboard in her mind Felicity 1 – Kord Executive 0.

“Don’t Kord have their own designers for this sort of thing?” Felicity asked just as she heard a familiar, chipper, voice approaching.

Shit.

She could hear her but she couldn’t see her – yet.

“And you saw how easily that was hacked, our client has asked that we bring in outside help, on a need to know basis of course.”

Of course.

“And what exactly do I get to know?”

Another sigh as the peppy voice of her mother drew closer. She would have tinted the wall of her office but she knew that would be utterly pointless. Tinted walls wouldn’t dissuade Donna Smoak. A brick wall and armed guards wouldn’t dissuade Donna Smoak.

“We can discuss that at a later time, for now we need a system that includes its own GPS, driverless cars, multiple routes, time locks, self-destruct,” he paused to suck in a breath, “the whole hog.”

“Self-destruct?” she repeated, more for her own benefit but loud enough that it was heard. What the hell were they transporting?

“Is that a problem?” the executive asked bluntly.

“Not at all,” the request had piqued her interest and that was more famished than was her desire to stay away from anything that would require a self-destruct.

“Good. We need something by August.”

That was less than two months away, and for what they were asking...

“I’ll see what my team can do,” she assured, it seemed piqued-Felicity also didn’t care too much for restricted time constraints.

“Ms Smoak there is to be no team, just you. Only you,” she didn’t need it repeated but he did so all the same, “if you require any help from your team you will be required to keep the details of it need to know.”

“Why?”

She didn’t know what she bothered to ask, she knew what the answer would be.

“Classified. Special request.”

She was beginning to think the executive knew as little about it as she did, but he won this round. Felicity 1 – Kord Executive 1.

“Have your EA arrange a meeting for August,” she replied politely, though she had absolutely no fucking clue how this was going to happen.

And, she could feel her blood pressure rising – just in time to see her mother waving frantically outside her office window.

“Excellent,” the executive commended, “we’re glad to have you on-board.”

Felicity pushed down that lump in her throat and the gnawing in the pit of her stomach – she
honestly had no idea what she had just signed on for.

The instant the phone hit the cradle Donna walked through Felicity's door like it was a Broadway show, towing a line of strangers in behind her. Felicity however wasn’t surprised, this wasn’t this first time her mother had shown up with an entourage and it probably wouldn’t be the last. She absolutely knew what this was, it was an intervention of the fashion kind.

“Hi Mom,” Felicity smiled though the tone of her words didn’t quite match as she stood to meet her mother in the normal fashion. “Hi Hon,” her mother's cheery introduction was doubled-down with a kiss to each cheek as she embraced Felicity with a lingered and rocking hug.

“You look thin, have you been eating?” Donna asked with a suspiciously raised brow.

“Yes,” Felicity replied before she braced herself for the second, tighter, squeezed cuddle that came no less that five seconds and no more than ten, later.

Eight seconds later she felt the air squeezed from her lungs as she imagined this is what lemons felt like.

“Why is it that I have to traipse all the way down here to see you?” Donna asked with a mournful sigh.

“Well you’ve seen me, I’m alive but I’m very...”

“No you’re not,” Donna interrupted, “Curtis told me you have at least an hour before you have to go see your daddy.”

Felicity would deal with Curtis’ treachery later, but first...

“Please don’t call him that,” Felicity shuddered, the word conjuring up things she didn’t wish to equate her father with.

“You used to,” Donna pouted as she fluffed Felicity's hair like she was ten again.

“I’m pretty sure I never did,” Felicity grimaced.

The hovering, nameless people were becoming restless with tapped heels and squeaky wheels from their suitcases and racks of clothes.

“Who are these people?” Felicity asked, almost resigned to the fact it probably didn't matter.

“Stylists honey,” Donna answered like it was the most natural thing in the world.

“What is going on?”

Honestly, she already knew.

But feigning ignorance was her last ditch effort to stall this.

“The charity event next weekend,” Donna smiled while she smoothed down the same hair she had just fluffed up.

“What about it?”

“We’re designing a look.”

Felicity chuckled and was met with five sets of disapproving eyes.

“I have a dress mom, I’m fine.”

It was futile, but she offered it nevertheless.

“You’re not going in just any old dress.”

That must have been the battle cry as the stylist circled her like prey, with much less attractive prospects than Oliver had last night.

It was the hairstylist who pounced first. A flash of purple fauxhawk before Felicity was back in her chair and wincing at the suddenness of it.

“Are you okay?” Donna asked, noticing the fleck of discomfort flash across Felicity’s face.

“Fine,” she grimaced through a fake smile, “just a rough work out at the gym.”
Felicity hadn’t seen the inside of a gym in six months but Donna shrugged and turned her attention back to the hairstylist, Maurice.

“How do you feel about black? It’s very chic,” Maurice asked, although Felicity got the distinct impression he was asking her mother, not her, “or bangs?”

“Would you let me shave her…”
There was the confirmation Felicity needed.

“Okay, first, no thank you,” Felicity announced as she brushed his beautifully manicured hands away from her head, “bangs aren’t really my thing and for the love of Christ no you cannot shave my hair.”

Maurice sighed and dramatically rolled his eyes, “très boring it is then.”
He combed and tugged her hair before turning to a silent shadow of a girl who stood clutching a notepad behind him.

“Honey blonde and fix the highlights,” he instructed and the shadow scribbled.
Maurice tipped Felicity’s head and made a part an inch away from her natural one, “dry scalp, signs of dandruff.”
The gasp from the shadow and Donna was audible.

“Really, is this necessary?” Felicity sighed obtusely as she tried in vain to swat him away from her hair.

Only this time her hand was caught by a striking dark-haired woman with a luxuriant Nordic accent.

“We do gel tips,” she spoke matter-of-factly, “bling them up and add an inch.”
The shadow nodded and scribbled simultaneously.

“No, no fake nails,” Felicity argued as she shook her hand free, “I type with this puppies so I need them as they are.”

She was beginning to think she hadn’t been heard given that the shadow wasn’t taking notes and the striking brunette didn’t seemed fazed by Felicity’s rejection, but before she could repeat her objection the kindly face of a bubbly blonde woman – not unlike her mother but with a few more curves – zoomed in on her personal space and studied her face so ridiculously intensely that Felicity was about 60% sure she was counting freckles.

“I’m thinking glitter,” the sweet southern belle smiled as she finally stepped back from her extreme close up, “like a butterfly.”

“WINGS!” Donna exclaimed.

“Mom,” Felicity replied “am I going to a five year old’s birthday party?”
The southern belle seemed to actually listen and nodded slowly.

“Smoky eye and plush lip,” she simpered and the shadow wrote.

“Okay, now that’s all sorted,” Donna gestured as she pulled Felicity up from the chair, “time to choose a dress.”
Felicity’s eyes scanned the six-foot long rack stuffed with more dresses than she dare count. They were an array of lengths and colours and, in some cases, textures.

She didn’t think there was anything that either didn’t bare her ass, didn’t have feathers or wouldn’t induce an epileptic fit if she walked too fast in it…until.

Her eyes landed on a shimmering dress that resembled an extravagant cascade of melted gold dusted in diamonds. The cut was simplistic in nature, v-neck and fitted bodice but the dress fell like a waterfall from mid-thigh and spilled down the back in a small train and, to finish the opulence of it, it was completely backless until it scooped tightly around the waist and plunged dangerously
close to immodest.

It was stunning.
“You’d look beautiful in it,” Donna smiled, instinctively knowing the dress that had caught her daughter’s eye.

Felicity drew a finger down the dress as Donna absently tucked a few strands of hair behind Felicity’s ear.
“Felicity?” her mother mused.
“Mmm?” Felicity replied, barely paying her attention.
“Did you have sex last night?”

The four uninvited guests gasped and Felicity’s mouth fell wordlessly open and her cheeks instantly turned pink.
“Mom, why would you? What? I, nooo…” Felicity lied, pulling out the ‘o’ like it would add some value to her argument, though it did the opposite.
Yeah, right.

Felicity raised her hands in protest as her shoulders stiffened automatically.
“I have work to do, a company to run and a board of directors that think because I’m a woman I am bound to fail, I don’t have time for this, please.”

Donna smiled as she ushered everyone from the room before Felicity slunk down into her chair.
“I’ll have the dress tailored and sent to your house,” Donna offered kindly once the room was cleared.
“Thank you,” Felicity replied quietly as she pinched the bridge of her nose.
She was exhausted and stressed.
The coffees were wearing off.

“You work too hard hon.”
Felicity offered a placating smile – it was not the first time her mother had said the same thing, but Felicity had little choice in the matter. She knew she had vultures circling just waiting to see her stumble.

“Was it at least good?” Donna asked.
Felicity raised her head before tipping it to the side.
Leave it to Donna Smoak to ask.
“Mom, I didn’t…” Felicity paused, she didn’t really have it in her to lie, but she definitely didn’t have it in her to tell the truth.
“Oh course you didn’t,” Donna smirked, “but if you happened to, I would say good because a good sex is great for the mind, body and spirit.”
Donna didn’t wait for a reply before she sauntered out of the office and waved goodbye down the hall.

If good sex was great for the mind, body and spirit, Felicity could only begin to imagine the wonders the spectacular sex from last night brought.

And with that knowledge firmly implanted in her mind and a smile painted across her face Felicity got more work done that week than she could have ever imagined, all with distant pricking thoughts about just how epic that one night stand had been.

~*~*~*~
It had happened on a Wednesday, an entire ten days ago but Oliver hadn't let the memory fade into oblivion just yet. He held no fanciful ideas that Felicity would strut into Verdant with an accompanying halo of radiant sunlight and a mist of sweetly scented perfume, but a few times the sound of footsteps had caused his heart to jolt just a fraction.

This afternoon was no exception and the sound of woman's shoes on concrete had Oliver rolling out from underneath the Volkswagen like his life depended on it, only to be met with a scowl he had spent the last ten days becoming acquainted with.

"The answer is no Thea," Oliver answered without a question even leaving her lips. He wasn't wrong though.

"Come on Oliver, cut Roy some slack," she pleaded the same case she had every other day with varying degrees of annoyance, "he needs this job."

"He shouldn't have got himself fired then," Oliver replied, a word for word repeat of his reply every day.

"You're as cranky as Jax," Thea protested, "speaking of which you need to sleep at home tonight, that demon is on his last noise warning and he won't howl if someone is home."

Oliver half acknowledged the instruction with a grunt.

"I'm serious Oliver, your dog has a shitty attitude, always growling and barking at people," she smiled and he knew what was coming next, "not unlike you actually."

Oliver smiled sarcastically.

"Although you would be a little less cranky if you called up your girl," Thea added with a pouted smile and a raised brow.

"I don't have a girl Thea," Oliver huffed

"You could."

Oliver was in no mood for a debate.

"Where are you going, a funeral?" he asked, unskilfully changing the subject. Thea looked down at her black attire and smiled.

"I got a gig waitressing," she explained, "earn some of my own money."

"Who the fuck would hire you?" Oliver mocked as he playfully flicked her shoulder.

She smiled like the little kid he remembered fondly.

"Some Charity Gala tonight, lots of posh people bidding stupid amounts of money on things they don't need to make themselves feel better."

"Sounds fun," Oliver joked, "do you need a ride?"

"Roy is going to drop me off and pick me up."

Oliver's lip tensed, "you trust him to show?"

"Last week you wouldn't have asked me that," she replied, matching his terse tone with one of her own, "because of a jacket you're going to act like he's another gang banger?"

"Because he is," Oliver shot back.

"Then so are you," Thea matched him attitude to attitude.

"I know Thea," he exclaimed as he ran a rough hand through his hair, "that's why I know you deserve better."

His voice quivered as his head hung low. He never thought he was better than Roy or any of the others, in fact if he was honest perhaps he was worse. Oliver was destined to live out this life, but Thea didn't have to. He had made a promise that he intended to keep, whatever it cost him.

Thea threw her arms around Oliver and squeezed him tightly. There was a lot she knew about her
brother, in so many respects they were cut from the same rock, but she also knew there was a
darkness that every once and a while consumed him. He never spoke about. Never let her see past
the front he put up, but she knew enough to know that he thought his happiness was unattainable
and come hell or high water Thea was determined to show him that wasn’t true.

“Have a good night Oliver,” she whispered as she pulled away, lightly grazing his cheek with a
kind kiss.

~*~*~*~

[That Night]

Oliver ran a hand down Jax’s head as it lay contentedly on his lap and he flicked idly through the
late night channels. It was just after 11pm and he had spent the last two hours ruminating over a
decision he knew he needed to make.

To say he was pissed at Roy was an understatement. Oliver had spent the better part of two years
mentoring Roy and teaching him something that could see him hold down a job that didn’t involve
pointing a pistol at a shop owner.

He huffed out a smile with the last thought, after all that’s where he had met Roy, a scrawny kid
pointing a shaking gun at a shop owner that barely flinched.

~2 Years Ago~

“He’s got a six gauge shotgun pointed right at you under the counter,” Oliver warned as he found
himself in the middle of a robbery at the corner store a few blocks from home.
Roy looked at him through the ill-fitting balaclava and Oliver could tell he wasn’t much older than
Thea.
“You kissed your mom goodbye this morning?” Oliver asked as he chomped down on a red vine,
“because if you didn’t, she’s going to be real sad you’re not coming home tonight.”
“Shut the fuck up,” the shaky voice ordered.

Oliver blew out a soft laugh mixed with a sigh as he stepped in front of the pistol.
“You keep waving that thing around and this gentleman back here,” Oliver explained as he nodded
towards the shop keeper, “he’s going to shoot you clear in the gut and you won’t be getting up
from that,” Oliver continued, placing a twenty dollar note on the counter to pay for his 6-pack of
beer, the red vines and the magazine he had rolled up under his arm.

Roy said nothing, but his arm – and the gun – remained outstretched.
“Ain’t that right Siref?” Oliver asked the man behind the counter.
Oliver frequented the place enough times to be on a first name basis.
Siref simply smiled, the type of smile that confirmed everything Oliver had just said.
“Put the gun down and you walk out of here. You’re just a kid, don’t you have anything fucking
better to do?” Oliver snapped, just enough to make Roy stumble and his shoulder to drop.

The rest happened quicker than Roy could make sense of it. All he knew was that the next minute
the gun was gone, emptied of bullets and tucked into the back of Oliver’s jeans and he was
sporting a fat lip and a throbbing head from his face meeting with Oliver’s kneecap before he was
been dragged from the shop by the scruff of his neck.

“Keep the change,” Oliver called as he and Siref exchanged knowing waves.

Oliver spent the next few hours lecturing the kid in a booth at Big Belly Burger. The kid was
young, impulsive and stupid, but Oliver saw something else. He wasn’t out there trying to rip off shop keepers for cigarettes and beer, he was doing it to help his mother keep a roof – albeit a dilapidated one – over her and his younger siblings’ heads, seven of them in total.

“Be there tomorrow morning at eight, don’t be late,” Oliver instructed once the food was nothing but scraps and dusk was starting to settle.
“What is this?” Roy asked as he took the card Oliver slid across the table.
“An opportunity,” Oliver replied, “I teach you a trade and pay you a fair wage.”
“And what do you get out of it?”
Amends Oliver thought.
“Your word that you won’t try and stick up my local convenience store again,” Oliver smiled as he threw done money for the food and tip, “Siref stocks the beer I like,” he added with a smirk before he left.

~*~*~*~

Roy had turned up the next day, and every other day after that. He was a good worker, diligent and ready to learn and in teaching him Oliver found a mentorship he hadn’t anticipated. He had done his best to keep Roy away from the whispered lies of the snake that was Malcolm Merlyn, but in the end it didn’t seem he had done enough; and now Oliver faced a crossroad.

Leave the kid to fend for himself; or try and claw him back.

“What do you think boy?” Oliver asked as Jax raised his head, one bright blue eye cocked open, “you think I give the shithead kid another chance?”
Jax growled through a yawn and snapped his lips together.
“Yeah, you’re probably right,” Oliver sighed as he stood.

Jax raised up on his front legs at the disturbance, curious as to where his owner and friend was going.
“Don’t start howling the minute I leave. I’ll be home in like thirty minutes,” Oliver warned with a stern voice before he patted the half-German Shepherd, half-Husky on the head.

Roy would be outside the Gala waiting for Thea soon, if he wasn’t already, and Oliver wasn’t ready to give up on the scrawny kid (although he wasn’t all that scrawny anymore) just yet.

~*~*~*~

Felicity smiled through another conversation as the night wore on. Truth be told she hated these events, and the stunning gold dress and perfectly applied makeup did little to change that.

She always felt like she was been rolled out at these things for spectators to see, like a sideshow where a man in a top hat chanted, “look at the youngest CEO we have and she’s a woman” as though that was all she had going for her.

Felicity knew to most of the people in this room she was a pretty face with glasses and a ponytail that you could slap on a bumper sticker to feel like you are socially aware. It went unsaid, but the fact that she had Curtis as her second in command definitely ticked the diversity box to them.

But that was all she was. They never actually cared about her opinions nor did they put much value in what she could achieve. All the cared about was the PR and Goodwill she brought them to balance out the building full of stuffy old white guys in all the other CEO offices.

That fact was merely cemented by the questions she was asked by reporters covering the Gala. Not
a single one asked about the press-release in respect to the breakthrough in cavalier technology that Cisco, under her management, had achieved. Rather, they wanted to know what designer she was wearing, where she got her nails done and if she was dating any of the eligible bachelors that would be there.

One even had the audacity to ask about her exercise regime rather than the fact she was only a few billion dollars away from revolutionising spinal care injuries.

That was all she was to them.

She excused herself from a conversation that had never involved her and headed towards the door. Her mother was preoccupied enough sharing cocktailed-infused stories with some of the other executives’ wives that she didn’t notice when Felicity fled out the front door.

~*~*~*~

Oliver tapped on the side window of Roy’s car and waited as he slowly wound it down.

“Thea’s not out yet,” Roy said with pensive lips.

“I’m not here to talk to Thea, I’m here to talk to you.”

“About?” Roy asked with a sarcastic eye roll, “you said plenty last week.”

“I stand by what I said, you hooking up with the Souls is a huge fucking mistake,” Roy gritted his teeth.

“In saying that,” Oliver sighed, “I’ll see you Monday morning.”

He tapped the roof of the car and stepped away.

“Wait, you’re giving me my job back?” Roy called out the window as Oliver strolled back to his bike parts a little way in front.

“Don’t be late,” Oliver called back with a slow nod.

He hopped onto his bike and was about to put his helmet on when he saw her – a vision in gold with soft honey hair fanning across her face.

~*~*~*~

Felicity unpinned her hair and let the cool night air pick up her tresses and blow them softly across her face. There was something ethereally calming about the feeling of hair and a soft breeze stroking your face and Felicity melted into it.

She didn’t know how long she stood there, it was probably only a few seconds, half a minute at most, but it felt like hours slipped over her as each breath she took felt like a wave of relief washing over her.

Her eyes slowly floated open as a delicate hand brushed back hair from her face. She took a few steps down the stairs, letting the cool air prick down her naked back. It wasn’t unpleasant, in fact there was something refreshing about the way cold air pricked at tempered skin, perhaps there was even something a little sensual about it.

A few more steps found her at the curb, looking down the road towards a taxi that was sat without a fare a short walk away.

She wasn’t even sure why she looked across the road. She had no reason to. But she did, an unexplainable feeling dragging her vision upwards, until her pale blue eyes saw him, lit up in a down light of muted orange.
Felicity almost wondered if his Adonis form in dark jeans and darker leather was nothing more than her imagination’s idea of a joke. That was until he waved. One hand, almost timidly. He saw her too.

Oliver wasn’t in control of his hand when it raised like a puppet and waved back and forth in a process he had never, ever, engaged before.

She was stunning even at this distance. Her shapely form was bathed in gold that caught the warm orange reflections of street lamps and the luminous white of the moon on full display which was hung above her like a spotlight for her alone.

Her arms were bare with one raised as she held back her hair.

And then she waved, a mirror image to his own. She saw him too.

Oliver lifted the helmet and put it in the air between them. It was hers if she wanted.

Felicity swallowed a lump in her throat as she lowered her hand back down to her side. There were a million reasons why she should turn around and go back inside, and yet...

She took a wavering, unsteady step forward before she took another, then another followed by yet more until she had crossed the road and was standing barely a foot from where Oliver stood his arm still extended and the offer still open.

“Going home?” Oliver asked when she was close enough to hear it. Felicity took a slow and steady inhale, “thanks,” she blew out softly as she took the helmet from his hands.

No sooner had Felicity pushed on the snug helmet then Oliver handed her his jacket. She didn’t turn it down this time, slipping it on and zipping it up over her chest.

He started up the engine as Felicity stared down at her couture gown, her mind formulating the best course of action. She bunched it up around her knees and climbed on the back, pooling the excess fabric between them before she sunk in against his back and breathed in that rich musk of sandalwood and motor oil.

She couldn’t believe she was doing this again.
The ride to Felicity’s house seemed quicker than the last time, so much so that she contemplated telling Oliver to just keep driving, unwilling to end the bout of freedom she felt just yet. There was just such a rush about feeling the cold wind against her cheeks that made her forget about the stuffy world she had become a part of.

But by the time she thought she had plucked up enough courage and formulated the words to actually ask Oliver, he had shut off the engine just a short walk from her garden path.

“I’m not sure which one it is,” Oliver admitted as his eyes walked up and down the row of virtually identical houses. Felicity stepped from the bike holding the tail of her dress bunched up in front of her before she spilled it to the ground like a golden waterfall.

She tugged the helmet from her head and shook out her hair, letting the breeze briefly sweep it across her wind-chapped lips.

“This is fine,” she smiled as she handed Oliver back his helmet, a million words sitting in the back of her throat.

“You should have folded down the visor,” he replied with a gentle laugh as his thumb instinctively grazed across her dry lip.
When he pulled his thumb back apologetically Felicity rolled her tongue across her parched bottom lip, wetting it with a gloss of saliva before she folded it inwards and snagged it with her teeth.

It was a simple act on her part to stop any more words spilling forth. “So goodnight I guess,” she thanked as she peeled down the jacket zipper and shrugged the warm, scented leather from her shoulders. Oliver unapologetically let his eyes travel the sleek curves of her body as he vividly remembered just how good his hands felt driving over them. Felicity felt the heat of his eyes but she didn’t mind them, honestly she didn’t mind them at all.

But she couldn’t stand there all night, lapping in the attention his eyes were dishing out and if she stayed there much longer she might consider doing something completely, utterly and absolutely foolish, she might just...

“Did you want to come in for a drink?” she asked. That, she might just do that.

Oliver was surprised. Granted the invitation was a welcomed one, another few hours with that body was definitely something he had thought about when he saw her across the road, but he hadn’t expected her to ask.

Uptown women like Felicity dipped their toes in the underbelly of society to feel a little rush in their otherwise dull lives, they didn’t invite him into their homes.

When he didn’t answer Felicity regretted her impulsive tongue. But after a few moments of reflective clarity, she probably still would have asked because it just made mathematical sense. It was the law of odds. Felicity’s first one night stand turned out lovely. Quite lovely.

The odds of having a secondary one night stand that would meet the bar set by the first were low, terribly low, unless... The law of factorising...or whatever the opposite of that law is. Instead of removing the common factor, Felicity planned on adding it.

To have greater odds at repeating the mind altering sex her first one night stand had produced she needed to ensure as many common factors as practicable.

Common factor number 1, her. A given.
Common factor number 2, just sex. Tick.
Common factor number 3, unplanned. For the most part it was, at least everything up until this moment had been unplanned.

She didn’t think the location or the day of the week had any bearing and that just left the other party. That just left Oliver, her common factor number 4.

It made perfect sense.

But Oliver wasn’t saying anything. She might have miscalculated his willingness.

Oliver kicked down the stand and tucked his helmet under his arm. He didn’t say a word as his motorcycle boots scuffed along the pristine sidewalk. He stopped at the edge of the path that lead through the gates with a cocky smile embedded on his full lips as he bowed slightly and gestured
his free hand up towards the path.

*Lead the way.*

They walked without words, Felicity half a step a head of him watching Oliver in her peripheral. He didn’t look left to right, didn’t take any of his surroundings in at all but rather his eyes stayed in one place and that was on her.

The porch sensor light came on and Felicity almost bolted, the suddenness of it shining an instant and stark light on what she, they, were about to do, at least until his fingers grazed the underside of her wrist and ignited an undeniable and insatiable demand between her legs.

Felicity unlocked the door and stepped through it. For a moment she wanted Oliver to take her hand and entwine their fingers together, but just as sudden as the thought took her it was gone. That was far too intimate a gesture for what they were doing.

This was just sex.
Really good sex hopefully, but nevertheless just sex.
The only hand holding allowed was his holding hers against the headboard, or vice versa.

She heard the door click closed behind them and a tiny exhale of nervous air escaped from her lips. She turned her head briefly and noted the smile on his face was now less *cocky* more *intrigued*.

Oliver couldn’t decide what he found more attractive, the way she carried herself – shoulders back, eyes affixed forward, lips slightly pensive but giving away nothing – practiced confidence; or the slight lapses in that character – the finger that tapped a code subconsciously against her leg, the blink-and-you’ll-miss-it quiver of her lip before she spoke.

Both sides of her coin were infatuating.

“So do you want a drink?” she took a single step into the darkened living room, lit only by a small lamp, before she flooded it with cascading beams of white light from the ceiling, “I don’t think I have beer, but there might be some left over merlot, although you don’t seem like the merlot type.”

She felt his presence following her into the living room doorway. Felicity could feel Oliver's warm breath on her neck, brushing away tiny strands of hair. She knew he must be close.

Felicity didn’t dare move lest such a move made him fall back. Her skin tingled and flurried under the fan of his breath as she tried to make sense of the fact him *just* breathing on her was dampening between her legs and twisting her core into knots of sexual hunger.

*He was only breathing for fuck's sake.*

Felicity could feel her cheeks blushing and instinctively she placed her palm against one in an attempt to disguise it. It was then that she caught Oliver's reflection in the wall mounted TV across the living room.

He was so impossibly taller than her, even in her shoes, and so salaciously close that seeing it made her gulp as she stood, anchored to the floor beneath.

“Is that really why you asked me inside?” Oliver asked, his voice was low and thick, almost a growl that permeated through her entire body like a heatwave.
He was a cocky son of a bitch and Felicity *should* hate that, but she didn’t. *Quite the opposite* actually.

She turned slowly, where not a single part of their bodies touched. Their lips were so close that
they shared breaths and yet they didn’t touch.
“No,” she whispered, her eyes locked to his.
“So why don’t you tell me why I’m really here?” Oliver rasped, his voice thick with ardour.

Felicity drew her thumb over his lower lip, splaying it under a little pressure as she tugged it down toward his chin before it sprung back up and Oliver wet it with a single stroke of his tongue.

And then she kissed it.
It was barely more than a graze of hungry lips against wet ones. Like a playful breeze that danced across his lips with promises unspoken and desires unreleased. It was a feather. His one lip encased between her two until she started to pull away.

Oliver’s hands latched around her back and she smiled back into the kiss. It pressed deeper, laced with more fervour and licentious need. He turned her and her shoes skated across the dark polished wood. They stumbled backwards, blindly engrossed in a war of lips and tongues until her thighs hit the hall table, toppling a few picture frames she had there.

His hands gripped her waist like he was going to lift her before they travelled up her sides, the tips of his fingers grazing against her naked skin where her dress cut away.

“Where is the bedroom?” Oliver spoke with a husky voice before his teeth nipped at her lower lip.

Felicity didn’t hesitate to nip him back before she shifted from against the hall table and began to ascend the stairwell. She didn’t need to check he was following her because his fingers reached out and touched just the fringes of hers.

Oliver decided it was a nice house, comfortable, modern, though it had little in the way of “homely touches”. The art work on the walls were hung like they would be in an art gallery. They were woven colours, abstract and he had no idea what they were there to represent.

His fingers dragged along the glass bannister, it was impeccably clean.

Felicity stopped at the second door along the landing and even though Oliver couldn’t see her face he imagined her lips were pensively trapped between her teeth as she tried to make a decision.

He was about to offer her an out, drop her hand and comment that he should leave, when she opened the door and passed over the threshold of her room.

His eyes scanned the room giving it a pre-cursory looking over for any reasons he shouldn’t be there. Oliver hadn’t bothered to ask but he saw no signs of her living with a man, or a woman – he wouldn’t judge – but he was fairly certain Felicity slept alone in that bed, that impressively large floating bed with a charcoal grey pillowed headboard that was affixed to the wall.

Subconsciously he breathed a sigh of relief when he noted that bed was free from an elaborate display of throw cushions and/or stuffed animals. Just simple light grey linen with a sneak of white sheets underneath, matching pillowcases and two turquoise throw pillows that looked like they were thrown on the bed as an afterthought.

That was the only break in the straight lines and cleaned areas that he saw. All the drawers on her dresser were closed as was the double mirrored wardrobe doors.

There was no art exhibition paintings in this room. Just a series of black and white photos hung up on the wall that faced the bed. They were still hung perfectly, but there was something so much more real about them than anything he had seen in the hall.

Before is eyes could scope more, they stopped in the middle of the room and Felicity was now
stood in front of him, her eyes an ocean of turbulent blue.

She really wasn’t sure what she was doing here. She barely knew Oliver but here he was in her inner sanctum about to probably breach her inner sanctum. She dated the last guy for two months before he ever stepped foot into her bedroom, preferring to make out on the couch or at his penthouse apartment where she wore only designer lingerie and he preferred she kept her hair up and neat.

Felicity shook that from her mind, none of that mattered now.

Oliver hooked a finger under the thin strap of her dress lifting it from her skin but keeping it just as it was, giving her a chance to call an end to whatever it was they were doing here.

But she didn’t, rather she slipped her fingers underneath the strap on the other side and slid it off her shoulder. Oliver smiled coyly as he followed suit and walked the strap down her shoulder with his cool palm gliding against her humid skin.

His lips brushed a kiss where the strap had once sat, as though he was soothing the spot that had so valiantly held up her dress made of gold and sewn with sin in mind.

Felicity’s breath seeped over her wet lips almost like a strangled moan as Oliver worked his kisses slowly up towards her neck, warming her with his hot breath.

The bodice of her dress fell away from her body, exposing her naked breasts to the lightly cooled air of the bedroom and the flaming heat of his stare. It was exhilarating, immersing, engulfing... it was consuming. She was on display to him and Oliver was taking his sweet time taking it in. Perhaps he was giving her moments, breaks in the passion, to change her mind, but Felicity had made it most resolutely standing outside the bedroom door.

It was going to take some act of god to make her stop this.

He started at her neck, a slow, gentle kiss where the threads of her throat bled into her collarbone. Felicity breathed out a plush sigh over rouge lips, just as Oliver's slid a set of fingers down her chest. The moment they grazed over her nipple she felt a jolt of electricity shudder down her spine and soft bleats of pleasure fell from her mouth.

Oliver grinned against her soft skin, the slowness of his actions were painful. Sure, he was acting cool, calm and collected but fuck if he didn’t want to pick her up and carry Felicity to the bed and simply devour her because he did. Fuck he did.

But fate rarely gave do-overs, and while he had no mind to correct anything that happened in Verdant, he was certain that a third opportunity to enjoy Felicity Smoak was not going to come about, so tonight he would last, last until his vision was blurred and every drop of blood in his entire body was throbbing in his cock.

He was going to experience every part of that body and greedily drink in every sound, sight and sensation she could give him for as long as she would let him.

His trail of kisses led down to her pert breast and as his palm cupped the underneath his lips encased her pebbled rosy nipple. He grinned as her back arched into it and her fingers twisted in his hair. His tongue toyed with the tip of her nipple, skating over it with slow swoops and fast whips as her fingers mirrored the same movements against his scalp.

Oliver wasn’t even sure she realised she was doing it, even when he grazed his teeth lightly against her feverish nipple and her nails dug into her scalp in response. It was intoxicating.
He growled against her breast, his tongue shaking against her nipple as the reverberations sunk deep into her core. Felicity could hear every noise he made. His imposing stature was now stooped against her body, his mouth attached to her breast while his hands massaged and explored her body. He sounded like a hungry dog searching for something to satisfy his needs.

It was guttural and carnal and it made Felicity feel like she was the only one in the world to have ever elicited such noises from within him. It was probably just the clever tricks of a man who had expertly bedded women, making each one feel as special and as desired as the last, but she didn’t care. No, she really didn’t, she would enjoy the lucidity of it all the same.

Oliver dropped her breast from her mouth, nuzzling his nose against it for just a few languid moments before his lips travelled down the centre of her body with slow, dragged kisses that wet her skin and left a trail of goose bumps in their wake.

Her fingers mimicked the slow, gentle caress of his lips with soft strokes through his hair, soothing his scalp where they had moments ago scourged.

He stopped at her belly button and looked up her body as she, wordlessly, looked down. His chin rested against the low line of her dress as it hung around her hips with his stubble prickling against her supple skin there. It wasn’t a sensation she recalled ever experiencing before, and that simple fact made it even more enjoyable.

“Felicity,” he practically growled her name.
She responded with an almost unheard “mmm?”
“I want to fuck you.”

If her tongue hadn’t fallen so far back towards her throat she would have definitely cursed at the utter directness of his words.
Jesus, that was direct.

“Oh,” Felicity replied timidly, despite the fact it was Oliver who appeared subservient knelt on the floor in front of her, “the bed…” she started to say as she tipped her head over her shoulder to gesture to the bed a few feet away.

“No, here,” Oliver interrupted with a tipped smile that drove up the corner of his lips, “with my tongue.”
Felicity blinked in his words, she knew what he was saying – she wasn’t virginal or anything – but his request was so…so...
forward.

“I want to fuck you, standing right here, with my tongue,” Oliver reiterated, “is that alright with you Princess?”

Her stance wavered and it was only then that she realised he had planted both his hands firm against her upper thighs, holding her there so she wouldn’t fall.

“Yes,” Felicity replied, the single word carried on a rasped sigh that dripped from her pouted lips.
“Good,” Oliver smiled as one hand walked over her ass and blindly found the tiny zip in the back of her dress.
She felt each tug as the pull tab clipped over each of the teeth like a train slowly working down the tracks. There was a final tug when the tab reached the end.

It was then that the dress fell away from her body like chocolate from a fountain before it pooled around her feet in a decadent puddle of gold.

She heard Oliver gasp as her eyes slowly fluttered open, she had surprised him and she couldn’t
help the wicked smile that floated across her painted lips.

Felicity wasn’t wearing any underwear.

“Is there a problem Oliver?” she smiled as she twisted a section of his hair around her index finger.
“Fuck no,” he replied before his hands cupped under her ass and tugged her closer.
*No problem at all.*

His lips closed in around her mound and that tiny thatch of trimmed hair. There was something wild but controlled about it, and just like every discovery he had made about her already, he liked this one too.

Oliver breathed her in, deep and long, letting the sweet notes of her vanilla-scented arousal seep into his senses.

His tongue peeked between her slit, parting them like the blade of a chef’s knife. She moved in front of him, rocking on her stilettos as his hands slipped around the back of her thighs towards the inside and slowly widened her stance.

Felicity moved as he directed, shuffling her shoes across the cream carpet. Oliver hummed his approval at her dutifulness, although he had already witnessed that she was no wallflower. His tongue slipped further into her folds, finally tasting the arousal that had tempted and toyed with his nostrils in those moments before.

He kissed her sex, his lips forming around the crest of her folds. Felicity’s head tipped backwards before she pulled it back down and forced her eyes open. There was something insanely sexual about seeing just the top of his hair, a curtain of dusty blonde, with his face pressed between her legs. Her head cocked either side, watching as his fingers now clamped around her hips with his thumbs digging trenches into the dip just below her hip bone.

This wasn’t the first time a guy had gone down on her, but it was the first time a guy had made quite the visual show out of it. He wanted her to watch and even if she had to tear her fingers around from their coiled place within his hair to pry her eyes open, Felicity wasn’t going to miss this.

Oliver snaked his tongue between her, parting and savouring each back and forth stroke he made. He found her clit, budded tightly, before his tongue lifted back the hood and his lips formed around it.

Felicity moaned salaciously as Oliver lips caressed her swollen nub which only made him deepen the kiss, pressing his chin further into her folds, his beard gazing against her slit as his cheeks brushed over her inner thighs.

Her voice became like a whimper as her fingers twisted ruthlessly into his hair as though she was afraid that letting go might give him pause to stop.

But Oliver was of no mind to stop.

His tongue weaved around her clit in a mixture of patterns and pressure that continually left her guessing as which direction it would turn next. His teeth lightly plucked at it, just enough to send an erotic spark down the back of her legs. Oliver drank in each moan, catering his movements to elicit even more from her until his tongue throbbed to be inside her, to feel her tight body encasing part of his.

The pad of his thumb replaced his tongue within seconds of his lips releasing her clit, swarming
over her as he stroked down through her wet folds before moving back to circle her fisted clit.

His knees were beginning to ache and he knew he needed her legs spread further apart to complete bury his tongue inside her like he so desperately wanted to do. He had a mind to drop her as quickly and gently to the ground as he could right there and then to feed his insatiable hunger, but he still had a little common courtesy – enough to get her to the bed at least.

Felicity felt her feet lift off the floor as Oliver pressed her lower half to his chest and lifted her effortlessly into the air. Before she had time to wrap her legs around him he deposited her on the edge of her expansive bed as the cover billowed up around her. A smile fluttered across her lips as she wondered if Oliver would actually ever let her walk to the bed in the future.

_The future?!_
She gulped and the smile disappeared the instant the words filtered through her brain.
There wasn’t supposed to be a future. She had ticked that off. One night stands – even repeat ones – didn’t lead to _futures._

Oliver must have seen something in her face because before she could let her mistake cloud out the moment, he kissed her. Deep and hard with his fists balled into the expensive linen either side of her completely naked body and Felicity forgot. Everything.

When he broke back for air she tugged expectantly on the hem of his navy tee. She could still remember what lay underneath and her fingers were desperate to explore his form once again. She didn’t need to ask, her snagged lip and her raised eyebrow said plenty and Oliver tore the shirt over his head like he was on _Baywatch._

He was standing in front of her and her eyes were locked with his crotch. Her fingers artfully unfastened the aged-brown leather belt and tugged it from around his waist with a crack as it came free. Vision of using the stiff leather to drag trails down her skin flooded her mind and she was surprised at just how much the idea aroused her.

She masterfully peeled down his fly and slipped a hand under the heavy denim. Oliver grunted and then moaned as her fingers dashed over his long, firm shaft. _Oliver was just as into this as she was._

Her hands carried his jeans to the floor as her lips marked a slow path down the inside of his thigh. “Fuck,” Oliver cursed when the first, air-like kiss landed just below the hem of his briefs.
He sunk his hands into her tussled hair as he imagined her sensually plump lips freshly painted in sinful red – like the first moment he saw her – kissing a trail across his body leaving lipstick stains everywhere they touched.

If he didn’t think such an act would cause him to ejaculate far quicker than he was prepared to tonight he just might have asked her if she would be willing to, but for now just the thought of it made his cock ache and his throat bleed out strangled groans.

Her kisses ended at his knee as he stepped free of his jeans and kicked them backwards. He’d never considered the back of his knee at all, let alone in any sort of sexual way, but the way her lips caressed it and her tongue traced the creases of it, Oliver was completely taken with the spot.

Felicity reached for the clasp of her shoes as she shifted backwards a little on the bed, making way for Oliver’s knees to fit between her legs. His hands caught hers.
“Leave them on,” he rasped as he plucked her fingers from around the clasp, “please,” he added with a salaciously uneven smile.
“Seeing as you asked nicely,” she breathed before she kissed the curved side of his lips.
His body walked her up the bed until her head found the pillow. His lips hopped down her body as his hands ran unfettered lines like rivers behind.

Oliver’s tongue sunk inside her the instant his lips touched between her legs. Felicity gasped as her back arched off the bed. One hand twisted a fist into the bed as the other dove into his hair.

The slow, languid strokes that he had painted between her legs when she was standing were gone now, replaced with deep, penetrating assaults from his tongue and fast, tantalising circles over her clit with his thumb. The onslaught was a cacophony of sensations, each building on top of the other.

She whimpered and moaned, hot breaths of pleasure pouring from her lips, each one urging Oliver deeper and faster. Her arousal came thicker and coated his lips as Oliver sucked and nipped and dived.

She forced her body upwards, balancing herself on one elbow as she looked at Oliver buried between her legs. He had been right the first time they had been together, Felicity had never allowed herself the emersion of watching so tonight, with her lip snagged between her teeth and her blue eyes blown wide Felicity was going to watch. She was going to watch all of it.

Her core tightened as Oliver continued thrusting his tongue inside her. Her clit teetered on the edge of pleasure and pain as he tweaked it between his forefinger and thumb and lightly twisted. His lips sucked her inward and her thighs felt grazed by strokes of his unshaven jaw.

A wave of pleasure washed over her as she threw her head backwards. With her last bit of control before her body let go, Felicity whipped her head back, digging her chin into her neck. She would watch.

Felicity felt the moment her orgasm crashed. It was explosive, consuming, engulfing and she came with a litter of pleasured criers and curses. She heard nothing and saw only white lights forming over her eyes for an instant before her body shook and rumbled through one of the best orgasms in her life – tied equal only by the one Oliver had given her the first time.

She blew out a breathy laugh as she listened to the snuffles and snorts and hums that came unabashed from Oliver, like he was enjoying every second of it – of her. The sounds he was making alone almost made her come a second time.

Oliver looked up from between her legs, his lips glossed with her spend and there was no mistaking the smile he wore before his tongue licked over his top lip twice as his eyes stayed firmly entrenched in hers.

He smacked his lips together while his left hand eased her through the last remaining spasms of her orgasm with long, sweeping strokes of his thumb and the gentle massage of two fingers against her walls.

“Did you want to clean up?” Oliver asked as his free hand weaved tracks across her chest, lightly tracking over her budded nipples

“Why?” she breathed as she sat back, shifting her pelvis just enough so his fingers slid out from inside her, “we’re not finished are we?”

“I was hoping you’d say that,” Oliver smiled before his lips pounced on hers and they both tumbled backwards into the embraced of the bed.

His hand walked down her bent leg and stopped at her ankle. He smiled against her lips as he let his fingers trickle over the clasp of her shoe.
He pulled back from the kiss, sitting up on his knees as his eyes travelled across her body. She had
one arm raised above her hair, blanketed by a curtain of golden hair as the other hand twisted into
the waistband of his briefs.

The blue of her eyes was almost sky-like and cloudless, free from the turbulent storm he had seen
earlier on. Her lips were glossed with the remnants of her that he had kissed there and her cheeks
were blushed with a perfect shade of rose that matched the colour of her nipples.

Her hand tore down his briefs, letting his hard cock escape from behind the wall of cotton-spandex.
She bit her lip before they splayed out into a smile as Oliver lowered his body onto hers. She
moaned and he groaned as the tip of his cock pressed between her folds. He could still feel the heat
of her orgasm radiating from her and weaving around his cock as he dipped down lower, jostling
his underwear from his thighs, over her knees, down his calves and kicked to the foot of the bed.

Felicity folded her fingers around the back of his neck as her eyes delved deep into his. They
smoothed across his shoulders and over the crest before she tightened her grip around his upper
arms.

With the element of surprise Felicity tipped Oliver over and before he realised it he was now on
his back and she was straddled over the top of his thighs with his fully aroused cock in her hands.
“Fucking hell,” he sighed as her nail traced a vein that wound around his shaft.

_It was Oliver’s turn to watch._

Three small pumps had Oliver sweating before Felicity leaned in and pressed his cock between her
folds. She lowered her body, bending his dick upwards and sandwiching it between her warm,
dripping sex and his firm, taut chest.

He growled her name as her fingers walked her body down onto his. Her lips peppered kisses
across the upper muscles of his chest before she raised her hips just enough to let his cock spring
back, slapping against her ass cheek.

She slid her ass down his thighs, stroking his cock once more between folds, repeating the same
movements up and down it until Oliver’s breath became ragged and his brow became thick with
perspiration, and then she sat up, with his cock in front of her just like before, only now it was
covered into a thin film of their combined arousal.

“I want you to watch,” she said quietly, her confidence growing as Oliver dutifully and
immediately nodded at her request.

She lifted onto her knees and held his cock at her entrance for just a few short seconds before she
lowered herself onto him, swallowing his cock in a slow and fluid motion.

Her hands came away from the base of his cock and slid up to his chest, anchoring them at the
curve of his shoulders.

She slowly rocked against him as her body stretched and formed around him. His eyes lit up and
his mouth stayed turned at the corners in a smile that stirred her on. His hands were around her
waist now, but he wasn’t moving her, not even a little.

Felicity was completely in charge of the pace and she had set it slow, deliriously slow. She could
see the sweat beading across his forehead and she bent down to kiss it away.

“Shit you’re perfect,” Oliver commented as her lips pulled away from him, her chest still lightly
touching his and her hips maintaining their slow rhythmic rock.

“I am?”
No one had ever called her that, not even in a moment like this where you could be prone to exaggeration and rose-tinted thoughts.

Oliver grabbed the back of her hair and pressed his lips into hers to seal his answer there. “But I need you to get off,” he lamented with a groan, his lips tracing the words across hers. “You do, why?” Felicity asked as she pulled back from his kiss, “was that not...” “I need to put a condom on,” Oliver smiled, stopping her words before they had a chance to dent the confidence she was showing.

Shit, how could she have forgotten that?

The truth was Oliver was barely holding on and if she rocked against him a handful more times he was going to go past the point of return. “Do you have one?” he asked as Felicity raised herself off him and nestled her knees into the bed alongside him. “Oh, um, you don’t?” she replied as she drew lazy patterns across his chest. “I wasn’t planning on being here tonight,” Oliver sighed while his palm sunk un around her thigh and his fingers slipped into her folds.

“I might have one,” she shrugged innocently – which, given their state of nakedness and what they had been doing moments before, made Oliver smile.

She hopped off the bed and walked towards a door across the room. Her ass swayed as she teetered on those gorgeous heels and Oliver couldn’t help but stare. It was quite a sight.

Oliver could hear her as she opened and closed ensuite drawers out of sight as he sat up with his back against the headboard.

He cursed himself for taking that condom out of his wallet a few months earlier, deciding in some haze of self-denial that he wasn’t going to engage in random hook-ups anymore. Honestly if time machines existed, Oliver’s first act would to be go back to that moment, slap himself across the head and write Felicity’s name on the little tinfoil packet to keep in his wallet, because if that pretty little vixen couldn’t find one Oliver was going to have a severe case of blue balls.

Felicity came back still, thankfully, completely naked but now wearing a slightly disheartened look. Oliver sucked in a breath of air as he readied himself for disappointment he would try his best to mask – after all tongue fucking her had been pretty damn great. He could always just do that again, and again.

“You couldn’t find one?” Oliver asked as he watched her walked towards the foot of the bed. A smile peeked from behind her lips as she held up one foil packet that quickly toppled into a row of three. Fucking hell.

Felicity climbed on top, nestling her body into his thighs before she tore one of the packets across the perforated line. She smiled wickedly as she placed the other two condoms on the empty pillow beside them.

She wasted no more time in slipping the condom onto his cock as Oliver’s tongue licked his approval across his pouted lower lip. With her hands on his shoulders she lifted her body up before sinking back down, pressing his large cock back into her hungry walls.

She started slowly with long, measured rocking-strides against his cock as they kissed languidly with warm breaths and wet lips. But her desire to draw this out was quickly overtaken by her desire to feel completely and utterly fucked.
She kissed a trail to Oliver’s ear and smiled against the seam of it.
“I want you to fuck me Oliver,” she whispered devilishly.
Oliver cursed a rasped *fuck* under his breath as his hands settled in around her waist.

He wouldn’t turn her, Felicity wanted to be on top and that was just fine by him. He quickened her rocking and she mewed happily into his ear. When the speed had built up enough Oliver lifted her from his body, twisting her hips just enough to let the head of his cock skim against her, before he pulled her back down, pummelling her smooth and tightening walls.

Felicity moaned into a kiss she pressed into his neck as she pulled his taut skin into her mouth and grazed it with her teeth.

Oliver continued the same pattern, building up the speed and depth until he was bouncing her atop his cock. She bit down on his shoulder, the opposite side to where her teeth had left the last mark (which had only just faded) and Oliver was spurred on to thrust even deeper.

Their bodies slapped against each other and their voices became nothing more than heavy panted breaths. She came first but Oliver was seconds behind her in a heavy fog of cries and cursing.

They didn’t stop thrusting even as her walls clamped around his twitching cock, just to take from this moment ever second that they could until there was nothing left.

Oliver loosened his grip on her waist and Felicity slid slowly off his cock and stood from the bed. “Was that lovely?” Oliver asked, smirking.

“I would say that was splendid,” Felicity replied, matching his smirk with one of her own. Oliver stood off the bed and kissed her cheek in a sort of tender way Felicity wasn’t expecting before he slunk past her and walked towards the bathroom.

“Do you mind if I…?” he asked, looking down at his slightly drooped cock and the filled condom. “Of course not,” Felicity breathed as she absently skated two fingers down his large arm.

Oliver disappeared into the bathroom and Felicity caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. This time, unlike the last, she wasn’t critical. Her hips were tender to the touch and her lips were swollen but she felt *amazing*.

Oliver stepped from the bathroom, his cock now hanging between his legs, He saw her almost immediately, sitting with her back against the headboard, her skin even creamier when put against the darker backdrop of grey. Her legs were crossed at the ankles in front of her and she was sporting a particularly fetching smile.

And of course, she was holding up the two unused condoms.

---

[Next Morning]

“Curtis?” Felicity whispered down her cell phone pressed tightly to her ear. “Why are you whispering?” Curtis yawned as he rolled over in his bed, slumped over his husband Paul’s body and stared through fuzzy eyes at the alarm clock beside the bed, “and why are you calling me at eight in the morning on a Sunday?”

“Because he’s here,” Felicity replied, maintaining her whispered voice. “Who’s where?” Curtis groaned as he flopped back down onto his pillow and threw his arm across his face in protest of the morning.
“Oliver,” Felicity squeaked.
“The biker?”
“Mmmhhmmm.”
Curtis sat bolt upright in his bed.
“Where is he?” he asked, suddenly much more awake.
“At my house,” Felicity admitted with a cringe she was glad Curtis couldn’t see.

“What?” Curtis spluttered, “you need to call the cops, nine-one-one.”
“No,” Felicity peeped, embarrassed in advance of what she was about to confess to, “I invited him.”
“Ooooohhh,” Curtis said before silence fell between them.

“Well, okay,” he added after a minute of silence lapsed.
“What do I do?” Felicity asked before she snapped her lip inward and rocked slightly in the chair she had tucked herself up on.
“About?”
“Do I bring him coffee? Or breakfast,” she prattled, “because I don’t really have anything that would count as a breakfast stable. I think I have some bread somewhere, but it’s probably a science experiment by now and…”

Curtis blinked rapidly as the exchange of information, “why would you bring him coffee?”
“Do I wake him up?” Felicity asked, ignoring Curtis’ last question.
“I’m confused, he came over this morning and now he’s asleep?”
“Technically he came over last night,” she corrected as she squeezed her eyes closed before the fluttered open again.
“Wait, is he in your bed? Did you two have…”
“Sssh don’t say it,” Felicity interrupted.
“Why?”
“Just don’t.”
Felicity didn’t need reminding, the throbbing feeling between her legs and the bump on the back of her head where it met with the side table was reminder enough. Not that she was complaining, because she really wasn’t – those things certainly didn’t outweigh the absolutely euphoric state of bliss that multiple orgasms in one night could give you; *at least until you wake up swamped by the arms of the guy in the harsh reality of morning.*

“Where are you?” Curtis asked as his feet his the floor of his mid-city apartment.
“In the bedroom.”
“You’re watching him sleep?”
The sudden high-pitch of Curtis’ voice woke Paul beside him who sat up in a half-sleeping daze.

Felicity’s eyes travelled over to Oliver sprawled out across her bed. His skin looked a delicious hue of golden against the canvas of her stark white sheets. He was lying on his chest and his back was a veritable chessboard of tattoos and injuries she had spent a few silent minutes looking over. His face was smushed into the pillow with one arm trapped underneath and the other spread out across the empty side of the bed. She had woken up underneath that arm.

“Maybe a little,” she admitted quietly.
“You can’t be doing that?” Curtis replied, his tone verging on horrified, “that’s weird.”
“So I should leave... oh shit, he’s stirring,” Felicity hushed as she saw the sheets move around him.
“Get out.”

Felicity stood up and began a tip-toe run towards the bedroom door.
“Felicity?” Oliver yawned as his eyes darted around the unfamiliar surroundings until his brain caught up and fed him flashes of last night’s escapades. Felicity stopped dead in her tracks and slowly turned towards Oliver, a grimaced smile growing at the corner of her lips.

“Hi,” she cringed as she raised her hand to chest height and waved awkwardly. Oliver rubbed his eyes and stared down at his watch. It was morning. Shit. Oliver had spent the night here. Fuck.
He wasn’t supposed to be here.
Not that there wasn’t something pretty fantastic about waking up without police sirens or the
neighbours that have at each other every morning. And the scent of her pillows, a beautiful vanilla
musk with tiny notes of peach and apples, it was about the best things his nose had ever taken in.
But all the same he wasn’t supposed to be here.

After the third time they had sex, a fantastic doggy style position where his eyes got to lavish
attention on that flawless back of hers, he had needed a few moments to catch his breath. She had
told him where the guest bathroom was as she held a sheet to her chest, a show of modesty he had
found particularly alluring seeing as only moments before he had run his tongue across her ass and
made her moan.

He’d come back to the bedroom with the sound of the shower going. For a few moments he
contemplated seeing if she would let him join her, watching the water caress her body would be a
fucking glorious sight to behold, but before he could the water stopped.

He knew it was late, 2am by the clock near her bed, they had fucked for hours and honestly his
dick felt raw, but it didn’t feel right just leaving right then.

Felicity emerged from the bathroom dressed in nothing more than a singlet and black cotton
panties and Oliver’s cock was ready to go again.
She looked surprised to see him before she looked down and swallowed her body up with her arms. “I didn’t expect you to still be here,” Felicity stuttered, tendrils of towel-dried hair snaking over her shoulders.

“I can go,” Oliver effused apologetically. “No, you don’t need to,” she offered a little smile, “I just wasn’t expecting it,” she added as she looked embarrassingly down at her simple attire. *It was hardly sexy.*

Oliver didn’t catch the nuance in her stance or words because frankly he thought she looked pretty damn good. “How’s your head?” Felicity chuckled as she touched the back of her head, “it’s okay.” “I’m sorry about that, the last thrusts, I forgot my own strength,” Oliver cringed when he heard the whole sentence put together, he sounded like some predatory egomaniac when all he wanted to do was genuinely apologise for thrusting Felicity into the corner of her bedside table.

Felicity blushed, not out of embarrassment but arousal. “I didn’t mind,” she offered with a coy shrug. She really didn’t. To say the sex she had engaged in previously was dull might have sounded cruel, but with the exception of a few college experiences, it was accurate. The last relationship especially.

Oliver closed the space of dead air between them, his fingers aching to feel her smooth skin like some sort of drug. Honest to god, if he believed in one, he was certain he was addicted to Felicity Smoak.

Giving in to their cravings Oliver slowly ran his index finger down the v of her sternum. Misted water bled into the pad of his finger and Felicity sighed with swollen and rosy lips, her black lashes splayed across her pale cheeks. “Still, I feel like I should make it up to you,” he quietly protested with a smile that drew up one corner of his lips. “We don’t have any more condoms,” Felicity mused as she watched his other hand reach out to ghost fingers down her arm. They never touched but goose bumps raised underneath regardless. “We don’t need one,” Oliver spoke, his voice a thick gravel coated in carnal need, “I’d really like to taste you again.”

Felicity swallowed, holding back her surprise this time. She was a fast learner and she had decided Oliver was blunt. He wanted what he wanted and he wasn't afraid to ask. She couldn’t fault that. “I see,” she replied with lips that curved ever so slightly into a smile and eyes that shone under raised brows.

Oliver fingers trickled down her bare arm and Felicity couldn’t help the sensuous pine that dripped from her dewy lips, still swollen from the hours spent tortuously trapped between her teeth or hungrily kissing Oliver – his lips, his neck, the sweeping mass of muscles that rippled across his chest, his stomach that pinched inwards when she blew softly over the top of the wet kisses she peppered there, his thighs which were warm and deliriously musky with a scent she couldn’t pinpoint but one that she craved all the same and then, of course, that spot at the back of his knee that made his stoically rough exterior melt into a pool of hot, languid sighs, Felicity would have to confess, she liked that part the most.

“Can I?” Oliver asked when a reply wasn’t forthcoming from Felicity.
She smiled before dancing her lips barely a hair’s breadth from his own, her lips tangled with his for a moment before she whispered, “you are a guest, I suppose.”

When her spend was once more coating his lips and her breasts were heaving tightly under the confines of that grey singlet, Oliver crawled up alongside her.

_A few moments to catch his breath and he would kiss her goodbye and leave._

Only Oliver fell asleep.
And so did she.

With her underwear around one ankle and his hand on her breast, they both, completely overcome with exhaustion, fell dead asleep.

Until Felicity woke up to the sight the next morning, slipped from bed and spent twenty minutes pacing a track in the kitchen before she returned to the bedroom and rung Curtis.

_And never made it out of the room before Oliver saw her._

Oliver threw back the covers as his eyes blinked heavy and slow beats. He wasn’t supposed to be here.

Felicity peeped out a tiny moan before she could swallow it down, Oliver was completely naked and his hard cock stuck out like a prominent salute making her insides both scream and throb.

Oliver looked down and became abruptly aware of his nakedness before he snatched clothes up from the floor and pushed them against his crotch.

She couldn’t help the tiny smile that flittered across her lips and nor could she stifle the tiny chuckle that followed – Oliver was embarrassed and there was something altogether endearing about the statuesque beast who stood before her with rock hard abs, a jaw you could cut your lips on and a tousle of dirty blonde hair being acutely and nervously aware of his immodesty.

_Especially given where he’d been last night._

Felicity blushed at the recount, no man she had been with had ever done that before.

“I’ll leave you to get changed,” she spoke with blushed cheeks and a furrowing smile.

She didn’t wait for any response before she scooted from the room and hurried down the stairs.

“What is going on?” a male voice Felicity assumed to be Paul’s said in the distance down the line as she put the phone to her ear.

“I don’t know,” Curtis shot back in a half whisper, “I’m waiting for her to…”

“Curtis?” Felicity interrupted as she gazed back up the stairs – Oliver hadn’t followed her.

“Oh thank God,” Curtis sighed, relived, “what happened?”

“He woke up,” Felicity bemoaned as she walked her fingers along the furniture in the living room, mindlessly setting them a task so she would start gnawing on the corner of her nail.

“Okay…” Curtis said, his tone signalling that she better not stop the conversation there.

“He looked surprised.”

“Good surprised?”

Felicity rolled her lips over each other as she thought about the question, her eyes blinking back to see Oliver’s expression lodged in her memory.

“No,” she finally answered, “more like _shit what have I done_ surprised.”
“Maybe he was just surprised at how comfortable your bed was?” Curtis offered, it was beyond lame but he was trying.
“What do I do now?” Felicity groaned as her head lulled from shoulder to shoulder and she took comically large steps into the kitchen.

“Offer him coffee? or thank him for the sex?”
“Curtis,” Felicity gaped, “I told you not to say it.”
“It’s a Sunday,” he mocked, “you can’t threaten my job on a Sunday.”

Oliver tugged on his jeans and ran a thick comb of fingers through his long hair. It was one of those days the shoulder-tapping length irritated him, not for any wrong doing on its part but just because he’d fucked up – again – and it seemed like an easy out to be frustrated with his hair.

He stared down at the screen of his phone and cringed. He had five missed calls, all from Thea. He put the phone up to his ear and listened to the last voicemail left less than five minutes ago.

Oliver fucking Queen, I ask you to put your dick on ice ONE NIGHT so your big stupid dog doesn’t end up in the fucking pound, which is a nice way to say your dog is going to get arrested and sent to death row, you know that right? What was I yelling at you about, oh right – where the fuck are you? The stupid dipshit (he heard the protest of a man in the distance) is here trying to take Jax. If you don’t want your dog arrested I suggested you get here, now.

Miss please move came the exhausted voice of someone Thea was clearly pissing off.

Why don’t you put those grubby hands on me and see what the fuck happens to them…

The message cut off.

Fuck.

He wasn’t supposed to stay the night.

Oliver threw on his tee and scrambled to the door as he tried pulling on one unlaced shoe at a time. He made an awful racket as his foot banged the wall and jolted one of those pristinely hung artworks.

“Fuck, shit,” the words leached from his mouth as he stabilised the picture with a clenched jaw.

The stairs were next and he practically fell down them. His eyes locked onto the front door, but he couldn’t just leave, he at least had to try and apologetically say goodbye.

Felicity appeared from the living room with her phone swinging in her hands just as Oliver careened down the final few stairs.

“Good morning,” she yelped as he stopped inches short of bowling her over.

Oliver caught his breath and stared at her wide-eyed for much longer than was comfortable before she took a step backwards and blinked down.

“Good morning,” Oliver finally spoke, his words a little breathy and short, “I’m sorry,” he added as he forced himself to take a slow and steadying breath.

“About?” Felicity asked, attempting to play it carelessly as her foot swept softly over the tiles under her feet.

“Sleeping over, I didn’t mean to,” Oliver remarked, catching his breath enough now to offer Felicity a genuine smile.
She shrugged as Curtis’ words repeated in her head.

*Offer him coffee or thank him for the sex.*

She certainly wasn’t going to do the latter, at least not right now, so maybe the former wouldn’t be so bad?

“Did you want a coffee or a bagel?” she offered, the words flooding from her mouth before she had a chance to articulate them in a manner she ordinarily would, “not that I have bagels because I don’t, but there is a little place at the end of the block that does if maybe you want to,” she scrunched up her nose, *she was doing this, she was asking him,* “um maybe g…”

“I can’t,” Oliver interrupted, though he felt like absolutely shit doing it.

“Oh.”

Her stance said it all, she drew away from him another step and her hands wrapped around her slender waist.

_Shit, fuck, shit_ was all that was being processed in his head.

“I have to go,” he added regrettably.

“Of course,” she shook her head and forced out a breathy laugh, “it was just a silly idea.”

“It’s not because I don’t want to.”

*He really needed to go – shit.*

“It’s fine Oliver,” she shrugged even though she would have preferred to curl up into a ball and pretend this wasn’t happening.

“It’s my dog.”

“What?”

“My dog is getting arrested, I’m sorry.”

Felicity had to hold herself back from cleaning her ears to make sure she heard that correctly. She half expected him to laugh, but he didn’t, his lips didn’t even flinch.

Of all the half-baked excuses that someone could have cooked up for leaving the morning after a one night stand – round two – that had to be the worst.

He was looking at her waiting for some sort of answer, but the best she could offer him was a surprised shake of her head and a bemused “Okay, that’s fine.”

Oliver’s phone rang in his pocket, he pulled it out and cringed as Thea’s name came across the display.

“I’m sorry, I have to…”

Felicity smiled guardedly.

“No apology needed,” she sniped, “we can’t have your dog being a felon now can we?”

She opened the door and Oliver stared at her with a locked jaw and a swirling of words he had no idea how to formulate into something that would make any sense.

“I’m really…”

Felicity tapped on the doorframe.

He wanted to leave and frankly it was best that he did so without any fake placating apologies.

“Bye Oliver, thank you for the ride last night,” she spoke bluntly before she caught her own mis-speak.

“HOME,” she corrected, “thank you for the ride home.”

Oliver stepped out onto the porch just as his phone stopped ringing. He looked down at it half expecting it to immediately start ringing again but by the time he looked up, hoping to offer another apology, Felicity had already shut the door.
"You're welcome," he sighed before he turned and scuffed his boots down the front stairs. That was a fucking epic disaster.

“I’ve been waiting for like two hours for you to call me back,” Curtis huffed as Felicity put the phone to ear without even uttering a greeting. “It’s been twenty minutes,” Felicity sighed as she ran a finger across her brow. It had actually been about 24 minutes since she had closed the door on Oliver.

“Well it felt like two hours,” Curtis reacted as breakfast dishes clanged in the background and Felicity glared at the half eaten bowl of tasteless cereal she had found buried in the back of the pantry. “Sorry,” she distressed, “I started working on something.” “With him there?” It was an almost perfect segway. “Oliver left,” Felicity answered the unstated but obvious question. “Oh…” Felicity idly stirred the spoon through the oddly coloured milk. “No oh, he just left,” she quipped. “You sound mad.” “I’m not mad.” She was.

“Oooo-kay,” Curtis started. “He said his dog was getting arrested, I mean the least he could have done was come up with a better story than that right? Even just a simple no would have sufficed,” she huffed out a breath that blew loose waves of hair back from her face. “His dog,” Curtis chuckled, “arrested?” “I know,” she humphed as she tucked her feet up under her feet on the padded leather desk chair, “who would believe that?” She could tell Curtis was trying not to laugh. “I’m sorry,” he stifled a laugh and his voice came out choked. “No need Curtis, I’m fine,” she lamented as her fingers toyed with her hair. “Fine like you’re actually fine or fine like you’re saying you’re fine but you need a hug?” “I don’t need a hug.” “Because it’s Sunday, I’m allowed to hug you on Sundays.” That brought a little smile to her lips. “I’m fine Curtis, but thanks for the offer.”

There was a pause and Felicity could almost hear Curtis trying to decided if he should asked what he wanted to. “He really said his dog was getting arrested?” he asked with a mixture of shock, disbelief and humour. “He did,” she groaned. Worst excuse ever. “That’s the lamest thing I’ve ever heard.”

Didn’t she know it. But it was better she stopped thinking about it, because the more she did the more pragmatically annoyed she got. She wasn’t even worth a better excuse?
“What are you working on?” Curtis asked, thankfully shifting the conversation.
“Specs for that new Kord contract,” Felicity replied listless, they were asking for such an intense combination of systems that she found her mind wandering into the reasons why anyone would need that sort of level of security.
“You need help?”
Even if she wanted to say yes, ‘need to know’ didn’t allow for it.
“It’s Sunday,” she remarked, “enjoy time with your husband.”
“Okay,” he hummed, “see ya boss.”
“Not your boss on Sundays.”
“See ya Felicity.”
“Bye Curtis.”

Oliver pulled his bike up alongside the curb just as the animal control officer, Marcel, was surreptitiously attempting to get around Thea who was not making it easy.

“Woah, woah, wait, come on,” Oliver called as he hopped the knee-high fence and skidded across they dewy grass.
“Oliver,” Marcel sighed as he twisted the blue cap on his head, “you know I have to take him to the pound.”
Jax was growling with bared teeth and ferociously wild eyes.
“You should calm him down, make him go quietly,” Marcel pleaded.
“He should make him bite your fat ass,” Thea chimed in with all the grace of a truck driver.
“Not helping Thea,” Oliver growled, not unlike Jax.
“I’m just doing my job Oliver,” Marcel huffed as he took a hesitant step forward only to take two back when Jax lurched forward and Thea laughed.
“Works good,” he answered.
“Anyone else in this City would have ripped you off,” Oliver explained, his hands outstretched in the space between Jax and Marcel.
“Oliver…” Marcel quipped, he knew what Oliver was alluding to.
“It’s true though isn’t it?”
Marcel nodded. It really was.
“I did you a solid,” Oliver spoke calmly, “remember when your missus’ car broke down, who did you call?”
“You.”
“Why’d you call me?”
“Cause you’re a good mechanic Oliver,” he confessed, “but your dog.”
“Look I’ll have him stay at the shop a few weeks or keep him inside,” Oliver promised, “the neighbours will think you did what you needed to so everyone wins.”
A smiled edged across his expression.
Marcel sighed, tipping his weight from one foot to the other.
“Come on Marcel, just do me a solid,” Oliver was another minute away from begging.

“You keep him inside Oliver or at the shop with you,” he ordered.
“Scouts honour.”
“If anyone makes another call…”
“I know, your hands will be tied,” Oliver agreed with a swift nod.
“Fine, fine,” Marcel muttered as he walked back through the archway gate towards his truck.
“Where the fuck were you?” Thea pestered as she slapped Oliver’s arm. He winced more from her telling off than from her attempt at wounding him. “I went out,” he stated with no further explanation. “Yeah I figured,” she mocked as he lead her and the now happy Jax inside the house, “shit Oliver the one night I tell you to keep your ass at home, you gotta go out and party.”

He closed the three of them inside the house and pinched his eyes with his thumb and forefinger. “It wasn’t like that,” he huffed as he tried to side step her. But Thea wasn’t having a bar of it and she blocked every path he attempted. “Roy said you stopped by the Gala last night, gave him his job back.” “Until he pisses me off again, sure,” Oliver grumbled with a single, heavy shrug. “Said you took off with a girl,” Thea added with an inquisitively raised brow. Oliver cringed, but kept silent.

“I told you to keep your ass at home and you go hook up with some random chick you find on the side of the street?”

*Jesus, she wasn’t taking prisoners.*

“It wasn’t like that, I just gave her a ride.” he paused and the most inexcusable place, “home,” he added hurriedly, reminded of Felicity’s same foopah. “Does she live in California because you were gone all night?”

“I’m done talking Thea,” Oliver snipped, it was his go to attempt at shutting her down and he was going to stick with it. “I’m not,” Thea argued, following him down the hall, “I thought you were done hooking up with random chicks you met on the side of the road? You’re like the good Samaritan but with your dick.”

“Thea,” he growled. “You pick up some random chick outside a gala and you stay all night with her.” Thea’s arms were flailing as Oliver headed for the sanctuary of his bedroom. “She wasn’t random,” he countered. “So you’re dating someone?” He opened the door and paused just outside it. “No,” he answered as he turned around, “I’m not.” “It has to be one or the other Oliver,” she said belligerently. “Thea, my private life isn’t any of your concern.”

That was final. End of discussion and he closed the door between them in solidarity with it.

It was about two hours later after a long, reflective shower and a broken, but exhausted nap, Oliver found himself in the shop fruitlessly kicking tires while Jax chewed on the remnants of a blown one a few feet away.

He couldn’t get Felicity out of his mind. Thoughts of her had rained down on him in the shower when his fingers touched parts where her nails had marred him in stripes of red. As he attempted to sleep, visions of her played with his dreams, but every time she would infiltrate a dream it would end the same way.

Pinched brow, pained eyes and full, parted lips breathing a sad “Oh.”

And then he grew an idea...
Felicity crowded over her laptop and ran a tired hand through her mess of hair. The network of computers hummed behind her in a glow of state of the art technology, but today Felicity preferred the simplicity of one laptop and her tireless brain. That was, after all, the core of what she was doing. Every other gadget, code or the like built on from that.

Her brains were the bones, even if other people refused to see it.

A knock on the front door tore her eyes away from the screen before they dropped to her naked legs. It stemmed from her days at MIT, but Felicity always worked better sans pants.

It was probably Curtis, and while Felicity thought her stems were at least slightly above average thanks mostly to her mother's genetics and the perceived workout she got from rolling her chair around the room, she wasn’t under any illusion they could turn a gay man straight.

And besides, Curtis had seen worse. Her sweater at least mostly covered her.

She sauntered down the stairs as another knock echoed through the townhouse before she reached for the door handle and pulled it open.

Expecting Curtis she was smiling, but once faced with the decidedly different face of Oliver Queen she rapidly blinked it away.

Oliver was holding a tray of coffees and a brown paper bag with a half hooked smile.

“Finally I got the right house,” he smiled awkwardly, “you’re next door neighbour invited me in though.”

He attempted a chuckle but it came out a little strangled as he nodded to the house next door.

“She’s a bored housewife with two nannies and a husband that’s never home, I’m not surprised,” Felicity replied with very little in the way of emotion.

She honestly couldn’t fathom what Oliver was doing here.

“I didn’t know what you drink so I brought a couple of different ones,” he drawled as he jolted out the tray of four coffees.

(JFC they smelled good.

Felicity looked down at them before her eyes tracked back up, her face attempting to remain expressionless.

Why was he here?

“And bagels,” he added with a little smile, “apology bagels.”

“You don’t owe me an apology Oliver, there is no reason you need to be here,” she replied bluntly.

If he felt bad for his horribly executed lie and departure, that was on him. Felicity wasn’t of any mind to placate his guilty conscience. She was tired of excusing men.

“We both got what we wanted out of last night and we parted ways this morning, that’s how these things work right,” she continued.

She could hear the bluntness in her voice and perhaps he didn't deserve the full brunt of it. But time and time again Felicity, personally and professionally, was expected just to accept what was been said, to smooth over a man's ego and hurt feelings, but enough was enough. She was done with society's expectation of the same. She was the fairer sex no more.

“I felt bad because I left in a hurry,” Oliver explained.
He wanted to say more but his tongue was in knots.

_Not because you lied about your dog getting arrested?_

“Well you shouldn’t. I don’t,” she said flatly.

“All the same,” he propped out the tray of coffees as a gesture of peace. Felicity looked down at them and reluctantly took them from his hands, if only to get him off her porch.

There was a high chance he was expecting her to invite him in, the squirmed smile on his face bore witness to that, but no, not today. Right now that tall Adonis was every man that she had ever stepped aside for and, deserved or not, this was her battleground, she was standing firm. _He shall not pass._

“I should go,” he offered, like his balls were in a vice and every second he stood there the vice tightened.

“Okay,” she shrugged.

Apathy, never underestimate the power of it.

Oliver backed away from the door and towards her front steps. She should have just closed the door but she couldn’t help herself...

“So does your dog have a rap sheet now?” she quipped, sealing a smile behind her full lips.

“No, he was let off with a warning,” Oliver replied, oblivious to the undertones of her words.

“Right.”

_Unbelievable._

She tipped the door closed with a flick of her wrist.

That was the end of that.

---

_[Ten Days Later]_

It was a Wednesday and there was a slight chill in the air. The weather forecast was bleak as an unseasonal rainstorm approached the City. Felicity was tired. A string of late nights and early mornings were beginning to have an affect and the burst of endorphins from _incredible_ sex had finally worn off.

Despite his pathetic bow out the following morning, Felicity gave credit where credit was due. Oliver was exceptionally good in bed, and no doubt any other surface he attempted.

But he was just a passing thought she kept to herself now. Curtis knew better than to ask and her mother, the sex sniffer dog, hadn’t made any surprise visits since.

Whether he intended to or not, Felicity assumed not, Oliver had been a spur forward. The following day when a balding little white man with lifts in his shoes dismissed her comments at a company meeting Felicity bit back at him with a poised but piercing tongue.

It was a personal victory that she had kept figuratively pinned to her chest for days.

But today, it was all waning and the deadline for the Kord meeting was barrelling ever closer. She needed coffee and as the clock ticked over to 11am and Curtis wasn’t at his desk, Felicity decided to take a breath of fresh air and hunt out her own Arabica goodness.

The coffee cart in the foyer looked appealing as her heels clipped along the ornate tiles, but she had
made the resolute decision in the elevator to go outside and feel what might be the last of the sunshine before the impending storm – which would probably fizzle into nothing before it even reached Starling.

She turned right outside the doors and walked against the flow of foot traffic, which strangely felt so incredibly freeing. A soft breeze reddened her cheeks and lightly swished her unassuming ponytail. She pushed her glasses up her bridge more from habit than necessity as she made a flash decision to cross the road.

Felicity couldn’t recount the last time she walked just for the sake of walking, without an exact place to be and a deadline to meet. It was such a small, insignificant thing, but fuck, it felt freeing.

It seemed Oliver had had a domino effect that splayed out into other facets of her life.

She stopped outside a quaint little coffee shop she wasn’t sure she’d ever noticed before. She hadn’t ventured far, but far enough that the foot traffic had thinned and the Kuttler building was only distantly visible.

A tiny bell announced her presence before the gentle, calming aroma of coffee wrapped it’s familiar and comforting arms around her. Felicity walked up to the counter as she rummaged through her bag in search of her wallet.

“Coffee with milk and two pumps of French vanilla sweetener please,” she prattled off before she had a chance to eye up the cashier.

“It's you” a familiar female voice spoke with an ever so slight lisp.

Felicity snapped her head up and was met with Thea's face, half smiling with wide green eyes.

“Felicity,” she offered.

“Yea, I know, sorry, its how I remember,” Thea chuckled as her slender fingers brushed back her hair, “Uptown Felicity, kind of like that Billy Joel song.”

“You know Billy Joel?” Felicity asked, somewhat surprised.

“My first dad was a fan.”

She spoke the words like it was a practiced way of approaching her unique situation. Her first dad.

“You work here now?” Felicity inquired while Thea put through her order

“Just until they fire me,” she laughed, “I get fired a lot.”

“I’m taking my break,” Thea announced to another employee who looked less than okay with the idea.

“Oh you don’t…” Felicity started, but before she could finish Thea had led her over to a table and they were both sitting down.

“So you work around here?” Thea asked, her arms laid flat on the table, her eyes fully attentive. She was remarkably like her brother in that respect.

“Yeah, in the Kuttler Building a block away,” Felicity answered as casually as she could with Thea's eyes staring right through her.

“No shit, are you a secretary or?”

Felicity smiled, the young girl seemed impressed.

“Oh no, I run my company from there.”

“Fuck,” Thea cursed proudly, “you own a company?”

“As much as I can own it I suppose, but yes I run it.”

“How old are you?”
Ordinary people refrained from asking that question, but Thea, like Oliver, didn’t seem to care all that much about the rules of general conversation. Felicity actually admired that.
“Twenty three.”
“That’s fucking amazing;” she drum rolled the table, “Oliver didn’t tell me that.”
“Um…” Felicity shifted uncomfortably at the mention of his name.
“It’s okay, Oliver didn’t tell me much, I mean I saw the bite marks but yeah, not a word.”

Felicity laughed nervously as Thea grinned and nodded knowingly.
It was the need to be anywhere other than this conversation that made Felicity say the next thing.
“So is his dog still on probation?”
“Jax? Yea he’s still on house arrest,” Thea answered without pause.
“Wait, he actually has a dog?”
Felicity almost choked on her words.
“Yeah,” Thea replied as she raised a brow, “wait how did you know about him nearly getting arrested?”
“Um,” Felicity gulped.
“Shit, you were the girl he went home with?”
“Um.”
_Ground swallow her up._

“That’s why the bastard wouldn’t tell me where he was,” Thea continued.
“Ummm.”
Felicity had no other words.
“And I thought he was cleaning out some old lady’s pipes,” Thea shook her head in disbelief.
“Um,” Felicity peeped as her takeout cup was placed in front of her.
“But he was with you?”
Thea’s smile grew exponentially as did the glint in her eyes.
“He actually has a dog that almost got arrested?”
“Yes,” Thea nodded, “Jax and he’s a mean son of a bitch.”
“That wasn’t a lie?”
Felicity blinked back to the conversation on the porch.
“My brother is a lot of things, but he’s not a liar,” Thea insisted.
“Oh.”
_Shit._

“I should go,” Felicity declared as she stood up, scraping the chair across the floor with a heinous sound.
“Wait, Felicity,” Thea retorted as she scribbled something on a napkin.
“He’ll be at home tonight,” she finished writing and handed Felicity the makeshift paper, “here.”

Felicity looked down at the napkin with an address in the glades scrawled across it.
_He actually did have an almost felon dog._
It's a little cute <3

Tap, tap, tap.
Felicity was pacing.
She tapped the pen in her hand against her temple as she searched aimlessly out the window of her office.

Tap, tap, tap.
Oliver wasn’t lying.
She plugged her thumb into her eye.
He wasn’t lying.

She walked a path back to her desk and pumped the pen along the top of her leather desk chair, clicking it on and off at lightning speed. She considered sitting, but she had no focus left.

Oliver hadn’t been lying. His insanely lame excuse hadn’t been all that lame, or insane, after all.
She had spent the last days muttering curses about his audacity at making up such a ludicrous excuse...and it was true.

Curtis walked through the open door, sliding his brown loafers across the polished floor in some sort of attempt to replicate *Risky Business*, only fully clothed.

“Cisco needs more red vines, but that is like the third purchase order this month,” Curtis remarked as he sauntered closer to the desk, his eyes wandering across the information on the tablet in front of him.

“He has a dog,” Felicity sighed before she sunk with a decidedly loud *humph* into her chair.

“Uh,” Curtis looked up, scanning the room, “what did I say?” he asked, unsure where her words fitted in with his.

Felicity reached into the drawer where she kept her purse and pulled a $100 note from inside it.

“Give this to Cisco and tell him to buy red vines but I want him to create an armour plating that can withstand something self-destructing inside it,” she spoke with head dropped into her other palm while she waved the note above her.

“Why would it…” Curtis began while he plucked the money from her fingers.

“And I need something to work with by next week. Specs at the very least.”

“I shouldn’t ask any more questions should I?”

“No,” Felicity groaned as her head rolled in her palm.

“Who has a dog?” Curtis asked, switching seamlessly from executive to friend.

“Oliver,” she sighed as she finally dragged her head up from her palm.

“So he has a dog,” Curtis shrugged, “that doesn’t make his excuse any more believable.”

He tapped a foot against the floor as his long arms wrapped around his centre. Felicity appreciated the solidarity he was displaying.

*We didn’t like Oliver Queen, Oliver Queen made up dumb excuses to not go out and have coffee.*

Only, he didn’t.

“But it was true,” Felicity remarked while her hand absently tightened her ponytail – they needed something to do.

“No it wasn’t,” Curtis chuffed out a laugh.

“I ran into his sister today and apparently he *does* indeed have a dog that was almost ‘arrested’,” Felicity released an almost silent groan.

“And you…” Curtis gaped as he recollected the conversations they had been having on the matter.

Felicity nodded lethargically.

“Oh and the coffee…”

She nodded again, *the coffee he had bought.*

“And the apology bagels…”

Felicity considered dropping her head onto her desk to hide the grimace that was part of the landscape of her face right now.

“Yes Curtis, thank you,” she muttered, she really didn’t need to be reminded, “all of that.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Nothing,” she replied abruptly, before she took a few more moments to consider the question, “I don’t know, should I do something?” she added with a hitched brow and a furrowed lip.

Curtis opened his mouth to reply.

“I should do something,” Felicity replied to her own question.

Curtis’ mouth closed without saying a word.

“But I mean, I could just leave well enough alone, that’s what happens on these things right?”
Felicity continued before Curtis opened his mouth once more to reply.

“You just see each other the once,” Felicity continued.
“Twice,” Curtis finally managed to say something.
“Once, repeated,” Felicity challenged with a pursed lip that dared Curtis to continue.
“Which is practically…”
“And then that’s it, sleeping dogs lie, don’t rock the boat, leave well enough alone,” Felicity interjected as she nodded to her own raft of sayings that meant something along the right lines.

“I’m not sure what you want me to say?” Curtis said reflectively as he offered his friend (not boss in this moment) a kind smile.
“Nothing,” Felicity replied as her shoulders slumped and her head rocked slowly side to side.

Honestly, there was nothing that Curtis could say. She wasn’t even sure if there was anything she could say. Felicity felt pulled in two different directions and she really had no idea which was to choose.

The paper napkin bearing his address was still in her pocket, calling to her that Oliver deserved an apology, if for no other reason that she didn’t wish to be remembered as that crazy woman who barked at him on her doorstep when he bought her four different kinds of coffee and bagels, apology bagels.

But, there was also something daunting – no terrifying – about going to his house and offering an apology that he could either not care to accept or not even remember the slight. Felicity wasn’t sure which would be worse, and she wasn’t sure she wanted to find out.

But, he hadn’t been lying.

Felicity sat in the taxi for a good five minutes staring at Oliver’s house until the driver’s coughing made her startle.
“This is the house miss,” the driver spoke without turning his head.
“Uh, right,” she reached for the door handle but snapped her hand back, “actually it looks like no one is home, so let’s just go,” she remarked, feeding the driver a lie she didn’t have to tell.

It was evening, well after sunset and the lights in Oliver’s house were standing out like beacons; and even more damaging to her claim were the silhouettes that walked past the well-lit windows. Someone was definitely home and the driver’s raised eyebrow in the rear view mirror told Felicity he knew it too.

She handed him a few dollars more than the fare’s worth and opened the back door, for no other reason right now than to abscond from his judging eyes.

Felicity scurried across the road and checked her watch under the streetlamp, 8:23pm. Maybe it was too late to be making house calls?
She turned, half set on getting right back in the cab, only to see a flash of yellow as it pulled away from the curb in a hurry.

“Great,” she muttered to herself as she looked up and down the deserted street.
It was an old neighbourhood. An original neighbourhood from Starling’s industrial heyday no doubt. Beyond the rows of houses sat factories long since boarded up and empty, at least of anything more than vagrants and rodents.
Maybe a cat or two.
She shook the thoughts from her head, the occupancy of abandoned factories wasn’t really her main concern right now.

Streetlamps flickered, dogs howled in the distance and she could hear the rumbling sounds of a train a few blocks over, the night had a certain ambience of its own and this one was far different to the one where her town house sat sandwiched between other lawn-less townhouses.

This was the type of suburbia where kids rode bikes down the sidewalk and parents set up sprinkler showers in the front yards during the height of summer. If you took away the broken down cars and the discarded couch on the street corner, Felicity imagined that once upon a time this was where people once dreamed of living and raising their children.

Her foot touched an empty beer bottle in the gutter. A neighbourhood fallen from grace.

She picked it up, unsure exactly what her intentions with it were, but there was something so intrinsically wrong about leaving rubbish where it sat. It wasn’t her bottle, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t be part of the solution.

Felicity’s options were limited – scarce, non-existent – she could call another taxi but that would see her standing on the street corner outside Oliver’s house for at least fifteen uncomfortable minutes.

She could walk a distance and then call for a taxi, standing instead outside a stranger’s house – although giving an address might be a little more complicated she dissected as her hand feathered across the napkin in her bag.

Her eyes tracked up the small path of broken concrete and sighed with the weight of two worlds, the last option – knock on that door and do what she came to do.

Felicity passed through the archway gate and walked tentatively up the unlit path, watching each step she took so her heels didn’t catch on a crack – or so she told herself, but her lack of speed was more entirely due to her hopes that a fourth option would appear.

It never did.

She reached the door with the empty bottle still in one hand, swinging idly beside her leg. Her other hand raised and stayed, for what seemed like an eternity, trapped in the space about an inch away from the chipped-white wooden door.

*Just knock.*

Oliver was running a towel through his hair as he walked the hall between his bedroom and the living room with Jax trailing along behind, weaving in and out between his legs in a walk that had become like second nature to them.

The cool evening air from the open windows blew against his damp skin as he slipped on a fresh white singlet and leaned up against the living room doorway silently judging the TV show Thea had chosen to watch.

He couldn’t be sure, but it was some rich housewives shopping and cussing each other out and Thea was eating it up with her feet tucked up under her slender body and a bowl of popcorn sitting on her lap.
She still looked eight to him, despite the fact she would be eighteen in six months. She had a foul mouth and an attitude but she was his little sister and he would do just about anything he could to keep her safe. The tattoo on his chest was a testament to that.

“Don’t silently judge my choice of TV show Oliver,” Thea remarked without turning her head, “either sit down and watch or…” She didn’t finish her sentence as a knock on the door interrupted.

Oliver looked towards the door a few feet away and scowled. He assumed it was Roy, but when Thea didn’t leap off the couch in a rush to answer it – as was usually the case – Oliver became even more suspicious of the knock.

“Are you expecting someone?” he asked Thea who seemed to be avidly avoiding making eye contact.

“Nope,” she simpered before she shoved a handful of popcorn in her mouth in an attempt to frustrate any further questioning.

“Hold Jax,” Oliver instructed gruffly, sensing there was something his sister wasn’t saying.

Thea patted the spot beside her on the couch and Jax reluctantly sat down there, although his eyes were trained towards the door with his lips shuddering and a low, prepared growl. He liked guests even less than Oliver did.

Oliver opened the door less than ten inches, ensuring that his foot stayed anchored behind it and one of his shoulders braced against it. It was habitual, and in this neighbour – this life – it was necessary.

Expecting someone wanting or selling something, Oliver was wearing his best ‘what the hell do you want?’ face, only to be met with a brown paper bag held up in front of two big blue eyes shielded behind distinctively familiar glasses.

He didn’t need to see any more of her to know who it was.

“Felicity?” Oliver remarked, unaware that Thea was silently high fiving herself a short distance away.

“How about apology bagels?” Felicity spoke, her words verging on a question as she shook the bag gently.

He couldn’t stop himself from casting his eyes up and down her, she was dressed in a tight navy dress that flared out a palm print away from the waist of it. Her hair was pulled back into a ponytail that had probably been tighter during the day but had since loosened, spilling tiny wisps of hair down her porcelain face.

She looked effortlessly beautiful. But she also looked like she really didn’t belong here. Oliver could see the distant shapes of someone standing on the other side of the road, wide and menacing. It was probably nothing, but all the same…

“Did you want to come in?” he asked, opening the door a little further in sync with his behest.

Jax leapt off the couch and careened towards the front door much faster than Thea had any hope of stopping. Oliver however caught him by his collar just as Felicity stepped inside.

“This is your dog,” she smiled as her hand stretched out.

“Felicity, don’t…” Oliver warned, but before she could listen Jax had jumped forward.

Thea shrieked and Oliver gasped.

“What?” Felicity asked, confused by their horror as Jax proceeded to lick Felicity’s hand with his
tail beating against Oliver’s leg like a puppy.

Oliver stepped around them and closed the door. His eyes were wide and his mouth was void of any words.

But Thea had some.
“What the actual fuck?” she mumbled as she watched Jax fall to the floor in an attempt to get Felicity to rub his belly.
“Is something wrong?” Felicity asked as she stood and straightened the skirt of her dress.
“No, it’s just…” Oliver began, trying to find the right words to frame the idea that his dog was generally an asshole.
“That dog is an asshole,” Thea finished, with her unique finesse.
“This dog?” Felicity laughed as she pointed down at Jax who was lifting his paw to her.
“Uh,” Oliver droned, he was still utterly surprised at what he was seeing.

The last time Oliver had a girl over it was a very different scene.
“He’s just a big puppy,” Felicity cooed as she ruffled Jax's head.
“Are you hiding sausages in your pocket or something?” Thea asked.
“Not that I’m aware of no,” Felicity answered, though the question was likely rhetorical.

Felicity could feel the two sets of eyes in the room trained on her with a mix of surprise and confusion and suddenly they felt like heated stage lamps.
“But I didn’t come to play with your dog,” she started, “I came to give you these,” she handed him the brown bag of bagels, “and this,” she finished as she also handed him the beer bottle.

“An empty beer bottle?” Oliver remarked, if there was some sort of connection or inside joke, he wasn’t getting it.
“Well I didn’t bring that all the way here,” she laughed, noticing just how cute Oliver’s confused look was, “I just picked it up outside and I figured you could put it in the trash for me.”
“You’re cleaning up my curb?” Oliver asked as his smiled tracked up through his cheeks and glinted into his eyes.
“Technically the curb belongs to the city,” Felicity corrected as her finger ran across an arm of her glasses, “but yes.”

“I’m going to go watch TV in my room,” Thea announced to the room as she brushed her palms over each other.
“Oh you don’t have to leave,” Felicity assured as Thea wandered past her.
“I’m pretty tired and it’s past my bedtime,” Thea lied with a smile that was meant for Oliver.

She sunk around the front of Oliver and briefly kissed his cheek.
“Goodnight,” she said aloud before she leaned in closer and whispered, “like dog like owner I guess.”
When she pulled away, Thea was wearing an unmistakable smile – she didn’t even try to disguise it.
“Goodnight Felicity,” she added as she started down the hall.
“Goodnight,” Felicity returned.
“By the way, I’m a super deep sleeper, noise doesn’t wake me at all,” Thea called down the hallway before she kicked her bedroom door closed, echoing the sound down the hall.

Felicity knew exactly what inference Thea was giving and it made her cheeks blush a bright red and feel like fire under her skin. When she looked up at Oliver he was wearing a look that wasn’t much different.

“So you want to sit?” Oliver asked, he would get Thea tomorrow for her parting comment.
Felicity knew she should probably say no, she had shown her face and given him apology bagels, that was all it needed to be, she should say no, she should say...
“Okay,” she replied.

“Do you want a drink?” Oliver asked as he walked her to the couch Thea had just vacated.
“I probably shouldn’t have any alcohol, work night,” Felicity replied with a soft shrug.
“I meant coffee, I don’t always need to get you drunk.”
He words trickled like warm honey down her spine and Felicity found herself nibbling away at the inside of her lip.
“A coffee would be great, thank you,” she expressed as her eyes softly batted up at him.

The heat between them was unmistakable. They had been intimately intimate in ways that still made Felicity’s toe’s curl and here there were stealing side glances at each other trying to act like they could drink coffee across from each other and not want to rip the other’s clothes off.

Oliver tore himself away and disappeared into the kitchen a short walk away where he blew out a long, but silent, breath of air he had been holding probably from the moment he opened the front door to those familiar breathtakingly blue eyes.

*He probably shouldn’t have asked her to stay* he remised as he peeked through the breakfast bar to catch a sly glimpse of her. She was sitting demurely with her feet crossed at the ankles and her hands gently laying on her knees. She spent a few seconds picking with the hem of her dress before her eyes wandered around the room. Oliver quickly sunk behind the wall before she caught him looking.

The first night they had been together had been about insatiable, carnal lust. It had been raw and heated and crazy. Like two animals on heat. Oliver could still smell the scent of her skin as he kissed along her neck and thrust himself inside her. Everything about that night had been unforgettable. It was supposed to eventually fade into a distant memory, but one that would always be available for the recount if he needed it.

The second night, something had changed. Something had slowed. The sex was still vivid and sexual and hungry, but he found himself wanting to know more about what she liked, he found himself moving his hands slower down her body to enjoy just how soft her skin was. He found his kisses slowed, relishing the taste of her as something more than just a meal to be devoured. Oliver had savoured her.

And it should have stopped there.
They were from different worlds and would be nothing more than a tempest.
Oliver didn’t doubt the sex would continue to be something amazing, but they couldn’t be meant for anything else, even if for only a moment he allowed himself to imagine otherwise.

~*~*~*~

Felicity feathered her fingers across the hem of her dress as she listened to the clanging emanating from the kitchen. The room was small, but nice and she assumed the rest of the house was much the same.

She wasn’t sure what she had expected, perhaps sheets used for curtains and the American flag emblazoned on the biggest wall in the room, but there was nothing like that here. The furniture didn’t match but nothing felt out of place. The couch was soft and cosy, like you could just curl up on it and it would feel like someone was holding you in a warm embrace.

There were a few scattered photographs that Felicity held back from walking over to get a better
view, but she assumed the two smiling children were Oliver and Thea and the parents stood behind them were they’re parents – Thea’s *first dad*.

Nothing about this room screamed bachelor pad and Felicity wondered if perhaps his room was another story.

Just the thought of his bedroom made her cheeks flush and her skin heat up around her neck. She probably shouldn’t be here, her clothes had a tendency to fall off around Oliver and the thrumming between her legs suggested that he still had that effect on her.

She couldn’t explain the pull.
Not for all the therapy couches in the world.
It just *was*.

Oliver walked cautiously back into the room, his eyes trained down on the mugs in front of him like he was the most astute waiter in the world and a single spilled drop would see an imagined record broken.

He stooped just enough for Felicity to take the cup from his hands. It was flowery and the sudden realisation of the same had Felicity snickering, regardless of how hard she tried to hide it; and when her eyes walked up to see the cup he was holding – a white and yellow one with Charlie Brown and Snoopy on it – she couldn’t help but snort out the laugh she tried to hold in.

“Is something wrong?” he asked before he took a seat at the other end of the couch. Perhaps the distance would mean he couldn’t become aroused by the perfume he imagined she was wearing.

“Your mug, it’s cute, I just didn’t picture you…”
Oliver looked down and smiled, “most of this stuff belonged to my parents, mugs included.”
He winked as he took a slow sip.

“When they passed away my old neighbour took what she could and kept it in her garage, after I left the system she asked if I wanted it back,” he continued, telling the story in as little words as he could.
Because there was more to it, there usually was, but Oliver didn’t speak about it. It was always better that way.

Felicity wasn’t sure what came over her, but her hand stretched out and gently touched a finger to his hand and for his part Oliver didn’t flinch at the contact.

“That must have been hard, losing both of your parents,” Felicity offered sympathetically. She had both of hers, at least physically, but there was a part of her that liked to think she might know just a slither of Oliver’s loneliness.

“You do what you have to,” Oliver remarked with a practiced shrug, he was used to putting on a strong front – he always did with Thea.

Felicity smiled gently as she pulled her hand away. The space between them was soon swallowed up by Jax who yawned with a groan and placed his head, uninvited, onto Felicity’s lap. When her fingers scratched the underside of his chin he nestled in tightly against her leg, that was all the invitation he needed.

“Was Jax your dog when you were younger?” Felicity asked as she continued to ruffle her hands through his fur.

“No, I met him on the street he was a runaway just like me,” Oliver started, still carrying a smile of surprise at just how quickly and thoroughly the dog had taken with her, “he was bred to fight. Stopped me getting my head smashed in and I shared whatever food I could steal. We looked out
for each other.”

“I’m sorry.”
She didn’t really know what else to say.
Oliver shrugged.

“I’m also sorry I didn’t believe you, but,” she sung, “in my defence you said your dog was getting arrested.”
A soft laugh escaped her faded red lips.
“I did say that didn’t I?” Oliver lamented with a chuckle of his own.
There had been something so remarkably unsettling about just how comfortable he had been waking up in Felicity’s bed. The sudden jolt of realisation about where he was and the recollection of Thea’s warnings had made him flustered and confused and frankly, he would readily admit, it had all gone downhill from there.

“It just sounded so ridiculous and when you came back,” Felicity sighed, she remembered the encounter well, “you just became a representation of all the shitty men in my life making up excuses. Of all the times I’ve been overlooked or underappreciated because I have boobs. You became this symbol of all the bullshit and I’m sorry, you didn’t deserve it.”

“Don’t be sorry,” Oliver encouraged.
Felicity looked at him a little befuddled, she had expected something different.
“You should never be sorry for standing up for yourself,” Oliver continued.
In all her years, no one had ever said that, and certainly not a man.

She drunk the last of her coffee and shifted slightly in the seat amidst Jax’s sleepy protests.
“I should probably go,” she decided as she took her phone from her bag intent on calling a taxi.

“Do you like Russian?” Oliver exclaimed, louder than he had intended and he cringed a little when Jax’s head shot up looking most perturbed.
“The language or the food?” Felicity chuckled, as her hand soothed down Jax’s head.
“The food.”
“I can’t say I’ve really tried it,” Felicity shrugged apologetically.
“The neighbour I mentioned before she has this little restaurant a few blocks from here, maybe we could go together.”
He was still cringing, that sounded so much more suave in his head.

It took Felicity a few moments to register and maybe she was reading too much into it, but it sounded like Oliver, the gruff ruffian with tattoos and the prowess of a male escort, was asking her out – on a date.

Her lips frozen slightly parted.
“On Friday,” he added, though that addendum did little to make this sound any less disastrous.
“I can’t,” Felicity answered.
“Oh,” Oliver breathed before he tugged his lips inward.
“My neighbour’s cat has jury service.”
She laughed when Oliver’s face piqued in confusion.

“I have a board meeting on Friday, could we do Saturday?”
Felicity was throwing caution to the wind. When she got home no doubt she would be absolutely horrified with her present self, but so be it.
“Saturday, sounds good,” Oliver remarked, hating how he sounded like a high schooler asking his crush out to a drive in movie, “I can pick you up or...”
“I can meet you there,” Felicity countered, “just text me the address.”
“I need your phone number to do that,” Oliver winked.

“Is that your phone?” she asked pointing to the one a few feet away on the coffee table.
“Yes.”
Felicity tapped silently away on her phone for a solid minute before she looked up from her screen and smiled.
“You now have my phone number, it’s under Felicity.”
“How did you…?” Oliver started
“Thank you for the coffee Oliver,” Felicity smiled as she stood, much to Jax’s dismay, but he wasn’t in any mind to stop her more than one, lethargic paw tap to her leg, “enjoy the bagels.”

[Saturday Morning]

Oliver stood from the kitchen table as Thea walked into the room, yawning and fisting her hand into her eye.
“Morning,” Oliver quipped as he dropped his cereal bowl into the sink and began to rinse it off.
Thea grunted as she dove her hand into the cereal packet and retrieved a handful of the honey frosted flakes.
“I stopped by Raisa’s last night,” Thea smirked as she leant against the tabled and kicked her foot into Oliver’s butt.
“Oh yeah,” Oliver remarked, shifting uncomfortably on the spot as he started to rinse out his dish.
“She said you made a booking for tonight,” Thea continued, digging her toe into the small of his back.
Oliver flinched before he shrugged.
“For two.”
Oliver turned off the tap and dropped the dish into the rack before he reached for his keys off the off-white countertop.
“I’ll be at the shop if you need me,” he noted as he headed out of the room.

But Thea, much more wily than him, beat him to it and she netted her body across the doorway.

“You’re going on a date,” Thea said smugly, almost amused that Oliver thought he could hide it from her.
Oliver sighed, but said nothing.
“With Felicity right?”
He didn’t want to answer, as far as he was concerned Thea already knew too much – but he recognised that look in her eyes and she wasn’t going to stop pestering him until he gave her something.

He nodded, just the once.
“Well shit,” she grinned before she slapped his shoulder.
“Thea, it’s not a big deal.”
“Sure its not.”
He smile said she didn’t believe his down play, not one little bit.
“It’s not.”

She shrugged, it was a waste of energy to argue the point with her stubborn older brother. The fact remained, he was going on a date, something she wasn’t sure he had ever actually done.
“What are you wearing?” she asked as she hopped up onto her tippy toes and straightened his hair.

Oliver swatted her away and looked down at his indigo jeans and his fresh black cotton tee. He
wasn’t intending on getting dirty at the shop doing paperwork and if by chance he did he could always throw on a different, but almost identical v-neck after his shower.

“You’re not wearing that,” Thea reprimanded.
“What’s wrong with it? I’ll put a jacket over the top,” Oliver said with a confused shrug.
“No.”
“What?”
“No,” she argued as she stole the keys from his hand, “we’re going shopping.”
He considered arguing with her, but there was a small part of him that would appreciate the help.
“Fine,” he gave in, “but I’m driving.”

“You’re not serious?” Oliver groaned as he kicked his dirty, scuffed shoes across the sidewalk outside Men’s Warehouse.
“Oliver it’s a first date,” Thea reminded, though he really didn’t need it, “you can’t look like that.”
Her eyes purveyed his attire with a deliberate scowl.
“What is wrong with my clothes?” Oliver objected.
“Do you want a list or?”
“I can’t afford this place.”
“I’m not suggesting you buy a tuxedo, although if you keep seeing her, which you will,” Thea prattled as she dragged Oliver though the sliding doors, “you will probably need to invest in something other than oil-stained slacks and a leather jacket, but we’ll deal with that later.”

Thea squealed as she sidled up to the first rack she saw, she picked out two dress shirts in colours that Oliver wouldn’t be caught dead in and threw them into his arms.
“Hold these,” she ordered.
“Thea,” he huffed as he looked skyward.

“Oliver?” a voice peeped from behind him.
Oliver spun around, paisley and pink-striped shirts in tow, to meet with Curtis’ smiling face.
“Curtis,” Oliver remarked.
“Who’s this?” Thea asked as she appeared from between two racks, her dark-rimmed eyes walking up and down Curtis to ascertain whether he was friend or foe.
“Oh she’s spritely,” Curtis said as he felt the intensity of Thea’s eyes.

“Curtis this is my sister, Thea,” Oliver introduced, “Thea this is Curtis he works with Felicity.”
“I’m her EA,” Curtis added.
“Her secretary?” Thea questioned, her eyes still deciding whether or not the tall stranger posed a threat.
“Funny, your brother said the same thing,” Curtis rattled off, “but no, I’m her assistant.”
“What’s the difference?”
Oliver blinked slowly, his sister took no prisoners.
“Well, first it means, I am, well, see,” Curtis started as his weight shifted from one foot to the other, “um, not a lot actually…”
Thea shrugged as her eyes softened. Curtis wasn’t a threat.

“What are you guys doing here?” Curtis asked, his chest relaxing now that Thea’s eyes had pulled back on the laser-like stare.
“Oliver has a date tonight,” Thea smirked, “with your boss.”
“Oh I know,” Curtis nodded excitedly, “we’re also friends so I helped her pick out this gorgeous …” he paused to consider his next words, “oh wait, I probably shouldn’t be telling you.”
Oliver’s eyes squeezed closed, this was encouragement his sister didn’t need.
“No, this is good,” Thea exclaimed, “we could use this so Oliver doesn’t look like a complete idiot, or homeless, which he’s prone to.”
“Thea,” Oliver gritted.
“Shut up Oliver and go try those shirts on,” she said as she waved him away.
Honest to God, if she was anyone else…

While Oliver wasn’t keen on leaving them to discuss his private life, he knew that whether he was there or not was irrelevant and at least if he wasn’t there he wouldn’t have to hear it. So without any argument he walked to the back of the store and into one of the changing rooms, falling against the door to close it.

It was going to be a long morning.

~*~*~*~

“So, spill, what is she wearing tonight?”
“She didn’t want to go too formal, but she really looks good in striking colours,” Curtis started with haphazard gestures, “so she went with this stunning red dress, it’s gorgeous, knee length, but it has this diagonal zip down the skirt of it that plays off some of the formality of it, and of course she looks great in it.”

Thea nodded as Curtis talked exuberantly. When he was finished she tapped a black-tipped nail against her nude lips and nodded to herself.
“You’re a smart dresser,” she noted as her finger walked up and down through the air between them.
“Why thank you,” Curtis preened.
“I’m not hitting on you.”
“Oh, I know,” Curtis chuckled, a little taken aback, “and I’m married.”
He waved his left hand in the air.

“She’s a lucky girl…” Thea nodded, her words tipping up at the end as though she was asking a question.
“Lucky guy,” Curtis corrected.
Thea smiled and nodded once more, “that makes so much more sense.”
“Oh thanks.”
“You’re welcome.”

“So new friend, are you going to help my brother not look homeless?”
Thea looked up at Curtis with a glint in her sea-foam eyes before Curtis nodded assuredly.
“A happy boss is a good boss,” he added with a smile.

[Saturday Night]

Oliver shifted nervously in his seat. His palms felt clammy and his clothes felt stiffer than an ironing board. He tugged relentlessly at the cuffs of the black sports coat before his fingers ran under the collar on the white shirt underneath the black and red plaid bowtie.

His hair was pulled back into a tight knot at the nape of his neck and his face still felt warm from the professional groom that Curtis had insisted on.

“The waitress told me you were dressed up and I didn’t believe her,” a sweetly familiar voice, threaded with an accent Oliver knew well, spoke from behind.
Oliver stood and embraced the woman who had spent many years being like a second mother to him in his youth.

“I feel stupid actually,” he coughed as he pulled away from the embrace, almost like the bowtie was strangling the life out of him.

“You look very handsome,” Raisa encouraged as she smoothed the lapels of his sports coat, “this lady must be special.”

“She's...” Oliver started, but his words drifted away when the front door opened and Felicity appeared.

“...Here,” he finished.

Felicity took a long, steady breath as her eyes tracked across the small restaurant. There were twenty tables at most and only a few were without diners chatting amongst themselves. The warm lights from above bathed the room in just enough rich red light to make it inviting and comfortable.

Soft music played from the ceiling as Felicity smoothed her hands down the sides of her red dress before a finger trickled through her pinned back braid. She wet her lips with her tongue as she willed her feet to step into the room a little further, much like the argument she had been having with herself for the last 5 minutes standing outside.

And then she saw him.

Or at least a very close replica of him in different attire.

He was standing, his arms to his side and his palms flat against his legs. There was an older woman beside him with a kind face and a white apron. Felicity decided that must be the neighbour that Oliver had spoken about.

Before she realised it, her feet had finally began to work and she was standing only a few feet away.

“Hi,” she breathed, trying to still the quiver in her voice.

This wasn’t a one night stand any more, it wasn’t even a one night stand squared, it was an date.

An actual date. A proper date. A date-date.

“Hi,” Oliver mirrored her breathy exchange.

“Krasivaya [красивая],” Raisa said kindly as she smiled sweetly at Felicity.

“Ya znayu [я знаю],” Oliver replied.

“The waitress will be back soon to take your orders,” Raisa spoke softly, her accent woven between each word, “if you need anything, you know where to find me,” she added with a tipped, motherly smile at Oliver.

“Thank you,” Oliver mouthed before Raisa excused herself.

Oliver pulled out Felicity’s seat and gestured for her to sit.

“You speak Russian?” Felicity remarked as she sat down on the plush velvet chair.

“Very poorly,” Oliver laughed, “but Raisa humours me.”

For everything she knew about Oliver in a physical sense, there seemed to be double the amount of things she didn’t know.

“She said you looked beautiful,” Oliver added as he shuffled in his own chair, his eyes skimming a menu he already knew.

“Oh,” Felicity peeped before she looked across the table at him, “and what did you say?”

“I said, ‘I know’, ” he admitted after his eyes swam in hers.

Felicity couldn’t take her eyes off Oliver, it felt like that moment in Beauty and the Beast where Belle wasn’t exactly sure the Prince in front of her was the Beast she had come to know. The man
sitting across from the table sure sounded like Oliver, with his gruff, beast-like voice, and his eyes were still strikingly familiar, even in the limited red-hue light of the restaurant, but he looked different, he looked like….

She stopped the thought before it got there.

“You look uncomfortable,” Felicity noted as she nodded towards Oliver’s fingers which had dipped under his shirt collar again.

“I’m just not used to…” he started as he stretched out the collar in a vain attempt to make his neck feel less claustrophobic.

“Have you ever worn a bow tie before Oliver?” Felicity chuckled as his chin grazed back and forth over the tips of it.

“No, is it that obvious?” he blushed.

“It’s funny, but you remind me of someone,” Felicity grimaced playfully as the idea popped back into her head.

“Curtis?” Oliver remarked.

Felicity pressed her back into the seat, Oliver was absolutely right.

“Yeah, I’m not surprised,” he sighed as he tugged a little more at the suffocating collar, “him and Thea.”

Oliver didn’t need to say anything more, Felicity had already pieced together the likely order of events.

“Here,” Felicity breathed as she stood and took a few steps towards him.

She bent down, her face so close to him that he could smell the sweet orchard notes of her perfume.

Her fingers walked around the back of his shirt and loosened the bowtie before it came free from his neck. She placed it gently on the table and then feathered her fingers across the top button of his shirt, opening the collar.

Oliver sighed out a breath which made Felicity’s eyes flicker up to his. Her eyes stayed anchored to his as her fingers walked down the sports coat and undid the two buttons near his stomach.

Felicity slid her hands back up his firm chest, her fingers underneath the jacket, before they went their separate ways across his shoulders. His jacket slipped from his body and, taking the hint, Oliver shrugged the same down his arms.

Felicity swung the coat onto the back of the chair before her fingers gently combed through his hair, loosening the tightness of the knot just enough that tiny wisps of hair came loose. She stepped back to admire her work and then smiled.

Now he looked more like her Beast.

“There,” she nodded, “better?”

Oliver jostled his shoulders and swayed his neck from one shoulder to the other. He could breathe again.

“Much better, thank you.”

“Don’t let Curtis dress you again,” Felicity chuckled as she returned to her seat.

He nodded in agreement.

“What do you want to try?” Oliver asked.

“I trust you,” Felicity answered, “you choose.”

Oliver accepted the request with a nod as the waitress appeared alongside the table.

Oliver ordered a few dishes Felicity couldn’t repeat if she tried, without even glancing at the menu. It was apparent Oliver came here frequently.
“I hope you like it,” he worried with his hands rolling against each other.
“I grew up on all you can eat buffets in Vegas, I’m not picky,” Felicity jested before she took a sip of the water beside her.
“You grew up in Vegas?” Oliver queried, surprised by her admittance.
Felicity nodded reluctantly, it was a time in her life that wasn’t in the glossy magazines, at least not honestly.
“I just assumed,” Oliver started.
“That I had ponies and went to Starling Preparatory?” Felicity finished with a charismatic and immediately comforting laugh.
“Yes,” Oliver admitted with a soft chuckle that slowly turned into a laugh.
“My father is rich and influential, but he wasn’t always,” Felicity spoke honestly, “my parents split when I was a baby, he came to Starling to strike gold and my mother stayed in Vegas with me.”

She took another sip of water. She barely spoke about her past but unsettlingly, it felt like second nature with Oliver.
“The prodigal father returned when I was 19 and ranked second in the National Information Technology competition, and here I am,” she simpered.
Her life story wrapped up with a neat little bow, but there was something practiced about the way she spoke. It gave answers, but nothing beyond.

It was an interview answer.
“You don’t like him much do you?” Oliver asked bluntly.
He saw her shoulders retreat into themselves as her finger ran the rim of her glass.
“He’s my father,” she answered simply, practiced.
“That didn’t answer my question.”

The food arrived with perfect timing and Felicity took the welcomed distraction.
“What’s this?” Felicity asked pointing down a pie-like dish.
She didn’t want to talk about her father and he wouldn’t push it.
“That is coulibiac, salmon, rice and vegetables baked into puff pastry,” Oliver explained, unaware until he looked up that Felicity was teasing a smile across the table at him.
“And this one?” she asked, pointing to another before he could inquire about her tipped smile.
“Golubtsy, cooked cabbage leaves with mincemeat, Raisa cooks it in a tomato sauce.”
Felicity was still smiling as she pointed to a third dish wordlessly.
“Wait, I know this one,” Felicity added, “Chicken Kiev, yes?”
Oliver nodded, “though it’s made a little different then what you might be used to.”

“Are you going to tell me why you’re smiling?” Oliver asked with a chuckle as he started to dip his fork into the coulibiac.
“I just didn’t pick it,” Felicity chatted.
“Picked what?”
“Oliver, the master chef.”

It was about an hour later when only scraps of food remained that Oliver and Felicity realised the long forecasted rain had began falling against the windows.
“Looks like that storm they promised,” Felicity remarked with a soft shrug, it barely looked like a drizzle.

_Hardly a storm._
The next time Felicity's eyes wandered to the window, the light smattering of rain had remained steady and glistened in the glow from the nearby lights.

The conversation had lulled but it wasn’t awkward or uncomfortable, in fact there was something comfortable and reassuring about it and Felicity drunk it up until Raisa appeared alongside their table.

“You should get going before it gets heavier,” she suggested before she handed Oliver a wrapped bundle.

She turned to Felicity and smiled warmly, that kind of smile that felt like a grandmother who knew something you didn’t.

“This is Chak Chak,” Raisa explained as she tapped the foil package in Oliver’s hands, “it was always his favourite.”

“She always makes me take them,” Oliver laughed as he pecked a passing kiss on the older woman’s cheek before he slipped the package into his jacket pocket.

“I’ve never heard you complain,” Raisa winked as Felicity watched the interactions with a smile on her face. She didn’t know any of her grandparents and while Raisa wasn’t actually related to Oliver, watching them together felt more of a family than she was used to herself.

“Take an umbrella from the front and dry off when you get home, I don’t want you catching a cold,” Raisa instructed with a tone that wasn’t to be argued with.

“Da [да],” Oliver nodded before he gestured Felicity towards the door.
“Thank you for a lovely dinner,” Felicity spoke graciously at Raisa as the woman brushed her hands against her apron. Oliver started towards the door with Felicity a few steps behind until Raisa caught her elbow and halted her steps.

“He is a good boy, with a good heart,” Raisa said softly, too quietly to be heard by Oliver who was now half a dozen steps ahead, “it just needs a little polishing.” Felicity’s lips floated up into a smile. “Such a handsome little boy,” Raisa reminisced as her eyes walked to the umbrella stand where Oliver was now standing, “you come by again and I’ll show you photos,” she added with a sweetly jovial laugh. “I’d like that,” Felicity answered before the two parted ways.

“You can call a taxi from my house, it’s only a short walk so you don’t have to wait outside,” Oliver offered as Felicity met him by the umbrellas. Felicity nodded in agreement without even considering a different option. The truth was that she wasn’t ready to let this night end just yet.

They stepped out into the brisk night air. It was chilled and Felicity shivered as goose bumps sprouted down her bare arms. Without a word Oliver took the jacket slung over his arm and placed it around her shoulders before he opened the umbrella and held it mostly over her.

They walked slowly at first, listening to the melodic sounds of the water falling on the umbrella above them. “Dinner was lovely,” Felicity finally spoke up, her words mixing with the tap of her heels on the pavement and the sounds of cars driving across the water-slicked road beside them. “I’m glad you liked it,” Oliver replied, his lips staying parted as though he had more to say but lacked the conviction to say it, “I’m glad you came,” he finally added.

The wind grew a little wilder and Oliver struggled with the umbrella as the raindrops became larger and faster. Whips of wind turned and flicked the rain towards them as they rounded the first corner, halfway to Oliver’s house.

“I’m glad I came too,” she replied softly, most of her words lost in the surrounding noise, but her smile wasn’t as they passed under another streetlamp that flickered orange.

Oliver found himself lost for other words, perhaps he could blame it on the increasing rain or the wind that was rushing past his ears making it almost impossible to hear anything, let alone be heard, but the truth of the matter was he didn’t know what to say.

No matter how he played it out in his head he couldn’t understand his sudden retreat into his own mind. She looked gorgeous and the sway that took her hips while she walked would ordinarily be something he would quite happily comment on, just to see her cheeks blush and her lips fall open in a silent gasp. But at this moment all he wanted to do was hold her hand.

The idea was chaste and innocent and wholly foreign to him, so far removed from the things they had done previously which would make most people blush and even further set apart from the things he wanted to do.

But maybe he considered, as his muscles strained to keep the umbrella down against the battling wind which had other ideas, it was because those times were just raw sexuality.

They didn’t involve feelings or emotions above the level of what felt good at the time. It was hedonistic and wanton.
But walking down the street where every third street lamp was broken and with his jacket tugged around her svelte frame he felt something else for her.

A desire to protect her.
Keep her safe.
Make her laugh.
Make her moan.
Make her eyes float to the back of her head.
Make her stay.

It was that last thought that took his mind somewhere distant, enough that he forgot the turbulent wind trying to best him. The wind snatched the umbrella, pulling it upwards and almost ripping it from his grip. Oliver managed to hold it, but before he could correct it the umbrella twisted and snapped inside out breaking almost each of the arms and rendering it completely useless.

As if to punish the two of them for hiding beneath the umbrella for so long, the flood gates opened up like a bucket tipped over them. Oliver wrestled with the umbrella a few seconds longer before the storm took its last bout of vengeance and tore it from his hands. Oliver fumbled backwards in a pointless try to collect it, before it disappeared half way down the street and across the road.

An effervescent laugh fell from Felicity’s lips as the rain drove tracks down her face, catching in her deep lashes and falling from her expressive eyes.

Oliver took her hand and began jogging down the street, laughing as the frigid rain tried it’s best to dampen their spirits. His fingers interlocked with hers, diverting trails of water around them as the heat of their bodies mingled to warm them from the inside, despite the inclement weather.

Felicity’s heels kicked through the puddles of water as the drains overflowed around them and the gutters became like raging torrents. Oliver was a few paces ahead with his hand tightly gripping hers as though letting his grip loosen even a little might see her swept away, and while she doubted there was any possibility of that actually happening, there was a comforting security in the gesture all the same.

Oliver turned as they jogged, his eyes falling to the ground where Felicity teetered on shoes with a devious smile threaded across his rain-coated lips.

Before she truly understood what was happening, Felicity’s feet were dangling in mid-air and her eyes were staring down at the pavement-turned-lake beneath Oliver’s feet. After a few seconds of adjustment she realised he had slung her over his shoulder as was busy almost sprinting the two of them through the howling gale and the rolling thunder.

“Put me down,” she laughed boisterously as she straightened her back and wrapped her arms around his neck.
“I got you Princess,” Oliver winked before he blew the drops back from around his eyes.
She thought about protesting more, but honestly this was the most careless abandonment of civilities she had given into in a long time and fuck, if she didn't enjoy the hell out of it.

Oliver scooted into the path of his house and reached his covered porch, aglow with a buzzing white light, in less that ten steps.

He slipped her body down his, enjoying every second of the contact, until her feet touched the ground.

Felicity wiped a hand across her cheek as the sharp light above them drew thick shadows across
Oliver’s face. He had stopped laughing now, they both had, but his smile stayed firmly affixed to his face.

Oliver couldn’t help smiling, even in the unforgiving florescent light Felicity looked luminous. The rain that was veiled across her face glistened like a curtain of diamonds and her plump lips, with beads of water pooling across them, looked like morning dew drops on a rose bud.

She laughed softly as she looked down at her hand, the same one that had brushed across her cheek only moments before.
“What’s so funny?” Oliver asked, intrigued by anything that was able to pull such a sound from her heavenly lips.
Felicity tipped up her hand, showing it to Oliver in the small space that had opened up between them. Her hand’s pale complexion now streaked with black.
“This mascara is supposed to be waterproof,” she sighed, her lips still tipped into a smile that could warm even the coldest of hearts, “I bet I look like a raccoon.”
“Maybe,” Oliver whispered as his fingers pinned back tendrils of hair that had fallen down across her face, “just a little,” he added with a hum that sent a rumbling down her spine, “but you’re the prettiest raccoon I’ve ever seen.”

Felicity didn’t think.
She didn’t even pause to consider her actions.
She couldn’t help herself.
The way his fingers felt against her sodden skin.
The way his eyes watched her, studied her.
The way his lips, those indescribably soft, subtle lips surrounded by a forest of trimmed hair, turned up at the corners to smile at her.
She really had no other option.

She kissed him. With her drenched body pressed against his hard, wet chest, she lifted her chin up and kissed him. *Hard.*

The rain that still marred their faces mingled and traced lines around their lips even as the wind taunted them, changing directions once more to sweep the thrashing rain under the porch and against their bodies.

Her fingers wound through his hair and their hot breaths created smoke signals in the crisp night air. Oliver’s hands skidded down her body like a racetrack, swerving where her curves took him before they drove the same track up and into her hair.

Her body was sandwiched between him and the stucco wall as his lips fought with hers, hungry and desperate. Felicity bucked her hips against him, feeling his hard cock straining against the confines of his pants.

He wasn’t shy as he moaned into her mouth and powered his cock into her, letting her feel the thick rod hard against her pelvis.

His teeth nipped at her lip and like a drawbridge they parted to allow his tongue to swarm her mouth. Their tongues fought, batting against each other as they completely gave themselves over to the moment.

Felicity’s lips closed around him, circling his tongue before she sucked gently inward, sealing his mouth against hers. Oliver growled symptomatically into the kiss before his hands dropped to her ass and kneading salaciously into the rounds of it.
She could tell he wanted to lift her as his hands spanned out across her ass. She raised one leg, twisting it around the back of his in an invitation for the same. Oliver pulled her back from the wall just a few inches before he lifted her into the air and pinned her back against the wall, her spread legs around his core.

Her hips tipped down before the rode back up, skimming the hard ridges of his erection between her legs.

Felicity moaned, like thick strands of hot air into his mouth as she repeated the motion, sliding his erection closer to her thrumming sex, desperate for that friction that has become like a drug to her.

It was lascivious and wanton, frantic and carnal and Felicity knew exactly how good it could feel – how could he could feel.

But it was also safe, perhaps indescribably so, but safe all the same. The first night they had been together she had thought him a predator, seeking to devour her.

But a predator was selfish and desperate and unconcerned with anything more than seeing their own venal needs met.

*Oliver Queen was no predator.*

But she would be his prey.

Oliver’s hand drifted up her thigh which was slick with rain, weaving between the inside and outside. It felt like velvet beneath his calloused hands as he reached her apex. Felicity keened into his touch before her teeth snatched his lips, greedily asking for more.

Oliver pushed her panties to the side, sparing only a moment to notice how fragile they felt in his hands as he imagined sheering them from her body with his teeth.

His finger dove between her folds causing Felicity to gasp breathlessly into his mouth. Oliver drunk it up, enjoying the way her misted breath felt like fire next to the icy wind that hounded them.

The arch of her back forced his fingers deeper between her sex until his fingers were coated in her slick, hot wetness. His thumb circled her clit starting softly before building into quick, unpredictable figures.

Felicity moaned harder, her entire body wracked with the pleasure her was giving. Two digits entered her and hooked into a spot that made her writhe off the wall. Her juices spilled around his fingers as her walls clenched the same.

Oliver thrust his fingers in deeper, desperate to feel her come undone around them as their kiss became frantic and frenzied.

Thunder cracked in the distance followed by a bolt of lightning that lit up the blackened night. “Oliver,” Felicity howled as her lips broke away from his.

His fingers stilled immediately, staying lodged deep within her.

“You want me to stop?” he panted, his breath ragged and thin, his eyes dark with desire.

He stood on the edge, but if she asked him to stop he would.

“We’re still outside,” she quipped before her tongue snagged between her teeth and her walls clamped around his fingers, desperate to feel them for even just a moment longer.

Oliver drew them out slowly, skimming the pads of his fingertips against her smooth, cushiony
walls.

With her body still pressed to his and their eyes locked, Oliver fed the two digits that were veiled in her wetness through his lips, relishing her taste as his tongue lapped between them.

Felicity swallowed deeply while she watched him with saucer eyes as he devoured every inch of the two fingers that had been so deep inside her. The sight itself almost had her coming apart at the seams; and for just a moment she thought she might have a shuddering orgasm right there on his front porch.

She managed to stem the sensation just long enough for Oliver to let her down from the wall and feed his keys into the front door. The moment felt like slow motion as he turned the key and stepped into the darkened house.

Felicity didn’t even wait for the door to close before her lips pounced on his once more. Blindly Oliver kicked the door and it slammed closed, shutting out the raucous of the storm almost immediately.

“Wait,” Felicity hummed as her lips pulled away only to fall back onto his a moment later, “your sister,” she added, ghosting the words across his lips. Oliver stole a few more kisses before his thumbs slowly dragged her lips from his. “Thea,” he called into the dark house before his hands fumbled for the light switch behind his head.

No response came as the lights above them sparked to life. Oliver shrugged at the lack of reply before his lips sought out Felicity’s once again. “Are you sure she’s not home?” Felicity asked, pulling her lips away from his despite the groan he gave her. “I’ll be right back,” he huffed playfully before he stole another kiss.

Felicity watched him as he walked, heavy-footed down the hall in search of his sister.

She looked around the room, its contents now a little more familiar and a lot less surprising than the first time. She noticed the photo of Raisa with Thea and Oliver on the wall now that she had not taken any notice of the first time she set foot in that small but cosy room. She slipped the sodden jacket from her shoulders while her eyes searched in vain for a place to hang it.

As she watched the drips from it spill onto the floor, Felicity realised she too was reminiscent of a drowned rat and the sudden realities of what she was doing in Oliver’s house poured over her like glacial water.

She had come into Oliver’s house with every intention of having sex with him against whatever surface they could get to first. Honestly, she would have fucked him right there on the front porch if it hadn’t been for the thunder and lightning sobering her up.

The law of odds was still definitely at play here and she had figured out a winning formula for fantastic unadulterated sex that had only a few components. Her, Oliver and the expectation that there were no expectations.

But standing alone in his house, detached from the embroilment of desire, Felicity knew this time was different. There was no way she could write this off as another one night stand, she had known that the moment he asked her out on a date, and sealed it when she said yes.

Her breezy, uncomplicated sex with a stranger was no more. There was no way of skewing this to
get it back.

It wasn’t a one night stand anymore.
It was sex on the first date.

Morally, it was neither ‘better’ nor ‘worse’ in Felicity’s eyes and she was of no mind to dissect the conundrum right now. But, it was different.

Because it was now real.

“Is she there?” Thea asked as Oliver skulked around her room with his phone to his ear.
He huffed out a non-descript answer that she took as confirmation.
“I’m going to stay at Roy’s,” she quipped, “they’re closing most of the roads anyway.”
Oliver pressed his thumb into the pounding vein that ran down his temple.
“I can hear your vein thumping,” Thea laughed, “you guys have the house, I just ask whatever surface you fuck on you clean afterwards.”
“Thea,” Oliver growled through clenched teeth.
“I think that’s pretty fair.”
“I don’t, we won’t...”
Oliver wasn’t entirely sure what he was arguing with Thea about, he had every intention of doing exactly what she was implying.
“Given this is the third time,” Thea cautioned, “you can't write this off as a quick bang so at least try to be a little less growly Oliver, unless she likes that,” Oliver could almost hear her mind ticking over, “I bet she does, frisky little minx.”

“She’s staying over with a friend,” the last word felt like grit between his teeth as he strode down the hall towards Felicity.
Felicity offered a half-hearted smile as she battled back a host of conflicting emotions.
“I should go,” she peeped in an almost unrecognisable voice.
Oliver hid his thoughts behind a heavy brow and a short nod.
“They’re closing roads across the City, so you should call a taxi now,” he offered sensibly.

He offered her the towel that he had collected on the way to Thea's room and Felicity took it graciously from his hand, offering him his jacket in return.

With the towel around her shoulders Felicity dug through her bag to find her phone. She tapped it against her palm, to-ing and fro-ing between what she thought she should do and what she actually wanted to do.

Both their mouths opened, unspoken words hung on the edges of their tongues before a loud crash
thundered so close to the house that it shook the window panes and shuddered the ceiling above them.

And then it was black.
The whole house plunged into a thick curtain of night, even the windows offered no respite from the darkness.

Oliver stumbled blindly towards the window where his eyes peered through the now relentless torrential rain. Not a single house in the block had a light on.
“It looks like a power cut,” Oliver noted.

Felicity held the screen of her phone up, it’s dull glow like a remedial light so at least she could make her way to the window without tripping over something.

Something brushed against her leg and she squealed in surprise, losing her footing before Oliver caught her by the waist and steadied her. She jutted the phone down towards the floor where it met with two vividly blue eyes and a panting tongue.
Jax.
“Sorry about that, he doesn’t much like thunder, or lightning, or darkness,” Oliver chuckled before he beckoned Jax with a whistle, “I’ll find some candles, you should make the call,” he continued, nodding towards her phone.
“Right. Of course,” Felicity sighed.

It took Oliver ten minutes to dot enough candles around the room to bathe it in a warm amber hue and Jax had settled in a far corner near a cluster of scented ones Oliver had requisitioned from Thea's room.

Felicity's ear was humming with the same three-cord melody that had been tormenting her for those same ten minutes.

“Still on hold?” Oliver asked.
Felicity replied in the form of an impatiently dramatic sigh tipped with a soft smile. The last message she had heard advised at least another ten minute wait.

The tortuous melody stopped abruptly before the sweet sound of ringing started. It was at least four rings until someone finally answered, but before Felicity could even ask, the answer was read off a script directly into her ear.
“I’m sorry, we are unable to offer any rides at this stage. If you think your journey is an emergency situation please hang up and dial nine-one-one. We’re sorry for any inconvenience. Thank you for calling Co-Op Taxis.”

The call disconnected and Felicity listened for a few seconds to the repetitive sound, distantly hoping it would somehow change, before she ended the call and sandwiched the phone between her trembling palms.

“They aren’t,” she hummed the broken sentence as she rolled the phone between her hands.
“I would take you on the bike, but it’s not safe in this weather,” Oliver expressed.
Felicity silently nodded, she understood his hands were tied, figuratively.

“I can call some people see if…”
Felicity peered out the window before she shook her head slowly.
“It’s really coming down out there,” she lamented.

“You could stay,” Oliver offered watching as Felicity snapped her head towards him, “just to
She looked back towards the window, streams of rain like flood waters down the glass, she didn’t have much of a choice.

She turned back to Oliver, studying the soft orange glow across one side of his face. She knew he could sense her hesitancy and she wondered if he understood her reasons for it. Regardless, however, he was dutifully respecting them.

“You can have the bed, I’ll sleep on the couch,” he added, his words softly sweeping over his lips, trying to make her comfortable, trying to make her feel safe.

“Thank you,” she replied, two words that encompassed so much more than his final offer.

“We should get you out of those clothes,” Oliver started, “because they’re wet,” he quickly added. A smile grew across Felicity’s lips, it was nice not to be the one fumbling with innuendo. “I can see if Thea has anything,” Oliver continued, taking a breath to steady his words. “While your sister’s wardrobe reminds me of my college years, I don’t think we’re the same size,” Felicity remarked with a one shoulder shrug.

Oliver’s gaze dropped down her lithe frame until it reached the sweeping curve of her waist and the fullness of her ass. “Yeah probably not,” he grinned suggestively. Felicity couldn’t help but blush under his gaze. He made no secret of his attraction to her, despite the obvious distance she had placed between them.

She thought she saw him wink as he sunk into the shadows with a torch, but perhaps it was nothing more than her lecherous mind playing dirty tricks on her. He returned a few minutes later with an offering of clean, dry clothes and the torch.

Felicity stayed in the bathroom longer than she needed to, studying her white-lit face in the medicine cabinet mirror.

There was a growling between her legs and it grew with each passing moment that Felicity let her mind wander to deliciously titillating thoughts of Oliver. His tee skimmed her knees, the fabric feeling like tortuous pleasure to her thighs, while his shorts sat, still folded, on the edge of the vanity.

The first time she had had no reservations, perhaps aided by a little liquid courage. The second time she had been spurred on by the memory of the first, unable to quash the desire to chase the same, passionate end. But this was different, this would be deliberate.

What they had been toying with was some thing. Tonight would cross into something.

She sucked in a sudden breath of air, the force of it stiffening her back and lifting her shoulders. She was 23 and this didn’t have to be anything more than fun.

She still didn’t need to know his credit history and she still didn’t need to delve into the cavern of previous relationship and vice versa. There was nothing wrong with some thing, as long as it was what they both wanted.

When she returned to the living room Oliver was sitting on the couch, now turned into a makeshift
bed with two blankets and a pillow.

“Are you okay?” Oliver asked as he shed the singlet from his body, leaving him in just his cotton briefs. Despite the chill in the air he was always more comfortable sleeping that way. “I’m fine,” Felicity answered softly as her hips swayed in a slow walk towards him. “Do you want something to drink or…” She interrupted his sentence with a slow shake of her head before she placed the torch on the table beside him and skated her nails up his arm.

He sighed achingly at the contact with his lids growing heavier the further up his arm her fingers roamed. She rounded his shoulder and smoothed along the horizon of it before she cupped base of his neck. Her other hand mirrored the path until both her hands were sunk in around his neck and her legs were pressed hard up against his knees.

Felicity straddled his legs, sinking her body in deeper to his until she could feel his brimming erection sheathed under a cotton curtain that did very little to hid it. She waited until his lips parted to speak before she captured them with her own, relishing the way they slightly trembled out silent words.

When she had stolen his words for long enough she pulled her lips away and brushed her thumbs over his cupid’s bow. “Felicity, are you sure?” he asked, his voice gravelled and guttural. “I’ve never said no to you before,” she whispered, her lips skimming over his lobe, “why start now?” She kissed a sloped path down his jaw before meeting with his lips one more soft time. “We can just have fun right?” she asked, sealing the question with a feathered kiss that blew across his lips. Oliver smiled as he caught her head between his palms. “We can have all the fun in the world Princess.”

His middle finger circled the outline of her coiled nipple while his eyes watched the breath leak from between her pouted lips. The fabric which had once felt so dull against his own chest felt like silk now that it covered her. Her eyes were an exquisite blue with licks of candle light raptured inside them as she refused to look away from him.

Her tongue stroked her lower lip as her hips edged her body closer to his. She rolled her sex against him causing the tee she was wearing to ride higher up her silken legs. His mouth became dry with thoughts of her, of taking her pebbled nipple between his teeth and nipping it with delicious wonder, until she told him enough. He wanted to know her limits and feel her give herself over to her every want and desire. She need only ask and he was certain he would do it.

Felicity kissed his neck, softly and languidly, dragging her bottom lip across the pumping veins that she found there. Her tongue teased his pulse point, licking and swirling around before her lips invaded it and her teeth gingerly bit into it. Oliver hissed and she drew back with turbulent eyes before he soothed her worry with a wicked little smile. “Bite me again Felicity,” he whispered as he pinched her sensitive nipple between two fingers. Felicity smiled ardently before she dropped her lips into the curve of his neck.

He hummed into her ear as her lips danced feather kisses down the cords of his neck. She found the
identical pulse point and licked the tip of her tongue slowly across it, eliciting a guttural moan to pass across Oliver's parted lips.

Her teeth snagged his skin, nipping him hungrily before the flat of her tongue soothed it and her lips encased it.

With his fingers threaded in her hair, Oliver tightened his grip around the roots and tugged her back. His lips pounced onto hers, caressing them with hot, ravenous strokes before he braced her body against his with one arm and flipped them.

Felicity landed on her back with a breathy moan before Oliver tore the tee from her body. His eyes circled hers as his large hand cupped her breast. With her head on the arm of the couch, Felicity lifted her body and captured his lips, slowly melting a kiss into them.

Oliver's lips travelled down the centre of her body in a path of fiery kisses as his hands continued to toy with her breasts, kneading and rolling the pad of his thumbs over her tightly wound nipple.

His mouth reached her mound and a playful grin grew across his lips as he stared at the thin, wisp of red fabric that was in front of him. His teeth snatched a corner, skimming her skin tantalisingly.

Felicity watched him with delirium as he dragged her panties down her leg using his teeth and the aid of one hand. His stubble grazed a path down the inside of her leg as he threaded her panties over her knees before he whipped them the rest of the way with his hand.

She was completely naked underneath him and he took his sweet time kissing a trail back up the inside of her leg.

His tongue slipped between her folds, scooping up her readiness with a growl that shuddered to her core.

The rain pelting against the window pane faded to the background as the room was filled with pleasured cries and throaty moans.

As his lips encased her clit and his fingers swirled around the cusp of her entrance while Felicity dove her fingers into his hair and dug her nails into his scalp.

“Oliver,” she moaned as her eyes fluttered towards the ceiling.
“Yes princess?” Oliver asked, his face still buried between her legs. She needed to be filled by him, with more than just his fingers. She wanted his thick, hard cock to pummel her, no exceptions, no substitutes.

“She needed more.
“How much more?” Oliver asked, as the words deliriously slipped from her mouth. He added a third digit while his thumb teased her clit in fast circles.
“Please,” she hummed through almost closed lips as she bucked her hips against him. Oliver nipped on her clit as his fingers thrust into her. Felicity cried out, pleasure dripping like warm honey from her mouth.

“But she needed more.
“How much more?” Oliver asked, as the words deliriously slipped from her mouth. He added a third digit while his thumb teased her clit in fast circles.
“‘You’ the request bled from her lips.

“I’ll be back,” he hummed as he pulled himself off the couch. Before she could protest Oliver took her hand, pressed her palm into her mound and slipped her fingers between her dripping folds.
“Keep yourself wet,” he grinned with a smile the devil himself would be jealous of.

Felicity let her fingers skid slowly between her lips, skirting her entrance and grazing over her clit.
in slow figure eights. Oliver nodded his approval as his tongue wet his lips before he backed away and disappeared into the shadows.

He returned a few moments later sans briefs, with his gloved cock bobbing as he walked. Felicity didn’t mean to but she moaned when she saw it, before she bit her lip to stifle any further quips.

Oliver slid his thumb across her plump lower lip, freeing it from her teeth before he knelt between her spread legs and held himself at the rim of her entrance.

“Be as loud as you want, it’s fucking perfect,” Oliver smiled as he sunk his cock into her.

Her legs threaded around his waist and coupled at the ankles as he drove deeper into her warm, tight body, deliciously stretching her to accommodate him.

He stilled for a moment but Felicity didn’t want time to adjust and her heels sunk into the small of his back to prove it.

Oliver thrust deeper, capturing the tiny pants that blew from Felicity's lips. She tipped her hips up allowing him to delve deeper which he did earnestly.

His fists white-knuckled the blankets beneath her as he sped up his assault. His mouth nuzzled a breast, tugging it into the wet confines of his mouth and teasing his tongue along the tip before Felicity stilled him at the waist and Oliver dropped her breast with an amusing plop.

Felicity ground her hips into his pelvis, rocking his cock lodged inside her before she dropped her ass to pull him an inch out. She rode back up him seconds later with her nails scouring into his waist. But he didn’t mind, not one fucking bit, because watching her ride his shaft was about the sexiest fucking thing he’d ever seen.

Felicity speed up her pace, twisting and change her angles so every inch of her walls had tasted the delicious feeling of his head running against them.

She watched as Oliver’s arms shook either side of her, trembled from holding himself still while she rode him from underneath.

She could see his eyes rolling back and the breath thicken from his parted lips. Her core tightened and ached as her skin boiled from the inside. Her breath was tight and ragged when her fingers finally let him go and Oliver instantly started up where she left off.

He ploughed deeper while she wrapped her arms around his shoulders and hung on.

For what felt like a lifetime, they fucked, in a haze of dewy, fogged breaths and unfiltered, amorous cries until Felicity came with a shuddering, thunderous orgasm that crashed over her like a tidal wave.

It was only seconds later that Oliver too felt himself let go with one last plunge while her walls clenched around his trembling shaft and his body dropped onto hers.

“Fuck,” he groaned as he dragged his lips through the thin film of sweat across her collarbone. Felicity hummed her enjoyment as she tickled her fingers through his hair, enjoying just how heavy he felt on top of her.

He didn’t want to move. His cock lodged inside her massaging walls and her willowy frame trapped warmly beneath his. This was fucking perfect.

“Did you want to have a shower?” he inquired, “there should be enough warm water in the cylinder
for one shower.”
Felicity cupped his face and lifted it to latch eyes.
“Then you should join me,” she smiled seductively.

He wasn’t fucking saying no to that.
Oliver watched as the water slalomed down Felicity’s naked skin in streams that teased his senses. Her back was to him, her ass dangerously close to his rousing cock and her hair, darkened with water, sat over one shoulder. His fingers twitched beside his leg, eager to touch her but unwilling to do anything that might steal this art from his eyes.

Streams weaved and crossed paths down her spine, mesmerising Oliver until he sucked in an inhale, suddenly realising he had forgotten to breathe.

The sound made her move and the rivers of water moved with her. Her eyes wandered over her shoulder with her chin sinking into the slope of it. “You’re staring,” she remarked as droplets beaded across her lashes. “Can you fucking blame me?” he growled, as he snapped his lips toward her but pulled them back before the made contact.

His guttural voice spurred her to turn and take a step towards him, causing the tip of his shaft to graze up her thigh as it rose. Felicity licked her lips as her eyes skated wantonly down his physique.

Oliver Queen was *built*. 
His shoulders dwarfed her and when she pressed a curious finger into the muscles that rolled down from them they didn’t buckle underneath. He was as hard as a rock. His chest was no different, solid, impressive, dangerous. It wore scars and it wore tattoos, memories she couldn’t, wouldn’t, shouldn’t ask him about. Because you didn’t ask those questions when you were just having fun.

His hands were broad, his fingers thick, and Felicity found herself getting wet at the simple recollection of how good the latter felt inside her.

Her eyes continued downward, eating up the veritable feast that was Oliver Queen, until they reached that deep crevice of a V which was so prominent it looked like it was carved from stone, an arrowhead that pointed directly to that.

Felicity could feel her mouth filling with saliva as her head filled with deliciously wicked thoughts. There was just something she had to do.

She pushed him up against the shower wall, the cold tiles sending a bolt down his spine. Felicity knew he could have easily stood anchored to the floor and she would have had no hope of moving him, but he didn’t, in fact the way his eyes raised at the corners and his tongue flittered across his lower lip, it looked distinctively like Oliver was enjoying her burst of assertiveness.

Her fingers weaved down his body, exploring and enjoying the wet ravines and peaks of his chest before her nails skimmed through his thatch of dark hair that fanned out into the base of his cock.

The water was beating around them, missing all but their lower legs now as Felicity wordlessly dropped to her knees. Oliver’s eyes widened as they followed her. Faded red lipstick accentuated her swollen lips as they curved into a smile before she leaned a little closer and kissed a delicate kiss to the eye of his cock.

Oliver found one of his hands grappling into the smooth tiled wall behind him, unable to find anything to grip until it stumbled onto the empty soap dish that jutted out from the wall and hadn’t been used in all his time living there.

Felicity smiled as she looked up his chest to catch the anticipation in his eyes. And honestly, it was right to be there.

Her mouth opened and she took just the tip inside her incitingly warm, wet mouth, guiding him with her tongue as it twisted over the head, tasting the salty notes of Oliver’s skin as she hummed softly to herself.

Oliver gripped the soap tray tighter while his other hand floated above her unsure as to where it should go even though it ached to touch her.

Felicity took him in a little deeper, slowly feeding his cock between her sinfully-soft lips while her tongue swirled around, stirred by the subtle differences in the texture of his skin. The nail of her index finger grazed up the underside of his cock, following the thumping vein she found there.

Oliver’s head tipped back against the wall and his eyes studied the ceiling for only a moment before he snapped it back down, desperate to see her perfect mouth wrapped around his pulsing member.

Felicity sucked her cheeks inward as his tip skimmed the roof of her mouth, guided underneath by her tongue. She watched as his knuckles turned white and expressive moans fell successively from his lips. Her hands pumped his shaft towards the base while her head bobbed up and down him.
Oliver’s hand, unable to be held back a moment longer, combed through her wet hair, cupping her head in his palm as he moaned in unadulterated pleasure.

She quickened her movements, adding a slight chin lift when she reached the tip, pressing the same to the roof of her mouth in a move that had the back of Oliver’s knees on fire and his eyes blown deliriously wide.

His fingers gripped into her hair, winding around the sodden strands and grabbing fistfuls as she worked him over, planting stars in his vision and stealing air from his lungs.

“Fuck,” Oliver grunted as tendrils of pleasure spread out across his body.  
His core twisted, pulling his bellybutton towards his spine.  
His heart rate soared, his veins pumping excessive amounts of blood to only one part of his body.

His entire weight rested on that tiny little soap dish as he fought back his release. The hand twisted in her hair managed to trickle down her cheek and raise her head just enough so his eyes could search hers.

He was close, painfully close and he needed her to pull away or give him the green light, because Oliver wasn’t sure how much longer he could stay in control of his appendage.

“Felicity,” he rasped, hot threads of air mixing with the water that had since become tepid though neither of them had notice.  
She keep on sucking him inward and blowing him back while her hand pumped the few inches left towards his base.

“Felicity,” he repeated with some urgency.  
She responded by cupping her hand around his swollen balls and gently massaging them before she winked, deliberately slowly, at him.  
And he was done.  
Gone.  
Over the edge – *fucked*.

Her mouth filled with salty strings of his release as she continued to ease him through it and her hands played tricks on his senses – sudden, hasty bursts of interval pumping at his base and slow weaving fingers massaging his undercarriage.

His body slumped and the dish took his full weight for only a few moments longer before it fell from the wall and crashed onto the shower floor, bouncing just the once before it came to rest near Oliver’s foot.

“Shhh-iiiit,” he cursed, rolling the word out like a sigh of syllables.  
Felicity dropped his softening cock and smiled as the long, thick shaft bobbed like a head nodding fervently between his legs.

Oliver Queen was *built*.

---

[The Next Morning]

The rain continued throughout the night and into the early hours of the morning, not long after Oliver and Felicity had succumb to their exhaustion and fallen asleep, naked, entangled and *thoroughly* satisfied.
It was Oliver slipping from between the simple white sheets that roused Felicity enough to open two sleepy eyes and stare at him across the bed.

“Where are you going?” she yawned as she held the skewed cotton sheet tight across her chest. It didn’t seem to matter that after the shower they had fun on the chair in the corner of Oliver’s room, followed by fun twice in the bed, Felicity still found herself shielding her body from the realities of waking up beside her fun-buddy.

“I’m going to get something for breakfast,” Oliver smiled as he threaded his legs into a pair of black jeans that had faded to a charcoal grey.

“You’re bringing me food?” Felicity asked, her brow pinched with surprise.

“I’m man,” Oliver grunted, “I hunt food.” Felicity smiled as she sat up in the bed, the sheet still stapled across her chest and her hair a wild mess of blonde across her shoulders.

“Not bagels,” she quipped.

“Why?”

Oliver slipped a simple tee over his head and wrestled the hem down his chest.

“Because,” Felicity simpered, “you have nothing to apologise for.”

Oliver leaned across the bed with his fists embedded in the mattress and pecked a chaste kiss on the tip of her forehead.

“I’ll be back in about fifteen minutes,” he spoke as he pulled back from the tender moment.

Felicity could tell there was another question scribbled in his pacific-blue eyes.

“I’ll be here,” she answered.

Oliver stood up, satisfied with her reply and shrugged on his leather jacket. As his thick fingers skimmed instinctively down the open zipper Felicity found herself admiring them once more, those thick, long digits – the same ones that she had playfully threaded between her pouted lips, sucking into her warm mouth, when they dared to get to close.

It had caught him by surprise and her even more so, but there was something to be said for it when a wicked smile grew across his face and the temperature between the sheets soared even hotter.

When Felicity’s eyes continued up his body and met with his own, she could tell Oliver knew exactly what she was thinking around. He shuffled the jacket on his broad shoulders and dragged his thumb in a heavy stroke across her swollen, kiss-ravaged, lower lip.

“After breakfast,” he whispered, so quietly she wondered if she was even meant to hear it, “I’m going to have desert.”

His eyes wandered down her body as a smile grew over his face. Despite the sheet that covered her, Oliver knew exactly what lay underneath.

“If that’s alright with you princess?”

Felicity held back a smile and despite her instinct to blush away from his soul-searching gaze, she kept her eyes on his and simply raised one eyebrow, just a fraction.

Oliver chuckled silently as he headed towards the door, walking backwards to savour every second he could looking at her ravaged features.

Fuck she drove him wild.

It had been twelve minutes since Felicity heard the front door close when she finally decided to
slip out of the comfortable embrace of Oliver’s bed. She found her discarded, borrowed, clothes
hung over the arm of the chair in the corner of his room, although she wasn’t sure how they had
found their way there.

She had only managed to put on the top when there was a jarring knock on the door. Assuming it
was Oliver, sans keys, she trotted into the hallway and down towards the front door.

Another knock made her lips purse.
*There was no need for him to get impatient.*

She saw her panties on the living room floor and took a detour to collect them, hoping some sort of
overly sensual trick to play on him would come to her in the short distance it took to get to the
doors.

With the red panties hanging from her index finger and a devious smile across her devoured lips,
Felicity swung open the door without giving much thought to the possibility of it being someone
*other* than Oliver on the other side.

But it was someone else.
Instead of seeing the mischievous smile of Oliver, Felicity was presented with the dark scowl of
the same girl from Soul Club all those weeks ago – the night this *fun* started.

“Who the fuck are you?” Laurel scathed as she blinked at the red panties dangling from Felicity’s
black polished nail.
Felicity settled her hand, and the panties, into her hip and stood taller against the door.
“Who’s asking?” she replied.
Felicity had no reason or desire to ‘play nice’.
“Where is Oliver?” Laurel demanded as she tried to look past Felicity into the house.
“Out,” Felicity shrugged as she leaned against the doorframe, closing the door in tight against her
body.

Jax appeared moments later alongside Felicity’s leg, growling with his teeth fully bared. His front
legs were low and his heckles up – all symptomatic of fighting mode. He lunged forward biting at
thin air, but making his feelings abundantly clear.

“Fucking mutt,” Laurel shrieked as she stumbled back a step.
Her reaction just made him growl louder.
“Jax, heal,” Felicity instructed calmly and Jax immediately complied, sitting back on his hind legs
with his tongue flopping happily out of his mouth.

Laurel’s surprise and disdain were clearly visible across her worn and hard-edged face.
“Oliver’s not here right now, he’s gone to get breakfast,” Felicity yawned purposefully as she
ruffled a hand through her distinctively tousled bed hair, “can I take a message?”
“Tell him Laurel stopped by.”
The purse on her lips made Felicity smile.
“I’ll let him know Lauren,” Felicity smiled – she knew her mistake and it was probably the most
inanely childish thing she had ever done, but *goddamnit* if it didn’t feel great.
“Laurel,” she spat bitterly, “maybe you should write it down.”

“No need,” Oliver said as he appeared, somewhat surprisingly, from the path around the corner.
“Oliver,” Laurel started before he brushed past her with a bag of groceries tucked under his arm.

He didn’t stop until he reached the door and planted a lingered kiss against Felicity’s cheek.
Felicity bit back a smile as she imagined columns of thick black smoke coming from Laurel’s ears.
“I need to talk to you,” Laurel continued through gritted teeth. Oliver stepped inside the house and offered her a pleasant enough smile. “Nothing that can’t wait I’m sure,” he answered before he gently tugged Felicity inside and closed the door.

*End of discussion.*

“Power is back on,” Oliver remarked, switching the nearby lights on and off to prove his point, “if you want to take a shower before breakfast.” He was going to blatantly ignore whatever that just was and Felicity wasn’t all that sure how to feel about that. She *wanted* to ask him about Laurel, but *fun* didn’t extend to needing to know about girls that show up on his doorstep.

*They weren’t exclusive.*

She was, because well, there weren’t any other options and frankly the idea of being with two men overlapping never took her fancy – *ever.*

The logistics of the whole thing seemed like a veritable nightmare, and that was even without the moral ambiguity of it, the gross jealous-possessiveness that undoubtedly came with it and realistically the competition that would follow – *would she find herself in bed with one man only to be thinking the other did that particular aspect better?*

No, Felicity was definitely a one-man at a time kind of girl, regardless of the circumstances or agreed terms.

But the point to her mind-rambling was simple – They never had that talk. Because *fun* doesn’t have serious talks about exclusivity and girls called Laurel on the front doorstep.

*After all, that’s what condoms were for.*

Felicity cringed at herself. Regardless of how okay she was trying to be with the concept that Oliver might be seeing another woman – *other women* – she really wasn’t.

But *fun* didn’t ask those questions.

“Sure, I’ll be back out in a few minutes,” she shrugged, repressing everything else. Oliver caught her wrist as she started to walk away and swung her into an embrace before crashing his lips onto hers.

The kiss felt raw, almost painful, before his tongue glided lazily across her lower lip, delicately soothing where the rough kisses from the night before had marred.

“I bought you a toothbrush,” Oliver ghosted the unexpected words against her pillowed lips as his hand fossicked in the bag before reappearing with a simple medium-bristled toothbrush in basic white.

“Is my breath that bad?” Felicity laughed as she plucked the toiletry from his hand. “No,” Oliver declared, offended, before he kissed her a second time to prove his point. “I just thought you might want to…” he paused, considering his words. “This is the first time I’ve been on a date and been given a toothbrush to take home,” Felicity laughed, her eyes flouncing with each soft chuckle. “Or you could leave it here.”

Felicity swallowed the connotation his sentence held. *Fun* didn’t leave toothbrushes. His face looked almost as concerned by his quip as she did.
“I’m going to go to the shower,” Felicity said abruptly. She didn’t wait for a response before she turned on her heels and headed towards Oliver’s bathroom.

“Uh, I’ll go,” Oliver started, his words stunted as he also turned but headed the opposite direction, towards the kitchen.

Oliver deposited the paper bag onto the counter and let out a frustrated sigh that started from the deep recesses of his chest and howled through gritted teeth.

He had no valid explanation why he had said that, why he had allowed those words to just float from his mouth as casually as they just had.

They were just having fun. *Fun* didn’t suggest leaving toothbrushes.

With a finger running in along his creased brow Oliver let out another sigh, one that nestled in the back of his throat and his mouth never opened for. He didn’t even know why he had even bought the toothbrush in the first place. He had walked past the small toiletry section in the superette and just plucked in from the shelf.

It was $3.59 and he hadn’t even considered the implications until the moment when he handed it to her and she looked at it like it was an engagement ring.

They had both made their feelings clear last night. Whatever this was, it was just a bit of fun. They had both agreed – and then he went and bought a *fucking toothbrush*.

But maybe he could still salvage this.

---

“So what’s for breakfast?” Felicity asked as she appeared in the entrance of the kitchen twenty minutes later, shaking a towel through her washed hair.

Felicity had decided, while brushing her teeth with the *toothbrush of doom* that she wasn’t going to bring it up. It was just a slip, not a Freudian slip though, because fun didn’t do that. It wasn’t meant to be anything other than a toothbrush and the logical conclusion that she had one at home and therefore didn’t need to take that one – ergo, she could leave it there.

When she shut off the water she had nodded resolutely to herself in the fogged up mirror. *That’s all it was.*

“Pancakes,” Oliver replied as he flipped the last one in the skillet for a few moments before turning it out onto a plate of almost a dozen near-identical ones, “and fruit, coffee, eggs,” he continued as he pointed to the different dishes.

He walked the eggs and the pancakes to the small table nestled in the corner of the room and bathed in mid morning sunlight – a mocking and complete 180 from the weather last night.

“Wow that’s a lot of food,” she quipped as she tied a knot at the side of Oliver’s oversized tee, tightening it enough around her slender frame that she didn’t feel quite like a child drowning in clothes anymore.

“I have a big appetite,” Oliver hummed as he brushed past her on his way back into the kitchen.

Felicity got the distinct impression from the glint in his eyes and the raised-tipped smile that he wasn’t referred to food and she could absolutely attest to that voracious appetite for other things.
But, Felicity wasn’t sure her body could take anymore. The warm water passing between her legs in the shower had alerted her to just how absolutely wrecked she was.

Oliver stopped in front of a chopping board and settled a knife into his firm grip before he cut slow strokes downward through a fresh pineapple. The knife glided through the yellow flesh like butter and the silence in the room was replace with taps on the wooden board as each slice was made.

“I’m sorry about the toothbrush thing,” he finally spoke as he carefully folded the knife alongside the sliced fruit, “I didn’t mean it to be a thing.”
“It’s fine,” Felicity answered.
It was just a slip.
“Because we agreed on fun,” Oliver left the end hanging like a question as his brow raised a fraction.
“It’s what we both want.”
“I just thought it made sense to keep it here,” Oliver reasoned.
Felicity nodded with a settled smile.
“Fun can make sensible decisions.”
“It wasn’t a thing?” Oliver asked cautiously.
“Nope,” she peeped as she leaned against the counter, daringly close to Oliver, “not a thing.”

He closed the inches-wide gap between them and kissed the underside of her jaw, his bristles skimming against her sensitive skin and making her sigh.
“Good,” he hummed, his breath fanning over where his kiss had once been.

Felicity tugged down the black bandeau mini skirt that Oliver had procured from Thea and left on the bed for her as she felt the thrum between her legs ignite. It was a feeling she was becoming used to in Oliver’s presence, one that had been dulled or almost non-existent before.

She swallowed down her arousal, wondering if it was written across her face.
“Mmm pineapple,” she hummed, her voice tipped with a seductive tone she hadn’t meant to add, but it made Oliver growl beside her, “my absolute favourite.”
She picked up a piece and slid it between her pouted, naked lips. Her eyelashes fanned across her cheeks as her lids drew out a long blink.

A salacious, throaty hum bled from her lips as tiny drops of juice dribbled down her chin. She raised a finger to brush it away, but with lightning reflexes Oliver caught her wrist and scooped up the tantalising teardrop of juice from her chin with the tip of his tongue.

Their faces were so close that Felicity felt the growl that Oliver let out as he savoured the taste of the sweet drop of pineapple.
Fuck.
Every part of her body felt like it was on fire. From the tip of her lips to the pad of her toes, flames of desire engulfed her. She wanted his lips on hers, madly, furiously, brutally…

She chased his lips with her own but stopped a hair’s breadth away from kissing him. Their breaths were shared and their eyes were placing bets on who would snap first.

“Who’s Laurel?” Felicity asked in a rasped undertone.
She didn’t know why she asked or how she had let that question slip.
Fun didn’t ask questions.

Oliver blinked away, severing the contact as he took a step backwards, their breaths no longer mingled.
“An old friend,” Oliver replied sullenly.
Felicity didn’t buy it, what she had witnessed wasn’t the back and forth of old friends. It was frosty, bitter, angry.

“If you don’t want to tell me, just say so,” Felicity asserted, “but don’t lie to me.”

*Fun doesn’t need to lie.*

*Fun still deserves honesty.*

Oliver’s face was twisted and his brow was clearly working through her admonition. It took a few moments before he smoothed his palms down his jeans, swallowed a heavy lump that had settled in the back of his throat and locked eyes with Felicity.

“What do you want to know?” he asked calmly.

Felicity mimicked the swallow with lips that quivered in a fleeting purse.

“Is she your girlfriend?”

“No,” he answered her directly without blinking.

“Are you sleeping with her?” she asked, preparing herself to hear the word yes, “it’s fine if you are, but I should know,” she annexed.

“I’m not anymore.”

“But you were?”

She felt like an investigative journalist and she could see Oliver’s brow growing heavy.

“A long time ago.”

“Who ended it?”

It was a heat of the moment question, one that in cool-considered light Felicity didn’t think _fun_ had any right to ask. But it was out there now.

“The State when it put me into Iron Heights.”

Felicity watched Oliver’s face tightened as her eyes popped open in surprise. She didn’t know why she was surprised, it wasn’t a giant leap to imagine Oliver might have served time. It was naive to think otherwise.

“We both ended it,” he prefaced his earlier comment.

“We have the same indirect circles. She’s nothing you need to worry about,” he finished as he wiped his sticky hands on a nearby dishtowel.

“I wasn’t worried,” Felicity clarified as she crossed her arms protectively across her chest.

*Fun didn’t get worried.*

“I just should know if you’re with other woman,” she continued as Oliver leaned in and reached around her to collect two plates from behind her.

“I’m not,” he answered as he walked the plates across the room to the table.

“Because you can be,” Felicity spoke as she followed a few steps behind, “this isn’t exclusive.”

“I’m not,” he reiterated as he separated the plates and put them either side of the table.

Felicity stopped at the side of the kitchen island and pressed her palms into the smooth wooden top as her body butted up against the edge. She could act casual.

“But if you were that would be okay,” she shrugged, _casual._

Oliver walked the path straight towards her, stopping so close that the stiff fabric of his jeans brushed against the side of her knees

“I’m not,” he answered a third time, his eyes dark storms of blue.

“Okay,” she breathed.

“Are you with other men Felicity?” Oliver asked tempestuously with his hands hovering above her shoulders, anxious to touch.

He didn’t mean it to sound so jealous, but Oliver wasn’t good at masking his feelings and if the next word from those sensuous full lips, still swollen from the hours spent he enjoying them, was
yes, he wasn’t sure what he would do with that knowledge.

“No,” she whispered, brushing the word against his lips as she perched on her tiptoes. \textit{Thank fuck.}

“It’s fine if you want to, but I should know,” he spoke intently as his arms threaded through hers and his hands gripped the lip of the island.

He was repeating her sentiment but honestly Oliver couldn’t think of anything less okay.

It wasn’t okay, he wanted her to himself. To be the only one to please her…

His fingers were turning white and his jaw was aching as he clenched it tighter. \textit{He didn’t want to share her.}

“I’m not and I won’t,” Felicity kept her eyes attuned to his and Oliver didn’t see a thread of uncertainly inside them.

“If you change your mind?”

“I’ll be sure to let you know,” she paused, her lips trembling to kiss him but they didn’t, not just yet, “and if you decide…”

Oliver’s grip softened on the counter as he slid his hands closer together and his thumbs brushed across a slither of skin where her top had lifted.

“You’ll be the first to know,” he replied, his words like warm caramel oozing down her throat.

\textit{Fun} had to pretend to be just fine with it.

The storm in Oliver’s eyes didn’t settle with her words but the darkness was replaced with a glint of something else.

His hands locked around her waist, pausing for a moment to gauge her reaction. She flashed him a delicious smile and Oliver snapped it up almost immediately with his lips.

He lifted her moments after and dropped her gently onto the smooth-varnished top. Her thighs slid open and her hands shifted behind to prop her body up.

Their tongues duelled as her hands swept up his chest, taking his top with them. Oliver raised his arms and Felicity tore the tee from his body before she threw it blindly behind her and her mouth fell greedily back onto his.

Oliver gripped her legs at the knees before sliding his warm hands up her legs, his thumbs drawing delicious waves along the inside. Her skirt was around her waist when his thumbs reached the junction of her thighs and slipped underneath her panties and between her crease.

She gasped into his mouth as he slipped a deliciously thick thumb inside her. He pulled his lips back from her, eager to see the desperation fill her eyes as her lips chased his. He smiled before she snapped his lower lip between her teeth, tugging him back.

He pulled away a second time as he thrust his thumb deeper inside her warm confines and massaged her inner walls while he watched her eyes spark with carnality.

Her heels dug into the dimples at his back and slammed his body against the edge of the counter. She sat up, with his thumb still embedded inside her, and delved her hand into his pants before wrapping it tightly around the base of his cock.

She was making her wants \textit{abundantly} clear.

Oliver withdrew his thumb and watched as her body slumped back onto her palms. He put his thumb up to his lips and, just as he had done the night before, he slowly licked her arousal off it.
“Do you have any idea how good you taste?” Oliver spoke, his voice like gravel and his eyes a piercing blue.

Felicity cupped his neck with one hand and crashed their lips together in a kiss that only lasted a few seconds before she ended it just as impetuously as she had started it. Her eyes set aglow with her own wicked thoughts as Felicity licked a steady line across Oliver’s glistened lip.

“Fuck,” Oliver grunted, his cock now straining against the seam of his pants. Felicity watched him pant out three laden breaths as she took his hand and slid her tongue up its length, from base to tip, without blinking.

“Now I know,” she hummed before she patted her lips together.

His mouth gaped like a cartoon character and Felicity found herself giggling for just a second at the sight before she hooked up an eyebrow and reached a hand into her bra.

Oliver watched with devoted eyes as Felicity purposely lingered her hand against her breast. She teased her nipple with a pinch before her hand slipped out with something trapped between her fingers.

She waved the small foil packet in front of Oliver’s face before she blinked down to his jeans.

“Fun came prepared,” she whispered as she nestled her ass into the counter.

It took Oliver barely a minute to have his pants around his thighs and his engorged cock sheathed in latex.

Felicity wet her lips as she wrapped her lithe fingers around his solid manhood and began to stroke it. She only made two when Oliver stilled her hand.

“I ain’t gonna need you to do that princess,” he smirked as he wrestled her fingers from his shaft.

She fed herself closer to the edge of the island with a devious smile threaded across her lips.

“Show me,” she teased.

Oliver grabbed her waist and tipped her hips, her weight dropping onto her palms behind her. His thumb hooked her panties to the side before he drove his tip into the mouth of her arousal, sighing as her clenched walls caressed every inch of him.

His lips nestled into the warm crook of her neck, kissing the threads of her throat as he inched himself deeper, crawling inside her so his ears could savour each husky gasp she made. Her skin was tempered, warming to his touch, and dusted in a fine film of sweat when his hilt finally bumped against her sex.

Her hips tipped forward to skim his groin against her desperate clit. He kissed a trail up to her ear, his tongue dancing with her lobe before he lightly nipped it.

He eased his cock back, breathing in the languid moans that trickled from her parted lips. He held his head barely inside her as he continued to dampen her neck in kisses.

Felicity moaned softly, her body missing the fullness of his rod. She snapped her bottom lip between her teeth before she freed it with her tongue. Oliver drunk in the simple, sensuous display as his thumbs burrowed into the creases of her hips.

She rocked against him just as Oliver propelled himself forward, burying his shaft inside her before retreating just as suddenly. Felicity palms skidded atop the smooth wood as her body sought him out but his hands restricted her movements.
Short seconds passed before he sunk back into her as she lifted her ass to swallow him deeper and her legs constricted tighter around his torso.

His body shadowed hers while he massaged fingers into the naked rounds of her ass. His shaft grazed erotically against the thin lace panties his thumb kept hooked to the side.

He charged forward again and again, quickening his pace and causing Felicity to arch her back as tantalizing cries seeped from behind pouted lips.

In, out, in, out, he hammered not taking a pause even as Felicity threw her body forward, collapsing against his. Her teeth suck into his shoulder spurring him to tunnel deeper and faster.

She called to him, dripping wet keens of delirious pleasure.
Her words, yes, yes, fuck yes, echoed through him as he ploughed towards expulsion.

Felicity could feel her chest tightening as her body teetered on the precipice. Her whole sex ached with a cacophony of pleasure and pain. She had never felt so utterly destroyed, yet so desperate for more.

Her kisses devoured his naked shoulder as her nails tore up the muscles of his back. She felt his thighs tense under her feet as his breath became ragged and short.

He pushed still deeper, still faster and she took it all, every thrust and every retreat.

Cusses spilled from her lips, a litany of words she had never strung so successively together before. Her head was a mess with chants of yes and harder. A few escaping from her lips and causing Oliver to growl into her sweltering neck.

Her release came moments later in a torrent of warm juices that soaked Oliver's trembling cock. Even through the condom he felt it and the warm embrace sent him toppling over the cliff right behind her.

“Was that fun?” she whispered, almost breathless as they rode slowly through their parallel orgasms.

“Fuck yes,” he panted into her neck, “that was the most fun I’ve ever had.”

---

It was well after lunch when Laurel walked into Lost Souls with her handbag slung over her shoulders and a purpose in her stride.

“Is he in there?” she asked the thick idiot that was lingering near the Members Only corridor.

“He’s busy,” came the huffed reply that Laurel rolled her eyes at.

“He’ll see me,” she snipped as she pushed past the mass of muscles.

He could have stopped her without trying, but he didn’t. He simply shrugged before going back to his lazy game of pool with a man who was his body equal.

Malcolm was staring at the list of fallen brothers on the wall when Laurel came bounding into the meeting room. He spun around immediately, his eyes full of fury at the interruption.

“What do you want?” he demanded as he took five hasty steps forward, his face like thunder and his fist clenched, “you shouldn’t be in here.”

Laurel stumbled back against the wall and for a moment she regretted her foolhardy actions.
“I heard you were after some information,” she choked as she felt a cold shiver down her back, half expecting Malcolm to strike her – it wouldn’t have been the first time.

But he didn’t. He stopped an inch from her, his breath smelt like bourbon and stale smoke. “Heard you were asking about Oliver’s new girl,” she continued, forcing her eyes up to meet with his.

Some of the black flames had been extinguished, replaced with threads of intrigue. “How did you know that?” he asked, sucking in a breath that made his voice sound akin to a serpent.

“I have my ears to the ground,” Laurel smiled hesitantly, “for you.”

Malcolm walked a jagged path to the meeting table, the centre of which was carved with the club’s emblem. “What do you know?” he asked as he traced a solitary finger along the edge of the table. “You’re right. He’s got a new girl.”

Laurel dipped her hand into her bag and pulled out a rolled up copy of *Starling People*. She placed the glossy magazine that was the society pages of the newspaper and smoothed down the curled edges.

“That’s her,” Laurel announced, digging her chipped purple nail into the photogenic face staring up at her, “Miss Felicity Smoak, one of Starling’s elite.”

Malcolm picked up the magazine and silently scoured the page. He could see the attraction as his eyes rolled over the curves of her body hidden beneath the molten-gold dress.

“Oh she is more than just that,” he smiled as his eyes walked over the comment below her image, *Felicity Smoak, young CEO of fledgling tech company*. “Are you sure this is her?” he asked, turning his attention back to Laurel who had regained her air of confidence.

“I saw it with my own eyes this morning,” she quipped, “I asked around. That’s definitely her.” “Interesting,” he cooed like a man with deviant thoughts.

“Did I do good?”

His hand gripped her ass and squeezed so tightly that she whimpered in pain. His lips pounced on hers to steal the end of her whimper. He kissed her roughly and bit her lip as he pulled away. “Keep those ears of yours to the ground and I’ll be sure to thank you,” he gritted as he loosened his grip on her ass and patted it.

“Sure thing,” she agreed, nodding as she backed away slowly with her eyes lowered.

“And Laurel,” Malcolm growled, his voice forcing her to look up, “keep this to yourself.”

She nodded again, “my lips are sealed.”

Laurel didn’t breathe properly again until she had left the room and fallen against the corridor wall. She wasn’t sure what she had just done.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact, the kitchen scene originally ended at "Fun comes prepared" but after hearing (I haven't had a chance to watch so NO SPOILERS, lol) that Olicity smut was interrupted so much this episode, I went back and added a little something-something....
Dedicated to canon Oliver's blue balls (and our desperate need for 9pm slot goodness)

PS: do you like my manip? yuuuuum.
Fun.
That was what they called it and it had definitely being just that. The last month had been *fun*.

Felicity smiled as she shifted slightly in her seat feeling the shallow soreness between her thighs that had become almost second nature over the last month.

She was so far adrift in her own thoughts that she didn’t even notice Curtis saunter into her office.

“Thinking about your rough around the edges boyfriend?” was the moment she realised she wasn’t alone in her office any more.

Felicity looked up at the intruder with large, startled eyes before she lowered them slowly and blew out an amused laugh.

“I don’t have a boyfriend,” she replied matter-of-factly.

“Well, then who is giving you those hickeys,” Curtis smirked as his brow twitched upwards twice and his finger pointed rather directly at her neck.

Felicity shook her head as she tried to wrestle her hair nonchalantly over her shoulder to cover the tales of another night of *fun*.

“We’re not like that?” she spoke, trying her best to keep her expression straight despite the
temperature spiking across her cheeks.
“Haven’t you been seeing each other for like almost two months?”
She watched as Curtis propped his weight from one foot to the other while his impressively tall stature looking down on her sat at her desk made her feel like she was being reprimanded by the school principal.
“Oh, I mean,” she toyed with the ends of her hair, “it’s not serious.”
“And you’re both okay with that?” there was a distinctive hesitancy to believe the answer he predicted he was going to get.

“Sure, we’re like friends with benefits only without the friends part,” Felicity shrugged as she plucked a pen from her desk for no other reason than she needed to occupy her hands so they would stop playing with her hair.

“Not that he’s not my friend, he’s just not…” she paused to try and make sense of her own rambling, “he’s more like an acquaintance.”

“An acquaintances with benefits?” his brow was still raised with disbelief.

Felicity wasn’t going to dig her hole any deeper.

“Did you want something Curtis?” she asked, tapping the acquisitioned pen along the edge of her desk.

“You have that meeting with Kord this afternoon.”
She nodded, “I’m aware.”
He had already reminded her three times that morning and his assumption she would forget was so baseless it was becoming frustrating.

“And your acquaintance’s sister is in the lobby,” he added.

Felicity wasn’t going to dig her hole any deeper.

“He wasn’t expecting that.”

“What?” she quipped as the pen fell from her fingers onto the floor.

“That sassy little firecracker that likes leather and heavy metal tee shirts,” he prattled, “about this tall…” his hand was hovering just below his shoulder.

“I know who you mean Curtis,” Felicity huffed a breath that blew back wisps of hair, “I mean what is she doing here?”

“Oh I don’t know,” he answered as he shook his head synonymously, “but she is downstairs. Do you want me to have her sent her up?”

Felicity stood, collected her bag from the back of the chair and selected a pair of shoes from the line-up behind her, automatically straightening them as she spoke, “no, I’ll go down.”

“The meeting with Kord is in one hour.”
She knew how to tell the time.

“Wait, what?” Curtis called out after her, “what about need to know?”

The elevator doors opened.

“Felicity replied before disappearing from sight.

“Thea?” Felicity said as she skidded to a halt beside the same security desk she had met Oliver all those months ago.
Thea brushed back the hair that had fallen over one side of her face while she touched the arm of
her sunglasses.
“Is everything okay?” Felicity asked while they stepped away from the desk.

“Yeah, its fine, I just…” Thea looked around the foyer nervously, “can we go somewhere and talk? I feel like all these fuckers are staring at me.” Felicity watched as Thea dug her nails into her forearm while it hugged across her stomach. There was definitely something different in her stance.

“Yes, have you eaten?” Felicity asked as her eyes travelled subconsciously down to her watch. One hour.
“Maybe somewhere a little quieter?” Felicity’s finger pinged in the air as an idea hit her.

Ten minutes later the two of them were sitting in a small meeting room with coffee and untouched muffins from the coffee cart in the foyer beside them.

“Is everything alright, is Oliver…?” Felicity caught herself before she finished the sentence.

“You and my brother,” Thea smiled before she took a sip of her latte, “it’s cute.” Felicity smiled, unsure what else to do or say.

“It’s nice to see him happy. He hasn’t been happy for a long time,” Thea lamented as she tapped the top of the to-go cup.
Felicity wanted to ask why, but she shouldn’t.

“I was hoping maybe I could crash at your place tonight,” Thea asked abruptly, “for a couple of nights.”

“You and my brother,” Thea smiled before she took a sip of her latte, “it’s cute.” Felicity was taken aback by the request.

“How can I help?” Felicity offered quietly and calmly.

Thea peeled the sunglasses from her face and kept her eyes lowered while Felicity saw exactly what the large dark frames had been hiding – a very prominent and recent black eye.

“Who did that?” Felicity gaped, afraid of the next words that tumbled from her mouth, “did Oli…” she couldn’t say it.

“No, no, god no,” Thea insisted, “my brother would never hurt me, or anyone he loves. It wasn’t him.”

“You have a boyfriend?” Felicity continued, Oliver had spoken about a friend of Thea’s through gritted teeth but she had not yet met him.

“Roy? No, he’s a big teddy bear, kind of dumb, but…” she paused to let out a breath as her finger touched the corner of her darkened eye, “it doesn’t matter who did it. I spoke out of turn and it happens,” she shrugged.

No Felicity wanted to yell, it doesn’t just happen. This isn’t okay. She wanted to lecture Thea until the words stuck, but Felicity knew now wasn’t the time for that. Now was the time to listen.

“How can I help?” Felicity offered quietly and calmly.

Thea didn’t seem like someone who trusted people easily, but she had come to Felicity, probably as a last resort.

“I just need somewhere to crash for a few days until I can cover this with make-up. I was going to go to a motel, but I…” Felicity got the sense that Thea wanted some company and, while she would probably never admit
it, she was also maybe a little scared.

“No, I have room, you can stay with me. But what will you tell Oliver?” Felicity offered without hesitation.
“I’ll think of something,” Thea shrugged
“Come on, I’ll take you home now.”
“I can just kick around for a couple of hours. I don’t want to be any trouble.”
“It’s no problem,” Felicity smiled kindly as she stood, “come on.”

She happened down at her watched again, forty minutes.

The taxi ride took a speedy and almost unheard of fifteen minutes which certainly lowered Felicity’s blood pressure at least a little as she unlocked the door to her townhouse.

“This is a nice place,” Thea remarked as she looked around the house much more lavish than the one she went home to everyday.
“Thank you,” Felicity replied as she tried to ignore the buzzing in her pocket.
It was only the sixth message Curtis had sent since he saw them leaving the building.
“Do you need to take that?” Thea asked, nodding down to Felicity’s vibrating coat.
“No, it’s fine.”
She shook off the lie with a smile.
Thirty minutes.

“I asked Oliver once about your place,” Thea spoke as she walked sluggishly around the foyer peering into the spaces.
“Oh, you did?”
Felicity was trying not to sound curious as to Oliver’s response, but she absolutely was.
“He said it was clean.”

Felicity wore her bewilderment quite expressively on her face before she wiped it away with a soft hair tousle and started towards the stairs.
She stopped just ahead of the first one, “is that good?”
Thea shrugged one shoulder.
“I think so.”

Clean – Felicity had no idea what to make of that, but she supposed it could have been worse.
“I’ll show you to your room,” she swallowed down the clean comment and walked up the stairs.
“I’m okay to crash on the couch,” Thea replied as she nodded towards the living room.
“Thea, I have a spare room, you don’t need to sleep on my couch.”
Thea’s lips sparked into a smile, one that made Felicity realise just how young Thea actually was. She was seventeen.

When Felicity was seventeen she was a freshman at MIT, just starting to discover the world. Thea had already seen so much.

They walked the stairs in silence. Although there was a lot Felicity wanted to say, she kept it to herself, at least for now.
“So whose room is this?” Thea asked as they stepped into the predominately grey room with perfectly placed yellow accents.
“Oh no ones,” Felicity answered as she headed towards one of the two doors in the room.
“But there are things in here…”
Thea spoke as she walked around the room, touching the draped yellow-knit blanket on a corner
armchair before she moved to the dressing table that had a perfectly placed brush and mirror set and a silver photo frame with a smiling couple Felicity had never noticed before.

Truth be told she never came into this room and she had never had any guests stay over, at least the kind that required their own room.
“I don’t know this is just how it was designed,” Felicity chuckled as she opened the door to the attached bathroom.
“Designed?”
Thea looked like Felicity was talking a foreign language.
“The interior designer did all this,” Felicity remarked as her eyes walked around the room she barely knew.
“You didn’t do it yourself?”
“Uh nope.”
Felicity had never given it much thought until now, but the only visitor this room had was the cleaning lady.

“So you have your own bathroom and there should be some toiletries in there,” Felicity changed the subject as she gestured towards the onsuite, “I think there are some leftovers in the fridge and just help yourself to whatever you want. There is a list on the fridge of places that will deliver and you can just tell them to put it on my tab?”

“You order in that much you have a tab?”
Thea chuckled and Felicity simply shrugged, she’d never really thought about that either.

Donna had never cooked and when Noah came back into their lives he came with a chef. Felicity had never even tried to cook.

Her eyes wandered down to her watch again as her phone once more sparked to life.
Fifteen minutes.
“You need to go?” Thea asked intuitively.
“I’m sorry,” Felicity apologised, “I have this meeting that is kind of important. I’ll just be a few hours.”
She felt bad about leaving Thea but cancelling this meeting would be tantamount to career suicide.

“It’s cool,” Thea answered honestly, “I admire that. How you work and shit, that’s pretty cool.”
“You work,” Felicity cajoled, “at the coffee shop.”
“No, I got fired.”
Thea spoke with practiced apathy.
“Oh?”
“Yeah, the owner was a real tool. He tried to grab my boobs so I broke his nose.”
Again, she spoke like she had just told Felicity what she had for breakfast that morning.

“Oh, um,” Felicity startled, “did you talk to the police?”
“What for?”
“Well he shouldn’t touch you.”
“No one’s going to believe me.”
The look in Thea’s eyes wasn’t sad, but hardened, like she actually believed it.
“Oliver would have,” Felicity remarked, having just one person believe was the start.
“Sure,” Thea agreed, “and then he would have broken the guy’s nose so I just saved a step.”

Felicity drew her mouth closed.
Thea was only seventeen.
She didn’t know what to say.
Ten minutes.
Felicity toyed with the idea of staying, of talking to the young girl who seemed to think men touching her and getting a black eye was just an average day, but right now all it would feel like was a rushed lecture.

Tonight, they could relax and talk tonight.
“I’ll be home at about six and I’ll bring dinner,” Felicity promised as the two reached the front door.
“Cool, thanks,” Thea smiled genuinely.

Felicity opened the door and paused on the doorstep.
“Call Oliver,” she pleaded.
“I will,” Thea assured.

The drive back took twenty three minutes leaving Felicity in deficit to the tune of thirteen minutes.
“You’re late,” Curtis cringed as he met her outside the glass-walled meeting room on the twenty-third floor.
“I know Curtis,” Felicity grinned, fully aware the Kord executives could see the interaction, “staying out here isn’t turning back time though is it?”

Her smile stayed in tack as she waved through the glass to a frowning row of men.
“Right okay,” Curtis stammered as he followed on her heels into the room.
“Apologies for my delay gentlemen,” Felicity said calmly – she would offer them nothing more. She had learned long ago the more apologies you offer in the business world, the more rope you give them to hang you with.

She sat down and skated the black executive chair under the tinted glass table, which was lined with an array of untouched bagels that had her lips turning up at the edges into a smile.

“We sent the preliminary information you sent us away to our client, they were happy. There are a few things they want tightened, but all and all…” Felicity stopped them with a single digit in the air.
“First I want to know what they’re moving,” she said politely, but directly.

The three men of varying ages – but all older than her – looked back and forth at each other. “That’s not for you to know,” the older man with the dusted white hair dictated.
Felicity stood up and collected her tablet from the table top, “thank you for your time.”

Curtis, who had only just sat down, started to stand.
“You’re leaving ?” the younger of the three executives asked, gobsmacked.
“If you aren’t willing to tell me what it is we are moving and securing then I’m not willing to stake my company, my reputation and my father’s name on it. Thank you for your time.”
Felicity strategically manoeuvred the ‘cards’ to her side of the table – in a bluff move she hoped they didn’t call in.

There was another set of discussions between eyes until the older spoke up, “your secretary needs to leave.”
“Uh, I’m an EA,” Curtis interjected.
“Curtis stays.”
Don’t call her bluff.
Her eyes stayed steeled.
“I’m afraid we can’t…”

“Then we both leave,” she cut him off as she turned towards the door. Curtis lingered a moment longer, unsure exactly what he was doing. Sure his boss was smart – incredibly smart – and tenacious and really good at her job, but he had never, ever, seen her play a room full of people like this. She was ruthless.

“Fine, but it doesn’t leave this room.”

Felicity, with her back to the table, let out a small breath she had been holding. “Understood,” she answered simply and she walked back towards the table. She took her time to settle back into the chair before she wrapped a smile across her lips, silently ushering them to proceed.

“Our client is a private security firm, they have some experimental weapons,” the one who had previously remained silent spoke. It was the same one she had spoken to on the phone, and Felicity recognised something the moment the two others sat back into their chairs – they knew nothing, but this one, the middle, the one Curtis scribbled on his tablet the name Bryan for – he knew something.

“Experimental?” Felicity parroted back. “Patent pending if you will. They need them transferred through the city, they will of course handle the hands on security themselves, but they need some technical expertise and that’s where we come in,” Bryan chuffed. Far too proud of himself, Felicity thought, for a man who couldn’t keep his own network secure. “You mean us,” Curtis jested before Felicity shot him a look that begged him not to make her regret fighting to keep him in this room.

“They want what we spoke about, self-driven transport that can’t be hacked, fail safes…” Bryan begun. “You mean self-destructs?” Felicity interrupted as she leaned forward in her chair. She was borrowing some of the intimacy Oliver projected. That moment where he would stare across the table at her and her alone and she would feel the heat of his gaze to the point where it felt verging on scolding and she would literally tell him anything he asked.

Granted, she wasn’t trying to sleep with Bryan, but when he – a man older and one who probably considered himself more important than her – blinked away, Felicity knew she had him. Thank you Oliver’s stare.

“Semantics,” Bryan shrugged.

“It’s not semantics if I am designing a weapon to self-destruct because undoubtedly there will be fallout,” Felicity spoke through tight lips.

“How is this even legal?” she added, refusing to divert her eyes from Bryan even when he shifted uncomfortably underneath it. “This has the full support of both local and governmental authority. Our client is contracted to produce these weapons with the defence force.” “Then perhaps they should consider having the army move it.”

Bryan sat up in his chair, the idea of the money no longer lining his pocket was enough to pull him from the slump. “Not an option. As you can appreciate Miss Smoak having the National Guard show up on Starling’s doorstep will only seek to draw attention.”


“If the self-destructs are required,” she paused, the word required felt so removed from the truth, “if it’s detonated, what are we looking at?”

“If you’ve done your job and built an un-hackable system we won’t have to worry about that.” Felicity saw her worry mirrored in his own eyes.

He didn’t know the answer.

“When is this all happening?”

“We won’t know until closer to the time, but we will need a progress report next month.”

Felicity nodded, the folded arms of the men across the table signalled she had gotten all the information they were going to give – or even that they possessed to give her.

“Thank you for your time,” Bryan said as he stood, the other two following suit seconds later, “we’ll be in touch.”

A brief round of handshakes and they were gone, leaving Felicity and Curtis alone in their own – but almost identical – thoughts.

“We’re not actually considering going through with this right?” Curtis asked, breaking the silence.

“Curtis those weapons will be transported with or without our help,” Felicity remarked as she gathered her things from the table, “did you see how easily Kord Industries was hacked?”

“You could do it while Oliver was giving you a hickey,” Curtis jested, almost high fiving himself over his topical quip.

“Unnecessary illustration,” Felicity fired back with a pinched brow and a slow but steady head shake, “but probably,” she added, changing her disposition to a smile before it straightened again.

“If we leave it in their hands and someone finds out…”

Curtis nodded, she didn’t need to spell out what would happen.

“Experimental weapons in the streets of Starling doesn’t sound good,” Curtis breathed, imagining the fallout.

“We’re the best chance they have at getting them from A to B as safely and quietly as possible.”

“What do we tell the team?”

“Nothing, the less people know about this the better. Keep on Cisco about the Kevlar lining, if we can line the inside of the transport vehicles…”

“…and double that with a system that will cloud any outside hacks…”

They were finishing each other’s sentences.

“On it,” Curtis declared as he strode towards the door.

“And Curtis?”

He turned, “Yes?”

“This doesn’t get out,” Felicity warned.

It didn’t take much of an imagination to think of what could happen if it did.

“Not a word boss.”

Felicity balanced the Chinese take-out between her other bags as she navigated through her front door, relieved to hear the sound of the TV playing – *Thea hadn’t left.*

She kicked the door closed and listened for the automated lock before she trundled into the living room to find Thea, dressed in PJs with her hair bundled on top of her head, sitting cross legged on the couch.

She looked so young and carefree, until the shadows in the room moved and Felicity saw the
darkening bruise around her eye, the reality of which made her wince.

“Welcome home,” Thea smiled as she tipped her head just enough to see Felicity hovering in the doorway. If it wasn’t for the reasons she was here – Felicity would have considered it nice to come home to the company of someone.

“I hope you don’t mind,” Thea added as she tugged on the plain navy PJs that swamped her willowy frame, “I found these in my bathroom.”

“On no,” Felicity brushed off the concern Thea offered, “that’s fine those are guest pyjamas.”

“You have guest pyjamas?” Thea laughed while Felicity kicked off her shoes and sighed at the immediate relief her feet got from the soft, thick piled carpet.

“Doesn’t everyone?” Felicity joked as she deposited her bag and laptop on a nearby armchair before sliding her hose-covered feet towards the coffee table that was littered with snacks.

“You shop delivers,” Thea blushed as Felicity brushed the empty packets to the side, “I’ll pay you back.”

“No need,” Felicity smiled as her eyes looked over the mountain of candy wrappers, she was glad Thea had reverted to a youthful state – even if it was only in her choice of confectionary. “I hope you still have room for dinner,” Felicity cheered as she laid out the way too much food on the coffee table.

“Absolutely,” Thea nodded while she rubbed her hands gleefully together.

Felicity walked into the kitchen to retrieve some plates when Thea called out after her.

“Does Oliver have PJs here?”

Felicity almost choked on the question as she stared into the plate cupboard like it held the answer. Oliver is never clothed the cupboard unhelpfully returned.

“Uh, he doesn’t normally stay,” Felicity answered diplomatically as she strolled back into the living room.

Thea combed a finger across her scalp before Felicity handed her a plate and fork.

“I don’t know why he would want to return to our shit hole when he could stay at this nice place.”

“I think your brother prefers his own space,” Fun has its own space.

Thea shrugged, she still couldn’t understand Oliver’s preference.

With their plates piled with food, Felicity nestled herself into the other end of the couch and tucked her feet up under her butt before smoothing down her pencil skirt.

“So what are we watching?” she asked casually.

“Real Housewives,” Thea replied, holding a hand across her mouth as she ate and spoke. Felicity followed a piece of chicken around her plate with the chopsticks she was determined to master.

“Is this a documentary?” she asked as she scowled at the chunk of chicken.

“It’s a reality show.”

Felicity could hear the soft laughter in Thea’s voice and when Felicity looked up Thea was sporting a very amused expression.

“I don’t watch much TV,” Felicity admitted as she finally caught the chicken between the two wooden poles.

“Oliver said you work really hard.”

There was his name again.

“He did?” she shrugged, like the idea of what else Oliver might say about her wasn’t eating her up
from the inside – which it absolutely was.
“Yeah,” Thea mumbled.

There was a lull in the conversation as Felicity contemplated the results of asking what she wanted to verses saying nothing… but it was the former that won out.
“Does he, uh, talk about me a lot?” she asked, hating the way she sounded like she was in eighth grade.
“A little,” Thea smiled as she laid her fork on the lip of her plate, “don’t worry he hasn’t told me any of your sex kinks or anything.”
Felicity gulped.

“I think he just does it because he thinks you’d be a good influence for me or something,” Thea continued before picking up her fork and returning to demolishing her plate of food.
“Ooooh,” Felicity sighed, the word coming out sounding like a sick owl or the stunted howl of a dog, either way it wasn’t the best sounding noise.
“I mean you seem to have your life together and shit,” Thea commented while her eyes tracked between Felicity and the blonde woman yelling on the TV screen.

“And shit?” Felicity laughed.
“Sure, and shit. There is probably a lot I could learn from you. Him too,” she spoke resolutely, “but I reckon there is also a lot you could learn from us.”
The last sentence surprised Felicity.
“Like?”
“I know we don’t look like much, me and Oliver, but we’re a family,” Thea chatted as she looked around the room, “where’s yours?”
Thea’s eyes had turned from jovial to almond shapes of concern.
“There are no photos around here,” she said softly.

Felicity’s eyes followed the same path across the room that Thea’s had taken moments before. She had never really thought about but Thea was right. The walls were full of paintings crafted by famous painters, but Felicity hadn’t chosen a single one of them.

In fact the more she looked around the living room the more Felicity realised this could be anyone’s house. The owner, her, was interchangeable.

“I hope I didn’t say anything dumb. Oliver says I have a big mouth,” Thea offered with an apologetic smile.
“Your honesty is refreshing,” Felicity assured her.
Thea laughed boisterously, “that is the first time someone has used that word to describe me.”

“Did you call Oliver?” Felicity asked before she started on her eggroll.
“I told him I had gone to Cali to see a friend,” Thea replied, her shoulders dropping a little, like the lie held some weight there.
“You don’t think you should tell him the truth?”
Thea placed her plate on the table before turning her body towards Felicity.
“Have you ever seen my brother angry?” she asked pointedly.
“No, not really,” Felicity responded, there had been that altercation outside the bar months ago when the guy commented on the tightness of her lady parts, but Felicity didn’t consider Oliver that angry.

She watched as Thea toyed with a broken thumb nail and breathed out a heavy sigh.
“We were driving around a little over a year and a bit back. I was sixteen and I had begged him for months to let me ride alone,” she paused to offer a reminiscing smile, “I was riding a bike in front
of him, his front tire to my back when this guy in a Jeep ran through a stop sign.”

Felicity swallowed the impending words.
“I should have been able to stop really, but I guess I froze. In less time than it takes to blink, Oliver overtook me and dove his bike to shunt mine out of the way. I was in his full leathers so I barely got a scratch,” she paused to brush back a few tears that had sprung from her eyes, “but Ollie…” Felicity heard the tremble in her voice and instinctively she put her hand onto Thea’s ankle for reassurance.

“He was hurt pretty bad. Then the fucking driver gets out of his car and starts going off at him for hitting his car. While Oliver was pulling himself up off the ground, with blood just seeping through his clothes, the guy comes up to me and starts cussing me out and raising his fists.”

Thea stopped to collect her thoughts, the day still vivid in her mind.
“I thought he was going to punch me, but the next thing I know Ollie is on top of the guy just wailing on him,” she stopped, her face deadpan serious, “he could have killed him. The guy turned out to be the son of some City official and Ollie got arrested for assault…”

Thea shook her head, deciding to leave the story at that and Felicity didn’t push.
“My point is, I know what my brother will do for the people he loves,” she added before she turned back around, severing the brief contact they shared.

“You’re afraid of what he’ll do to whoever did that?” Felicity asked as she nodded at the black eye.
“I know what Ollie will do.”
“And you don’t want the other person hurt?”
Thea turned her head, her eyes a sharp, focused blue.
“It’s not them I’m worried about. If Ollie goes for him bad shit will happen. Me and him, we have to look out for each other.”
“Who did it Thea?”
She shook her head determinatively.
“It’s better you don’t know.”

Felicity heard the familiar sound of her phone buzzing in her jacket pocket. She slipped it out and saw Oliver’s name pop up on the display.
“I’m just going to take this upstairs,” Felicity explained to which Thea simply shrugged.

“Hey,” Felicity spoke quietly as she answered the phone at the bottom of the stairs.
“Hi, I’m sorry, I know you said you were working tonight,” Oliver’s smooth, velvety voice spoke down the phone.
“It’s okay,” Felicity remarked as she reached the pinnacle of the stairs and ducked into her office, “I’m out of the meeting earlier.”
“Okay good,” Oliver sighed, he seemed relieved.
“Everything okay?”
“I don’t know,” Felicity could hear him sighing down the phone, “this is stupid,” he argued with himself.
“What is it?”
“You know how you found out where I was when you dropped those tickets off and we…?”
“Uhhh,” Felicity grimaced, “hypothetically let’s say I know what you’re talking about.”
“Could you do that for Thea?”
Shit.
“Uh why?” Felicity tried her best to ask indifferently.

“I know that it probably violates a bunch of trust things,” Oliver rambled, “but she told me she was
“And you don’t believe her?”
“No.”
There wasn’t any doubt in his answer.

“Roy hasn’t seen her since last night and I haven’t see her since this morning,” he continued.
“Maybe she’s just getting some space?” Felicity offered, thankful that Oliver couldn’t see the tiny beads of sweat that were starting to form across her forehead.
“My sister can be a little shit, but she would have come by the shop and said goodbye to us, only she didn’t. I’m worried about her and I thought you could help.”
Felicity bit her lip and squeezed her eyes closed. He sounded really, really worried.

“If that’s alright,” he added, his voice cracking.

“Shit”

“She’s safe Oliver,” Felicity sighed in one continuous breath.
“You found her already?”
“Sort of…” Felicity cringed.
“I don’t understand.”
“She’s here.”
Her eyes rolled up to the ceiling and her throat felt immediately dry.
“What?” he startled.
“She’s staying with me.”
“I don’t understand,” his voice had lowered to a soft, confused mumbled and Felicity imagined his eyes starting to glaze over with a thin film of tears.
“Oliver she asked me not to tell you, but she’s safe.”

Felicity didn’t know what else to offer him.

“Why is she with you?”
His voice had stiffened somewhat.
“Oliver please,” she pleaded, not wanting to disappoint either Queen sibling.

“Why?”
“She has a black eye,” Felicity admitted, “she was afraid of what you might do if you…”
The next thing Felicity knew she was talking to the disconnected call tone.

“Shit.”

It took twenty minutes of Felicity anxiously biting her nails before there was a knock on the door.
Thea barely moved as Felicity, now dressed in a much more comfortable pair of pyjama pants and singlet, leapt to her feet.

“That’ll be for me,” she sung out as she tried not to sprint to the door, “of course it would be, I live here,” she continued, her babbling raising Thea’s interest.

“Okay,” Felicity wobbled her hands in front of her, “just stay there and eat.”
Thea looked at her with a mix of amusement and bafflement, but after a moment she shrugged and turned her attention back to the TV.

Felicity hung off the sliding door between the living room and foyer.
“I’m just going to close this, boring work stuff probably,” she hummed as she dragged the door
Thea didn’t move an inch.

Felicity opened the door and when she was greeted with Oliver’s face she clamped a hand over his mouth and pushed him outside.

“Where is she?” he grunted when Felicity peeled her hand away.

“Keep your voice down,” Felicity warned as she quietly closed the door.

“Where is she?”

“Oliver just hear me out.”

Felicity watched his jaw clench, but she standing between him and the door so short of picking her up and physically moving her, he wasn't getting inside.

“First, she is safe,” Felicity spoke as she laid a comforting hand on his shoulder.

His face softened at the contact.

“Second she came to me because she wants to trust me, if you barrel in there you will achieve nothing,” she continued, squeezing his shoulder gently.

His eyes were a tempest of pain and she understood it, but...

“She doesn’t need her big burly brother, she needs a friend and maybe that could be me,” she offered calmly, her eyes seeking out his.

“You know I didn’t...” Oliver started, acutely aware his exterior pushed people towards certain assumptions.

“Oliver, I know it wasn’t you, and she swears it wasn’t Roy either.”

“He might be an idiot,” Oliver remarked, “but he cares about her.”

“Why wouldn’t she tell me?” he questioned as he racked his hands down his face.

“She’s afraid of what you might do,” Felicity answered softly before her hand slipped from his shoulder to his chest where he grasped it, he looked tormented, “I understand her concern.”

“We’re all we got you know, we’re alone. I need to protect her.”

“Oliver,” Felicity leaned up and feathered a kiss against his rough jaw, “you’re not alone.”

She pulled back to see his smile.

“I just mean, you have friends,” she annexed, “you both do.”

Felicity was worried she had said too much as Oliver stood, silent, in front of her. She retracted her hand from his chest as she thought of ways to negate her words in case they pushed him away.

But before she could Oliver had returned her gentle kiss with one of his own on the cusp of her forehead. Warm, lingered, filled with much more than just fun, and she didn’t mind at all.

“She’s safe Oliver,” she soothed, “she has you, Roy, her father...”

Oliver’s face changed the instant the last word left Felicity's lips. Felicity recognised a man about to create havoc, he knew who it was.

“Oliver, don’t make her concerns a prophecy,” Felicity warned, “I know you love your sister, but you need to not get yourself arrested.”

He backed away slow towards the steps.

“Thank you for keeping her safe.”

Those were the last words he said before he disappeared into the shadows, at least until Felicity heard his bike start and tear away from the curb.

“Oliver don’t do anything stupid,” she sighed into the wind.
“You hitting teenage girls now Malcolm?” Oliver yelled after he burst through the meeting room door.
Surprised faces shot up as an instant hush fell over the handful of people sat there.
“Welcome back Oliver,” Malcolm smiled as he leaned back in his chair, folding his hands behind his head.
“She’s your fucking daughter and you did that,” Oliver raged, the vein in his temple thumping through his skin as he stomped through the room.

“Everybody get the fuck out,” Malcolm hissed and within seconds the room was emptied.
Oliver’s chest was puffed, his eyes as black as night and his jaw clenched like titanium.

“She had a smart mouth, just like you used to,” Malcolm spat as Oliver stood barely an inch from his face.
“I will fucking kill you,” he gritted.
Malcolm smiled as he reached into a drawer nearby and pulled out a magazine, throwing it onto the carved club table where Oliver could see.

“Starling has some real pretty ladies around don’t it?” Malcolm grinned menacingly.
Oliver blinked down and saw Felicity’s face immediately, her photo circled in red marker.
“Especially this one,” Malcolm hummed as his finger tapped the page, “she is all kinds of pretty.”
Oliver pushed the magazine violently from the table before he slammed his fist down in its place.
“If you’re making a threat Malcolm, make one,” he hissed, his neck thin cards of stretched angry.
“No threats Oliver,” Malcolm laughed as he backed away with his hands surrendering, “no threats at all.”

“Next time my sister’s smart mouth bothers you and you need to put your fists on something, you fucking come and see me and we’ll make a night out of it,” Oliver growled as he pounded his fist into the table a second time.

He collected the magazine, the message, from the floor and balled it up in his hands.
“Good to see you Oliver,” Malcolm smirked as Oliver turned his back and left.
His fists were itching to meet with Malcolm’s face, but the magazine had made its point – they knew who Felicity was.

And almost what she meant.
It was after midnight when Felicity heard the light tap on the front door as she sat with her feet curled up under her body in the dimly light living room. She rubbed her knuckles into her eyes and blinked at the laptop monitor perched in front of her, thinking for a moment the knock might have been a hallucination brought on by the fact she probably should have gone to be an hour ago.

And then she heard again, just a fraction louder than the first knock. She rolled her shoulders as she dragged her tired body from the comfortable seat and slowly padded towards the door. For once, even in her I should be in bed state, Felicity remembered the front door camera.

She let out a silent yawn as she leaned in to study the grainy image that presented her. One more dragged fist through her eye and she recognised Oliver’s face. She wasn’t surprised.

Felicity instinctively walked her eyes up the stairs to make sure Thea hadn’t emerged from the bedroom before she unlocked and opened the door as quietly as she could.
“Is she still here?” Oliver asked, his voice so light and whispered that without seeing him Felicity would have never guessed him capable of such a tone.

“She’s asleep upstairs,” Felicity replied with one arm hanging from the door and the other wrapped around her svelte waist.

“Can I come in?” Oliver requested as he raised his shoulders before burying his fists deeper into his pockets, “I promise not to make any trouble.” Felicity couldn’t help but smile at the expression across his face, in the moment both in name and demeanour he reminded her of the little orphan Oliver.

She stepped back and opened the door before her eyes once again checked for movement near the first floor balcony. Oliver stepped inside on the balls of his feet, aware that his riding shoes weren’t exactly made for sneaking, before he shut the door behind him.

Felicity walked into the living room and beckoned him to follow before closing them inside just in case their voices travelled up the stairs. While it was always Felicity’s adamant belief that Thea should be open with Oliver, discovering him there after midnight wasn’t the way it ought to be done – regardless of the fact that Oliver already knew she was there.

Felicity had no intention of ambushing a 17 year old.

“I’m surprised you’re still awake,” he remarked as he treading around the furniture.

“I had a feeling you might come back,” she commented as she stood back and watched him repeat his path – coffee table to couch, couch to entertainment unit, back to coffee table.

“Is there likely to be police officers knocking on my door soon?” she spoke up again when he had done at least half a dozen of his self-made laps.

He pulled his hand from his pocket, the knuckles wrapped in a white rag, and dragged it across his troubled brow, “No.”

“So do you want to explain that?” Felicity nodded towards his hand, tempering her voice so there was no judgment (at least for now) and only concern.

Oliver looked down at his hand like he wasn’t even sure who it belonged to, but the memory was his. After leaving Malcolm he had punched a rather sizeable hole in the corridor wall then spent the next few hours driving aimless out of the City along the coast highway until he ran out of State to drive.

“Was is someone’s face?” Felicity asked pointedly, although he still didn’t hear any judgment in her tone.

“No, a wall,” he replied as the calloused thumb of his other hand scuffed across the faded white rag.

Felicity closed the gap between them and gently teetered his hand on her small palm while she unwrapped his knuckles, “let me see it.” Oliver didn’t stop her but he did cringe when the makeshift bandage came free and his hand was a mess of plasterboard, dry blood and a seeping of fresh blood too.

“The wall must have really bothered you,” Felicity said as she sucked in a breath at the sight. His hands had always been somewhat dishevelled from years of using them, but the battered sight of it now surprised her, stealing her breath for just a moment.

She offered him a soothing smile before she led him into the kitchen area and settled him on a barstool at the breakfast bar. As gently as she could, and probably more mollifying than Oliver required, she laid his palm on the granite top and pottered around the island to the cupboard above
Oliver watched her with a silent smile as she lifted her body onto her tippy toes and stretched to reach a first aid kit tucked into the small overhead cupboard, a feat which he would have accomplished by barely stretching his arm.

“You know who did it don’t you?” Felicity asked as she carried the kit back to where she left him – and where he had stayed exactly as placed.

“Yes,” Oliver huffed, trying his best to swallow down the aggravation he felt.

“But you’re not going to tell me are you?” Felicity sighed as she unzipped the kit and stared down at its contents while she struggled to think back to the first aid class she had taken in high school.

A shake of his head, no.

“It’s better you don’t know,” he added.

Felicity took the rubbing alcohol and tipped it onto a cotton pad, “funny your sister said the same thing.”

She pressed the wet pad gently onto his grazed skin to clean the wounds.

“Oww fuck,” he gritted his teeth.

“Did that hurt?” she asked as she gently brushed a second pad across the same wounds.

“Yes.”

Oliver was aware he probably sounded like a scolded child.

“Good.”

“I didn’t pick you for a sadist Felicity,” he mumbled as he watched her repeat the same step, although this time the pain was a little less sharp.

She offered him nothing more than a one-shoulder shrug paired with a half winged smile.

“Did you at least scare the guy into leaving her alone?” she sighed as she threw the spent pad in the trash.

Oliver sighed with a heart as heavy as iron.

“I wish it was that simple.”

“He must really have a hold on the two of you,” she noted, as she dapped some cream across the knuckles that bore the most damage.

Oliver could offer her no response as his eyes dropped to the floor.

“It’s her father isn’t it?”

He should have said no the instant the question left her mouth because the less Felicity knew the better, but he couldn’t stand to lie to her and in the end his silence confirmed her belief.

“That’s why you can’t leave?” she asked while she started to bandage his hand, moving hers under and around his.

“He won’t let her go,” he sighed pensively.

“Oliver,” she sighed, her eyes entrenched in his, “what does he want from you?”

It was a loaded question, one Oliver wasn’t even sure of the answer to, but the only thing he could offer were two simple words, “a pawn.”

“You aren’t this life Oliver,” Felicity added reflectively, sensing the desperation in his words.

He wished she was right, but Oliver knew better.

He held a blink long enough to gather his thoughts while Felicity tied the end of the bandage and tucked away the tail.

There was another reason he was here.

“Felicity,” his eyes rose to hers, but looking at the hopefulness in her eyes made his own despair too heavy so he couldn’t hold the stare, “thank you for looking after Thea and what we’ve had it
was nice and *fun*…”

Felicity knew what he was doing and she found herself swallowing back the sad realisation of where this conversation was marked to head.

“Don’t,” she whispered, laying her palms open on the cold granite, “don’t end this because you’re trying to protect me from something, from someone.”

Oliver’s lips pursed and his brow furrowed, *she read him like a neon billboard.* But he had to do this, he had no other choice, Felicity didn’t deserve to be sucked into this vortex.

“I expect this to end at some stage Oliver,” she spoke calmly as she watched the anguish leak from his expression, “so if it’s run its course and *you* want to walk away that’s okay,” she paused to steady her breath and consider her words.

“I won’t fight with you to keep this alive if it’s done. But don’t do this because you think you’re keeping me safe or because you’re trying to keep my hands from getting messy. I’m not afraid of a little mess,” she spoke softly as her fingers brushed down his wrists.

Oliver blew out a smile, *he didn’t doubt her.*

“If you want to end this because fun has run its course then I’m a big girl, you can just say so. We both knew what we were starting,” she stopped, waiting for his reply.

“It hasn’t run its course,” Oliver admitted, “but…”

“There doesn’t have to be a but,” she interrupted before Oliver took her hands and pressed them between his own.

“The world that I’m part of, it’s dangerous.”

“Are you?” she asked directly, “are you dangerous?”

“Once.”

Her hands slipped from between his and came to rest against his bristled cheek.

“I’m not afraid of *once,*” her thumb stroked across his apple, “you don’t have to protect me,” she leaned in with a tiny spark of a smile on her lips, “I’m stronger than I look.”

He simply nodded, *he also didn’t doubt that.*

“I should go,” Oliver lamented as he stood, sighing as her hand slipped away from his face.

“Where?” she enquired.

Oliver chuckled as her nose crinkled while she waited for his answer, “home, I promise.”

She walked around the island and placed a blushed kiss at the tip of his lips.

“Get some rest and think about what I said Oliver. If this is finished…”

His lips swooped in to kiss her as his unbandaged hand sunk into the small of her back. Seconds later his lips pulled back leaving hers parted and her breath panted.

“It’s not finished Felicity,” he spoke, his voice a gravelled rasp of need.

Felicity’s eyes drew to the ceiling before falling back to his.

They both knew their *needs* would have to wait tonight.

She pressed her chest into his and walked her palm up his large arm, licking her lips as she felt his muscles twitch under her feather-light touch.

“I’m glad,” she smiled before she chewed for just a moment on her lower lip, her body enjoying the warmth of his, “I wasn’t ready for it to be over either.”

It was Oliver’s turn to glance skyward before a very shaky sigh blew out from between his hungry lips.

*Not tonight.*
The idea was a cruel taunt, but they both knew it was for the best.

He kissed her again, slow and lingered, enjoying the caress of her pillowed lips and the sweet mewls than dripped into his mouth. His hands stroked up her back before combing through her hair as he took the time to remember every inch of her and every second she keened into him, because tonight he would need those memories.

Felicity woke up the next morning to the sound of her alarm bleating like a civil defence siren near her head. A slew of curse words, a power shower and twenty minutes later found her navigating down the stairs as she blindly, but expertly, applied a rather pink lipstick and tussled her hand through her hair in some hope it would help it dry quicker.

*She really should consider waking up earlier...*

She shook the thought from her head as she decided she had enough time to throw some coffee into a travel mug and scrawl Thea a note before her driver arrived.

Felicity swerved into the kitchen only to find the latter thing completely unnecessary, Thea was already wake, dressed, and, despite her distressed jeans and raw edged cropped Alice Cooper cropped tee, she looked far more put together than Felicity felt.

“I made coffee,” Thea said with a semblance of pride as a most glorious smell wafted across Felicity's nostrils.

“Ahuh,” she sighed as her path diverted straight towards the glorious black gold, “thank you.” It took half the coffee pot to fill the travel mug emblazoned with her company logo (a name registering present from Curtis, and the only of its kind as far as she was aware).

Thea kicked her feet across the kitchen floor, idly touching objects as she tried to formulate her next words. If she was being honest Thea had very little idea how to interact with people in this sort of setting, the kind where they didn't want something from you and it wasn’t filled with sub-context and thinly veiled insults.

Oliver had been the only exception, until now.

“Is there anything you need doing around here, I could clean or...” she started, watched as Felicity guzzled the coffee she had just made.

“Oh I have a lady that comes in to do that, she’s quite particular so I wouldn’t get in her way,” Felicity replied as she topped up her coffee again.

“Your cleaning lady is particular?” Thea giggled.

“Mmm,” Felicity nodded quite seriously, “one time I moved the plates into a different cupboard, the next day I came home to them put back and post it notes on each cupboard saying what went where. I suppose that’s a little weird right?” Felicity finished as a laugh broke her serious expression.

“A little.”

“Well feel free to just roam, but if a somewhat grumpy southern woman with a hairnet lets herself in, that will be Tildy.” They laughed in chorus.

“Do you need any help in your office or anything?” Thea asked as her laugh dampened down. Felicity was surprised and her face showed it, “you want to come to work with me?”

Thea’s slim shoulders shrugged haplessly.

“Better than staying here all day,” she remarked, while her words were somewhat non-committal,
there was something about her body language that suggested she would appreciate the chance, “but only if you could use my help,” she added.

Felicity tucked some hair behind her ear and casually brushed the arm of her glasses while she briefly considered Thea’s proposal.
“I bet Curtis would love an extra set of hands,” she smiled, imaging how giddy her assistant would be at the idea of his own assistant for a day.
The smile on Thea’s face said it all.

“Is what I’m wearing okay?” she asked, drawing a critical eye down her attire as it compared to Felicity’s.
Felicity took a more engaging look at Alice Cooper and smiled.
“You look just fine,” she declared.

What was the advantage in being the CEO if your casual fling’s sister can’t come to your work rocking an outfit that reminded you of a simpler – more freeing – time in your own life?

It had only taken Curtis approximately ten minutes to find a slew of jobs for Thea to complete under his watchful eye (of course). Thea, despite her portrayal of a rebel-don’t-care teenager, seemed to enjoy Curtis’ pragmatic approach to his filing systems.

When Felicity returned from a coffee jaunt for morning break, Curtis was shadowing the younger Queen with the look of a father teaching a child to ride a bike.

“First A and then B…” he was offering.
“I know how the alphabet works,” Thea chuckled with a brief roll of her eyes that told Felicity this wasn’t the first time in her absence that Curtis had spoken similarly.

Felicity rattled the brown paper bag in her hand as she balanced the take-out drink holder on the edge of Curtis’ desk.
“I come bearing coffee and muffins,” she interrupted, thankfully by the smile Thea gave her.

“Trim mocha with a shot of caramel,” she started, pulling the first cup from the holder.
Thea plucked it from Felicity’s hands with an appreciative smile.
“Frappa with double shot of hazelnut,” Felicity continued, handing the same to Curtis who thanked her with a smile and a bob of his head.

Felicity didn’t see the need to announce her coffee order, but if anyone was interested it was an extra-strong (she needed it), extra-hot (it would probably sit on her desk longer than it ought), dark roasted (the darker the better) flat white (straight to the point) with a pocket full of sweetener (just because).

It was her drink of choice when she was likely going to commit to doing something that might verge on the mildly illegal and highly unethical.

Felicity was going to look up everything she could on Malcolm Merlyn.

“Everything okay out here?” Felicity asked as she rubbed her fingers across her ear lobe, a tell Curtis immediately questioned with a furrowed brow.
“Nope, we’re all good, Curtis is teaching me the alphabet,” Thea teased, gently jabbing her elbow into Curtis’ arm, who chuckled in good spirit, but kept his eyes fixed to Felicity.
Felicity tugged her hand away from her ear and imagined stapling it to her leg as she tried to keep her give-aways in check. “Let me know if anything uh, needs me,” she added before she turned, a flash of blonde hair waving, and walked quickly into her office. “Are you working on the Kord….uh the thing?” Curtis called out after her. “Yes,” she waved her hand over her shoulder without turning to expose the I’m lying face she was probably sporting, “the thing.”

She closed her office door with her foot and didn’t dare turn around and look up until she was firmly concealed behind her computer screen.

Two hours later and Felicity tapped her nails against the glass desk before she ran a finger across her tired brow. Her coffee was left almost untouched and she had found next to nothing. Malcolm, the infamous President of a gang that was one of the few plaguing the City, had not been arrested for about 8 years, questioned but never charged. Not even so much as a parking ticket. So either he had kept his nose decidedly clean (doubtful) or he had kept someone’s pockets decidedly full (far more believable).

He was known to law enforcement locally and further afield, but nothing stuck. Witnesses clammed up, evidence went missing or incompetence saw everything slip off him like he was made of Teflon.

Felicity had found nothing and now, looking at the photograph on her monitor, she was experiencing a huge bout of hacker’s remorse. Because staring back at her was a ten-ish year old Oliver with a crewcut and unmistakable blue eyes sandwiched in between a ruggedly handsome man with salt and pepper hair and a pretty woman with a smile that didn’t seem to reach her eyes as she balanced a small baby on her hip.

The Queens.
Oliver’s family.
The one she felt intimately acquainted with even though she had not been invited.

Thea was tiny, not quite a new born but she had definitely not yet seen a birthday. Oliver looked happy – it was a strange happy, perhaps it was merely because he was young, innocent, child-like, but there was something in his smile, something that looked like relief.

It wasn’t just that he was smiling – it was almost like he was finally allowed to smile.

His father’s expression gave less away. He was smiling behind a trimmed beard, and it seemed genuine, but he wore the same furrowed brow that she had come to know in Oliver – almost identical to the one he wore last night in the kitchen. It was the brow of a man who had seen more than a smile could supress.

His mother was undeniably attractive with honey coloured hair that was perfectly quaffed to the style in fashion at the time. Her clothes were demure – motherly, but not matronly – her makeup was perfectly applied – honestly, it felt like Felicity was looking at a woman not unlike herself.

While it was only a picture and perhaps Felicity was projecting far too much onto a single moment, Moira Queen looked well-educated, smart, savvy and strong. All attributes Felicity hoped someone would see in her.
And yet…
There was a certain kind of sadness in her face. She was smiling, a kind smile that saw her leaning towards her son with unspoken amounts of affection. The stunning shade of red lipstick she wore brightened her smile and made it focal in the photograph, but that smile didn’t stretch beyond her lips and if you covered her mouth and saw only her eyes you would have never guessed that she was smiling.

They were the eyes of a woman that had seen so much. Too much.

Felicity let her head fall into her palms as her elbows stayed anchored to her desk. She was looking at a memory Oliver had never invited her into and she felt guilty for it.

He had never explained how Thea was his half-sister and Felicity had never really given it much more than a passing thought. In her mind she imagined his parents had been turbulent, perhaps separated at the time, but this wasn’t the imagery of a broken family.

Did Robert Queen know the little girl in that picture wasn’t his biological daughter? Did Moira know and that was the reason for her smile-less eyes?
These were questions Felicity had no right to ask, but she asked them to herself all the same.

It was Curtis knocking on her office door that made her head pop up from her hands and with lightning reflexes close the photograph that had been staring back at her so hauntingly.

“Everything okay?” she asked as she brushed back loose strands of hair. Curtis closed the door before he walked deeper into the room. “She’s adorable,” he started with a smile bursting across his face, “can we keep her?”

Felicity chuckled. “She’s not a puppy Curtis.” Curtis shrugged like he understood the validity of her comment but it didn’t change his request any before he took a few more steps forward so only the width of Felicity’s desk separated them. “I didn’t want to ask her,” he started, looking back through the glass to Thea who was engrossed in whatever task it was he had her doing, “but the…” he paused to circle his eye and Felicity knew immediately what he was trying to get at.

“Keep to that,” Felicity encouraged, “don’t ask.”

Curtis nodded understandingly. “I don’t need to be worried about you?” he enquired, watching her with his precision eyes. “No, you don’t,” her reply was genuine and it was all Curtis needed to hear. “Good.”

[Later that Night]

“Any thoughts on dinner?” Felicity asked as the two stepped into her townhouse. Felicity had called it a day around 5pm, even though the shortening days made it appear much later than that.

Thea toed off her shoes and stretched her neck as she ferried them to the wall. Felicity was surprised she had lasted all day with Curtis but she had shown remarkable stamina and by the end
of the day Curtis was just as smitten – if not more – with her.

“I was actually wondering if we could invite Oliver around,” she spoke quietly, unassured – so wildly different to the no fuck’s given Thea that Felicity had come to know, “I don’t want you to have to lie to him and maybe if you’re here he won’t go crazy.”

Felicity was almost certain she was hearing inflection where there wasn’t any, but there was something about the way Thea had said the word lie, it was almost like just saying it left such a bitter taste in her mouth.

But for now thinking on that could wait, Thea wanted to tell Oliver the truth and by all accounts that was the most important take away from this.

The door closed behind them and Felicity’s mouth turned up into a smile. “I think that’s a good idea.” Felicity assured, a comment which seemed to alleviate some of the concern in Thea’s face.

The two, now barefoot, padded into the living room and sighed almost identically, letting the day wash over them. Felicity plucked the phone from its holder and held it out to Thea.

“Do you want to make the call or would you like me to?” She could see the pensiveness on Thea’s face and Felicity wondered for a moment if she should just make the call, but before she could offer it, Thea held open her palm and nodded. “I should do it.”

Felicity placed the phone into Thea’s expectant hand and offered her a sympathetic smile. Thea was right, she needed to talk to her brother.

“Do you mind if I take this upstairs?” Felicity shook her head, of course she didn’t.

She watched as Thea drew in a deep breath, held it and blew it out through her mouth before she headed towards the stairs. “Provided he’s still speaking to me at the end of the conversation, I’ll ask Oliver to bring burgers,” Thea added as she spun her hand on the balustrade.

It was at least 20 minutes before Thea emerged from upstairs with slightly red and puffy eyes, but a smile of relief on her face. “Everything okay?” Felicity asked as she muted the quiz show she had found herself mindlessly watching. “Yeah,” Thea nodded, brushing back remnants of tears, “these are good tears. For once in his life, he listened,” she jested, though Felicity didn’t doubt that there was some truth in that.

Felicity let out the breath she had been holding on to, “I’m glad.” “He’s going to bring Big Belly, he shouldn’t be too far away.”

Felicity found herself swallowing butterflies as she thought about seeing Oliver again.

It was ridiculous, she had only seen him last night, but still there was an unmistakable flutter in her chest – until it was replaced with an ink spot of guilt.

Something about his mother’s eyes.

It wasn’t her business to ask. It wasn’t her business to know why his mother would find herself pregnant with a child that wasn’t
her husbands.
It wasn’t her business to ask how much Oliver knew of it.
“I asked if you were okay with that?” Thea repeated as Felicity realised she had completely zoned out.
“Yeah, of course, that sounds great.”

It wasn’t her business to ask.
So she didn’t.

[A Couple of Days Later]

Dinner with Oliver had been a little unwillingly tense.

He had known what he was walking in to, but to actually see first-hand Thea’s eye bruised and battered was something he wasn’t fully prepared for. Felicity had recognised it almost immediately – the vein at the side of his temple was engorged like a river about to burst its banks and his fists were clenched, almost trembling, at his side.

She took his hand by instinct and gently rubbed her thumb over his white knuckles.
*He wasn’t alone anymore.*

She never asked about the family photo and she never asked any of the questions that swam around her head.

Thea went home that night with her brother, leaving with a hug and an eternally grateful smile.

It was mid-afternoon on a Thursday and Felicity had decided to bow out of work early when Oliver called to see if she had had lunch yet, which she hadn’t.

After a pleasant bite to eat Felicity made the decision to venture into Nordstroms in the hunt for a dress, surprisingly Oliver asked if he could come too.

“Most men hate shopping,” Felicity said before a charming chuckle fell from her pink-stained lips, glossed with a fresh lacquer of one that smelled like cherries as they wandered the department store.

Oliver leaned his body against hers, tipping his lips close to her ear – the words he was about to speak meant only for her.

“Watching you undress and dress repeatedly sounds like fucking heaven to me,” he whispered, growling the last few words like they teased his tongue.

Their fingers danced over the other’s hands, not quite holding, but unwilling to be separated for anything longer than a passing moment.

“You can’t come into the changing room with me,” she taunted playfully as her eyes wandered down the outline of his chest beneath the simple navy crew he was wearing.

The smile that trickled across Oliver’s face was one that screamed *we’ll see.*

Felicity always shopped decisively and today, despite her delectable company, was no different. Within twenty minutes she had two evening dresses slung over her arm.

It was Oliver who added a third, a very short, undoubtedly very tight, black leather mini tube dress with a zip that started at the top and went all the way down the back of the dress.
It was a dress made less to be worn and more to be taken off.
“I was aiming for something a little more formal,” she jested, although allowing Oliver to add it to the others.

“Humour me,” Oliver smirked as he walked barely an inch behind her, letting the sweet floral notes of her perfume tap dance in his nostrils.
She took his hand and led him into the corner of the dressing room.
Felicity’s back was against the wall, his body shadowing hers. His tongue fought his lips and his eyes gave away every sinfully risqué thought he was having about her right now.
“Ask nicely,” she breathed, pressing her breasts to his heaving chest and relishing the way he hummed in reply.

His eye twitched upwards and the seam of his lips bent into a suggestive smile before he pressed himself against her, nailing her to the wall, and lowered his lips to her ear.
He kissed her once and then spoke, “Please.”

When Felicity heard the sound of approaching voices, likely the shop assistant returning to a post she had probably only left a second before, Felicity pulling Oliver into one of the spacious cubicles and locked the door behind them.

Their lips found each other immediately, their tongue vigorously massaging against each other as they shared the same dizzying breaths.

Her hips grinded against his and he thrust himself forward in response. The tumbled against a wall before spinning at hitting the other in a fiery raucous.

“Everything okay in there?” came a voice on the other side of the door.
“Mmmhmm,” was all Felicity could manage.

“No one person in the changing room at a time.”
They started laughing with their heads pressed together.
“I told you,” she whispered.
“Fine, I’ll wait outside on one condition,” he intimated.
“Which is?”
“Any zips, you let me do them up.”
Her smile grew as she watched his eyes gloss over at the thought.
“What is it with you and zips?”
“It’s not the zip,” he remarked with his thumb settling into the base of his neck, “it’s your curve.”
His thumb traced her spine, slowly riding it like a wave.
“It’s fucking perfect.”
He wet his lips and smiled.

“Felicity Smoak, is that you?”
The voice was eerily familiar but before Felicity had the time to place it she had three faces smiling back at her.
“You’ve cut your hair, I almost didn’t recognise you,” the same, bottle-blonde princess in a panted-playsuit smiled as she tossed a curtain of glossy hair over her shoulder, in a display of perceived superiority that was not lost of Felicity.

The tribe were her parent’s fellow country clubbers.
Elise was the one who could cosplay as Rapunzel. She was Felicity’s age and stood less than two
inches taller than Felicity – two inches that she made a point of exaggerating.

Her friend, Maria, was undoubtedly much prettier than Elise, but her much quieter demeanour left her to fall into the shadow that Elise cast. Her skin was a most elegant shade of caramel and her hair was a cascade of natural brown tones that shone beautifully even under the artificial light.

The third was Elise’s mother, a woman with a permanent smile that looked more like a sneer and the inability to open her eyes into anything wider than a narrow glare. A woman, Felicity had decided a long time ago, that would happily stab you in the back if it meant gaining something.

Felicity could have gone the rest of her life without meeting up with them again –

“Are you still all work and no play?” Elise asked, the snark in her tone unmistakable – but Felicity didn’t take the fact she worked hard as an insult – quite the opposite actually.

Felicity was about to answer with a dismissive shrug when she remembered Oliver was stood right next to her, so instead she simply smiled. **Felicity played alright.**

It seemed Elise noticed Oliver at the same moment and she spent much longer than necessarily eyeing him up and down with a critical but intrigued eye.

“Or are you playing after all,” she asked lewdly without removing her eyes from Oliver.

“Elise just got engaged,” her mother announced, bluntly stabbing the silence with her voice. Felicity couldn’t decide whether the announcement was for her benefit or to remind her daughter of the same given the drool forming at the corner of her lips.

As if on demand Elise jutted out her hand to present a ring with a colossal sized diamond sticking up off it.

“That’s great, I’m happy for you,” Felicity placated. **Or lied.** Depending on how you chose to look at it.

Her fiancé was 35, going on 60, bald, with a middle-aged spread that he tried to pass off as a six pack, and an eye that would never only look at one woman.

He earned well and would be sure to keep her in Jimmy Choo shoes and Fendi bags, but that was hardly a cause to celebrate. Realistically Felicity gave them five years.

“He’s going this weekend,” Elise added, though no one cared enough to ask, and then she stiffened her back and took those less than two inches, lording them over Felicity, “will you be attending alone this year again?”

There is was.
Like clockwork.
It was all this woman had to hold above Felicity – less than two inches of height and the fact she wasn't content to hang from someone’s arm. **Predictable, pathetic and Felicity shouldn’t buy into it – but she did, hook, line and sinker....**

“Oliver will be there,” Felicity replied, immediately regretting dragging him into this mess.

They hadn’t known his name – and she had just given it to them.

Touted him like an accessory.

She didn’t dare look at him as she imagined his face twisting in abhorrence.

“Oh really?” Elise purred.

Felicity could hear the moment Oliver swallowed.

“I wouldn’t miss it,” he replied, his voice dreamy and deep and not at all dripping with disgust like Felicity imagined it would.
She tipped her head up to see him seconds before his arm wrapped around her waist and he lightly bumped his body against hers.

He didn’t look the least bit miffed, mortified or repulsed. And then he kissed her cheek with a gentle, chaste kiss, so decidedly different to the one they had shared moments before against the changing room wall.

Elise lost the two inches when her shoulders slumped forward. “I guess we’ll see you there then.”

Felicity hung the two long evening gowns on the returns rack, making a point of holding up the short number Oliver had given her before she slung it back over her arm. She had no intention of wearing it to the event on Saturday, but the look on the older woman’s face that Felicity was even intending on purchasing such a devilishly salacious dress was absolutely fucking priceless.

“Mmhmm,” Felicity hummed dismissively before her and Oliver walked away. Felicity could feel their eyes lingering on the unlikely pairing and even though Felicity knew it would set tongue wagging she did something so liberatingly scandalous.

She slipped her hand down Oliver’s pants and squeezed.

Oliver leaned in, brushed his stubble across her jaw before he gently suckled on her ear lobe. “Naughty Felicity,” he whispered, his voice a smoky trail of desire, “making the Stepford wives jealous.”

She shrugged playfully and those two inches meant nothing.

“Sorry about that,” Felicity sighed when they had disappeared from view, “you don’t have to go.” She toyed with the hem of the dress (if you could call it that) in her hands as she offered Oliver an out, because fun didn’t mean he should be obliged to go to some stuffy event with her.

In fact if it wasn’t an excellent marketing tool Felicity probably wouldn’t dream of attending it either. But she needed to make her company thrive, and that meant playing society’s rules – at least until she had enough backing to not give a fuck anymore.

“What if I want to?” Oliver asked, unexpectedly. Felicity bit back her surprise. “That would be nice,” she replied softly. “Only one problem.” Oliver’s lips turned up into a playful grimace.

“Which is?” Felicity chuckled. “I’m assuming what I’m wearing won’t work?” Felicity looked down at his scuffed jeans and navy top and while he looked, incredibly sexyful (if that was a word it would epitomise Oliver Queen), he was right – that wasn’t exactly black tie event attire.

She shook her head morbidly slow, “Uh no.” “I suppose I could ask Curtis…” Oliver began.

Felicity cut him off with a sharp, “No.” The last time he had been so undeniably uncomfortable. “Come with me.”

She led him to the menswear department and set about making silently crucial decisions until she had found the one. A deep navy – verging on midnight blue – woollen Tom Ford tuxedo suit with a brushed velvet lapel, matched with an embossed charcoal tie and a single shade darker soft cotton shirt.
“How do I look?” Oliver asked as he emerged from the changing room cubicle. Felicity stood from the cream pleather ottoman as her eyes did a double – triple take.

She wasn’t surprised he filled out the jacket with his strong shoulders and broad chest, nor was she surprised when he turned a little and she saw the way the pants hugged the top of his ass, but she was surprised at just how much both of those factors turned her on.

She wet her lips with a wayward swipe of her tongue as a muted sigh fluttered from between them.

Felicity could feel her arousal building with each step she took closer. When they were barely a foot apart she feathered her fingers down the jacket lapel, dropping a sultry smile as the fabric felt like air under her thumbs.

But there was something a little too foreign about it.

She threaded out each of the three buttons purposefully slow as Oliver watched her with aroused fascination. When all the buttons were freed she smoothed her hands up the mountains of his hard chest and slipped her nimble fingers under the shoulders of the jacket.

She dragged the jacket down his arms, her mouth virtually salivating as memories of them braced across her naked body played in her mind. Once her fingers guided it free from his body Felicity draped the jacket across the ottoman.

“I think it comes with the jacket, it’s on the mannequin,” Oliver simpered. He nodded towards the mannequin behind her but Felicity never followed his gaze, preferring to keep them latched to Oliver.

She wrapped a section of his hair around her finger and tugged it playfully, “I like you better than the mannequin.” The winged smile on her lips found Oliver itching to kiss it.

Felicity walked him coyly back towards the cubicle. “Felicity, you can’t come in with me,” Oliver playfully intoned, the sly smirk across his lips adding to his mischief.

“Oh yeah,” she hummed as she closed the door and leaned against it.

“What?”

“Do you know the best thing about the men’s department Oliver?” she asked, locking the door behind her back.

“What?”

The word sounded more like a strangled cry.

“They never have an attendee.”

She pushed off from the door and flattened her palms to his chest, driving him backwards. “Really, they don’t?” Oliver remarked as his back hit the wall.

There was fire in her eyes, her deep black pupils dilated like pools of oil before they were set alright.

“Nope,” she replied, the word sounding like a pop as she exaggerated her lips around it.

Her eyes walked down his body, like they had done so many other times that day, but this time she didn’t try to hide it, not even a single, little bit.

“Now strip,” she ordered with a tone that was playfully forceful and made Oliver harden almost
immediately.
He didn’t question her instructions and nor did he waste any time in following them. He loosened his tie and slipped it over his head, dropping it to the stool nearby.

Felicity's skimmed a single digit over her silken and glossed lower lip, enjoying the way her sensuality made the threads running down Oliver's neck constrict. He wasn’t shy with his approval.

She softly pinched the same lip before her tongue soothed over it as Oliver undid his shirt, a single button at a time. In a momentary lapse into another worldly idea, Felicity imagined just how much more salacious Oliver's striptease might be with a perfectly chosen song playing in the background.

*Oliver the stripper.*

He shrugged off his shirt and placed it not far from the tie. A muscle twitch and a brief flex of his biceps had Felicity swallowing back a litany of dirty requests before her eyes travelled down to the closure on his pants. She licked her lips almost entirely on instinct.

He peeled it open slowly before he brushed his pants down his solid thighs. His briefs were tenting, drawing up like a totem pole underneath a curtain of black stretch cotton. Felicity couldn’t look away, not that she wanted to, as she imagined – to the degree that she could feel it – his hard length pummelling inside her and her body stretching around him, inch by delicious inch.

Throttling her sex with his cock, hard, fast, relentless until she spilled over; and by the ravenous look in his eyes, that’s how Oliver wanted it too.

Felicity walked her finger down his length, watching as the lust speckled his eyes. She shimmied up her skirt till it sat just below her ass before she walked her fingers underneath it and hooked her thumbs either side of her panties.

She tugged them down, apricot lace framing a delicate white chiffon. They were flimsy and slipped like oil down her legs as she wiggled out of them. Threading through one heel then the other before she scooped them up and hung them on the back of the door.

Then Oliver pounced.

His hands locked under her arms before he lifted her into the air and seconds later it was her back braced against the wall. He made light work of the three pearl buttons on her honey-cream blouse before he slipped his hand into her bra – matching the panties that hung on the hook behind him.

He tweaked her nipple with his thumb and forefinger just to see the smoky cry drip from her wet lips. Neither the time nor the place allowed for much relishing but Oliver, if given the chance, would gladly spend drawn minutes with her pert breasts, teasing, licking, sucking.

The pad of his finger roughly circling her budded nipple had Felicity mewing with soft whimpers at the titillating stimulation.

“You’re going to have to be quiet princess or we’re going to get thrown out,” Oliver cheekily warned before he tweaked it a third time.

Felicity’s hand disappeared down his briefs until it latched around the base of his cock and lightly tugged it.

“Fuck,” he rasped.

“You’re going to have to be quiet...”

He kissed the rest of the words from her mouth with a clashing of lips and gnawing of teeth, in an apparent display of their feverishly insatiable appetite.
He rubbed his shaft between her sex, moaning as her arousal wet through his briefs. The friction felt between her legs found her bucking against his sheathed cock, desperately search for more.

He kissed her neck, hot, heavy, wet.
“In my pocket,” he grunted as she continued to stroke his member between her legs, “my wallet,” his voice was stumbled and stretched, “condom.”
She thought about telling him not to worry but she had removed her implant about 6 months ago and being a mother was not on the cards right now.

She slipped her hand into the pocket of his jeans hanging to the left of her and found his wallet. Inside were four condoms.
Oliver came prepared now too.

Two were identical, one was the same brand but ribbed and the fourth was altogether different. She read the tiny printed numbers on the side of the package and laughed.

It had expired two years ago. Which meant it had probably been made about seven years ago.
“What is this, the first condom you ever owned?” she laughed as she studied the slightly crumpled packaging,
“I just grabbed them from my drawer, I didn’t...” Oliver grimaced as he fumbled over his words quite endearingly.
“Were you even old enough to have sex when this condom was made?” she joked.

Oliver smoothed his finger underneath her chin, tipping her head upwards.
“Are you sassing me?” he crooned with a smile that took over his whole face.
“A little,” she breathed before a soft laugh took her over, “are you mad?”

A grin, “no, I like it.”
His hand traversed down the sweeping slopes of her body until it dipped between her legs, scooping up her warn desires and a finger skimming around her entrance.
“Now I have all day to spend touching you while you rib me about an expired condom,” he remarked while his finger traced a figure around her clit before it dipped inside her.

Felicity gasped in wet, hot pleasure.
“But I’m afraid that we’re going to get caught in a bit of a compromising situation if we stay like this too long.”
His voice reverberated down her spine, a rough gravelled tone that made her walls tremble with excitement.

Point made
Felicity slipped the two extras back into his wallet and the expired one away from them so it could be discarded later. Flattening her back against the wall she lifted his cock out from his briefs. His head was moist with pre come and his shaft twitched as her hand encased it. She tore open the wrapper and with a level of expertise she had gained over the past two months she slipped the condom down his rod.

When she was done her hands gently stroked his balls before returning to his shoulders.
“How do you want it?” he asked, his voice cracked as he used his last bit of self control to ensure Felicity got what she wanted, because all he wanted was to give her that until her walls clenched around him and she drowned him in her warm juices.
Felicity let a moment go by where her own answer was a lopsided smile.
“Spirited,” she hummed as she lined her body up with his.

He sunk into her, burying himself completely to the hilt as Felicity arched her body around him.
His fill was almost immediate and without respite until his cock was seated deep inside her.

Her legs scrambled around his waist, her toe caught in his belt loop. It was carnal and fleeting. Stealing each moment, each second as their own.

Oliver kissed her neck, desperate and wet as his tongue circled her throbbing pulse. Her fingers raked his chest before one dipped between their conjoined bodies, teasing and tracing his base and her own, tightly coiled clit.

Their foreheads pressed together as he thrust deep and fast, bucking like a colt. Their hips slammed and crashed together as her fingers intermingled, stroking his sack before skating around her drenched lips.

A heavy thrust broke their foreheads apart.
Felicity caught their reflection in the mirror, his back scarred but his muscles ripped and taut.
She traced nails over them before he tunneled deeper, spreading her wider while his pace became wild and uneven.

Her nails sunk into his flesh as he quickened himself, pounding so deep and so fast it caused her breasts to bounce behind her bra.

She could see his body tense with each thrust.
She could see her body leaking with perspiration and her eyes lidded with pleasure
She could see just how much larger he was than her.

The imagery was so erotic it pushed her dangerously closer to the edge and caused her walls to clench around him.

“I love it when you do that,” he grunted like a caveman.
“What?” she hummed as her eyes stayed focused on the mirror, on watching them fuck quite explosively, “This?” she added as she clenched.
“Fuck yes.”

His hand dived between her legs seconds before his thumb rubbed her clit. It was all she needed to hurtle over the edge into orgasmic oblivion.
Her hands clasped to her mouth, but it wasn’t enough to stifle the sounds of her cries as she dissolved into pleasure.

Oliver buried his face into her neck, beaded sweat mixing, as he chased her release. Noise faded to nothing, his vision grew dim and tendrils down the back of his thighs felt electric.

And then he exploded with his lips around the curve of her neck and his teeth lightly nipping at her thin skin.

“Pity the stepfords couldn’t see that,” Felicity panted as her head lolled against the wall.
“We always have this weekend.”
“Did you see their faces?” Felicity huffed as she perched on the edge of a bathtub, half watching Oliver as he freed the tap from the vanity (in search of the reason for the incessant dripping that had annoyed him to the point he couldn’t ignore it anymore), and half stewing from the snide looks the Stepford wives had metered out.

She was fully aware this was not the first time since they had arrived home over 2 hours ago that she was bringing it up.

“Why do you care?” Oliver answered, the response coming with a lopsided smile and a quick wink.

Felicity folded her arms across her chest in protest, “I don’t,” she remarked before her face gave way to a smile too.

Oliver placed the tap into the sink and walked over to where Felicity had perched, knocking his knees gently against hers.

“It sure sounds like you do,” he noted as his finger lifted her chin without any resistance.

He was right.

Their pompous, lofty attitude had riled her the wrong way.
It wasn’t like she wasn’t use to it herself, but seeing them subject Oliver to the same judgmental glare, despite having no idea who he was or what he had been through, made her want to put on her sharpest pair of heels and step on their toes.

She couldn’t help but smile at the very evil prospect of it until the warmth of Oliver’s palm against her shoulder tore her from her diabolical plans about where she might encounter Elise barefoot.

“Oh, Oliver they were judging you and they don’t know the first thing about you,” she argued as she stood up, still with folded arms that skimmed against his chest. Oliver shrugged before he wrapped his arms around her completely, making her feel cocooned. “And?” he flashed his Devil-may-care smile, “Felicity, I’ve spent a good portion of my life being judged by people, it doesn’t bother me. In fact there aren’t many opinions I do care about.”

They swayed idly together as Felicity considered his words and enjoyed his smile. “Thea’s?” she asked finally as she cocked her head a little to the left. “To some degree, but don’t tell her,” he said with a grin that flourished into a laugh.

“Raisa’s, I bet you care about her opinion,” Felicity hummed as her arms slowly unfolded from around her chest and snaked, instead, around Oliver’s waist. “On the way I cook eggs? No,” he answered with a wink, “on everything else? Yes.”

Felicity leaned her weight back against his arms, absolutely sure he could hold her up without even blinking. “Is that all?” she asked with a slightly raised brow. Oliver shook his head fluidly in response. She smacked her lips together to ponder who else might hold that kind of position in Oliver’s life. Possibly someone at work, but she’d never actually met them. Definitely not Laurel – remembering the door being closed on her was still amusing to Felicity as she let a smile peek across her lips – His mother? It was possible, but Felicity didn’t think him the superstitious kind.

She was drawing a blank. “Who else?” she enquired. “You.” There wasn’t even a second’s hesitation and there was no irony or mocking to be heard in his tone. She wasn’t expecting that. But it didn’t seem strange hearing it. Her eyes stayed on his, telling him she wasn’t frightened of his words and he offered her the same.

It was the sound of the doorbell that broke their eyes apart. “That might be dinner,” she breathed as her body started to feel weak in his arms. Honest to god, she was swooning.

“You should answer it then,” Oliver replied, a certain huskiness and rasp in his voice that she found undeniably appealing. “Are you hungry?”

His eyes walked down her lips, scrutinising the way her tongue lapped idly over the lower one when she was thinking. Did she fucking know she did that? Did she know what that did to him?

“Starving,” he licked his lips and Felicity knew his reply wasn’t about food.

It would look like a cheap porno, but Felicity was 100% okay with it if Oliver took her right there and then on the bathroom floor.
A second knock. “Shit,” she mumbled and Oliver laughed – he found her occasional cursing quite endearing if he was honest. “Can we,” she paused to kiss him, briefly and without warning, but Oliver leaned into it and kissed her right back without any reluctance, “come back to this.”

She hadn’t meant for the word come to come out quite like it had – overtly sexual – but she smiled at the grinning response Oliver gave her like she had meant just that all along.

“I’ll finish up in here,” Oliver said with a wink as he collected the wrench from the vanity, “and then I’ll be down.”

Town she finished salaciously in her head.

_God, this relationship was a playbook on innuendo._

This…relationship

Felicity’s eyes widened when she realised what she had said.

She didn’t call it fun like she usually did – even in her own head.

She called it a relationship – and it wasn’t the least bit terrifying.

Another knock brought her back to reality.

The tips of her fingers slid down his bare arm, her lips curving into a somewhat deviant smile as she strolled from the bathroom.

Her appetite had already been satisfied in the changing rooms just a few hours ago, but if the thrumming she could feel radiating from between her legs was anything to go by, she was desperate for another snack.

She trundled down the stairs and instead of seeing the face of the local delivery man with whom she had developed quite a rapport, she saw her mother on the doorstep checking her lipstick in the camera again.

_Honestly, she was surprised it had taken this long._

“Mom,” Felicity preened dutifully as she opened the door to the vivacious smile of Donna Smoak. Donna’s face erupted into an even bigger smile – though Felicity didn’t know how that was even possible – before she toppled into the townhouse the two embraced, somewhat hesitantly on Felicity’s part.

“So I take it word got back to you?” Felicity sighed as they stood near the open door – left that way as a subconscious way to ensure a quick exit – even from her own home – if required.

“The wheels turn fast in this City,” Donna replied, her smile dimming somewhat. “I’m sad it didn’t come from you.”

Felicity blew out a soft sigh. She deserved that.

“I guess I don’t feel a part of your life much anymore,” Donna added, the smile dropping even further down.

“I’m sorry,” Felicity offered honestly. Everything else aside, this wasn’t exactly the way Felicity wanted her mother to find out about Oliver – truth be told when this whole thing started Felicity wasn’t exactly planning on telling anyone about the hot rebel she’d been sharing a bed – and many other surfaces – with.

But something between then and now had evolved and she had begun to consider dates, actual dates – drive in movies, milkshakes, driving up to make out point – _because apparently her_
imagination and idea on dates was firmly rooted in the 1950s.

“Don’t be sorry,” Donna soothed, “not if you’re happy.”
“Am.”
Felicity hadn’t except the answer to be so easy, but it had been – it had just floated from her lips without a second thought.

“Then I am too,” Donna’s smile returned, together with a resolute nod, before her expression changed to another Felicity recognised immediately – curiosity, “will I get to meet him?”
That answer wasn’t so forthcoming as the one prior and Felicity stood, dumbfounded, for a time that grew progressively more awkward.

Until Oliver trampled down the stairs with his head down while he picked silicon seal from off on his hands. He stopped when both feet landed heavily on the wooden floor after the last step; and expecting something quite different than the scene presented him with, he choked out an almost inaudible gasp.

“Oliver this is my mom, mom this is Oliver,” Felicity introduced, seeing no other remedy to the awkward silence.
Donna smiled like all her Hanukkah wishes for her daughter had come true.
Oliver, for his part, choked out another – more audible – gasp.

He was surprised but he took it mostly in stride from then.
“’Tis nice to meet you,” he charmed.

The change in his demeanour from the man ready to pounce on her and tear her clothes to shreds (yes please) moments ago in the bathroom to the man who was charming her mother with a soft smile and innocent blue eyes was truly remarkable and she doubted he even knew the switch.

*He could be a Mayor, kissing babies by day and fucking her rampant at night in their room surrounded by mirrors.*
Felicity swallowed down the ideas that she was surprised to be having – though not in the least put off by them.

The delivery man stumbled onto the scene and looked between the three people as to who he should hand the meal to. Oliver stepped forward and took it, allowing him to leave what felt like a moment he wasn’t invited to.

“I’ll take this to the kitchen,” Oliver remarked as his eyes moved from Felicity to Donna and then back to Felicity.

*He would have never picked her mother to be a blue-leopard-print dress wearing type.*

“It was nice to meet you,” he finished when his attention fell back to Donna.
“’You too Oliver,” Donna replied before he disappeared into the living space.

“Well I can see you’re busy, but I just wanted to pop by,” Donna effused as she absently toyed with the tips of her blonde hair.
“Thanks mom,” Felicity remarked genuinely, “and I’m sorry, I didn’t want you to find out through the gossip chain.”
Donna burst out another smile to go with her shrug.

“It’s okay. To be honest their shock alone gave me a pride,” she laughed, “you left them all speechless which for stick-lodged-in-her-ass-Elise is a pretty big undertaking.”

Felicity couldn’t help but laugh. It was in these rare moments, with just the two of them, that reminded her of happy, simpler times in Vegas. Times she took for granted and couldn’t get back now, no matter how much she wanted to.
“But you are happy, he makes you happy?” her tone was soft, her words engaging.
Felicity looked towards the living room, imagining him there, “it’s early days but I’m happy.”
And that was the truth.

“Good,” Donna sighed, content with the answer.
Felicity caught the slight nuance in the raising of Donna’s eyebrow, “anything else?” she asked.
Wait for it.
“He does have quite a nice ass,” Donna winked.
There it was.
“Really, I hadn’t noticed,” Felicity sarcastically shrugged.
Donna leaned in and kissed Felicity’s cheek.
“You’re my daughter after all,” she added as she pulled away.

With her order of the best Chinese in the City (and she would fight anyone who disagreed) laid out on the table in front of them, Felicity stretched her legs across the couch accidentally skimming against Oliver’s legs while the tried haplessly to decide on a movie to watch.

She pulled them back with a mouthed ‘sorry’ but Oliver snapped up her ankles and rested her feet on his lap in a surreal moment of domestic bliss.
“Everything okay?” he asked as he discarded the remote on the arm of the chair and twisted his body towards hers.
“Yeah,” she offered, casually enjoying the simplicity of the moment.
“Your mom seems nice.”
And not at all what I expected. He kept that nugget to himself.

Felicity nodded, “she’s great.”
“But?” Oliver quizzed.
“Nothing.”
She sighed hopelessly, it was stupid really.

Oliver gently began to massage the underside of her foot, much to her surprise, but when his thumbs sunk into the top part of her instep she almost groaned in pleasure and melted into a puddle of goo on her nice grey couch.
“Come on there is a but,” he hummed while his fingers worked their magic.
“She’s different,” Felicity finally admitted.
“From?”
“From when it was just us,” she remarked, “she was fun and carefree and oh my god, she offered to buy me a fake ID.”
Felicity chuckled at the reminder.
“She was crazy and wild and she taught me about hard work and determination and she wasn’t perfect, she can’t cook and she could never understand my homework, but we were happy.”
We were happy.

“And you’re not now?”
Felicity sucked in the chilled air of truth.
“She doesn’t feel like the same woman anymore,” it was vague, but she had little more than how she felt, “it’s like a spark is missing, like she settled for my father and,” here was the real kicker, “that’s my fault.”

Oliver’s hands moved from one foot to delighting the other.
“How is that your fault?”
“He left us and that was shitty, but I sought him out, I found him and I tried so hard to impress him. I put her back in his orbit and while I believe they love each other, he toned her down, changed her.”

She had watched her mother slowly but surely lose her identity. Sure, she still clung with brightly painted nails, onto a few things – blue leopard print being one of them – but there was little, at least in public or under the watchful eye of Noah Kuttler, that reminded Felicity of the woman who could ride a bull machine for five minutes without breaking a sweat.

“I fought so hard for the adoration of a man that seemed to only care when I showed I was more like him. I let him pay for college and I let him give me my company even though I knew that had my life’s ambition being something other than this he wouldn’t have given me a passing thought. How sad is that?”

She let a breathy laugh pass over her lips, even though she found it more troubling than funny.

“It’s not,” Oliver assured her, his words like a salve to her ear, “it’s not sad at all. We all try to impress our parents, even when they fuck up worse than we do.” The pain in his words was unmissable.

Felicity shuffled up the couch, tenting her knees, before she took one of Oliver’s hand and held it tightly between her palms.

“If you want to talk, I’m listening.”

Oliver turned her hand and brought it up to his mouth where he littered it with soft, sensual kisses that lingered on her skin long after he lowered her hand.

“Thank you,” he breathed the word like no one had ever offered him such consideration before.

But he wasn’t sure how to or where to begin and he hoped she could understand he refusal, just for now.

“But not now, if that’s alright?”

Felicity scooted a little closer still until lines of her body touched his.

“Of course,” she breathed, calming, comforting.

Oliver tipped his head down and gently encapsulated her lips in his. It wasn't demanding or rushed like ones that had come before and as Felicity felt his lips tremble around hers only one word came to her mind – it was emotional.

They came up for air after what seemed like an impossible length of time. They both knew it was a different kiss, that somewhere between a one night stand and wherever the next words from their mouth would take them, something had changed.

Fun had been replaced.

Felicity folded her lips inwards as they still tingled with his minty kiss before she suddenly remembered they hadn’t eaten yet and the takeout containers sat, still unopened, on the table in front of them.

“Have you ever eaten Chinese food naked in bed after vigorous sex?” she asked, relishing the way Oliver’s eyes lit up with her sudden burst of words.

“I can’t say I have,” he chuckled, the tip of his tongue passing slowly between his lips, tasting her there.

“Do you want to?”
The two of them looked absolutely ravaged. Felicity’s ponytail lay completely off centre and almost falling from her bushy blonde hair. Her lips were completely void of any lipstick but were stained red from their constant need to crash their lips together. A small rash circled her lips from his beard and her shoulders were mottled with a mixture of the same rash and the deeper red pinch marks of his teeth – which FYI she very much enjoyed and encouraged.

And that was just the parts of her that could be seen above the crumbled sheet that sat between their bodies as they faced each other holding the takeout they were currently feasting on.

Oliver didn’t fare much better, his hair was akin to sticking his finger in an electrical socket despite his earlier attempt to smooth it back down with his hand. His lips too were swollen and while Felicity had not a stitch of lipstick on hers anymore, his were covered in the deep rouge and his chest was its own painting of fingernail trenches and love bites – that FYI he also very much enjoyed and most definitely encouraged.

“Vigorous was an understatement,” Oliver smirked as his eyes moved over their respective battle scars.
“I should really move the bedside tables away from the side of the bed,” Felicity chuckled as she rubbed the back of her head, half expecting to find a large egg at the back of it.
Oliver wore the most stunning of smiles as a blush broke across his cheeks.

“Thank you,” he breathed after a few moments of quiet.
She finished her mouthful of chicken rice.
“For?”
“For looking after Thea.”
“Your sister didn’t need looking after, she just needed a friend,” Felicity spoke as she hovered her chopsticks above the container.
“Those are hard to come by.”
They let the words hang uncontested between them.

“You need to take her away from here don’t you?” Felicity asked the question that had weighed on her mind for some time now.
“Every time I’ve tried, I’ve had Malcolm on my back,” Oliver gritted, “all he does is pay a few cops, they say she’s not eighteen and drag her back. It’s bullshit but I don’t have the money to fight it.”
He rolled the back of his palm across his worried brow. It was something that had cost him many night sleep over his lifetime.
“She’s eighteen in January. If I can just get her out of this life, make her see that she can be more than some old lady to a dipshit who either fucks around or ends up in jail.”
His words stung his own heart and his chest grew tight.

“You’re not like that,” Felicity offered as she took the half empty container from his hands and placed it next to hers on the bedside.

Oliver glanced up, his eyes a speckled blue of worry and appreciation.
“Not the fucking around,” he said softly, his voice teetering on the edge of cracked.

Felicity knew that he had said that to reassure her and while she didn’t need it, she appreciated it all the same.
“But she deserves better than what she has,” he added firmly with his fist twisting in the sheet.
“She doesn’t remember much of life with our parents, but for a time there it was good, even if…” he stopped and she touched his hand, “even if some of it was a lie.”
“Your father didn’t know about Thea?”
Oliver’s shrug was weighted and lethargic.
“I can’t say, but I remember when my mother found out she was pregnant. She wasn’t happy, she was devastated and I guess that’s why.”

Felicity squeezed his hand a little tighter, she was there, she was listening.
“I won’t ever understand it though,” his eyes pinched closed, “my mother hated Malcolm Merlyn, she spent the better part of a decade fighting for my father to leave the gang and when he finally did, she went and…”
Oliver stopped abruptly and Felicity could feel he didn’t want to hate his mother but all that he knew made him angry.

“Don’t let the fact that Thea was Malcolm’s child be all you remember about her Oliver,” Felicity offered, she knew as well as any that families were complicated, though she couldn’t imagine what Oliver faced living without answers to so many questions, “she fought for your father to have a better life and I bet she loved you.”

Oliver nodded, his fondest memories of the years they spent together were still enough to make him smile.
“I won’t ever understand why she did it,” he whispered, aware for the first time – ever – as an adult that he felt vulnerable and that that was okay.
“Sometimes there is more to a story than we know.”
It wasn’t much, but it was the only advice Felicity had to offer.

They kissed, slowly, longingly, the type of kiss that you savour to remember when your lips are lonely, before they fell down together on the mountain of bed linen beside them.

They didn’t have sex again that night, their bodies not craving that kind of closeness but another, more intimate one. They coiled their bodies together and let their hands roam freely over each other, mapping out the other as their lips caressed and their tongues lathed and their limbs mingled.

It was private, tender, cherished – it was so much more than fun.

--

[Night of the Gala]

Felicity watched from behind her curtain as Oliver pulled his bike up to the curb. He was right on time and the fact he wasn’t late made her smile and blush with equal ferocity.

She toyed with the edge of the practically see-through negligee robe of satin and lace before she brushed back a tumble of lightly curled hair from her shoulder and waited for the doorbell, which came just a few seconds later.

She floated down the stairs, the long robe fanning out around her legs as she walked, exposing her tiny chiffon panties.

Felicity opened the door, shielding herself half behind it until Oliver was completely inside and she could push it closed.
She could tell, when he noticed her distinctive lack of clothing, that he was trying to be somewhat of a gentleman about it but the hand twitching at his side was eager to be something quite different. “You’re on time,” she spoke, her breath smoky.

Little did Oliver know that she had been awaiting his arrival for the last thirty minutes, spending her time thinking the most deliciously salacious thoughts of him while her fingers traced the outline her nipples made on the robe.

In fact, Felicity had been pretty damn close to getting herself off to just the thought of Oliver Queen sat in front of her, legs spread wide, pre-cum glistening in the perfectly chosen light of her bedroom, her mouth salivating at the…

She blew out an exhale, fully aware if she allowed herself to continue thinking about it she might just slide down the back of the front door in a quivering mess now.

“And you’re not ready,” Oliver growled, matching the smoke in her voice with a rasp in his own.

She started backwards towards the stairs, her eyes beckoning him to follow, “it starts in an hour and we’ll be late.”

“Then why did you tell me to come so early?”

Judging by the smile on his lips, he had a fairly good answer as to why and it was causing him to test the inseam of his brand new tuxedo.

“My dress,” Felicity pouted as she hopped up onto the first step, enjoying the moment of being almost the same height as him, “it has a zip on it.”

Oliver followed her as she ascended the stairs, watching her svelte body move under the gown. Her ass swayed like a salsa dance in slow motion and it took every ounce of self-control he had not to reach out his hands and squeeze it.

His mind right now was crammed full of so many dirty little thoughts, at least 90% of them involving his hands on that perfect, round ass.

They walked silently to the bedroom and once inside Felicity left the door open. She lived alone so it really didn’t matter, but there was something just a little dangerous about leaving it open all the same.

“You cut your hair,” she spoke as the tips of her rouge lips curved into a smile and her fingers danced along the slicked back hair that now sat almost three inches from his shoulders. “Just a trim, Thea suggested it.”

She soothed the worry line that had formed across his brow with three simple words, “I like it.”

He looked around her room, waiting for her to issue instructions, but she didn’t. Even as she ironed down the velvet lapels of his jacket and let her lips fall slightly open, she gave him nothing more than a smile.

Until she finally spoke, her voice dancing with ribbons of smoke, “you seem nervous.”

His lips cracked a smile, “I’m shitting bricks.”

Her lashes splayed across her cheeks as the centres of them warmed with a soft, pink glow. “Maybe I can help.”

Felicity led him to the rich charcoal wingback chair she had dragged out from the corner of the room and positioned now somewhere closer to the middle before he’d arrived.

She lowered him with her hands on his chest and Oliver offered no resistance as he sat halfway back into the chair.
Felicity tugged on one end of the satin belt, that restrained the robe around her body, before letting it float to the ground in a pool around her feet. She took a few small steps forward until her knees brushed against his.

Oliver’s eyes walked from her hips up the centre of her body and around the curves of her tight, pert breasts topped with nipples her wanted to rub the flat of his tongue over till she begged him enough.

“That helps,” he rasped, breathing heavily from low in his chest.
“Oliver, I wasn’t finished,” she snipped playfully before she kicked his feet far enough apart that she could neatly slot herself between his splayed legs.

She bent over, her breasts now directly in his eye line, taunting him as she swayed ever so slightly with each move she made. His mouth salivated as his hungry eyes devoured every morsel.

She unzipped his pants and walked them slowly down his legs until they rested at his ankles.

“Fe-lic-ity,” he spoke her name rough and hoarse but he let it linger on his lips as long as he could. She had never heard her name sound quite so desperate, so wanted.

She stroked her hand across his briefs, enjoying the way his cock shuddered underneath her attention.

“The first night we, you know,” she smiled – he did, “do you remember what you did?”

“Yes,” the word was barely more than a croak.

“And why you did it?”
She teased the head of his sheathed cock, rubbing circles around the eye.

“Yes,” another rasped response.

“You were right,” she gripped his shaft tight, her nails digging through the thin cotton into his skin, “I’d never seen myself come undone before.”

He touched a finger to the wrist of her hand that held his cock, feeling the strain of her grip pulling over it. He would enjoy her jerking him roughly, just to see if she liked it.

“Happy to oblige,” he answered with a smirk.

“I thought maybe,” her hands left off his cock as she spoke while she walked across the room, “you’d enjoy watching too.”

She slid the closet door closed, watching Oliver’s smile grow as he realised he was seated directly in front of a large mirrored door.

“Fuck,” the word dripped word from his lips.

She painted another layer of red lipstick across her pout before she walked, in only her heels and panties, back towards him.

“I’m going to have to wash that off,” he breathed as he nodded towards her freshly coated ruby red lips.

She smacked them together with a pop, “not where I’m kissing you, you won’t.”

Oliver felt the second the air gasped from his lungs.

“And where are you going to kiss me Felicity?” he asked with a cracked and strangled voice, despite knowing her insinuated answer.

She took his cock out from behind his briefs, snapping the waistband against his thighs

“She patted his cock between her palms, warming it as she leaned forward and dusted a feathered kiss at the very tip. Oliver groaned, deliciously guttural and undeniably wanton.
She watched his eyes widen as she opened her lips and gently threaded his cock into the warm, inviting depth of her mouth, sliding it down until the head of it grazed against the roof.

Oliver hummed in hedonistic bliss as the warm, soft and wet sensations of her mouth caressed almost his entire cock. And then she smiled – just a fraction at the tips of her lips – and Oliver almost completely lost it.

His fingers rolled through her hair as her tongue toyed with his head, circling it, teasing it all while tasting the hints of salt on his skin.

The hand in her hair was gentle in its combing, and while Felicity appreciated the gesture, it wasn’t what she was after right now. She dropped his cock from her mouth and licked her lips while Oliver whimpered at the sudden loss of all the explosive sensations that had been coursing down his shaft and fanning out to every part of his body only moments before.

She felt nervous about asking – she hadn’t quite reached the heights where she could say something as bluntly as he would, but she really wanted him to…

“What do you want me to do?” he asked, reading the question hung in her pensive brows.

“I want you to…” she paused to gnaw at the inside of her lip. She felt like a wanton woman wearing a scarlet letter, but…

“You can tell me,” Oliver assured her, he wanted to hear that smoky voice ask for what she wanted – hell she could demand it and he’d be okay with that.

“I want you to fuck my mouth Oliver.”

She was surprised at how the words sounded in her own voice, liquid, sensual with just a hint of warning if her request was denied.

Oliver folded his lips into a smile.

Fuck.

That was hands down one of the sexiest things he had heard, not just because the idea of fucking that sinful red mouth was insanely hot, but mostly, absolutely, positively, because she wanted it. She asked. No coercion, no sense of duty, no suggestion by him – she wanted it and she asked for, near on demanded, it. That was molten-lava-level-hot.

“What is that what you want princess?”

He had to be sure.

With her lip snagged she nodded, she really does and she wants him to watch.

His fingers coiled around her hair, it felt like ribbons of silk. He gave her a gentle tug to ensure the grip was enough. He watched her carefully as she smiled moments before her lips formed an almost perfect circle and she eased his cock back into her mouth.

She slipped him in slowly, guiding him from underneath with her curved tongue until his head slid against the hard, smooth surface at the roof of her mouth.

When he was well settled inside the confines of her deliciously wet mouth and after her tongue had tasted every inch of him it could reach, she winked with one hand fanned over his taut chest and the other around the base of his cock, nails teasing whatever parts of him they ventured to.

His fingers tightened taking the hair at the roots. As he looked down his body at her and he saw a faint twitch at the corner of her lips, Oliver worried the move had been too tight or she had changed
her mind, this wasn’t what she wanted at all.

But then she hummed like a goddamn angel – like his tightly wound fingers and the way he filled her mouth were the best sensations she had ever encountered; and her eyes didn’t show even a hint of regret.

His hands held her head steady as he set an even pace, slow at first, relishing the way the flat of her tongue nestled around his shaft while the tip dance and flailed playfully.

His eyes wandered from her to the mirror where they studied, memorized, the full rounds of her perfect ass in that tiny black scrap of material that he knew he could tear with his teeth and the sweeping curve of her back. It was all so much, so fucking much.

He lifted his ass from the chair as he thrust up into her mouth. Her cheeks hollowed, sucking as he thrust, hard and fast. Using the balance of a one handed grip on the arm of the chair and the sheer strength of his muscular thighs Oliver kept the pace.

He watched her eyes, wide, bright, as she watched him, devouring the animal in his own eyes that he could feel growing from the pit of his stomach.

Felicity felt the swelling between her own sex as she claimed that absolutely carnal look in Oliver’s eyes as a personal victory. The power trip had her insides thrumming until it fanned out into a painful thump between her folds. She used that sensation as inspiration when her dark red nails clamped into the back of Oliver's thighs.

He hissed, his eyes darkly pleased with her insatiable appetite before he stilled his thrusts and instead controlled her with the fist full of hair he was tightly clutching.

The pace was a gallop. Red lips riding down hard, white flesh until Oliver felt the distinctive tightening around his thighs. He jerked her head up, he needed her eyes, needed to know it was okay.

Felicity's grip tightened at his thighs, almost breaking skin as she anchored him – giving him the answer his eyes sought.

She relished the pulse of his cum as it coated her throat. His fist loosened as Felicity took the control back, easing him through the climax until he went limp and folded back into the chair.

Euphoria painted his face. Every part of his expression was touched with the glow of it and the glisten of his sweat.

When she was sure there was nothing more he could give to her and his cock began to lax in her mouth she slowly pulled away and caught his shaft in her hand.

She smiled as she noted the smears of red staining his milky skin. She had branded him in MAC Lady Danger, fitting.

“Don’t wash that off,” she commanded as her fingers swept up his remnants at the corners of her mouth, “I want to see it tonight.”

She finished her sentence with a smile before she stood and brushed her tongue over her teeth. “As you wish,” was all Oliver could muster and even then each word was panted and strained.

“Good,” she commended, enjoying the way his eyes snapped up to her as she gently stroked his cheek.
She walked over to the bed and held up the black gown that was stunning in its simplicity. “Now, I’m going to need you to zip me up,” she chortled as she held the cut away dress against her frame.

[Two Hours Later]

Everyone noticed when Oliver rode the Harley into the valet queue with Felicity, kept warm behind his tux jacket on the back, the split on her dress dangerously close to exposing her paper-thin black panties.

Eyes studied them with severe interest and where once upon a time Felicity would have cared, she didn’t tonight. Let them look.

The valet pointed Oliver to a spot for motorcycles, unsurprisingly completely empty until Oliver roared into the row and kicked down the foot stand with his freshly polished shoes.

She unwrapped her arms from around him and waited on the back while Oliver got off and pulled his full face helmet from his head. Two strokes of his slicked hair before he propped the helmet on the seat and offered Felicity the crook of his elbow.

With unspoken charity he stood in tight to her right leg to ensure that if her teasing split crept up her leg that any bystanders wouldn’t see a damn thing.

When it became obvious who she was whispers started and she relished every second of it. Oliver tipped up her chin and released the strap on the half helmet she had insisted on wearing to protect her perfectly applied makeup. Oliver had made a mental note to get her the modular helmet he had somewhere in the shop. An open face would be safer than the one she was currently wearing.

Not a single person that knew him before Felicity would have considered Oliver to be safety conscious, and yet here he was trying to devise a scenario for a repeat event.

When he plucked the helmet from her head Felicity shook her hair loose. The curls had fallen, replaced instead with large waves blown into a perfect level of volume.

She slipped his jacket from her shoulders and handed it out to him. He threw it over his shoulder before he tucked the two helmets under his arm.

“You ready for this?” she asked as she smoothed her fingers down his shirt placket. Oliver leaned in and gently kissed her cheek, “lead the way.”

As they walked towards the red carpet that was actually silver, Oliver dropped the two helmets on the valet's podium.

“Thanks man,” he smiled.

Felicity walked the gauntlet with Oliver hanging a little behind her just watching. One noticed him but Felicity brushed off the question with a practiced and charming laugh. She wasn’t intending to feed him to the gossip columnists tonight.

When she got to the third one to stop her, the Starling Gazette, Oliver sighed under his breath out
of the same relief he was sure she must have felt.

The two before him, *housewives rag* and *gossipers anonymous* (he was sure their publications had different names but he had little mind to remember them) had asked her the most inane questions, they loved her hair was she excited for a season of caramel tones – *whatever the fuck that meant*, they dissected everything from her shoes to her shade of lipstick – he had been pretty damn close to answering that one himself but unbuckling his pants...

But this guy was in his late 30s, wearing a respectable suit and Oliver had just overheard him asking a balding rotund man toting a trophy wife he absolutely found on a website a series of questions relating to the stock market and where investors should look to next year.

*This* guy wouldn’t ask about her jewellery, or something equally ridiculous, *he wouldn’t ask about*...

“That dress is stunning, who is the designer?”
Oliver’s mouth gaped like he was attempting to catch flies.

He watched Felicity's back stiffen and her shoulders tighten.
She was fucking brilliant and accomplished and these fuckers only cared about what clothes hung off that fantastic figure of hers.

“Fuck this,” he mumbled as he stepped next to Felicity.
The reporter who had assumed Oliver was security looked surprised by his sudden appearance at her side and even more surprised when Oliver’s fingers toyed with Felicity’s before she slipped her hand into his.

“Do you know she’s the youngest CEO in the whole city? The whole state even?” Oliver asked pointedly.
“Uh,” the reported stammered as he looked down at his notes.
“Did you ask him who he’s wearing?”
Oliver kept the heat on as he nodded to rotund sugar daddy.

“Uh no,” the reported admitted, the flush of embarrassment clear across his cheeks.
“So you have to have a better question lined up for her then right?”
He bit back the slew of words that would have Raisa probably slapping his face. He could make his point without them – this time.

Felicity squeezed Oliver's hands as her eyes calmly stated *enough*.
“I’m not sure who designed the dress Adam, but I'm happy to discuss either my work in the advancement of biotech, especially in respect to paralysis, or about the charities I’m deeply fond of, Women in STEM for instance.”
Oliver beamed with adoration. *She had this.*

The interview lasted less than five minutes but ended with a promise that they would continue this in a sit down interview as soon as one could be arranged.

Felicity bypassed the last reporter.
“Not him?” Oliver asked curiously.
“He has multiple charges of sexual harassment and he believes in reverse sexism, I don’t talk to weak parasites,” Felicity scathed, loud enough to be heard by the two wives standing in line with their successful husbands.

Felicity smiled when one tugged her husband away and he dutifully followed without question
before she waved sarcastically at the parasite.
“Holy shit,” Oliver mumbled through a chuckle.
She really had this.

When they were out of earshot of anyone else, Oliver paused and soothed circles around her pulse on her wrist.
“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have butted in,” he apologised “it’s just irritating to see how they treat you. You’re smarter than all of the old guys here.”
She smiled her thanks.

“But I shouldn’t have spoken for you,” he added as he bowed his head.
“Oliver it’s okay, I’m glad you did, I think it shook him. Unfortunately next time it’ll be someone else or he won’t remember. Believe me I have tried and that’s not to say it gets a free pass, but sometimes I have to pick my battles and while answering questions about my appearance are belittling and devaluing, they aren’t the biggest battles I face,” she sighed, “not by a long shot.”
“How do you do it? How do you just ignore it.”
Felicity tapped a finger to her lips as she considered it.
“Because I know it’s not me. I know my value, I know how much good I can do working with girls like Thea, ones that just need a hand, and if answering stupid questions about my nail polish puts money into the pockets of the charities that need them, then for now, so be it.”

For at least the third time that night alone Oliver marvelled at the woman that stood in front of him. Felicity was strong, motivated, spirited, smart, tenacious, fucking gorgeous and categorically unapologetic for every single one of those things.

Twenty minutes later found them well and truly surrounded by the scent of leather shoes and hairspray. The venue was as extravagant as Oliver had expected it to be and yet it still surprised him the amount of money that must have poured into this night to create such opulence.

The entire ceiling was hung with sweeping yards of black fabric woven under, around and over lawyers of white fairy lights that gave the illusion of a night sky unadulterated by city lights. It reminded Oliver of the open road, but without the scent of freedom that he usually attached to it.

Floor to ceiling cylindrical glass columns encased vines of twisted black and white with blue lights hidden around the base that cast fans of light up towards the ceiling.

Long, sweeping black leather sectionals provided a few different seating areas with black, mirrored bar tables filling most of the remaining space, aside from the dance floor.

There was more to the room that Oliver noted, but all he really saw was money showing what money can buy.

The first person to actually approach them, although they did garner a few looks, was Felicity’s mother, adorned in a sleek silver dress.

“Felicity, you look stunning,” she spoke proudly as they air kissed politely.
“Thank you mom,” Felicity replied before she offered a kindly smile.
“Nice to see you again Oliver,” Donna effused as she turned her attention to Oliver, “in very different attire.”
It wasn’t said with any malice or double meaning and Oliver couldn’t help but appreciate that Donna seemed to be genuinely happy to see him with her daughter, no judgment.
“Some things are worth getting dressed up for,” Oliver made it clear what he meant when his eyes dipped down to Felicity, she was worth it.
His eyes blinked down at the empty glass in Donna’s hands, “can I get you another?” he asked with a most charming smile.

“Wow, a gentleman,” Donna gushed, quite taken with his unexpected charm, “thank you.”

Oliver took her empty champagne glass before turning his attention to the woman who seemed to commandeer it without needed to do anything.

“And for you?”

Felicity smiled, “the same,” she remarked as she nodded down to the empty glass.

As Oliver made his way towards the busy open bar a server plucked the empty champagne glasses from his hands. No sooner had that happened he found himself holding a tumbler of whiskey and ice. It was rich in colour and strong enough that the scent of it danced across his senses, making him taste it in the back of his throat before he’d even taken a drink.

“Sales, am I right?” a young guy, not much older than himself asked as he folded his hand into the lapel of his impeccable jet black suit.

“No,” Oliver answered as he brought the glass closer to her nose.

“1950s vintage batch, had them decant it especially,” the guy said as he noted Oliver’s reluctance, “I promise it’s only the best.”

Oliver took a measured sip and let the nectar touch every taste bud on his tongue before it glided like molten liquid down his throat.

“Fortune 500 company then?”

Oliver smiled to himself, he wouldn’t call Verdant Motor a Fortune 500 company, but he was of no mind to explain his business to a stranger.

“I’m just here with my date,” he replied before sucking in another sip of the biting drink.

Oliver’s eyes moved through the crowd, tracing his steps back to Felicity across the room. She was chatting to people, effortless, charming, stepped back from them to ensure her mannerisms weren’t taken as anything other than professional, but engaging enough that not one of them seemed to mind.

He was so wrapped up in watching her that Oliver never noticed the man beside him following his eye line and he never heard the “really,” slip from the mouth of same man who was about half a foot taller than himself.

By the time Oliver regained himself, impeccable tailoring was gone.

He shrugged as he continued the short distance from the bar and ordered two champagnes.

After his order was acknowledged, Oliver turned back to watch Felicity with his back leant up against the bar.

Felicity could feel him watching her and she found herself smiling, playing into the pretence of ignoring his stare. She touched her neck with feathered fingers as though his gaze was sparking a flame there. She wet her lips with her tongue and found herself breathing deep, steadying sighs.

She turned her head just enough to catch sight of him, with a whiskey glass pressed to his lips he watched her over the rim. There was a smile tugging up one side of his lips – perhaps it was more a smirk than a smile – and Felicity could only imagine what he was thinking.

It seemed like he didn’t blink the whole time she watched him, it was likely only seconds, but it felt like hours that they stayed locked in an exhilarating foreplay with their eyes across a sea of people. When she thought no one was looking – aside from Oliver – she dragged a lazy finger from her neck down the V of her dress, seductively weaving it down her torso, her eyes setting out her demands, these are the places I want you to touch.

“Your drinks sir,” the bartender said behind him.
Oliver turned and saw the two glasses of champagne. “Is one of those mine still?” Donna asked as she slunk in alongside Oliver. Oliver smiled, “yes ma’am,” he replied as he handed her one of the drinks. “Thank you for coming with Felicity, it’s nice to see her with someone supportive. Someone that will let her shine.”

Donna backed away as though she had said what she wanted and it was best nothing more be spoken on the subject matter at this time. Oliver offered her a friendly smile before she retreated into a crowd and threaded her arm through the arm of a man with silvery hair who was deep in conversation with a group of near identical men.

Oliver decided that must have been the illusive Noah Kuttler, the one he wasn’t so sure deserved his daughter’s younger adoration.

He took Felicity’s drink into his hand and turned back around to where his eyes had left her. She wasn’t watching him anymore, not even close.

There was a man beside her, even at this distance Oliver recognised him as the man who had presented him with the vintage whiskey and assumed he was talking to one of his peers – of which Oliver was, by his own admission, not.

The man took Felicity’s arm, roughly and uninvited. Oliver could see his fingers pinching in around the skin of her slender elbow. In an instance Oliver’s face turned from one of intrigue to unbridled rage.

He lurched a few steps forward, halted by a waiter who swanned haphazardly in front of him, and when the way was clear again Oliver watched Felicity yank her arm away from the man. Her demeanour had shifted into something quite different from the Felicity he had watched moments before.

Her body was walled off with her arms, her stance was pensive and irritated and every mannerism she threw out was cold and unfriendly. She didn’t like this man. She didn’t want him anywhere near her; and she was more than happy to let him know just that.

Oliver didn’t reach her before the man had absconded into a crowd of other tuxes and Felicity swept the anger from her eyes when Oliver arrived.

“Who was that?” Oliver asked, his fingers clenched around her flute. “No one important,” Felicity brushed off the question and Oliver had no reason to argue, her distaste for the man had been apparent. She was entitled to a few skeletons, he sure as hell had them.

Felicity pounced on Oliver’s lips, taking him by surprise. She was making a display and he was happy to be a part of it if it meant everyone in that room knew her lips spent their nights around his. He took control of the kiss after thumping down both drinks on a nearby bar table.

His tongue dipped in between her lips, scouting the warmth of her mouth before retreating back behind his own. His hand cupped the back of her head while the fingers of his other hand, chilled from holding his drink, trickled down the naked parts of her spine.

She gasped against his lips, keening and pressing herself closer. His tongue plunged back into her mouth, wrestling with her own for long enough that their point was well and truly made. They were together.

“Not that I mind, but you want to tell me what that display was for?” he asked before he sucked
back the rest of his drink
“Mainly because I wanted to and a little because I can,” she offered playfully.

Oliver rode his hands slowly down her shoulders and arms stopping at her wrists.
“Dance with me and whisper all the filthy things you want to do?” Felicity asked as her eyes pleaded the same request, “I want to be so near to a climax just because of them.”

Oliver resisted the urge to kiss her but he hung his lips close to hers regardless.
“I thought you’d never ask,” he whispered.

They walked together to the darkened dance floor, Oliver's hand seated at the small of her back with his thumb hooked over the plunging waistline of her dress.

The music was live, a melodic tone of something that would be considered soft jazz. Oliver had no intention of doing much more than swaying a few inches either side of where his feet were planted and when Felicity pressed in close to him he was thankful that she didn’t want for much else either.

Her hands ran up his broad chest and stilled just as her fingers rounded his shoulders. The scent of her hair teased him as it brushed across his cheek. He kissed her temple before his lips fell closer to her ear.

“I want to bend you over a table and take you from behind,” he admitted with a whispered growl. Felicity stilled in his arms and Oliver considered perhaps he had been too honest, until she smiled up at him with her lips pinched between her teeth and her eyes glinting with delectation.

He smiled, she wanted more.
“I want you to enjoy every second of it,” he continued. Felicity hummed against his chest.
“I want you to sit on my face and tell me where to go.”
That admittance made Felicity's lips part in a silent gasp before she writhed her hips against his.
“I want to take you for a drive,” he started before wetting his lips with a swipe of his tongue.
“That’s not dirty,” Felicity jested.
His lips twisted into a smile.
“Wait for it,” he paused to chase his words with another kiss against her temple before he leaned even closer to her ear, “and when we’re alone on the side of a road I want you to lie on my bike with that perfect clit of yours pressed into it while I rev it up.”

Felicity felt a fresh warmth pooling in her nether lips, growing as he continued.
“And when you’re all warm and wet,” he licked his lips, the sound making her mewl, “I want to fuck you right there on the seat of my bike, vibrations pulsing, stimulating you while I fill you.”
Her panties grew damp.
“I want my name to stammer from your lips until you come,” a sweeping sigh bled into her cheek, “and come and...”

Felicity broke away from his entanglement of arms and dangerously delicious words with her breath uneven and shaky. 

Did he know her body was trembling on the point of climax and he hadn’t done more than confess the desires he had?

She took his hand and without a word rushed him from the dance floor, out one of the side doors and into a hallway before she braced him against the wall and climbed her hands up to his neck.

“What are we doing?” Oliver effused.
“I’m going to combust Oliver,” she pleaded, moisture dripping between her folds.
She kissed him ferociously, sweeping her tongue desperately over his lips that had filled her ear with dirty little wishes.

“Not here,” he growled.

“I don’t care if people find us.”

And she didn’t, not even a little.

“I do,” he pushed her back just a little as his cock throbbed painfully behind his pants.

“Why?” she laughed, trickling her fingers down his jaw, “stage fright?”

He laughed off her teasing before his hands caught hers.

“I’m a very jealous man Felicity,” his tongue warred with his lips as he spoke in a rasp, “if I make you come I want to be the only one to see it.”

He saw the wine cellar door just across the hall.

“How here.”

He didn’t wait for an answer before he pulled her through the door and down the stairs. With the haste of a comic book hero Oliver collected a chair and jammed it under the door knob.

When he returned, Felicity was dangling her panties from her fingers. The aroma radiating from them made Oliver growl in carnal arousal.

His back chafed against the hard wood wall, despite being still fully clothed, as Felicity slammed him against it while her lips pursued his relentlessly.

“What did you like best princess?” he teased, prolonging her wait for satisfaction.

Her nails dug into his pecs.

“All of it,” she hummed, “riding your face.”

“Mmmm,” the deviant sound slipped suggestively from his lips.

“Riding your bike,” she paused to suggestively grind her body against his slightly bent leg, “God Oliver I need you.”

Her fingers tore the shirt tails from his waistband before undoing the fly and freeing his engorged cock. There was no time and no need to play with it but she couldn’t help stroking his length fluidly from the base to the tip, her thumb caressing the lipstick that still stained his skin.

“That’s an endorsement for its staying power,” she laughed breathily as she skimmed a nail over the slit.

Oliver raised her dress as he lowered himself down the wall. Her sex glistened, ready, needy, hot.

“Fuck, I can smell you,” he growled, threads of gravel caught between his words.

“You could taste me too,” she replied with a salacious grin.

He considered it, the table behind them, a chair in the corner of the room, the jute rug on the floor, the wall...there were countless places he could spread her wide and taste her sweet juices, but he didn’t know how long they had here uninterrupted and when he went down there he wasn’t planning on resurfacing for some time.

His thick fingers pushed between her folds, “later tonight, when we have all the time in the world, my tongue will be your slave,” he promised.

He jerked her forward so her legs straddled his upper thigh, the muscle taut and strained as he held his legs at almost a 90 degree angle to the wall his back was flat against.

He rolled her waist stroking her naked sex against the soft wool fabric of his pants where they bunched at his thighs.

She hissed at the soft friction that teased her clit.
He sunk a little lower down the wall until the head of his cock brushed the edge of her wet folds. “Felicity?” he growled her name.
Her eyes hooded with delirium barely blinked as she acknowledged him with a low hum. “I won’t be able to hold this position for long,” as he spoke he lifted one leg so she straddled both of his thighs, “so it’ll be quick.”

He was asking with her eyes if she was ready for it hard and fast and her answer came in the form of a wink and a half tipped smile, *fuck yes.*

She rummaged through his pocket for a second before she found his wallet and barely 30 seconds later one of the condoms was wrapped around his cock.

Oliver grabbed her ass and tore her feet from the floor as he balanced her on his lap. His thighs trembled under the weight but he could hold her long enough for them both to come completely undone.

Felicity guided him inside her, both of them sighing at the realisation of the sensation they had both craved. When Oliver's cock was seated deep inside her, Felicity braced her feet against the wall before she warmed his lips with a sensuous kiss.

His grip on her ass slid up under her dress to lock around her waist. She leaned back a little while he tipped her pelvis up.

Ready.
Set.
*Go.*

There was no time to be languid and his first thrust set the rapid pace as he bounced her up and down his shaft in an unrelenting barrage. Felicity's entire body shook and her head fell backwards while the tips of her golden hair brushed across his knees.

Faster, harder.
The sound of flesh slapping against flesh and heavy, desperate moans filled the room. Sweat trickled down their bodies. His eyes watched, enraptured, as his shaft slipped, frictionless, in and out of her entrance.

Their groans grew louder as Oliver’s thighs began to shudder. The pain coursing through them only spurred him on and moments later a familiar tightening in his balls signalled just how close he was.

“Felicity, are you,” he stammered, almost breathless, “close?”
“Yes, yes,” she bleated as she snapped her head up.
The flush across her cheeks was rose tinted and glistened with a veil of sweat.
He wished he could see her nipples, sure they would match.

She jerked her head forward to encase his bottom lip with hers, seconds before her core knotted like a fist then exploded like fireworks.

Her body shuddered over the edge as she gasped against his lips before peppering tiny desperate kisses across his face.

The warmth of her climax soaking through the latex sheath and the tight embrace of her walls around his cock was all Oliver needed to join her in his own ferociously vivid orgasm with her name cascading in breathy pants from his lips.
Everything about her was amazing, and somehow he was lucky enough to be in her orbit, in her life. This wasn’t just *fun* anymore, not for him and he needed to know that it wasn’t for her too.

“Felicity?”
Her vividly blue eyes walked up to his.
He stroked a hand through the hair that was lightly glued to her cheek.
“I don’t want fun anymore.”
She looked confused before he pulled her closer and kissed her deeply.
“I want you and me, together,” he finished after he severed the kiss just as suddenly as he had started it.
“Are you asking me to go steady with you Oliver Queen,” she teased his lip with her thumb.
“I am,” he chuckled.
Her palms held either side of his face, “Yes,” she nodded, her smile exuberating the joy she felt.

*This wasn’t just fun anymore.*

Chapter End Notes

;)

I edited this a little hungover, apologies for any errors :(
It was nearly two hours and one and a half bottles of wine later that Oliver sat propped up against the same wall with his long legs stretched out in front of him and Felicity lying with her head lazily on his lap, her shoes kicked off and her hair tumbling down the side of his legs and spilling onto the stone floor below.

Her slender fingers wrapped around the neck of the vintage rosè that she had managed to drink half of (together with the empty bottle on the table) without a drop of help from Oliver who was idly stroking her bare arm and admiring the beautiful pink flush that was illuminating her skin.

“I’m going to have to carry you out of here if you finish that bottle too,” he mocked while she rolled her head towards him, her pouted lips dangerous close to where they had been wrapped around earlier that night.

“Won’t that make quite the scene,” she replied in an impromptu English accent.

They eased back into a calm silence that was framed only by the occasional tap of Felicity’s painted nails against the neck of the bottle.

“He was my ex-boyfriend, Ray Palmer” Felicity finally filled the lull, ending her sentence with a soft sigh.

“The guy that grabbed you?” Oliver’s jaw clenched just thinking about it as he gently stroked the spot just above her elbow.
He watched her take a deep inhale before she blew it out through her lips.
“You saw that?” she looked embarrassed but Oliver’s assuring smile offered her more comfort than she could quantify.
“I damn near knocked him out,” he warred, he was smiling but there was definitely a level of truth in what he admitted.

“He’s not a bad person,” Felicity started, and while she realised it sounded like she was excusing him, it was the truth, “he’s just…” she paused to take a drink straight from the bottle, high school style, “…expecting.”

She blinked at the ceiling as she looked back on what she never considered a necessarily bad relationship, or a good one for that matter – it was just one that existed – not unlike most of the marriages in the ballroom a stone’s throw away.

“I don’t mean to make him a villain, because he’s not,” she continued as she folded her lips over the top of the wine but never actually took a sip, “but he was exacting in whatever I did.”

She sat up and Oliver held out his arms to steady her as she nestled in beside him, her back now against the wall.

“Ray would choose what clothes he wanted me to wear, and not in a ‘grrr this has a zip and I want to tear it from your body’ type of way,” she laughed as she raised an eyebrow at Oliver who smiled knowingly, “but in a ‘this is couture and it shows how much money I earn,’ way. He would take me to these work dinners like an accessory that was there to extol his many business virtues, like a pretty blonde cheerleader who was so gosh darn proud of him.”

Felicity took a quick drink before standing the bottle between her thighs, pulling the already tight dress even tauter.

“He tracked my phone, kept tabs on my friends, apparently because some of them were ‘bad influences’” she gestured his quote in the air, “I felt like I was more of a commodity than I was his girlfriend.”

It was only now, reflectively, that Felicity could see how insipid that kind of behaviour was, but in amongst it, she was almost blind to it, and everyone around her extolled his behaviour as ‘being interested in her’, ‘considerate’ and ‘sweet’ but in the cold light of day it was controlling.

“You don’t seem like the type that would like that,” Oliver offered with soft words.

“Not anymore,” she cheered, “but once I suppose I used to think that’s what I was expected to be.”

Felicity turned to look at him with almost translucent blue eyes and he couldn’t help but tumble the back of his fingers down her cheek.

“Do I need to be worried?” he asked, half serious, half sure he knew the answer already.

Felicity laughed, far louder than she had meant to, “no.”

Ray was definitely not competition for Oliver.

She folded her hand around his face, making sure their eyes were locked, “no,” she repeated calmly but without a shadow of a doubt that she meant it.

“I believed you when you laughed,” Oliver replied before giving her a playful wink.

“There are many, many reasons you have nothing to be jealous of, one happens to relate to what we just did,” she smiled sensually as she took another drink, one that saw her drink almost an entire glass’ worth.

“Terrible in the sack?” Oliver asked pointedly while his fingers grazed up her arm and down the edge of her dress’ neckline.
“Some woman might like the feeling of a wet fish flopping around on top of them, but not me,” her eyes blew wide when she realised just how savage that had come out.

“That bad huh?”

Oliver smiled, he absolutely relished the way she was looking at him right now. Her eyes wide, her lips parted and plump and her hair a tumble of blonde that gave away what they had been doing.

She smirked, unsure whether she should answer, but another drink of wine loosened her lips.

“I would brain storm coding algorithms while we were having ‘sex’” she admitted as she used both hands to create air quotes, even with the wine bottle hanging like a pendulum from one of them.

Oliver grinned as he pulled Felicity onto his lap and seated her tight against his growing erection. Felicity licked her lips before she kissed him, the sweet notes of the fruity wine bleeding from her lips to his.

She bucked against his crotch slowly before she severed the kiss and stroked her thumb across his lips to close them again.

“You’re on top of him with your thinking face and he wasn’t the least bit concerned?” Oliver spoke, his voice getting gruff as Felicity continued to slide her body up and down his thighs, stimulating sex.

“I was never on top,” she groaned as his sheathed cock brushed against her covered clit.

“Ever?”

Oliver gripped her waist to slow her down, he could ride this sensation all night if allowed.

“Almost two years and I was never on top,” she huffed as she eased off Oliver and sunk her warmed palms around the sides of his neck.

“We had sex one way and in one place,” she shrugged, it had been one of the reasons Oliver’s repositioning her that first night had been so surprising, “all we did was missionary and the only place we did it was in the bedroom.”

She went to slide off him but Oliver gently pulled her back, even if she stayed motionless he enjoyed the heat and the contact. Felicity smiled as she nestled her body back into his lap, squeaking just a little when she sat hard against his shaft.

“Ray was very,” she paused, considering which word to use, “clean…” she finally settled on, dragging out the word for a few extra seconds, “in every sense of the word. He had this routine before we could do anything that involved antibacterial sanitiser, wet wipes, vigorous teeth brushing and he preferred my hair up,” she rattled them off like they were nothing, but, again with hindsight, she realised just how demoralising the whole thing had become to feel and how remarkably different Oliver was.

She just had crazy, fast, insanely hot sex against a wall with her dress hiked up around her waist and his pants around his knees.

Oliver looked at her somewhat perplexed, “after sex?”

“Oh no,” she shook her head as she reached for the wine and took another drink, “this was before. After sex was akin to a decontamination shower on his part.”

She shrugged, but lying in a wet patch on the bed alone while he spent at least 25 minutes giving himself a thorough scrub down had never been fun.

“He never just threw you onto the floor and fucked you?” Oliver grunted as he lifted her up his chest and thrust his lower half towards her.

Felicity hum salaciously at the re-enactment and she was well aware that if she simply leaned over and asked it of him Oliver would have no qualms about doing exactly that.

“It was never spontaneous,” she remarked as she raked her nails through his hair, messing it a little.
“No just watching you watch TV and he can’t help but spread you open and start,” Oliver’s tongue pushed through his lips, making feasting sounds like a wild and hungry animal, “between your legs?”
Felicity shrugged nonchalantly, “oh, he didn’t like that.”

Oliver looked horrified, his mouth gaped and his eyes flung open in recoil.
“What?”
Felicity soothed him with a kiss to his forehead.
“Oral was never on the table, germs,” she offered his reason with a shrug, “you can’t Purell your vagina so…”
“You’re fucking kidding?”
She shook her head, she really wasn’t.
She remembered bringing the idea up once, she could give him oral and he could at least try. His facial reaction was something that she would have expected if she asked him to clean the toilet with his toothbrush and then brush his teeth afterwards.

“Oh holy shit he was missing out,” Oliver cursed while he rocked his head side to side, disturbed, “you have the best cunt I’ve ever seen.”
Felicity almost screamed as she slapped his arm, “Oliver!”
“It’s true, when it goes that pink colour when you’re all aroused,” she squeezed her eyes closed, she couldn’t believe they were having this discussion, but given the fact she was definitely tipsy and borderline drunk, it wasn’t mortifying, “and it’s wet and juicy like…”
“Oliver stop,” she interrupted, burying her blushing face into his neck.
“It’s fucking delicious,” he finished by smacking his lips together and humming his enjoyment at just thinking about it.

“Anyway, his problems extended beyond me so I don’t take them personally,” and maybe that was why she didn’t consider him a bad guy, “he even ironed his underwear.”
The wine had definitely made her lips loose.

“What the fuck?” Oliver scoffed before he blew out a chuckle.
“And named them, like who did he think was going to steal them?” Felicity remarked as she exaggerated a shrug, “if I asked him to talk dirty to me he would have given me facts about micro germs in washing machines.”

Once they had both laughed, Oliver because of the absurdity of it, Felicity because of the truth of it, a quiet fell over the room for just a moment.
“Why did you stay with him so long?” Oliver asked, having a hard time imagining the vivacious Felicity he knew being stifled for so long.
“He wasn’t a bad person and for all intents and purposes he treated me well so I just accepted his quirks,” she offered a lax shrug.

Felicity knew she struggled with much more than she let on, her father leaving seemed to be the root of all of it.
“What changed?”
“I realise I needed more than this role of doting girlfriend with a job for a side project,” she sighed, “I asked for support that he couldn’t offer me so I broke it off and that was that.”
It had been as amicable as she expected. He had been cold, but he’d never really been much more than tepid so she hadn’t really cared all that much.

“Why did he put his hands on you tonight?”
Oliver asked the question that had been circling his head for some time and he watched as Felicity took a slow, measured breath in before she pushed it out twice as fast.
“He told me I was making a scene,” she replied simply before snuggling in just a little closer to Oliver’s chest, placing her hand where his breathing moved it up and down.
“How?”

She sighed, one that sat on the bridge between sadness and annoyance.
“By bringing you,” she spoke softly, afraid of hurting the man she was coming to love, “he called you my pet.”
She hated the way the words sounded in her mouth and to repeat them left a bitter taste. She wasn’t trotting Oliver out for show and she had no intention of putting him under anyone’s scrutiny.
“That ain’t so bad,” Oliver remarked before he laughed lightly.
“Oliver, it is,” she argued, “you’re more than sex in a suit to hang off my arm. You’re a fighter and a brother and business owner and…”
She had forgotten how to breathe and she gasped before she could finish her sentence.

“Like I said,” Oliver cooed, smoothing down her hair as an excuse just to touch her, “I don’t care what other people see in me, the only person here whose opinion I care about is yours.”
She tipped her chin forward and kissed him softly in response.
“Well, I’m sorry for making a scene regardless,” she sighed after she pulled back from his lips.
“When you kissed me?”
“Yeah, sorry”

Ray’s comment about her making a scene when Oliver clearly didn’t belong there had riled her up so much that she had decided – very reactively – to make a scene when she launched her lips onto Oliver’s.
“Oh princess,” Oliver’s lips drew up into a smirk, “you don’t ever have to apologise for kissing me, especially not like that.”

He snapped her lips up with his own and they kissed more deeply than the one just a few moments ago as their hands skipped about their bodies and sweet sounds of arousal dripped from their lips.

“Take me home Oliver,” she growled against his lips before she snaked her tongue across them, “take me home, throw me on the floor and fuck me senseless,” she pulled back from the kiss so she could see the sensuality pulsing through her darkening eyes.

She finished the last few drops of wine before she smiled and licked the remnants of his kiss from her lips.
“No,” she hummed, “fuck me on your bike, right outside this stuffy little event. Let’s make a scene.”
Her whole body sighed at the thought of it, just as Oliver had whispered in her ear. Her panties were getting damp and her sex tortuously aroused as she began to imagine how the vibrations might feel and how full Oliver could make her.

Her eyes drifted closed as she dragged her fingers down between their entwined bodies, stimulating both the rod between Oliver’s legs and her own sweltering heat.

“I told you, I’m a jealous man,” he growled near her ear before he sucked in a cord of her neck, “I want to be the only one enjoying you come undone.”
He pressed his thumb into her folds, expertly finding her swollen clit and Felicity hummed as she threw her head backwards.

When he withdrew his hand her head slowly lowered back down.
“Fine, but I want to go home, with you,” she stared as her fingers touched his face, “and I want you to stay, with me.”
Oliver nodded, there was no other choice to be made.
“I want to make love to you,” her words were smoky and sensual as she watched the pleasure at hearing them leak over Oliver’s expression.

She kissed the edge of his lips, “slow,” she kissed him again, “and tender.” Felicity rode her body up his, causing them both to quiver in excitement.

“I want you to know that you’re mine and I’m yours and it doesn’t matter what anyone else says.”

Her fingers dipped under his shirt.

“I want to feel our bodies pressing into each other,” she whispered before her nails dug into his chest and Oliver growled erotically, “I want to use my tongue to explore you slowly,” fingers trickled down towards his waistband, “and I don’t want to stop until we’re so exhausted that we fall asleep still entangled in each other’s arms.”

“If you keep talking like this,” Oliver warned, his mind circling the ideas of where they could do just that.

“What Oliver, what will you do?”

She leaned in and licked the side of his face, from the tip of his lips to the seam of his ear.

Oliver didn’t get time to answer before the door up the staircase began to rattle.

“Shit,” he remarked as he eased Felicity off his lap and tried to smooth down his pants.

“Take me home Oliver,” Felicity wet her lips as she slipped on her shoes. With his engorged cock folded up into the waistband of his briefs and a pretty tipsy Felicity leaning up against him with her arm around his body, Oliver removed the chair and greeted the surprised wait staff.

“Excellent wine down there,” Felicity remarked, trying to keep a serious face despite her slight sway.

Oliver held her a little closer, like her pillar.

“The empty bottles,” she said, pointing back down the stairs to the table, “just bill them to Kuttler Consolidated.”

She winked inconspicuously at Oliver.

There was only one way out – through the ballroom – and half way across the dancefloor Felicity stopped walking.

“Dance with me again Oliver,” she pleaded with her lips folding into a pouted smile and her lashes fanning out across her cheeks, “but this time I’ll tell you all the dirty little things I want to do to you.”

Oliver gulped, she was teasing him. Even more so when she started to nibble on her bottom lip.

Fuck, he would gladly take her right now.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” he nodded down to where he had tucked his already hard member, “much more arousal and I won't be able to contain this thing.”

“Positive,” she said before she licked her lips and stroked her hand across the bulge, “and hey, if we make a little scene.”

“Felicity?” the sound came from right behind them.

She recognised it immediately.

Once she had stiffened her shoulders and straightened her back, she turned expectantly and smiled, “Hi dad.”

Oliver had been right, the man he thought was Noah Kuttler was in fact the same one standing in front of them now.

“And who’s this?” Noah asked, cordially.

*Straight to the point.*
“This is Oliver,” Felicity looked at him and smiled, “my boyfriend. Oliver this is my father, Noah Kuttler.”
It was surprising how absolutely natural that sounded to her.
Noah’s hands shifted in his pockets, but he never removed them.

“I didn’t realise you were seeing anyone, your mother usually keeps me informed.”
“It’s somewhat new,” Felicity quipped.
Oliver couldn’t get a read on him. He didn’t seem angry, happy, sad, bothered – he seemed robotic –
how was this guy with Felicity’s mother?

“Are you leaving?”
Oliver wasn’t sure if that was a question or a request.
Felicity stumbled and laughed as Oliver caught her.
“We were going to dance a little,” she anchored her hand to his chest.
*God it felt hard.*

“I think its best you go home, sleep it off,” he scolded and Felicity instantly stiffened in Oliver’s arms.
“I’m not drunk,” she chilled.
“You are acting like it”
“How would you even know what that looks like?”
While their voices never raised beyond what just the three of them could hear, their strained faces gave others around an idea of what was going on.
“Maybe we should go,” Oliver leaned over and whispered in her ear.
“I’ll call you a cab Felicity,” Noah said bluntly.

Felicity rolled her eyes, she knew exactly what her father was doing.
“I don’t need one, I came with Oliver.”
Noah looked at Oliver expressionless before he looked back at Felicity.
“All the same,” he grumbled.

“I assure you, I’ve had barely half a drink all evening sir, I’ll see her home safely,” Oliver remarked as he felt Felicity’s body weighing back against his for support.
Noah ignored every word Oliver said.
“Take my town car Felicity and I’ll order another.”
“Oliver just told you how I was getting home, with him, my boyfriend who I have been seeing for months.”
Felicity was sober enough to realise she sounded petulant, but right now that was what he deserved.
“You’re making a scene,” Noah warned.
“No, I’m not,” Felicity shot back, her voice instantly sobering up, “you are by acting like Oliver is some sort of deviant because he has long-ish hair and tattoos.”
“This isn’t the time to have this discussion.”
Felicity blew out an exacerbated sigh.
“It never is.”

“Come on Oliver, let’s just go,” she said turned to him with a plea in her eyes.
“It was nice to meet you sir,” Oliver extended his hand but it stayed lonesome in the space between them.
“Unbelievable,” Felicity scoffed before they walked away.

“Felicity, you’re leaving?” her mother asked running (as best she could in her heels) up behind them as they reached the door.
“Yeah, I just want to go home,” Felicity stoically replied.
“Your father…” Donna started.
“Don’t mom, don’t make an excuse for him again.”

“I’ll go get the bike started,” Oliver offered as his hand brushed down Felicity’s back. He sensed they needed a moment.
“I’ll be there in a minute,” Felicity replied, her face looking drawn and tired just from that short interaction with her father.

Oliver walked out and collected the helmets from the valet just as a Lamborghini rolled up to the curb and Ray approached it.
“Nice car,” Oliver commented dryly.
Ray turned to offer Oliver a smile that said he knew exactly who Oliver was, “you appreciate cars?”
“I do.”

The valet stepped from the car and Ray folded a $50 note into the young man’s hand.
“Seems we share tastes in women and cars,” Ray smirked.
Oliver offered him nothing until he finally spoke, “one tastes better when you’re rolling your tongue over it though.”

Ray’s face stiffened and Oliver tried not to laugh remembering what Felicity had told him.
“Thanks for the whiskey by the way,” Oliver said as he stuck his hand out in the space between them much like he had with Noah a few minutes earlier.
Ray grimaced but took it.
Oliver squeezed his hand tightly, locking Ray where he was as he leaned in close – his next words picked out just for Ray.

“I’m saying this with a smile on my face so it looks like we’re friends,” he started, his eyes tracking to the curious valet a few feet away, “but trust me when I say I’m one hundred percent serious. If you ever put your hands on a woman when she didn’t ask you to, I will personally break every one of your fingers. You understand?”

Ray nodded as Oliver pulled back.
“Good,” Oliver commended as he slapped Ray’s arm.

Oliver released his grip and stepped away leaving Ray to sink into his car alone just as Felicity stepped through the front doors.

Oliver waved Ray goodbye with a smirk plastered across his face as Felicity approached.
“Everything alright?” she asked watching as the Lamborghini pulled noisily into traffic.
“Everything’s fine,” Oliver smiled offering her the helmet, “you ready to go?”
“Ready.”

Oliver pulled up to the curb after the easy drive home, cruising through the quiet streets and thinking about nothing in particular as Felicity’s body warmed against his back and her hands locked around his waist.

“We’re home,” he spoke softly as he shut off the engine.
She moaned quietly, but never moved. While he couldn’t see her face, Oliver was pretty sure she had fallen asleep.
He slowly peeled back her hands from around him and slipped off the bike, keeping her upright with his other arm. Her eyes fluttered and she said something that was lost beyond a quiet groan.

He picked her up off the bike and draped her across his arms. She rocked into him and snuggled her head against his chest. He carried her slowly, but easily to the front door of her house. “Felicity, I need a key.”

She handed him her purse and while balancing her legs across his knee, he found the key and unlocked the door. Once inside he kicked the door closed and headed for the stairs.

She mumbled something softly that saw her trickle soft fingers down his neck as the warm amber glow of the dimmed lights she had left on guided Oliver up the stairs and into her blackened bedroom.

He laid her gently down onto the bed and switched the lamp on beside her.

“I wanted you to throw me,” she muttered, her eyes barely opened as she lolled around on the bed. “Not tonight princess,” Oliver smiled as he slipped off her shoes. Felicity rolled onto her side and pointed at the back of her dress with a groan. Oliver understood her hint and slowly dragged the tab of the zip down the sweeping curve of her back – any other night and under different (sober) circumstances, Oliver would have followed that line with his tongue.

Felicity smacked her lips together as she shimmed the dress down her body and kicked it free before she snaked a finger down between her breasts, watching as Oliver watched her. He swallowed down the temptation, they could wait another day, as he stood up and pulled the covers over her nearly naked body.

“You’re leaving?” she pouted as she half sat up.

“You should sleep”

“They need to do anything tonight.”

Oliver toed off his shoes and stripped most of his clothes off by the chair where she had given him the best blow job he had ever had, before he made his way to the bed with his pants still on. They didn’t need to do anything tonight.

He climbed into bed and Felicity cosied up against him before she reached her lips up and kissed his cheek. “I love you,” she mumbled into his chest as her fingers splayed across it.

The corner of Oliver’s lips turned up into a smile, he didn’t think she realised that that was the first time she had said it and it would remain his little secret for now.

He kissed her forehead before he returned the sentiment in a slow, soft whisper, “I love you too.”

He wasn’t sure what he was doing, knowing Malcolm knew who she was made him uneasy, but he could protect her, keep her safe. He had looked after Thea and a part of him wanted to believe that Malcolm was just letting him know that he knew, it was all puff and bravado, nothing more.

It would be fine.

The next morning a fresh eyed Oliver walked carefully across the bedroom balancing an array of
breakfast foods and a freshly brewed coffee on a tray as a less than fresh eyed Felicity dragged her body into a slump position against the headboard and blinked at him like he was a mirage, at least until she smelled the lifesaving aroma of coffee.

“Where did I find you?” Felicity yawned as she rubbed her fists through her mascara blackened eyes.
“I think you fell on top of me,” Oliver smirked as he set the tray on the bedside table.
“Actually,” she challenged before she blew on the coffee, “you pulled me on top of you.”

Oliver leaned in over the bed, his fists dipping into the puffy cover, and kissed her fleetingly before she sighed, content, against his lips.
“Eat some breakfast with me,” she ghosted across his pouted mouth, “or let it sit here and wait while we,” she paused to trace fingers across his chest, “do something else.”

Oliver considered her proposal with a happy glint in his eyes and a smile that turned up the corners of his mouth. His lips hovered just above hers as she wet her bottom lip expectantly right before Oliver's left pant pocket started ringing.

"Ignore it," she hummed as her fingers laced around his neck.
Oliver half groaned, mostly wanting to listen to her, but also worried it might be something important.
“I’ll just be a minute,” he winked as he picked up a slice of toast and slotted in her mouth, “eat before it gets cold.”

He pulled the phone from his pocket and his lips tightened when he saw Malcolm’s name.

What did he want?
He offered an apologetic smile as he backed out of the bedroom.

“You must have dialled the wrong number it’s a Sunday, shop is closed,” Oliver answered the phone bluntly.
“I have a job for you this afternoon,” Malcolm spoke down the phone.
Oliver could almost hear the smile in his voice.
“I don’t do shit for you anymore Malcolm,” he hissed reactively as he walked into the guest room and pushed the door almost closed.
“Why, do you need to ask your girlfriend?”
Oliver's fist clenched and he had a sudden urge to punch something that could resemble Malcolm’s face.
“I can have my guys knock on her door, it’s the black one right?,” Malcolm continued, the smacking of his lips echoing down the phone line as he chewed gum.

Oliver strode to the window and peeled back the curtain just enough to give him a glimpse of the suburban street frontage. There were a few cars parked along the curb in both directions but nothing that stood out, aside from his own bike.

“You're there with her Oliver. Maybe you can ask her permission?”
His fist clenched tighter, turning his knuckles white.
“If you’re threatening something, fucking say it,” Oliver hissed, venom spilling from his words.
“I don’t make threats Oliver, I make promises.”

Oliver could feel the rage building, pulsing through his forehead like a freight train at high speed.
“How much does she know about you? What you’ve done? Does she know you’ve killed people without a fucking care in the world? Does she know what you’ve done Oliver?”
His voice was menacing and calculated.
“Enough,” Oliver gritted his teeth.
“It’s enough when I tell you it’s enough. I told that shit scared little boy that showed up on my door step trying to be tough that once you’re in this, you don’t get out,” his voice raised, strained, “do you need me to remind you? Maybe I’ll talk to that sweet piece of ass myself. She shouldn’t walk around in her panties with the curtains open, makes a man think things.” Oliver pounded his hand against the window frame, the only thing he could do to stop himself busting a hole in the wall.

“You stay the fuck away from her.”

Malcolm paused reflectively before he cleared his throat.

“I’ll ask again, but don’t push my good will Oliver. I need you for a job today.”

“What is it?” Oliver asked through clenched teeth, his palm throbbing and his temple pulsing.

“That’s better,” Malcolm chortled, “come around the bar in two hours. I’ll tell you then.”

Oliver listened to the sound of the disconnected call before he buried a strangled cry into his fist.

He almost sprinted into Felicity's bedroom making her startle as she held the coffee mug to her lips, still in bed. His eyes shot to the window, expecting the curtains to be open, but they weren’t. Malcolm wasn’t watching her this morning, but that didn’t mean he hadn’t been before.

Oliver knew what Malcolm was capable of.

“You scared me, everything alright?” Felicity asked with wide, blown eyes and a small tremor in her voice.

He walked over to the window and took a look through the gap in the curtains. It was almost the same view the other window had.

“Oliver, who was on the phone?”

His behaviour was making her anxious and it showed in the quiver of her tone.

“Someone about a job,” he responded somewhat gruffly.

“It’s Sunday, you’re closed on Sundays,” she replied naively.

“That’s what I told them,” he sighed as he collected his shirt from the arm chair and slipped it onto his body.

“Are you coming back to bed?”

Felicity already knew the answer, Oliver was getting dressed right in front of her, but she asked it in the vague hope he would say yes.

“I have to go,” Oliver sighed, noting the disappointment in her eyes and they felt like a blade inching down his chest.

“Where?”

“Few things I need to look into.”

His answers were vague and she wasn’t letting him off easily.

“Are you coming back?”

Oliver brushed a comb of fingers through his hair.

“It’ll take me all day.”

“Oh,” she breathed, staring down at the milky coffee.

“Hey,” Oliver leaned in and kissed her cheek, “how about dinner tonight, I’ll make you something special at my place?”

He flashed her a coy smile and she couldn’t help but reciprocate it.

“Ahh tempting me with food,” she hummed.

“Is it working?”

Oliver waited for her answer with a childlike grin blazed across his face.

“Yes,” she playfully pouted as she held the blanket across her breasts.

“I’ll see you at six.”
He backed away from the bed before blowing her a quick kiss. “Okay,” there was a hint of reservation in her words because she knew there was something Oliver was keeping tight lipped about, she just didn’t know what.

He wanted to kiss her, or fall into bed with her consequences be damned. But that wasn’t something afforded to Oliver right now.

Oliver drove straight home with the weight of the world on his shoulders. *Maybe,* he thought, *a better man would have ended it there and then with Felicity* but he couldn’t, maybe selfishly he didn’t want to. Being with Felicity felt weightless, it felt like there was a chance he could live a normal life and enjoy the simple things like bringing her breakfast on Sundays – things that had never been afforded to him, things he had never even considered himself worthy of dreaming.

But Felicity gave him hope. 
*Until Malcolm stole it away.*

He didn’t look in the mirror before he left his room. Oliver knew what he looked like – full leathers, bandana around his neck, gloves, dark beanie, vacant stare – he looked like he had done once before, he looked like trouble.

But he couldn’t escape the house without Thea noticing too.

“What are you going?” she asked, stopping him just as he reached the door.

“Out,” he replied gruffly.

It was a dance they had done years ago.

He opened the door, she slammed it shut.

“What?” her voice grew louder like a growing tempest.

“Out.”

He pushed past her and opened the door a second time.

Thea grabbed his arm almost painfully tight and Oliver grimaced, not from the pain she was inflicting on him, but rather the hurt he was putting her through.

“You fucking got out of that life Oliver, where are you going dressed like that?”

Oliver pulled his arm free and pursed his lips closed.

“What would Felicity say?”

He didn’t want to think about that.

“I don’t know, but Oliver would tell you to mind your own fucking business,” he growled.

He knew his words were harsh and it took a little of his soul every time he put them on for her, but if keeping Thea safe meant she hated him for a moment then so be it.

“You’re turning back into a shit, why?”

His eyes held a blink for longer than needed as he blew out a sigh, Thea wasn’t wrong.

“Go back to your shows Thea,” he pleaded.

“When will you be back?”

She stepped away from the door with crossed arms and angry eyes.

“Later.”

“Will you be home before dark or should I just wait for a call from the police?”

Oliver opened the door and stepped out into the afternoon sun.
“I’ll be home in a couple of hours.”

The door slammed behind him and the anguish marred his face. He could keep them both safe, he had to.

Oliver drove with purpose and stopped on the outskirts of town at a graveyard that ran alongside a small Church which looked like it belonged in the rolling English countryside rather than the smoky, dilapidated outskirts of the crime-riddled City.

Oliver supposed once upon a time it didn’t look like this, but it wasn’t a time he remembered with much depth.

He took the small boutique of supermarket daisies from his bag and attempted to make them look a little more presentable as he walked through the squeaky gate that was only hanging on by one hinge.

He walked the path he knew by heart even though it had been some months since he had travelled it. He stopped in front of the two identical headstones, the ones that belonged to his parents.

Laying the flowers on his mother's grave he took a long, troubled breath before he gently cleared a few weeds that had grown up around it. Turning to his father's headstone he took a rag from his pocket and wiped the grime away.

Oliver knew that his mother would have hated seeing him like that, dressed up like you do when you’re about to start trouble, but he didn’t have a choice. Malcolm didn’t trust him enough to give him anything meaty so whatever he was going to have him do this afternoon probably wouldn’t be that bad – he would have done worse once.

“Sorry I failed,” Oliver said quietly as he took a seat between the two, “I tried to keep Thea away from all this, but I couldn’t.”

He bowed his head into his palms.

“I know what you made me promise you dad, that I would look after her. That if anything happened to you I would take her out of Starling but I was child when it happened. I couldn’t get her out fast enough, I tried.”

His words quivered as he felt the pain pulling across his chest and the weight of his guilt hanging like a noose around his heart.

His father had never told him why, but the night the officers came to the door just after midnight Oliver already knew they were gone.

~*~*~

“Is there anyone else here, any adults?” the officer had asked.

Oliver shook his head.

“Raisa, she lives next door.”

One officer stayed in the house while 5 year old Thea slept through it all. The other accompanied Oliver next door where they roused the older Russian and the Detective with the sad smile told them the news.

His parents were dead.

They were riding home from where they had gone that night. Witnesses said the road had loose gravel and that it kicked up and hit a car. The car swerved into oncoming traffic before correcting itself and driving on, but it forced his parents’ bike into the shoulder, something made the tire blow
and they drove through the railing and down the embankment.

It took an hour to find them in the dark, dense scrub. They were both dead by the time they did.

Oliver didn’t remember crying. All he heard was his father’s words told to him before they went out that night.

“If something happens to your mother and I there is money in the metal box under the bed. Take it, pack only what you need for a few days, take your sister and leave,” Robert had instructed.

Oliver paused the video game he was playing in his room and shrugged.

“Where is the box?” his father tested him.

“Under the bed,” Oliver groaned.

“Good,” Robert nodded, happy Oliver was listening, “put your sister in the front of you on the bike, she’s too little to hold on at the back.”

Oliver smirked, “I’m not supposed to ride with her, mom will have a fit.”

“Oliver, I need you to understand what I’m asking.”

“Sure, I understand,” Oliver shrugged, “where are we supposed to go?”

“Go down the coast road, out of the state. Stay off the highways.”

Oliver watched his father’s expression – he was serious.

“Dad, what’s going on?”

“Nothing you need to worry about, but you have to look after your sister okay?”

“Okay.”

The conversation rung over in Oliver’s head even as he stood there, listening to the officers.

“Someone can take the kids tonight,” he was talking to Raisa, “they will put them into a foster home until something more permanent…”

“No, I don’t want to,” Oliver replied, his voice calm but forceful. He had to do what his father asked.

“I’m sorry son, its protocol.”

Take your sister and leave.

“Can’t we stay here with Raisa?”

The older woman nodded, “I can stay at their house.”

After a short debate between the officers they decided it would be alright and at around 2am Oliver crept out of his room with a small backpack on his back. He went and retrieved the money and snuck into Thea’s room. After he added some of her clothes to the backpack he carried her into the garage, past Raisa who had fallen asleep on the couch.

He almost made it to California before they were pulled over and subsequently became a ward of the state.

He hadn’t been fast enough.

~*~*~

Oliver ran a tired hand through his hair. He didn’t understand most of what happened after that, but he ended up in a juvenile home and Thea ended up with Malcolm once the truth about her parentage came out.

Twelve years later and he was still trying to follow his father’s instructions. He kept Thea out of the gang as best as he could, doing whatever Malcolm asked of him to make sure she stayed safe.
And now, he realised as he tugged on the sleeves of his jacket while he stood up, he was about to do the same thing to keep Felicity safe.

He had tarnished his soul a long time ago, so what did it matter anymore.

Oliver stormed into the bar, making the door crash against the wall. He saw Malcolm across the room talking with a man a few feet shorter than Oliver but built like truck, they were passing something that looked like a photo between them. The clear weight difference didn't factor in as Oliver made a beeline for the two.

He snapped up a pool stick from the empty table nearby and tackled the truck into the wall, pinning him against it with the stick bending across his neck.

“Is this the fucker you had following her?” Oliver growled, pushing the stick so deep that any more weight would see either the stick or the truck’s throat break.

“Oliver you’re paranoid,” Malcolm chuckled, enjoying the display of brute force.

“If I see this fucker or any other of your other fucks anywhere near her, they’ll answer to a crowbar, am I clear?”

The truck nodded like the question was been asked of him as he struggled to breathe.

Oliver pried the photo from the truck’s hands before he let him off the wall. It was Felicity, alone, walking down the front steps of her house. Oliver couldn’t tell how old it was.

“Who took this picture?” Oliver spat in Malcolm’s face.

“It was delivered to me,” Malcolm lied through a smirk.

“Bullshit.”

Oliver felt his anger boiling. He wanted to feel Malcolm’s throat under his palm. One day he would kill the man. Oliver knew it. Deep down he had always known.

“I’ll do this job for you but then you keep her out of this, she has nothing to do with you and with this place. Your threats won’t fly a second time.”

The malice in his words were clear. Pointed and clear.

Malcolm smiled, there was the killer he knew.

“Good to see you back Oliver.”

“What’s the job?” Oliver asked through gritted teeth.

“Simple, someone just owes me some money, I want you to go pick it up.”

Oliver pursed his lips, “A shakedown?”

“Good to see you remember how this work around here.”

Oliver ignored Malcolm’s comments, he wasn't playing into his game.

“How much?”

“5Gees.”

Oliver cleared his throat, “what do you want me to do if he doesn’t have it?”

“Whatever you think is fitting.”

Oliver finally relinquished the pool stick, leaning it up against the wall.

“This and I’m done,” he gritted, his blue eyes now almost black.
“This and you’re done.”
“Give me the address.”
“Juliana’s, a little Italian place down on Pitt Street.”

Oliver didn’t reply, he simply left and took the corridor to his shop.

He kicked his office door shut, much more forcefully than it required but it did, for a second, release the tightly wound anger pulsing through his body.

He opened the safe and looked at the money he had spent years saving. It wasn’t much, $8,000 probably, but it was all he had to get Thea out of Starling. Out and far away, just like he had promised he would.

But he had no choice now.
He took what he needed from the safe and put it into a canvas bag. He slung it over one shoulder and collected a baseball bat from beside the bed which he hadn’t slept in for sometime, *the bed he and Felicity had...*

He blew put a soft sigh. Meeting her had changed his life, whatever came of that, he knew it would stay with him.

Oliver walked out of the shop with what he needed and was met by another one of Malcolm’s crew.
“Who the fuck are you?” Oliver grunted.
He was in no mood to be pushed today.

“Malcolm wants me to go with you, make sure you get the job done.”
Oliver considered wiping the smirk off the guys face with his fist.
“I don’t need a fucking babysitter.”
“Yeah, well you got one.”
*He could use the bat instead of his fist.*

“You should walk your stupid ass back in the bar and tell Malcolm I left already,” Oliver warned. The hint wasn’t taken and as Oliver mounted his bike and took off, the babysitter followed.

---

Oliver arrived at Juliana’s, his babysitter not far away, though he parked at a distance. Oliver pulled the bandana across his mouth and gripped the shaft of the bat. This wasn’t him anymore, and yet he knew it like second nature.

He ignored the closed sign and walked through the door with the painted ivy on the window. A bell jingled above him before Oliver carefully closed the door.
“Dinner service starts in an hour, come back then,” a tired sounding voice said from behind the bar, without even turning towards Oliver.
The babysitter stayed outside, sitting on his bike, at a vantage point where he could see almost everything.

“You the owner here?” Oliver asked.
The man didn’t reply, not until he heard the click as Oliver locked the front door.
“Yes,” the man swallowed lumps of air as he turned to face Oliver, a dish towel and wine glass in his trembling hands.
Oliver walked towards the bar, his heavy shoes stuffing the ground with a sound he knew the man
would find intimidating.

“Who are you?” the owner asked.

He took a step back and bumped against the alcohol shelves and the sound of glass rattling echoed through the restaurant.

Oliver swung the bat and crashed it through a row of freshly washed glasses. The sound was shattering and bounced off every surface as shards of broken glass showered the bar and floor around it.

“Malcolm Merlyn sent me, you owe him some money,” Oliver said as he calmly rested the bat back on his shoulder.

“I, I don’t have it,” the owner trembled.

“You’re going to take me to the cash register,” Oliver ordered, using the bat to point the way they would walk.

“I don’t have it all, couple of hundred maybe.”

Oliver raised the bat and the man jumped.

“Cash register, now.”

He nodded and stumbled towards the register.

“Open it,” Oliver grunted as he looked outside to see where his babysitter was, his view now would have been slightly obscured by a large potted fern.

Oliver placed the bag from his shoulders onto the desk and the man looked inside, returning a look of confusion to Oliver.

It was full of money already.

“You’re going to pretend like you’re putting money in that bag from the register and the safe under the desk. Nod if you understand,” Oliver spoke clearly, his voice only slightly muffled under the bandana.

The man nodded.

“While you’re doing that I’m going to break some shit.”

Oliver placed a roll of hundreds, $1000 in total, on the counter where the babysitter couldn’t see, “use that money to fix whatever I break.”

The man look confused but he nodded slowly all the same.

“If you mutter a word about this to anyone, I will come back and break your knee caps, understood?”

This time his reply was a far more fervent nod.

“And if you need to borrow money again you go to a fucking bank,” Oliver warned, his anger genuine, “if I see you’ve gone back to the Lost Souls I’ll drive you to the Nevada desert and leave you ass naked in the middle of nowhere. Got it?”

His nod was shaky, “I just borrowed the money for my daughter, Juliana,” he eyes walked sadly to a photo on the wall behind him. It was a young girl, maybe ten years old, “she got sick last year and no one would help us, I needed to get her better.”

“Is she better now?” Oliver asked, his eyes taken with the large brown eyes of the smiling child.

“She has good days and bad days,” the owner replied, his voice tinged with sadness.

“I’m sorry,” Oliver mumbled.

The man continued the pretence of filling the bag.

“Thank you, but I don’t understand why you’re doing this?” he spoke softly and kept his head low, bowed.

“I have my reasons,” Oliver replied.
Oliver took the bag from the counter and slung it back over his shoulder.  
“Sorry for what I’m about to do.”

Oliver didn’t wait for a response before he overturned a table with such force it toppled a nearby one. He then picked up a cherry wood chair and launched it through the front door in an act that made the greatest impact with the least amount of damage.

He stepped through the shattered door without looking back, even as he felt another part of him blacken.  

“You made quite a show,” the babysitter laughed as he stepped from his bike when Oliver approached. 

He had enjoyed what he thought he saw.  

“You shouldn’t have followed me,” Oliver’s lips twisted up into a smile as he pulled a switch blade from his pocket.

Without another word he drove the knife into the front tire of the babysitter’s bike, slicing it open in one fluid move.  

“Next time it won’t be your bike.”

“Here’s your money,” Oliver hissed as he threw the bag onto the pool table in front of Malcolm.  

“You’ve always been good at your job Oliver,” Malcolm commended as he took a precursory look into the bag and smiled, “very good.”

“This isn’t my job and I’m done,” Oliver growled as he banged his fist on the green felt.  

Malcolm raised his hands in retreat, “of course as promised.”

“If I see anyone near Felicity I will come for you,” venom dripped from Oliver's warning.

“I don’t doubt that.”

“And I’m out.”

Malcolm smiled, “there’s the door.”

Oliver walked towards the door, even though he was worried it seemed easier than he expected.

“Wait, don’t you want your cut, ten percent?” Malcolm spoke like the serpent he was.

Always enticing, twisting, suffocating.

“Keep it,” Oliver growled, “just stay the fuck away from her.”

He didn’t need to say her name, they both knew who he meant, Felicity.

Oliver trudged through the front door of his house, preparing himself for a barrage of words from Thea.

But it wasn’t Thea who met him in the doorway, it was Felicity.

She looked him up and down, taking in every aspect of his attire. Oliver looked different, he looked menacing, he looked like a member of a gang. Her ruffian for the first time actually resembled one.
“You’re early,” he remarked as he pulled the bandana from around his neck. “Sorry, I got bored at home and I thought we could hang out, but,” she touched his gloved hands, “where have you been?”

Oliver looked across the room at Thea, she was giving him nothing with her stare. “Just out riding.” He hated the idea of lying and when her blue eyes blinked away, he knew Felicity knew he was. “Oh okay,” she sighed as she dipped her eyes, she didn’t want to see him lying to her. 

_It was safer she didn’t know_ Oliver tried to remind himself.

“I’m going to go freshen up,” he remarked as he leaned in and kissed her cheek. “Okay,” he heard the disappointment in her voice. 

_But it was better._

“Then you can help me cook dinner,” he smiled as he tipped her chin up with his finger. “Oh that’s really not a good idea,” she replied, a soft laugh floating from her lips that he was thankful to hear. “Come on, it’ll be fun,” he winked. “I’m not sure who for,” Felicity jested as she touched a finger to his jaw, _that still looked the same_, “go clean up.”

He kissed her cheek a second time before they parted.

Thea followed him into his bedroom and kicked the door closed behind her. “So you’re just going to lie to her?” she asked bluntly with her arms folded across her chest. “Stay out of it Thea,” Oliver sighed, listless, as he took off his gloves and dropped them onto his dresser. “Where were you really?”

Oliver ignored the impatience of her tone and the tapping of her foot as he peeled off his jacket. “You were doing a job weren’t you?” she asked, barely pausing before asking another question, “do you needed extra money? You think she wants you to get money like that?”

When he still gave her no response Thea grabbed his arm to force him to look at her. “She’s being so nice to us Oliver, she’s the only one that ever has, you could have something real...” tears formed at the edges of her eyes, glazing them over. “Get out of my room Thea,” Oliver pleaded, his chest tight and his breathing strained. 

_It was better._

“Please don’t fuck this up Oliver,” Thea begged as she brushed a tear from her cheek, “I like her.” “I like her too,” Oliver breathed before he took Thea into an embrace, pressing her head to his chest.

“You don’t have to worry about this Thea, everything is alright,” he spoke softly as his hand brushed down her hair. “You told me that when I was five and we ran away from home the night mom and dad died,” she whispered before she pulled back from the embrace, “you’ve protected me ever since, but I’m afraid at what cost.”

Oliver sighed as he playfully tapped her nose. “There isn’t a price I wouldn’t pay,” he swore. “I know,” Thea lamented, “that’s what scares me.”

Oliver watched as she walked slowly towards the door. “I’ll be out soon.” Thea turned just before she reached the door. “I love you Oliver, people love you.”

He smiled thankfully as she left. When he was finally alone he dropped down down onto the edge of the
bed and hung his head between his knees.

People loved him

He wasn’t sure he deserved that.
For a little added fun I have added some of my gifspiration for this chapter, hopefully they work, lol. {they're not exactly replicated but they give you the idea and it's a little fun}

Special thanks to Katsandra for trying to help my research, you truly are a great Bish lol.

“When I told you I didn’t know how to cook, I wasn’t lying to be cute,” Felicity pouted as she stared, almost frightfully, at the array of ingredients Oliver had piled on the bench.
“You have to start somewhere,” he joked as he stirred the rich tomato-based sauce.
“So what are we marking Oliver the Tattooed Ruffian Chef?” Felicity asked as she rolled the strange mottled green vegetable around the bench, “and what is this?”
“That is a Kabocha squash and we will be filling cannelloni’s with it and feta, cooked in a fresh basil and vine tomato sauce with a side of roasted vegetables.”
Felicity licked her lips slowly as her eyes hooded over.

“Okay so that sounds ridiculously good, but I don’t think I can do any of that.”

Oliver put a carrot on the thick chopping board and handed her the knife. Felicity took it and sighed playfully at the task in front of her.

“It doesn’t have to be pretty,” he smiled as he moved to her back and pressed his chest to her spine before slowly skimming his hands down either side of her body, stopping when they shadowed her hands.

“I think I can cut a carrot without help,” she smiled, tipping her head over her shoulder.

“Maybe I just like being close to you,” he sealed his words with a kiss at the very tip of her jaw.

“Where were you, really?” she asked softly, her words barely above a whisper as she was afraid to turn them loose.

_Afraid for both the lie and the truth._

Oliver’s chin rested on her shoulder and his sigh misted against her neck.

She placed the knife flat in the counter and turned slowly in his embrace.

“Please Oliver, whatever it is you can tell me. Just please don’t shut yourself behind a lie,” she pleaded as her palms warmed the side of his face.

He blinked slowly, unspent tears forming at the corners of his eyes.

“The only secrets I keep are the ones that keep you and her,” he nodded towards the living room, towards Thea, “…safe.”

Felicity watched as his face bore heavy scars, not from fist or knife, but from secrets and mistakes. She wouldn’t push him for those right now, they were a burden she hoped he would share in time, but it had to be because he wanted to not because she forced him to.

“Did you hurt anyone?”

She kept her voice low and her eyes open.

He didn’t blink away, “No.”

For now, that was enough for her, and she offered him a thankful smile.

“I’ve spent a long time in this world, I don’t want to see it touch you. Please.”

His glazed eyes cracked and a tear slipped from one, crawling down his cheek.

“Please,” his voice trembled.

Felicity turned over his hands and balanced them on her much smaller ones.

“Do you see these?” she breathed, looking down at his palms before her eyes walked back up to meet him.

“Yes,” he sighed, breathy, pained.

“What do you see?”

The words floated from her lips like a calming lullaby.

“My hands,” he replied almost mutely as his eyes travelled the deep trenches on his rough palms.

Felicity lowered his left hand and rested her index finger at the base of his other splayed palm still cupped in her hand.

“I see your struggles,” she started as her finger glided along the _life line_ as it curved up around his thumb, “I see your strength,” her finger turned and floated down the _wisdom line_ towards the side of his hand, “and…” she breathed as she gently hopped her finger up to the _love line_ “I see them clean.”

She blew out a soft sigh when her finger reached the end before she laid her palm flat against his, the difference in size so clearly visible. His hand could swallow hers whole.

“My hands will never be clean,” Oliver answered, the guilt threaded in each and every word.

He wore them on his heart.
She sunk her knuckle into his chin and forced him to look at her, no matter how hard he wanted to shut himself away.
“This life isn’t you Oliver. It doesn’t own you and you don’t owe it anything,” she spoke softly but resolutely.
“I’m done,” his voice was hoarse and thin, “this was it. Today was it.”
He wanted to believe that. He needed to believe that.
“Okay,” was all she could offer him.
“Okay?”
“Oliver,” she smiled as her finger swam across his jaw and lightly plucked a length of hair, “you carry around more demons than I can probably imagine and I won’t force you to bare them all to me now,” she paused to put her palm back atop his, “but I believe in redemption and I believe in you.”

She turned his hand in hers and lifted it up, pressing a soft kiss against his knuckles.
“You can keep them clean, start today.”
For the first time since she had collected it, Oliver’s hand moved of its own will and twisted to entwine his fingers with hers, pulling her hand against his thrumming chest so she could feel how it raced for her.

“Why do you believe in me, you don’t know what I’ve done?” he breathed with tiny hints of trepidation.
“No, Oliver, I don’t. And I hope that one day you will share your pain with me to heal, but I can see that regardless of what you’ve done…” she brushed a tear from his cheek, “you’re a good person who was dealt a bad hand.”
“You really believe that?”
A smile started to grow across his lips.
“I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t,” she offered a ruby-red smile in return, “don’t get me wrong Oliver, you have an exceptional ass and the sex with you is ah-ma-zing,” a chuckle broke free from her smiled lips, “but that’s not why I’m here, in your kitchen about to make an absolute mess of dinner.”

They stayed in silence for a few moments until his hand smoothed against her cheek, her entire face almost shadowed by his large hand.
“You said something last night when you were half asleep and tipsy,” he teased his tongue over his lips.
Felicity’s face pulled into a grimace, “oh god, what?”
“I’ll tell you one day soon,” he winked before he leaned in and kissed her forehead.
“I take it all back,” Felicity pouted.
“Which part?”
“The sex is only so-so.”
She crossed her arms over her chest and raised a single eyebrow tauntingly at him.
“You’re lying,” he smirked as his body pressed hers against the lip of the counter.
“How do you know?” she breathed, trying to hold together a semblance of control even as vivid memories of the wild escapades they had already engaged in around this room filled her head.

Oliver leaned in and brushed his lips against her ear, “no thinking face,” he whispered.

“Do you guys want me to leave or…” Thea interrupted with a laugh as she stood poised in the entrance.
Felicity pushed Oliver away with such force that he stumbled back hard against the kitchen island making a chorus of noise when the fruit bowl clanged to the floor and a glass in the sink toppled
“Thea,” she yelped.

“It’s okay,” Thea said with a smile as she slinked into the kitchen and pulled the wooden spoon from the tomato sauce, “I know you guys are boning,” she shrugged before she dipped her pinky finger into the spoon and threaded the same finger through her lips.

“Boning? Really Thea?” Oliver mused as he shook off his unexpected launch across half of the kitchen.

“Bumping nasties, making condom babies, sliding into home base…” Thea prattled off as she casually stirred the sauce and added a pinch of salt.

“Okay, you can stop,” he reprimanded before he appropriated the spoon.

“Point is,” she spoke as she relinquished control of the sauce and tiptoed around the kitchen, “I know and I’m cool with it. You don’t have to act all catholic school around me. I’m very aware what sex is.”

The spoon clanged against the side of the saucepan as Oliver spun around, his face looking Friday 13 level horrified.

“What the fuck does that mean, you’re very aware?” he interrogated as the corner of his eye began to twitch involuntarily.

Thea shrugged casually, “you’re not the only one getting some around here.”

“Oh hell no, you didn’t just…”

Oliver’s face had turned an expressive shade of fire engine red.

“Relax,” Thea chuckled as she walked over and patted the side of his face, “that vein on your temple is about to explode. I’m completely safe, in fact,” Thea turned her attention to Felicity, “I wanted to ask you about the implant, you’ve had one right?”

“You’re not having this discussion,” Oliver clenched his jaw.

“Oliver, it’s admirable that your sister wants to practice safe sex,” Felicity replied very matter of fact.

“She shouldn’t be practicing any kind of sex,” he grumbled.

“Abstinence, while a perfectly excellent choice for some isn’t really realistic for everyone.”

The vein was now alternating with his eye twitch.

“You’re supposed to be on my side,” he grovelled.

Felicity dropped her head to one side and softly shrugged, “I’m on whatever side means your teenage sister doesn’t end up pregnant.”

“Ooohh,” Thea grinned, “I like this one a lot.”

Oliver opened his mouth to speak but nothing more than a groan came out before he clamped it shut again.

“Yes, I have had the implant and its great,” Felicity turned to Thea to answer her, “I was actually considering getting another one.”

Oliver’s ears perked up, as did his smile, “really?”

“It makes financial sense,” Felicity smirked.

“So what no little baby bikers for me to spoil?” Thea feigned a pout, “I would make a great aunt.”

Felicity looked at Oliver who simply looked right back at her.

“I don’t think that’s on either of our agendas right now,” Felicity remarked as Oliver blinked in agreement.

“Was it weird having something in your arm?” Thea quizzed.
“At first a little, but after a while you don’t really notice.”
“And the bleeding…”

“Okay, out of the kitchen,” Oliver interrupted, shaking his head wildly.
“Oliver, are you squeamish?” Felicity mocked.

“Out, out, out,” he playfully picked Felicity up and carried her to the doorway.
“If I knew all I had to do to get out of cooking duty was talk about periods…” she grinned as he let
her down in the living room.
He bent down and kissed the tip of her forehead before he pulled back slowly, “dinner is about
forty minutes away.”

Empty dinner plates sat almost licked clean on the coffee table in front of them as Felicity
stretched out down the couch rolling her hands over her stomach with her back propped up against
Oliver.
“So has Oliver taken you riding yet?” Thea asked as she balanced her empty plate on top of their.
“To and from my house, and the gala, does that count?” Felicity asked while Oliver ran feathered
fingers down her arm.
“That’s all?” Thea recoiled playfully, “Oh Felicity, you need to feel the rush of the open road
There is nothing like it, some people say it’s better than sex.”
Oliver coughed and both Felicity and Thea laughed.
“We’re not having another discussion about sex,” he grumbled.

The smile of Thea’s lips said she considered riling Oliver up again but her jostled shoulder shrug
showed she decided against it – for now.
“Oliver is one of the best trick riders,” Thea enthused.
“What’s a trick rider?” Felicity asked, she could probably guess but it wasn’t a saying she had
heard before.
“He’s never shown you?” Thea reacted with an almost scream before she whacked Oliver’s
shoulder with the back of her hand.
“I don’t do it anymore,” Oliver sighed as he rubbed the spot where Thea has smacked him.
“You should,” Thea spoke as she walked towards the TV cabinet and opened the cupboard
underneath, “you were amazing,” she finished with her head almost entirely inside the cabinet.

A few more moments passed before she emerged holding a green and black photo album. Felicity
sat up to make room for Thea on the couch beside her.
The plonked herself next to Felicity and opened the album. The first page was just two photos of
Oliver geared up and standing beside a motorcycle, but when Thea turned the paged, trick riding
gained a very clear definition.
The first photo Felicity’s eyes were drawn to was of Oliver, she rightly assumed, hanging onto the
back of a bike, his body almost horizontal as it travelled down the track.
“This bike is moving?” Felicity gaped, wondering for just a moment if it was just some camera
illusion.
Oliver leaned over to look where her finger pointed, “yes, about forty miles.”
“And you’re holding on the back of it?”
She could see it with her own eyes, but Felicity was struggling to believe it.
“Yes,” Oliver chuckled at the look plastered across Felicity’s face.
It was like she couldn’t decide whether to be petrified, horrified, or actually kind of turned on.
She pointed to another where the bike was in mid-air and the rider, Oliver, was doing a handstand
on the handlebars.

“And this one, this is you?”

Another soft chuckle, “yes.”

“This is amazing,” Felicity breathed in awe as photo after photo contained another seemingly impossible trick, “how old were you?”

“About ten when I started doing stunts.”

“Ten?” Felicity almost choked on the word.

“And about twenty two when I stopped.”

“How did you stop?”

She watched Oliver stiffen in his seat.

“It didn’t pay the bills.”

“But it could have,” Thea piped in.

“We’re you scared?” Felicity asked as she continued to turn each page, slowly taking it all in.

“Sometimes,” Oliver admitted, “stunt riding is adrenaline and belief. Its split second stuff, but this,” he pointed to a photo of him stood on the seat of motorcycle, his arms outstretched like an eagle in flight, “this was always better.”

She could hear the reminiscence in his voice, shrouded under a quiet sigh.

“It looks…” she paused trying to think of the word, “free.”

Oliver nodded slowly, “they call it surfing and there isn’t anything in the world like it.”

“And you still do this?”

Oliver folded his lips together before he blew out a small exhale, “I haven’t for a while, but yes,” he paused, his eyes looking at something only his mind’s eye could see, “when I want to feel the wind.”

Shea clapped her hands together suddenly, jerking Oliver from his distance stare.

“I took a video last year, you should watch him, it’s fucking amazing,” Thea cheered.

“Thea, she doesn’t need to see it,” Oliver spoke, listless.

Felicity gently squeezed his knee reassuringly, “I want to.”

Barely two minutes after Oliver nodded his head in agreement Thea had found the disc with the recording and Felicity was watching the glimpse into a part of Oliver she didn’t know.

Thea was sitting on the back tray of a convertible driven by a man that Felicity didn’t recognise, although she assumed it was John Diggle, the man Oliver had often spoken to her about and only with admiration.

The camera panned down a road that seemed both empty and nondescript. Two men sat on bikes as the sun hang low in the sky, evening almost taking its hold on the day. Their frames were almost identical but the one on the left of the screen seemed broader across the shoulders and wider through the chest – even beneath a helmet, a crew neck and a unzipped tan leather jacket, Felicity could tell that one was Oliver, although she couldn’t picture who the other man might be.

There was some kind of hand slap between them before the bikes started to travel down the road. Thea’s laugh lit up the room as the car started moving forward, and then the two men stood, almost in complete unison, the car pulling to the side and they floated past, just like the photo – arms outstretched, jacket flapping in the wind, steady as a rock but soaring like a bird.

Free.

Felicity felt herself drawn closer to Oliver, snuggling her chin into his strong arm before he wrapped the same around her.
“Will you show me this one day?” she asked quietly, her chin pressed to his chest and a smile threaded through her eyes.
Oliver brushed back her hair and kissed the bridge of her nose, “I’ll teach you to fly.”

Felicity’s Monday morning had started off like any other – dragging herself from the warm confines of her bed (unfortunately alone), a brisk shower so she didn’t linger, half a slice of toast because this week she was determined to eat breakfast every day (although she knew come Wednesday her resolve would fade and she would return to two cups of coffee before 10am and a pop tart after) and a town car ride through morning traffic that gave her enough time to apply her makeup, fix her hair in a flouncing ponytail and add a fresh coat of nail varnish that would see the striking red last another day until she had a chance to get to the salon.

For a Monday it was actually going pretty well.
Curtis had every non-essential thing in hand and had even made a few hardware suggestions to her specs for the Kord job that were actually pretty damn near perfect. Once Cisco finished the casing they could assemble a miniature of the most advanced and impenetrable moving fortress both physically and remotely, the likes of which the world hadn’t seen before.

Monday was her bitch.
Even when her office door opened and her father stepped in unexpectedly, it didn’t diminish her thoughts on the day.

Even when he cleared his throat and said they needed to talk, Felicity continued to be optimistic that Monday wouldn’t be ruined.

But then he said something that made the storm clouds close in.
“I’m hearing great things about what you’re doing.”
A compliment – those never came without strings, without a but.

“But,” there is was, “some people are questioning your maturity Felicity.”
Her name, she only got that in special dressing downs.
“Oh really,” she would act surprised, although if she was honest she was surprised at how long it had taken Noah to trudge down to her office, “and who might that be?”
She watched her father straighten his jacket unnecessarily.

“Board members and other people, the influential around town.”
Read — old, rich, men.
“Because?” she asked as she sat back in her chair and folded her arms loosely across her chest. “I don’t think I need to remind you about the weekend.”
For a man who was absent more than half her life he sure liked to play the father tone.
“I think you do,” she shot back, reclining a little more, “because I only recall you being rude to my partner.”
“Partner? Felicity, really?”
The chuckle at the end of his words had her standing to her feet involuntarily.
“I’m not fifteen and I don’t need dating advice from my father,” she argued her eyes fierce and unwavering.
“You must see how this all looks,” Noah argued, as he walk an imaginary line in front of her desk.
“No, actually, I don’t. Please explain how this looks.”
“He has a record.”
Felicity coughed back a laugh.
“So you’ve looked into him,” she spoke as her head shook in disbelief.
He hadn’t bothered to look her up for nearly 18 years, but in the span of two days he already knew everything he thought there was to know about Oliver.
“Yes, he’s involved in your life,” his voice raised.
She could match it.
“Answer me this,” she snipped, “is that because you care about my personal welfare or because you’re protecting your investment?”
She watched as he blinked away, he couldn’t even look at her.
“Does it matter?”
Felicity pursed her lips, honestly she wasn’t surprised by his answer — he didn’t even have the fortitude to lie to her about what he cared more for.
“You’d be surprised just how much that matters.”
His shoulders stiffened and he adjusted his jacket for a second, still unnecessary, time.
“Are you aware of his rap sheet?”
“Yes,” she could feel her foot itching to tap on the hard, glossy tiled floor.
“Are you okay with his past criminal behaviour?” it was a baited question she had no intention of answering, “do you know he served time for assault?”
“After a man knocked him and his younger sister off their bikes and threatened a minor. Yes, I’m aware of it.” Felicity argued, her tone becoming heated and sharp.
“His criminal connections?”
“You mean the world he was born into and left with a lineage through no fault of his own?”
A third straighten of his jacket.
“It’s not a good look for this company.”
Felicity’s eyes rolled as she shook her head, unbelievable but not surprising, before she walked the short distance to her office door. She pulled it open roughly and Curtis startled — Felicity was certain he had heard most, if not all, of that exchange.
“I’ll tell you what Noah, you come back to me when Joe Stuckey has resigned from the board for paying for his son’s drink driving case to vanish. Or how about when Michael Stanton admits to his wife that he’s fucking his secretary, or James Keate stops doing lines of cocaine in his private bathroom. Or how about you come and talk to me about what looks good when you finally sit
down with a reporter and admit that you left your girlfriend and your baby girl in Vegas and disappeared for years because it was just too fucking hard for you.”

She stepped to the side of the door.
“Until any of that happens, you can keep your opinion on my personal life because I’m not interested in hearing it,” she finished with her shoulders pinned back and her eyes staring dead ahead.

There was no room for misunderstanding.

Noah didn’t reply, not even a twitch of regret passed across his brow as he walked away and Felicity knew she shouldn’t have expected there to be. While she wouldn’t villainise him, she wouldn’t bestow him with any hand-painted father of the year mugs either.

When she heard the elevator doors close around him in the distance, she finally expelled the sigh she had been keeping locked away.
Monday was fucked.

“Woah,” Curtis grimaced as he stood and walked around his desk toward her, “are you okay? I mean I’ve kind of wanted you to say that for years and I actually want to simultaneously hug and applaud you and I’m not even sure what I’m doing with my hands right now,” he babbled as his hands flipped and spun in random gestures.
“I shouldn’t have said all that,” Felicity lamented as she ran a finger across her tired brow. Spewing out years of pent up bitterness took its toll.

“Yes, yes you should have and you know you should have,” Curtis replied as he finally settled his hands into his pockets.
“Will you still say that when he withdraws his investment and we’re all unemployed?” Felicity joked, although it was not altogether an impossible outcome.
“You’ve never needed him you know.”
“I’ve needed his money, I’ve needed this,” she admitted as she looked around the spacious offices and the high-rise view.
“You could run this business out of a downtown loft and every stuffy old man in this place knows it,” Curtis declared without a wisp of doubt.
“Would you eat Ramon noodles and work in my loft for pennies and hugs Curtis?”
A small laughed brushed across her lips.
“Absolutely.”

The corners of her lips hooked up into a thankful smile. She could always count on him for that – and one other thing.
“Okay, I’ll take that hug now,” she quipped.
His long, almost gangly arms wrapped entirely across her back and then some as he gave her the best sloth-like hug she had ever gotten.

“So the first two I knew about but James and Cocaine? His PA never told me that,” Curtis remarked as they stayed in the embrace.
“That’s because she’s dating his dealer,” Felicity shrugged.
“Hot damn those old white guys are messed up.”
The two of them stood a little while long quietly laughing to themselves at just how royally fucked up this Monday had gotten.
Felicity should probably feel bad for finishing and entire Italian pizza herself, but as she threw the last half eaten crust into the box, she really didn’t. She also didn’t feel bad about the soda she had guzzled or the tub of ice cream in her freezer that, as soon as she got off the couch, she was going to inhale.

That’s why she was wearing her comfy pants and *damn if she wasn’t going to take advantage*. Regrets were for tomorrow when she had a stomach ache that felt like an active volcano in her gut. Now it was time for triple chocolate decadent ice cream.

She stretched as she stood from the couch and for a moment she considered instantly flopping back down, until a knock on the front door pulled her attention.

She couldn’t think who it might be, but there was a chance in her food ordering rage she may have ordered more than just pizza. *It wouldn’t be the first time.*

She saw Oliver in the display and her heart instantly lifted before in sunk when she realised there wasn’t enough time to fix the *given up on life chic* outfit she was wearing right now. *Oh well, he should probably know what shit Mondays look like.*

Felicity opened the door to Oliver's half smiled, half smirked face.

“Hi,” she peeped.

“Hi.”

“I’m sorry, did we make plans tonight, I thought you were busy?” Felicity sighed as she wiped pizza sauce from the corner of her mouth.

“I was,” Oliver smiled, his hands still a little dirty from the scrapyard rummaging he had been doing, “but Curtis rung.”

“He really takes his job far too seriously,” she muttered.

“He said you had a rough day and…” he paused to wipe the same pizza sauce from the tip of her nose, “….maybe he was underselling it.”

“Is that all he told you?” she laughed, though it was barely cheerful. While her father probably deserved everything she said, it hadn’t made her feel good to say it.

“He suggested I should bring you flowers.”

Felicity tipped her head to look either side of his body, but all she saw was a brown paper bag held in one hand.

“And you decided against such sound advice?”

Oliver raised a finger before he winked and drove that same finger into the bag, pulling out two items that he nestled into the crook of his arms.

“I brought these instead,” he grinned, looking from one to the other – Massage Oil and Kentucky Bourbon, “pick one, or both or neither.”

Ten minutes later found them holed up on the couch with the lights set to the softest dimmer setting and music playing quietly behind them. Felicity’s eyes were closed, her body reclined against the arm of the couch and her feet up on Oliver’s lap as he gently rubbed the warm elixir into her feet.

“I must look like a mess,” she hummed as she shook a hand through her skewed ponytail.

“I think you look beautiful,” Oliver replied, his voice like warm liquid gold – or sex.

“Right answer,” she sighed blissfully.
“So I take it your dad isn’t a fan of mine?”
“He apparently isn’t a fan of his daughter, I’m sorry, his PR prodigy, looking human,” she seethed, “half of the men in corner offices are sleeping with someone that isn’t their wife, the other half has skeletons that would full their walk in closets and he’s going to stand there and judge you for owning a motorcycle.”
She blew out an annoyed *humph.*

“And going to jail,” Oliver reminded her.
“Whose side are you on?” she bemoaned as she lightly kicked her toe into him.
“He’s not wrong Felicity. I don’t exactly look like the type you take home to meet your parents.”
“He wasn’t there for most of my life so this has nothing to do with meeting my parents. You don’t hide who you are so you’re not *on brand.*”

She sat up and shuffled in closer, her eyes hanging half closed.
“Sometimes I just feel like I spend my life trying to be this impossibly perfect daughter but that if I stop being that then he’ll leave again,” she sighed, it was not the first time she had thought like this, but it was the first time she had ever divulged it, “and maybe I don’t care, but my mother will.”

She bit back tears.
“I just want to feel free, even if its only fleeting. Like the moment your arms touched the wind and the air blew through your fingers, I want to feel free like that,” Felicity looked at him with piercing blue eyes and he knew just what to say.

“Let’s go then.”
Her brow pinched inward, “what?”
“Let’s go, pack a bag and we’ll leave tomorrow.”
She shook her head, unsure, “I can’t, can I?”
“Princess you can do whatever you want.”

Oliver stood up and extended his hand to her.
“We can’t go now,” she laughed as she starred down at her sweat pants and tank top.
“We’re going upstairs.”
“Why?”
She looked at him through a side glance.
“So my tongue can massage between your legs.”
As if to prove his point he ran his tongue from one side of his bottom lip to the other and Felicity swallowed a heavy sigh.

She wasn’t about to refuse that offer.

[Next Morning]

Felicity stretched out across the empty bed until her hand hit a small note on the pillow.

*Morning Sexy,*
*If you want to feel free pack a bag and meet me at the shop whenever you’re ready.*

Maybe she could.

It was well after noon when Felicity paid the cab driver and slipped from the back seat, a heavy boot landing on the cracked concrete of the pavement just outside Verdant Motors. She had made
all calls she needed. Every scheduled meeting this week was cancelled and every out of office was set.

When she told Curtis he had almost choked in surprise but then assured her that he could hold down the fort, and honestly, she didn’t doubt that he could, or at least he was quite capable of not destroying the place.

She jostled the knapsack over her shoulder and took a long, steadying breath before she looked down at her outfit and smiled. A single hand rode down the open zip of her black jacket, fingertips glossing over the cropped brassier before she tapped a palm at the side of the pants that rode down her legs like black lacquer.

And then she took a step towards momentary freedom, swinging the helmet an eager shop assistant had sold her in one hand. Another step, and another, until she saw Oliver look up over the hood of a car he was standing behind.

He blinked at least twelve times as she walked closer.
“Holy fuck,” Oliver gasped as he dropped the wrench in his hands and walked, single focus, towards her.
“I figured it was about time I dressed the part,” Felicity side-curtseyed as she hoisted up the top she was afraid she might fall out of.
She hadn't worn underwear as outerwear before, but she did like the dopey look Oliver was sporting right now.

He idly wiped his hands on the rag hung from his belt loop, his eyes still bouncing from one part of her to another.
“Does the offer still stand?”
He leaned in and kissed her with his hands in a surrender above his head so he wouldn’t tarnish her perfect with grease.

“Yeah, I’ll just clean up, then we’ll swing by the house and I’ll grab a couple of things.”
Felicity clutched the strap of the bag slung over her shoulder and pushed out a readying breath.
“Felicity, this is John Diggle, the only guy I trust to look after this place,” Oliver introduced as John propped the welder up on the stone bench and smiled with kind brown eyes at Felicity. He had the type of smile that would make you feel instantly like you’d known him for years.

“It’s a pleasure to finally meet you,” John offered an un-gloved hand which Felicity took, “you can call me Dig.”
“It’s nice to meet you too Dig,” Felicity replied, just before the phone started ringing through the
shop.
“I’ll get it,” John announced, offering Felicity a smile that was both apologetic and warm before he disappeared into the office.

“And this is Roy, Thea’s…” Oliver paused to grimaced at the word that was swimming in his head, “friend.”
Felicity laughed as Roy wiped his hand on a rag strung up just like Oliver’s and extended it.
“Thea’s told me a lot about you. Oliver mostly just yells at me for being a shithead,” Roy joked, although Felicity didn’t doubt there was some truth in that.

“I’m going to clean up, try not to be a shithead for a few minutes,” Oliver mocked before he headed for the small bathroom across the shop.

“So you’re the infamous Roy,” Felicity resonated with a smile.
He slapped his hands on the rag a second time, pushing it between his fingers.
“Is that a good thing?”
“I think it depends on how well you treat Thea.”
“I plan on treating her real nice, making some more money to buy her nice things.”

Felicity admired his dedication but she took the moment to offer him a different perspective.
“Most woman don’t need nice things, we need nice guys.”
“But she deserves good things you know, whatever she wants.”
“I guarantee you Roy she would much rather know that she can trust and count on you above however many pairs of shoes you buy her.”
He nodded like he was listening, but as nice as he seemed, she saw a touch of bravado life had not yet purged from him.

“Ready?” Oliver asked as he appeared beside her.
She nodded. She was ready to taste freedom.
“Shop’s yours John,” Oliver called out and John raised his hand in recognition of it behind the glass windows of the office, the phone still pressed to his ear.
“Ride safe,” Roy called out.

It was late afternoon when they reached the outskirts of the city, driving a road Felicity didn’t even know existed. It was long and straight and almost complete baron.

Oliver pulled over on the state line and lifted his visor.
“Ready Princess?”
Felicity sunk her hands tight around his waist, loosened her shoulders and took a long, steady breath in. She couldn’t remember the last time – if ever – she had just gone with no place to go.
“I’m ready.”
She was.

Oliver took off down the straight stretch of road at a speed that felt like her troubles just blew right off her shoulders – at least for now, and that was all she could have asked for.

She felt him pull off the throttle a little and the bike dropped to a cruising speed that breathed a smile across her face.

“Put your arms up,” Oliver called behind.
“What?”
“Trust me, do it.”
She wiggled in closer, locking her knees against his sides.
“Okay,” she yelled into the breeze washing over them.
She raised her arms, hesitantly at first until she felt Oliver’s hand fold over her knee – *he had her, she could trust him.*

Felicity raised them higher until they reached above Oliver and she felt the gentle breeze dancing with her fingertips. Her fingers splayed as an ethereal calm came over her.

*This was free.*

One arm sunk back around his waist not because she was scared, but because she wanted to feel him near as she painted the sky with her fingertips, because there was something else Felicity was feeling.

Not only was she free.
She was free falling – *in love.*

Time moved like the blinking of an eye as the scenery flew by in hazes of greens and browns while the sun lit up the cloudy sky in radiant burning hues of orange and pink. There had been a sunset every day Felicity had been alive but she had never appreciated one this magnificent before, over 8000 sunsets and it was like she was seeing one for the first time.

A side road up ahead slalomed towards what looked like a lake in the distance, shrouded by scattered trees that had seen more that 8000 sunsets themselves. A smile grew across Felicity's lips before she tapped Oliver's shoulder and directed him to the side road.

Without question Oliver turned and followed her whim. They drove the length of the gravel road until they pulled alongside the shores of a lake that was a still as glass and reflected the falling shades of the sunset and the ran out of road.

Oliver stopped underneath an outstretched branch of a lone acacia tree.
He removed his helmet as shook a hand through the length of his hair, “dead end princess,” he breathed as he hung the helmet over one handle.

Felicity tugged the snug helmet from her head and let a fleeting but feisty breeze whip her locks across her face before she slipped off the back of the bike and took a few steps away to breathe in the air that smelled nothing like Starling.
“Here,” she spoke before a beautifully enchanting sighed fluttered from her parted lips.
“Here what?”
Felicity fingers wrapped around the zip of her jacket, twisting and toying with it before she slowly dragged it down the line of her body.
“How do you whispered, here,” she seduced as she shrugged the jacket from her shoulders and dropped it to the ground.

“Do you want me naked?” she asked, butterflies tickling her words as they rode up from her stomach.
It was still daylight, dusk hadn’t fallen yet, but maybe that was part of the needy arousal pooling between her legs.

Oliver swung his thick leg over the bike and took barely one stride to meet her, his body just inches from hers. His eyes ravaged her taut collar bone and her breasts straining behind the tiny strip of black fabric that kept them covered.

“Do you want to be naked?”
His words were like a growl that she felt in her core.

“Yes,” she whispered, her lashes brushing against her pinked cheeks.

Oliver’s fingers snaked up the halter of her bustier, touching nothing but the clasp at the back of her neck. With a flick of his wrist the straps fell open like tendrils down her body.

Two fingers pinched the zipper tag in the centre and in one brutally quick move her breast were exposed to the tiny whips of brisk evening air.

Her nipples instantly coiled and when Oliver brushed his thumb across the first Felicity hummed salaciously into the wind.

But it wasn’t enough, not yet.

“Keep going,” she rasped as Oliver brushed silky, wet kisses across her chest.

Oliver took his time with the zipper on her pants, each tiny rub of slider over teeth making his cock grow painfully behind their denim prison. When it finally had no more track, Oliver’s warm, calloused fingers crept around her waist and eased the tight pliable leather over the curve of her ass.

Felicity’s breathing quickened when Oliver walked her pants down her legs, lowering himself to his knees. He slipped her boots off one at a time, watching her naked breasts rise and fall and her lips fold together, aroused.

One foot before the other, Oliver removed her pants and laid them neatly beside her shoes. As he stood his thick, explorative fingers weaved up the inside of her thigh.

She was almost completely naked standing tall in front of him, enjoying the way his eyes ravished her. Felicity was nobody’s prize to be claimed but damn if she didn’t enjoy the hunger so clearly scribbled through his expression.

“Keep going,” she ordered with a tipped smile.

Oliver threaded his fingers over the waistband of the delicate lace panties in a vivid red.

“How many pairs do you have?” Oliver asked with a husky growl as his fingers tested the fabric taut.
Her brow raised, she knew what he was asking, “Enough,” she answered in a breathy whisper.

A wicked smile drew across Oliver’s lips as his fists twisted tightly. And then, his eyes locked to
hers, he tore her panties clean down the seam of one leg and then the other.

Felicity, although expecting it, gasped at how easily Oliver tore them, the lace and tulle like tissue paper in his hands.

His hands skimmed the sweeping curves of her waist, before he took her hand and brushed a delicate kiss across her fingers.

“Show me, please,” she requested, her tone soft but not fragile.
Oliver led her by the hand back to the bike, her creamy skin almost luminous as the hues of pink and burnt orange bled together and faded in the falling light.

He brushed his hand across the soft leather seat before he helped her on. Felicity shivered as her naked skin brushed against the cool slope of the gas tank.

The bike was barely idling but Felicity felt the low hum of the engine almost immediately, and when the cruiser shuddered every few seconds the vibration intensified. Her heated palms slipped around the sides of the tank as Felicity tried to kept herself vertical while her body felt awash with the many different sensations – the cool breeze grazing her budded nipples, the residual heat emanating from the engine up through the seat, the consistent idle of the engine and thrum of every few turns, and then a single finger ran down her spine.

“Are you joining me?” Felicity asked, her voice slightly trembled as the vibrations massaged her clit.
“In a minute,” Oliver answered with a smile that said for now he simply wanted to watch and listen.
He warmed her shoulder with a line of kisses towards her neck before he reached around her body and gripped the handles.

With his foot on the brake and one hand tightly gripping the handbrake, Oliver dropped the clutch and revved the engine. Felicity gasped as the low gentle hums were replaced with thick, bursting threads of vibrations that swarmed her clit.

Her back arched the second time he did it and she whimpered into still air when on the third time his warm lips also began to caress the slope of her neck.
“Are you wet?” he asked, even though he could smell the answer.
“Yes,” Felicity hummed before her teeth pinned her lips closed.
“Do you like it?”
He wasn’t playing fair, asking the question a mere second before he revved the engine again, making any answer Felicity had twist into a frenzy of breathy moans.

He watched her writhe against the seat with each rev, until her arms trembled, unable to hold her up a moment longer.

“Tell me what you want, and I’ll give it to you,” Oliver whispered, so quietly Felicity wondered if, in her heightened state, she had imagined it.
Sweat misted across her naked body even as the wind chilled her damp skin.
“You,” she panted before he revved it again, longer, harder this time and Felicity could barely ride it out, her folds dripping with arousal and her walls clamped around empty space, desperate to be filled, “inside me Oliver, please.”
The pain of her emptiness made her voice scratched and throaty.

Her scent caressed his senses as he kissed a line down her back.
“Are you sure?” he ghosted across her shoulders, “you must be close, I can get you over with just
Felicity rode it out with silent cries bleeding from her lips, "No," she snapped, her blue eyes darkening as they scolded his teasing, *she wanted him to fill her, to the hilt, completely, utterly, and take every damn inch of her and pummel it...* It was only when the last word left her lips Felicity realised she had said the aloud, but she didn’t care how completely carnal and wild they sounded. *That was what she wanted.*

“Pummel, it is,” he whispered with a grin. Oliver released the throttle and Felicity, thankful for the momentary respite fed her fingers into the pocket of his jeans and pulled out his wallet.

There was only one condom left in the main pocket, and she made a mental note to ensure they purchased more. She slammed it into his palm and Oliver chuckled but didn’t delay her clearly urgent request.

Less than a minute later Oliver was seated, naked from the waist down with his cock free from one enclosure and sheathed in another made of latex.

He pulled Felicity onto his lap and slid himself inside her warm, wet entrance. He stilled, enjoying the pressure as she leaned forward and he felt the pulsing idle running across his hilt and down through his balls, like fingers massaging in rolling waves.

A vibrant red blush spread down her body even as the final shades of the sunset grew dim, replaced with the deep blues of evening.

His hands brushed against her waist as they returned to the handles before Felicity leaned back against his strong chest and wove her arm back around his neck.

He revved and she rode his cock, slipping him an inch out before swallowing him back inside as the vibrations added to the sensations wracking their bodies.

Her feet scrambled behind him to gain a few measures of leverage and allow Oliver to match his thrusts with the growl of the engine.

He trapped rough kisses to any part of her back he could reach as Oliver thrust himself deep, pummelling her walls just as she had asked.

It was relentless and the air around them filled with rasped pants and strangled cries as pleasure took hold of their bodies and shook them violently. Wave and wave Felicity grew closer as her core banded tightly.

His name fell in short bursts and strangled moans from her between her lips as her begged him *harder, faster, more.*

And when one more rev shuddered down between her folds and made her walls clench so tight around Oliver's cock that he too could feel the same vibrations, they came seconds apart in a spectacularly strong climax.

The kind that had you talking in tongues.
The kind that had your body shuddering in cold sweats.
The kind the made toes twist almost painfully into the pad of your foot.
The type of orgasm that took every last bit of your power and turned your body to jelly.

With her clit thumping and her walls pulsing around his softening cock, Oliver released the handle
bars and wrapped his arms lazily around Felicity, holding her tight against his body.

“Your heart,” she sighed as her head lolled happily from side to side, “it’s thumping so heavily.” Oliver kissed her cheek, breathing strands of hot, moist air against her cheek.
“For you it is.”

They sat there a little long until the very last fingers of the sun dipped below the horizon.

Where she would usually cover herself or dress quickly, Felicity did neither. She enjoyed the wicks of air that teased her nipples. She enjoyed the way the soft seat treated her sweltering clit. She enjoyed the freedom.

Every last moment of it would be hers.

She finally peeled herself away with a listless sigh before she dressed, sans panties, and enjoyed the air filling her lungs a little longer.

Oliver was looking over at her with a smile he didn’t try to hide. “What? Why are you looking at me like that?” she asked with a breathy laugh.

“I love you,” Oliver admitted without a hint of anything other than clarity. Felicity sucked in a sharp bite of air, she hadn’t expected that, but her reply came easily. “I love you too.”

That was the most freeing admission of all.
It was two hours and 13 minutes before Oliver pulled over again into the forecourt of a gas station in a little town that Felicity had already forgot the name of even though they passed the sign only minutes ago.

He got off first before helping her down from the bike, enjoying with a smile the way her body slid against his. She tapped her fingers gently against the side of his helmet before he tugged his head free and slung it over the handle bars.

“I should call Thea,” Oliver suggested as Felicity shook a hand through her hair once free of her helmet.

“Fill up with gas then make your call,” Felicity spoke as her fingers laced around his neck before she pecked a kiss to his slightly parched lips, “I’ll go in and pay,” a finger coiled in his hair, “and some supplies for the night.”

“You want to stay here?”

Felicity shrugged as her eyes walked across the road to a neon vacancy sign that hung from a white stucco motel that had most definitely being built before she had taken her first breath in life.

It wasn’t the Hilton, but it had all they needed, and maybe that was part of the appeal.

“Sure, all I need is you, naked and a bed,” her tongue bathed her lips when she was done talking
and Oliver watched every deliciously slow swipe of it.

She reached around him, grinding her hips into his growing erection as she grabbed the pump nozzle and lifted it free.
“I’ll go see if they have a room,” she hummed as she slid her free hand up the inside of his leg. Oliver plucked the pump handle from her grip before she kissed his cheek and slid out from between him and the bike.

She walked purposefully slowly, knowing, like she always did, that Oliver, her ruffian, Queen couldn’t help but watch her walk away; and when she looked over her shoulder back at him, it was absolutely not a surprise that he was wearing the smile of a delirious fool.

When Felicity returned with a room key to unit 5 Oliver was kicking stones in the distance with his phone to his ear. She glanced at the pump number, despite being the only vehicle on the forecourt and headed inside to pay.

After walking the three aisles and gathering a haphazard handful of supplies she placed the strawberry pop tarts, a box of condoms, lubricant, beef jerky, half a gallon of milk and a bag of sour candies on the counter. The cashier smiled as he rung it all up but neither of them spoke about the purchases, offering only a pleasant “goodnight” before she left.

Oliver was still on the phone when she came out and she decided to head back across the empty road to a liquor store with a dancing Mexican as their logo.

~*_*_*_~

“Everything okay?” Oliver asked down the phone, ignoring the breathy laugh reply due wholly to the fact it was the third time he had circled around to an alliteration of that same question. “Yes Oliver we are surviving without you,” Thea huffed down the phone then laughed animatedly, “will you just try and have fun, just don’t go eloping.”

When the last word, and all the ideas it carried hit his ear, his lips closed up tight and his brows pinched even tighter.
“I suppose I would get over it, but I want to be there,” she continued to prattle on even when Oliver hadn’t made a sound.
“We’re the only family we have, so even if I'm in a coma, I’d want to be there,” she chuckled softly, “have them marry you at the foot of my bed, it’ll still count.”
“Thea?” Oliver sighed.
“Mmm?”
“I’m not going to elope.”
“Good,” she announced, “because I would actually be super pissed.”
“Noted,” he assured as he glanced over to Felicity walking back across the road to the liquor store.

“And Oliver.”
“Yes?”
“You do realise that’s the first time I’ve mentioned you getting married someday and you haven’t choked on the idea?”
Oliver blew out a soft laugh into the crisp night air.
“Huh, imagine that,” he replied coyly.
“Are, you, actually...”
“It just doesn’t sound all that bad,” he interrupted.
“Oh my god,” he heard her clap a hand over her mouth and Jax barking loudly in the background to her sudden exclamation, “fuck, you’re in love with your one night stand.”
“Goodbye Thea,” he groaned, hovering his thumb over the disconnect button.
“Who would have thought it, you really did go falling in love with an uptown girl.”
“Don’t do shit while I’m gone.”
“Actual shit or...”
“I mean it Thea, stay away from the bar and no sleepovers with Roy,” he paused to clear his throat, “I’ll know.”
“Night Oliver.”
“Night.”

He hung the phone up just as Felicity approached, bags dangling from her wrist and a key swinging from her finger.

“Everything okay back home?” she asked, stopping a foot away.
Oliver pulled her into a surprise embrace before his lips pounced on hers.

After the surprise kiss of wet, warm lips and knocking teeth, Oliver pulled back and smiled with his fingers still laced at the small of her back.
“Everything is fine,” he assured, “what’s in the bag?”
“Bourbon,” she spoke with a wink as she held up one bag, “and condoms,” she finished, holding up the other bag.
Oliver shook his head through a chuckle that lit up through his cheeks.
“Is that all?”
She shrugged, “right now it’s all we need.”

They fell together into the motel room, ignoring the subtle notes of lavender used to disguise the hints of mothballs as their lips fought and their tongues battled in a winner takes all fight.

Uncensored moans fell between them as they shared hot, wet air. Their teeth knocked and their hands devoured the other's body. His fingers tightened in the roots of her hair, holding her head tight against his lips while her hands rummaged under his shirt, fawning over the hard lines of his chest, nails digging into taut flesh.

When no winner was declared they broke apart in a breathless truce, though their hands stayed tentatively exploring.

“There is a table here,” Felicity ghosted the words against his lips before her teeth lightly scrapped his bottom lip, “you could bend me over it.”
She watched as a smile grew across his lips while she toyed with the zipper on his jacket, keeping a softly coy look in her eyes.

“Isn't that what you wanted to do Oliver?” she asked as she walked him by the lapels of his jacket further into the room, “you wanted to fuck me from behind, yes?”
“Yes,” the word came out like a growl, but he didn't attempt to correct it.

“Will it be rough Oliver?” she hummed as her fingers danced around the neckline of her top, her jacket already discarded on the floor.
He leaned in and kissed the seam of her ear before he gently blew warm air against the same spot.
“When we do that, it'll be as rough or as gentle as you want,” he whispered and she sighed in exchange, “but right now, I have a different idea.”

She watched him intrigued as he took the bottle of Bourbon and cracked the lid.
“You don't need to get me drunk, I'm very willing,” she said with a smile that coiled up the corners of her lips quite wickedly.
Oliver took a drawn sniff of the bottle before he blew out a sigh and placed the same on the table beside the bed. “It’s not for you,” he rasped as he walked back across the bedroom and folded his fingers into Felicity’s hand.

“Do you know the best part of you being naked?” he smiled deliciously wide as his fingers danced with hers. “What?” she asked, the word threaded through a sigh. “That I get to undress you,” his fingers slipped from hers and poised at the waist of her leather pants, paused over the closure.

Felicity dropped her gaze to his fingers before settling back in his eyes, “go ahead,” she smiled.

Oliver moved much quicker than he had on the side of the deserted road and once her pants were around her ankles Felicity kicked them free while Oliver stayed on his knees in front of her naked form.

His large hands curved around her hips, the tips of his fingers skimming the dip of her rear before he leaned forward and pressed his kiss to her nether lips, kissing them as passionately as he would the ones that were currently panting his name atop small, stilted breaths.

She wobbled a little, but his hands held her firm as he dove his tongue between her folds. His panted name turned into a whimpered one when his tongue found her clit and circled it roughly. Felicity keened into him, her nails digging into his scalp. Every part of her sex was still thrumming from the moments they shared on the bike hours ago, not to mention the ride to this Podunk town sans underwear with every inch of her pressed into Oliver's back to create the most delicious friction she had every experienced.

As his teeth nipped at her clit and Felicity walked the tightrope between pleasure and pain but all she could say was a moaned, “yes, fuck, yes, god, yes.”

“On the bed,” Oliver requested with carnality. Felicity dropped onto the bed with a hot breath of air leaking from her lips.

“Do you want to play a game Felicity?” Oliver asked as he slowly removed her top and threw it haphazardly across the room. “What’s the game?” she hummed as her eyes lulled between opened and closed while his fingers stroked the inside of her thighs. “Statues.” She laughed breathlessly as she felt him settle on his knees between her legs, moving her closer to the centre of the bed. “Statues?” she asked with one cocked eyebrow. “Mmm,” he hummed as he worked his tee shirt up over his head and threw it almost the same direction as her top, “think you can handle it princess?” “What are the rules?” she asked somewhat pensively as she tried to ignore his thumb toying with her budded nipple.

“You have to stay still,” he smiled, the smile of a man with a most satisfying idea as he eased one of her arms above her head and folded her hand around the foot of the bed, tucking just the tips of her fingers between the mattress and the base, “no matter what I do,” his fingers trailed down her
other arm until they reached her wrist, “like a statue,” he continued while he moved her second hand to the same spot as her first.

With her arms pulled tight above her head Felicity's taut stomach and chest showed every breath she took, slow and considered, to match the same expression her face wore.

“Okay and what happens if I win?” she asked, putting on her most business-like voice despite the fact she was completely naked with a decidedly sexy man between her legs who muscles were tormenting her with tiny twitches and glistening drops of sweat.

“I'm going to use my tongue between your legs until you can't see straight and then I'm going to go buy you dinner, come back and do it again,” he answered, sneaking a finger around her entrance before dipping just the tip inside.

“And if I lose?”
Oliver folded his lips together as he considered her question for a few silent moments.

“The exact same thing will happen,” he finally answered.

A fruity laugh left her mouth.

“It sounds like I win either way.”

“Oh princess,” he growled walking his lips up her body, only his breath touching her taut skin, “we both win,” he finished before he pecked a surprisingly chaste kiss to her lips.

Felicity rolled her shoulders into the mattress and blew out a long breath as she nodded her head.

“You're on,” she agreed with a smile woven across her lips.

Oliver sat back, an expression of pleasure threaded across the blue of his eyes and turning the corners of his lips upward.

He settled his knees between her legs, opening her stance a little wider and growling low as his eyes wandered over her body like a drone.

“A fucking masterpiece,” he whispered, but Felicity caught it all the same and blushed a smile.

There was nothing that could compare to seeing the look of absolute desire on Oliver's face. He didn't temper it, never tried to hide it and in no way did she ever think he would use it as leverage over her. It was honest, raw and deeply sexual; and Felicity loved it.

Because she loved him.

“Now,” he smirked as he left the lid on the bedside but held the neck of the bourbon bottle tightly in his hands, “don't move.”

Felicity nodded with her eyes.

A tiny stream of golden liquid pooled below her breasts as Oliver gently tipped the bottle above her. Felicity gasped at the sudden coolness of it as her fingers dug into edge of the mattress.

When he was satisfied with the pond in the dip just below her breasts Oliver slipped the bottle onto the ground and pressed his lips to her navel.

His tongue weaved slowly up her stomach making her wriggle just a fraction at the contact. She could feel every nerve in her body desperate to move as her breathing became rapid and uneven the closer Oliver grew.

She couldn't completely contain a shudder when he reached the pool of liquid and his warm breath fanned out over her aroused breasts.
He sipped the rippled pool, making a sound that ought never be sexual but right now, in this moment, as she looked down the line of her naked body to him and the smile he wore so openly, it was the most fucking sexual thing she's ever heard.

His finger dipped into the liquid and spread it over her nipple, but before she can process the sensation of the roughness of his pad swimming around the tip of it, Oliver swallowed her breast into his mouth and the finger became his tongue, swirling and sweeping across her coiled nipple. Long, slow sweeps that lulled her and made her body want to sway before a light nip of his teeth saw it change to short, rapid flicks with just the tip of his tongue.

Felicity could feel her body aching, every inch of her wanted to writhe and move and she knew his knee wasn’t far from her sweltering sex, so desperate to feel something.

With noises of sheer delight Oliver devoured her breast until he felt her shuddering beneath him. He dropped her from his mouth and surveyed the glistening remnants of his libations on her skin.

Oliver only gave her a moment to collect herself and steady her ragged breathing before he repeated an almost identical attack on her other breast.

His name fell like bullets from her mouth and Oliver smiled against her breast at hearing the desperation in her tone while his tongue battled with her nipple.

Two digits snuck between her folds and gently stimulated her clit which, for a few moments, eased Felicity's need to move, to grind, to seek out something that would provide relief for the scorching desire pooling in her core.

When he was satisfied with his feed of her soft, silky breast, Oliver returned to the dregs of the pool, now slightly sticky against her warmed skin. He lapped up the rest, flicking his tongue furiously in the valley up her centre.

He sat back on his heels to purvey the form of her body, dropping back twice to collect tiny drops that had escaped from the pool and travelled down to her waist, before he hummed his utter enjoyment of the moment.

“Did I win?” she laughed softly, her chest barely moving as her grip on the mattress loosened. “We're not done yet,” he answered as his hands moved to either side of her slim waist and rested just above her hips.

Before she could ask what he meant Oliver flipped her like she was a pancake. One hand twisted over the other before her hands quickly adjusted to the move.

Felicity pulled herself onto her elbows before she tipped her head back towards Oliver. “Now what?” she asked with a cheeky grin. “Stay still,” he smirked, making tiny finger tracks down her spine. He held the bottle above her once again but before a drop left the bore, Felicity piped up. “Time out.”

Oliver brushed back her hair and placed three languid kisses from the curve of her neck to the round of her shoulder. “You called a time out?” he breathed into her skin. “I want to change the game a little.” “To?” “You pour the bourbon down my back and wait with your tongue at the base of my spine, right
above my ass that I know you like to watch every time I leave the room, if you don't spill a drop there is a bottle of lube in the packet with the condoms.

He swiped his fingers between her folds, “I don't think we need that,” he whispered in her ear, his fingers coated in her warm juices.
“It's not for there,” she breathed, twisting a little so her body rested on one elbow.
“What's it for then?”
Felicity smiled as she dragged her fingers down the slope of her side, stopping at the highest peak of her ass.

Her eyes begged him to take a guess as she nibbled on the inside of her lip.
“If you wanted to,” she whispered through one breath as Oliver's eyes slowly widened, “I'd let you.”
“In there?” he stumbled his words like a nervous teen and Felicity found it instantly endearing.
“Do you want to?” she chuckled.
A blush instantly settled in the apples of his cheeks as his tongue swooped across his lower lip. He didn't need to actually answer, his face said it all, yes.

“And if I lose?”
Felicity pressed a finger to her lips and hummed.
“Don't lose.”

Oliver lost his pants quickly and returned to his spot between her legs with the discovered lube now next to him.
“I don't intend to”
Felicity lifted her body onto the palms of her hands and tucked her knees under her body while Oliver licked a path up her spine to mark where the liquor would travel.

“Ready?” he rasped in her ear as he moved her hair over one shoulder.
“Yes,” she vowed, her tone warm and like a whispered song to his ears.

It felt like slow motion as Oliver tipped up the bottle and its cool contents cascaded down her spine in a way that made the tiny stream feel like a torrent. A hand locked onto her hip and she felt the moment Oliver drove his tongue between her cheeks, breaking through the top and collecting every last drop.

She felt the sharp pinch of his mouth forming around the very tip of her ass and she didn't need to look to know what Oliver was doing. With a impressively strong suckle, Oliver gave her a glaringly red hickey right there on her ass.

“That wasn't part of it,” she laughed as she brushed her rear against the ridges of his abs.
“I improvised,” he smirked as his hands massaged her rounds.
“We don't have to,” he started, “the other thing, we don't have to.”

Felicity plucked the bottle of sensual warming lube from the bed and popped the cap as she turned to face him.
“I want to,” she spoke softly with a smile as she filled her palm with the silky smooth liquid, “I want to be with you in every way.”
Oliver sighed as Felicity cupped his stiff shaft, gently coating it with the lube that warmed with each stroke.
“And we've done almost every way,” she continued, her dropping lids softening her eyes to a come
Oliver's head lolled to one shoulder as his eyes hung low, he was fairly certain he could come to this stimulant alone if she carried on rubbing lube down his shaft for much longer.

“I want to feel you...” she paused to thumb over his tip where pre cum had leaked, “...inside me, and this way we both get it.”

She smiled, satisfied, at the glistening coverage across his long, thick shaft before she handed him the bottle and turned around.

With a slow, considered breath, Felicity lowered her top half onto her elbows and lifted her lower half onto her knees to create what Oliver considered the most beautiful slope he'd ever seen and the low, guttural moan that leaked from his lips attested to that.

Coating his fingers with the same lube he eased two digits into her puckered hole. Felicity felt the pull only momentarily as Oliver stretched her gently, coating her tight entrance with the silky warmth.

He asked if she was okay and Felicity nodded before he added a third finger. A gentle hand rested on the small of her back, the thumb of which was drawing tiny, coaxing circles before it snaked around her waist and lightly brushed against her sex.

The slow grazing of his fingers around her clit relaxed her almost immediately as she moved with the sway of Oliver's fingers.

He settled his head at her rosette, barely pressing before he moved slow, tentative circles around it. Felicity pressed into him, dipping his head where his fingers had been only moments ago. Her hips arched against the sensation, but her heated words encouraged him on, soft, moaned, *ready.*

He eased into her, her tiny squeezes milking his head as her body spread around him. The bite was just enough to cause Felicity to chew on her bottom lip and close her eyes tightly to feel him lowering himself deeper into her. He stilled when a tiny gasp left her mouth and sounded to his ears like a whimper but her hand soon found the fingers he had between her legs and she moved them faster between her folds, making her body shudder with arousal.

The lubricant made him glide almost frictionless into her tight canal and when he was fully seated inside of her, he trawled his fingers down the curve of her spine before rounding up over her rear.

*It was perfect.*

He pulled out slowly, feeling her body grip his naked shaft like a vice. Oliver stilled again to let Felicity adjust as mewls dripped from her parted lips. His thumb continued to gently stroke her clit while she pushed her weight back onto him, taking him deep once again.

Oliver watched her body rock against him, his cock buried deep inside her and her body coming apart in his hands. He dipped two fingers inside her warm, wet entrance and Felicity bucked into them.

With her sweetened moans filling the air around them and nothing between them, Oliver began to thrust himself, building up a rhythm that matched his fingers skimming her cushioned walls.
Felicity's body shook around the double penetration, feeling each glide Oliver made with his cock in deliciously slow motion while his fingers seemed to travel at the speed of light.

The sounds that came from Oliver's throat were low and deep as his fingers curled around her hips, keeping her close to him, firm against him.

His name dripped, heatedly, from her lips, “Oliver, Oliver, Oliver,” her voice was needy and stretched and he knew she was close.

His glide became quicker, his cock pressing deep into her hot, tight ass, even as her trembling body pinched around him. His arm banded around her waist before he pulled her up, hugging her tight onto his lap.

The change in angle had Felicity feeling a sudden rush between her legs as her body crumpled around Oliver's fingers, her entire body so filled with him.

His release came moments later, with his lips embedded into her shoulder and his cock plunged deep inside her rear. Skin on skin, unsheathed and free Oliver came in hot ribbons of release while Felicity shuddered in his arms.

“Are you okay?” he asked, the words slightly strained and whispered into her neck while his eyes fought to see hers.

Felicity turned her head, her cheeks flushed pink, her bottom lip speckled with tiny embedded teeth marks and a glow of sweat lining her brow.

“Yes,” she replied, virtually breathless.

He went to move from under her, but she stilled him with her hand on his thigh.

“I love you Oliver, I know that I already said that, but I want you to know that, past aside, I love you and I don’t think I’ve ever meant it with anyone else, until now, with you, I think I finally understand what it means,” her fingers gently swept over his skin, misted with sweat, “and it’s okay if you don’t feel exactly the same way as I do right now, I understand,” she continued, her eyes fluttering to keep up with the speed of her words, “I just, I wanted to tell you,” her fingers entwined with his and her chin skimmed her shoulder.

“I love you too,” he breathed the words against her shoulder, “and I know that I mean it because I’ve never said those words before.”
Her face lit up curiously, “you haven’t?”
“My mother told me when I was younger that I should only say it when I mean it, and I've never meant it before, not until I saw you and how you were just you,” his shoulders lightly shrugged, “and saying it to you was like breathing.”

Her hand folded around his neck, pulling his lips onto hers in a warm, trembled kiss.

*It was as simple as breathing.*

Hours later, after filling themselves with fried chicken and something that was apparently mashed potatoes and gravy, the two of them lay naked in the bed watching reruns of Friends.

Oliver tapped the remote against his leg like Morse code to his brain before he pushed mute.
“Everything okay?” Felicity asked looking up from his lap where she had made her pillow in the blankets.
“I want to tell you something,” he started, his voice tight and unsure.
“Okay,” Felicity replied pensively as she sat up slowly, noting the tempest of uncertainty in his eyes.
“Something about me,” his eyes stayed down, like he was afraid to look at her, “to let you in.”
A soft sigh fell from her lips as his vulnerability shone beautifully across his face.

“I'm listening,” she found his hand and gripped it tight to let him know she wasn't going anywhere.
“I want to tell you about Tommy,” she didn't know who he meant, the name had never crossed his lips before today, but she waited, silently, for him to continue, “Tommy was my best friend.”

Was.

“He was the other rider with you, on the video?” she asked softly, watching as a tear broke through the corner of his eye, stilling for a second until Oliver let it slide down his face.
“Yes,” he answered with a nod, “we grew up together, our dad's were both Lost Soul members,” she watched him swallow, “he was Malcolm's son.”

Felicity felt his fingers strangle her hand.
“I started off joining the Lost Souls to look after Thea, but the longer I stayed, the deeper I got. I wore the VP patch for a while and Felicity, I did things that I can’t be proud of. I hurt people, ran drugs, fucked any woman I wanted to. That’s what paid my bills.”

His guilt riddled the lines on his face.

“We were running drugs, undercutting the nearby supplier and word got back to them. We thought we were invincible, untouchable,” the last word cracked as it left his lips. He took a moment to regain himself before he continued, “but we weren’t and Tommy took two bullets to the chest.”

His words quivered and his chin dropped to his chest as he squeezed two more pained tears from his eyes.
“I managed to get Tommy back to the club house, but he was bad,” Oliver opened a palm, remembering how the blood had stained the lines of it for days after, “I wanted to take him to the hospital but Malcolm said no, that the cops would arrest him on outstanding federal charges.”

Oliver bit back tears as he remembered that night, it was moonless, the smell of blood permeated the air and Tommy shuddered and spasmed on the pool table as he clutched gauze to his wounds.

Oliver could still, even now, taste the stale air and hear the chorus of boots scuffing the floor.
“I fought Malcolm, but I should have done more, I should have taken him to get the help he needed.”

His hand shook, still only when Felicity took it into hers.
“He was just a scared kid like I was years ago. This gang had taken his youth from him too,” Oliver's voice broke.
“Before Tommy died he said that there had to be more than this, that there had to be a better life,” his fingers absently tightened around her hand, “he promised to say hi to my parents and made me swear that Thea wouldn’t become like us and that I needed to leave and find something better.”

A few moments of silence hung between them.
“That was the day I told Malcolm no more, that I was done. I was out. I stayed only as close as I needed to for Thea.”

He released her hand and ran his fingers across his scalp before her hand warmed his cheek.

“I’m sorry Oliver, I’m sorry for everything you faced.”
He sighed into the comfort of her hand.
“Thank you,” she breathed while her thumb brushed up his damp cheek.
“For what?”
“For trusting me. I know it can’t be easy for you to let people in, but you’re safe with me Oliver,”
she avowed softly, “we’ve both been hurt by people we thought that we could trust, left by those
that we needed the most, but you can trust me, I won’t leave you.”
The deep blue of her eyes promised him the same thing.

“Even when you know what I was, what I did?” he asked, his eyes sullen.
“Of course,” she smooth the line along his tense jaw, “because that’s not who you are, it’s just the
path you travelled to get here.”

He skimmed a finger under her chin and tipped it up to gently kiss her. A savoured, lingered kiss
steeped in emotions that neither possessed the words to express.

“You can trust me too Felicity,” he breathed, their noses brushing against each other and their
forehead pressed together, “I won’t leave you.”
She took a sharp breath inwards, he saw her tarnish, her cracks.
“Even when it’s hard and I break and I crumble and you see everything that I try to hide. When I’m
not perfect?” she asked, her words bleeding onto his lips.
“Especially then, because your breaks, your crumble, they’re the most real and beautiful thing
about you. Real isn’t perfect, but we do get perfect moments.”
She breathed him in, soft, warm, safe.
“Like this one?” she asked, kissing the last word to his lips.
“Like every one that I’m with you.”

A perfect moment in a cloudless night, moments before tiny raindrops fell against the window
pane, like the smallest drum beats that mimicked their hearts.

Chapter End Notes

So that was a first in writing for me ;)}
Sorry this chapter is a little late, but life gets a little complicated sometimes. Anyway, happy ROD new year lol, thank you for the amazing amount of support this fic has received. I love you all xox.

Just a little AN about why I choose to use OC instead of only using Arrowverse characters: Because.

Long answer: I don't think a verse character should be shoehorned into a fic just because their name is known. I use the ones I think I can work with, but for minor characters (and in rare but pivotal cases main characters, Macie (RTTW), Chris (Thursday, I count him) and Wolfe (Memo)) I find OC enrich because they don’t come with pre packaged ideas. Anyway, that’s just a little midnight musing from me. I hope you enjoy my choice. Xox

“It’s been two years,” Oliver piped up as he shifted his naked back nervously against the cushioned
Felicity paused her fingers as they weaved through his, and her body – also devoid of clothing – sat between his legs facing him.

The slight pull in her brow alluded to the fact Felicity wasn’t entirely sure she knew what Oliver was referencing given they had been sitting in serene silence for nearly 20 minutes.

“Before you, before us,” he paused to twist his fingers around hers, starting back up the game they had been playing, “I hadn’t been with a woman for about two years.”

Felicity managed to hold her lips closed so her mouth didn’t gape, but she couldn’t say the same thing for the spring in her eyes.

“When I stepped away from the gang, when Tommy died,” he said as his voice softened and his eyes dropped, “I stepped away from everything, women included.”

His eyes walked back up to hers, the blue almost translucent.

“Until you,” he spoke the words like a breath that fell from between two cushioned lips, almost whispered.

The surprise on Felicity face stayed, although it did dampen just enough so she was able to offer him a smile as she smoothed her thumb down his wrist and let her knees sit atop his thighs before she moved a little closer to him.

The way he made love – had sex – certainly didn’t feel like someone who had been out of the game for two years.

“Why me?” she asked softly as her eyes roamed his body – down the centre of his chest, rolling over the definition in his stomach, over the thatch of twisty, blonde hair and lastly down the long, slightly stiff cock that twitched involuntarily as she grazed a finger up the inside of his thigh. “Are you kidding,” Oliver rasped, his eyes trained on the finger she slalomed up his body, “have you seen you?”

She blushed as her teeth snagged her lip and her head dropped to her shoulder.

“I’m serious,” she chuckled, a sound which warmed his heart and made his lips curve, quite of their own volition, into a smile.

“I saw you just before you stepped out in front of a car,” he admitted. Watched would have been a more apt word, but Oliver wasn’t quite ready to admit how his lecherous eyes had thought about Felicity naked in a bubble bath, his eyes free to traverse her body as they pleased.

He licked his lips at the recall of his daydream before he continued, “you had this air of confidence about you, focus, like nothing would get in your fucking way.”

Felicity sucked in the compliment with a breath of air that reddened her cheeks.

“Also, I mean that ass is phenomenal,” Oliver joked as his finger tipped the underside of her chin, just enough to watch her smile grow into a laugh.

She playfully slapped his arm with the back of her hand before her fingers swerved down his stomach.

“Then when I turned on my charm and you shot it right back at me with your ‘if I asked, there would be no probably about it’,” Oliver sighed, his tongue wetting his lips idly before he continued, “I don’t know, it’s foolish.”

His head lolled back and forth.

“Tell me,” Felicity teased, pinching her fingers lightly into his abs.

Oliver smiled, a languid but timid one that merely lifted the corners of his mouth, “I wanted to know who you were.”
His thumb slowly skinned over her lower lip, his eyes drinking in the way it moved with him before it slipped back.
“And after I kissed you,” he sighed, almost breathless, “I wanted to know every part of you.”

Felicity felt her body being drawn closer to him. Her legs unfolded and shifted until they sat either side of his waist, her hands sunk into his sides just above his hips and her whole body scooted forward, close enough to brush his now engorged cock between her folds, slick with arousal from his words.

“Why me?” he asked, his voice tethered to a gravelled tone from the pit of his stomach. His fingers folded through her hair, still tousled from the time they had spent together in bed. “Well,” she hummed, watching his lips as they slowly parted, preparing to kiss her, “if you’re going to have sex with a veritable stranger, it’s a far better story to tell when he owns a motorbike.”
She floated her lips closer to his until they shared the same air, breathing in and out identically.
“Is that so?”
His voice was guttural, rasped and Felicity felt it reverberate down her core and between her folds making her walls clench around an empty feeling.
“Mmmhmm,” she replied with just a noise as her teeth stapled her lips closed.

“So you just want me for my bike?”
“And your cock,” she admitted with a Cheshire grin as she rocked her pelvis into it, pushing his cock a little deeper into the embrace of her warm and wet folds, “it’s a very impressive cock.”

She felt his fingers drip slowly down her spine until his hands cupped her ass and lifted. It was barely a breath later and Felicity’s back was sinking into the continental blanket and Oliver’s tongue was circling her nipple like a bird circling its prey.

Her humming coaxed him closer, each exhale he made made tickling her skin and pricking bumps in its wake. He placed the flat of his tongue below the line of her areola, holding it there until her whimpered plea, that wasn’t actual words, spurred him onwards.

His tongue, heavy against her skin, licked over her tightly coiled nipple once, twice, a third time. Felicity’s back rose off the bed, pushing her body against his, her craving for friction showing in her tiny moans.

He smiled before his lips fell to her navel. He breathed in, letting her arousal dance across his senses before he licked his lips, imagine her sweetness dripping from them. But he didn’t kiss her there, not quite yet...

His tongue stroked the centre of her chest, rolling seamlessly over her supple skin before it veered to the left, up the rise of her pert breast. His mouth captured her nipple harder than Felicity was expecting, but the sensation catapulted her body to the edge of a moan that she couldn’t keep confined.

“Fuck,” she moaned loudly, the sound of it ricocheting off the cabin’s panelled walls. Oliver reacted to the urgency in her voice by sucking her breast deeper into his mouth, swarming her nipple with his tongue before he nipped it with his teeth.

“Fucking fuck,” she trembled, her back arching and her shoulders scooping, pushing her flesh deeper into the warm confines of his mouth.
He pulled back, pulling her breast with him in a most delicious fashion. Her fingers twisted in the bed before one snapped to his hair and tugged it sharper than she had intended, but Oliver just growled happily, enjoying the slight pang of pain her actions sent across his scalp.

He found himself sucking her breast deeper, feeling the flesh flex and tighten against his attentions.
Her moans drove him harder and his suction tighter.

Her fingers twisted and coiled against his scalp, pulling and jolting his head as a most salacious moan filled his ears.

His teeth bit into her flesh and Felicity lurched upwards for a moment before her body fell back down onto the mattress with a whimper.

Oliver dropped her breast instantly, regret and worry threaded through his expression.
“Shit Felicity, I'm sorry,” he grimaced as he looked down at the red mark he'd left on her porcelain skin.
“Don’t be,” she panted, her lips rosy and smiling, “I enjoyed it.”
Her eyes weren't lying but Oliver’s remained threaded with anguish while his thumb stroked over the brand he'd given her, “I got carried away,” he whispered.
“Mark me Oli-vurr,” she whispered, her voice amorous and smoky, his name melting into a purr.

“Are you...,” his question tapered off, irrelevant once he saw the mischievous glint in her eyes. She was sure.

He placed a gentle kiss on the fading red mark at the soft plump of her breast, a mere hair’s breadth from her budded nipple.

The next suck was tortuously slow, bringing her supple, soft breast deep into his mouth, surrounding her with the tight clench of his inhale. Oliver watched her intently; warm, hitched breaths passing over lips swollen and embedded with dents from her own teeth, her eyes glazed but hooked to his, one hand twisted into the sheets above her head and the other trickling down his cheek.

One of her fingers sketched the outline of his hollowed cheek before rimming the crescent of his lips where they met with her breast.

He fed his arm between her legs and under her back, raising her off the bed at her waist. Her flushed pink and heated sex brushed up his arm and the contact made her beg his name in short whimpers, “Oliver, Oliver, Oh-liver.”

The taste of her sweat bled into his lips as he watched her breath quicken and her eyes flutter, her body balancing on a tightrope between not enough and too much.

She raised herself onto her toes, so close that he could once again smell the delicious notes of her sex rubbing against his flexed arm. It was warm and wet and every inch she moved had Oliver's cock throbbing for attention.

“Inside me Oliver, please,” she pleaded, her entire chest now blushed a dusky colour of arousal. His cock was thrumming, desperate to obey but Oliver wanted to see just how far he could push her body, her limits.

He pushed his arm firmly against her sex, prying her folds open. She yelped when his taut muscle skimmed her clit, the pressure like fireworks bursting in her core.

Felicity could feel herself rising up on her toes and then dropping her hips in quick succession – she was riding his arm like a rodeo bull in a country bar – but she was of no mind to stop it. The friction was making her delirious, spots of light filling her eyes as she struggled to keep them open in an effort to watch Oliver as his lips contorted her breast, marking her just as she had asked.

Her fingers felt like they blew away into nothing at the ends and her breath halted in her throat as
every part of her body collapsed into her core and the tightening across it.

_Fuck_ she was close, with stimulation only.

He dropped her breast and the sudden assault of cool air found her breath kick start into a sharp inhale. Just as suddenly he pulled away entirely to survey her body as it writhed beneath him.

She whimpered at the immediate loss of pressure against her clit but before she had time to question it, Oliver's face was between her legs and his tongue was well and truly buried inside her.

He hummed and growled and purred against her folds, sending wave after wave of stimulant against every part of her sex.

She had nothing left, not even an inch of restraint and in what seemed like only seconds after his tongue dipped inside her, Felicity was climaxing in a shuddering, sighing, bleating chorus of sounds.

Oliver drank her up, her rich, sweet release coating his mouth and warming his throat. He would never tire of that taste.

As her body still jerked through what was left of her orgasm Oliver kissed a soft path up the centre of her chest, taking his time to kiss the outskirts of the bright red brand he’d left at her behest.

She was his, because she wanted to be.
And he was hers, because his heart belonged in her safe hands.

He brushed back her hair which had stuck with perspiration to her face.
“Where do you want to go tomorrow?” he asked softly.
Felicity rolled her head to look at him with crystal blue eyes, free from any imperfections if doubt, “with you?,” she whispered, her voice still chasing the aftershocks of her release, “anywhere.”

It was a few hours after noon, with the sun bright and high like a beacon in the sky and the unspoiled scenery whizzing past them as they headed down a highway that was destined to take them towards the coast.

Felicity’s free hand swam with the breeze, up and down like a dolphin riding through the waves as her other arm held tightly around Oliver’s waist.

She let her eyes close as she breathed in the air that rushed past them and the tiny notes of Oliver that radiated from the back of his neck the closer she allowed herself to get.

Her body tingled with the sensations that ghosted over her from last night and she smiled as she recalled the discovery this morning of the mark that bruised her chest where she had asked him to make her his.

She pressed her breasts closer to his back, _their little secret._

Her thoughts of it were interrupted and her eyes shot open as a sudden influx of noise filled the once quiet open road. Felicity didn’t know how they had appeared so suddenly without her hearing them before now, but as she raised her head from Oliver’s back she realised that a swarm of
motorbikes was closing in around them.

Her breath quickened as Oliver moved towards the shoulder, giving them all and any space they needed to carry on past but, while a few carried on past without slowing, at least a dozen bikes carrying heavy set guys with bandanas across their mouths slowed down, their eyes bouncing between the road and Oliver.

Felicity snaked both her arms around Oliver, constricting so that the leather in his jacket puckered on either side of her embrace. She could feel her breath quickening from panic that had already gotten well underway before she could try to stem in with slow, ordered breaths.

But the roar of the engines and the low drone of the bore exhausts was making her pulse skyrocket and before she knew it she was screwing her eyes closed and struggling for air.

It felt like his ribs were cracking under the pressure of her grip and while he couldn’t see her face Oliver knew that Felicity was overwhelmed – or worse – by the sea of motorbikes that had encircled them.

The first thing he did was to look for patches and he saw a few but nothing that gave him immediate alarm – he had left his own at home and none of the faces, from what he could tell, seemed familiar enough to know him without it.

And then an older one, with a beard of shock white, half sheathed behind a black and white bandana, lifted one hand into the air before he rolled his wrist and pointed towards the shoulder.

Felicity could feel the bike drifting to the right but no matter how many times she instructed herself to open her eyes to actually look at what was happening, she just couldn’t. In her mind she imagined Oliver would soon speed up, pass through the sea of them, but it began to feel like almost the opposite was happening – he was slowing down.

And then he stopped.

Her eyes flung open and even when Oliver pulled against her embrace as though he was going to stand up, her arms just strangled around him tighter, silently begging him to stay.

He peeled her arms from around his waist after he slipped the helmet from his head. He heard Felicity whimper even above the sounds of the idling bikes that had stopped alongside him.

More rode past the pack and in the end there were only about a dozen who had pulled over to the side. Oliver reckoned he could knock out at least five of them, the bigger ones, with his helmet before they would get him to the ground.

Funnily enough, this wasn’t the worst odds he’d encountered.

Felicity was all ready to step off with him, but her nails were embedded in the seat that he’d just lifted off from and her heart was sitting so far up her chest she thought she might just vomit it out. She managed to tear her helmet off and instinctively clutch it tightly against her chest.

She would scream if she could remember how to.

But she didn’t.

She just watched as one that looked like a tatted up Santa approached, pulling down his bandana as he walked.

She watched as his hands hovered around his belt, the wind flicking back the sides of his worn leather vest.
She swallowed air as her eyes blinked, trying to decipher if they had truly seen a gun tucked into the back of his pants or if her vivid imagination was running away with her.

She watched Oliver’s hand grip around the edge of his helmet and his stance widen. His back stiffened until *Tattooed Santa* got close enough for Oliver to see the man’s face.

Oliver’s stance immediately loosened, his shoulders relaxed and he put his helmet on his seat. Felicity watched with a gaped mouth and a ghostly white expression as Oliver and *Tattooed Santa* embraced, slapping each other on the back with a thunderous clap.

She watched as the older man reached around his waist and under his vest, his hand blindly searching for something.

*A gun.
He was going for a gun.*

She didn’t mean to scream.
And honestly she didn’t register she even had until the eyes of 13 bikers, *Oliver included*, were affixed to her.

“Is she okay?” Tattooed Santa asked, with a kindly southern drawl that Felicity was in no way expecting to come from underneath that bush of white moustache and beard.

Oliver’s eyes read her expression like an *A is for…* book and he offered her a soft nod and an even softer smile.

“I think you fuckers gave her a bit of a scare,” he jested before he walked back to her and lay a calming hand on her cheek.

“I’m sorry for the theatrics Oliver but you have a tail light out, cops around here ticket for that.” Felicity’s eyes bounced between Oliver’s and the grey ones of Tattooed Santa framed with untamed brows.

*They knew each other?*

“Shit really?”

Oliver’s hand left off Felicity’s face as he leaned around the back of the bike, sighing in exasperation when he saw the broken light.

“You know each other?” Felicity asked, her voice still a little fragile and cracked.

“This is Big Joe, he used to ride with my dad, way back when. Big Joe this is Felicity, my girl.”

Joe finally reached what his hand had been search for and even though she didn’t mean to, Felicity flinched when he pulled out a rag and wiped it across his brow before drying his clammy hand and offering it to Felicity.

“It’s nice to meet you Miss.”

Felicity took his hand somewhat reluctantly, her head taking some time to catch up with what was going on here.

“I’d recognise that bike anywhere,” Joe hummed as he let Felicity’s hand go and walked around the front of the bike before blowing out a whistle, “your father would be damn proud how you’ve fixed her up Catch.”

Felicity watched as Oliver’s eyes tweaked at the name Joe used and Felicity filed it away to ask about another time.

Oliver nodded his thanks as he scuffed the roadside with his boot – *that was a name he hadn’t heard in a while.*
“You folks driving through?”
“You heading for the coast.”
The man blew out and understanding “Mmmhmm” as his head bobbed.
“You on a run?”
“Sure are, there is a town about 50 miles away, it hosts this yearly event for charity. You should stop in. Great music and food, your pa would have loved it.”

Oliver tipped his head back towards Felicity who, still, looked close to passing out.
“Thanks but...”
Felicity blinked, finally taking in some of the actual faces that had stopped, they all seemed to be smiling, and none so much as Big Joe – the guy who knew the Oliver from a time that Felicity wondered if even he’d forgotten. A man that knew the father Oliver didn’t like to talk about.

“Let’s do it,” she quipped, the colour finally returning to her cheeks.
“You sure?” Oliver asked in a hushed voice, his back towards the crowd and his mouth close to her ear.
“Yeah,” she nodded enthusiastically.
*These were his people.*

“Alright, you mind if we join your pack?” Oliver asked as he reached past Felicity and collected his helmet from his seat.
“Riding with Robert’s kid?” Big Joe laughed, one that made his large belly shake, “we’d be happy to have you.”

Soulful country music – completely the opposite to what Felicity had expected – filled in the ambience of the once wide open empty field the bikers had now swarmed into. Some had pitched tents and the small cabins of the neighbouring motor camp had also been snapped up. Big Joe had offered Oliver and Felicity his one without prompting and wouldn’t take no for an answer, so they would spend the night there.

A bonfire roared up into the stunningly clear evening night, a rich black covered in a blanket of stars – a sight the City never graced you with. Planks of wood, balanced on lumps of trunk, became makeshift benches and Felicity was now sitting on one, listening to the drifting music that was pleasantly faint at this distance, with Oliver's jacket hung over her bare shoulders.

Oliver was a few feet away looking at another rider's bike who had been complaining about something Felicity didn’t understand but Oliver had been quick to recognise.

Every so often he would glance back towards her and it was clear that he was keeping an eye on her, a move that found her feeling unmistakably safe.

Big Joe’s Mrs, Maise, was a woman of at least 50 with orange hair that curled in ringlets and bounced on her shoulders. She was kind and offered Felicity a drink, which Felicity accepted with a gracious smile. She had sat down to talk when someone rushed in requesting help. She left Felicity with an apologetic shrug and promised to return.

Felicity sipped on her beer, it wasn’t exactly to her normal tastes but ... *when in Rome.*

She felt the sudden presence of another person and, expecting Maise, Felicity didn’t look until she
peripherally saw a young girl who was definitely not a spritely 50 year old red head sit down beside her.

“Cute shoes,” the cherub cheeked girl said with a smile as she nodded down to Felicity’s lace up boots.
“Oh thanks,” Felicity sighed as she tugs Oliver’s jacket tighter around her shoulders, even though the heat from the bonfire was quite toasty.
“My name is Jenny, but most these people,” she nodded around at no one in particular, “call me Dots, because of my freckles,” she laughed as her slender fingers touched her cheeks.

She was a wisp of a thing, narrow shoulders that sat slightly forward, auburn hair with sections of purple spilled down her back. Her pert breasts were covered with a thin grey tank that stopped high enough to show her flat stomach and sharp hip bones.

“Felicity,” she introduced herself with a smile.
“How long have you been his old lady?” Dots asked as she tipped her head towards Oliver and her arms wrapped around her bent knees.
“Pardon?” Felicity asked, she had heard Oliver and Thea throw the word around but she couldn’t say she was entirely sure she knew what it meant.
“Are you together?”
He said he loves me, Felicity smiled to herself.
“Yes,” she answered.
“How long?”
Felicity wasn’t entirely sure when they should be counting from, but she really didn’t feel like laying out all the finer points of their one night stand turned relationship for a girl who, for all Felicity knew, could be denied entry into an R-rated movie.
“A few months,” she answered simply.
“Wow, it must be great to get picked,” the girl prattled as her fingers moved from her knees to circling around her hair to nervously picking purple nail polish from her thumb before they settled back around her knees, “were you working in one of their bars beforehand, I reckon that’s the best in. Learn how to pour a beer just right.”
Dots’ lips smacked together as she talked, a habit which made her look like she was chewing gum even though Felicity was fairly certain she wasn’t.

She was actually really pretty and behind the layers of black eyeliner Felicity could see green eyes that looked lost.
“I have a job,” Felicity answered absently, although that wasn’t the question that had been asked.
“No shit!”
The girl was genuinely surprised and it took Felicity a moment to comprehend that such a thing might be considered surprising.
For all the time Felicity had spent in Thea and Oliver’s company, she hadn’t ever really being around this atmosphere. She had never genuinely considered that it might be the pinnacle for this girl to be attached to a man. That was her goal.

“I actually own my own company,” Felicity continued, perhaps the girl could see that there was more to life than whose arm you hung off.
It was so close and yet so very different to the stuffy housewives of Starling’s upper class.

“Like a nail salon?”
“No like ...”
“So he lets you work?” the young girl interrupted, her head full of questions moving too fast for her mouth to keep up with, “he’s okay with that?”
Felicity blinked as she tried to make sense of what she was hearing.
“Oliver doesn’t need to let me do anything,” she answered sharply before softening her tone, “that choice is mine.”

Dots sat back, her eyes wide with genuine wonder in a display that made her look even younger. No matter how hard Felicity tried, she couldn’t age the girl.
“But you’re his old lady aren’t you?”
“I’m his girlfriend,” Felicity corrected.
“He doesn’t share you right?”
Felicity straightened her shoulders and tried not to look too startled by the concept that that question even needed to be asked.
“I don’t share me,” she answered kindly, but with a stern tone that meant it was the categorical truth. No bones about it.

“How old are you?” Felicity asked.
“Nineteen, so I know I got a few years of being a pass around first,” Dots shrugged, quite blasé about the whole thing before her eyes travelled across the other side of the campfire where a man who looked older than Felicity’s father stared at them with a crooked smile that exposed a gold tooth which shimmered in the amber hues of the open flames.

“But you’re with him?” Felicity asked, trying her best not to sound disgusted by the whole idea as she watched him rake his chubby fingers through his greasy hair. Felicity instinctively twisted in her seat, closing her shoulders around her body and pulling Oliver’s jacket even tighter. She was taken – he could take those lustful eyes elsewhere.

“No,” Dots answered, making the O sound pop, “but if he asks for a good time I’ll give it.” She laughed as she winked at Felicity like she ought to know what the young girl meant.

It wasn’t too hard for Felicity to decipher the code.
Sex.

“He looks old enough to be your father,” Felicity cringed, “he looks old enough to be my father,” she added, unable to stop her lips grimacing as she thought more about it. There had to be at least twenty years between them.

“You have to suck a few wrinkly cocks to get anywhere.”

Another shrug as she idly wet her glossed lips with her tongue.
“No you don’t,” Felicity shot back, resisting the urge to shake that idea from the young woman’s head, “isn’t there something you wanted to do?”

Dots sat silent for a few moments and Felicity wondered if her sudden attack on this ‘way of life’ had made the young girl clam up; but before Felicity could apologise or soften it somehow Dots answered with another shrug, “be a vet I suppose.”

“So do that.”
Felicity watched intently as the other woman tugged on her hair while she considered what Felicity had said, but it wasn’t long till she was shaking her head in reply.
“Why? I can just be an old lady to a man that will treat me good.”

“Dots,” Felicity sighed as she took her business card from the pocket of her black jeans, “you can do better.” The girl took the card Felicity handed her and read it, at least twice.
“This is you?” she asked, her eyes returning to the letters under Felicity’s name CEO.
“Yes, you’re young, you can be more than just someone’s old lady.”
Dots opened her mouth to speak but before she could answer Felicity the man that had watched them across the campfire was kicking his steel-capped boot against Dots’ boots and holding his hand out expectantly.

“You spoken for?” he growled at Felicity as his eyes walked across her breasts and down between her legs in a way that made her physically repulsed.

“You’re not my type,” Felicity spat back, “you’re not her type either,” she added as he placed her hand on Dots’ hand, pressing it into the wooden bench, urging her to stay.

“That true?” he gritted his teeth, making his voice almost hiss as he looked down with demanding eyes at the young girl.

Dots laughed and slipped her hand out from under Felicity’s.

“She’s tripping, don’t mind her.”

Felicity could smell the beer leaching off the man as his twisted smile grew up his expression while his eyes stayed focused on Felicity.

Dots stood up and shook Felicity’s hand free before she reached for it a second time.

“You don’t have to,” Felicity urged, her eyes pleading with the girl to stay.

Dots slipped Felicity’s card in her jeans and flashed Felicity the same smile she had when she’d sat down.

“It was nice to meet you Felicity,” she remarked before she folded her hand into the greasy biker’s expectant hand and led him towards the dense row of pine trees a short walk away.

Felicity sprung up from the makeshift bench and almost flew to where Oliver was still talking shop with a group as they sucked down bottles of imported beer. She latched onto his forearm like a claw and pulled him haplessly away from the other men who didn’t skip a beat in the conversation.

“Oliver you have to go after that girl,” Felicity urged as she pointed towards Dots seconds before her and her repulsive follower disappeared into the thicket.

“Why?” Oliver blinked, trying his best to piece together the message behind Felicity's words.

“He’s going to have sex with her,” she gritted, just saying the words made her shudder in disgust.

Oliver’s face tensed and his hands fist ed.

“Is she drunk?” he asked as he started towards where they had last seen the pair.

“No, I don’t think so.”

Felicity hadn’t seen her drink and she certainly came across pretty sober.

“Too young?”

His large strides kept him at least a metre ahead of Felicity, his head twisting back to ask the question.

“Well no,” she admitted.

Oliver’spaced started to slow as they reached the line of trees, enough that Felicity finally caught up.

“She doesn’t want to sleep with him,” she added as she squinted her eyes into the shadows they stood on the cusp of.

“Did she say that?” Oliver's neck tensed before his eyes wildly searched the same shadows.

“Not exactly,” Felicity quipped causing Oliver to whip his head around to face her, “but I could tell, he’s fat and old Oliver.”

He blew out a frustrated breath, his fluctuating moments of rage were beginning to take their toll.

“Did he take her, or force her?”

Felicity’s lips folded over his question a little longer than his patience could take.

“Did he make her go?” he repeated calmly.

“No,” Felicity sighed, “she went willingly, but only because she thought she should.”
“Felicity,” Oliver blew out an exhale, drawing out the sounds in her name as his fingers combed through his hair, “you’re not giving me much reason to go interrupt an old dude getting his nutsack played with,” he jested.

“You’re okay with that?” she bit back.

“You know if I thought there was anything wrong I would go. But you said it yourself, she’s a consenting adult.”

He raised his hands in a surrender, unsure what she wanted from him.

“I’m sorry,” he added as he cupped his hand against her arm.

“Were you like that?” she asked bluntly, her eyes seeded downward.

“Well I’ve never been fat,” he offered with a chuckle.

When she looked up with a tempest in her eyes, Oliver knew his jest was ill timed and he offered her an apologetic smile.

“Were you like that, fucking some girl you don’t know?” she huffed.

Oliver studied Felicity with a half cocked brow, just waiting for the penny to drop.

It didn’t take long.

“That’s different,” she argued, “We’re different.”

“Why?”

“Because I...” Felicity stopped realising she had no point to actually offer.

“Because you were old enough, sober enough and wanted to?”

She knew what he was doing and she forced out a breath through circled lips.

It wasn’t the same.

Oliver was... Oliver.

This guy wasn’t Oliver.

“She can’t possibly want to,” Felicity pouted, her brows pinching inward in utter disbelief.

Oliver offered her a knowing smile, he understood, he truly did. The way woman were passed around had never sat well in the pit of his stomach, but consenting adults didn’t have to answer to his stomach.

“This is the life some of them have Felicity,” he sighed looking around the sea of riders.

This was their world.

“Should want for better.”

Felicity ran a hand through her hair, frustrated.

Oliver couldn’t give her anything more than a soft shrug and a tempered, “maybe, but you can’t force people to want better.”

She brushed past him as she shook her head and stepped further into the shadows. The headlamps that shone into the brush barely reached their fingers past the first row of trees, but it wasn’t going to stop Felicity.

Oliver caught her arm but she wrenched it away.

“Hey, you’re mad at me for this?” he implored as he brushed her hand with the tips of his fingers.

“Yes,” she asserted, perhaps she was unfairly so, but girls should want for better.

“I’m not the one getting my balls sucked out here,” Oliver bickered.

“No,” she narrowed her eyes at him, “you’re not.”

And won’t be any time soon.

She turned on her heels and walked further into the maze of trees, passing through almost complete darkness until the tree canopy thinned and the moon illuminated her path. After a few more steps her eyes had adjusted and despite the hour, it wasn’t that hard to see.
“Oh come on Felicity,” he pleaded, he couldn’t stand the idea of her and all her fieriness being directed at him.
“These are your people,” her hands gestured somewhat more wildly than she intended, the back of her hand slapping his arm.
He caught it gently, using it to turn her around, “and they make their own choices,” he sighed, a long breath that brushed over her hot cheek.
“And if it was Thea?”
She watched him tense at the question.
“It wouldn’t be.”
His teeth were gritted, the question testing his very fabric.
“But if it was?”
“It’s not.”
“But,” she paused to take his hand in hers, “if it was?”
“I’d drag her out and pull a switch blade on any nut sack that came close,” he admitted coldly, but honestly.
“Dots could be someone’s sister.”
Oliver heard her, he understood her, but this was it, this was what this was...
“This is the life Felicity,” he breathed, reluctantly letting them fall from his mouth as his hand gripped hers, eager to not have her pull it away again.
“Well it’s shit...”

Her mouth stayed open, ready to say more, when a scream broke through the night air.

Oliver took off running towards the sound with Felicity only half a step behind her. It took only a few minutes to come across the scene, Dots on the ground, crying and clutching a hand across the side of her face, greasy fat dude standing menacingly nearby with his pants around his ankles.

Oliver helped Dots to her feet, the limited light made it hard to see her injuries, but there was a trail of blood coming from her lip.

“She fell, didn’t you bitch?” Greasy fat dude wheezed out a laugh as he reached for his pants.
“Yeah,” Dots replied timidly, tears springing from her eyes
“You lying son of a bitch,” Felicity hissed, the raucous situation drawing a crowd from those who had been mulling not far from the clearing.
“Tell your old lady to back off,” he snarled at Oliver who kept his attention on Dots as she brushed the leaf dander from torn top.
“You and your shrivelled codfish penis hit her, you piece of shit,” Felicity berated as she took Oliver’s jacket and put it around Dots.
*It looked even larger on her.*

“Hysterical bitches,” the brute spat as he shunted himself forward in an attempted to make Felicity flinch, she didn’t.
“Don’t call her that,” Oliver warned, the vein across his temple thumping like a drum solo, “and if you point that snarl at someone, you point it at me.”
“Or what,” he laughed with a cocky rasp, pretty sure that he had an advantage over Oliver, *quite mistakenly,* “are you going to sick your little bitch on me?”
He swung but Oliver ducked easily before his clenched fist came up under one of the man's chins and knocked him back.
Flat on his back.
Out cold.
His pants dropped to his knees, his flaccid cock, crowded by swollen belly fat now on display.

Oliver shook his fist, the impact jarring down his forearm.
“I told you not to call her that.”

Felicity expected some sort of retaliation, but most that had gathered disbanded and the few that remained were busy laughing, one even taking a photo on his phone of the unconscious man.

Oliver and Felicity walked Dots back to their nearby cabin and Felicity opened the door while Oliver collected the first aid kit from his bike.

“Are you okay?” Felicity asked as she pulled one of the two chairs back from the small table and gestured for Dots to sit.

“Yeah,” she replied, nervously twisting a finger through her hair as she sat in the chair.

Oliver placed the kit on the table making its uneven legs wobble a little before he placed a passing kiss on the back of Felicity's head and perched himself on the edge of the small double bed barely two feet away.

“You two are cute, you remind me of my parents,” Dots remarked while Felicity dabbed some saline solution onto a cotton pad, “not that you guys are old,” she corrected with a slightly fractured laugh, “just because they were like you, showing affection and shit.”

*And shit.*

Felicity smiled, she sounded like Thea.

“Thank you,” Felicity smiled as she sat on the edge of her chair and leaned a little closer, “this might hurt just a little.”

Dots squeezed her eyes closed and took a sharp breath to prepare herself. She winced when Felicity dabbed the cotton pad over the small cut on her bottom lip.

Every part of Felicity wanted to march the girl down to the nearest police station and make someone listen until they arrested the jerk who thought he had a right to put his hands on her, but, *this was their life,* all they knew and she knew the young girl would pull away if she even suggested it right now.

“Where do your parents live?” Felicity asked, hoping the questions would dull the sting.

“They live about 80 miles away, in the suburbs, typical middle class, best damn parents you could hope for, but I was a little shit. I got bored two years ago so I ran away and came out here. I haven’t seen them since,” she spoke sadly, her face softening as the question distracted her.

“So go home,” Felicity said warmly.

“I left kind of mad with them,” Dots admitted as she shook her head, “typical teenage shit.”

Felicity pulled the cotton pad away, the cut was only small and would heal quickly. She took Dots’ hand and squeezed.

“I bet they would love to see you.”

She watched as a tear left the young girl's eye.

“You think?”

Felicity pulled her phone from her pocket and placed it on the table in front of Dots, “call them, you’ll see.”

Dots looked back and forth between Felicity and the phone with reservations twisted in her eyes.

“You have nothing to lose and so much to gain back.”

Dots collected the phone and held it so tightly that her knuckles whitened.

“I’ll just...” the girl's voice trailed off as she tipped her head towards the door.

Felicity nodded, she understood.

With an inhale wrapped in trepidation Dots stood, dialled and walked towards the door.

She bit her quivering lip as the ringing echoed in her ear.

And then he answered.
“Hi dad,” she whispered, her voice cracking under the weight of the moment, “it’s Jenny.” She disappeared out onto the porch of the cabin, closing the door behind her.

“Your turn,” Felicity looked over and Oliver's grazed fist.
“It's fine,” Oliver replied, flexing his fingers to prove his point.
“I’m sorry about before, it’s not your fault,” she sighed, with a soft smile threaded over her blush pink lips.
“Turns out you were right though,” Oliver offered as he reached out his arm and lay his hand on her knee, “I’m just so used to seeing it.”
He might have almost removed himself for two years, but old habits and apathy die hard.

“Did you with girls?” Felicity suck in air sharply, she didn’t know why she was asking a question she probably didn’t want to know the answer to.
“Yes,” he answered softly, his eyes lowered in his own deeply entrenched shame.
“A lot?” she wanted to sew her mouth shut and she saw the pained expression cross his face.
He wanted to be honest but...
“Of course look at you, you’re an Adonis,” Felicity attempted to laugh it off.
“Who only has eyes for you.”
His voice was a soothing whisper, and his eyes tore through hers.
See me, before you, telling you the truth.
The door opened and Dots reappeared with tracks of tears down her smiling face.
“They’re driving down to come get me,” she spoke, her voice cracking as she brushed back fresh tears, “said they missed me.”
She walked further into the room, smoothing Felicity's phone between her palms as she walked.

Felicity stood and embraced Dots, who started sobbing softly.
“I’m going to go pack a few things,” she quavered as they broke apart.
“Do you want us to walk you home?” Felicity asked and Oliver agreed to with a silent nod.
“No, I don’t live far.”
Dots put Felicity's phone on the table and shrugged off Oliver’s jacket before handing it to him.
“I just want to say thanks,” she offered quietly, looking between the two of them.
“My number is on the card, when you’re settled back home, call me,” Felicity said as they walked to the door, “we'll get you studying to be a vet in no time.”
“Why are you helping me?” Dots asked as she paused at the door.
“Us girls, we have to stick together,” Felicity winked, “if we can’t have each other’s backs, who will?”

Dots smiled as she stepped out into the night.
“Thank you Felicity, I promise I won’t forget.”
They said their goodbyes before Felicity watched the young girl stroll down the brightly lit street.

“You should put something on that,” Felicity mentioned as she closed the door and looked down at Oliver's hand.
“It doesn't hurt,” he replied, his voice a smoky sigh as he wrapped his arms around her waist.
“It doesn’t?”
He leaned in, nudging her nose with his as his warm breath misted over her lips, “not while I’m kissing you.”
“Well then...” she hummed, silvery and smooth, “I should probably kiss you.”
She pressed her body to his and tipped her chin to catch his lips with hers. A lingered kiss that melted their lips into each other, slow and warm.
He sighed when her soft lips left his.
“How is it now?”
“Still sore,” he whispered with a half smile that made his dimple dance.
Felicity worked the tee shirt from his body and dragged her nails slowly down his chest, smacking her lips together gleefully as his body twitched under her teasing.
“I better keep kissing you then,” she smiled as she pushed him gently towards the bed, “all night,” she finished with one last playful shove that dropped Oliver onto the mattress.

His hands caught her waist and she fell with him with a laugh before his mouth trapped her lips onto his.
“All night,” he moaned salaciously against the kiss.

[The Next Morning]

After only a few hours of sleep, their bodies spent from the hours they spent together, and with the sun peaking through the lilac curtains, Oliver pecked a kiss at the tip of Felicity's forehead as she stirred beside him.

“Good morning,” she hummed, her voice slightly scratched from the night before, “how long have you been awake?”
“Not long,” he shrugged, though he knew it had been about an hour that he’d lay there, watching her sleep, thinking of all the things he wanted to say.

“I’ll never go back,” he whispered, his breath brushing against her temple.
“Back to where?” she asked, her eyes scouting up to his.
“Back to the gang, back to that life, its the past. As soon as Thea is eighteen we'll be rid of it all.”

He had thought about it a lot over the time she’d slept beside him and while being with her wasn’t his only reason for leaving it well and truly behind, Felicity was the dawning of a new day, a day filled with things he once didn’t think possible for him.

Her finger tips smoothed down his bristled jaw.
“We can start our own gang,” she spoke, her eyes like bright lights at the end of a dark tunnel. Oliver laughed genuinely while he drew lazy lines down the slope of her shoulder.

“And what would you call us?”
She thought about it for only a moment before a smile took over her expression and plumped her cheeks.
“The bra felons,” she announced proudly.

His laugh bubbled freely from his mouth and honestly, if he stopped to consider it, he wasn’t sure he could say the last time that had happened.
“You like it?” she asked as she sat up with the sheet pulled tight across her chest.
“I love it,” he grinned while his fingers pinned back the hair that fell over her smiling cheek, “I love you.”
“I know,” she hummed as her hand cupped his face, “you told me.”
“And I’ll tell you again, and again, and again...”
His smoky voice trailed off as she leaned closer to him.

She peppered his chest with a few puckered kisses, “how about,” she hummed before dropping two more kisses onto the curve of his shoulder, “you show me.”
“After breakfast,” he winked before he slid out from under the covers.
Her lips pouted as she stretched out across the bed. “Come back to bed.”

Oliver chuckled as he dressed quickly, “After we eat. I’ll get something from the diner down the road. Any preference?”
“Coffee,” she answered quickly.
“Coffee isn’t a food group.”
“It’s a category of its own,” she beamed, “it’s called, give Felicity coffee in the morning or the world will end.”
“Done,” Oliver leaned across the bed and pressed a chaste kiss against her pouted lips.
“No bacon right?” he asked as he pulled on his tee and checked his wallet and phone were still in his jeans.
Felicity sighed as her limbs spread and stretched in different directions before she curled up into herself again, “I won’t tell my rabbi if you don’t,” she answered with a wink.
“I’ll be back soon,” he said before pecking another kiss against her smiling cheek and heading out the door.

It was twenty minutes later and Oliver was walking the short distance back to the cabin, passing friendly faces looking a little worse for wear when his phone started to ring in his pocket.

Swinging the take out from his forearm he answered it, idly assuming it was probably Thea checking in.

“Enjoying your vacation?” Malcolm asked dryly.
Oliver’s lips tensed and his feet halted in the middle of the cracked sidewalk.
“What do you want?” came Oliver's terse reply.
“Is that the way you treat your friends?”
Oliver could hear his smile down the phone and it angered him more, pulling the threads of his neck tight and making him speak through gritted teeth, “We aren’t friends.”

“Well that’s unfortunate,” he laughed, crooked and verging on menacing, “here I was about to tell you something important...”
“Keep it,” Oliver shot back instantly.
“...About Felicity,” Malcolm finished.
Oliver walked through the cabin doors, his heart thumping through his chest so violently that he swore that if you were to lift his jacket you would be able to see the outline of it bursting through his skin. It only settled when he saw her, wearing one of his tee shirts and walking around the cabin without pants.

The breath he expelled was one he had kept since his call from Malcolm and despite the insanity of the idea a part of him was terrified that something might have happened to her already.

He threw the food onto the table with a force that made it knock loudly against the wall and consequently made Felicity startle.

Before she had time to say anything or even turn completely towards him, Oliver took her from behind into an embrace that strangled the wind from her lungs.

“They know about her Oliver and it seems they’re still a little pressed about you underselling them.”

Oliver swallowed Malcolm’s words before he let himself inhale the scent dancing on Felicity’s hair. He’d brought her into this world and people who once hated him now knew she existed.

“The Culebra has her picture on the wall next to yours Oliver.”

“How do you know?”
Panic washed over him.
“I’ve seen it.”

Felicity felt Oliver clenching and the grinding sound of his teeth gritting against each other. She moved, just a fraction, and his grip tightened on her as though he was afraid to let her go. She turned in his arms, slowly, the only way she could turn in the confines of his embrace.

She saw the tempest in his eyes, like a raging storm of blue throwing itself against a circle of black. His irises were dark and turbulent and they glistened with unspent tears.

“Oliver,” she spoke his name so quietly, like she was trying to rouse him gently from his tempestuous thoughts.

He looked down at her, trouble etched into the very fabric of his expression.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, fearful, as she cupped his head with one hand.

He blinked, long and slow, before his eyes opened again and where there had once been a frightful storm there was now just black.

Like the deepest recesses of the ocean.
The parts that never got to see the sun.

“We have to go,” he breathed with regret tipping the edge of his words.

“Where?” she asked, struggling to understand where he was coming from or what he was actually saying.

“Home, we have to go home.”

His embrace loosened somewhat and Felicity broke back from it. Her pinched expression studied him, but Oliver was a wall now, expressionless and immovable.

“I don’t want to go home,” she retorted quickly as her arms replaced the line across her body where his had once been.

Oliver huffed as he walked over to where they kept their bags and started to push the contents back into the knapsack.

“I don’t want to go home,” Felicity repeated, her voice raising just enough so she was certain he heard her.

He glanced over his shoulder at her and she knew he was almost begging for her to listen and go along with it, but nothing inside her was willing to just accept his request without a reason.

He fisted his clothes into his bag, pummelling them down like they were the cause of every frustration he had.

“What do you need?” Oliver asked Malcolm, he knew the information came at a cost.

There was always a cost.

“I have a job for you, just make a little run for me and this goes away.”

“How?”

“Oliver, you know me, I can make things go away.”

“I do this for you and…”

“…and I see to it that the Culebra never even look at Miss Smoak again.”

“Oliver,” Felicity said, the second time she had although he had been oblivious to the first, as she pulled back his hand and dared him to look at her.

He twisted, his wrist still caught in her grasp, “Felicity, please just pack your things, we need to leave.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” she argued, “until you tell me what’s going on.”
Her request was met with silence even though he ached to tell her.
He couldn’t protect her by telling her.

Felicity reached into his pocket and he knew what she was heading for before she clasped his phone and pulled it out, but he never tried to stop her.

Her eyes scanned the last calls and at the top of the received list sat a name she had come to know quite infamously, Malcolm Merlyn.

“What does he want from you?” she asked boldly, crushing the phone into her palm.

Oliver gritted his teeth to seal in the absolute truth, because telling her was just too much, “just a job,” he answered with his fists clenched at his sides.
She blinked, watching him as his jaw tightened with each word he spoke.
“I thought you were done,” her voice wasn’t raised, but there was no mistaking her reply for timid.
“Felicity…” Oliver breathed her name, like saying it was painful.
“No,” she bit back, her eyes grounding into his, “are you done or are you not done?”
“I’m done,” he paused, stretching out his hand just to touch her, but pulling it away before it reached, “but.”
“There wouldn’t be a but if you were done,” she took a step back, her eyes reading him – seeing right through the black exterior he was so desperate to put up, “what does he have on you?”

Oliver’s entire face twisted in a brief moment of pain.
To tell her that he’d painted a target on her back.

“Oliver, let me in, we can fix this,” she urged as her eyes glanced back towards the bed where her tablet sat like a beacon, there had to be something she could do.

He watched her and travelled room alongside her eyes – he could see what she was thinking.

“You’re the smartest person I know Felicity,” he praised, his eyes and brow still burdened with the truth, “I don’t doubt that you could have the FBI and the IRS beating down on Malcolm’s doorstep, but,” a long sigh that came from the deep recesses of his stomach broke from his mouth, “that won’t stop a bullet.”

Felicity’s eyes reacted to his words in a fluttering blink but she couldn’t believe him.
There had to be something she could do, she could hack almost anything, there had to be a way to get Oliver and Thea out from under the control of a man who played chess with people’s lives.

He went to touch her arm, to sooth the storm that was raging in her wild eyes, but only his fingers brushed across it and for only a second before she stepped away and towards the tablet.
“There has to be something, something…” she mumbled, to herself or to him – it didn’t matter.

He caught her hand before she could pick up what she had bent over to collect.
“Zeros and Ones mean shit when there is a gun pointed at your head and the finger of a mad man is on the trigger,” Oliver growled, the intensity of his words darkening both his eyes and hers.

She wrestled her arm free and he didn’t fight for it back.
“He doesn’t own you.”
“Neither does the tax man, but you have to pay him all the same.”
The word pay was spoken with a thick surround of anger – Oliver had spent years paying.
“It’s not the same thing,” Felicity shot back, her fingers braced against his chin as she forced him to look at her.
“Where I’m from, it is.”
Bitter resentment mixed with resignation was all he heard.
Battle scars were all he saw.
He watched the tears spot her eyes before they rolled to the corners and escaped in slow, winding trails down her cheeks.

“And what are you paying for this time Oliver?”

He couldn’t keep it from her. She had a right to know, a right to walk away.

“You,” he whispered, the word stinging his throat as he said it.

Her head rocked back and forth in disbelief, “I don’t…”

“Another gang with a vendetta against me knows about you,” he explained, his words tipped with fear that this was it. This was going to cost him the only thing he’d ever cared about beyond his sister, “I make a delivery for Malcolm and it goes away.”

Resignation.

How? Was the first question that sprung up in her mind but she never asked it, too afraid to know the answer.

“I understand if you want out,” his eyes dropped to the floor, maybe they were saving him the pain of watching her leave.

He shivered when her warmed palm cupped the side of his face.

“I don’t want out,” she whispered as her free hand brushed a solitary tear that worked its way down his cheek, “Oliver I want you.”

His face showed everything – relief, fear, pain – but when his eyes met hers he saw only one emotion – love.

Felicity picked up his phone from the bed and folded it into his hand, “tell him he can wait, whatever he wants from you it can wait for two days.”

He looked down at her, pensive and unsure, but when she nodded down to the phone she had placed in his palm, Oliver sent a message just as she had asked.

She plucked his phone from his grip, turned it off and slid it onto the table, next to the food. Her fingers laced with his as she walked backwards towards the bed, her eyes never staving off his.

When her knees brushed the edge of the mattress she stopped and dropped his hands to his side. She could only manage a small smile, but it was enough, before she lifted the shirt from his body and dropped it carelessly to the ground.

Her fingers wove slowly across his chest until her palm stopped atop his heart and took a moment to feel the way it thundered underneath her touch.

“Be with me Oliver,” she whispered, smoky notes embracing the edges of her words, “let me take some of the burden from you,” she added as her fingers traced the lines across his brow.

They kissed slowly, his lips quivering as she took the lead. She felt every one of his emotions; fear, relief and pain, in his lips and her kiss deepened with each one.

Felicity didn’t know what the future held but what she did know was that, right now, they had this and whatever else that came she would stand beside him.

Ride or die.
Felicity rocked beside Oliver as the mid afternoon sun tried to force its way between the break in the curtains. He sighed contentedly beside her but his embrace tightened across her back the instant she tried to move away.

She leaned in and kissed the round of his shoulder, letting her lip trace a jagged scar he had there, “knife,” he offered simply, the third such injury he had quietly explained to her as she moved across his body.

He’d also explained the scar that puckered his skin near his ribs on the right side (an operation to remove gravel and glass that had torn through him and embedded in a wound when he’d come off his bike wearing a simple cotton tee) and the one that Felicity was circling with a slow moving finger.

“Did it hurt?” she asked, almost recanting it when she realised just how foolish the question sounded out loud. Oliver had been shot, through and through, to the right of his stomach, thankfully missing all vital organs – of course it had hurt.

She watched him shrug as his eyes stayed taped to the ceiling. He’d told her so much, offered her an insight into the world he’d come from and was still grappling to escape – if Felicity wanted him, then she deserved to know what baggage he came with.

She needed to see his scars, inside and out.

“A little,” he answered her softly, his skin tensing under the attention of her fingers. Felicity pulled her hand away, an apologetic sigh misting over his shoulder, “I’m sorry, Oliver, I…”

He caught her hand and rested her fingers back on the spot where they had been. He didn’t know how to express it, but her touch – even though the rawness of it frightened him – soothed him.

She took the words from his gentle smile and once again circled the scared skin that was rougher than all the rest.

“Were you afraid?” she asked, watching his eyes as they blinked over her question. “Of dying, no,” he answered truthfully, “of leaving Thea behind, yes.”

His head rolled towards her, the honesty blazing in his eyes.

She knew what he was asking without him even needing to say the words. “She has me too now Oliver,” she comforted, memorising the instant look of relief that covered his expression, “she will always have me.”

Felicity sealed her promise with a lingered kiss to his neck before she slowly sat up in the bed they had barely left all day. She smiled as her eyes danced over the pile of used condom wrappers on the bedside table – to say she was throbbing would be underselling the feeling between her legs right now.

“Where are you going?” Oliver groaned, his fingers down her arm hoping to coax her back down. “We have a festival to see,” she peeped as she playfully swatted him away.

“You still want to go? Even with the thing with Dots?” he asked as he sat up beside her and placed three soft kisses at the base of her neck. “They aren’t all bad people,” she nodded affirmatively, “there are good people, people like Big Joe.”

Oliver nestled his chin into her shoulder, “he’s a good guy.”

“He was close with your dad?” she asked as she turned her head enough to look at Oliver.
“They rode together before the Souls and even when the chapter started he stuck around. When Thea came along he helped dad leave the gang and get on his feet as best he could, vouched for him and got him a solid job,” Oliver prattled, flashes of fond childhood memories playing through his mind.

“He called you a nickname, Catch?”

Oliver nodded, the name he hadn’t heard in a long time – *not since his life was thrown into a shadow of chaos.*

“My dad rode with me at the front of his bike,” Oliver reminisced, “he told me it was because I was the bug catcher, the name stuck. Big Joe reckoned every rider should have a Catch.”

“I would have like to have met him, your father,” Felicity paused, reading the softening expression on Oliver’s face, “your mother too.”

Oliver nodded slowly, *he would have liked showing her off to them,* “He would have loved you, probably said you are way outside my league. Something about us Queen men getting the best fish in the sea and holding on for dear life,” he joked as his arms wrapped around her waist.

She turned in his embrace, her breasts grazing his arm and soliciting a carnal groan from the depth of his core.

“I’m not going anywhere, I’m more of a rock than a fish,” she chortled, a pleasant laugh floating through the air, “so take your rock out for some food that isn’t cold leftovers from breakfast.”

He pecked a kiss against her mouth, hovering there to graze his nose against hers.

“Yes Princess.”

Felicity emerged from the bathroom sometime later as Oliver slipped an open plaid shirt over his white tee and scooped a hand of fingers through his lightly damp hair, his skin fresh from the time they spent in the shower until the water ran cold.

“Do I look okay?” she asked with sweet, honeyed tones.

Oliver turned to face her even though his answer was always yes, it really wouldn’t matter what she was wearing, everything was beautiful about the women he loved.

Not even Oliver's usually stoic, cool, calm and collected outer could hold back the absolute jaw drop his face made when he saw her.

The black dress that ran like paint down her curves was instantly recognisable, it was the same built for sin dress he had pulled off the rack what seemed like a lifetime ago.

“Fuck,” was the only word he knew. 

*Fuck, Fuck, Fuck.*

He couldn’t even see the back, but just knowing there was a zip that ran like a ladder down her back was enough to make him stutter, “Fuh--uck.”

“Is that a yes?” she teased as she brushed her blow dried hair over her shoulders.

“Fuck,” he gaped.

*The only word he knew now.*

“Do I look like your old lady?”

She kicked up a heel and sauntered a few steps closer.

“You know I'm going to get into a fight with you wearing that?” Oliver grinned before he smacked his lips together, “I’m bound to knock some guy out if his eyes linger a little too long.”
The night rolled on and after wandering the streets taking in the sights, sounds and tastes of the festival that swarmed the small town streets, Felicity and Oliver had secluded themselves away in a little bar called Kenny’s.

Half the bulbs in the light fixtures were blown, casting the bar, that hysterically reminded Felicity of Moe’s Tavern, into what some might call ‘mood lighting’.

The bar was mostly empty, a few cheerfully rowdy bikers sat at the maple bar singing along with whatever classic hit was currently playing on the jukebox and another group huddled around two tables in the far corner, guzzling down bottles of beer and trying to best each other in a game of darts they were progressively getting worse at.

There was also a young couple, sat on one chair, making out so rabidly that Felicity and Oliver had taken bets on how long it would take them to come up for air.

Oliver winked as he walked around the sequestered pool table, eyeing up his next shot as Felicity slowly rubbed blue chalk over the tip.

“I know what you’re trying to do,” he countered as he leaned over the edge and lined up his shot. Felicity patted her lips together with a soft hum while her fingers stroked the pine shaft, “and what’s that?”

He blew out a steadying breath and made a perfect shot, sinking the 10 ball, “distract me.”

She smiled coyly as Oliver drank the last of his beer. Her eyes strayed from him for a moment, caught in a drag net of the lewd look she was getting across the room.

He was her age, maybe a little older, with broad shoulders, a cocky expression and a mop of black slicked back hair. To some the attention may have been welcomed, but it made Felicity uncomfortable.

Oliver followed her eyes and stopped on the same stare. His expression tensed before slick back raised his beer and offered Oliver a nod.

Oliver walked around the table to Felicity, “is he bothering you?” he asked through gritted teeth as he positioned himself in front of the licentious glare.

“No, it’s fine,” Felicity shook it off and, after glancing over Oliver’s shoulder, she was relieved to note slick back had returned to his dart game.

“So,” Oliver sighed, touching her waist, “do you need me to help?” he finished in jest while he nodded towards the table.

“It's all math and angles, I don’t need your help,” she laughed before bumping him away with her hip.

“But, I’ll take another beer,” she added with a wink as she handed him her empty.

He watched her as she tipped her body forward and leaned down to eye level with the ball.

Oliver hummed as he drove a single digit down the tracks of the taunting zipper. Every part of him ached to touch it and to watch it peel off her body like a banana skin. When his finger rode over the curve of her rear, Felicity looked up Oliver with a mischievous grin.

“I promise not to take the shot until you get back,” she offered after offering him a playful wink.

Oliver tapped her ass lightly as he backed away, “hold that position.”

He backed away from the pool table slowly and the background ambience of the guys drinking at the bar grew closer, but his eyes stayed on her and the perfect slope she made bent at the hips.
He sighed, longingly, before he turned around and waited at the bar to order.

Felicity held her stance and walked her eyes fastidiously from one of her solid coloured balls to the other while her mind retreated into itself as she calculated the angles and velocity required for each shot.

Hands on her hips startled her from her equations as they held her tightly, pulling her ass up.

“I told you I don’t need hel…” her words trail off when the hands weren't familiar and the scent of the breath behind her smelled distinctively like menthol cigarettes.

Felicity turned to find slick back smiling down at her before he thrust his pelvis against her waist. “You want me to tell you you’re pretty,” he crooned before his hands tightened at her waist and his body pressed her into the pool table, giving her no room to move. “I want you to take your hands off me and step the fuck away,” Felicity gritted, her eyes narrowing as she braced her hands against his chest.

She was of no doubt that he wasn’t used to girls saying no, and while he was almost as good looking as Oliver, it was overshadowed by everything else he projected.

“Come on, with what you’re wearing, you know you wanted people to look,” his breath felt heavy on her neck as he leaned in closer, “to touch.” She felt his fingers graze over the curve of her ass, slipping closer to the hemline of her dress.

The lax in his grip allowed Felicity to push against him enough to slide away from being crushed between the table and his bulk physique. “What I wear,” she spat as she straightened her skirt, “is my business and there is nothing that gives you the right to put your hands anywhere near me without a very clear, coherent and continued invitation.”

“So now you’re going to act all precious like you don’t want it?” he laughed, breathily. Her eyes walked down him and then snap back up, “I never wanted a damn thing from you and I suggest that you walk away or when that guy turns around,” she spoke nodding towards Oliver who was stood across the other side of the bar with his back to them as he waited for their drinks, “he’s going to see you and he’s going to be pissed and when he’s done with you, I’m going to take a walk across your delicate regions in these here shoes,” Felicity allowed herself to smile as she looked down at the leather pumps with the ice pick heel.

He looked at her waiting for a moment where she might flinch or the steeled look on her face might soften, but it never came – it wouldn’t.

“Everything okay here?” Oliver asked, venom leaking from his words as he stood next to Felicity and stared slick back down. “He was just leaving,” Felicity replied while her arm wrapped around Oliver’s waist, both as a show and because she could feel him on the verge of self-fulfilling his prediction about knocking someone out.

Oliver glared him down for a few moments before Felicity noted the vein on the side of his temple started pulsing faster. “The lady says you were leaving,” he spat as he jostled his shoulders, loosening them up for if or when he needed to swing.
Slick back blew out a nervous laugh before he turned and walked back towards his group who had been watching silently at a distance.

“Did he touch you?” Oliver asked as he set the two beer bottles he was carrying in one hand down on the end of the pool table.
“I handled it,” she smiled, pinching the corner of his frown.
He thought, for just a moment, about arguing with her but soon thought better of it as she sucked down the beer and watched him over the edge of it.

“It’s your turn” he said as he nodded towards the pool table.
Felicity sat her half-drunk bottle down and smiled as her finger walked around the lip of it.
“Actually,” she smiled, snagging her lower lip between her teeth, “I need to go to the bathroom.”
Oliver’s brows pinched momentarily as he watched the smile grow over her lips and her own brows arch in expectation – it actually took him far too long to catch the hint – but when he did he sat his own, barely touched, beer down and took her hand into his.

They walked like devious school children in a room of teachers towards one of bathroom doors.

They burst through the door and could barely contain the ravenous kisses they attacked each other’s faces with.

His back cracked against the wall, his shoulder barely missing the paper towel dispenser hung there when Felicity pounced. Her fingers scampered under his plaid shirt and she smiled when they finally met with the warm, smooth skin of his stomach.

Her nails pawed down the lines of his chest as she pressed her body against him and devoured his lips with her own. There was no time to talk and no time to take a moment and enjoy the way his body writhed under her fingertips.

Her hands dropped to his belt buckle allowing her nimble fingers to race to loosen it and before Oliver’s tongue could even breach her lips, Felicity’s hand was down his pants, tugging at his shaft with such fervour that it took him stilling her at the wrist to not spill himself into her palm.

Their lips broke apart in hot, frantic and uneven breaths. Their eyes were both wild and any care about how easily they could be discovered here were long since discarded on the floor with Oliver’s pants (now in a puddle around his ankles).

Felicity eyed up the vanity beside them, but even as her desire grew to dizzying heights, she knew there was no way she was going to be able to perch herself up there, with her legs wide enough for Oliver to slot himself between, in the dress she was wearing.

But Oliver had his own ideas.
His lips caught hers again and with a desperate flourish he kissed her, fast and crazed, finally threading his tongue between her swollen lips to fight with hers. His fingers laced through her loose hair until he gripped a handful at the roots and gently tugged.

Felicity thrust her body into him, enjoying the way he moaned against her lips in response.

Then, as though she was standing on a Lazy Susan, Oliver spun her and pressed her waist into the edge of the vanity. Her palms slipped up the peach laminate countertop before bracing against the splashback as she felt Oliver’s lips caressing the curve of her neck.

“You alright Princess?” he asked, a devilish growl in his voice as he walked her legs as far apart as they could go.
The heels of her shoes lifted off the tiled floor as she leaned her body down and arched her hips upward. “Undo me,” she spoke, her voice sultry as she watched him over the slope of her shoulder.

His fingers pinched the zipper tag at the bottom of the dress and he worked it slowly up the centre of her body and over the round of her ass, as she gave it a little wiggle.

He stopped at the line of her waist and Felicity spread her tiptoed legs even further apart. Oliver ran his fingers between her legs on top of her black silk panties, relishing the way her arousal soaked through them and warmed his fingers.

He pushed them to one side and watched her mouth gasp as he pushed a testing finger deep inside her warm entrance and skimming against her cushioned walls.

Her nails gripped the tiny lip of the splashback as she felt Oliver sink his cock into her sex next. He didn’t still until he was fully seated inside her, his thatch of hair now brushing up against the smooth rounds of her ass.

Felicity hummed as she rolled her hips, feeling his fullness stretch and press against her at every angle when his hands cupped her waist.

She watched him in the mirror slightly to the right as his smile turned from devious to absolutely fucking wild before she pressed her backside into him, kick starting his rhythmic thrusts.

The speed and depth grew quicker than it ever had before and Felicity could feel her entire body shaking with each thrust that Oliver made.

Guttural cries lurched from her mouth, framed either end by long, slow moans as Oliver thoroughly pummelled her insides. Her breasts bounced against the tight confines of her dress, one nearly escaping as a particularly energetic thrust lifted her feet from the ground.

The sound of their bodies slapping together – hot, sweaty skin against hot, sweaty skin – made Felicity delirious while his name dripped in stunted syllables from her mouth.

Oliver’s thumbs stretched over the dip of her naked back and after one, impressively deep, thrust he kissed the very tail of her spine, his lips tasting the slightly salty notes of her skin.

His eyes moved to the mirror when he lifted his lips off her and he revelled in the way a pink blush was colouring her cheeks and caressing the tips of her breasts. He watched, gleefully, as deep thrusts pushed her breasts hard up against the fabric, ivory fighting ebony.

It had only been a few minutes of frantic and carnal sex when Oliver’s balls ached and his thighs tightened while Felicity’s walls began to cave in around him.

“Condom,” Felicity panted, her voice ragged and scratched as her fingertips whitened under the pressure of her grip on the vanity. Oliver pulled his cock out of her with brutal abandonment and immediately crouched to blindly rummage through the back pocket of his crumpled jeans. His mouth peppered uneven kisses against the underside of her ass while he breathed in the wetness of her folds.

Felicity moaned and dropped her forehead to the counter when his tongue dipped greedily between her folds, slurping up her slick juices before he found his wallet and threw it up to her.

With his tongue lapping and slicing through her folds and his fingers lightly toying with her clit, Felicity searched his wallet for a condom, sighing when she finally found one – only…
“Shit,” she swore as he searched the pockets of his wallet again, and again and again, “shit.” 
Oliver appeared beside her, his lips glossed with her spend. 
“You only have the expired one Oliver,” she groaned, her clit instantly aching and her walls feeling heartlessly abandoned. 
“Shit,” Oliver echoed Felicity’s sentiment and word before he positioned himself behind her again, his fingers now slowly caressing her nether lips, coaxing the heat back into them. 
“We could…” she breathed, pausing to enjoy his slow strokes, “like we did the other night.” 
Oliver kissed her neck and his breath fanned over her cheek.
“We don’t have any lube and I don’t want to hurt you,” he whispered, his thumb lightly pressing into her puckered hole.

“Do you trust me?” he asked softly as his hand moved to massage her rear.
“Yes,” she answered without reservation.
“I’ll pull out if you want me to keep going.”

Felicity chewed on her lower lip – this sounded like High School Health Class and the warning the teachers gave, but Oliver wasn’t a prepubescent boy that couldn’t control himself and honestly every part of her just ached to feel full with him even for just a few moments more.

“Please,” she answered, her voice a little tight with need.
Oliver sunk himself inside her pulsing walls a second time, even with the pause he knew she was close as her whole body caved into him, melting against his form in a way that made them fit together so perfectly.

He worked her hips back and forth, rounding off at the top, aware by the feverish hums that were bleeding through her closed lips, that he was hitting the right spots quite perfectly.

He built the speed back up until her breasts began to bounce like they had before. He crowded over her, shifting the angle of his cock so it dug deeper into her thrumming walls.

His mouth nuzzled at the seam of her ear before he whispered with a husky undertone, “come for me princess, let me feel you.”

Her eyes screwed shut and she snapped her legs closed like a vice around him seconds before she climaxied in a flood of warm release that wrapped around his cock like a blanket.

His balls ached and his thighs prickled but he held his own release back to soak in her warmth until the aching became too much and he pulled himself free.

His cock was still very much engorged and it slapped against the inside of her thigh as he kissed a path along the ridge of her shoulder, *it would soften in a few minutes.*

While her climax still rocked her body Felicity turned, forcing Oliver back from her. He looked at her quizzically before she pushed him up against the same wall she had done earlier.

Felicity didn’t say a word as she reached up to the dispenser and pulled a wad of paper towels down from it. With a rudimental swipe she cleaned down his erect shaft and dropped the used towels in the trashcan beside her feet.

Before Oliver could comprehend what was happening, Felicity was on her knees in front of him with her red lips wrapped around his cock.

“Fuck,” he groaned as she fed him in deeper while her hand gripped his base.

His fingers rolled through her hair as her tongue slalomed over his tip, teasing it like a toy.
Felicity hummed as she tasted the notes of his salty skin blended with the remnants of her sweet release. It tasted so markedly different and there was something so insanely erotic about tasting what he tasted in times gone before.

*The fact that Oliver was panting like teenager on heat certainly added to the whole experience.*

His fingers combed through her hair, gripping a little tighter as she rolled his head against the roof of her mouth and quickly pumped his base.

His eyelids were hanging on loose hinges, drooping as pleasure engulfed him, but they swung open seconds after the bathroom door did.

Felicity heard it, but as her nails scraped up the inside of his thighs and under the draping fabric of his shirts, she really, really, didn’t care.

Oliver saw the widening eyes of *slick back* as he took in the intimate moment in front of him. For a moment Oliver smiled before his senses got the better of him and he started to move, to protect what was for them alone.

Felicity also felt Oliver start to move away and her growl reverberated down his swollen shaft before a firm hand pushed him back against the wall.

*Stay.*

Her nails embedded into his flesh making Oliver suck in a sudden gasp of air, but enjoying it all the same.

And then he simply offered slick back another, broader, smile that said it all.

*She’s with me.*

The door closed again and Oliver found his eyes lolling back once more as Felicity pleasured every single inch of him – her tongue swam across his tip, her cheeks hollowed around the centre and her hand worked the base until it all came together in one, explosive orgasm that shot hot spurts of release deep into her mouth.

Felicity swallowed his threads, sighing against his trembling shaft as it warmed her throat, until he gave her his entire spend. His body slumped against the wall, wrecked, before she pulled back and slowly stood up.

Her thumb wiped the traces of him from the corners of her mouth before she lightly grazed her fingertips down his length.

His expression looked completely ravished and Felicity smiled as she drunk in the sight of it. Loose whips of hair clung to his face and his lip swung manically over his dried bottom lip while his eyes slowly flickered open.

He lifted up his shirt and laughed when he saw the violently red lines her nails had left behind.

“Oh, you don’t ever have to be sorry Princess, you can mark me up as much as you like,” he declared as he reached around her back and tugged the zipper on her dress closed, “any fucking time you want.”

“Oliver,” she hummed as she stooped down to collect his pants and walk them up his legs. “Hmm?”

“You need to throw away that prehistoric condom,” she laughed while her fingers adeptly redressed him.
“I know,” he replied with a lopsided smile.
[Two Days Later, End of August 2012]

“I’ll just be gone a couple of days,” Oliver sighed, listless, as he stood on Felicity’s doorstep a little after dawn.
Bright hues of the morning, radiant oranges and pinks, were drawn like watercolours through the morning sky as his hands swallowed hers.
“I know,” she answered quietly, she knew he wanted something else, an okay, a condoning of what he was doing including its inevitable dubious legality, but Felicity couldn’t give it to him. No matter how much she loved him, her heart was sinking at the idea that she was helpless to stop him.

He was right about what he’d said before.
Any dirt she could dig up on Malcolm – it hadn’t stuck before, so there was little reason to think it wouldn’t stick now. All it would achieve was putting her in his crosshairs and making Oliver feel like he needed to do more.

They would find a way out from under Malcolm’s shadow, but right now Felicity had to trust that Oliver knew what he was doing.
Right now, *that’s all she had.*

“Oliver…” his name dropped from her lips like a whispered prayer. She watched as his face grew more sullen and pale, like it held the weight of the world in its lines.

“Please don’t ask me not to go Felicity or what I’m doing,” he begged, unafraid and unashamed of the desperation in his voice, “I don’t want to lie to you but you shouldn’t know.” He’d crossed lines before, all sorts of them, but if today was the day that it caught up with him he didn’t want Felicity to be forced into a position where she sat across from a detective and lied about what she knew.

It was better that she didn’t have to lie.
It was better that she didn’t know.

She nodded slowly as she bit back tears – she would shed those later, alone, when they wouldn’t add to his burden. Because if he saw them he would ask her why and she would have to admit that as guilty as he felt, so did she – he was, after all, protecting her.

Felicity signed up to being with Oliver naively believing that their worlds could be seamless, but the deeper this went, the more apparent it became that life was never that simple.

She opened his palms and drew a finger around the edges.
“I’ll keep them clean,” he offered with a smile that fought for its place on his lips.
“Keep them *safe.*”
“I’ll do that too.”

His fingers brushed back her hair and pinned it at her temple before he grazed a delicate kiss against her damp cheek.
“Does your alarm work?” he asked, gesturing his head towards the keypad near the door. Felicity glanced over her shoulder before nodding softly, “Yeah,” she breathed, “but I don’t really use it.”

Oliver tipped her chin up and brushed a tear from her face before his eyes anchored into hers, “will you please, even when you’re home.”
She blinked, relishing the gentle touch of his finger against her skin.
“For me,” he added, his words giving way to a pained sigh before he searched her eyes for an answer.
“Yes, alright,” she promised before his hand melted away and sunk into the pocket of his black jeans.
“I love you,” he mouthed as he backed away.
“I love you too.”

Felicity waited until she couldn’t see him anymore before she closed the door and pressed her forehead against it, shuddering though a silent cry.

“He’ll be okay,” Thea said softly as she placed a calming hand on Felicity’s shoulder.
Felicity sucked back new tears and banished away old ones before she turned to face Thea – she had momentarily forgotten she’d offered to stay with her.

“He always is,” she added with a soft shrug.
Felicity nodded while she sunk her arms around her waist, instinctively consoling herself. She couldn’t blame Thea for the slight hint of apathy in her words, this was the world she knew too. Felicity didn’t doubt that Thea – both as a child and now – had told herself that mantra every time her big brother walked out the door.
“But,” Felicity sighed as she walked with Thea towards the kitchen, following the aroma of freshly brewed coffee, “he shouldn’t have to pro…” her words trailed off as she realised she didn’t know what Oliver had told Thea about any of this.

But the young brunette just smiled knowingly.
“…protect you?” Thea finished, “I’ve said that for years about me, but it’s in his nature Felicity. He’s like a Pitbull, he will fiercely protect the ones he loves, even if in the process he becomes something vicious, something hated.”

Thea poured the two cups of coffee carefully, “right now, he’s just Malcolm’s toy, but my father will tire of that soon enough and cut him loose.”
“You really believe that?” Felicity asked as she gripped the handle of the white ceramic mug.
Thea shrugged again before meeting Felicity’s enquiring eyes, “I have to.”

The two women walked around to the table, drinks in hand, and chose seats opposite each other. Thea tucked one leg up on the edge of her chair, pulling taut the hole in her grey jeans.
“We can talk about something else,” she said quietly before she blew a ripple across the top of her coffee.
Felicity nodded appreciatively, “I’d be glad for the distraction. How was Curtis while I was away?”
Thea chuckled to herself, “manic,” she answered.
“To be expected.”

“Actually,” Thea’s brow furrowed just like Oliver’s did, “I was wondering if I could talk to you about something.”
Felicity set her cup down on the table and smiled, “of course, anything.”
“Please don’t tell Oliver, he’ll get way ahead of himself, but…” Thea reached around the back of the chair where she had earlier slung her Black Sabbath tote, “I was thinking about going to college next year,” she continued as she cautiously took a folder from the tote and placed it on the table between them.

“This is it?” Oliver huffed as he tore a frustrated hand through his hair.
He hated been here in the same room as Malcolm knowing he was about to do his bidding.
Malcolm nodded as he closed the car boot over enough drugs to see Oliver do more years in prison than he’d lived out of it.

“Just drive it across a couple of state lines without getting caught,” Malcolm sneered with a twisted smile.
Another grapple through his hair, “Payment?”
“Already taken care of, you just drive.”
Oliver nodded as he slapped his hands against the side of his legs.
“And our business?” he asked, his eyes narrowing at Malcolm.
“It goes away, I promise you.”

Oliver sucked in a troubled breath, he didn’t see an alternative.
“You pay whatever price they have on me to make sure they stay the fuck away from her, got it?”
Malcolm pressed his palms together in a prayer, “absolutely.”

“I need to grab a couple of things, be ready to leave in five,” he gritted across at Carl, a wiry gang-banger with a chip on both his shoulders and a flock of auburn hair, before he walked, heavy-
footed, from the garage.

“What does he mean?” Carl rasped, “the Culebra haven’t given a shit about him in years and they
certainly don’t care about the pretty ass he’s tapping.”
Malcolm smiled, “but he doesn’t know that.”

“Suits you,” a familiar voice cooed from behind as Oliver tucked a small pistol into the waistband
of his jeans.

He stayed stoically silent as he turned around and met with Laurel leaning against the doorframe of
the Chapel.

“It’s nice to see you come back,” she continued as she sauntered deeper into the room.
“I’m not back,” Oliver grunted as he slammed the gun locker closed, making a sound that echoed
off the large carved table in the centre of the room.

“This girl is really messing with your head Oliver,” Laurel sighed, her plum lips rolling into a pout
as she straightened his shirt before he brushed her hand away, “you were good here, you were
going places.”

Oliver shook his head in disbelief but not surprise.
“I was going to an early grave and if you stay around these people, so are you,” he replied bluntly
while his hands jostled with the shoulders of his shirt.

She stood back, her weight on one leg as her arms banded across her chest, “Malcolm says I’m
important.”
A soft, pitied chuckle blew through Oliver’s chapped lips before he brushed his tongue across
them.
“For now, until he can get someone else to do whatever,” he looked at her dryly, “he has you doing
for him.”

He walked towards the door before she caught his wrist.
“This is the life,” she argued, her brow as pensive as her smile was tight.
Oliver thought about what Felicity had said and he echoed her words almost perfectly, “but it
shouldn’t be.”

He sighed as he tugged his wrist from her grip, “you should want for better. For yourself, for
Tommy.”
“Fuck Tommy,” she said bitterly, although Oliver knew she probably didn’t mean it. He watched
as she sucked in a breath and blew a trembled one out, “he got out of this the only way you can.”
“Walk away Laurel,” Oliver remarked as he walked towards the door, “before this place takes
what’s left of you, if there is anything.”

“Thea, these applications look great,” Felicity effused as she carded through the paperwork, “but
Art History?”
Felicity had expected fashion or something that would see Thea opening a club to be more up her
alley.
“I was thinking about looking into becoming a museum curator,” Thea replied sheepishly as a light
blush dusted her cheeks.
Felicity’s blinked back her surprise, *she hadn’t been expecting that.*
“I didn’t know that interested you.”
She watched as the young girl’s shoulders crowded in around her chest – they may have had different fathers, but the mannerisms between Thea and Oliver were unmistakable.

“It’s stupid,” she sighed, nervously toying with threads of her dark hair, “but I always felt safe there, like time stands still and you can just reflect on how far you’ve come, if that makes any sense.”
“It does,” Felicity nodded kindly.

Thea pushed her now empty coffee cup to the side of the table and leant closer, laying her forearms across the light birch wood.
“I don’t know what Oliver has told you about our mother,” she started, cautiously treading through a landmine of memories, “but Raisa fills in what Oliver doesn’t like to talk about.”
Felicity subtly nodded as she listened.

Oliver still kept so much of his past close to his chest but she couldn’t resent him for that. *When he was ready to talk, she would be there to listen.*

“My mother was smart, like really smart. College educated, ambitious, charming,” Thea paused to smile wistfully, “probably a lot like you.”

Felicity thanked Thea with a smile as the young woman’s fingers drew restless patterns in the wood while she remembered fondly the things she’d been told.

“Raisa said that she could wear something from a second hand store and make it look like a million dollars. She loved art and she used to take us to the museum as children. I was just a baby so I don’t remember much, but when they died and Oliver,” she stalled to breathe in a quiver, “when he came back for me he tried to keep that going.”

Felicity listened silently, thankful that Thea was letting her in where Oliver, for now, struggled.

“He didn’t have a lot of money but it was cheap and safe and I think for him it was a sanctuary,” she continued, tipping her head gently to her shoulder as a smile peeked across her lips. As much as Oliver loved Thea, she loved him back just the same.

“One time we ended up not having the money to go inside so we were just going to sit outside I suppose,” she chuckle lightly, remembering how at 8 years old she hugged Oliver’s bulky arm and told him it didn’t matter and that she liked it outside, “but the curator was eating his lunch outside and he recognised us so he let us in for free that time and every other time after that.”

Thea could still remember his name, Professor Martin Stein. It had been a while since she’d visited the museum with, or without, Oliver and she couldn’t help but wonder if the man with the soft eyes still worked there.

“We’d just sit there for hours,” she reminisced, “I liked to look at the places around the world and *wish* I could be somewhere different. I think Oliver was just looking for a place where he didn’t have to be…” she clenched her teeth and ‘grr-d’ softly, “…gang Oliver.”

She tapped her hand on the closed manila folder and sighed, “It’ll probably never happen though, most of the schools with good programmes,” she breathed, “I don’t have the money and I won’t ask Oliver for it, he’s already done too much.”

She shook her head softly, Oliver had spent so many years focusing on her, she wouldn’t ask him to make this his problem too.

“I’ll pay,” Felicity said the instant the idea presented itself.
“What?”
Her head bobbed as she quickly thought through the logistics, *it made complete sense*, “A lot of company’s give scholarships and I have a company.”

She looked across the table at Thea’s slightly perplexed smile.

“But I won’t be studying technology.”

“No,” Felicity shrugged casually, *but what I build, what I create, it would be nothing without the pioneers that came before me. Everything I have comes about because someone tried before me, their successes and their failures, they’re all part of what we have today. And maybe one day, you’ll curate a museum that will have something I did in it. I think that’s pretty awesome.*”

“But I couldn’t take money from you,” Thea remarked.

“You’re not, it’s a scholarship.”

“Maybe I could intern with you guys so I feel like I’m earning it.”

“Oh, you don’t need to Thea, honestly.”

Thea blushed as her lips folded over words she was trying to say, “maybe I could just help you out as a friend then, I mean if we were…” she ran a flustered hand through the lengths of her hair, “not that you should feel like you have to be my friend because you’re dating my brother, it’s just…”

She blew out an exacerbated sigh before Felicity laid her hands on top of Thea’s and smiled.

“We are friends,” she spoke concisely, “regardless of mine and Oliver’s relationship. Thea you’re a remarkable young woman who is on the cusp of making her own mark on the world. I am confident that it’ll be a great one and I would love a front row seat to cheer you on as your friend.”

It was a good four hours and one bathroom stop later, as the Ford sedan was rolling down a dry and empty highway when Carl kicked his legs up onto the dashboard and lit up his fifth cigarette.

“That girl you’re banging,” he puffed as he blew smoke out of the cracked window, “she’s a nice piece of ass, got any pictures?” he croaked out a laugh as he nodded down towards Oliver’s phone in the consol.

The car swerved wildly off the highway, kicking up a cloud of dust as the wheels skidded to a stop in the dirt. Oliver pulled the gun from his waistband and pressed the barrel of it into Carl’s temple.

“What the fuck man?” he grimaced as the cigarette hung from his mouth and he raised his hands to the roof.

“You ever mention her again and I’ll blow your fucking brains out then change my shirt,” Oliver threatened, the thump of his temple vein like a marching band in his head, “I won’t even bury you, you understand?”

There wasn’t a flicker of hesitation in his threat.

Carl nodded, somewhat frantically, “Fine man, Jesus.”

Oliver smiled, “Trust me, you so much as even *think* about her again and not even the lord himself will save you. And put out your fucking cigarette, that shit stinks”
bags were taken inside.

Oliver followed Carl, begrudgingly, through the door and into the smell of beer and pickles that permeated the wooden walls.

“You want a beer?” one of the three men asked, nodding to a young girl behind the bar who started pouring before Oliver answered.

“You got your stuff, deal’s done,” Oliver glared at Carl as he took the beer and settled into a bar stool.

“You just drove nine fucking hours and my ass is numb,” Carl snorted before he chugged down half the beer and wiped foam from his hairy upper lip.

“Our people need a couple of hours to check if it’s all kosher,” the President smirked as he handed Oliver a glass, “take a load off, we’re all fucking friends here.”

“Oliver doesn’t believe in friends,” Carl snorted while he lit up the cigarette he pulled from the top of his ear.

“You got something to hide?” a rasped voice of a man sat the other end of the bar piped in, his eyes straying from the TV just long enough to glare at Oliver.

“Our resident paranoid,” the President joked through thin lips, but Oliver got the point.

Snitches made everyone suspicious, if Oliver looked antsy about leaving it wouldn’t go unnoticed.

“Thanks,” he said dryly as he collected the drink offered.

Oliver nursed the single beer for as long as he could, an hour, before the weary eyes of the paranoid fell on him again and he was forced to finished it and ask for another.

The pretty face of the girl behind the bar smiled at him as she leaned across the polished wood. At a passing glance she may have looked a little like Felicity, but Oliver considered that he may have just been projecting how much he missed her while he thought about how guilt had coloured her cheeks this morning.

Guilt
It was an emotion Oliver was painfully familiar with. He carried his fair share, but to see how it frayed her smile and darkened the sheen of her blue eyes was a bitter pill to swallow.

It was an impossible equation.
He was here to protect her.
But she wouldn’t need protection if it weren’t for him.

“Thanks,” he said with a melancholy tone as he offered the woman a brief smile.
She returned his smile with one of her own before she poured two beers for a rowdy pair by the pool table, in the middle of discussing, unbelievably, which Kardashian was sexier.

Oliver shook his head with a short laugh, it was obviously Kourtney, or at least that’s what Thea would have demanded he say.

“Her name’s Becca, she ain’t attached,” the President laughed, slapping Oliver’s shoulder, “call her a thanks for coming gift.”

“No thanks,” Oliver returned briskly.

Carl laughed with a drunken boisterousness as he slung his arm around a pretty Latina with dark hair that skinned her waist, “he’s got a lady back home,” he slurred as he grabbed a handful of ass,
“but she doesn’t have to know.”
Oliver finished his beer and slammed the empty glass on the bar.
“There a spare room? I’m pretty tired,” he gritted his teeth as he spoke, his hand itching to pull his gun on the idiot for the second time that day.

“No shame in having the same warm woman to climb into bed with,” paranoid offered wisely from the same seat he’d stayed in all night, “take one of the rooms out back.”
Oliver thanked him with a nod, pleasantly surprised he understood.

It was almost 3am and Oliver was letting his subconscious dream of Felicity. He’d called her just after 1am to hear the soft notes of her comforting voice. They hadn’t talked about where he was or what he was doing but instead he sat, propped up against his pillow and listened with tired eyes to her talk about the movie her and Thea had watched.

It was nothing.
Pointless to some, but to Oliver that simple conversation meant everything.
She never questioned if he was alone. She trusted him.
She didn’t hold resentment in her voice. She loved him.
She talked of the mundane so he could fall into a restful sleep with her voice on his mind. She knew him.

_I love you Oliver_ were her final words that night and they floated around him like a warm embrace. He imagined her lips folding around his earlobe as a smile tipped her naturally rosy lips. _Oliver_ she purred his name and it warmed the blood coursing through his veins.

He imagined her tongue tickling the seam before brushing down his bristled jaw. He hummed, feeling her breath fanning across his cheek. It made his skin shiver delectably and instantly miss it when she pulled away.

He begged her back with a hum through slightly parted lips, but his petulance subsided as he imagined her warmth shaping around his body. Her breasts pressed up against his arm, a curtain of soft hair behind his shoulder and a toe skimming the inside of his leg – Felicity, his little heat vampire.

He breathed deeply, desperate to imagine the sweet scent of vanilla and honey dance across his senses, but instead the smell of spent cigarettes and dark ale assaulted him. His brow pinched, annoyed at how his mind was failing to recreate a scent he knew well.

“Felicity, baby,” he crooned to the air that brushed across his chest like fingernails.
Mmmm he heard, soft notes _but not quite right._
His head was a fog of her voice, _why was this not quite right?_

“What are you…here…,” he mumbled in soft simpered words.
“So you can fuck me.”
_That didn’t sound like her_
_Why does she sound so different in his dream?_

His cock tightened imagining her hand gripping him, making slow, even strokes up his shaft. He could feel himself growing engorged and throbbing under his briefs.
_How does that feel so real in his dreams?_

He smiled thinking of Felicity and how warm she’ll feel when he can sink inside her. He’ll grip her
waist and watch her body slowly glisten as they move together...soon.

But now it’s just her hand, stroking up him.
“Felicity,”
“Is that her name?”

Oliver eyes snapped open. The breast on his arm had a nipple ring that glistened in the orange hue of the lamp he’d left on when he fell asleep.

The arm lying down his chest was tattooed.

It wasn’t Felicity.
Oliver leapt from the bed
“Shit, you’re not...” he spluttered as vision returned to his tired eyes.

As he rubbed his eyes the whole scenario came hurtling in vivid colour. It was Becca. Becca was naked.
“Fuck,” he cursed as he threw a hand over his eyes and fell back against the wall.

“It’s okay,” she effused, laughing at his reaction, “I won’t tell your girl, your secret is safe with me.”
“What are you doing in my room,” he asked, horrified with his eyes still covered, “naked?”
“The guy you were with, he said you asked for me.”

Oliver squinted around the floor while keeping his arm up as a visor. He found a shirt that wasn’t his and threw it blindly towards where he guessed she was standing, “please put some clothes on.”

She chuckled until she realised Oliver was serious.
“Look Oliver, you’re an any hole kind of guy,” she admitted bluntly before she pulled the tee over her head, “take your pick and no one has to know,” she continued as she threaded her arms through and tugged down the hem, barely enough length to cover her ass.

Oliver didn’t even attempt to acknowledge the compliment.
“How old are you?” he grunted as he took his jeans from the chair beside him and yanked them up his legs.
“Twenty-two,” she answered with a coy shrug.

He continued throwing on his own clothes haphazardly, “Jesus, you should be in college or something, not wasting your life with these shits.”
“You sound like my father,” she chuckled, feathering a hand through her hair.
“Well maybe the man has a point.”

Oliver tugged up his boots, leaving them unlaced.
“If I had a daughter,” Oliver started, pausing for a moment to consider the idea, unable to stop the smile that blanched across his lips, “if I had any child, I wouldn’t want this life for them.”

“That girl of yours must be something,” Becca complimented with an obliging tone.

Oliver smiled, “she is the centre of everything beautiful in my world.”

He shrugged on his brown weathered jacket and combed his fingers through his hair.
“And she would be better at telling you all of this, but as a guy that maybe one day has a daughter, you can be anything you want to be. If you really want to be serving fat guys in leather tap beer then you’ve found your home. But if there is ever a time you look around and think maybe you might want something more,” he found Felicity’s card in his wallet and handed it to Becca, “call her, she’ll know what to say.”
She flipped the card in her hands as Oliver walked towards the door.
“Where are you going?”
“Home,” Oliver resolved as he pulled open the bedroom door.
“What about the guy you were with?”
“When he wakes up,” Oliver smirked, “tell him he can hitchhike.”
“She’s lucky to have you,” Becca simpered as she tapped the edge of the card. Oliver paused, smiled and shook his head softly, “No, I’m definitely the lucky one.”

[11:12am]

Felicity yawned as she tapped out a few lines on her keyboard before she paused to rub her tired eyes and take a sip of the cold coffee from the mug on her desk.

She pushed the chair away and listlessly stood up from her desk. She had barely slept last night and the enthusiasm she had tried to muster for the day was quickly waning. She expected Oliver home tomorrow and despite the level of unease she had about the whole thing she was trying to distract herself with the Argus project.

They had a date for the project now – December 24th. They would move the truck through the streets late Christmas-eve night because most people would be at home. They would be like Santa except without the reindeers and toys and red suit.

While there was still more to do the basic premise was decided, the truck would be unmanned and be travelling a set course.

If there was even a slight deviation (which was impossible because you would have to get IN the truck to be able to have any hope of hacking it and you couldn’t get in because it was moving) KABOOM – at least inside, it was Cisco’s job to ensure that explosion didn’t destroy half a city block.

The weapons they were carrying were technological ones, and if Felicity had to wager a guess it would be things like spy software, drone specs, chemical compounds, armour – things that would put the army ahead of its current game and be worth a significant amount of money to whoever was selling it.

Felicity was certain that her team could get it through the city without incident, after all not even she would be able to hack the navigational system.

She continued the yawn she’d started at her desk as she sauntered out to Curtis’ desk and ran her fingers along the lip.
“How are the specs on the chip going?” Felicity asked, stemming the second yawn that threatened to break free.
“There are a couple of issues I can’t seem to bypass, but shouldn’t I be working on the Argus thing with you?” Felicity shook her head, “this isn’t really where I want our focus, it brings in the money at the moment but I started Smoak Tech as more than just a fancy taxi company for an off the radar defence contractor.”

Curtis opened his mouth to answer just as Oliver skidded around the corner and straight up to Felicity. He embraced her tightly, lifting her feet off the ground and stumbling back onto Curtis’ desk, knocking over a pen caddy.
Before Felicity could open her mouth to speak Oliver's lips were on them, crushing and devouring her while his hands gently propped her up on the edge of Curtis' desk.

“Go get lunch Curtis,” he growled against her lips as his hands swallowed her cheeks.  “It's like eleven, it’s not...but I suppose” Curtis vacillated.  

Oliver growled “Just go.”

Curtis nodded as he slowly backed away, “I’m going to go, um, coffee,” he shrugged.

Oliver’s hand slid up between Felicity's thighs as he sighed, enamoured and huskily, against her wet mouth until her hand caught his wrist.

“Oliver,” she breathed as she pulled, just a fraction, back from the heated kiss.

“Mmm?” came his hummed response as he leaned closer to her lips, taking back the space she had put between them.

Her finger grazed his puckered lips as she chuckled lightly.

“Hi,” she beamed.

“Hi,” he mumbled, kissing her finger in substitution for her lips.

“You’re back earlier than I thought.”

She slipped off the desk and pressed both her hands against his.

“I needed to see you.”

He went to kiss her again, but Felicity side stepped him with a laugh.

“Okay well we’re not doing that here, on my assistant’s desk,” she bubbled as she walked him into her office and closed the door behind them.

“You did what you needed to do?” she asked with a slightly raised brow as she noted the unease in his stance.

He shifted his weight from one leg to the other while his palms smoothed the side of his jeans.

“Oliver, what’s wrong?”

He shook a hand through his hair and blew out a troubled sigh, “I’m so sorry.”

Felicity watched him pensively, “Wow, okay, for what?”

“There was a girl and she was naked, but I left, I left I swear,” he answered through a jumble of words and sharp breaths.

“Oliver, slow down,” Felicity urged, though a few words had already made her heart race, “start from the beginning.”

Oliver took a long and troubled breath, “last night I was dreaming about you, you were kissing me baby and you wrapped your hand around my cock and that’s when I realised it wasn’t you. I woke up and it was someone else, she was naked and she...” he stumbled, “...she wasn’t you, princess I’m so sorry.”

He gripped his hands to either side of his head and blew out a frustrated sighed.

“Did you have sex?” she asked bluntly.

Oliver shook his head ferociously, “no, god no, when I woke up I made her put a top on, I gave her a lecture about what her father would think of all this and I told her to want better, and I gave her your card, told her about how smart you were.”

“Did you kiss her?”

He rubbed his temple to try and remember the moments before he woke up, “no, I don’t think so, her lips were near mine I think but I thought it was you, that I was dreaming of you.”

“So she kissed you?”

A nod, “yeah.”

“Oliver,” she laughed softly as she took his hand and sandwiched it between her own, “you don’t
have anything to apologise for.”
“I don’t?”
He studied her face for jealousy or anger but he found neither.

“No, if what you’re saying is that she went into your room while you were sleeping and touched you and kissed you and as soon as you woke up you left, honey, I can’t be mad at you for that,” she brushed a kiss against his cheek, “and well I’m not too thrilled she tried it but I can’t blame her, you’re very attractive.”

Felicity grinned as she guided his arms around her waist and pushed her body into his.
“But you, I trust,” she soothed the trouble sewn across his brow.

“You’re not mad?”
“Nope,” she popped happily, “but thank you.”
“For?”
“For telling me and for being so terrified of her,” she chortled.

She lifted her body into her toes and pecked a kiss to his lips before he caught it and held her there. His lips swarmed hers, soft and warm, encasing her bottom lip between his while his fingers crept up underneath her top and outlined the clasp of her bra.

“I love you,” she sighed into the kiss while her fingers laced at the back of his neck, “but don’t even think about it.”
His fingers dropped down her back as he looked at her puzzled.
“I can’t have sex in here Oliver, at work,” she playfully berated, “it’s unprofessional.”

His face resembled a wounded puppy.
“But,” she sighed, her eyes dancing with a smile, “I’ll see you tonight at my place and I’ll wear nothing but a smile.”

Felicity kept her word that night and by the end of it, a smile was all that either of them were wearing.

Chapter End Notes

*Chapel = the meeting room*
“You know the drill,” Dr Caitlin Snow smiled as Felicity adjusted the paper smock attempting to keep a certain level of her modesty intact – despite the fact she had her legs splayed open for an old college-day’s friend.

“Have you been sexually active since your last appointment…” Caitlin turned to look at the chart on the screen in front of her, “about eight months ago?” Felicity studied a chip in her mauve nail polish religiously. “Yes,” she answered like a puff of smoke.
Caitlin looked up from the chart and smiled coyly, “How did I not know that?” Felicity cleared her throat when it suddenly constricted with an unspent enamoured and giddy giggle that was far too unbecoming to let loose, “Are you asking as the girl I waitressed with in college or as my OB GYN?”

Her friend shrugged her slender shoulders and brushed back her tawny hair before she snapped the rubber gloves onto her hands. “Can’t it be both?” Felicity watched as Caitlin chose a speculum and doused it with four pumps of lubricant. Just watching the display made Felicity want to clamp her legs shut and cower in the corner.

“How about I simply answer yes while I have my legs spread eagle and my lady parts on display and maybe I can expand on that, as friends, when, I, well, don’t,” Felicity bartered.

“Sounds fair,” Caitlin agreed before adding another squirt of lubricant and wheeling herself a little closer, “this is going to feel pretty awful.” Felicity exhaled a heavy sigh as she leaned her head back in the chair and proceeded to count the dots on the ceiling, her lips twisting into a grimace that was doing its best at keeping the curse words she wanted to say behind the closed doors of her mouth.

“Hmm,” Caitlin mumbled as her stool’s wheels shifted on the linoleum floor. “Hmm?” Felicity repeated before she sucked in a deep breath of sterile air, “no woman wants to hear a hmm about down there.” Caitlin placed the swab into the canister and slapped a label on it. “This guy that you’re seeing, he’s kind of big right?” she asked as she checked the patient numbers between the chart and the label.

Felicity sat up and squinted at the obscure question, “I guess like 6’2 and 180 pounds.” “No,” Caitlin laughed softly, “I mean, like big,” she cupped her hands around an imaginary and swollen circle. “Oh wow,” Felicity coughed, “um, I … I mean I suppose.” The Doctor ticked a few boxes on the form as she spoke, “and the two of you are quite active?” Felicity shifted in the seat of the vinyl chair. “We have a healthy enjoyment for sex.” “You can put your legs down now,” Caitlin offered as she turned back towards Felicity, “and this healthy enjoyment, is it in a lot of different positions?” Felicity could feel her cheeks turning amber from embarrassment, “Caitlin, I really…” “Look,” her friend sighed as she laid her clasped hands on her lap, “you have some bruising around your cervix and you have a few tiny tears.” “Tears?!” Felicity gasped, her legs automatically clamping together. “They’re not as bad as they sound,” Caitlin restrained her chuckle but a smile did work its way across her lips, “they don’t look like anything to be concerned with. Sometimes we see these kind of things in women who are a little dry or, because I’m going to guess that’s not the case for you, those that have particularly active sex especially where the man is, well endowed.”

The floor could swallow her up any minute now. “Do I need to do anything?” “Well as your OB GYN I would suggest letting your lady bits have a rest for a few days and maybe opt for some nice and slow missionary every once and a while,” Caitlin snorted at the decidedly red colour of her friend’s face, “but as your friend I’d like to high five you because damn.”
“Caitlin, you like women,” Felicity reminded while the smiling Doctor stood and disposed of the blue latex gloves with the distinctively powdery scent. Her friend looked almost offended, “I can still appreciate the male form and applaud other women getting some great sex in whatever form they enjoy it.”

Felicity laughed and Caitlin followed suit seconds later.

“How are you and Iris?” Felicity asked.

“Amazing, perfect, blissfully happy,” the brunette cheered as she absently hugged her waist, “we are the couple that have a joint Facebook account and we make everyone sick with our overly sweet Instagram posts.”

Felicity enjoyed the soft sparkle in Caitlin’s light eyes, her and Iris had met their final year of college and had been together ever since. If the law allowed it, Felicity was in no doubt that the two would have been married by now and she hated the fact that they couldn’t be.

“We need to catch up, all of us, and not like this,” Caitlin winked, “maybe we could meet this stallion of yours.”

Felicity blushed warm, “maybe.”

She knew her friends wouldn’t judge him like the ladies of high society and her father had, although she was also certain they would want a full clinical history and background check to ensure his suitability to give them a ‘niece’ or ‘nephew’.

“Oh,” Caitlin piqued as she spun back around to her computer, “so standard question are you using protection?”

Felicity’s soft blush turned into fire engine red streaks across her cheeks, “mostly,” she answered quietly.

“Mostly?” Caitlin’s eyes narrowed as they stared across at Felicity, “do I really need to give you the STI lecture I give high school students?”

“Is it graphic?” Felicity teased.

“There is a slide show.”

“Well now I just have to see it.”

Caitlin sighed as she typed briefly what Felicity had said. When she next turned to face her friend, Caitlin’s eyes with serious and her brow most definitely meant business.

“But in all seriousness, protection is number one.”

Felicity nodded, appropriately reprimanded, “that’s why I’m here.”

“But the implant doesn’t stop you contracting something if he’s sleeping around.”

A fervent shake of her head, “Oliver isn’t sleeping around.”

Not her Oliver.

“His name is Oliver, aww,” she gushed before shaking her serious face back on seconds later, “but adorable name aside, are you sure you can trust this guy?”

Implicitly.”

Caitlin sighed.

“But,” Felicity added, “when he heard I was coming here he went and got a check too.”

The information lifted at least half of the ‘serious’ from Caitlin’s expression.

“Well-endowed and smart. But you know because you answered yes I’m going to need to run a few tests and give you the little pamphlets we have about safe sex.”

Felicity nodded like a scolded child.

“You’ll have to come back in a couple of weeks to get the implant fitted, providing everything is clear.”
Felicity crinkled her nose, “that long?”
“Yes, that long,” her friend once more adopted the very serious face and Felicity bobbed her head submissively, “Come back then and in the meantime fill your bag full of condoms.”
“Thanks miss,” Felicity laughed as she shuffled her skirt back down her legs.

“Is he cute?” Caitlin asked as she set a pen aside on her desk and stood up beside Felicity.
“Very,” Felicity sighed pleasantly.
“All muscley?”
“He has muscles I didn’t even know existed and he’s usually always a little sweaty and they’re always firing.”
Felicity’s lips smacked absently together as she spoke, “You know the best part?”
“Pray tell.”

Felicity smiled as she strolled towards the door with Caitlin hot on her heels.
“He rides a motorbike.”
“Jesus of course he does,” Caitlin gaped, “because you stole this man from the pages of a dirty novel.”
Felicity reached for the door as she laughed softly.
“You have to tell Betty,” Caitlin added.
“Your receptionist?”
Felicity’s eyes widened with surprise at the suggestion.

“She’s sixty-two years young and all we get around these parts are lady bits, make her day,” Caitlin pleaded as Felicity opened the door.
“I’m not telling your receptionist about my boyfriend.”
Caitlin tapped a pensive finger tapped against her glossy pink lips, “You’re right, you should definitely show her a picture.”
Felicity slipped from the exam room but turned in the corridor.
“Bye Caitlin,” she smiled as they embraced, “say hi to Iris for me.”

______________________________

It was a little after 6pm while Felicity was upstairs tapping away on her computer with her stomach demanding its protests be listened to, that she heard the creak of her front door opening and then the clink of it closing again.

“Felicity?” Oliver called out from the foyer, his eyes roving between the quiet living room and the faint sounds emanating from upstairs.
“Upstairs,” she called back.

“You used your key” she smiled when Oliver appeared in the doorway.
“Is that alright?” he asked as he swung the keychain nervously around his finger, “I just thought.”

Felicity untangled her legs and stood from her chair before she brushed a kiss against his bristled face, “Of course it is,” she chuckled while her arms slipped around his waist, “I gave it to you for a reason.”

Oliver’s smile turned into a frown as he tipped her chin upwards so their eyes met, “Your alarm wasn’t set,” he grumbled.
“I’m home,” she answered with a peppy smile.
“Alone.”
“Not anymore,”
She pulled him tighter to her body and pecked a kiss against his pouted lips.
“You promised,” the words ghosted in a soft growl against her lips, each syllable brushing against
her warm mouth.
“But you got it sorted,” she kissed him again, fracturing her sentence, “we haven’t heard,” another kiss, “from anyone in weeks,” another, “right?”
Oliver sighed, it was futile to try and keep his growly face on, but he gave it one last, stern, crack, “Still…”

“Move-in-with-me,” Felicity puffed out without pausing.
The grimace that had previously been there completely vanished from Oliver’s face and was replaced with a look of wide-eyed, open-mouthed surprise.

“You practically live here anyway,” she stepped half a step back from him and shrugged her chunky cardigan up her shoulders, “and next year Thea is going to live on campus and she can always have a room here whenever she wants it, and you know I adore Jax so of course he’s welcome…” she could feel the words spilling from her mouth like a running tap and she was in no position to stop them – even if she wanted to, but she didn’t, because everything about what she had just vomited out in words felt absolutely, 100% right.

Oliver ran a considered hand through his hair as his mouth slowly closed before opening again, this time with words attached to it, “You really want to live with me?”
Felicity curled her shoulders into her chest and smiled with folded lips.
“Yeah,” she said softly, her eyes blinking between the floor and Oliver’s wide blue saucers, “I want to reach new levels of domesticity with you.”

Oliver closed the gap almost instantaneously before he flung his arms around Felicity, pulled her into a tight embrace and kissed her with more passion and reverence than she had ever felt with his lips alone. She could melt into a kiss like that, it didn’t say a single word but it told her everything she needed to hear – he wanted that too.

When they finally broke for air, his eyes were glassy and his brow was softly timid. There was sparks of innocence and wonderment there she had never seen before. Oliver Queen had never been loved – not like this, not like she loved him.
“I love you too,” she breathed, answering the words his eyes said.

He brushed back her hair and kissed her tenderly at the temple, taking a moment to let the scent of her warm his senses – or maybe he was just checking that this moment was real, because never in his wildest dreams had he imagined he deserved this.

Never had he allowed himself to think of a life other than the one that tarnished his past, but in his arms was his future.

“What you’re doing for Thea, I …,” he stumbled for the words he wanted to say, the ones that would express just how much this meant to him.
“It’s okay,” her voice warmed his soul as her thumb touched the edges of his lips, “Oliver you don’t have to thank me again. I’m doing it for her because I believe in her and I can.”

He held her a little tighter and Felicity willingly moulded around his body. She pressed her ear against his chest, listening to the thump, thump, thump of his heart. A good heart, born from a boy who was forced to grow up too soon, but now belonging to a man who had finally found some semblance of peace.

“What are you doing?” he finally spoke after a few minutes of peaceful silence.
Felicity followed his eyes to her computer screen.
“Coding a kill command into a navigation system,” she sighed, the task had agitated her most of the afternoon and the idea of returning to it tonight made her abysmally unhappy.
“That sounds intense,” Oliver offered, he was reading the lines of code but not even a scratch of it made any sense to him.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” she huffed while she brushed the back of her hand across her brow, “it’s just if this truck gets stolen, or rather someone attempts to steal it, any deviation from the course programmed will set off a self-destruct.”

“So big boom?” Oliver asked with his hands exaggerating an explosion a few feet wide. She closed his hand to a little closer to a foot, “Hopefully just a little boom. The plating Cisco is building is meant to contain it.”

She watched his eyebrow pluck up with an idea – she adored that.

“Couldn’t you just disable the truck?”

She smiled at the way his brain was ticking through a problem like he shared it with her, “Yes,” she agreed with a soft nod, “but then the truck is still vulnerable. If the intended recipients can’t have it they say no one can.”

His brow crinkled even deeper.

“Someone can’t accidentally try and steal it at traffic lights can they?”

Felicity laughed as she tucked her fingers around the tips of his hair, “no,” she assured, “once this truck starts, it won’t be stopping.”

“So it’s like a ride or die,” he quipped.

She looked at him with a quizzical arch in her eyebrow, “What?”

“You take a ride with it, or you die with it,” he spoke as his head nodded along, “Ride or Die.”

Ride or Die

She smiled as she hovered over her keyboard, “That’s what I’m going to call it,” she decided before she christened the programme with a name.

“I have something,” he suddenly remembered as he pulled a slightly crinkled envelope from his jacket pocket.

“Ooo what’s that?” she asked as she gleefully rubbed her palms together.

“My results from the...” he looked down at his crouch “...test.”

She bit her lip, “what does it say?”

“I don’t know, I haven’t looked,” he shrugged as he held the unopened envelope out to her, “I thought you should know at the same time.”

She took it and somewhat dubiously peeled back the seal. She read it expressionless and quickly before she folded back up and handed it to Oliver who had suddenly gone a deathly white shade.

She patted the lapels of his leather jacket and finally let a smile break across her lips, “All clear. We should celebrate,” she hummed seductively, to the point she almost purred.

Oliver picked her up in one fluid motion and lumped her over his broad shoulders. She laughed brightly as he carried her the short walk down the hall, into her bedroom and up to the foot of her spacious, inviting, bed.

With little pause he dropped her onto the bed, her limbs splaying out across the billowing linen while her hair formed an almost perfect halo around her head. She sat up on her elbows and beckoned him near with a single bent finger.

He crawled up her body, watching her with almost deviant eyes as his body heat radiated through both of their clothes. Just the sound of his deep, rasping breaths was enough to make Felicity smack her lips together to muffle a moan.
His lips crashed against hers and they fell together onto the bed like randy college students in a frenzy of tongues and gnashing teeth.

“Wait, wait,” she huffed against his lips after his hand disappeared under her ribbed-cotton top. “What?” he mumbled as his mouth travelled up her cheek and down her neck, his teeth nicking the thin threads there.

His hands blindly wrestled her slate-grey yoga pants from her legs as she scratched her nails under the shoulders of his jacket. “We have to,” she sighed as Oliver sat up on his knees and shrugged the jacket from his shoulders and tore the pants from her legs.

“We have to what?” he growled before he dropped his mouth to her inner thigh and sucked in her supple flesh. She twirled her fingers idly through his hair, enjoying the way his unshaven jaw bristled her thighs while the tips of his hair tickled over almost the same spot. “W...have to....have nice, .....safe, .....slow...... vanilla sex,” she mumbled, barely coherently as sighs framed almost every word while Oliver hopped wet and warm kisses up her inner thighs.

“What?” he chuckled, his breath melting through the thin cotton fabric of her panties. “My OB/GYN says there is a little bruising,” she replied idly as she watched his hand snake under her top and massage her breast.

He stopped when the last word left her mouth. His eyes searched the tops of her legs, scouring her milky complexion for these illusive bruises. “Inside,” she laughed as she watched the animated confusion twist up Oliver’s face. “Inside you?” he asked, aware of the naivety of his surprise that that was even possible. She nodded, relishing the youthful curiosity that made him blink back the sparks in his eyes. “I…” a languid pause as his mind ticked through it, “bruised, you…” another baited paused, “… inside?”

She laughed, quite exuberantly as Oliver sat back on his heels and cocked his head to one side, in a move that resembled a puzzled puppy. “Apparently,” she snorted. “Oh god,” he gaped, “I’m so sorry.”

He clambered off the bed and walked a tight, short circle for no apparent reason. “Oliver,” she said as she tried, and failed, to stop laughing, “it’s fine.” She rolled onto her side and watched as he paced a short track up and down the length of her bed, grimacing with his own thoughts. “Does it hurt? Did I hurt you? Is it bad? How does that happen?” he paused to take a much needed breath, “does it hurt?” he repeated.

She smiled, enamoured by the worry that laced his twitching brow, “No,” she answered softly, “Not really, it’s not, vigorous sex and, once again, no.” “Now,” she patted the space beside her with one hand as she slid the finger of her other hand down the curve of her waist and over the rise of her hip, “come back here,” she purred. “It is safe?” he asked pensive, but unable to stem the thumping between his legs as he watched her finger strum the side of her panties. “It’s fine, it was a joke,” she prattled as she pouted a frown at him, “I was joking.” “But there are bruises?” “And a few tears,” she added, though why she found it necessary to do so she wasn’t sure,
especially when she saw the look of distress wash over Oliver’s face

“Jesus Fucking Christ, just from my dick?” he recoiled in horror. Felicity shrugged apathetically, “It’s an impressive dick.”

“But I, I didn’t mean to,” the words stumbled from his mouth.

“Oliver I know,” she smiled as she threw her legs over the edge of the bed and sat up, “don’t freak out about this, she wanted to high five me.”

“Your OBGYN?!” he announced to a, thankfully, empty house.

Felicity reached for his hands, grasping one in each of her own before swinging them playfully in the space between them.

“Well, as my friend,” she corrected, “I’ve known her since college. We went to different schools, but we waitressed together and even ended up living together for a while,” she explained with a smile hoisting up the corner seams of her lips, “she’s great and she’d love to meet you.”

He shook his head guiltily, “so she can know what I did?”

“Oliver,” Felicity laughed, tugging him towards her, “oh my god, stop. It’s not a big deal.”

She pulled him again and they fell back onto the bed together again, Felicity’s feet springing into the air and Oliver in a push-up stance above her.

“No, we should let you, your…” his eyes wandered to her sex as he sighed, “it should get better first.”

“Are you putting me on a sex ban?” she asked as she hitched up a suspicious brow.

Oliver pushed off the bed and folded his arms across his chest like he was holding himself back.

“Yep,” he nodded decisively, “I’m blocking the trade routes, it’s an embargo.”

Felicity pouted, smirked and then rolled over to her drawer which she opened slowly, “Oh really, okay,” she hummed as she slipped her hand into the drawer and retrieved a candy pink vibrator.

“What is that?” Oliver asked, almost sternly as he watched Felicity tease the end of it with a solitary finger.

“My new best friend with benefits,” she answered coyly as she shuffled her body around the bed until her back was against the headboard and her legs were tented in front of her.

Oliver shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

“You have a vibrator?”

She nodded dramatically, “I do.”

“How long?”

“A while.”

“Have you used it while we’ve been together?”

She laughed at the interrogating nature of his questions.

“Why, are you jealous?” she asked as she flirted with the slightly ribbed edges of the battery-powered wonder-toy.

“No,” he answered, but his pout suggested otherwise.

She nestled her shoulders into the headboard before she fluffed a pillow at her lower back and spread her legs a little wider.

Oliver’s grip around his own chest tightened and he could feel his mouth filling with imagined cotton balls, “How many has it given you?”

“At the same time or…?”

Oliver tried to hide his gape but failed miserably, making Felicity chuckle while her head lolled to one side.
“It can do more than once?” he asked through tight lips.

“It’s a dual simulation,” she explained glossing her fingers over the parts of it as she spoke, “so it does the inside and the outside.”

Oliver glared at the toy in her hand, causing her laugh to become more animated.

“Are you staring down my vibrator?” she snorted as she watched the miniscule twitches of his biceps match up with the clenching of his jaw.

“How many?”

She tapped the toy to her leg and ran her tongue slowly across her lips, “two at the same time, but it rolled into a third within a minute.”

“Okay,” Oliver bobbed his head in a nod, “let’s do this.”

“Do what?”

He stole the vibrator from her hands and banished it to the opposite end of the bed before he climbed on beside her.

“Challenge accepted.”

He snatched her lips with a kiss as his hands gripped the underside of her knees. With a quick jerk of them Felicity slipped down the bed and her head fell onto the pillow she had propped behind her back mere moments before.

A laugh burst from between her moistened lips as Oliver pushed her top up above her breasts and dropped his mouth down in the middle of them. He hopped rampant kisses across her smooth skin while she writhed underneath him and he worked his way down south.

A single finger hooked the side of her panties and pulled them across like a curtain just as Oliver’s mouth reached her mound. He sliced his tongue between her folds, smiling when it became apparent Felicity was already wet.

The tip of his tongue circled her clit as his thumb collected some of her dewy arousal.

“It’s fucking hot when you’re already wet Princess,” he smiled salaciously before he spread her wide.

She pressed her lips together in a knowing smirk as she fed her hand down his pants and swirled the pad of her thumb over the wet tip of his cock, “Ditto.”

His finger skirted her entrance before it sunk into her with a deep thrust.

Felicity winched and Oliver reflexively withdrew.

“Shit, did that hurt, did I?”

“No, no, it’s fine,” she breathed through the momentarily sharp pain, “its just a little tender from today.”

Oliver hovered above her before he leaned down and kissed her forehead with expressively tender lips.

“I don’t have to beat it today,” he ghosted the words into her temple before he feathered another few kisses down her cheeks.

“It seems far more reasonable to wait until we’re at our peak,” she agreed with a deep and calming breath.

“Like athletes,” Oliver hummed as he gently plucked her lips with his own.
“No I don’t need you to come, it’s just an implant,” Felicity laughed as she shifted the phone from one ear to the other so her free hand could search her bag for keys, “It'll be done next Wednesday morning and then back to work.”

She silently cheered as she pulled the keys from the recesses of her bag and trudged up the front stairs.

“You're going back to work?” Oliver asked, his surprise leaking down the phone line.

“Yes,” she laughed, juggling her laptop bag and a canvas bag full of a few groceries in her attempt to become domesticated, “why wouldn't I be?”

She could almost hear his brain ticking over and, if it was possible, the concern he had for her made her love him even more.

She threaded the key into the door and unlocked it, just like she had every other day for the last however many years that she had called it home.

She stepped inside as she spoke, “You’re making a bigger deal ….”

The words froze in her mouth as her eyes settled on the scene in front of her.

The side table where she displayed a few family photos was tipped onto it’s side and glass littered the floor. Shards of white pottery and a pile of withered flowers was all that was left of the arrangement she had brought home yesterday.

Spray paint marred the wall that ran upstairs and a blade had been torn through every piece of art that stepped up the same.

Glass crunched under her shoe as she foolishly stepped further into her house, her eyes walked into the living room – whatever point they were trying to make clearly came at the end of purposefully swung baseball bats. Nothing was left where she had once orderly placed it.

All Oliver heard was silence.

“Felicity?” he said into the void.

Silence

“Felicity?” his pace was quicker, his tone more panicked.

A shaky breath.

“I’m here.”

“What’s wrong?” he inquired, “you scared me.”

Felicity looked around when her hands began to shake and the gravity finally landed on her shoulders before she walked back out of her house, closing the door behind her.

“Someone,” her voice trembled, thin and fragile, “broke into my house…”

She hung up the phone and sobbed.

After committing a list of traffic violations the length of his arm, Oliver found himself arriving at Felicity's house seconds after the Police did – they seemed to respond reasonably quickly this side of town, a prejudice that today he was thankful for.

He sprinted up the path and found Felicity huddled on one of her porch steps staring vacantly out
He knelt down in front of her and took her pale and trembling hands into his own. She blinked at him twice but it felt to him like she was staring right through him.

“Hey, are you okay?” he asked in a softly calming muster.

She blinked a third time, only now registering his presence. She looked down at her hands in his, as though she was startled at how she couldn’t recall the moment he took them.

“Yeah, I’m fine.”

Her trembling hands and ghost-white complexion said otherwise, but Oliver didn’t argue.

His hand looped around the back of her head and he guided it towards his shoulder until she fell against him and cried, her entire body shaking with an avalanche of sobs.

“They destroyed everything Oliver,” she cried into his shirt, the cotton-knit weave doing little to soak up her flood of tears.

Each one she shed was like a burn on his soul, because Oliver knew what this was.

It was a message.

A message to him.

He held her tighter to his chest and pressed a foray of kisses onto her head.

“It’s okay princess,” he breathed, it would be, he would make it.

---

_I’ve said it so many times_
_I would change my ways_
_No, never mind_
_God knows I’ve tried_

A few hours and a series of police reports later found Oliver pacing the hallway of his house with the background noise of Felicity in the shower and an audience of a decidedly, and accurately, worried Thea.

She could see it in his expression; twisted, pained, dark.

Oliver was going to start trouble.

He stopped pacing and grabbed his jacket from the back of a nearby armchair.

“When she gets out, tell her I’ll be back in ten minutes.”

“Where are you going?” Thea shot back, her young face showing lines of furrowed worry.

“Out,” he huffed curtly.

“Oliver, are you going to start trouble?”

He looked back towards the bathroom and sighed heavily, weighted with more guilt than he could take.

“This is because of me,” he answered bitterly.

“You don’t know that.”

“We both know that Thea.”

Her eyes pleaded with her older brother, the only family she truly had, “She wouldn’t want you to go.”

He raked a hand across his scalp, “ten minutes.”

Thea knew there wasn’t a damn thing she could say or do to stop him.
Oliver saw their patches long before they ever registered his bike pull along beside them. He kicked down the stand and peeled the helmet from his head. With a death wish inscribed in the lines of his face Oliver walked directly up to the three men.

He took the first by surprise, slamming his helmet into the side of his head and laying him flat on the pavement before the smaller of the three could stub out his cigarette.

The second fell hard against the brick wall of the alleyway when Oliver landed a breath-stealing punch to his stomach. He clambered against the tin trash cans, spilling them in his fumbled attempt to get to his feet as the third, a wiry initiate with a baby face and a sneer he undoubtedly practiced in a mirror every morning, threw a punch that never had a hope of connecting.

Oliver grabbed the boy's fist and twisted his wrist until he cried out in pain. A stiff kick to the second guy who had finally gotten his feet sent him straight back down.

“Do you know who I am?” Oliver growled as he threw the younger one up against the wall. He shook his head frantically.

“Do you know who I am?!” Oliver yelled a second time, shaking the kid barely a scratch older than Roy by the collar of his jacket.

The young eyes squinted, like he wanted to answer Oliver but he genuinely didn’t know. “Oliver Queen,” the one on the ground coughed, the air only just returning to his lungs.

“Right,” Oliver gritted his teeth, “So if anyone in your crew has a fucking problem with me, they take it up with me.”

He raised his fist and the boy flinched before Oliver pushed him and released the grip he’d taken on his collar.

He’d made his point.

Oliver landed the punch to the side of Malcolm’s face before he had time to expect it and the entire bar burst out into a chorus of feet skidding and chairs scraping as the occupants stood.

Malcolm spat a mouthful of blood onto the floor and raised his hands to silence the muffled tension.

“What the fuck was that for?” he growled at Oliver before his tongue counted out his teeth in his blood drenched mouth.

“I told you to stay away from her.”

Malcolm laughed menacingly, ribbons of red framing his teeth. “And I did.”

“So it wasn’t on your orders someone trashed her house?”

Oliver’s tone was bitter and mocking.

“Why would I do that?” another glob of blood spat onto the floor, “I don’t enjoy getting punched.” Oliver clenched and released his fist half a dozen times as he stared down Malcolm. He couldn’t tell if he was lying or not and the prospect of that unnerved Oliver.

“Then who the fuck was it?”

“I don’t know,” Malcolm shrugged before he swilled back his beer, “but I’ll look into it.”

“What’s the price?”

It probably didn’t matter, Oliver was desperate enough to know, he would probably pay whatever was due.

“None,” Malcolm smirked, “For old time’s I’ll tell you what I find out free of charge.”

It was a risk to believe him. Oliver wasn’t that naive, but he was out of options.
One week had passed and Oliver wasn’t any closer to finding out who was trying to send him a message and what specifically it was. Felicity, despite his pleas to the contrary was making plans to return home once the authorities cleared it. With the façade that it didn’t phase her, she had gone about making a series of executive decisions about refurbishing the house, idly asking Oliver whether he preferred a pearlescent or a matt finish on the walls.

Despite him offering that she stay with him, she had leased an apartment that was close to work and not too far from her terraced house. Oliver had conceded when he’d found out she was a) on the fifteenth floor, b) it was a manned and secured apartment complex; and c) the first time he visited they wouldn’t let him anywhere near the elevators until Felicity came down and physically collected him.

He realised quickly enough that she was safer there than his house with the peeling paint on the street that one day should probably be condemned.

He stared down at the engine mount in front of him and blew out an anxious sigh.
“She’ll be fine,” Digg said instinctively as he patted Oliver’s shoulder and offered him the wrench he had needed, but hadn’t moved to get.

“I’m always going to be the person I was five, six years ago aren’t I?” Oliver lamented as his head swung like a small pendulum, “I’m going to keep paying to shit and now she is too.”

John could offer his friend nothing more than an understanding nod and a few short words, “don’t let it pull you back in man.”

Oliver grimaced, John knew enough to know it probably already had.

It was at the same moment that Oliver opened his mouth to speak that Malcolm walked with a heavy foot into the garage and announced his presence with a gruff clearing of his throat. Oliver closed his lips tight and Digg’s once friendly expression instantly darkened.

Malcolm looked over a John and smiled thinly, “can Oliver and I have a minute? This doesn’t concern you.”

John’s fist clenched at his side as his blood boiled through his veins. If it didn’t carry a slew of consequences, he would have knocked Malcolm clean out just for the satisfaction of doing it.

Oliver laid a calming hand onto John’s shoulder and nodded to both him and Roy, who was skulking in the back of the shop, to leave the garage.

Only once the two of them had absconded into the adjoining breakroom did Oliver finally speak up, “You have some information for me?” he asked, bitterly aware he was making deals with the devil as he wiped his hands on an oil rag.

“Seems your girl has garnered herself some interest,” Malcolm started as he leaned against the side of the vintage Mustang and kicked the heel of his heavy boot into the tire, “word on the street is that she’s moving weapons.”

Oliver laughed and shook his head humourlessly, “Yeah she’s a real gun runner.”

Malcolm lit a cigarette, pinched it between his lips, sucked and inhaled in a long draw before blowing a puff of smoke towards the ceiling.

“Weapons are more than just guns these days Oliver,” he rasped as he flicked ash onto the ground, despite the flammable nature of almost everything in the garage.
Oliver stubbed out the embers with the toe of his shoe and stared, expressionless at Malcolm. He absolutely knew what the gang’s patriarch was referring to, but nothing on Oliver’s face was going to alert Malcolm to that.

“Something is moving through Starling sometime around Christmas and it ain’t a sleigh full of presents,” a menacing chuckle rattled Malcolm’s thin lips before he took another drag on his cigarette.

Oliver fidgeted with the rag in his hands, running his thumb along the hem of it as his face remained stern, “It has nothing to do with Felicity.”

Malcolm grazed the end of his nose with his thumb before blowing out another cloud of smoke, “But you and I both know it does.”

Oliver threw the rag over the radiator and strapped his arm across his chest, his sinewy muscles tightening the weave of his black cotton tee, “Who trashed her place?”

“Amateurs,” Malcolm scoffed and Oliver saw the lie almost instantly, “but I put some other information out that’ll put them on a wild goose chase,” his weight shifted and he kicked his other leg against the mags, “they won’t bother her again.”

There wasn’t much of Oliver stupid enough to believe what Malcolm had told him, but in an effort to continue playing the part of someone that trusted the man that was once his mentor, Oliver offered a placating, “Thank you.”

Malcolm took another long drag on the menthol dipped cigarette before he chucked the half spent stick to the ground and snubbed it out with the heel of his boot.

“While your gratitude is welcome, I’m afraid I’m going to need a little more than that.”

Oliver’s eyes darkened and his jaw tensed, “What?”

Malcolm shrugged as though what he was about to ask was a trifle in the scheme of things. “Just a little information, nothing much. Just tell me the route the truck is taking and the time it’ll be there.”

Oliver blew back a disgruntled exhale, Malcolm couldn’t find what he was looking for at Felicity’s house so he was instigating his plan B. “I don’t know anything about her job, or what’s she working with,” Oliver replied bluntly, instinctively widening his stance.

He was unmistakably bigger than Malcolm Merlyn and perhaps now was the time to remind him of that.

“A little pillow talk and you could.”

Oliver bit back his agitation, anything from here on out Malcolm would use, manipulate, prey on and Oliver couldn’t give him the satisfaction of that.

This had to stop.
Not because Oliver was tired of taking orders from a man who had already demanded so much, even though he absolutely was. But the personal cost to Oliver was never something he’d considered. He had always done, and would probably always continue to do, whatever he needed to do to keep the people he loved safe, irrespective of what harm that did to him.

That was his cross to bear.
The weight of it sat on his shoulders alone.

But what Malcolm was now asking shared the burden.
What he was asking for could destroy everything Felicity had fought tooth and nail to achieve.
Every snide reporter’s comment about her clothes, every older male’s exception taken to her sitting
amongst them, every fight she had taken up to build something that could be bigger than even she gave it credit for.

And that just wasn’t going to happen.
“No,” Oliver replied, his voice collected and stern, his face rigid and his stance like a solid brick wall.
“I don’t think you understand my terms here Oliver, we can keep this clean, simple. You just feed me that information and I do the rest. No one ever knows.”

Malcolm was fidgeting, a point of reference which made Oliver almost smile.

The snake couldn’t touch Felicity and he knew it. He hadn’t found anything by ransacking her house. He didn’t have a hope in hell of getting into the Kuttler Consolidated Tower. She was living, for at least the next six months, in the Fort Knox of apartment buildings. Approaching her directly would undoubtedly make Argus go to ground.

Malcolm Merlyn had no fucking options.
Except one.
Oliver.

His smile vanished and his tensed jaw and tight lips returned.
He couldn’t be part of the equation anymore.

“No,” Oliver repeated, his voice boomed like the deep note of a trombone.
“There are other ways Oliver,” Malcolm bluffed, “I’m being generous…I can…”

His words died down the moment both men saw Felicity step into the shop holding something that resembled a picnic basket which looked like it belonged in an English period movie.

Felicity stopped in her tracks when she saw the heated expressions threaded across both men’s faces and absently smoothed a hand down the simply yellow sundress she was wearing as the afternoon sun outlined her frame angelically.

Thea, who had been beside her minutes ago had now disappeared, likely in search of Roy around the side of the building.

Felicity took a single step closer, her eyes looking from one man to the other – whatever discussion they had been embroiled in, neither looked happy about it.

Oliver knocked past Malcolm and up to Felicity and stood, with his arms still crossed, a few feet from her.
_Close enough to be heard, far enough away to be understood._
He didn’t have any other options.
This wasn’t about trust.
This wasn’t about honesty.
This wasn’t about choice.

This was about doing what needed to be done.

“What are you doing here?” Oliver asked pensively, keeping his usual warmth hidden behind a cool exterior.
Felicity noted it almost immediately and the slight crinkle between her eyebrows told Oliver so.
“Just a surprise visit,” she smiled softly, “I finished the code and I have my OBGYN appointment tomorrow so I just thought…” she looked down at the sappily-sweet picnic basket her and Thea
had filled with everything they knew Oliver liked after leaving Curtis in charge, “…I had hoped that you would be a little more happy and surprised about it.”

He had to.
This was never going to stop if he didn’t
He could give himself over to protect her, but not at the cost Malcolm now demanded.

“I’m a little busy,” he replied, a slight gruff in his voice as he glanced around the garage, “I don’t need you just showing up.”

He saw the instant his words hit her ears – the crinkle turned pinched and her shoulders closed in around her.
“Oliver…I…” she blinked at him, her eyes pools of agitated water, stirred up in confusion.
“Look babe, this thing we had was fun,” Oliver shrugged, his tone a little more pleasant but vastly different than the caring one he had always adopted around her, “but you’re getting a little clingy and it’s too much for me.”

She stepped closer when others would have retreated, “Oliver, what’s going on?” she asked, pointedly aware that this Oliver was not the same one who had last night made her dinner and strung his lips along hers for almost an hour.

Oliver carelessly rolled his eyes, diving into a character that was what he needed to be, “for a smart chick you aren’t getting it too fast.”
He laughed on the outside, but inside he burned. He had to hurt her so that she never came back, no matter how hard he grovelled or pleaded because he inevitably would.

He needed to make himself nothing more than a bad memory that Felicity would never want to recall.

“I don’t…” he could see the hurt glassing over her eyes, “why are you saying all this?”
He shrugged.
You can’t love me anymore, or ever again.
“Times up I guess.”
His words were ones borrowed from a heartless man, because that’s what he needed to be.

“No, Oliver,” she grabbed his arm and he flinched, “whatever you think you’re doing this for, don’t, you don’t need to.”
Her eyes pleaded with him, the corners wet with impending tears.

He swallowed back his own knowing he had an audience that needed to believe all of this meant nothing to him. That she meant nothing to him.
“I’ve just had enough, I got what I wanted from you,” he gritted, swatting her arm away from his. Felicity looked over his shoulder towards Malcolm – she knew what he was doing, but not why.
“Oliver don’t,” she quivered under her breath, “whatever he has on you, whatever he’s threatening you with. I’m not afraid of him, he can’t hurt us and he knows. Oliver…”

He looked away, unable to watch the first tear slide down her cheek.
“Oliver, look at me,” she begged, her nails clutching at his arm.
He felt them like sharp knives and he sucked in the pain – he deserved it for what he’d already done and what he was about to do.
He had to hurt her irrevocably.

“Oliver please don’t,” she pleaded, another tear joining the first, “you love me and I love you,
He never noticed the office door opening behind him nor did he notice Thea being dragged in by their voices or Roy alongside her.

“I just told you what you wanted to hear,” Oliver spoke, a plagiarised aloofness in his tone, “so I could tap that pretty little ass of yours,” he grinned salaciously, all an act, “but I got my fill, I’m bored.”

Oliver watched her recoil at the picture he painted of yet another man who had used her.

A few more nails in the coffin and she would hate him, like she needed to.

He brushed a clammy hand down her arm, “Maybe I’ll call you up some time when I get an itch.”

He shrugged carelessly.

She had to hate him.

“What can I say?” he answered briskly, “you fell for it.”

Felicity sunk back from him, her watery eyes closing to free the tears she could no longer hold onto, “For months I’ve listened to people that didn’t know you tell me what kind of person you might be,” she started, her voice almost a whisper, “that you were rough, a criminal, a gang banger, a thug, but every single time I could look them in the eye and tell them they were wrong,” her words tore at her chest as she looked up to meet the storm in his eyes, “Look me in the eyes now and tell me they were right.”

He wasn’t coming back from this.

He shrugged carelessly.

She had to hate him.

“What can I say?” he answered briskly, “you fell for it.”

“I’ve always known you were dented, rough around the edges, damaged even,” she sighed as she
took another few steps away from him, “but I never considered that you could be cruel.”

He saw her heart break.
She hated him.
It was done.
He had removed himself from the equation.

Felicity turned around and walking she was reminded how the shattered glass had cracked under her feet – only now it wasn’t picture frames or vases that had been broken, it was something much more valuable, it was her heart.

Oliver watched her leave, keeping his feet tortuously anchored to the oil-stained concrete underneath.
At least she was safe.

He turned back towards Malcolm and the rest of the shop only to be greeted by his sister’s young face twisted up in pain, confusion and hatred – every feeling Felicity deserved to feel but had tried her best to conceal from him.

Finally put it altogether
That nothing really lasts forever
I had to make a choice that was not mine
I had to say goodbye for the last time.

Thea wouldn’t understand.

“What did you do?” Thea shouted as she pulled her arm free from Roy’s grasp and ran towards Oliver.
He stood, outwardly a wall while inwardly he crumbled.

She pushed him as hard as her young arms could, the impact didn’t hurt Oliver, it barely even jarred his shoulders, but he felt an indescribable pain all the same.
“What the fuck did you just do?”
Her voice was loud but cracked.

“That’s done.”
Oliver gritted his teeth, it was all he could do to keep himself from reneging on everything he had just said. He couldn’t do that, Malcolm was still watching for the chinks in his resolve. He couldn’t give him any, not even ones that embraced the only family he had left.

She slapped him with a force that jerked his head and felt like a burn across his cheek – at least it made him feel tangible pain.
He deserved that.

“She is the only person who has ever given a fuck about us Oliver,” Thea cried, her svelte body looking so frail – it wasn’t just him who had relished having Felicity in his world, she had too and he knew it, “Felicity was the only person who never wanted a pound of flesh in return. She never wanted a fucking thing from us and I just stood here and watched you break her fucking heart like it didn’t mean shit to you.”
He understood her anger.
He deserved it, and so much more.
But it was the only option he was left with.
One day maybe she would understand – maybe they both would.

Thea stepped back from him, her damp cheeks now a canvas of faded, wet black and an expression of utter loss.

“You are going to die alone here surrounded by your fucking bikes and tools and no one will ever give a shit because you just left the only person who could have,” she scathed, although the quiver in her voice and the tremble in her lips said she didn’t really mean it.

Or maybe that was just Oliver’s wishful thinking.

“You will die alone,” she repeated in an ominous whisper as fresh tears broke through, “I won’t die with you.”
“He couldn’t lose her too.
“Fuck you,” she breathed as coldly as he had done to Felicity.

She pushed past him and ran from the garage, Roy in close pursuit. It took Oliver everything he had not to follow her, but he couldn’t.

“I guess I won’t be invited to that pillow talk after all,” Oliver remarked as Malcolm walked towards him, a smirk threaded across his lips.
“Bravo Oliver,” he applauded with a slow clap, “that’s was a masterpiece,” he lay a hand on Oliver’s shoulder and leaned into his ear, “you managed to lose the only two people who would cry at your funeral.”

Oliver listened to the heavy scuffed footsteps and the bitter laugh of the man that had cost him everything he cared about.

But it was done.

I always keep you inside
You healed by heart and my life
And you know I tried…

Chapter End Notes

If you wish to comment in gifs alone, you can do so using the following code without the *:

<*img src="GO TO GIPHY.COM AND GET A URL FOR A GIFT">*

You're Welcome (?)
John looked across the garage at Oliver and in the years Oliver had known him, the look on John’s face was not one he’d ever seen before. He imagined it to be similar to the one his father would have worn if he’d just witnessed what John had.

Or, perhaps, it was an outward expression of how Oliver felt in himself.
Utter disbelief.

John opened his mouth to speak but Oliver couldn’t hear whatever he was going to say. “Not now,” Oliver gritted as he picked up and threw down a nearby wrench that had done nothing, but it aggravated him all the same.

It clanked harshly, metal against metal, onto the nearby trolley, provoking Oliver more. He kicked out at it, centering all his pent up rage at the inanimate object. His heavy boot caught the leg of it and it went flying, spilling at least a dozen tools across the oil-stained concrete.

He hated it.
With years of bridled anger hurtling to the fore Oliver bent down, collected the same wrench that had started this and threw it across the shop with such force that it shattered the metre long pane of glass that sat between the garage and his office.

The sound of glass shattering echoed off the tired walls before Oliver stormed over to the roller doors and wretched his riding jacket from a hook nearby.
He had to get out of there before he trashed years of work in a fit of his own resentment and rage.

He didn’t know where he was driving and he didn’t consciously make the choice, but before he realised it, Oliver was at the gate of the cemetery where his parents were buried.

With his bike’s engine idling at the curb and his foot scuffing at the dirty tar seal of the road Oliver debated whether he should go and return with flowers as was his custom, but he was afraid that if he moved from that spot he would just keep driving until Starling was well behind him.

But he didn’t get to leave.
He didn’t get to run because whether she hated him or not he wasn’t leaving without Thea.
And, whether she knew it or not, Oliver wasn’t leaving until he was sure whatever Felicity was moving across town was done and she was safe.

He kicked down the stand and combed a hand through his wind-tangled locks, Moira would have given him an earful if she had found him driving helmetless, not that a helmet saved her in the end.

He took a different path today, opting to keep his distance from their graves. He slumped down onto a bench that still allowed him a view of where they were, but his guilt kept him from getting any closer.

He dragged his fingers through his hair once again as the wind pricked his damp cheeks and the rustle of the tree above him seemed to torment him with his own words.
I wanted you. I took you. I’m done with you.

He raked his nails into his scalp and winced at the pain. But he needed it – he deserved it.

He screwed his eyes closed and all he could see was Felicity’s face and all he could hear were her words, pleading with him not to do this, begging him to find another way.
You love me remember.

He nodded to the voices in his head.
He did love her.
He loves her still.

He lifted his head and the wind slapped him just like Thea had done. The cold shiver down his back, despite his layers of clothes, made him wish that Felicity had slapped him too. He wanted her pain. He wanted her anger and her hatred because that was the only way he was going to stay away.

Whatever she was feeling at that moment he would take any amount of pain to take some of the hurt away from her because Oliver had lit a match and watched them burn.

His eyes travelled in a different direction over his left shoulder. He couldn’t read the inscriptions on the headstones where his eyes fell, but he didn’t need to. Oliver knew who was buried where his eyes hung, he knew the name carved in the red marble headstone.

Thomas Merlyn
Oliver gritted his teeth.
The first name was synonymous with a brother, a kindred spirit, a friend.
The second was everything he hated.
Oliver had sworn, as he held Tommy’s hand and watched the light leave his eyes, that he would be better – for the both of them – that he would take his loss and not aim to get his own name inscribed on a red marble headstone long before his time. For the most part Oliver had kept that promise. He’d quietly worked the years away, still indebted to a man who would no sooner break his neck than turn him loose, watching their sister grow and desperately trying to keep her protected as best he could.

He hadn’t taken a life since Tommy lost his, but as he watched Felicity break, Thea cry and Malcolm sneer Oliver wanted nothing more than to wrap his hands around that sinewy neck and squeeze.

He wanted to kill him.
To watch the life drain from his eyes.
To claim his death as retribution for everything.

For never truly letting his father go from the life that eventually took his.
For sleeping with his mother when she was all his father ever truly had.
For taking Thea from him when he was no sort of father.
For forcing him to take up his father’s mantle and patch.
For relishing the control he had over him.
For letting Tommy die.
For making him hurt Felicity irreparably.
For letting Thea believe he was everything he hated.
For taking the only real chance at love Oliver had.

That promise to Tommy had been almost impossible to keep today and he couldn’t be sure he’d keep it tomorrow.

It was a few hours later when Oliver pulled into his driveway and sat for a few minutes before he rolled his bike into the single garage and slammed down the tin door.

Evening had begun to fall and the last feathers of the brilliant sunset were slowly fading from the sky.

He looked up towards the house and blew out a despondent sigh.
He didn’t know what he was going to say to Thea even though he’d sat on that cemetery bench and thought about it for hours. But he knew he had to take whatever she threw at him. He’d burned not only his own bridge to Felicity but some of the embers had undoubtedly scolded Thea’s relationship with Felicity too, and he hated that for her.

She had been right about Felicity being the only person that didn’t need or want something from them, but had given them so much.

He’d toyed with telling Thea the truth, all of it, but it wasn’t fair to her. Not only would it be dangerous for her to know what Malcolm was capable of, it would also be heartless to put such a burden on her young shoulders – they were blood after all. For now, her not knowing everything kept her safe.

She should just hate one person.
And that person should be him.
But all his thoughts and decisions meant nothing when he walked up to the door and saw the edge of a taped note blowing in the wind.

I’ve gone to stay with Roy.
Don’t come.
I don’t want to see you.
I don’t even know you.

~ Thea

He tore the note from the door and it crumpled in the weight of his hand as he dropped his head to his hands and cried.

A light rapt on the front door sounded like a herd of elephants crashing through her apartment as Felicity sat in the dimly lit space in almost trance-like silence. She tracked her eyes to the back of the door and stared through it in the hope that she could see who it was without moving.

Wrapping the knit cardigan around her, Felicity walked on the balls of her feet across the wooden floor and pressed her body to the vanished door. She peered through the peephole and breathed out a silent sigh.

A second knock pulled Felicity’s lip from the corner of her mouth as she considered her options, but honestly, she only saw one.

She unchained the door and opened it slowly.
“I’m sorry Thea, I don’t think I can do this right now,” she apologised as she sunk her body into the edge of the door, as though it held her up.
“Please Felicity,” Thea lamented and Felicity noticed her eyes looked as red as her own did, “I’m not here as Oliver’s sister,” she paused to expel a heavy breath, “I’m here as your friend, who thought you might want some company and…” she pulled a bottle of Vodka from her studded bag.
“You’re underage,” Felicity felt a light chuckle escape her lips, something which had become foreign over the last few hours, “how did you even get that?”
Thea smiled secretively as she shrugged one shoulder.

“Come in,” Felicity relented.
Thea walked light-footed despite the heavy shoes she was never without, “This is a nice apartment.”
Felicity looked around the dimly lit room with puffy eyes. The blinds were open, showing off the downtown lights and the TV was playing a show on mute she couldn’t remember turning on.

“Yeah, it’s okay, it has a nice view,” she shrugged listlessly.
She wandered towards the nightscape, her eyes drawn to flashing billboards in the distance, for no other reason than they gave her eyes somewhere to focus, as she continued to hug herself tightly.

“I understand if you hate him, I hate him too.”
Felicity turned slowly until she could see the pain in Thea’s eyes.
“I don’t hate Oliver,” Felicity blew out a soft breath, “I hate what he said, but…” her voice trailed off, “…I don’t hate him.”

“You should, what he did was fucked up,” Thea grumbled as she sat with a huff onto the suede couch.
Felicity collected two tumblers from the shelf behind a small polished chrome and tempered glass
bar and walked them over to the coffee table. She set them down and cracked the lid off the vodka.

After a moment's consideration she poured two drinks and handed one to Thea.
“‘It was,’” Felicity remarked as she took the second tumbler and tapped a finger to the carved base, “‘but you know just as well as I do that what Oliver said, the words he used, they weren’t his.’” She stared at the clear liquid for a moment before she sucked it back.

It bit, the alcohol slapping the back of her throat as it glided down. But for the first time in hours she was glad to feel something other than confusion and numbness.

Thea drunk back her glass and sucked air through her clenched teeth as it tracked down her throat. “‘But he said them.’” Felicity nodded and Thea poured another two drinks.

“I won’t pretend to understand why he said them Thea,” Felicity sighed, it had been a thought she'd run over many times that day, “‘Oliver has more demons than I think I ever really knew and maybe tomorrow I will hate him,” she answered honestly, “‘but right now all I feel is pity.’” The tears behind her eyes stung as she held them back. They weren't for her, they were for Oliver and she wasn't prepared to cry them just yet.

“‘Pity?’”
They both knocked back their drinks.
Felicity sat down, crossed her legs and hugged a pillow to her chest. It was the same pillow that had soaked up her tears for hours earlier.

“‘Pity, that saying those things and becoming the type of person we both know he hates, was the only way he saw out of it,” Felicity explained with quiet sighs framing her words. “‘It?’”
Felicity shifted in the couch, listless and morose, “‘I don't know.’”

Another drink was poured.
Thea sunk deeper into the couch and shook her head, frustrated, “‘Neither do I.’” Felicity stared into the clear puddle of alcohol while her fingers laced around the glass, as though she was hoping some sort of answer or explanation would appear in it like a crystal ball, but none came.

Thea placed her glass on the table and nipped her lips together for a moment before she turned towards Felicity, “‘So if you know he didn’t mean it, are you going to fight him on it?’”
Felicity shook her head slowly, each sweep of it feeling more painful than the last, “‘No.’”
_That wasn't a fight she could take up._

“But if you know he...” Thea lamented, breathless and confused as she sucked back her own tears.
Felicity put her hand on Thea’s shoulder, “‘He still said them Thea, whether he couldn’t see another way or wasn’t given another way, he still said them and I can’t fight that. I won’t fight that.’”
_She wouldn't win._

Felicity swallowed the drink that now simply warmed her throat as Thea brushed back pained tears.
“‘But that doesn’t change anything between us Thea,” Felicity assured softly.
Thea looked up, surprised, “‘It doesn’t?’”
Felicity offered the young girl a genuine smile, “‘No, we’re friends. I won’t leave you.’”
The two embraced on the couch, Thea arms wrapping so tightly around Felicity that it pushed the air from her lungs. But Felicity was glad for it, it was probably the most perfect hug she had ever had. It expected nothing and it wasn't afraid or shy.

There was something familiar about it, *Oliver hugged the same way.*

[Next Morning]

Felicity woke up with fog in her eyes and white noise between her ears. The sun streaming in through her curtains made her recoil under her comforter like a vampire, *the kind that turned to dust in the sunlight, not the type that sparkled.*

She was hungover.
Felicity groaned loudly into the blanket cave she had made, she hadn't been this hungover since College.

She took a hefty breath in and, even hidden beneath the billowing blanket, she swore she could smell bacon, and it smelled *fucking* good.

Her eyes widened suddenly when she realised she certainly wasn't cooking bacon. Her eyes traversed her body and she sighed audibly when she realised she was still fully dressed in the clothes she had been wearing yesterday.

But, *just to check,* she looked over to the other side of her bed – it was empty. Another audible sigh passed over her lips.

*But that still didn't explain the smell of bacon.*
She slipped out from underneath the covers and hissed at the bright sunlight that was still there tormenting her.

The smell of bacon became more apparent as she stood up and raked her fingers through her hair, which she clearly had not brushed before she went to bed. It felt like something akin to a bird's nest up there.

She smacked her lips together before she yawned, the type that took over your entire body and made it convulse involuntarily.

*She could taste the bacon.*

She walked towards her bedroom door intent on investigating the strange, but wonderful, smell that permeated her entire apartment.

The living room was covered in takeout containers and she counted three bottles of wine and one bottle of vodka on the coffee table – *all empty.*

She burped and the taste of cabbage rolls filled her mouth.
*And Pizza* she decided as she licked her tongue across her furry teeth.
*God, she was a mess.*
The further into the lounge she walked the stronger the smell of bacon became and she aptly followed her nose towards its origins.

She rounded the kitchen and found Curtis wearing a *Kiss the Cook* apron she was pretty sure wasn't hers – *unless she’d also done some online shopping last night and they had drones delivering it?*

She looked down at what he was standing in front of and sighed – a fry pan full of the illusive and delicious origins of the smell – *bacon.*

“Curtis?”
“Good morning sunshine,” he answered, far too peppy for this time of the morning she decided – whatever time that may be, but it had to be early.
“What the fuck are you doing here?” she grumbled as she sought out another delicious smell - *Coffee*
“Thea rung…” he started.
“OHMYGOD THEA?!” Felicity reacted with wide eyes as her head darted around the apartment, “Where is she?”
Curtis smiled, “She’s fine, she rung late last night and said you’d cut her off and drunk your body weight in wine.”
Felicity groaned and covered her eyes with her hands.

“She suggested that maybe you shouldn’t be left alone but she wasn’t sure if you’d be okay with seeing her face in the morning. So I came around and slept on your couch and now I’m making bacon,” Curtis finished, answering like there was nothing strange about that scenario at all.

“What time is it?” Felicity groaned, tapping her index finger to her temple.
“A little before 11am.”
“Shit, work!”
“You’re not going to work, that’s already taken care of.”

She found her phone on the table and looked at it with pinched brows, there were three missed calls, all from Caitlin’s medical centre.
“Shit, my appointment,” she groaned.
Curtis grimaced, “We’re friends and all, but I didn’t think it was appropriate for me to call your OBGYN.”
Felicity smiled thankfully.

“And don’t worry, Thea confiscated your phone so you didn’t send any drunk texts.”
She hadn’t even thought about that.
*Oh god?*
She scrolled quickly through her messages.
Curtis was right, she hadn't sent any, *but...*

Oliver had.

*I’m a shithead waste of space that was never good enough for you*
*Don’t ever think what I said was right*
*This is me Felicity*
*Not you*
*Please hate me.*
*You deserve better.*
“I need to make a call,” Felicity vacillated as she stepped away from the table.
Curtis looked across at her anxiously as she patted her phone between her palms.
“To Caitlyn,” she assured, “about my appointment.”

Curtis sighed his relief before Felicity walked to a quiet corner of the apartment and dialled
Caitlin's number. She picked up after the second ring.
“Hey hon, you missed your appointment and didn’t answer your phone and I know you're never
more than two feet from that thing,” Caitlin prattled, the worry evident in her tone.
“I’m sorry, rough night last night,” Felicity atoned.
“What did I tell you about rough?”
Felicity would have laughed if she didn't think it would have made her cry.

“Not that,” she cringed, thankful her friend couldn't see her expression, “anyway, I’m sorry for this
morning.”
“I’ve had a cancellation this afternoon so I can fit the implant in at 2pm,” Caitlin cheered,
oblivious.
Felicity dug a finger into her temple.
“I’ve actually changed my mind.”
She could hear the surprise down the phone, “You’re opting for something else?”
“MmmHmm.”
Abstinence.
“Because we also do the injection here or you can get an IUD fitted,” Caitlin continued.
“I’ll, um, I’ll get back to you, but for now, I’m fine.”
“Okay,” Caitlin answered wearily, finally picking up that something wasn't quite right with her
friend, “my next appointment is here, but maybe we could talk tonight?”
Felicity wasn't sure whether to be grateful for the concern or anxious over it, “Sure, yeah.”
She chose grateful.

“Bye Flex.”
Felicity smiled, that was a name she hadn’t been called in years. Only then it reminded her of
Oliver’s name, Catch and her smile dropped away.
“Bye Cait.”

The next call she made was to Thea.
“How is the head?” Thea answered, a definite smile in her words.
“I’m sure it’ll be fine,” Felicity groaned, “I hope I wasn’t a terrible influence.”
“I’ve seen much worse so don’t worry about it.”
Felicity didn't doubt that.
“Are you at home?”
Thea sighed, the smile instantly dropping from her tone, “I’m at Roy’s, I’m staying here now.”
“Oh,” was all Felicity could offer.

“I know that tone,” Thea acknowledged, “and I get what you were saying last night about not
hating Oliver because he’s family, but right now I’m about as bitter as you should be and I hate
him.”
Felicity listened as the young girl sighed, scared at the depth of her own words.
“I hate him for being the type of guy he’s forever telling me to avoid. I hate him for being a
coward. I hate him right now and I wish I could be as loving, kind and gracious as you are Felicity,
but I’m not. So it’s best I stay here for now.”
Felicity could hear the tears being brushed aside.
“I understand,” she replied softly.
She didn’t want to ask, to burden Thea, but the messages Oliver sent were coming from a place of pain. Oliver had his demons and Felicity didn’t want him to be alone with them.

“Do you think maybe Roy could just check on him, make sure he’s okay?”

Felicity expected some resistance given what Thea had just said, but instead she answered simply, “I have to go pick up a few more things so I’ll make sure Jax is okay.”

Felicity smiled, good enough.

“Thank you,” she breathed.

“No, thank you.”

Felicity hung up and sighed just as Curtis called out, “Breakfast is ready.”

And that was that.

---

[Wednesday, 31 October 2012]

“I miss having a house,” Felicity huffed as she kicked her woolly socks up onto the edge of the coffee table and nestled the almost untouched tray of candy into her lap, “only two came to the door the whole night and they barely put in any effort.”

She unwrapped a Jolly Rancher and slipped it between her nude lips, “I would have had at least fifteen kids come to the house,” she grumbled as she sucked the hard candy around her mouth. “Well at least we can eat it,” Curtis called out from the kitchen as Felicity unwrapped another candy despite having the other one still in her mouth. “Right because that’s what I need, more candy,” she mumbled to herself as she bit down on the sweet – instantly regretting it when the sound of her teeth grinding through the sugar crystals made her cringe.

Curtis, dressed as Count Dracula, bounded back into the living room with another corked bottle of wine and a tray of cheeses that Felicity was definitely going to ignore while she probably ate at least half the bowl of candy she was holding onto like Rose and the door.

He sat the new bottle next to the empty one and then sat on the plush couch to pour the delicately pink wine into two glasses.

“Why are you here keeping me company anyway, didn’t we decided that I am quite equipped to look after myself?” Felicity quipped as she put the second candy into her mouth and smiled.

“I would believe you if you hadn’t been spending every hour of every day for the last month working and pulling insane hours,” Curtis remarked as he handed Felicity her filled glass.

She shrugged as she took the third glass from him, she wasn’t drunk but the slight buzz was honestly quite a welcomed one.

“We only have two months before Operation Rudolph is a go, everything has to be right,” she declared after she took a long sip of the fruity blend. That was the name she had given the job in an effort to distance herself from the knowledge that they were in fact in charge of the safe transport of military grade weapons through the City.

Curtis took a drink, fangs and all, “And it is, you’ve made sure of that.”

“There still may be other loopholes I haven’t closed,” she hummed as her eyes began to blink
through every possible avenue, “what if someone got in the truck cab?”
Curtis laughed, “it will be going somewhere between thirty and forty miles an hour, seventy once it hits the highway, no one is getting on it.”
Her lips folded through other possibilities, “traffic lights?”
“It only has two sets to go through and we’ve already sorted that, it’s not stopping there.”
“Slow traffic on the highway?”
“It has a police escort, people will move.”
She sighed frustrated that he had an answer for everything.
“But someone could take out the police escort and get in,” she continued as she ran the candy along the inside of her teeth, clanking it along the way.
“While it’s moving?”
She shook her head, Curtis was right, of course he was.

“It’s about time you put your feet up and relaxed,” he looked down at her feet already up on the coffee table and nodded approvingly, “besides Paul is away on business this week and I have nothing else to do so…” he raised his glass and clinked it against hers, “cheers.”
“What are we cheers-ing too?” she asked before she took a much bigger gulp than she expected and coughed as a result.
“Fresh starts?” he started with a one shoulder shrug, “safe modes of transportation that have two or four doors and built in roll cages?”

Once she’d coughed through the mouthful of wine Felicity side-eyed Curtis and sighed, “Honestly, I’m fine.”
“So, you haven’t heard from him?” he asked curiously.
She shook her head in slow motion, “Nope,” she answered, popping the ‘p’, “I think he said all he needed to say.”
“And is Thea back home?”

She was less thrilled to answer that question with a negative, it hurt her to see the cavern that had opened up between them as a result of this.

“No,” she spoke softly as she fluffed her hand through her loose tresses, “but apparently neither is he, she said he emptied the place, put it all in storage or sold it and he’s sleeping at the shop. So I guess he’s planning on leaving town soon.”

Thea didn’t like to talk about it much and Felicity didn’t like to ask, but when Thea had looked particularly morose in the office one Tuesday morning, Felicity had taken her to lunch and assured her that she could talk to her if she wanted – the knowledge about Oliver moving out of the house was the result.

“And he’s given you no reason or…”
“No,” she cut him off abruptly, “and I really don’t expect him to.”

Although she did, had. Once.
She still meant what she had said to Thea – she didn’t hate him, but every so often there was a simmering feeling of bitter anger towards him that took a little longer to dissipate than she would readily admit.

She wanted to understand; firstly if he meant what he had said and if he did why had he tugged her along like a pull-toy? They had fucked the first night they’d met, it wasn’t like she had been playing hard to get.
He’d said I love you
He’d said it before her.
Sober.
Aware.

And not even now, in the harsh light of everything and after a month of trying to make sense of it – not even now, could she believe that he had made that all up, that it was nothing but deception and lies.

Had the idea of being in love finally scared him enough to want to call it quits? Maybe. But he could have just as well ghosted her, stopped returning her calls, slept with the girl who climbed into bed naked with him. He could have done any number of other things and the end result would have been virtually the same. She would have walked out of his life.

But he didn’t.
No, Oliver took a bat made of words and he swung it straight at her chest.
He took her insecurities about her father only wanting her when she was of some use to him and he used it against her.

He gave her every reason to hate him.
That wasn’t just a break up.

“You think I let him off too easy?” she asked Curtis before she took a slow sip of her drink and studied the candy bowl forlornly.
She heard his black viscose cloak rustle as he shifted in the seat, “before Paul I had this guy cheat on me, not that I’m saying that Oliver did…”
Another sip of wine, “good, because he didn’t.”
Of at least that much she was sure, she had seen the guilt on his face from a girl kissing him, so she was under no doubt that Oliver hadn’t cheated – although maybe if he had, that might have made more sense.

“So, what did you do?”
Curtis pressed his lips together and grinned, “Burnt everything he left at my house.”
Felicity choked on the next mouthful of wine – she wasn’t expecting that.
“Did it make you feel better?”
“I should probably say no,” a chuckle, “but it did Felicity, it really did,” he admitted.

She finished the glass of wine amused at the image of Curtis huddled over a trash can burning Dr Who figurines and ironic tee shirts. She set her empty glass on the table top, stood and walked wordlessly into her room.

She returned only a minute or two later with her arms banded around a few things that Oliver had left behind in her life.
“If it worked for you, maybe it’ll give me some closure too.”

She dumped the contents onto the couch cushion beside Curtis and he quickly rummaged through it, a tee shirt, a baseball cap, a soft toy he’d won her at one of those claw machines, his spare toothbrush, a few CDs and two motorcycle magazines.

“Do you have a trash can?” he grinned as he held the large tee up in the air, he may have been taller than Oliver but he was certain his shoulders would disappear in that black Henley regardless.
“No,” she huffed, the puff of air from her mouth sending her hair spiking upwards, “Will the kitchen sink work?”

With neither of them considering that lighting something on fire in a residential apartment high-rise would set off the detectors and likely end up in the evacuation of hundreds of people at almost
10pm, they bundled all but the CD’s into the kitchen sink.

Curtis lit the match but Felicity blew it out before he dropped it onto the items.
“Wait,” she called before he went to strike up another one, “I don’t want to do this.”
“You’re too nice,” he huffed as he put the box of matches on the countertop.

“No,” she argued, way more offended at being called nice than she ought to be, “I don’t want to do it because it won’t give me any answers and you know what, *fuck it*, I deserve an answer, I deserve a reason.”

She found a box she hadn’t yet unpacked and haphazardly emptied the contents on the dining table.
“I deserve one right now,” she said as she filled the same box with Oliver's things, “Curtis, call us a taxi,” she added as she headed towards her bedroom.

“Where are you going?”
Felicity looked down at her track pants, knitted sweater and rainbow woollen socks, “I don’t want answers looking like this,” she chuffed.

Twenty minutes later Felicity stepped out from her room in a black dress that belted at the waist and clung to her chest with leather triangles fastened into a halter.

“Holy shit,” Curtis gaped as Felicity slipped on a pair of heels and buckled them.
“I want answers looking like this,” she smiled dogmatically “it’s Halloween after all,” she added with a brief shrug.

The taxi pulled alongside the curb out front of the Lost Soul’s haunt. The parking lot was almost desolate and Felicity assumed the bar was too.

“Typical, all the big bad bikers stay at home on Halloween,” Curtis snorted, laughing at his own joke while Felicity gnawed the edge of her freshly painted lips.

She shifted, uneasy, in the back seat as she dragged a hand through her loose hair. The cab ride here had sobered her up just a smidge, but enough to become consciously aware that she was wearing very little, despite the frigid temperature and the time of night, and she was playing into the completely typical post-break up “Look what you’re missing out on” troupe.

Calm, logical, level-headed Felicity could see that this was pointless, but for once Felicity didn’t want to listen to calm, level-headed Felicity who just accepted shit.

She had just accepted Ray for far too long, until she had all but forgotten that other sexual positions existed and sane, rationale people didn’t iron their underwear.

She had just accepted her father strolling back into her life when she became the progeny worth noticing.

She wasn’t weak – never weak – but she just accepted far too much and she was done. She wasn’t going to just accept Oliver’s reasons until he looked her in her eyes and told her everything they had was a lie.

Then she’d accept it.
She took a breath that steadied her racing heart before she opened the door and placed a firmly resolved foot on the road.

She felt the seat shifting behind her and Curtis preparing to get out of the car too.
“Stay here and keep the cab waiting,” Felicity said as she exited the car and took the box from Curtis’ hands.
“Are you sure?”
He cringed out a worried smile.
“Yes,” she answered resolutely, “this is between him and I.”
Curtis chuckled as he nodded and sat back into the seat, “You know the last time you left me in a car outside this place you ended up…”

She leaned in with her hand resting on the car door, “Don’t say it Curtis, I don’t need to be reminded.”

After another deep inhale and with the cab door closed, Felicity walked across the glistening road, still wet with the rain from about an hour ago. She sidestepped a pothole that had become a small pond and rolled her shoulders as she reached the other curb.

The wind was bitingly cold against her shoulders and was making a flurry of her loose hair, but neither of those things stopped her walking closer.

Verdant Motors was closed and dark and Felicity doubted that Oliver was in there, curled up in bed having a restful slumber. She would try the bar first.

She blew through the door with the night air lashing in behind her, like a scene from a horror film at a seaside locale she imagined – she was the stark-raving mad sea captain that was going to tell some fanciful story that nobody would believe.

She shook the novel from her mind and let the door close with a thud behind her but no one other than the bartender, a large man with much more hair on his face than the top of his head, paid her any mind.

She walked up to him, smacking her lips together like this wasn’t only the second time she’d set foot inside here – Oliver had never wanted her to.
“Where is Oliver Queen?” she asked as she brushed her hand along the oak bar top, sticky with beer residue (at least she hoped that was what it was).
He looked at her like the words that came from her mouth weren’t English.

She propped the box of Oliver’s things on a stool and reached into her shoulder bag. She didn’t need to see what she was looking for, she had envisaged some resistance to information imparting on the ride over here and had seen to making appropriate methods available.

A hundred dollar note landed on the bar top and before the grizzly bear could get close enough to smell it, Felicity slammed her palm down on top of it.
“Where is Oliver Queen?”

This time the burly man’s face turned up into a smile, not a menacing one as Felicity should well have expected, but one that said something like well-played.

“Last I saw, he was in the Chapel,” Felicity looked at him with a single raised brow, she was going to need more than that because she assumed there wasn’t a church nearby where she might find Oliver praying, “through that door at the back,” he nodded towards it and Felicity took note, “third door on the left.”
She released the $100, “thank you.”
He tipped his chin in a comradery gesture.

She followed the man’s concise instructions and was honestly surprised that she wasn’t stopped along the way by some patches wondering what the hell she was doing in their inner sanctum.

She stumbled just the once in her heels, which could have either been as a result of the four glasses of wine, or the adrenaline coursing through her veins that was making her breathing somewhat erratic.

She counted the doors and stopped outside the third. With the box tucked up under her arm she knocked on the door, expecting some resistance she was surprised when there was none and the door opened making her stagger in after it.

And, of course, Oliver turned his head at the exact same time. He was standing with his back to the door, patched jacket clearly on display, cleaning the barrel of what Felicity, in her naivety, was going to simply call a shotgun.

It felt like a life sentence that their eyes just stayed there, locked to each other, and Felicity only blinked when her contacts were starting to dry to her eyeballs.

There may have been a moment – just a split second – where Oliver looked happy, but it was quickly replaced by a certain sort of sadness that Felicity couldn’t quite place.

It looked almost like grief.

She considered turning around and leaving, just dropping the box to the floor, giving it a shove towards him with her foot and that could be that. But she didn’t go there just to return stuff she doubted he even remembered he owned let alone cared about.

Felicity went to get answers.
She deserved answers.

“You left some stuff at my place,” she said sharply before she sucked in a bite of air, walked into the room and kicked the door closed behind her.

She could feel his eyes on her, and his jaw was twitching while his fingers moved at his side. With as much carelessness as she could portray (the irony of trying to act like you don’t care was not lost on her) she dropped the box onto the other end of the table from where Oliver was stood like a statue.

He clipped the gun back together and the metallic sound of it, laced with the dangerous nature of what he held so naturally in his hands, made her startle in her shoes and they skidded just an inch on the floor.

Oliver twitched as though he might have been preparing to rush to her aid if she fell, but within seconds they had both composed themselves.

“You came to return that stuff?” he mumbled, casting a brief eye over the box down the other end of the table before he turned back around, putting his back completely to her.

Her lips, the colour of sin and rubies, pursed in a sudden feeling of infuriation she wasn’t expecting but didn’t stifle, especially when it became apparent that Oliver couldn’t even give her the courtesy of looking at her.
She barrelled deeper into the room, her shoes tapping out an angry path.
“So, you’ve gone back to them?” she spat, her eyes carving into the patch on the back of his jacket. Oliver furrowed his brow in secret, he understood her anger – hell, he even felt it himself – but he’d made a decision to step back into the midst of the Lost Souls in an effort to make sure that if the walls started talking about Felicity, or the shipment, he’d know about it.

*Keep your enemies closer.*

At least until January – once he knew Felicity was safe then he was out of there, dragging Thea along with him whether she liked it or not.

“I would say it suits you, but it really doesn’t,” she spoke bitterly, refusing to mask her emotions in some effort to make him feel better about his.

Oliver turned to face her, “Thanks for bringing my stuff back,” he offered with a reserved voice that was thin and almost unrecognisable.

In that moment, where she was standing only two feet away from him, he would do anything to embrace her, to dip his lips against her neck and feel the blood pulsing through her body.

“That’s really all you have to say to me?”

Like the thinness in his voice, the bitterness in hers was also almost unrecognisable.

Oliver could tell she was angry, and he knew she had every right to be. He wasn’t going to take that away from her; but what he wouldn’t give to stroke her cheek and give her whatever answer she needed to be okay – *he just wanted her to be okay.*

“I have nothing else to offer you,” he said carelessly – a role he didn’t want to play but a necessary one all the same.

She was still in trouble if she cared, even just a little, about him.

She slapped him hard across the cheek, snapping his neck to the side where he stayed to relish in the sting of it. He almost wished she had hit him harder and that he could savour the familiar taste of blood, just to prove he was still alive.

Oliver had spent the last month drunk or numb, at least when she slapped him he felt *something.*

“He can’t, he shouldn’t.” she argued, her blue eyes tipped with pain and anger, feelings he would gladly take from her if he could, “don’t treat me like someone else. *I know you.*”

The last three words buried into his soul and all he wanted to do was to touch her, hold her, fall at her knees and beg her to love him again – *but he can’t, he shouldn’t.*

Felicity needed to forget about him.

He raised his head up slowly and even though meeting her eyes was an almost unbearable torture, he did because he deserved all the ire that he found there, “You should go.”

She watched as his eyes tried to hold hers but they faltered, dimmed and his eyelids hung heavy. Oliver looked broken.

As she stood in the Chapel and looked down at the elegantly carved table where the grim reaper’s smile burrowed menacingly into her soul, Felicity realised that she really didn’t know what she had expected from him.

*If he said sorry, would it make it any better?*

A tear slipped from her eye before she could banish it with the back of her fingers. Oliver grimaced at its sight, he wanted to hold her, kiss the tear away and tell her just how sorry he was, because he was so *fucking sorry.*
She should leave. She turned around bent on leaving this god forsaken place before the Harbinger of Death hooked her with his scythe and kept her. But her feet wouldn’t move, at least not backwards.

She walked closer to him, bridging the gap to barely a foot between them. “Look me in the eye and tell me everything we had was a lie,” she whispered, keeping her eyes latched to his even when his fell to the floor.

She was so close – so close – he could reach out his fingers and touch her; and it took Oliver everything he had not to.

He forced his lips together to stop them trembling. He wanted to give her what she wanted – what she needed – to leave him behind, but he couldn’t tell her it was a lie, because it wasn’t. Everything he’d ever said to her; the quiet moments where he’d kissed her neck and admitted he was happy, that he loved her and that he wanted to move in with her – none of that was a lie.

Another tear slid from her eye, but she didn’t brush that one away, she left it there, rolling down her cheek, to torment him – _he did that._

*He did that._

He hung his head low, fighting with the word *No* as he tried to give her a *Yes* so she would leave and move on.

Because she needed to hate him. She needed to believe that he was nothing. He wasn’t worth her time and not worthy of her tears. *She was better away from him, far away from him.*

She slapped him again and Felicity looked down at her trembling hand in shock, she hadn’t anticipated that and she didn’t remember making the choice to do it.

Oliver wet his lip with his tongue where his teeth had grazed it and his eyes begged for another. He craved it. *Maybe it would help her.*

*Maybe it would take away some of her pain.*

“Tell me it was a lie;” she begged, tears flooding behind her eyes. *Nothing.*

He couldn’t say anything.

Her fingers stung and her hand was shaking. She pushed against his shoulders and he stumbled backwards but Felicity closed the gap just as quickly as she’d opened it.

“Without an audience, just you and me, look me in the eyes and tell me,” she demanded before she beat her hand across his shoulder for a second time.

Oliver winced, not from pain but to stop himself from embracing her, to stop himself pulling her close and begging her to hate him, to leave and never look back.

“Tell me that it was all a lie,” another push, baiting him, begging him, rebuking him, “tell me that there was *nothing* between us, tell me…” she cried, “tell me that you *never* loved me.”

He cupped her face more desperately than he ever had and he kissed her. There was nothing soft
about it, it was hard and her lips felt rigid and frozen against his, but he wouldn’t drop them, no matter how much his brain was screaming at him to.

Her mouth softened and her lips parted; and he was there, with his tongue, waiting. He laved her lower lip slowly and Felicity closed her eyes as her body whimpered.

She should hate him for this, but her lips fought her resolve because it was all they had wanted for the last month.

_But she can’t._
_She won’t._

She pushed back on his shoulders and their lips broke apart.

“Don’t ask me to say that I don’t love you,” his voice was breathy, a whisper she wasn’t sure she was even supposed to hear.

Her hands hadn’t left his shoulders and just as quickly as she had pushed him away, she grasped his collar and pulled him back.

Her lips pummelled his as though she wanted to steal the very breath from him. Her fingers twisted in the leather and cotton of his clothes as they stumbled backwards until her thighs smacked into the edge of the table.

Her mouth opened in surprise and his tongue burrowed inside. Their tongues fought, rolling and slapping until his found a level of dominance. But it was quickly lost when Felicity bit down. He hissed, but didn’t withdraw and her hands worked to keep him there, locked to her mouth.

She bucked her hips against him. She could feel his hard length and she growled against his lips at the contact, her panties wet with wanting. His hands sunk onto either side of her thighs, trawling her dress up until it sat at the top of her ass where he grabbed two handfuls and squeezed.

Felicity dropped her fists full of his clothes and anchored her nails into his neck responsively. She hated how much her body needed him in that moment – how nothing short of having him buried to the hilt inside her will suffice.

Oliver hated how he couldn’t let her go and just how much he wanted to hear his name bleed from her lips, lingered on a hot breath.

She pushed back on him, grinding her body almost angrily against his as their tongues pin-balled in the confines of her mouth.

As they fell back towards the wall behind the head of the table Oliver’s shoulder caught a bookcase and a silver ashtray and a motorcycle figurine toppled to the ground while the rest of the contents shuddered at the jolt, but the two of them didn’t stop, not even for a moment.

They didn’t notice, didn’t care.

They twisted and faltered their footing back towards the table and when her thighs hit the lip for a second time Oliver lifted her and placed her roughly on the edge.

She kicked her legs out, catching a nearby chair and sending it crashing to the floor, not far from the ashtray.

His lips dropped from hers and worked hungrily down her neck, devouring every inch they touched as her nails scoured through the lengths of his hair.
He pressed his sheathed manhood against her sex and she gasped at the sudden and desperate feeling that encompassed her. Everything ached for him, for his touch, and she almost sobbed at the alarming carnality of her desire.

Not sated with only her lips and neck, Oliver kissed the salty tracks her tears had made down her cheeks as he worked back towards her mouth when he suddenly realised what he was doing.

He pulled his lips away and his hands jerked back from her body.
He didn't get to have that anymore.
That wasn't his.
*She wasn’t his.*

But she still had hold of him with her fingers twisted around his hair. Her eyes were glassed over with unspent tears but Oliver couldn’t bring himself to take her at the wrists and make her let him go, even though he *should.*

Felicity blinked and a single tear fell.
She should let go of him and her eyes were practically begging for him to make her.
But she didn’t want to, *she couldn’t.*
With every fibre in her being, Felicity wanted to hold on, just a little longer. Maybe it was selfish, or stupid, or both, but she just wanted… *something to say goodbye to.*

“Let us at least have this,” she spoke with such clarity, such need and assuredness that she even scared herself with how much she wanted – *needed* – this – *him.*

He watched the words come from her mouth, each one more steady than the last before he reached into his back pocket and took out his wallet. Wordlessly he placed it on the carved table beside her bare thigh.
*If she really wanted this…*

Felicity took the wallet, with her eyes staying connected to his. Blindly she looked for what they both knew would be in there. Her fingertips found the small foil packet in a corner of the far pocket and without looking she pressed it into her palm and tossed his wallet to one side.

The slap of his leather belt as she roughly loosened it made him groan salaciously and when his eyes returned from the ceiling, Felicity pushed both his pants and briefs down below his ass.

He brushed her hair back behind her ear as she opened the packet and took his engorged cock into her palm. He leaned in and kissed her mouth gently while she rolled the condom down his shaft and pinched out the air.

Where their tongues had once lashed and fought before they now danced slowly together. His hands brushed down her shoulders with his thumbs grazing her ribcage before she slid her hands under his clothes and up his chest, her fingertips exploring the map of his muscles.

He spread her legs with his hands around her knees before he settled himself between them. The air dropped from her lips when he pressed the head of his throbbing cock into her thin, cotton panties, now soaked with her heady desire.

His fingers floated up her thighs, relishing the softness he had agonizingly missed. Her hands retreated from under his clothes before they brushed the shoulders of his jacket down his arms. His hands fell away from her to shrug it off and it was only moments before his unbuttoned plaid shirt and white tee were also in a pile beside his feet.
A light finger grazed the edge of her soft dress, like silk under his calloused pad. Hesitantly he worked it up towards the soft leather bodice when Felicity caught his hand and silently guided him around the back of her neck where his fingers swept over the knotted tie.

Pinching the ends, Oliver pulled them slowly until the dress fell down her heaving chest. His eyes drunk in the sight of her rich, creamy skin, dusted with a soft peach and a light glaze of sweat.

His fingertips traced the underside of her breast while he watched the desire blush across her face and softly part her lips with a silent moan. He cupped the same breast while he skimmed her budded nipple with the edge of his thumb before his lips fell to her throat, savouring the taste of her skin with tiny little nips.

He continued to massage her breasts, swapping from one to the other as his mouth caressed her and his tongue savoured every moment.

Neither of them were willing to speak in anything more than the soft moans that came from their chests and she when took his length into her hand, Oliver swirled his tongue over the crest of her breast and swooped around her coiled nipple.

Sighs leaked from her lips as she pulled her panties to one side, feeling the moisture wetting her fingers as she did. She held them there, curtained, while she tipped the angle of her hips and pulled his shaft closer until the two met.

At the moment of contact Oliver pulsed forward and his tip slipped beautifully inside her. The sounds of their wet sighs filled the air between them as Oliver pressed his palm desperately into the plump of her breast, revelling in the way it felt and the keening breaths it made her release, dusting them against his ear.

She leaned back, bracing her arms behind her body, as she shuffled to the edge of the table and slipped him further into her pulsing entrance.

Her body stretched around him as she swallowed him deeper, her wetness making him glide smoothing between her cushioned walls. Her breath was hot and her moans salacious as she took him slowly, but hungry for more.

Snapping her head back up she caught the hesitation in his eyes, but it couldn’t stop here, Felicity couldn’t take the aching that would swell her body if they stopped here – like they should.

She put her hands to his waist and pulled him tight against her. His cock sunk deep and he didn’t stop until he was fully seated inside her beating walls as they cradled him in warm, wet suppleness.

Felicity wanted to sob at the fullness swelling her body as the ache she had felt for so long was finally quietened. Her legs folded around his and twisted at the ankle just above the crease of his knees while his hands slid decadently up the inside of her sweltering thighs, turned pink with arousal, and cupped the curve of her rear.

With hooded eyes and a shallow breath, Felicity slipped her arms underneath his and laid her palms flat into the back of his shoulders, her hands soaked up the misting of sweat while her fingers bent at the second knuckle to hold him there, right where he was – so close that they shared air.

And then, for reasons she wanted to ignore, she laid her head onto his beating chest, moving with him as he breathed, intermittently heavy and then shallow. Tonight she couldn’t bear to meet his eyes because she was fearful of what they might say.
His thrusts began slow, letting her body become used to him once more, but when her legs tightened around him he knew to speed it up. His lips caressed her temple as his tongue collected tiny beads of sweat he found there.

Felicity thrust with him in slow, constant rocks until they built up the rhythm together. It became hard and fast and tellingly silent.

She held onto him for dear life and his fingers gripped her so tightly that it began to hurt the mounds of her rear. But Felicity was okay with the pain; it reminded her that what she wanted – what she was getting – would come with a price, because no matter how good this moment felt she knew it was finite.

They both knew that.
Though neither would find the words to express it.

She pecked tiny kisses against his taut chest and nicked her teeth into his nipple, his taste so familiar – a musky tone with hints of fresh, woody dew.

Their lower bodies continued to move in time, Oliver slipping in and out of her tight cave and gliding against her smooth walls.

Sweat glazed their naked bodies and bled together where their skin touched. He dropped his painful clasp of her flesh as one hand moved to span across her entire lower back while the other dipped between her legs. Oliver’s eyes lulled closed as his fingertips traced the way Felicity opened up for him and the way his thrusts fitted her so perfectly.

He found her pearl and teased it between two fingers, alternating the sensation with a gently flick of his thumb over the top. Her nails dug into his skin and Oliver growled brutishly.

His digits swept through her juices and spread it up towards her clit, switching between long strides and short circles as he never quite made a pattern her body could settle into.

He could feel her cushioned walls clutching and tightening around his length, the condom was so thin that he could feel every single flinch as though it wasn’t even there.

Her warmth was enrapturing and he didn’t want to open his eyes in case it was nothing more than a dream, but he also didn’t want to miss the moment she let go.

His eyes snapped opened and he breathed in deeply, desperate to savour the delicious notes of her heady aroma, lest it was the last time he ever could. He pulled her closer to his chest where he could feel her moist lips dance the softest of kisses.

He sped up, chasing the feeling as close to orgasm as he could before he reined it back and teased her closer to her own release with his fingers around her swollen clit.

Coconut and vanilla swirled around his nostrils as he buried his nose into the midst of her hair. He whispered her name to the roots, begging them to keep his next words secret, *I love you.*

They did, and Felicity never heard him say it as she told her own secret to the scar on his swelling chest, *I love you.*

She came in a wordless wail and a gush of warm, silky release that Oliver could almost taste in the air. It blanketed his cock and felt warmer than it ever had before.

He considered sliding out from between her trembling walls and not allowing himself to find his
own release, painfully aware that perhaps he didn’t deserve to.

But she read his mind, and Felicity held him there, thrusting her body up and down him as he stilled himself for the few moments until he joined her in his own electric release.

He came in hot, pulsed spurts that seemed to go on indefinitely. He had never felt it this hard before as it pinched the muscles the entire length from his ass to the back of his knees where her heels dug into him.

His balls throbbed before Felicity detached a hand from his back and slipped it between their bodies to gently massage him through his climax.

If it was physically possible Oliver would have sworn he had come a second time from the feeling of her gently manipulating his sack and base while he continued to empty himself into the condom.

They stayed that way for countless minutes just stroking each other as they rode through the waves of their jointly explosive and emotional releases.

It was only then, as his breathing slowed and the air shifted between them, that Oliver felt her wet tears blanch his warm chest, and he knew what she was going to do and that he couldn’t stop her.

He wanted to hold her longer, bask in her warmth and tell her how special and perfect she was. How, no matter what words he’d said before, she was all he had ever wanted.

But then, inevitably, he would have to kiss her lips softly and utter that she was better off without him; because that was the truth.

But Oliver was stuck, silent, holding onto her for each second he could, until she pushed away from him.

*He can’t keep her here.*
*She’s not his anymore.*

When their eyes met, neither was holding the look of euphoria that would usually be there. The fleeting moment they had just shared was what they had both wanted, needed, loved, but it didn’t change anything.

Oliver withdrew his softened cock and blinked down at the sparse remnants clinging to the sides of the latex before Felicity pressed the bodice of her dress against her chest. Oliver shadowed her and glided his fingertips up the taut straps before he tied it off at the nape of her neck, savouring the way her soft hair brushed against his worn knuckles.

She shifted and he caught her waist to guide her off the table and even though she didn’t need the help she didn’t push him away, treasuring the last few moments of contact between them.

She thought about kissing his cheek to soothe the look of guilt that he carried but she was fearful such an intimacy would mean she would never walk out of that room.

*And she had to.*
He’d pushed her away for a reason
And while she came here as angry as the vivid ruby red lipstick she wore, she was leaving different.

Maybe she got the answer she was looking for after all.
They didn’t say goodbye and when she moved towards the door, Oliver didn’t stop her even if it took everything he had not to.

And by the time he allowed himself to move, to breathe, she was already gone.

Felicity hugged her waist tightly as she walked quickly from the bar and across the darkened street.

She slipped into the taxi and she could feel Curtis’ eyes looking over her, assessing her. “You were gone a while,” he said quietly, the few glasses of wine he’d had finally starting to wear off. She simply nodded, keeping her eyes out the window but looking at nothing in particular. “Is everything okay?” She leaned forward and tapped the shoulder of the driver, “we can go now.”

The cab moved away from the curb and pulled into the empty street just as the rain that had been threatening to fall fell against the window panes.

Curtis hovered his hand near Felicity’s hand as it flattened against the black leather seat until her fingers curled over the edge and she pinched the fabric tightly in her grasp. So he drifted it up to the air around her shoulders before laying lightly on top of it. “Did you get the answer you were looking for?” Felicity breathed softly as the car joined in with the highway of cars heading back across the other side of the City.

“I got an answer,” she replied quietly as her other hand brushed across her stomach, still tingling with her climax.

“I got enough of an answer,” she added as she placed her temple against the cool window pane and gently closed her eyes.

She got something she didn’t plan on.
“Morning,” Curtis grumbled as he stared down hopefully at the Aspirin dissolving in his glass of lukewarm water. He’d read once that tepid water was better for a hangover than cold, and this morning, with the heavy metal band playing between his ears, Curtis would take whatever old wives’ tale he could.

“How do you not look like death?” Curtis groaned, his tone seeped in self-pity “I’m almost certain you drank more than I did.”
Felicity shrugged her weighted shoulders as she offered Curtis a placating smile. The truth was, after the taxi had dropped Curtis off, Felicity had gone back to her apartment and spent almost an hour sitting at the bottom of a steamy shower until the water ran tepid and the steam dissipated, leaving her with nothing but her sobering thoughts.

It had never been her conscious plan to go and have sex with Oliver, but when she saw him broken and hiding behind a wall of what he thought she needed to see, all she could think about was him; having him, being with him, loving him as though somehow it would make it easier to walk away after.

But it didn’t, of course it didn’t.
It made it that much harder.
And as she tried to sleep, both warmed and terrified with the lingering feelings of his hands on her body and her head pressed to his chest, Felicity chastised herself at just how muddied she had made the already-complicated waters.

This morning though, after the sensation of his lips had finally left hers, she realised that she couldn’t trust herself with Oliver again. They were magnetic, and they pulled towards each other – consequences be damned – and there was no trophy to be won and no good to be had by sleeping with your one-night stand turned boyfriend, turned lover, turned ex, turned hook up. It was the epitome of terrible ideas and Felicity could ill afford any terrible ideas right now.

“Good genetics,” Felicity remarked as she squeezed Curtis’ shoulder, “I grew up in Vegas remember.”
After another vaguely sympathetic smile, Felicity cobbled into her office and greeted the City – and the new day – with a resolute sigh.

No terrible ideas.

“I don’t think that’s how genetics work,” Curtis argued as he followed her into her office a few moments later, device in hand.
Felicity kept her eyes out towards the City determined that one day she would make something that could really help it.
“Take that up with my mother,” she turned around slowly and laughed at Curtis’ disgruntled expression, “So where are things?”
Curtis cleared his throat and began, “Your father is roaming the halls with his serious face.”
Felicity nodded, it was budget time for the next year, the numbers man in him was unsurprisingly anxious, “Of course he is.”
“Kord has sent through the final GPS mapping coordinates.”

That bit of information was awaited and appreciated, “Good,” she hummed as her eyes wandered back out towards the other side of the Bay towards the Glades, “does it take out the residential path they had, like we requested?”
She heard the soft heels of Curtis’ shoes scuff the floor like he was doing a victory dance and when she looked back to verify, she wasn’t surprised to find him doing his rendition of the running man. “Yes,” he cheered, the five coffees he’d already downed this morning finally seemed to be kicking in despite his hangover, “it’s mostly highway and industrial.”
He looked down at his screen and studied it for a moment, “The industrial area is pretty much abandoned, it’s at the back of the Glades, old steel mills, that kind of thing.”
Felicity nodded, she knew the area he was talking about, it was the section you could see in the distance behind Oliver’s house – well, what was his house.

“Great,” she effused, banning Oliver from her mind right now – no terrible ideas, “that will
minimise any infrastructure damages if it’s triggered.”

She clipped her feet around to her desk and fired up the four different processors she had scattered around the room.

“You keep working on the assumption that someone is going to try and steal it, but they would have to know, first…” he stuck his finger abruptly into the air, “…that it existed.”

“They know,” Felicity interrupted, if her brief venture into the workings of the criminal underworld in Starling had taught her anything, it was that nothing goes beyond their notice. *Someone knew it existed.*

“Oh,” Curtis relented, “but second…” a second finger joined the first in mid-air, “they would have to know precisely *when.* The window is an hour *tops* from when it leaves Argus’ insanely secure location to when it arrives in the even more secure military compound.”

Felicity slipped from her heels and neatly arranged them next to the other aligned pairs, Curtis was right and that knowledge was settling, at least a little. The time and route had changed several times since this operation’s conception, and Felicity didn’t doubt that that had been done so with purpose to weed out any leaks or cracks within the inner circles, she also didn’t doubt that between now and December 25th, the time could change again, and *again,* and they probably wouldn’t have anything definitive until the week before, *if they were lucky.*

“Thirdly…” at the same time the word left his mouth the third finger pinged up, “they would have to have someone *inside* the cab, *while* it’s moving,” he scoffed, “and let’s not forget they would also need someone like you to hack the GPS once they were in the cab.”

“Also true,” she slumped into her chair and tightened the elastic around her hair.

“We got this boss lady boss,” Curtis praised, firing two finger guns at her.

“That’s weird, don’t do that again,” she mocked playfully before Curtis reflexively ‘holstered’ them.

“But you’re right, we got this,” she added with a definitive single nod, “make sure you file the map and destroy the older versions.”

“You want this offline?”

Felicity nodded, even though it went against almost everything she held dear, ironically in this day and age the safest place was off-the-grid, at least for now.

“So are we expecting our feisty little helper this week?” Curtis asked casually as he scrolled looking for anything else that required Felicity’s attention.

*Thea.*

Felicity found her phone surprisingly fast in the bottomless pit that was her bag and studied it intently for a few moments. She hadn’t heard anything from Thea for a couple of days.

“I’m not sure.”

She fired off a text and set her phone to one side.

As much as she needed to distance herself from Oliver, Felicity felt an eerily desperate need to draw closer to Thea, although her reasons for feeling that way weren’t abundantly obviously – *it was just a feeling.*

Thea felt her phone vibrate in her back pocket but she ignored it as she quickly thumbed through the roll of 20s in her hand.

“This alley smells like piss,” she mumbled as she blew air out through her nose to somehow vanquish the smell that had begun to permeate her nostrils.

“Look, it’s all there,” the nerdy junkie gritted, his suspicious eyes darting rapidly around the dank
Thea reached the end of the wad and nodded before she reached into her jacket pocket and plucked a clear bag from inside the lining.

“You get ten caps for this,” she explained coarsely as she dropped the zip-lock into his shaking palm.

His eye twitched and the hand that was sunk into his pocket was fidgeting with something “Fuck, that’s not enough, I gave you almost three hundred,” he argued, his eyes narrowing sharply.

“Yeah, well, that’s what you fucking get for that. If you have a problem with it, take it up with my father.”

Thea scuffed her heavy boots on the filthy concrete as she walked herself backwards. Once she reached the mouth of the alley she turned a sharp left and walked a full block before she took a pause to look behind her. The junkie hadn’t followed.

She shook off her nerves and tussled with her loose dark hair as she braced herself against a brick wall, tagged with a mixture of curse words and prophecies about where everyone this side of the bridge would end up – dead.

She lit a cigarette and pressed it between her pursed lips before she realised her hand was shaking. She ran it under her nose, brushing off the stench of the alley before she took a long drag on the white stick. When she was satisfied the tremble had subsided, Thea pulled her phone from her back pocket and looked at the new message.

Hi Thea, hope everything is okay and we see you this week. Curtis misses you sassing him. He has a hangover so he’s especially snippety today.

She stared at the message before she dropped the barely spent cigarette onto the ground and snubbed it out with the ball of her shoe. It felt like a cloud of guilt hovering above her head as her eyes glassed over.

Roy’s mother had lost her waitressing job and money was tight. Felicity had already helped her more than she felt she deserved and she wasn’t going to ask Oliver this time – despite the multiple texts he’d been sending asking if she needed any money.

She sniffed back her anger at him as she strangled her svelte waist with her slender arms. Oliver had always been this pinnacle to her, the god among men. No matter what he’d done before she found a way to understand him, but this time she just couldn’t. He’d become everything he was supposed to be the opposite of.

Maybe it was her impossibly high standards for the brother she’d always idolised, but Oliver’s idol was now tarnished and Thea didn’t know how to abate that.

Her mother was a liar and a cheater.
Her father is a cold snake.
Robert is a man she barely remembered.

Oliver was all she had.

Hi, sorry, I’m a little under the weather this week. I’ll be back next week, I promise. Hide Curtis’ stapler for me, he hates that. xo Thea

She pushed send and sniffed back the unshed tears.
Like mother like daughter – she was a liar now too.
She dipped her hand into her pocket and pulled out one of the samples. Without allowing herself to take a moment to reflect on what she was doing, Thea put the tab under her tongue and cried. At least this way she could forget her shit for a couple of hours.

**Feel better soon. If you need anything, I have a spare bed and the capabilities to microwave tinned chicken soup. Just let me know :)**

Thea read the message as the drug leached into her system and a serene tingling buzz floated down her body.

**PS: Curtis’ stapler is in the potted plant. He’ll never find it there.**

Thea smiled as she brushed back a wave of tears.
Oliver didn’t deserve Felicity.
And the more she thought about it, the more she decided maybe she didn’t either.

[Mid-November]

Thea tried to focus on the something other than the fuzzy feeling behind her eyeballs as she looked out the high-rise window of Smoak Technologies’ floor. She should have stuck with what she knew, but the little pink opiates had started to lose their effectiveness and Thea wanted to claw back some of the sweet daze she’d had felt before.

She sculled back half a bottle of water in a hopeless attempt to lower the fire that was burning under her skin.

“What’s Operation Rudolph?” she asked with a thin and husky voice.
Her throat felt like knives.
Curtis took the folder from her hands and tucked it under his arm, “that’s not the stuff for you to categorise, it’s that pile,” he nodded towards the stack of papers on the desk across the room.
“God sorry,” she flustered as she clawed her nails down her arm before she tore off her jacket and feverishly fanned her cheeks.
“Are you feeling alright?” Curtis asked as his eyes carried out a once over on the young ‘understudy’.
Her cheeks were flushed fire engine red and had a thick layer of clammy perspiration – in spite of the fact it was a chilly morning.
“Fine,” she flubbed, her tongue tangling around the simple word while she raked her nails up and down her arms.
They felt like they were on fire, except where she should feel pain, she felt a painful itch beneath her skin.
“Because you look like shit.”
“Fuck you too Curtis.”
Curtis threw his hands up in the air as he followed Thea clomp around the room, “I’m just saying, because you’re sweating a lot,” he bickered, ignoring the way her eyes darted at him like he’d said something so unimaginably evil, “like a lot a lot.”

Felicity rounded the corner with the mid-morning’s coffee order.
“Isn’t she sweating a lot?” Curtis blurted out, beckoning Felicity closer with one hand.
Felicity walked around the couch where Curtis had finally cornered Thea and studied the young girl briefly – she didn’t need much more than a brief look to appreciate what Curtis was saying.
Thea’s eyeliner, usually a perfect circle of black, was now bleeding down her red, blotchy cheeks. “Oh shit,” Felicity breathed, her brows twisting with concern. “The fuck guys?” Thea gritted her teeth. Felicity studied the young Queen, her eyes, which were usually bright, were now a sea of black and dilated pupil, “Are you feeling okay?”

Curtis put the folder that he’d early tucked under his arm on the coffee table beside them before he slipped the same arm around Thea’s shaky shoulders. “You should sit down,” he urged her with both his words and his guidance towards the black leather settee.

Thea didn’t argue this time, well aware that her legs suddenly felt foreign as though her brain had somehow managed to forget how they work.

She brushed a lethargic hand through her hair as she slumped into the seat. “Should we call someone?” Felicity’s question was directed to Curtis but Thea answered it before he could. “No,” she snipped, almost breathless, as she bound to be feet, “I’m fine,” she grabbed the folder Curtis had only moments ago taken from her, “where does Operation Rudolph go?”

Curtis looked at her curiously before he took the folder from her for a second time, “I just… never mind,” he shadowed his words with a shake of his head. “Thea,” Felicity lay a kind hand on her slim shoulder, brushing back the curtain of deep chestnut hair, “I think you should go home, I can call Oliver or…”

She stop herself mid-sentence when she realised that was the first time she had said his name or even allowed herself to think about Oliver since the painfully silent moments they had spent together under the Grim Reaper’s carved eyes over two weeks ago.

She had buried herself under mountains of work just to occupy her mind so she wouldn’t dwell on that hollow, empty feeling – the one she was wrestling with right now. It ached, like phantom pains in her chest as she involuntarily sucked air through her clench teeth while a pang low across her belly felt just like a realistic gut punch. She had made herself so busy in fact that two weeks had gone by in the flicker of an eye.

“No, please, not him,” her voice was stretched and merely an echo of what it usually was. “Roy then?”

Thea fell back onto the couch, she had no fight left. She barely had a nod in her.

Roy pulled the car over to the curb a distance from Verdant Motors and blew out an exacerbated sigh as Thea clutched her backpack to her chest and stared blankly out the window. “You need to stay in the car, you look like shit and Oliver will know you’re fucking high,” he mumbled as he snapped back his seatbelt, “I just have to get some shit and make up a reason for leaving work.”

He touched her shoulder to check she had heard him and Thea reactively flinched like his fingertip were fire pokers against her skin. “What the fuck did you take anyway?”

Her eyes blinked rapidly as she tried to focus on Roy, “Vertigo.” Roy angrily huffed as he raked his fingers across his cropped hair. “Thea that shit is a hallucinate, why would you take that?” he gritted as he slapped his palm into the steering wheel.

“Because,” she snipped, bitter tears forming in the corner of her blackened eyes, “I wanted to and
what the fuck is it to you? You’re not my mother, I don’t have one remember.”
She pulled her legs up to her knees and twisted away from Roy, her attention moving back outside
the car.

She could head Roy huffing through his limited options.
“Just stay in the car, I’ll take you home and get you through it.”
His hand folded around her cheek and pulled her face back towards him, “okay Thea?”
She nodded limply.
“Stay in the car.”
He pecked a gentle kiss to her forehead before he stepped from the car and shook off the moment
as he started towards the shop.

Thea rested her head onto her backpack and breathed deeply through the canvas weave. There was
more Vertigo in there along with the little pink opiates she had been selling on the streets.

She knew she was shaking because she could hear the sound of the creased fabric rubbing against
itself and it was like sandpaper to her ears, gritty and assaulting, but there was nothing she could
seem to do to still it. It was as though she could feel her body but not control it. Someone, or
something, else was pulling the strings to it and she was utterly helpless to stop it.

Her skin felt like it was covered with tiny claw marks of whatever it was she could feel burrowing
underneath her skin. Her scalp felt raw and painful and when she pulled her hand down from her
head she realised she had scratched it so violently that flecks of blood now stained the tips of her
fingers.

She forced her eyes upward, to focus on something else until Roy returned and could take her
home. The sign outside the garage swayed in a sudden gust of wind and Thea sucked in a startled
breath before she let it out in the form of hot tears streaming down her face.

_Oliver wasn’t the only one with demons. Thea had hers too._

Curtis peeked around the corner of Felicity’s office before he tapped lightly on her opened door.
She looked up from her screen and smiled before she rubbed her thumbs into her tired eyes.

“Late night?” Curtis asked while he dangled a brown paper bag into her office.
“I think my prescription is old, my eyes are getting a little fuzzy,” she brushed her hand under her
glasses one more time before she set them down on the bridge of her nose and stared across the
room with one eyebrow plucked up towards her hairline, “and don’t say it’s old age or I will fire
you.”

Curtis laughed as he crossed his heart, “hadn’t even occurred to me to say such a thing,” he
chortled before he rustled the bag, “Roy picked Thea up about fifteen minutes ago and I got you
lunch.”

Felicity _mmmm_-d loudly, her stomach had been doing backflips for the last hour so ‘ravenous’
didn’t even begin to explain how she was feeling right now.

“But,” he continued, raising the inflection in his tone, “I thought we could eat it up on the rooftop
like we used to,” his eyebrows tweaked as he waited for an answer, “the fresh air might do you
some good.”

“Okay,” she relented, without a fight because the idea actually sounded like a pretty good one.
Ten minutes later found them out in the open air setting up the two fold up chairs they had managed to trek up there over a year ago and store in the lockbox without anyone calling them out on it.

“I’m surprised these chairs are still up here,” Felicity chuckled as she pulled her hair back into a messy bun.
It had been a while since they had ventured up to their quiet spot where the wind was cold enough to turn your cheeks red and your lips blue. Where the same air may have been thinner but it was also so much fresher.

They had brainstormed about everything and talked about nothing at all while sat up there and Felicity sighed gently as she tried to remember the last time they had done it.

It seemed liked her life only lived in two time spectrums now – before Oliver and after – and the best she could decide on was that she hadn’t seen Starling from this vantage point since before.

Curtis handed her the Papi’s Deli bag and she took it with a gluttonous smack of her lips.
“I hope you got an extra-large one because I am…” she spoke as she quickly unwrapped the sandwich, “…Oh god.”
She slammed the paper back down across her lunch and stared at Curtis in absolute horror. The wind had caught the smell of something rank from inside the sandwich and the instant Felicity had pulled back the paper the stench had smacked her across the face.

“What is this?” Felicity gagged as she lifted the blanket of paper to carefully inspect it.
Curtis laughed her dramatics off, “it’s a meat sub, no pickles, extra mayo and double meat. That’s your order,” he prattled, finishing with a proud smile.
“Is the meat off?” Felicity cringed, the smell once more assaulting her nose before she wrapped it tightly back up and jutted it as far away from her face as her arm could stretch.

“I don’t smell anything but goodness,” he sighed with a roll of his eyes for added measure.
Felicity swung the sandwich into his face, “Curtis it stinks like rancid carcasses.”
“Now how would you know what they smelt like? You’ve never been on a farm.”
Felicity scolded his wisecrack with a pinched brow, “I just know… and they smell like this.”
Curtis shook his head in rigid denial, “I got it from Papi’s and their shit is the best.”

Felicity couldn’t seem to stop herself from gagging and, even when she sewed her lips shut her body lurched her shoulders up.

“It’s the meat,” she retched before she put her face into the crook of her elbow, “It stinks.”
Curtis leaned towards the sandwich Felicity held at arm’s reached and sniffed deeply, “it doesn’t stink.”
“It stinks,” she argued.
He shook his head vehemently, “it doesn’t stink.”

Regardless of what Curtis said, that sandwich was not going anywhere near her mouth, “You have it then.”
He shrugged and took it from her without argument before he handed her a large chocolate chip cookie he had stashed in his satchel for later.

Felicity thanked him with a soft moan and salacious eyes that were meant entirely for the cookie.
“So, do you want to talk about it?” he asked as he casually stretched his legs out in front of him.
“Does this face suggest I want to talk about it?” Felicity grumbled petulantly.

Oliver hadn’t called, or text or done anything and while she wasn’t sure what exactly she would
have liked or expected him to do, the whole thing made her feel like a confused teenager and she hated that.

“You could call him,” Curtis offered as he leaned away from her in case she took exception to his suggestion in the form of a fist to his arm. She whipped her head towards him and scoffed, “Why would I?” Another casual shrug, “To clear the air.”

We’d probably just end up having phone sex
Felicity bit back her smile at the thought that had instantly popped into her head, mostly because it was probably an accurate conclusion to make as she finished off her cookie and dusted her palms together, letting the wind steal the crumbs.

She cupped her hands to her breasts and yawned lazily, she would ignore Curtis for now – her annoyance at the bra she was wearing today was of far more immediate concern.

“What are you doing?” Curtis shrieked and then laughed. Felicity looked down and realised she had begun massaging her breasts without realising.

She slapped his arm like a whip, “This bra is annoying, it’s cutting in too tight and they hurt alright?”

“Okay because I mention Oliver and you start touching your breasts,” he mocked with a smile that was half an inch away from being a full smirk, “you can see why I’m all WHAAAT?”

“That’s not…” she grumbled, tongue-tied, “no, Curtis, I just must have put on the wrong bra this morning because this one feels tight and it’s making my boobs ache.”

She narrowed her gaze and held out her hand, “Now, hand over the other cookie you’re hiding.” “I’m a little afraid of you today, your aura is grouchy,” Curtis peeped as he handed over the appeasement in the form of a cookie. Felicity shrugged airily, “I’m okay with that.”

---

Thea couldn’t breathe. She knew her chest was moving but in her mind it felt like she is breathing backwards, blowing out air before she'd had a chance to take any in. Her chest was heavy as though her ribcage was shrinking in around her.

She swung her backpack over her shoulder and stumbled from the car. She needed to find Roy. Her feet seemed to move on their own and her steps weren’t fluid or even, but rather she made the walk to Verdant like a toddler might.

She stumbled directly into the solid wall of muscles that was Diggle’s chest and, unable to make her feet move backwards, there she stayed. “Thea?” he asked as he looked down at her head pressed to her chest.

She looked up and blinked at him profusely as though she was trying to decide if she knew him. Her cheeks were flushed and the hair around her face was stuck against her temples with sweat. “Where is Roy?” she slurred, her tongue felt too wide for her mouth and it sat inside it limp.

Oliver slid out from under a Jeep when he heard the recognisable, but oddly pitched, sound of Thea’s voice. He stood up from the trolley and brushed a firm stroke down his jeans to clean off his hand. “Thea?” Her head snapped towards him with eyes like blackened saucers.
She stumbled his way and Oliver caught her before she turned almost catatonic in his arms. “Thea, what’s wrong?” he yelled just as Roy ran out from the office with his jacket slung over his forearm, ready to leave.

Thea shook the inertia from her body before she pushed back from Oliver’s chest. “This is your fault,” she said through gritted teeth and with half-lidded eyes. “Thea?” Oliver pleaded, instantly aware that there was something wrong with her. “You’re just like her,” she scathed as her arms wrapped tightly around her waist, hunching her willowy shoulders forward.

Oliver reached for her instinctively as she swayed from her heel to the ball of her feet, “Like who?” She tore her elbow from his reach, “Like our mother,” she chided, each word laced with disdain she couldn’t temper, “she was a liar and a cheat and you’re just like her!” She punched out at his chest, beating against the rounds of his shoulders as tears haunted her face.

“Thea, it wasn’t like that, it was complicated,” Oliver lamented, every bone in his body aching to hold his sister and to take away from her the pain she was feeling and the anger she was carrying, “it’s complicated for me too,” he added, his voice frail and almost broken with regret.

“No, it fucking wasn’t. She was supposed to love your father, she was supposed to be this good fucking person, but she wasn’t, she was a liar,” she punched him again, this time stumbling forward and dropping to her knees. She looked up at him as Oliver stooped to help her, her eyes were glassy and tired and her face clammy and spotted while her shoulders slumped forward, “And you’re just like her. She didn’t love anyone but herself and neither do you,” she spoke with what little anger she could muster now that the air had all but left her body.

Oliver knew she didn’t mean it, but the knife stung regardless. She swatted him away as he tried to help her up, causing the backpack to slip from her shoulder. “Thea,” Oliver lifted her chin but her eyes were vacant, lost. His attention turned to Roy as he helped Thea to her feet.

“Roy, what has she taken?” Oliver asked, the frantic tone in his voice equalled with the anger. Roy shrugged anxiously and Oliver reactively pushed his heavy palms against Roy’s chest, “What has she taken?” When an answer didn’t come, Oliver shoved Roy towards a car and pressed his forearm across his throat, “What the fuck has she taken?” he screamed, the hot temperament of his words colouring his skin red and pulsing the vein across his temple.

“Vertigo,” Roy admitted, his voice croaked as he struggled for air, “but I didn’t give her that shit, I swear, I wouldn’t have let her take it.”

Oliver’s eyes were as dark as the sky at night, “Give me your keys.” Roy fisted into his pocket and offered them to Oliver on an open palm.

Oliver released his grip and took the keys wordlessly from Roy before turning his attention to Thea. He grabbed her wrist and began walking her towards the car. “I’m not going with you,” she argued, suddenly sparkling to life as she clawed relentlessly at the fingers roped around her wrist, “I’m not fucking going with you.”

Ignoring her he walked on with John and Roy following. “I hate you,” Thea screamed as she lashed out her free hand, “I hate everything about you.” He kept walking, swallowing all her hate with a pained breath.

“I have no fucking brother,” she hissed as she anchored her feet to the sidewalk and spat onto the ground, “You’re a liar just like she was, she fucked up everything, just like you did.”
Oliver’s face was etched in pain and although he knew he could pick her up and carry her the rest of the way with ease because her hundred pounds at best was no match for him, he also knew that she would fight him every step of the way and taking her to the hospital like that might delay her getting seen to. He couldn’t risk that.

“Can you take her?” Oliver begged as his eyes met John’s, “please.”

“Of course,” John assured before he took the keys from Oliver. He turned to Roy who cowered in front of him, “go to the hospital with her, tell them what she’s taken and make sure they see her.”

Roy nodded just as Oliver relinquished his grip on Thea’s wrist. It pained him more than anything he’d ever encountered not to go with her, and he bore the scars of many a brutal act, but getting her there was the priority, so he let her go – walking hugged to Roy’s chest.

John slapped his shoulder affectionately, “I’ll call you from the hospital.”

Oliver nodded his thanks as he watched Thea sink into the backseat of the car. “She doesn’t mean it you know. She’s young and angry and high,” John added.

Oliver smiled bleakly, he understood what John was trying to do, but for now his concern was solely on his sister, not his own hurt feelings, “Just get her seen, please.”

A few moments later he watched the car pull away with John and the helm and Thea huddled in the backseat with Roy. He waited until the car was out of sight before he walked gloomily with a heavy drag on his feet, back towards the shop.

He stooped to pick up the bag Thea had left behind when his thoughts suddenly moved to Felicity – she should know – but he shouldn’t call her.

He took his phone from his front pocket and dialled another number.

A few notes of the Star Trek Voyager theme echoed through the quiet air before Curtis realised it was his phone disturbing the peace. He pulled it from his satchel and stared at the display a little surprised by what the display told him.

He looked across the rooftop towards where Felicity was standing at a distance letting the cool air brush against her cheeks. She hadn’t noticed him or his phone ringing and it didn’t appear like she was going to any time soon. “Hello, Oliver?” he answered.

Felicity swayed with the wind as she kept her eyes closed and listened to the distant $thwop$, $thwop$, $thwop$ of helicopter blades. It was probably a little strange how that sound had always calmed her. Even as a child growing up in Vegas the loud noises of the city that most people found jarring had always relaxed her when anxiety was beating at her door and today she found the same serenity up here.

She carried around a feeling of morose today and despite her best efforts at self-diagnosing the same, she couldn’t pinpoint why. But standing here, where it felt like she was floating amidst the clouds, weightless, seemed to offer her some respite from the strange feeling that gnawed at her.

Perhaps it had something to do with the fact she was still living in the apartment and that, despite her insistence to the contrary, she wasn’t so sure about moving back to the house.

She had tried, last weekend, suitcase and all, but it didn’t feel like a home anymore. Everything she
touched felt tainted and everywhere she walked felt foreign.

The next day she made a call to the contractors and ordered a new bathroom and kitchen and a complete renovation of all bedrooms, despite the fact they had all but signed off on the earlier work. Undoubtedly a psychiatrist would diagnose her with PTSD before she even got a chance to sit on his expensive couch and, if she allowed herself to dwell on it, there was probably some truth to that diagnosis, but for right now Felicity would just allow herself to believe that a new kitchen would make all the difference.

Curtis’ hand on her shoulder startled her from her thoughts and made her eyes ping open. He looked worried and for a moment Felicity wondered if she had spoken out loud some of the thoughts twisting around her head.

“What is it?” she asked, mild trepidation stitched through her words.  
“Thea is in hospital.”


“She took some street drugs,” Curtis explained glumly.

Her hand clasped over her mouth in disbelief.

There wasn’t anything even close to a smile on Curtis’ sullen expression as he continued, “She’s up at the hospital now.”

“We should go.”

Felicity didn’t wait for an answer before she walked towards the door, but she stopped a few feet away from it.

“Wait, how do you know?”

Curtis looked down at the phone still clasped in his hands and sighed, “Oliver just called, he thought you should know, but I guess he wasn’t sure about calling you directly.”

She inhaled sharply as she bobbed out a short nod. She didn’t know whether to be sad that he didn’t feel he could call her himself or happy that he had even thought about her. She pushed the juxtaposition to the back of her mind, she couldn’t focus on that right now, she needed to go see her friend.

Felicity found John and Roy’s familiar faces in the waiting room a few moments after arriving. Roy was pacing with his head between two white-knuckled hands while John stood when he saw her.

“How is she?” Felicity asked after making a beeline to John.

“She’s okay, they’ve given her something to rest and we should be able to see her soon,” John explained, the exhaustion in his voice was blended with the relief in his expression.

Felicity looked around expecting to see a third familiar face in the crowd, “Where’s Oliver?” she finally asked when she didn’t see it.

John wrestled with his hands before he answered sadly, “Thea didn’t want him here.”

“Oh,” Felicity sighed, “I’m so sorry, it’s all just such a mess.”

She tracked a lethargic hand across her scalp and down to the ends of her hair.

“You don’t have anything to be sorry about Felicity,” he assured with a kindly smile that was as genuine and it was comforting.

But still…

“I hear you saying that,” she breathed, inwardly holding the breath that sat in her throat, “but his
sister is lying in a hospital bed and she won’t see him,” she brushed back a tear that sprung unexpectedly from her eye, “I feel like I came in and messed their family up,” another tear despite her best efforts to sniff them back, “and look at me now, I’m crying to a man who I’ve met maybe three times,” she shook her head, annoyed at her pitiful display and her inability to stop the tears that were crisscrossing down her cheeks, “I just can’t stop these.”

John smiled as he opened his arms and stepped forward. Despite her every usual inclination against hugging virtual strangers she took him up on his offer and fell, sobbing, onto his chest; and it just happened to be one of the best hugs she had ever experienced.

“Oliver and Thea will be just fine,” he soothed as he continued to hold her warmly, “They’ve been through some shit and they’ve always come out the other end.” Felicity couldn’t find any words to thank John for his reassurance so she simply nodded between the sobs that shook through her shoulders and wet his tee shirt.

The nurse approached them with a kind, but serious, smile drawn over her lips.
“You can go in and see her for a few minutes but, just a short time and only two of you please, if you’d like to follow me.”
Roy hurriedly, and expectedly, took the first slot as Felicity stepped back, expecting Digg to go ahead of her.
“You go,” the statue of a man offered, “I think she’d like to see your face before mine.”
“Thank you.”

Thea and Roy were already talking when Felicity reached the room.
“I can come back later,” she offered as she noted how small and frail Thea looked in the hospital bed and imagined just how heart breaking the sight would be for Oliver.
“I’m so sorry Felicity you trusted me and I…” Thea struggled to sit up as Felicity instinctively rushed towards the bed, “I understand if you want to take back the scholarship.”
Felicity took her hand and gently warmed it between her palms, “I don’t and I won’t. Don’t worry about any of that.”

John sat back down into his seat and dialled Oliver’s number. The call barely rung for a second before Oliver answered it with a hurried, “How is she?”
“She’s going to be fine,” he comforted, waiting for the sigh of relief from Oliver before he continued, “They want to keep her in for a few days. The drugs elevated her heart rate so they want to keep an eye on it.”
He could almost hear Oliver nodding and he didn’t doubt his friend was also running a troubled hand through the lengths of his hair.

“You should come down.”
Oliver sighed with an air of hopelessness, “She doesn’t want to see me.”
“And when have you ever listened before?”
A brief moment of joviality followed in the shape of a soft laugh from both men.
“Felicity is here,” Digg added, leaving the sentence hanging just as it was.
“Good,” Oliver breathed, “I’m glad.”
“Maybe you could see her too when you come down.”

There was a few seconds of silence, long enough that John checked to see that the call hadn’t disconnected.
“No,” Oliver dejected, “I can’t.”
“Why, because you’re scared?” Digg laid down his challenge bluntly.
“No,” came the embittered response, “because she’s better off without me.”

John sighed, long and loud, making his frustration pointedly obvious, “And who decided that? You or Malcolm?”
“Not now Digg.”
“Then when Oliver? When you’re fifty and sitting in an empty shop wondering how the hell you ended up so alone,” Digg goaded, “hell that’s if you even make it to fifty.”

The truth stung Oliver’s ears, but it was true all the same.
“I don’t want to die alone,” Oliver admitted, his voice thin and trembled. He could feel the tears building up behind his eyes and the pain swelling in his throat. 
<em>He didn’t want to die alone. 
He’d seen a future with Felicity. 
“Then don’t, be with Felicity.”</em>

Oliver bit back the tears he couldn’t afford to shed right now. He couldn’t allow himself to think of her, to think of what they could have been.

<em>I love you Felicity, every time he’d said it, he’d meant it. 
He wasn’t an angel, but she had loved him, scars and all. 
Deserved or not. 
She had loved him.</em>

“I’m going to go to Roy’s and grab some clothes for Thea and then come down.”
He didn’t give John a chance to say anything further.

Oliver looked around the shop before he shut off the lights and locked up.
But he forgot about her bag.

---

[Later than Night]

The rain tapping against the window pane was a welcomed distraction to the thoughts pummelling Oliver as he sat in the corner of Thea’s dim hospital room. She had been sleeping when he’d arrived and he’d slipped in quietly to let her rest, so far, despite the late hour, no one had come and asked him to leave.

The sound of hospital sheets rustling pulled Oliver's head up from his palms. Thea was awake.
“I can go if you want,” he hesitated.
Thea looked across at him, silent and virtually expressionless as he anxiously ran his thumb over the cracked vinyl and cut his nail through the exposed foam on the arm of the hospital chair, just waiting for <em>something</em>.

She didn’t say anything and Oliver stood to leave. He made it five paces towards the door before she spoke up.
“Wait, Ollie, wait,” she said, her voice so thin that his name was barely above a whisper.
He turned and stood at a distance to the foot of the bed before she beckoned him closer, patting the space beside her.

Wordlessly he sat down beside her on the bed with his hands clasped in front of him, still trembling with worry for her.

“Digg told me what I said,” she whispered while she reached out the hand with the IV line taped to
it and rested it on top of Oliver's clasped hands.  
“It's alright Thea,” Oliver breathed, his eyes wet and puffy with both worry and fear.  
“It's not alright Oliver,” her lip shivered as she spoke, “you've never made a selfish decision before, I can’t think that you would make one now. I was wrong,” she brushed back fresh tears, “everything I said was wrong and I’m sorry, you should hate me.”

His hand slipped out from under hers and tenderly cupped her face. Her eyes squeezed closed, releasing more tears, as she nestled into his palm.  
“You don’t ever need worry about us Thea,” he soothed while his thumb brush back the tears, “I will always protect you and love you. There is nothing on the face of this earth that I wouldn’t do for you.”

“I know,” she whimpered, “that’s what I’m afraid of.”

A curtain of silence fell between them as Oliver tucked her hair behind her ear and Thea folded the ends of her fingers around his hand.

“You still love her don’t you?” she asked, breaking the lull.

“Very much so,” Oliver admitted sadly.

“Then you should be with her.”

“It's complicated,” was all he could offer and it was spoken with very little fight, because Oliver had so little of that to offer anymore.

“Does it have to be?”

A tiny nod, “For now.”

Thea closed her eyes and sighed achingly, “It’s my father isn’t it?”

Oliver scooted closer, taking Thea's frail and sobbing body into his arms.

“Sssh don’t let it worry you,” he whispered as he pressed her head against his chest.

“I wish he would just leave you alone Ollie, leave us both alone,” she cried, twisting her fingers in his shirt, “if mom hadn’t…”

She couldn’t finish the sentence, but she didn't need to, it was one that had filled Oliver's thoughts for so many years.

“I know,” he sighed.

“Why would she do that? Why would she sleep with him, she loved dad, Robert didn’t she?” Thea peppered the questions Oliver couldn’t answer as she looked up from his chest.

“I don’t know that either Thea,” he admitted sadly, he wished he could make sense of it too, “in every memory I have of them they loved each other.”

Thea pulled back, though her hand still clutched his chest, “Like you love Felicity?”

He brushed back her hair once again and sighed, listless, there was no answer he could give that would make this any easier for either of them.

“Get some rest speedy,” he said as he stood.

“Will you stay?”

He smiled softly, “Do you want me to?”

“Yea,” she shrugged.

Oliver made his way back to the worn chair and Thea settled back into the bed. He pulled the chair closer to the bed before sitting down, “Then wild horses couldn’t pull me away.”

Thea chuckled as he lay his hand on the mattress and she linked hers over the top.

“You and horses,” she snorted.

“Why is that funny?”

“I would pay to see you in a cowboy hat on a horse ranch with a piece of dried grass hanging from your lips,” she mocked as she rolled her head towards him.

Oliver pouted, “I think I’d make a good cattle rancher.”
“You’d probably still be taking care of me there too,” she remarked, giving his hand a gentle squeeze.
He nodded slowly as he rested his shoulders against the back of the armchair, “Any universe speedy.”

[One week later: 20 November 2012]

Thea had spent two days in hospital, both recovering and detoxing. Since coming out she had promised Felicity to undertake counselling and she had already attended a support meeting. It was a long road she had ahead of her, she knew, but it was one she was hopeful in taking.

Oliver had promised to answer whatever questions she found herself asking about their parents and so far, despite the fact that memories of them pained Oliver to recall, he had kept his word and Thea was slowly putting together a picture of her lineage.

The day was like any other, the weather was inclement, but so far the rain had staved off. The distant sound of sirens filling the mid morning air was the usual ambience for the Glades and no one in Verdant paid it any mind, even as it drew closer.

It was only when the sounds became deafeningly close that Oliver pulled his head up from the deconstructed transmission laid out in front of him and the other three, Roy, Thea and Digg, stopped their playful bickering.

Before any of them could offer comment, four Police cars with lights blazing and sirens blearing, screeched to a stop outside the shop. Within seconds the garage was flooded with officers, guns drawn, shouting instructions to put their hands in the air and stay where they were.

“What’s going on?” Oliver yelled as he folded his hands behind his head.
“We have a warrant to search the shop,” the officer behind him gritted before he briskly patted down Oliver, “you the owner?”
Oliver nodded before he had a single sheet of paper thrust in front of him. He lowered his eyes to read it, trying to make sense of it in the surrounding chaos.
“There isn’t anything here,” Oliver growled as the four of them were marched to the edge of the shop front.
“We’ll be the judge of that.”

Jax barked and tugged violently against his chain when a large German Shepherd was led inside. Oliver whistled sharply and Jax settled to a low growl with bared teeth.

A few minutes later an officer returned with a small black backpack. Oliver saw the recognition on Thea's face, it was the one she had left there the day she was taken to the hospital.

“Nothing here right?” the officer chastised as he pulled out a plastic bag, swollen with pink tablets, from inside it.
Oliver watched as Thea stepped forward and began to open her mouth.

He pulled her back and stepped in front, “That’s my bag, those are mine,” he lied with the conviction of a priest.
Moments later he was on the ground with a heel in his back, concrete grazing his cheek and his hands handcuffed tightly at the small of his back.

“Ollie no,” Thea cried as she lurched forward, but Digg caught her and pulled her tight against his
chest, he understood.

“It’s alright Thea,” Oliver offered a bleak smile in an attempt to calm her, “stay with Digg. It’ll be alright.”
It was almost 8pm when Felicity was startled from the pages of her novel to the sound of a desperate knock on her door. She tightened the comfy fleece robe around her body and edged her glasses a little further up the bridge of her nose before she padded stealthily to the door.

She had visited the construction site that was once her home after work and the nostalgia of it had meant the ‘jitters’ had followed her home. Her sock-clad feet moved silently over the floorboards, avoiding the one that squeaked, until she could press herself into the back of the door and stretch her body up onto tiptoes where her eye met with the peep-hole. She relaxed when she recognised Thea, although there was a certain sort of panic in her eyes and she looked like she had been crying.

Felicity’s stomach lurched up her throat in a sudden wave of nausea, as she ran through scenarios in
her head like a bullet train. They all led back to Oliver…

*He’d come off his bike.*
*He’d been shot.*
*He’d left Starling.*

She boxed her shoulders into her chest and retreated from the door, stepping on the squeaky floorboard that made her reactively jump back. She shook the thoughts out with a sharp exhale and unchained the door. It was another calming breath later that she turned the deadbolt and opened the door – preparing herself for whatever it was.

“What, what’s wrong?” Felicity asked, skipping the usual pleasantries because the fresh batch of tears that were running down Thea’s cheeks didn’t suggest the need for pleasantries.

“It’s Oliver…”

With those two words Felicity felt the air being purged from her body. Her fingers tightened their grip on the edge of the door to hold her balance when her legs wobbled. Her eyes blinked rapidly, fighting back the tears that had sprung up surprisingly, all before she took a step backwards, opened the door wider and gestured for Thea to come outside – whatever would follow wasn’t a conversation to be had in the corridor; of that much Felicity was certain.

“What happened?” Felicity asked as she leaned back against the door to close it.

She watched as Thea dug nail trenches into the inside creases of her elbows while her svelte frame rocked from one foot to the other. She was anxious and Felicity wondered if every nerve ending in Thea’s young body was craving for something to take the edge off.

“He’s been arrested,” Thea sobbed as her shoulders fell forward.

Felicity slid closer and caught Thea to her chest, despite the fact Oliver’s younger sister was a few inches taller than a heel-less Felicity, she felt so frail and young in her arms at that moment. Felicity walked the two of them around the front of the couch and, without letting go of the embrace, they slumped down into the enveloping softness that the plush sofa afforded them. Her hand stroked through Thea’s hair as she gently swayed with the sobbing teen.

Thea lifted her head from Felicity’s shoulder and banished the tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand while she struggled through three deep breaths.

“What happened?” Felicity asked only when she could tell Thea was in a state to answer.

Thea’s lips furrowed as she collected both her thoughts and emotions, “He was found in possession of Class A drugs, enough to brand him a supplier.”

Felicity felt her heart sink into the suede cushion underneath her, she wasn’t a lawyer but she knew the kind of penalty that might carry and she also knew this wasn’t Oliver’s first time behind bars in a judicial system that took note of recidivism.

She couldn’t believe it.

It wasn’t that she didn’t want to either, she just couldn’t. The Oliver she knew, loved, he wasn’t a street dealer.

“It’s my fault,” Thea whispered as her eyes glassed over with guilt-laden tears, the type that felt like fire when they rolled down your cheek, “they were my drugs and he took the blame for them.” Felicity reflexively squeezed Thea’s shoulder consolingly. While it didn’t make the situation any better, it did make more sense. *Oliver the Selfless takes another hit.*

“It was from before,” Thea added, blinking up at Felicity in hopes her friend would believe that she had kept her vow to stop.
Felicity nodded softly, giving the young Queen a passing moment of comfort in knowing that she believed her.
Thea hung her head and rocked it back and forth softly, “With everything that was happening, I forgot about my backpack. I left it at Verdant and the cops found it.”

Idly Felicity combed her fingers through the tendrils of hair that had fallen from her messy top knot, “How would they know to look there?”
It seemed a logical question and Felicity’s mind automatically went to one person with some sort of a sick personal vendetta against Oliver for reasons she didn’t understand and probably never would but, before she could say his name, Thea bet her to it.
“It wasn’t Malcolm. He’s an asshole but the drugs were his, I was selling them for him,” Thea admitted though each word pained her, “getting them taken means he loses money,” she looked down as she touched a shaking finger to her neck, “a lot of money.”

“The hospital,” Felicity breathed as the conclusion formed simultaneously on her lips and in her mind.
Thea nodded limply, “I came in with street drugs in my system and I’m seventeen,” she bit back new tears as her nails scoured her arm, “some new blue blood is probably trying to make a name for himself, sees my name on it and thinks it’ll get him a good collar, but,” she drew a sharp breath in, “Malcolm Merlyn doesn’t give a fuck about anyone else, Oliver in jail isn’t even a blip to him.”

Felicity tried to find some words of comfort, but her heart was somewhere lodged in her throat and all she could do was offer Thea a sympathetic smile and a soft, “he’ll be alright,” that neither of them bought.

Thea edged her fingernail along a vein that travelled down her forearm and towards her wrist because the slight pain it caused helped stave off any tears for now, and perhaps it held back her craving too, “they’ll try and make an example out of Oliver,” she lamented with a quivered lip, “probably try and make him turn nark,” her eyes bounced up to Felicity’s, threaded with sorrow and pain, “but this isn’t his fault, it’s mine. I don’t even know where he is.”

Felicity’s shoulder’s arched back, “you haven’t seen him?”
Thea’s head shook softly, “I tried, I’ve been trying all day, but central processing wouldn’t tell me where he’d gone, they said I was a minor and not his lawyer. Felicity…” her eyes became pools of fresh tears, “he could be in a lot of trouble.”

Felicity didn’t doubt that Oliver could handle himself, he wasn’t a wallflower and his physique and stature would have been automatically intimidating, but the butterflies that had been fluttering around her stomach all day seemed to be agitated at the thought of not knowing where he was.

She stood up abruptly, making Thea look up startled, “I’ll go make a call.”

As Felicity walked towards her bedroom she knew she didn’t have any favours to call in or any home telephone numbers that belonged to anyone important enough to tell her where Oliver was, but she did have something.

She kicked the door almost closed behind her and sat down in front of her laptop. It had been sometime since she’d used her talents for this sort of thing, but civil obedience be damned. She cracked her knuckles and began.

“What are you doing?” Thea asked intrigued as she startled Felicity from her hacker trance about ten minutes later.
“Ohmygodnothing,” Felicity shrieked as she slammed her laptop closed, “you need a bell or something,” she added as her hand clasped at her racing heart.
“Were you hacking the police records?” Felicity squinted as she tried to think of some way around this that would continue to paint her as the careful, law abiding citizen that her company and laurels rested on.

But she couldn’t.
“Yes,” she admitted with a grim smile as she raised the lid of the laptop, “I prefer the term window shopping through their records, but yes.”
“You can do that?” Thea sounded more awestruck than surprised.
“Can, should?” Felicity prattled with her hands raised like the scales of justice.
“You are a badass,” Thea grinned, though it looked only superficial under the layers of spent tears.
“Is that judgment I’m hearing?” Felicity smirked softly, bright azure eyes framing her wide, deep pearls of black.
Thea shifted her weight to her left foot and smiled, “Pride.”

“So did you find anything out?” she added as her dry lips rolled over each other and she reactively went in search of her chapstick.

It took Felicity only a few more taps of the keys to find what she was looking for – although not hoping for.

“He’s at Iron Heights,” she answered quietly as his record, mugshot and transfer orders stacked up on her screen.
“Doesn’t he go to remand or something first, like a holding cell or something?” Thea was agitated and confused and any residual smile had vanished.
“Oliver confessed,” Felicity answered as she stared at the arresting notes while her chest tightened and her eyelids became heavy with the knowledge, “he was transferred to maximum security a few hours ago.”

Her mind flooded with hazy images of Oliver searched, fingerprinted, shackled and thrown to the pit. Maximum security seemed overkill for the crime, but his rap sheet had him confessing to a raft of offenses and at least one of those was a federal crime.

“I’m sorry Thea…” her voice trailed off, aware that there was nothing more to be said and nothing that could be done.

Oliver had confessed to whatever they wanted to pin on him to make sure they didn’t look anywhere else. She could only stand to skim the confession but, the bag was his, the drugs were his and he was supplying them.

“There has to be something, something you could do?” Thea’s voice quivered before she slumped down onto the corner of Felicity’s bed.

Ideas, none of them legal, ran through Felicity’s head – she could hack the evidence system and get the backpack lost in a chain of evidence kerfuffle, or hell even destroyed, she could destroy his confession, pin it to some other poor sap who was already facing life in jail or maybe she could override the entire prison security and in the confusion that would follow when the cell doors swung open Oliver could escape…but none of that would work, a backpack full of thousands of dollars’ worth of drugs wasn’t a simple blood work up, they were destroyed differently and not in a way Felicity could orchestrate. Destroying his confession on record would only destroy the digital version, pinning it to someone else would eventually be noticed, letting the doors swing open on a maximum security prison…well she could only imagine what that would unleash and Oliver being his stupid self would probably just sit in his cell and accept his fate anyway.

“There isn’t anything I can do, but I know a few good lawyers, I’ll call around some tomorrow, see
if anyone can think up a legal way around this.”
Felicity’s hands soothed down Thea’s slumped shoulders before the young woman looked up, “can you go see him?”
The lump in Felicity’s throat made her want to vomit.
“I don’t…” her voice floated off as her eyes blinked at the suggestion.
“You can tell him to recant, let them test the bag and they’ll trace it back to me and that’s okay, I deserve whatever I get.”
“You know Oliver would never go for that Thea.”
“I’m young, it’s my first arrest, I’ll probably just get a year in juvie.”
Felicity pursed her lips into a hopeless smile, with that amount of drugs she doubted Thea would get off that lightly, a fact Oliver too would have known.

“Thea, Oliver is doing this to protect you, I don’t hold any sway with him to get him to do otherwise,” she lamented, before she added a whispered, “not anymore.”
Though she wasn’t sure she ever had.

“He still loves you, you have to know that right?” Thea bickered as a flourish of fresh tears skated down her damp cheeks.
Felicity’s lip quaked as she tried to hold the unrelenting tears at bay, begging them to stay glassing up her eyes, “that’s the past.”
As she spoke her arms snaked around her waist, holding it in case it sobbed forward and made her heartache that much more noticeable.
I don’t love you, I never did.
Those words weren’t easily forgotten.

“No, he still does,” Thea’s brows furrowed and pinched inward, “he told me.”
Felicity sucked in the words atop a sharp breath as they buried themselves in the place she was desperately trying to protect – her heart.

A part of her wanted to hear that confirmation because when she walked away from Oliver that second time on Halloween, she didn’t see the cruelty that he’d affronted her with the month before, rather she saw a man, broken, lost, caged and in pain. But she also hated to hear what Thea was saying, knowing how desperately she had tried to untwist her heart from Oliver only to have those three words ‘he still does’ entangle her once again.

She opened her mouth to beg for enough, but no words came, only the soft and shallow sound of her breathing emptied into the room.

“What he did had something to do with Malcolm,” Thea kicked her shoe across the carpet in frustration, “I don’t know what, but you have to know Felicity, you have to know that Oliver still loves you…”

Stop. Please stop.
She bit back the words, but her eyes still pleaded them.
“I’m sorry, it’s not my place,” Thea retracted, seeing the pain her words had etched in Felicity’s tempest eyes, “but he might still listen to you,” she added softly, showing her vulnerability like Felicity had never seen it before.
“I’ll try,” Felicity relented, at least this meeting wouldn’t be a repeat of the last – two-inch thick glass would see to that.

The two woman walked sullenly, for their own reasons, back out into the living room, their cheeks red and painted with tiny tracks of tears.
“I know I’ve already asked so much,” Thea whispered as her head hung low, only lifting once she’d finished.
“It’s fine Thea, whatever you need,” Felicity response was just as quiet.

“Jax is downstairs in the car. We can’t keep him at Roy’s and Dig’s baby is allergic. I would have stayed with him at the shop but the cops won’t let us back in,” Thea explained, her hands rolling over each other as she leaned into the ball of her foot, “I was hoping maybe he could stay with you.”

Felicity didn’t have an answer even though her mouth opened almost immediately to give one. Having a tee-shirt of Oliver’s still there upset her, how could his beloved dog not?
“I’d be happy to pay for a kennel or…” she offered, hurriedly trying to think of some alternative that meant not having a living, breathing reminder of that man she was trying not to be in love with around the house.

Thea shook her head while she blew out a sigh, “He won’t settle in one of those places, he might look like he’s tough but he really ain’t,” her left shoulder raised and brushed against her cheek, “it’s okay I’ll try to figure something else out.”

Thea hardly had ‘options’ abundantly available to her.
“No, it’s fine, he can stay here,” Felicity advised as resolutely as she could, even though the doubt about her ability not to turn into a sobbing mess as Jax’s presence meant only one side of her lips smiled.
“Really?” Thea pipped, the relief apparent in her tone.
Felicity nodded while she tried to tell herself it would be fine, “Yeah, of course.”
“I’ll go down and get him.”

Thea moved quickly out the door, no doubt worried that if she dawdled to leave Felicity might change her mind.

With the echoing of the front door being pulled closed, Felicity looked around the apartment at the furnishings that weren’t hers – the curtains, the carpet, the rugs, the couch…and imagined them taken over by a large Husky/German Shepherd cross before she shook her head woefully “There is no way I’m getting my security deposit back,” she groaned.

She did her best to ‘giant dog-proof’ the apartment by removing the vase on the coffee table and throwing one of her blankets over the suede couch until Thea returned.

Felicity hadn’t even properly opened the door before Jax pulled himself free from Thea’s grasp and bounded into the apartment. She wasn’t sure if dogs could smile but as he jumped up and braced his paws against her shoulders, it certainly looked like they could.

“It looks like he missed you,” Thea chuckled, a welcome change to the heavy moments from before.
Felicity squinted out a smile as she felt the warm and wet slap of his tongue on her cheek.
“What does he eat?”
“Whatever you have. Oliver had some food at the shop, but they wouldn’t let us take it,” she huffed, “like he’d hide drugs in dog food.”
“It’s fine, we’ll figure something out, won’t we boy?” Felicity said while Jax circled her legs twice before he flopped onto the floor at her feet.
“Thank you,” Thea smiled brightly, the first one Felicity had seen that night.
“I’m really sorry about Oliver,” she offered as the younger woman stepped towards the door.
Thea’s smile faded a little as she nodded, “Yeah, I know.”
“If you need anything else, please just let me know.”

Another soft nod saw Thea’s chestnut hair dance over her shoulders, “Thank you.”
“Take care.”

Felicity watched the door close before she looked down at her new roommate, “so, you want my left over Chinese?”

As if he understood, the dog with the piercing blue eyes huffed out a reserved woof and marched deeper into the room.

“I will take that as a yes.”

---

[Wednesday, 21 November 2012]

For the second time in the last hour Felicity covered her nose as a waiter strolled past their table holding an open steak sandwich on ciabatta loaf with caramelised onions and a side of lemon pepper fries, Felicity assumed based on her heightened sense of smell.

And for the second time, Caitlin, her lunch date, looked across the small varnished maple table bemused.

“Everything alright there Flex?”

Felicity shrugged helplessly, it wasn’t exactly easy coming to terms with your body deciding to become a pesco pollo without any input or desire from conscious you.

“Yeah, fine, just,” she waved a hand in front of her face to brush away the lingering aroma, “I wish we weren’t sitting so close to the kitchen.”

“We always sit here,” Caitlin retorted before she took a deep and dramatic breath in through her nose to see if she could smell whatever distasteful thing had Felicity almost gagging every time the kitchen door swung open.

They weren’t close to said door, it was a good 20 paces away for a person with a wide stride, but it was the table that was furthest away from the entrance and the till (read, noise), it wasn’t by the bathroom, (read, noxious smells) and it had the best WiFi reception (read, Felicity’s request).

Caitlin stabbed a slice of cucumber as she kept her eyebrow suspiciously raised at Felicity, she took a nibble, paused, shook her head, took another bite then lay her fork on the edge of the plate.

“What?” Felicity asked with an obtuse laugh and a mouth full of spinach.

The brunette’s lips pursed and spouted, “When was your last period?” she finally asked rather indiscreetly.

Felicity snorted as she snapped her mouth shut to ensure her food stayed in there. Although it wasn’t the first time her friend had asked her that question, it was the first time it was over a grilled chicken and spinach salad.

“You were due a week or so after your missed appointment,” Caitlin continued as she fumbled in her bag, returning with her cell phone in hand.

Felicity nodded as she chewed and, once she swallowed, she cleared her throat and spoke, “Yeah it came,” she huffed, “it was miserable.”

A period after a brutal break up = savage; and recounting it, and the copious amounts of junk food she had consumed, caused Felicity to lose her appetite.

“And this month?” Caitlin kept her eyes glued to her phone and it was only when Felicity didn’t instantly respond that she looked up and away from the screen, “the app says you should have had one around the twelfth.”

“The what?” Felicity gaped.

“I’m your gyno and your best friend,” Caitlin raised her eyebrow making sure there wasn’t an argument on either of those points, “of course I track your cycles.”

Felicity laughed effervescently, “of course you do.”
“So?” Caitlin asked so impatiently that Felicity wondered, if she looked under the table, whether she might see her friend’s foot tapping.

“I’m sure I had one this month,” Felicity blew off the concern.

She must have, it happened like clockwork every month, November wouldn’t have been any different, she was just too busy to remember it precisely. As she took a long, considered sip of her drink she imagined she spent one day feeling sorry for herself and the other three eating M&Ms from her drawer like she did every month.

Caitlin changed tack abruptly and, rather loudly, asked “When was the last time you had sex?”

Felicity would have shrieked if it wasn’t for the water in her mouth, as a cafe full of people minding their own business on a Wednesday afternoon were dragged into a conversation they really didn’t belong in the middle of.

“Why don’t you ask a little louder, I think there are some people on the patio that didn’t hear you ask me about my sex life,” Felicity gritted through a whisper, “or lack thereof.”

“Sex is perfectly normal Felicity,” Caitlin pronounced in her polished ‘I’m a medical professional’ voice, “Enjoyable even,” she chorused purposefully loud.

Felicity leaned into the table, “Really Caitlin?”

Her friend leaned across the small table and in a gesture that looked like she was going to console Felicity as she reached her hand towards her. But it veered from Felicity’s face and abruptly, and roughly, smacked the side of Felicity’s breast, just under her arm.

“Ow,” Felicity squeaked as her knees hit the underside of the table, “Why would you do that?” She whispered her self as she rubbed her aching breast.

“Are they sore?”

“Yes,” Felicity pouted. She would have argued that it was simply because Caitlin had assaulted them, but Felicity knew they had been tender for a few days, if not longer.

“And you’re cramping?”

Felicity narrowed her eyes, “I ate some bad tacos yesterday.”

“And the smells?”

Felicity replied, somewhat tersely, “Allergies.”

Caitlin laughed as she shook her head bewildered by Felicity’s reply.

“How in the world would that be allergies? For a smart lady you sure are saying dumb things.”

Felicity took a drink, watching Caitlin suspiciously over the rim as she lethargically shrugged.

“You didn’t answer my question about sex,” Caitlin continued as she pointed her fork towards Felicity like an extension on her jutted finger.

“Why all these questions?” Felicity asked while she patted the napkin to the side of her mouth where she had dribbled water.

She watched as her friend took a deep inhale and blew it out through her mouth in a sigh that meant Caitlin was working up her best serious tone.

“I think you’re pregnant,” she said dryly with her arms tented over her plate and her hands clasped at the summit.

Felicity laughed boisterously until she had to clap a hand over her mouth when other patrons began to look over in confusion.

“No, that’s not…” Felicity spluttered before she took a drink to clear the surprised hitch that had lodged in her throat.

“When?”

When Felicity realised the feisty OBGYN wasn’t going to settle for Felicity brushing the question off she shifted nervously in the seat of her chair, making the leather fabric gasp under the move.
She hadn’t told anyone about Halloween. It had been a mistake, a terrible, ill-conceived mistake that was not worth mentioning, so she hadn’t. Her silence was also due in part to the realisation she probably couldn’t convincingly persuade any of her friends that it meant nothing – she couldn’t even convince herself that.

It was far better to keep it as her stupid little secret.

But Caitlin was like a dog with a bone and they had been friends far too long for Felicity to even attempt to get away with lying to her.

“About a month back I may have had a lapse in my better judgment,” Felicity mumbled as her eyes stayed focused on her half-eaten lunch, “but I can’t be pregnant,” she added in a rasped whisper as she finally tore her eyes up to Caitlin’s.

Another inhale-exhale, deep seated breath, “we used protection, I put the condom on myself,” she continued with a proud tip of her head, “and I passed High School sex-ed so I know how to put one of those on, I’m actually quite proficient at it. I could take it up as a hobby, putting condoms on things…” she joked, but when she noted Caitlin’s unamused, I’m still the professional here, expression she straightened her smile and stared directly across the table with a resolve as strong as steel, “Look, I took the condom from his wallet myself,” she continued as her hands idly gestured along with an invisible wallet, “I can even remember where it was, back pocket tucked to the lef… SON OF A BITCH.”

Her voice echoed through the café as her palms beat down on the table top. The sudden and encompassing silence of the café would have mortified Felicity in any other circumstance but her current realisation was like being hit in the face with a phonebook and all she could see were stars and all she could hear was white noise.

“You had one fucking job,” she groaned just as a waiter walked past and mistakenly felt her scathing directed at him.

When Felicity caught his stink-eye she offered him a bleak smile, “Oh not you, sorry.”

He didn’t look convinced but Felicity couldn’t spend any further time consoling a stranger’s feelings – she had her own, fairly massive ones to contend with.

“Felicity?” Caitlin peeped as she looked, worried, across the table.

Felicity’s brow was pinched inward and her eyes were glazed over as she stared at a painting on the far wall so intently that all the vibrant colours merged into one, “Condoms have expiry dates right?” she asked in a monotone of shock.

“Yes,” Caitlin replied softly.

“And they’re, important?”

An amused chuckle, “Yes, that’s why their printed on each individual one and not just the box.”

Felicity blinked, five times, in slow motion and by the fifth one she wondered momentarily if she just kept her eyes closed would it all go away?

“Theoretically what happens?”

She already knew the answer, she had told Oliver something similar, but she needed to hear it herself, here and now, from the mouth of both a professional and a friend.

“The latex breaks down, so they’re more likely to break or have minuscule holes in them.” Felicity tapped her finger to her lips, she was fairly certain the condom hadn’t broken because she had had that happen in college – thankfully before he’d spilled his load – and had felt it, like a dish towel flicked against her walls. Also, Oliver would have noticed when he was disposing of it and surely he would have said something.

“The date on them, I mean it’s not that big of a deal though right?”
Caitlin sighed, as though it was reasoning she had heard too often. “Condoms without spermicide have a life span of five years, max. With spermicide it’s three years. If you have a condom with an expiry date this year, that means it was made five years ago,” Caitlin’s eyes honed in on Felicity’s, “so it’s a big deal.”

“But there is a window right?”
A huffy sigh followed Felicity’s question, “maybe a couple of months, half a year at best.” “Oh shit,” was all Felicity could say.

“Felicity?”
Felicity shook the haze from her eyes, but it stayed somewhat in her brain, making everything a little fuzzy and echoing the sound of her heart beat as it thumped hard against her chest.

She put her palm to it and tried to calm herself, “What if, I don’t know,” she tried to talk off-handily but it was a poor impersonation, “say it expired in like 2010?”
Caitlin choked on her tongue as her eyes flew open.

“That means it’s seven years old, it was made when you were like sixteen.”

Well, when she put it like that…
“Oh god, oh fuck, oh shit, oh god,” Felicity hyperventilated as she tried to subconsciously sink into a ball
Caitlin scooted her chair around to the side of the table and smoothed her palm down Felicity’s arm, “I could be wrong?”

Felicity’s eyes shot up like bullets, “And I could type a complex source code wrong, but I don’t because it’s what I do and babies are what you do.”

“It’s not entirely what I do,” Caitlin replied with an apologetic grimace, she had started this whole descent into madness after all.

“Oh god,” Felicity rocked her shoulders forward and tried to stem the sudden urge to throw up.

Well, she wanted to throw up….
“We should go back to the clinic,” Caitlin mollified, “you can know for sure.”
Felicity looked at her friend with tears filling the corners of her sapphire eyes and nodded. She supposed she had to know.

“How long does this take?” Felicity asked as she fidgeted with the bracelet on her wrist while she sat on the chair with her legs banded tightly together – she was never going to open those things again.

“About three minutes,” Caitlin replied softly.

“And how long has it been?” Felicity asked as she anxiously bit at the corner of her nail and stared at the white stick that was silently tormenting her.
Caitlin looked at the timer on her phone and crinkled her nose, “about a minute.”
Felicity huffed out a breath that failed in its attempt to calm her racing heart. It felt like a stampede in there and there didn’t seem to be a damn thing that she could do to settle it.

She felt butterflies and nausea.
Her head echoed and was hammering thoughts to the back of her eyelids.
Her eyes were deathly dry under her glasses from staring without blinking.
Her mouth feared no better and it felt as though a dental assistant had sucked it dry.

Even the clock ticking on the wall behind her tormented her.

“If it says yes, do you know who the father is?” Caitlin asked, reaching her hand to rest on Felicity’s knee, a move which saw Felicity’s startle.
She blinked twice, trying to formulatethe question in her head so as to not answer it with a mindless and incoherent noise, “It was Oliver,” she admitted, the instant she said his name tears formed in the creases of her eyes and they went from the Sahara to the Amazon, “I went to return some stuff to him and things got well, you know,” she bit into the plump centre of her lower lip, *she really didn’t want to have to explain it.*

Thankfully, Caitlin nodded with no need for further disclosure.

The next two minutes was taken in silence but for the clock ticking like a gavel in Felicity’s brain, like the clock was both Judge and jury and she was being sentenced to an anxious wait over the cumulative crimes of sleeping with an ex *and* using a virtually worthless condom.

The chorus of birds chirping, which was Caitlin’s alarm tone, cemented itself into Felicity’s brain and she knew, from this moment onwards, it would be a sound that would stay with her.

“Oh god,” she could hear the tremble in her voice and see her foot tapping on the linoleum floor.

“Do you want to look?” Caitlin asked, reaching for—but not touching—the test.

Felicity shook her head fervently, *she couldn’t, “No, you look.”*

Caitlin agreed without arguing and took the small white plastic into her clammy hands. She was almost as anxious as Felicity… *almost.*

Felicity watched Caitlin’s expression like a hawk; she was wearing a subdued, almost sad, smile but beyond that Felicity didn’t know what to make of it.

“Congratulations,” the word was hushed, soft and her eyes stayed downcast, “you’re pregnant.”

Felicity hunched forward as her elbows dug into her knees and her hands caught her head.

You’re pregnant.

You’re fucked.

It’s not that she didn’t like the idea of children, she did, a lot, *one day, but now? Could she even do that?*

She pulled her head up and took a deep breath, she knew her hands were shaking and she felt the solitary tear rolling down her cheek but she didn’t try to brush it away or still it. Felicity let herself feel.

Feel the weight.

Feel the gravity.

Feel the truth.

She was pregnant with Oliver Queen’s baby.

“What do we do it again, be sure?” she whispered as she softly blinked, letting go of more tears.

“It won’t make a difference Felicity, these don’t give false positives,” Caitlin explained as she took her friend’s hand and squeezed, “but I can give you a blood test to be *absolutely* certain and I would recommend you do that anyway in a week or so, but…” she squeezed her hand again and smoothed her thumb over the top of her wrist, “you are pregnant, about five weeks.”

The floodgates, once referred to as her eyes, opened up and a deluge of tears fell down Felicity’s face as her body sobbed forward, “I *should* be happy about this right? People try so hard to conceive and I’m…”

Caitlin leaned in and wiped a stalled tear from Felicity’s chin, “You’re allowed to feel however you want to feel.”

Felicity nodded, thankful that her friend wouldn’t pass judgment for her reaction.

“Maybe I can call Iris and she could stay with you a little while,” Caitlin suggested warmly, “I have patients, but I can…”

Felicity brushed back the tears, *she’d done that enough now,* and stood up. She straightened her
skirt with a tug and tucked loose wisps of hair behind her ear. *That was enough of feeling sorry for herself, she had other things to do.*

“No, thank you,” she spoke calm and quiet, but her words were laced with a certain determination because that was how Felicity approached everything, the baby forming in her womb right now included, “I have to go back to work.”

Caitlin stood with her, “Felicity you don’t need…”

“No, I do,” Felicity breathed, emphasis on the ‘I’.

Caitlin walked over to the row of pamphlets she had given out to countless woman over the years and instinctively took the four she always handed out on the first visit, but this time when she handed them over, it felt so much more personal.

“These are pamphlets about alternatives and some early antenatal information,” she held them out to Felicity who took only the two that related to antenatal care.

“I know what I’ll do,” she spoke softly as she instinctively touched her stomach. *Accident or not, she was keeping the baby.*

“Thank you for lunch, and,” Felicity continued as she looked around the office and back down to the pamphlets she fist in her hand, “this.”

“Felicity, are you sure you’re okay?” Caitlin fretted as she grasped at Felicity’s arm.

“Sure. I’m fine.”

Tomorrow I will be.

Felicity was on a mission.

She didn’t stop to chat to the doorman who always gave her a friendly smile.

She didn’t hold the elevator like someone called out as they approached – *there were six fucking elevators in this building they could wait the ten seconds before another one went to ground.*

She didn’t exchange pleasantries with the muffin lady who she passed going into the elevator as Felicity exited; and, as she looked down the corridor towards where she knew she would find Curtis, she *absolutely* wasn’t going to stop and have a post lunch catch up with him.

*Tradition be damned.*

“So, I heard about Oliver,” Curtis chimed up as Felicity came into both earshot and eye range.

“Mmmhmm,” Felicity mumbled as she clutched the drug store carry bag close to her body.

“Thea told me, she also said they were hers,” he continued, oblivious to the wildness of Felicity’s eyes as she walked right past his desk.

“Mmmhmm.”

Curtis stood and followed Felicity into her office, clomping his feet in a way that would have annoyed Felicity if she could think of anything else right now.

“Are you okay?” he asked, following her through the office, albeit a few steps behind.

Felicity stopped at her executive bathroom door and twisted momentarily back, “Mmmhmm.”

She disappeared into the bathroom, unwittingly slamming the door behind her.

“Well okay,” Curtis said to an empty office and a closed door, “I’ll leave you to it.”

[50 Minutes Later]

There was a quiet knock on the door before Felicity dragged her eyes up the white laminate door and watched it listlessly.

*You wouldn’t get a false positive.*

She should have listened to Caitlin, the professional *pregnant-lady doctor,* because while Felicity
had taken an Aspirin last night for a bothersome headache, she had not had any tranquilizers, anti-
convulsants or hypnotics that could mean that she might be one of the very rare cases of a false
positive.

But she hadn’t listened, her eyes roved around the compact bathroom, had she?
“Felicity?” Curtis asked through the hollow door.
“Yeah?” she mumbled back a response.
“Are you okay? You’ve been in there a really long time.”
She sighed limply as her arms stayed banded around her stomach near enough to the place that was
currently ‘incubating’ according to the webpages she had busied herself scrolling through.
“Yeah, fine.”
Pregnant. But fine.

“Can I get you something, water?” he paused to listen for any response, “or prunes?”
Felicity stretched from her seat on the closed toilet lid and unlocked the bathroom door with a click
that sounded remarkably like that malevolent clock in Caitlin’s office that cruelly sealed her fate
with it harsh, echoing clicks.

“Come in,” she sighed.
He should know.
“Oh I don’t need…”
“Curtis,” she snipped, and he jumped like a scolded child on the other side of the door, “just come
in, as my friend.”
Not her EA.

She watched the door handle bend down and she listened to the slight creak as Curtis opened the
door sluggishly, as though he was about to enter into something he couldn’t come back from –
which wasn’t an entirely incorrect assumption.

His eyes landed first on her and she could see the relief that washed over him when he noted she
was fully dressed and not about to show him some boils on her private parts or something equally
as disturbing.

But then his eyes landed on a pregnancy test, then another, then another, another and another.
“Oh,” he continued, counting them in his head, “oooooh, ooooooooh,” his mouth got wider and his
surprised gasp got longer, as though each new test he saw added to the picture, even though a single
one would have sufficed to get the point across.

There were twenty tests in total.
Felicity had taken twenty-one pregnancy tests today.
Five different brands.
Two different methods, the pee on a stick and the dip stick.
She had even staggered the tests over a span of ten minutes, rationing out pee like it was gold.

Honestly she should be impressed that she managed to have enough to complete twenty tests in
thirty minutes, but she supposed the two bottles of water she made herself drink until she felt like
she wanted to be ill, helped.

Maybe, she really didn’t know.
This was hardly her area of expertise.

“You’re…” Curtis didn’t actually look at the results of any of the tests, but the fact there were so
many alluded to a positive result.
“Yeah,” she nodded, she wasn’t jovial, elated or sad because Felicity had lapsed into a state of
quiet acceptance, topped with a heaping pile of indolent shock.
“And they all…?”
“Yeah, you don’t get false positives,” she schooled.
“Did you need to do so many?”
She shook her head and mouthed, “no.”
Curtis leaned against the door and sunk his hands in his pockets, unsure what else to do with them,
“But you did anyway?”
She nodded and once again mouthed her reply, “yes.”
“And is it Oli…”
She looked up with laser focus and a terse pout.
“Of course it is.”
Perhaps she wasn’t so indolent after all.

Curtis raised one hand to his face as he cowered, “Just checking, I mean you could have gone
wild.”
She would have laughed if she didn’t feel the urge to cry instead.

“What am I going to do?” she sighed as she fluffed her fingers through her pulled back hair.
“Well I guess you have three options.”
She smiled but shook her head, “I have one, I’m keeping the baby.”
“Ohay,” Curtis accepted, offering no challenge or insight into her reply because the decision –
whatever it had been – would have been hers to make, ”so, next decision is whether to tell Oliver or
not?”

She took a sharp inhale and pushed it out through her swollen lips where she had gnawed it so.
“He has every right to know.”
Curtis nodded in agreement.
“But, just not yet,” Felicity annexed.
It wasn’t like Oliver was going anywhere and right now she was too emotional to be okay with the
look of disappointment and regret that Oliver might respond with. He had made his feelings on
setting up roots and children early on in their relationship – she needed to be prepared for the very
real possibility that he would want nothing to do with the baby.

“I just need some time to come to terms with it myself first,” she added, bobbing along with the
idea. She didn’t intend to keep it from him for long, but long enough so that she could handle
whatever response she got to the news.

“Which means Thea can’t know either,” she continued, Oliver needed to hear it from her and no
one else, history aside, he deserved that. “Or my parents,” that request was selfishly because she
just really didn’t want to deal with them right now.

“Just between us, and Caitlin of course,” she finished with a sigh as she tracked a finger along her
eyebrow.
Curtis nodded along with her terms as he swayed, heel to toe.
“Say it,” Felicity sighed, seeing the words almost leaking from his pores.

“Can I hug you? Because I’m going to be a Godfather,” he squealed, teemed with an air clap.
Felicity laughed as she pressed her lips into a teasing pout, “Who gave you that idea?”
“Pseudo Uncle then?”
She stood up and opened her arms. Curtis scooped in and lifted her until just her toes skimmed the
floor.
“Okay, put me down,” she puffed as she tapped his shoulder.
He lowered her with an apologetic smile and a matching one-shoulder shrug.
“You’ll be fine Felicity, you’re the most badass woman I know.”
She smiled thankfully as she brushed back her hair and took a long, deep inhale.
She would be.
“I know,” she agreed softly, “I’ll be fine, maybe just not today.”

It was almost 10pm when Felicity’s vision was starting to blur as she scrolled through page after page of *what to expect when you’re expecting* blogs, messages boards and Mama-Bird websites. It was daunting, but Felicity found some semblance of control in knowing everything she could possible soak in.

She had made an appointment with Caitlin for their first ‘on the books’ consultation on December 19th. She would be about 10 weeks then and while Caitlin preferred to see her clients at around 11-12 weeks, that was smack in the middle of Christmas so 10 weeks it was.

She had stopped at the health store on the way home and got every prenatal vitamin on the list Caitlin had texted her, because Felicity didn’t do things by half and if she was going to bring a little human into the world, she was damn well going to make sure she gave it the very best chance.

She had read the statistics.
Finding out at five weeks could be both a blessing and a curse and Felicity had taken some roundabout comfort – or excusal – in the fact that most people didn’t tell family until after the first trimester, around 10-12 weeks. Of course she glossed over the pages that had a whole raft of cute ways to tell your partner much earlier.

And somehow, after reading the size comparison to seeds and vegetables through the months, Felicity had found herself looking at day cares near work.

“This one looks nice?” she yawned as she hunched closer to the laptop screen as it rocked with the movement on the bed, “don’t you think, I like the rainbow.”
She looked down at her bed guest who in turn spread his jaw and yawned wildly as his tongue flopped out the side of his mouth.

“Jax, this sesame seed is going to grow into a pumpkin eventually, and there is a waiting list for the nice places,” Felicity argued as she rubbed her hand through the thick fur on his head. His black mottled lips smacked together as his lids hung sleepily over his aqua-blue eyes before he yawned a second time, this time stretching his paw out until it reached across Felicity’s lap.

She looked down and imagined a time where she wouldn’t see lap because she would have a skin covered pumpkin blocking her view and a soft chuckle escaped her nude lips.

“Oh god, I’m so not ready to be my mother,” she sighed as she imagined what it must have been like to be her mother 24 years ago, “pregnant and alone.”

Jax groaned in his throat like he took personal offence at Felicity’s last words.

“You’re right, I’m not alone, I have you,” she quipped as she tickled the underside of his chin, “but you have to keep this quiet for now okay?”

His reply was a huffed and listless bark of air and a sceptical head tilt to look up at her.

“I know I’m asking you to keep a secret from Oliver here Jax,” she lamented with a hidden smile at the absurdity that she was having a conversation with a dog that wasn’t even hers, “but you have to promise me, just for now okay?”

Jax’s head titled the other way and his ears moved like satellite dishes.
“Don’t give me that face,” Felicity pouted, “I’ll tell him when I’m ready in a couple of weeks.”

She closed her laptop with the 16 pages still open on the browser and stretched her cramping legs out in front of her. Slipping off the bed she tugged down the oversized tee and padded into the bathroom to brush her teeth.

She just wasn’t ready to tell Oliver yet.  
*Soon, but not yet.*

---

[24 November 2012]

*Bad at love, no, I'm not good at this*  
*But I can't say I'm innocent*  
*Not hardly, but I'm sorry*  
*And all my friends, they know and it's true*  
*I don't know who I am without you*

Felicity shifted on the basic metal stool riveted to the concrete floor as she tried her best to take in the completely foreign surroundings. The air felt cold, stale and there was a distinctive smell of disinfectant that occasionally breezed past her nose.

Every noise echoed.  
The first forty seconds she spent in the room had her on the edge of the stool as each jarring sound of metal clanking on metal had her almost jumping. A woman in her late thirties, if Felicity had to guess, leaned around the partition that separated the booths and offered Felicity a kind smile of full scarlet red lips, “You get used to it hon.”

Her jailhouse virginity must have been obvious because the woman on the other side of the partition to her right joined in the conversation, “took me two months not to jump when the buzzer rings.”

“How long has he been behind?” scarlet asked.  
Felicity assumed she meant behind bars as opposed to some question about their preference for certain sexual positions, “just a week.”

She felt foolish saying it, it was clear both women assumed Felicity was here to see the love of her life – which maybe she was – but not like that.

“It gets easier,” the one to the right with a drape of dark hair down her back offered, “my old man has been in for near on five years.”

Felicity sucked her lip into her mouth as she considered what her life would look like visiting Oliver in 5 years – she would have a four year old in tow, a four year old who would probably have learned the names of the women on either side of her right now because this would be his or her life – just par for the course.

Her little sesame seed would be a real, moving, talking, child.  
*Just visiting daddy at prison.*

She tried to push that to the back of her head. She wasn’t here to tell Oliver the news, that was for another day. Today she was doing what she’d promised Thea she would. She was going to ask Oliver to reconsider his confession.

He was going to say no.
But at least she could tell Thea she tried.

“If you need anything, my name is Darla and that’s Elouise, us girlfriends are like family in this place.”

“Oh, he’s not,” Felicity began, unsure why she felt the need to correct Scarlet, but if they were going to be prison families and her child was going to call them Prison Aunties, then they should at least know the truth, “we’re not together.”

“So why are you here?” Elouise asked, her slightly harsher face leading Felicity to conclude she was closer to fifty than forty.

“I don’t really know,” Felicity quipped, sure Thea had asked but she shouldn't be here – she shouldn't be here.

“I shouldn't be,” she added softly, a hint of confusion in her tone, as she stood up and turned towards the exit.

A loud clank followed immediately by a harsh buzz stopped her dead in her tracks. She tried to move, but her body wasn't playing along and her feet felt like anvils at the bottom of her legs – they weren’t leaving.

Oliver stopped a foot away from the stool when his eyes fell on her. She had her back to him but he didn’t need to see her face to know who it was who had come to see him.

He’d expected Thea or John.

Not her.

He hadn’t expected to see her, and it took his breath away in one sudden swoop.

Felicity could feel him.

She could feel his eyes on her and she imagined them wide with surprise, but she was too afraid to turn around and learn if her presence was a good surprise or a bad one.

She heard the light tap of a finger against glass – or maybe she imagined it, because in a sea of voices and clanking metal she couldn’t fathom how she could have possibly heard a tap on two-inch thick glass.

She was already here.

She might as well...

Felicity turned around slowly. He was standing at almost the same distance she was from the barrier, so the glass tap had been a figment of her overactive imagination. A white cotton tee hung over his frame, it was lose but looked stiff against his form. His lower half was shrouded in the typical orange pants with the top half of the jumpsuit tied around his waist.

He looked like every prison movie Felicity had seen, the only thing missing was a packet of cigarettes tucked into his sleeve. His hair looked damp, or greasy, she couldn’t tell, but it was slicked back in a way Oliver didn’t often wear it.

Dark circles around his eyes made the blue of them even more radiant, a fact Felicity found distressing. A blotchy patch just under his left eye looked to be the making of a bruise with a graze along the cheekbone and all Felicity could think was whether someone had tendered to that, like she would have once.

He couldn’t keep his eyes off her.

She looked beautiful with her hair glossy and in loose curls around her face. Ethereal, celestial and he knew he had been lucky to have been in her star dust if only for a moment in time.

She didn’t belong in this dreary place of concrete blocks and steel doors. He should let her go, he
should turn around and leave because Felicity didn’t belong here.

But he didn’t, he stepped forward, took a seat on the cold steel stool and picked up the black phone receiver, hoping she might do the same.

Felicity took a resilient breath and slunk onto the stool. Her lips were fighting back a quiver as her eyes dropped to her feet. Two breaths later she looked up and opened her mouth to speak.

Oliver’s face crinkled into a smile as he nodded towards the phone receiver on her side of the booth. Blushing at her inexperience, Felicity picked up the receiver and pressed it against her ear.

“I didn’t expect you,” Oliver spoke first, his tone was soft but thin, like he was holding back emotions he was afraid to show her in his voice.

“She asked me to come,” she replied, surprised by the echo of her voice that came back to her through the earpiece.

It sounded so hollow, so cold.

Was that how she sounded to him?

Oliver offered her a bleak smile, he was glad Thea had a friend, someone to go to and to confide in, but a part of him had hoped, selfishly, that maybe Felicity had come to see him because…she wanted to.

He swallowed the lump in his throat – he didn’t get to think like that, he was long past deserving her consideration.

“I also wanted to make sure you were okay,” she added, her tone softening as she lay a flat palm of the cool, stale and sterile floating table top of chipped laminate in a grim faded avocado green colour.

Oliver tried to hold his swelling heart behind a subdued smile, “I’m fine, been here before,” he said offhandedly.

“So was that another inmate,” she nodded towards the blossoming bruise, “or…” her eyes roved around the faces of the guards. If it wasn’t for the uniform she might have thought them criminals too.

“It’s nothing,” Oliver wet his lips as he spoke, “it doesn’t matter,” he added as his spearing blue eyes begged her to leave it be.

Felicity blew out a sigh, this was Oliver's world and she had to believe he knew what to do to keep himself safe. So, regardless of what she thought on the matter, she would let this go like he’d asked.

She straightened her spine as her eyes caught a glimpse of the clock. The guard that had ushered them in the room had said time was limited to twenty minutes and they had already used seven. She needed to get to what she came here for.

“Shea wants you to recant,” she said brusquely, though that hadn’t been her intended tone she couldn’t let herself get emotional, not here, not now.

Oliver shook his head before he pressed it against the glass and spoke into the mouthpiece, “No, I won’t do that.”

Felicity hadn’t expected any other answer, but still she pressed him, “Why? They weren’t yours.” He looked up, a little confused and almost affronted with her suggestion.

“You think I should?” he asked with piqued interest.
Felicity sighed, yes, no, it didn’t matter what she thought. 
“I want to be sure that when I tell Thea I tried, that I’m being honest.”
She watched some of the hurt fall from his eyes like he understood her dilemma; as much as she understood his.

When he looked at her again he saw her eyes soften although something turbulent and uneasy remained in the irises of them.

“Thea can do better in the world than I ever could,” Oliver remarked.
It was the thought that had occupied his mind every night here, solidifying his decision to take the fall for her. She deserved a chance at life, Oliver just squandered his.

Felicity dropped her head to her hand and bit back tears, she hated the way he did that, the way he so easily wrote himself off.

“Oliver...” she whispered, desperately wishing to give him whatever he needed so he could see what she saw in him. 

“It’s true, she’s going to college and she has a real shot at a future, what do I have?”

A baby.

“People who love you,” she answered while her eyes stayed pinned to his, no matter how painful it was to look at him that way, she needed it and he needed it.

Does that still include you? He fought back the question, angry at himself for even thinking it.

“I can’t,” he argued, “I just can’t. This is how I help her.”

While Felicity had never expected anything less than the stance of a martyr from Oliver, it didn’t hurt any less to see him so willing to sacrifice himself.

“Oliver,” she didn’t fight the tears away when they formed in the corners of her eyes, “when will it be time for you to think about you, about what you deserve in life, about what you want,” she cried as her fingers fisted against the laminate.

Oliver tipped his head forward and when he pulled it back up tears marked his cheeks too.

“It doesn’t matter, none of that matters, just Thea,” he tried to answer without a quiver in his words but it was impossible and one haunted the last two words he said, and the two more he couldn’t say, and you.

“There is more for you,” Felicity begged. To what end, she didn’t know, but she wanted – needed – him to finally see what she did, a good man in a shitty circumstance.
Her perfect ruffian with a heart of gold.
The father to her little sesame seed.

“I was made for this place,” he answered grimly, as though he truly believed that, “it’s where I belong.”

“Stop!” Felicity shouted and both Darla and Elouise looked around the partitions at her.
Oliver pressed his hand against the glass, she could see the lines, the scars and the callouses, “I was given something real and beautiful with you Felicity and I will always be thankful for that,” he quivered as he watched her with tear-laden eyes, “but this is where I need to be, it’s what I deserve even if it’s not for this crime, the devil has a long list to choose from.”
Including what I did to you.

“And what about your child, what do they deserve?”
She knew she had said it and when she tightened her lips after the last word she wasn’t sure if she should take it back or paint over it with something else.

When he didn’t reply, Felicity thought maybe she hadn’t said it at all, another imagining.
But the booths both sides of her had gone quiet, deathly so.  
*She had said it. There is was. Cards on the table.*

When Oliver remembered how to breathe he considered her words again, and again…*what about your child?*  
His child.  
His *child.*  
“What?” he whispered, his eyes wide with shock.  
“Oliver, I’m pregnant.”

No Pinterest board had given cute ways to tell the father if he was in prison. There was no cute mug for him to drink from that had the words, we’re pregnant at the bottom. No pregnancy test tied up with a ribbon and left where he could find it. No little box with a sesame seed tapped to it telling him how big their baby was.

There was nothing but the cold, stale air of prison air and the clanging of distant metal doors.

“You are?” his eyes lit up, like fracture glass glistening in pools of tears.  
“Yes,” she whispered.  
“But, how?” he marvelled like a child.  
The fact the next question out of his mouth hadn’t been whether or not it was his didn’t surprise Felicity, but she was thankful for it all the same.

“The expired condom from the stone ages Oliver, you never threw it out.”

Darla chuckled behind a cupped hand.  
*He had one job.*

“It’s okay,” Felicity tucked her hair behind her ear, “it happened,” she took a steadying breath, she had her next speech prepared in advance, not that she had intended to use it just yet, “I don’t expect anything from you because I know you didn’t want kids. I thought you should know though, what you do with the information is up to you Oliver,” the next part wasn’t rehearsed, “so this place, *this* life isn’t *all* you have.”  
“Felicity,” her name was spoken breathy and gravelled, “I said all that before I knew you,” he paused, taking her eyes into an embrace with his, “before I loved you.”

*Oh, tell me you love me*  
*I need someone on days like this, I do*  
*On days like this*  
*Oh, tell me you love me*

*I don’t love you*; his words kept playing in her head.  
“But you don’t”  
“What I said…”  
“Not now Oliver, please,” she begged, a room full of strangers and a divide of glass wasn’t the place for such confessions.

“One minute,” a guard called abruptly with an uncharismatic boom.  
There was so much he wanted to say, so much he wanted to ask. A minute wasn’t enough and as it was Oliver was struggling to breathe properly let alone formulate a coherent series of questions and heartfelt expressions.

*He was going to be a dad.*  
*A father.*
Behind bars.

His face twisted in pain like he had an impossible choice to make between Thea, his family from his past, and the child Felicity and he created, his future.

Felicity could see the unbearable pain etched in the lines of his face. He didn’t need to say a single word, she knew what he was toiling with.

“I will always let you be a part of his or her life Oliver,” she comforted, she knew what choice he would make and she would never resent him for it, how could she? “Wherever you are.” He would choose to protect Thea.

This baby would have her, a safe and happy home and a village of pseudo aunts and uncles. Thea, he believed, still only had him.

Felicity understood.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

“And you’re okay, the baby’s okay?” Felicity nodded softly, “It’s too early to know anything, it’s only five weeks, but yeah, I think we’re okay.” The relief on his face was palpable and his eyes thanked her in tears.

“Times up,” came the call.

The other inmates stood on command as Oliver's knuckles turned white around the black phone. There was so much more to say, to ask, to hear...

“To your feet prisoner.”

The barked instruction was to Oliver but he wasn’t moving, he needed to see her just a little longer.

“Oliver, go,” Felicity whispered, watching the guard walk, agitated, towards him. “I don’t want to go,” Oliver’s voice shook and his tone was stretched and rasped, “not yet.” “A sesame seed,” Felicity gently mused, “our baby is the size of a sesame seed.” She watched a smile brighten his face, puffing out his cheeks and dancing into his eyes. “Now go.”

He stood up, the smile still latched to his lips, and hung up the phone before he fell into line with the others and disappeared out the heavy metal door.

Felicity squinted in the afternoon sun as her boots scuffed along the gravel parking lot. Thea was leant up against the car Felicity had leased on a whim after deciding that babies and taxis probably didn't mix well, with a lit cigarette slid between her fingers.

Wordlessly Felicity took the white stick from Thea’s hand while she brought it up to her mouth. “You can’t do that anymore,” she sighed as she threw it on the ground and stubbed it out under a cloud of gravel dust.

Thea pouted indignantly, “I know it’s swapping one addiction for another, but really?” “No, I mean you can’t do that around me,” Felicity affirmed, “I’m pregnant.” She might as well know.

Thea screamed, loud enough to draw attention from a loitering couple on the other side of the
parking lot.
“Ohmygodohmygodohmy…” Thea stopped abruptly and arched an eyebrow.
“Yes, it’s Oliver’s,” Felicity pre-empted the question.
“And he knows?”
She nodded a tousle of blonde hair.
“So he’s going to recant?”
There was a juxtaposition of fear and resilience in Thea’s tone and accompanying expression. She was ready to face up to her mistakes.
“No Thea,” Felicity replied as she found the keys in the bottom of her bag.
“What? No,” Thea argued sternly, her young face writhing as she tried to make sense of it, “He needs to be with his baby.”

“He still believes protecting you is the right thing to do,” Felicity consoled with a hand to Thea’s shoulder.
“But you told him…” she spoke almost frantic as a hand trawled through her hair, “you told him not to.”
Felicity didn’t have an answer so she simply hugged the younger Queen.

“He needs to be a dad,” Thea sobbed into Felicity’s shoulder.
“He will be,” a softly cooed assurance, “just here. We’ll make it work.”
Somehow.

“No, he can’t miss out on this, not for me,” short, sharp breaths, “not because I fucked up.”
“It’s okay, it will be okay,” was all Felicity could tell both Thea and herself.

It was a little after 10pm when Thea walked, heavy footed, into the Chapel and found Malcolm exactly where he said he would be, puffing a Cuban cigar.

“The prodigal daughter returns,” he laughed out a cloud of smoke.
Thea rocked her weight onto one foot and banded her arms across her chest.
“I need your help.”


Am I right? Lol.
Sorry "name" you should probably tap out now

Chapter End Notes

Title song by Demi Lovato.
Felicity moved the silver fork around the bone china plate while her eyes fixated on the trim of gold paint, which her mother had once informed her was real gold, and sighed. The Michelin-winning meal on the fancy flatware made to be eaten with cutlery that had its own velvet box, was doing little to take Felicity’s mind off things.

Going to see Oliver yesterday had been worse than the time before and while she didn’t regret telling him about the baby, it was like some cruel twist of a knife in her side when he asked her about it down a cold, emotionless phone line and through a two-inch thick plate of glass.

He was trying so hard to reconcile his choice – one that, even though it hurt like hell, Felicity understood. He was going to protect his sister.

He thanked her profusely for taking in Jax and she effused the point it was nice to have the company and while Oliver tried his best to make the exchange appear as normal as possible, he was still wearing prison issued clothes and looking like he wore the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Felicity had considered asking him how it was there, but the deep shadows under his eyes and his sunken cheeks gave her all the answer she needed.
The morning sickness had all but taken her appetite as she neared her tenth week, although the name of it was grossly misrepresentative because that shit was any time of the day, and it was during the evening while she was alone and finally able to relax that she would be soon curled up alongside the toilet with her stomach doing somersaults.

Like an avid nurse Jax would come in and curl up beside her with his head on her lap and his soulful eyes telling her it would be alright, *eventually*.

Felicity hoped he knew what he was talking about.

“I’m sorry about Oliver,” Donna piped up as she looked across the table at Felicity’s vacant expression.

Felicity’s stomach tightened and she felt a sudden surge of nausea that she fought down. Of course Donna knew about Oliver going to jail, it was the talk of the *champagne* fountain at the elitist clubs. Felicity had dared to bring him into their sanctum at the charity event and they relished the idea they had been right about him.

Not least of all Noah Kuttler.

While she appreciated that Donna meant well, Felicity didn’t want to talk about this over chicken medallions and potato latke. So she offered her mother a placating smile and a slightly pinched brow that begged the older woman not to continue this conversation.

But it was too late, Noah dutifully pulled his head away from his phone screen and weighed in, “it’s really not all that surprising.”

Felicity gritted her teeth as her jaw tightened. It was the last day of Hanukkah and Felicity had agreed to eating with her parents at her mother’s insistence, but she was one snark from her father away from leaving, tantrum style.

“You don’t get to do that,” she scathed as she dropped her fork with a booming clunk against that *real gold* trim, “you don’t get to judge him.”

“He’s a drug dealer Felicity. I appreciate you had a thing for him but drugs are the main source of the degradation of our society.”

Felicity’s arms banded around her waist as she held her incessant need to throw up at bay – she wasn’t leaving this fight just yet.

“No, I think *poverty* holds that title,” she scoffed audibly while her eyes looked from the expensive china to the fine furnishing of this room alone, “but if you acknowledged that then you might have to also acknowledge that you are a big part of the problem, and you won’t do that now will you?”

Felicity abruptly stood, shunting the chair she was sitting on backwards and scuffing it across the varnish solid wood floors.

“Felicity, where are you going?” Donna begged as she dabbed a fine napkin to the corner of her mouth and sprung up from her chair.

“Home,” she replied tersely before she stormed from the room, she didn’t care that her actions might be perceived as emotionally petulant. Noah didn’t deserve the courtesy she might have once afforded to him and her hormones were in no mind to give it either.

She brushed a hand across her stomach as she reached for her winter coat, nor did he deserve to know about the baby she was carrying. Not right now.

“Hon, please stay,” her mother spoke calmly with a soft plea threaded in both her expression and
her tone, “we still have to spin the dreidel.”  
Felicity fed the coat onto her arms and fastened the chunky buttons down the centre of her torso. A soft sigh bled from her lips as she slowly turned to her mother.

The woman in front of her was the same one who had struggled for all of Felicity's childhood, the one who had supported her as best as she could and the woman who had nurtured a daughter she didn't always understand, but now when Felicity looked at her she saw a shell of that strength. She saw fine China plates and silver cutlery. She saw a stranger.

“Do it without me,” Felicity replied sadly.
What she wouldn’t give to be back in Vegas, eight years old and lighting the menorah before they ate deep fried hash browns and strawberry-filled donuts after which they would make a bed of pillows in the living room and watch movies.

“Don’t judge your father too harshly,” Donna’s manicured nails folded down the lapels on Felicity’s camel coat, “He means well.”
Felicity could feel her eyes rolling back into her head, the Vegas Donna would never have excused him, not now and not years ago before she fell into this life of false lashes and fake smiles.

“And why shouldn’t I? You don’t judge him at all so I’m just balancing out the scales,” Felicity shot back bitterly.

“Maybe she could argue back the mother she once knew and admired?”
He loves us,” Donna replied, with the conviction of a limp wiener.
“Now you might believe that, but what about then, when you were pregnant and alone? When you told him about me did he cry because you’d brought something beautiful into his life? Did he look at you like you had just given him the world and did he offer you everything he had in return?”
Felicity could see the regret, anguish and pain forming in her mother’s usually vivacious blue eyes, but Felicity already knew the answer.

“No, that’s right he left you, he left us,” Felicity wept angrily, and even though she knew that anger was misplaced she couldn’t tether it down, “But he is going to sit there and judge Oliver for protecting his little sister even at the cost of his own freedom?”
Felicity pulled open the door as sucked in the brisk evening air that greeted her, “I love you mom for everything that you did for me growing up. I will always love you, but you deserve better than this,” she spoke sadly as she looked around the lavish foyer, “we aren’t first place in his life, I know it and you know, but we should be.”
She looked down at her stomach, hiding under the layers of clothing; Felicity knew she was different, she knew that inside her something grew – something that Oliver had cried tears of joy for because it gave him hope and light in a tunnel that might very well have no end when he came up for sentencing the first week of January.

“Felicity, where is this coming from?” Donna asked softly as she brushed back the tears that soaked her cheeks.
Felicity leaned in and pecked a chaste kiss to her mother’s sodden cheek.

“Nowhere,” she whispered as she pulled away.

For now that little life would remain a secret.
The gloves on Felicity’s hand were doing little to warm them as she sunk her chin deeper into the infinity scarf she wore banded twice around her neck. There was a multitude of things she would rather be doing – rationing out her second, and last, cup of coffee for the night for starters – but poor Jax was getting cabin fever in her apartment and he was too big and far too rambunctious for Felicity to pass off taking him for a walk to the neighbour’s kids.

She was heading for the dog park a few blocks away and with Jax leading the way she took a moment to imagine if she could somehow fashion a sled out of a skateboard and a water skiing rope so he could simply drag her along behind him.

There was the lightest sprinkling of snow and Felicity laughed when every twenty paces or so Jax’s tongue would fly out from his mouth to catch one before it landed on his nose. It was uncanny just how much his tough exterior and gooey interior reminded her of Oliver. She bit back the tears as she foolishly allowed herself to imagine him walking this same path pushing a pram with their baby snuggled up behind it. Felicity would insist on the storm cover being down and Oliver would say that spoiled the magic of an early snowfall, so they would compromise and their bundle of baby would be wrapped up in an inch worth of clothing, a woollen hat, mittens, that while they looked adorable were ridiculous to try and keep on a squirming baby, and earmuffs that, naturally, matched the baby’s shoes.

She let the imagery linger longer than she should and she had to squeeze her eyes closed as she opened the gate to the dog park just to stop herself from crying about it, because that wasn’t going to happen, not with Oliver behind bars.

The best she could hope for is one of the visits where there wasn’t a wall of glass between them and where Oliver could hold his little bundled up baby in the crook of his massive arm.

Felicity did her best to shake the thoughts from her head as she stooped to Jax’s level.

“No chasing other dogs,” she quipped as she brushed a fresh dusting of snow from his snout. He cocked his head to the side and groaned from his throat.

“I mean it, you play nice.”

She unclipped his lead and he bounded off into the frosty grass with the exuberance of a puppy.

An empty bench called to her and Felicity scampered over to it before it could be snapped up by other likeminded dog owners.

She settled into the seat and rubbed her hands together as her eyes wandered around the fenced park like a mother ensuring she had a conscious eye on her child. She found Jax brushing his face into the grass just as she felt someone sit on the other end of the bench.

Instinctively she looked down the bench and caught the smile of a pleasantly attractive 30-something with neatly cropped hair and kindly-engaging brown eyes.

“Hi,” he said softly, but with a robust depth framing his tone.

“Hi,” Felicity offered back with a perfectly cheerful smile.

She severed the exchange as she tracked her eyes back towards where she had last seen Jax and blew a fog of warm air from between her lips, smiling as the small smoke signal rose up.

“Do you come here often?”

Felicity tipped her head back towards the stranger and offered a second, polite smile, “This is my first time. Cherry officially popped,” she replied with a breathy chuckle.

If she was going to have a conversation with a stranger, she may as well have some fun with it.
He laughed, releasing his own breathy fog into the frigid air.
“I’m Matt.”
“Felicity.”

He nodded his slightly-cleft chin out towards the flurry of dogs, “Can I guess which one is yours?” Felicity smoothed Jax’s leash between her fingers and smiled, “Be my guest.”

She watched as he playfully tapped a finger to his clean-shaven jawline.
“Is it the Dalmatian?”
Felicity shook her head, “Nope.”
“The little terrier over by the Shepherd?”
Her eyes widened in faux anticipation before she shook her head a second time.
“Nope.”
His lips pinched inward as his eyes scoured the crowd of fur, “The beagle staring at the tree trunk?”
Felicity followed his eyes with her own until they landed on the small dog which was sitting an inch from a tree trunk staring directly at it like it might move if he just kept looking.
“While I admire his refusal to blink,” she laughed, “no that isn’t the dog I’m with.”
“I give up, I’m stumped,” he surrendered with a wink.

Felicity took a few seconds to locate Jax before she pointed him out, “The Husky-Shepherd cross that seems to be gnawing on his own tail, I’m with him,” she laughed.
As if sensing he was being talked about, Jax bounded over towards Felicity. He skidded to a stop alongside her and flopped his head onto her lap before his eyes honed in on the stranger.

“I wouldn’t have guessed that,” Matt remarked, “he’s a beautiful dog.”
Jax growled, his lips rumbling it out behind his clenched jaw.
Felicity soothed him with a light pat down his head, “To be fair, he’s not actually mine, I’m dog sitting.”
It didn’t work and his growl deepened, making Felicity’s leg vibrate as he bared half of his teeth.
“He’s quite protective, do you think he’ll let me ask for your number?”

Felicity sat straight against the back of the bench, she hadn’t expected that.
“I’m flattered, really,” she smiled, he looked like a nice enough guy and maybe eight months’ ago she would have readily given it to him, but it wasn’t eight months’ ago, it was now and it was complicated, “but full disclosure Jax is my ex-boyfriend’s dog, my ex who is also the father to my unborn child,” she grimaced apologetically as she instinctively touched her stomach, “oh and he’s currently in jail, thus the dog sitting,” she added with a half-cocked smile.

She watched as Matt took it all in, one piece of information at a time, like they were artillery shells hitting the ground at his feet.
“Wow,” he breathed as his head reactively bobbed with the knowledge.
Felicity raised her shoulder in a small shrug, “I will absolutely not judge you poorly for not stopping me to ask for that number again,” she intoned as she clipped the leash onto Jax’s collar and stood up.

He offered her a parting smile and a quick, reserved wave.
“Have a good evening.”
Felicity smiled, “you too.”

---

[19 December 2012 : 10 Weeks]

“Are you ready?” Caitlin smiled as Felicity gnawed on the edge of her lower lip.
“What if you don’t hear anything?” Felicity whispered, afraid of the question but more afraid of not knowing the answer.
“You haven’t experienced any bleeding?”
Felicity shook her head, “No.”
“And you’ve just started getting morning sickness?”
“I would like to have whoever named that up on false advertising charges, but yes,” Felicity grimaced as she replayed each depressing night spent on the cold bathroom floor staring at her Christmas Pug socks.

“Believe it or not, morning sickness is a good sign,” Caitlin chuckled, and Felicity instantly shot her a dirty look for the horrendous nature of her statement.
“Tell that to my stomach lining.”
“Felicity I don’t see any reason why we won’t hear a heartbeat today, but it’s early and a lot will depend on where the baby is in your uterus.”
Felicity sighed, logically she understood what her friend and medical professional was saying, but the what if still weighed heavily on her mind.

“But,” the brunette soothed with softly lidded eyes, “if something is wrong, then I’m right here for you and we can do an early scan,” she finished as she placed her hand onto Felicity’s slightly-trembling one, “Okay?”

Felicity nodded, “Wait, can you record it?”
Caitlin smiled as she nodded towards the audio jack plugged into her PC, “I got you covered, perks of having an OBGYN as a friend.”

The gel went onto the wand with a squelch as Felicity lifted her shirt and tucked it under her bra. The sensation of the cold gel only lasted a few seconds before it warmed to her body while Caitlin slowly and precisely moved the Doppler around Felicity’s belly.

Felicity noticed her friends lips curve into a smile moments before she heard the reason herself. It sounded like a stampede in her stomach and even though Felicity knew her heart was racing, there was no doubting that the galloping sound was not emanating from her own organ.

“Is that…” Felicity breathed, her voice fading into silence.
“That’s your baby’s heartbeat,” Caitlin grinned, holding the device in place to let Felicity truly soak it in.
“It’s so fast,” she chewed on her thumb nail absently.
“It’s about 150 beats per minute, which…” Caitlin moved a little to the right and the sound seemed to become even more pronounced, “…is perfect.”

Felicity couldn’t have subdued the tears if she tried as they came on suddenly and like a deluge down her cheeks. She brushed them back as quickly as she could until Caitlin stilled one hand and the other stopped in response.

“What if we don’t hear anything?” Felicity bemoaned the lack of a fireplace in the apartment as she tugged the edges of her dressing gown. She was still unsure of her emotions, her heart was racing as she thought of what was to come, yet at the same time she felt numb, a void that threatened to swallow her whole. It was an emotion she didn’t understand, a feeling she didn’t know how to deal with.

“Felicity, are you okay?”
She blinked furiously as she softly whispered, “He should be here.”
“Maybe he will for the next one.”
“Maybe he will for the next one.”
Felicity managed a pained smile, she didn’t see how that would be possible, but she would hold onto the idea of it, no matter how improbably it seemed.
gown tighter across her body and slipped her toes under Jax’s limp, but impressively warm, belly as he lay asleep on the couch with his front paws falling over the edge. There were a million other places where he could have curled up to sleep, the spacious king size bed for instance, but he never went very far away from where Felicity was. So he made do with the cramped couch.

She was turning the pages on a pregnancy magazine Caitlin had given her but taking little to no information in as her brain grew tired and her eyes grew foggy, but it was only half eight and for some stubborn and ridiculous reason, Felicity refused herself the warm embrace of bed at such an early hour.

A knock on the door made Jax’s ears twitch but he didn’t move an inch, even when Felicity slipped her lethargic feet out from underneath him and stood off the couch. She yawned absently as she padded across the timber floors, dragging her feet with each step.

Inattentively she opened the door and was met with a face she wasn’t expecting.

“Hi,” Oliver breathed softly, his eyes drinking up the sight of her – pyjama pants that swallowed her sock-clad feet, a plush dressing gown bundled around her petite figure, her blonde hair still slightly damp in places from a shower (he assumed) with soft waves that framed her face and her a dusting of light freckles across her clean and dewy complexion – she was salve to the sorest of eyes.

“Oliver,” Felicity stammered in disbelief as she fisted her eyes absently, “what are you…how did you…you’re here…” each word she spoke was more breathy than the last.

“I didn’t escape if that’s what you’re trying to ask,” he grinned, the colour finally pinking his cheeks.

Jax bounded through the opened door and charged head first into Oliver’s leg, making him stumble backwards despite the weight advantage Oliver had. Oliver stooped to embrace his four-legged friend just as enthusiastically as Jax had rushed him.

“The DA dropped the charges, some bullshit about a tampered chain of evidence making it unreliable,” Oliver remarked with an unconvinced shrug as he stood and Jax made himself at home on the floor between them.

“Malcolm?” Felicity asked, tapping out a frustrated Morse code on the back of her door at the mention of the man.

Oliver nodded, he was just as sure as Felicity was that this was the Souls’ Patriarch’s doing.

“To what end, what does he get from you? What piece of your soul does he want?” Felicity asked sadly, what price would Oliver pay now?

Oliver’s face was a mix of relief and disbelief, like he was trying to come to terms with his own internal battle over the answer before he softly replied, “None.”

Felicity gently rocked her head side to side, “You said nothing is free with him.”

“And it’s not, Felicity, but,” he rasped out a taxing breath, “I can’t explain it. I didn’t ask for his help, I never would have, not ever again,” – not since he threatened you – he paused, swallowing back his hatred for what Malcolm had made him do, “I went there to tell him that and he cut me loose.”

Felicity combed her fingers through her hair as she tried to make sense of what Oliver was inferring.

“What?” She needed confirmation.

“He asked for my patch back, said he felt bad for bringing me in, that my old man would have wanted me out years ago and he should have cut me loose then and now with the cops pointing the
finger at me, I’m a liability so he wanted me out.”

“And you believe him?” Felicity knew it was a running theme in every question she asked, but it was Oliver himself who had told her Malcolm wasn’t to be trusted. Oliver looked conflicted as his lips tensed and his brow furrowed.

“No,” it was an honest answer, “but…” he looked up, pausing to breathe as his eyes glassed over. “Felicity I’m free, I’ve haven’t ever felt this free.” She watched as a single honest tear, carrying years of pain, slid silently down his cheek. He didn’t brush it away as it left its trail because what it carried deserved its moment.

As the tear reached his jaw he took a folded piece of paper from his pocket and offered it to Felicity, “He also gave me this.” She took it from his hand and opened it – it was a cheque for $40,000. “What is this?” she asked, confusion tugging her brows inward. “He says it’s my share of Verdant,” Oliver remarked as he raked his fingers through his roots, “He also said I can take whatever stock, tools or machinery I want from the shop but the premises and the name stay his.” Felicity refolded the cheque and handed it back to Oliver, “So that’s it?” She watched a smile blanch his lips before it faded back, “Aside from Thea,” he spoke quietly, the tie that still bound, “but he said he isn’t going to stop her going to college and that he wants her to move on and up.” Felicity hugged her arms around her body and shrugged a single shoulder toward her ear, “I hate to sound like a broken record, but you believe him?”

Oliver took a long and pensive breath, “I’ve learned never to believe him, but I don’t see what he gets from this.” “Does he know about…” her words fell silently as she looked down at her hand resting on her stomach. He shook her head, “I don’t think so, he didn’t mention it and neither did I,” he blew out a sigh as his hands fist at his side and his eyes glassed over, “I just want to be free Felicity.”

She watched a second tear form in the corner of his eye and Oliver unapologetically blink it free before she offered him a kind smile, “and you believe you are?” He blinked languidly before he looked at her with pure azure eyes, “Yes,” his voice was – for the first time ever – weightless.

He collected a small white gift bag from beside his feet and held it out to Felicity, “I wanted to give you this.” “What is it?” her interest piqued as she opened it and peered inside. Inside was a small white onesie screen printed with the block text “Future Riding Buddy” and a silhouette of a motorbike and rider. It was tiny and when Felicity held it up she felt a sudden flux of tears and a sudden loss of words before she dropped her chin to her chest. “I didn’t know if it was a girl or a boy so I got white,” Oliver smiled as he craned to try to see her face. “I know it’s just something little and probably silly, but I saw it and I just…” Felicity sniffed back her tears forcefully as she lifted her head slowly, “I love it Oliver,” she spoke with an unsteady whimper.

He smiled brightly as he plucked the second gift from the bag, it was a book – Oh, The Places You’ll Go – to be precise. “Mom used to read it to me and I figured this kid is half yours so they’re going to be smart, maybe they’ll like the book too.”
Felicity’s chin quivered and her lips shook as she felt the tears growing behind her eyes, she wanted to thank him but she was afraid of what would happen if she opened her mouth.

“I wanted to say, if you ever need anything, any help at all, hanging pictures, lifting, cleaning, midnight ice cream run, anything, just ask and I’ll do it,” he started as he reached for her hand but pulled it back before they touched, “I used to massage mom’s feet every night when she was pregnant with Thea, so I got you there too.”

Felicity bit back the tears and took a slow, steadying breath as she hugged herself tighter.

“Well my breasts hurt like hell, but I suppose I shouldn’t ask you to massage them,” she offered comically as she tipped her head against the edge of the door.

Oliver chuckled through a pure smile as his cheeks blushed a soft apple red.

“I know I have a long way to come back from what I said,” he atoned, the anguish in his tone apparent.

“You had your reasons.”

Oliver had told her that Malcolm knew about the Argus shipment at their last visitation. Felicity wasn’t surprised and she had relayed the information back to Argus soon after. They weren’t surprised either, but were confident enough to have everything carry on as scheduled. They had offered her a bodyguard supplied by them, but she deemed it unnecessary because the project was, for all intents and purposes, now out of Felicity’s hands. She had delivered them the means to transport their cargo, but Argus controlled everything and her job was done and paid for.

“Maybe,” Oliver spoke solemnly as his hands twisted over each other. Felicity couldn’t help but notice the rawness of his knuckles, there hadn’t been a day in the last six weeks where he probably hadn’t had to use them, “but even that doesn’t diminish what I said.”

There was so much regret and pain in his eyes as he forced himself to look at her. He needed to see her pain because he truly believed that he deserved the guilt of knowing it was his words that had caused it.

“I hurt you,” he whispered and Felicity felt a tightening across her chest as her shoulders slumped inwards while she recalled the cruelness of his words, “but I want you to know that it was always real to me.”

He reached for her again but he stopped himself before the tips of his fingers could graze her arm, leaving them to float above her instead.

“Every moment I spent with you was real and every time I said that I loved you, it was honest,” he watched a tear slip from her eye, I love you still, “I don’t want you to carry the words that I said with you in life Felicity, because they weren’t true,” his fingers feathered the tips of her plush robe as his eyes sunk deeper into hers, “Whoever is lucky enough to love you in the future, I hope he realises just how lucky he is.”

Felicity closed her eyes, splaying her wet lashes across her porcelain cheeks, as more tears spilled from her eyes.

Oliver took it all in, the pain of it etched in every line across his face, he had done that to the woman he loved – the woman he still loves, “I don’t deserve your forgiveness, but I just need you to know that none of it was a lie Felicity, not a single second.”

Felicity wanted to open her eyes – she wanted to see the honesty in his that she heard in every word he spoke, but they wouldn’t, she couldn’t. She had both waited to hear Oliver say something like this, to lay himself bare without any expectation of being forgiven, but she had also been terrified of it, of the reality that he loved her still … just as much as she still loved him.
“And I hope that one day I might be able to win back your heart but if I’m never able to, I will understand,” she listened as his voice cracked and each words became laced with sorrow, “having your light in my life for even just a few months was more than a man like me deserved and I will always treasure what you gave me.”

Her eyes opened slowly but heavy lids remained drawn over their watery pools of blue. She believed every word that Oliver spoke but her heart held back, afraid that another blow would open the wounds she had tried so hard to keep closed.

Noah had left.  
*She hadn’t been able to make him stay.*

She hugged herself tighter, symbolically shielding her child from the same fait accompli.

Oliver could see her hesitation and pain in each tear that marred her cheeks. He hadn’t come here for forgiveness he didn’t feel he deserved, despite how much he ached to hold her to his chest and comfort her.

“Felicity,” her name was like breathy prayer from his cracked and trembling lips, “I want you to know that I will be here for your baby in any way that I can, in any way that you’ll let me. I haven’t done much right with this life so far but I promise that I will love that child and I hope that I can be a part of their life,” his voice broke as he sobbed the last four words.

In truth, Oliver wasn’t sure he deserved a chance with that child either but if she saw to granting him one, then he would spend the rest of his life making sure she never regretted it.

His hand dropped from her arm as he swallowed down her silence. With a heavy heart he offered her a pulled smile and a soft nod – *he understood* – before he began to walk away.

“*Our baby*,” Felicity breathed.  
Two small words stopped Oliver mid-stride.  
“*Our baby Oliver,*” she whispered as he slowly turned back towards her, “*they’re the size of a strawberry right now and he or she is ours.*”

He was standing in front of her again, his eyes wide and pleading and his lips gently parted. She reached out her hand and brushed her fingers across the back of his knuckles.  
“I want you to be a part of this child’s life just as much as I am.”

Oliver choked back tears as he struggled to quiet his trembling lips.  
“You don’t have to thank me,” her fingers coupled with his, “just be the father that I know you can be.”

They stood there in silence for a few moments before Felicity brushed a stale tear from Oliver’s bristled cheek. The echo of his languid sigh swept through the space between them as her eyes pulled him a step closer until they shared the same air.

“I heard a heartbeat today,” she whispered as her lips curved into a soft smile.  
Her thumb caught the wing of his lips as it pulled back into a smiled gasp.  
“I have a recording,” she spoke as she smoothed the lines around his mouth, “if you want to come in and listen.”

The smile that broke across Oliver’s face was nearly indescribable, but if Felicity had to liken it to something it was like a child who wanted to be an astronaut being told they could go to Space Camp, or better yet that they could capture the stars and swing from the moon.
A few minutes later and Oliver was staring down at the small voice recorder in his cupped palms with his lips shaking through each breath he took. “It’s so fast,” he finally spoke as he lifted his glistening eyes. “I know,” Felicity answered with a breathy smile, “I said the same thing.”

He squeezed his eyes tightly to let the sound of it sink indelibly into his mind. He would never let this sound go. “But it’s all okay?” Felicity nodded as she brushed her hand through the edge of his hair with a reassuring smile, “it’s perfect.”

She rested her head on his shoulder and softly dipped her eyes closed, relishing how comforting and normal that moment felt. But still there was a lump of uncertainty in her throat, she couldn’t make her dad stay…

“My first scan is the middle of January if you wanted to…” she paused to look up from his shoulder, she needed to see the response of his eyes, “…if you wanted to come?”

His lips opened and his face was flooded with a smile that filled his cheeks and danced in his eyes, now glassed over with happy tears. “If this is ever too much for you Oliver, please just tell me, I don’t want you to run because you feel like you can’t…” She sewed her lips closed, afraid of her own fears.

“Felicity,” he turned so their eyes met and her cheek rested in his hand, “I won’t. I know what I said before when we first started us but the closer we got the more I realised how wrong I’d been, truth is, I had started thinking about a life with you, a real one,” his eyes looked down to the galloping heartbeat before they walked back to hers, “Something like this.”

Felicity could feel the breath hitch in her throat as she peeked her tongue between her lips. She wanted to kiss him.

Oliver could feel the pull of his breath across his chest as the sound of it echoed through his ears. He wanted to kiss her.

“I should go,” he whispered as he moved Jax from his feet, “thank you,” he added as he pressed stop and severed the sound he could still hear in his heart.

He offered the device back to Felicity as they both stood, she refused him with a smile and a soft shake of her head, “You can keep it. I have another copy.”

His eyes thanked her in a way his words could never truly articulate as he held the dictaphone tight to his chest. His other hand fossicked in his jacket pocket for a few seconds before he held out the folded cheque to her.

“I want you to have this.”

She wouldn’t take that from his hands either, “Oliver I don’t need that.” “I want to help,” he pleaded with a furrowed brow. “I know and I appreciate that,” she smiled softly, as she folded both her hands around his one and encased the cheque, “but take it, use it to start something new. Something that is your legacy and will one day be theirs,” she guided his hand to his chest, settling it next to his other hand, “Start something that shows your child that you have roots here, that you won’t ever leave them and that you took yourself from nothing and built something. Because that will be the best lesson they could ever learn and the best security you could ever give them, the knowledge that they have you.”

“I will,” he mouthed as his eyes stayed hung to hers. She smiled, “I know you will.”
Her hands fell away from his and Oliver backed slowly towards the door, stealing the precious few seconds he had left to see her face.

“Oliver wait.”
For the second time that night his feet stilled immediately.

She rushed to close the few feet that had opened up between them and without pausing Felicity’s lifted herself to her toes and kissed him.

It was soft and beautifully light but it carried the weight of her worries in it. When she pulled back, Oliver’s lips remained parted and pillowed and his eyes were watching her with adoration tipped with uncertainty.

*Had he imagined her supple lips pressing against his?*
*Was that just a goodbye and meant for nothing else?*
*If he kissed her back…*

She unthreaded the knot on her robe before shrugging it down her shoulders and draping it over the arm of the couch. He could see her heart rising up her chest now with each deep and uneven breath she took. He studied her as her trembling hands reached for the hem of her cotton tank top.

Wordlessly she lifted the pale blue fabric from her body and dropped it carelessly to her feet. Her breasts pushed against the silky indigo bra as her breath quickened.

“Stay with me,” she whispered as she ran her thumbs under the edges of his jacket, marking out the creases of his chest.

His calloused fingers rode over the slopes of her shoulders and grazed her arms before they fell away at her elbows.

“If you want to,” she added before anxiously tugging a corner of her bottom lip into her mouth. “I want to,” he rasped, his voice stretched and gravelled, his entire body fraught with a feeling of need he was only barely containing, “but do you?” he asked as he gently pinned her hair back from her face, “I don’t want you to regret it.”

She pressed her body to his and lifted her lips until they sat no more than a hair’s breadth away.

“Oliver Jonas Queen,” she ghosted each syllable across his lips, “I could never regret you.”

He kissed her softly, keeping his lips from pressing deeper in case she warned him away, but when her fingers coiled around the hair at his neck, Oliver knew she wanted this just as much. She pulled him closer, until it was though her lips hung from his. Her tongue traced the quivering line of his lower lip as she swept up his hesitation.

His fingers splaying across her naked back made Felicity gasp against his mouth. It had been ten weeks that felt like a lifetime since his rough skin had traced her spine and the sheer discovery of it again had Felicity whimpering in his arms.

His lips left of hers but Felicity’s stayed pouted, afraid to let the sensation slip from them. When he pinned back her hair her eyes fluttered open. His eyes were soft, a lazy but clear blue that held only adoration.

“I love you,” he spoke, as though it was his only way to breathe.

She wet her lips with her tongue as she relaxed her cheek into his palm, “I know.”

He smiled, “I love you,” his repeated declaration was now jubilant.

Felicity smoothed her hand against his, sandwiching it between her palm and cheek, “Oliver, I know.”

His jubilance turned to relief, “I love you Felicity,” then resolute, “I’ll never not love you.”

She lifted her body onto her toes and brushed a kiss against his lips the moment the last word left
off them.
“I know,” she whispered, her breath ghosting his lips while her nose skimmed the tip of his.

His hands rolled over the slope of her ass before they cupped her close and he lifted her into the air.
Her legs folded around his waist and twisted at the ankles while her arms draped over his shoulders
and her nails dug at the fabric of his shirt.

He carried her gently across the room and towards the bedroom as their lips stayed locked together
in slow, languid kisses while their tongues delved and explored together, rolling from one mouth to
the other.

After he laid her gently onto the bed, Felicity wiggled her body towards the centre and beckoned
him closer with both her smile and a small *come hither* of her hand before she sat up on her elbows.

He shrugged the jacket from his shoulders and the decadent sound of it falling to the wood floor
made a smile spring from Felicity’s lips. Keeping his eyes on her, Oliver tore the tee from his body
and that too ended up in a pile at his feet.

“And those,” Felicity effused as she waggled a finger at his faded ebony jeans.
Wordlessly Oliver toed off his shoes and smacked his lips together as he watched the excitement
build in Felicity’s eyes. The sound of the zip crackling as he pulled it down made Felicity’s chest
roll and her mouth gasp.

The jeans soon made their own crumpled heap on the floor before Oliver crawled onto the bed.
Felicity relished the way the bed dipped under his weight as she imagined herself beneath him,
with his hard body crowding over her and her delectably crushed under him.

She fell back into the embrace of the billowing goose-down blanket as her hands drove up the taut
muscles of his arms. With a smile imprinted on his face, Oliver scooped his hand under her neck
and raised her to meet with his lips.

Their lips mashed together as quiet moans and heavy sighs bled together in the room lit only by the
light spilling in from the living room. He dropped her lips, but held her head, as his eyes roved
down her body, smiling when he realised it was his own silhouette that caressed her figure.

When he moved, so did the shadows and the light that played against her smooth dips and curves;
and for what seemed like endless moments Oliver watched the display with avid enjoyment.

“Do you still want that massage Felicity?” he asked, his voice deeply gravelled and almost
growled.
She almost cried at the suggestion before she nodded quickly. He slipped his hand from her neck
and leisurely walked it down her spine until he reached the clasp of her bra. With finesse and a
playful smile he unclipped it before he nestled himself between her tented legs and sat back on his
heels.

She recognised the desire of his eyes and, playing into them, Felicity slid the straps of her bra down
her shadowed arms and plucked the scant fabric from her body.

“Fuck,” Oliver hissed with a carnality Felicity instantly fell in love with all over again.
“Okay,” she teased before she swiped her tongue across her lower lip, “we can do that too.”

Oliver floated his head above her before dropping his lips to her throat. He placed deliberate and
slow kisses down the centre of her body while his warm breath misted against her skin and woke a
fluttering of goose bumps across her bare shoulders.
He pecked a kiss to the crest of each breast before he sat back on his heels again, letting a single finger trace the crescents of her breasts.

Gently he cupped them and a surge of relief-tipped pleasure flushed down Felicity’s entire body almost immediately and made her reactively whimper his name.

“Oliver,” she hummed a second time, her voice finding a little more depth while Oliver deepened the pressure.

He kneaded into her supple breasts evenly while his outer fingers stroked down the centre of each breast in a soothing trance.

Without pausing or altering the pressure, Oliver leaned down and gently kissed her nipple. Her back arched from the bed as his name flew from her mouth for a third time – she enjoyed saying it and Oliver relished hearing it.

His thumb circled the skirt of her nipple, noting how her skin tightened and creased reactively under the rough pad, before he wet the tip of the tightly budded nipple with the tip of his tongue and Felicity found herself biting back a moan over the way it felt like a feather teasing her body.

A second kiss took her breast deeper into the warm, wet confines of Oliver’s mouth and this time Felicity let the needy moan fall raggedly from her body as a dusting of pink flushed down her chest.

Felicity moaned, loudly and unabashed as her heady scent started to float into the air. She needed to be filled by him and her body ached for that stretch, for her body to swell with him. “Please,” she huffed out sharp breaths and stunted words, “kiss,” a moan, “me.”

Her breast dropped with a soft pop before Oliver captured her lips with his own. It was a tango of tongues as they moved them in sync with each other.

The dark room filled with the sounds of their shared arousal before Oliver’s lips left off Felicity’s and traversed the same path down her body that they had taken previously, only this time his seductive kisses were dispersed with darkly-warm moans. His path passed between her heaving breasts, still being delicately kneaded in his palms.

He could taste the faded, but lingered, floral notes of her soap melting into his lips as he kissed down her stomach until he paused just above her navel and looked up the line of her body, glistening with a sprinkling of sweat. It didn’t need to be conversed because his smile said it all, their little strawberry was in there.

After the pause his lips returned to her richly velvet skin, his sweeping tongue now adding another level to the pleasure jolting down Felicity’s body. “Enough,” she whimpered, her tone nearing frenetic. His lips left off immediately, “do you want me to stop?”

“Olih-vurr,” a delicate purr, “I want you,” she rasped as her fingers traced the outline of his rigid cock straining under his briefs.

She lifted her lower body off the mattress and Oliver slipped her pyjamas down her shapely legs. A wanton growl escaped Oliver’s lips as he discovered Felicity was now beautifully naked beneath him, her eyes wild and hungry and her breathing just as erratic as his own.

He teased his lip with his tongue, wetting it with a slick outline, as he walked her pants free from her legs and dropped them blindly onto his own pile of clothes.

His fingers touched her first and Felicity nearly leapt off the bed at the sensation of his thick, rough...
pad passing over her swollen pearl as Oliver used his fingers to delicately spread her folds. Her head thrashed into the pillow as her entire body ached for him, to the point where no other thought remained in her body and no other feeling was felt except the gentle stroke of his breath passing over her heat as his mouth drew closer.

She would have screamed if not for her teeth stapling her bottom lip tightly closed when Oliver finally kissed her parting. The friction of his bristled cheeks against her luscious folds had Felicity fisting the linen and eagerly crying his name. Her entire body shivered as Oliver let his tongue drift through her wetness before teasing her clit with his tongue.

With her head a fog of nothing but her need to fill her empty walls, Felicity mewed, “Oliver… please…you,” she reached for him and coiled her fingers into his hair, “please.” “Baby I could finish you like this,” he rasped before he lapped her juices from around his mouth. She knew he could, she could feel the start of her climax already, but that’s not what she wanted, not tonight, tonight she wanted to see his eyes and kiss his lips as their bodies merged.

Her body shook as she tried in vain to focus her mouth to articulate the insatiable need that was burning like sulphur through her veins.

Tipping his body onto one shoulder he laid down beside her, their eyes now in line, “baby what’s wrong, do you want me to stop?” “God no,” her heard shook feverishly, “I want…” her nails gripped his back as she thrust her body into his.

Moments later her fingers were pawing at his briefs until his cock sprung free and his legs wrestled them the rest of the way down his legs.

Grasping his cock in his hand, Oliver gently swept it between her folds to coat his shaft in her slick arousal while his other hand gently feathered her swollen nub, keeping Felicity at her heightened state. “Do you have a condom?” he asked softly. A delicate chuckle bled from her lips as her head gently shook out a no. “You can’t get me pregnant again Oliver,” she smiled as a blade of light tiptoed over the planes and curves of her face before her smile faded and she realised he might have asked for another reason, “oh, have you…”

Was there a chance he’d been with someone else? Oliver caught her lips in a chaste kiss before she could ruminate over the idea. “Princess it’s only ever been you,” he charmed with just a hint of gravel in his silvery tone, “once I had you I knew nothing else would ever compare, there has been no one else.” She knew he wasn’t lying. “Then we’re good.”

She took his length from his hand and gently worked it up and down with her palm as Oliver guided her leg over his. Once her leg was settled atop his and the tip of his cock was nestled on the cusp of her entrance, they cuddled close together. His left arm fed under her neck while his right traced her ribs with a feather-light touch.

She tipped her head back and pecked a hasty kiss against his lips while her one hand cupped the underside of his face and the other weaved down the muscular slopes of his chest, gliding easily over a thin layer of sweat.

He pushed forward slowly and dipped his head inside her. The familiarity of his body invading hers made Felicity hum and her eyes widen lustfully. She took him another inch as she rocked forward before stilling her body to relish the slow stretch that she had so desperately craved.
Oliver kissed her neck as he slid another inch deeper into her pulsing and cushioned walls. He felt each roll and spasm her body made as he kissed up her willowy neck and wrapped his lips over her thrumming pulse point. Her breath misted and ticked his ear as he lightly nipped the cords of her throat.

He could feel her body swallowing him as she ground her hips against him and it took Oliver every thread of restraint he had not to slam the last length of his throbbing shaft deep inside her, because tonight wasn’t a race.

“I’ve missed you,” she sighed as she stirred her body around his cock.
“Fuck,” he gritted, already nearly breathless at the feeling of her walls crushing into him, “I missed you too.”

She smiled sweetly as her eyes traced the outline of his lips, “You’re holding back.”
Oliver pinned a section of hair back from her temple before he placed a tender kiss there.
“We’ve had a lot of sex,” he remarked with a serious tightening across his brow.
She laughed as a blushed reddened her full cheeks.
“I wouldn’t agree with that conclusion.”

“But tonight, I want to make love to you,” his cock took another small slip deeper, “can I?”
Felicity took his hand from her face and rested his battered knuckles against her lips, “Yes,” she answered simply, sealing her affirmation with a row of kisses across his worn fist.

Oliver didn’t have to fight anymore.
He was free.

“I should go,” Oliver lamented as he unravelled his arms from around Felicity.
“That’s what you said over an hour ago,” she teased while her legs stretched under the rustling blankets.
She braced her forearms onto his chest and shadowed his face with her own before she peppered his lips with soft kisses.

“Are you okay?”
She smiled at the concern that framed both his expression and his words because, despite his tough exterior, Oliver had a heart that was as pure as it was soft. That was the man she had fallen in love with.

“Well,” she quipped as she sunk her chin into his taut pec, “This is the first time in weeks I haven’t spent most of the evening on the bathroom floor.”
Oliver’s eyes immediately filled with worry before she touched his face to soothe it.
“It’s just morning sickness Oliver,” she grinned vivaciously, “although don’t let the name fool you, mine is worse at night right now,” she jumped his lips with a surprise kiss, “Dare I say you took my mind off it.”

“Glad to help,” he smiled before he stole his kiss back with a quick kiss of his own, “All the same I should go.”
He slipped out from the covers and walked down to the pile of clothes at the end of the sprawling bed.

“Where will you go?” she inquired while she unashamedly admired the plump rounds of his ass, licking her lips as she recounted squeezing her fingertips into the same, “You can’t sleep at Verdant, so Roy’s?”
“They don’t have the room for me but John offered his couch for a few nights until I can get something,” he spoke as he shrugged on his tee, “Landlords don’t fancy fresh out of jail tenants very much, but I’m sure it won’t take too long to find something.”

“Oliver stay with me,” the words tumbled, unadulterated, from her heart, “and not just tonight.” He turned around just as Felicity sat up.

“I want you to stay every night,” she continued as she tucked her arms over the edge of the blanket.

“Oliver, are you sure?”

Oliver hadn’t come here expecting anything that had happened after Felicity had opened the door to him and, as she wore the remnants of languid and dizzying love-making, Oliver wanted to be sure it was more than endorphins speaking.

“Yes,” she effused while she hugged her knees to her chest, “I’m sure Oliver. I don’t want to live on the fringes of love, I want to bask in the middle of it with you. And besides your dog already lives here, you might as well too.”

Her smile broadened across her face as Oliver climbed back onto the bed.

“I want that with you too,” he beamed as his hand swallowed her cheek.

“Maybe you, me, Jax and our strawberry could be...”

Her fears held her back from saying it, but his didn’t, “A family?”

Felicity nodded softly before she kissed the heel of his hand.

“Is that a yes then?”

He searched her eyes for any uncertainty, but he found only surety and content.

“Yes,” he gushed, “It’s a definite yes.”
Felicity woke up to the early morning sun slicing through the soft fawn curtains with a smile emblazoned on her mouth. A moaned sigh passed through her lips as she stretched her legs under the skewed sheets.

She could still feel Oliver worshipping her body, from the look on his face to the way his fingertips traced her lines and curves to finally the way he languidly kissed virtually every inch of her; and the fondness of those memories warmed her skin.

The desire to roll over and find him there became unignorable and Felicity moved with her lethargic body to turn lazily, but all she found were crumpled sheets and an empty pillow. Oliver wasn’t there.

*Had she dreamed it?*  
She sat up and tented her legs as she exhaled an anxious sigh.

A finger traced the invisible line across her shoulder that she was certain he had taken last night before it fell to her breasts. The heel of her palm gently skimmed the crest of her breast as she recounted how much they had ached before Oliver had gently caressed them between his broad palm and thick fingers.
Could she have imagined such a euphoric touch?

Her finger carried on its path down between her breasts and over the small rise in her belly, it was minimal, a couple of pounds at most and barely enough for anyone but her to notice, only Oliver had noticed, and she recalled with a smile laced across her full lips the way he had placed a soothing and fragile touch there, enamoured and in awe with the idea that inside her grew their baby.

When exhaustion had finally taken them, Oliver had tucked himself into her, cuddled into her back, and with his hand rested on her tiny stomach he had pecked an endearing kiss on her neck and whispered a breathy “goodnight” before he asked if it was okay if his hand stayed there.

Felicity had played with the fingers he had splayed out over her stomach, slipping down one and dragging up the other, before she overlaid his hand with hers, telling him wordlessly that it absolutely was.

Had she imagined that too?

Had she imagined the way he’d come to her door, not to end up in her bed but to offer her an apology that had come from his sorrowful heart, no conditions attached? Had she imagined the way he’d cried as he listened to the sound of that galloping heartbeat? Had she merely dreamed Oliver pleading to be in their baby’s life, however she would let him?

Her hand slipped further down her body, grazing over the rise of her mound before falling between her thighs. She sighed at the tender sensations that fluttered across her body and the slight ache of her inner lips – she hadn’t imagined that.

Pulling her tented legs closer to her chest another breathy exhale framed an anxious wrinkle across her expression.

Had Oliver left?

Had he had his time with her and then...

The door creaking open stole the rest of her thought as her troubled eyes snapped upwards and caught sight of Oliver. He was dressed only in a pair of stone-grey briefs, with his hair slicked back and a breakfast tray balanced carefully on one hand as he used the other to open the door. And, strolling a step or two behind him, was Jax.

“Good morning,” he said softly as he walked the length of the bed and placed the tray down on the bedside table. He sat down parallel to her with one leg tucked under the other as that foot stay anchored to the floor while his pecks twitched of their own accord, making Felicity absentmly swipe her tongue across her bottom lip as she was momentarily transfixed by it.

He wrapped his arm around her waist and tugged her closer, sheet and all, as Jax clambered onto the bed and took over the entire bottom portion of it.

Oliver’s brow creased as he watched a sigh of relief cross over Felicity’s dewy complexion. “Is everything okay princess?” he asked while his embrace tightened at her hip.

She nodded, embarrassed for ever thinking that Oliver could just leave her like that, like her father had, “I thought maybe you’d gone,” she admitted quietly as she fretfully nibbled on the edge of her lip and blinked her bright eyes downwards.

He pinned back her hair and swelled a tender kiss on her cheek. “I haven’t given you a lot of reasons to believe me in the last couple of months Felicity,” she
looked up at him sadly, his expression mirroring hers, “But, I promise you that I will never leave
you.”

She heard each inflection as a promise in itself as her heart desperately desired to believe him,
despite the failings of the men that had come before him.
His face softened as his eyes dropped to hers and reflected deep blue threads of promises glistening
in azure pools of hope, “My place is beside you, with you,” his hand rolled down her arm and in
behind the sheet, she shivered reactively as his chilled hand touched her stomach, “With you both.”

She rested her head on his twisted shoulder as his other arm swept around her back and encased her
in a tight embrace.
“[I love you],” he hummed before he kissed her forehead, “And I will spend the rest of my life
making up for hurting you like I did Princess.”
Her cheek warmed against his skin as she listened to the thumping of his heartbeat before she
raised her eyes to look up at him, “I don’t need that,” she spoke softly as her fingers tickled the
slopes and crevices of his chest “I just need you, here.”
“I’m here,” his words floated to her ears like a warm spring breeze and she sighed at feeling it.

For a few wordless moments they stayed like that, her head rested against his chest listening to the
drumming of his heart and his arms banded protectively around her. They didn’t need words or
promises or even long, lingered stares in that moment, he just needed the assurance of her soft
breath warming his skin and she just needed the safeguard of his embrace.

“I brought you breakfast,” he spoke, relinquishing the silence, “I read in that magazine you had on
the table…”
She looked up curiously, “How long have you been awake?”
“A few hours,” Oliver shrugged flippantly before his eyes turned sombre, “it might take me a
while to be able to sleep in again.”
He offered her the best smile he could as the last 40 something days ticked through his memory.

Six weeks encased in bricks, mortar and cold, unforgiving steel, that’s how long he’d spent in
prison and while it may not have seemed like long (it was barely a scratch on his last stay there) he
had resigned himself to much longer this time after bitter-sweetly tasting just how good life could
be when it was touched with love.
“I’m here too,” she vowed as the delicate tips of her fingers touched his face.

He thanked her with a smile before glancing back towards the breakfast tray, “The magazine said
you should eat protein and vitamin C so, eggs, orange juice and some toast and the banana is for
potassium because you might start getting leg cramps,” he prattled as he gently squeezed her tight
calves, “You didn’t have any bacon,” he added with a smile, “but I can get dressed and get some if
you have a hankering.”

He fluffed the pillow behind her and flattened her tented legs as she shuffled back against the
headboard. She laughed at his fussing before she shook her head in response to his last comment.
“In December I try to act a little more kosher,” she remarked with a playful crinkle across the
bridge of her noise.

Oliver settled the legs of the tray either side of her lap before handing her a fork for the puffy,
cloud-like plate of scrambled eggs.
“Is that why you don’t have a tree?” he enquired as Felicity set about demolishing the plate,
unaware just how famished she was until the first mouthful hit her pallet.

She finished the mouthful as she gently shook her head, “Oh, that’s just me being lazy,” she
laughed before filling her fork like a shovel, “Mom always had one. She would say that merging
the two never hurt her beliefs but I think she just liked tinsel,” she finished before she passed the shovel through her lips.

She fenced her hand in front of her mouth as she finished that mouthful too, “What about you, did your parents celebrate?”
Oliver’s lips puffed into a smile as he fondly remembered the handful of Christmases that he could easily recall, “My mother loved it. Christmas threw up, tastefully, in our house every year. She’d always go out of her way to make it something magical. Raisa would have these Russian Christmas treats called angel wings and Kissel and we’d eat so much.”

Felicity couldn’t help but smile as Oliver’s face lit up with each word and memory that past over his lips, “It sounds fun.”
He nodded as Felicity inhaled another fork full of eggs, “It was.”

“I want that,” she breathed softly as she lay her fork on the empty plate, “Marry the traditions of our two families and make something of our very own.”
Her eyes studied him inquisitively as she nibbled on her plump lip.

Oliver hummed softly as his palm cupped her cheek, “I’d like that.”
She leaned closer and pressed a delicate kiss against his slightly rough lips before she soothed her tongue along the seam.
His hand fell to her neck as they deepened the kiss and his tongue teased hers.

Felicity pulled back with her eyelids still hanging heavy over her eyes. She sighed contently as her lips patted together before her lids slowly rose. Silently she took the tray, folded the legs and balanced it on her bedside table before she cosied down the bed and fluttered a bevy of kisses on the back of Oliver’s hand.

Oliver shadowed over her as he lifted his anchored foot off the floor and burrowed into the crumpled sheets. His fingertips grazed her ribs as he balanced on one elbow and studied the sapphire pools of her eyes.

Holding her neck, Oliver gently tipped her head up as he lowered his and made their lips meet in a richly decadent cloud of panted breaths and a warmed kiss. Their lips massaged together with lingered enjoyment before Felicity, once again, pulled back.

“What above Jax?” she whispered as her eyes nodded down towards the foot of the bed where the oversized puppy was still relaxing.

Oliver whistled sharply and with only one annoyed yawn Jax clambered off the bed and saw himself out of the room.

“Now, where were we?” Oliver smiled as his nose nuzzled Felicity’s cheek.
“Hmmm,” she teased, tapping her lip playfully, “I don’t really remember,” she finished with a wink.
“Let’s see if I can help you remember,” he smirked as he threw the duck-egg coloured sheet over his head and scampered down the bed.
Felicity shrieked out a laugh as Oliver pressed a kiss to the top of her naked thigh, but it soon morphed into a tantric moan when she felt his tongue slide between her folds.

She lifted the sheet and looked down the line of her naked body just as Oliver looked up. His mouth was hidden between her legs and behind the slight rise in her belly, but his eyes were smiling plenty enough for both.
He licked the entire length of her sex before his tongue flicked up and he lifted his head, “Relax princess and let me take care of you.” He never waited for an answer before his tongue spread her open again and gently swept around her clit while his breath fanned warm air against her heat.

Her head drifted back into the puffy embrace of her pillow as the sheet floated from her fingertips.

*She could absolutely get used to this.*

---

After Oliver spent almost an hour between her legs and the languid shower where they couldn’t keep their hands off each other, it was almost 10am and Curtis had already rung twice.

“I don’t have to go to work if you want me to stay,” she quipped as she leaned against the counter and looked down to scrutinize her blouse, *it was fitting a little more snug than it had a week ago.* Oliver smiled before he leaned in and kissed Felicity’s softly blushed cheek, “Go, be brilliant.”

“What will you do?” she asked as she ran a finger comb through her freshly blow-dried hair.

“I thought I might get a couple of things from storage,” he kicked his foot sheepishly against the tiled kitchen floor, “If you still want me to stay.”

She smiled at the slightly nervous tweak at the corner of his lips before she smoothed it down with her thumb, “I meant it Oliver, I want us to be together.”

She breathed in and sighed it out, saying it hadn’t been as scary as she had once thought it might have been.

She was ready to make a home with Oliver and when he smiled brightly back at her, she knew he was ready to do the same thing.

“Do you still have any of your mother’s Christmas decorations?” she asked before finishing the glass of juice Oliver had shadowed her with most of the morning.

“I think so,” he theorised.

She rinsed the glass in the sink before rubbing her hand across half of his broad and taut chest, bunching up the grey cotton tee, “Bring some of that and I’ll go to my lock up after work and get a few things I have stored there;” she swanned around to his front and braced both her palms against his chest before she lifted onto her toes and kissed him gently, “We can start our own traditions tonight.”

---

When Felicity opened the apartment door that night, the glorious smell was the first thing that hit her. The second was more literal as Jax torpedoed off the couch and skidded to a stop in front of her with his tail wildly thumping the polished floor and his paw pressed against her thigh before he stretched his neck up and nuzzled into her coat-clad stomach.

Oliver appeared moment later from the kitchen with a dishcloth looped through his belt where he would have once carried an oil rag. He cleaned his hands down his pants as he whistled Jax back, who dutifully obeyed.

He took the box from her hands before she kicked the door closed and began unbuttoning her winter coat, still dusted with flakes of snow.

“Do you think he knows I’m...” she leaned closer and hushed her tone, “...pregnant?” Felicity
didn’t know why she naturally whispered the p-word, who was Jax going to tell?

Oliver looked back at Jax who was walking circles over a mat in the centre of the living space, “I’m not sure, maybe. He seems quite protective.”

“Oh I know, poor Matt almost got his hand bitten off,” Felicity rambled as she shrugged her coat down her shoulders.

Oliver’s lips instantly tightened, “Who is Matt?”

Felicity laughed at his instant demeanour shift before she brushed a kiss across his lips, softening them.

“Some guy that flirted with me at the dog park, but don’t worry,” she chuckled as she tapped her fingers against his bristled cheek, “between Jax’s murderous glare and my penchant for over speaking,” she winked as she rubbed a circle across her stomach, “he wasn’t interested in me for long.”

“What is that smell?” she asked as she walked further into the room.

“It’s a beef stew that has everything you need.”

She turned and walked a few steps backwards, “Does it have red wine in it?” she asked impishly.

Oliver raised a single brow.

She pouted playfully, “You’re no fun.”

“What’s in the box?” he asked as they reached the coffee table.

“A couple of things I found for a belated nod towards Hanukkah,” she answered with a proud smile.

Oliver pulled out a wound up cable, “How?”

“Okay well not that,” she laughed, taking the same from his hands, “most of my equipment is in storage too and I needed this.”

“For?”

Felicity pushed her lips out before pulling them back in, “I don’t remember.”

She was fairly certain this baby was addling her brain into forgetful mush.

He rested her box on the coffee table next to the larger one he had filled with trinkets of a childhood he’d once thought about forgetting.

“Oooh, what did you find?” she said gleefully as she tore open the box and began to fossick.

There were babbles, strings of gold, red and green metallic pearls, stockings with the four Queen’s names embroidered on them and almost every other quintessential Christmas staple.

“I didn’t go through it all, so I’m not really sure what’s in there,” he laughed as he reached in and pulled out something he had deliberately placed in the box, “but I did find this.”

“A polaroid camera?” Felicity smiled as she studied the 90s vintage camera.

“I remember my dad buying it for my mom, she loved it, but she didn’t get to use it much.”

He bit back a sad sigh as he recounted how happy she had been their last Christmas when she had unwrapped the camera, “I thought maybe I could use it,” he spoke quietly.

Felicity smiled, she loved the way her *ruffian* wanted to discover softer sides of himself that he had once carefully walled off.

“What do you want to take photos of?”

“You,” he replied breathily, without even a hint of sarcasm in his tone.

Her lips parted to expel a wordless breath.

Oliver raised the camera and with a silent smile threaded across his face he took a photo.

They waited the few minutes before Oliver held the Polaroid in his fingertips and lightly blew across its surface.
“Ten weeks, our little strawberry,” he beamed as he handed the candid shot to her. Felicity looked over it and smiled at the tiny bump under her blouse. “I love it Oliver.”

He sunk closer to her until they shared the same air, “I love you.”

“I know,” she popped the last syllable before a smile blanched her lips. “I’m not going to stop saying it.”

“Good,” she peeped, “because I’m not going to grow tired of hearing it.”

“How did your parents take the news?”

Her lips closed into her mouth before her teeth stapled them closed while her eyes scurried across the floor. “You haven’t told them, have you?” Oliver enquired with a slight chuckle in his voice as his brow slowly worked up towards his hairline. “In my defence,” Felicity started while her shoulders shrugged upwards and her hands banded around her waist, “My father doesn’t deserve to know this baby.”

Oliver perched the camera back in the Christmas box before he grazed his palms down her shoulders and rested them at her elbows. “You don’t really mean that,” he assured softly. “I do,” she argued, with almost no fight in her voice because Oliver was right – even after everything she was still that 8 year old who wanted her father to come back for Christmas.

One of his hands fell away from her elbow to brush a tear back from her cheek, “And your mom, does she deserve to know?”

Yes. “I can’t tell her without him finding out and I’m not ready to face what will come because of it.”

“What do you think he’s going to do?”

Felicity sighed listless, she didn’t really know but in the pit of her stomach she truly believed telling Noah would be an infuriating process. “Lectures,” she smiled as she brushed back another surprise tear, “lots of lectures.” She cringed as her headspace suddenly filled with the disapproving looks of the board members who had impregnated their fair share of women but still thought of it as some sort of illness.

“I can’t imagine the board will be all that taken with it either,” she huffed, frustrated at herself for even letting them take an inch of space in her mind. “Fuck them,” Oliver announced cavalierly, “they don’t know shit.” Felicity flung her lips onto Oliver’s for a fleeting but heated kiss. “You, Oliver Queen,” she spoke with a smile threaded across her mouth as her arms draped over his shoulder and her fingers coiled around the ends of his pulled back hair, “know exactly what to say.”

He kissed her chastely while his hands slipped to the rounds of her ass. “You’re probably going to start showing soon,” he remarked with understanding smile. Felicity sighed, she knew he was right, but she would take every minute she could get before then.

“I’m surprised your mom hasn’t noticed,” his smiled grew into a smirk as his eyes lowered to her growing chest, “I noticed.” Felicity tugged a clump of his hair, pulling his eyes back up, “Of course you noticed, but I don’t generally shower with my mother.”

Oliver laughed raucously before he pressed another, smiling kiss against Felicity’s lips as they shook through her muted laugh.
“I love you,” he breathed freely and happily. She ghosted a smiled kiss across his mouth, “I know and I love you too.”

[December 24th – Christmas Eve]  
[11 Weeks]

“You know we in a minority of people that actually came to work today,” Curtis griped as he leaned against Felicity’s doorway and kicked his long limbs out ahead of him. “I’m sure of it.” Felicity laughed as she slid her chair back from her desk and ran her hands down her black jeans that were now most comfortably worn with the top button undone.

The office had been scarcely occupied most of the day and what little staff that had come in for the morning had all but gone by the time 4pm rolled around, so there was an eerie sort of feel about the hollow halls and abandoned offices.

“But we are done now right?” Curtis asked with a hooked brow and saucer eyes. Felicity looked at her cleared desk and nodded succinctly, she could leave quite happily now.

“Do you need a ride home?” Curtis asked as he watched Felicity pull on a pair of boots she took from her bottom drawer, “Paul is downstairs.” Felicity shook her head as she opened the concertina door behind her and pulled out a canvas knapsack. “Oliver is picking me up.”

“Firstly, did you raid Thea’s wardrobe?” Curtis asked as Felicity walked around her desk with her bag slung over her shoulder. Felicity looked down at the heavy boots and laughed, “She did help me pick them out.”

Curtis nodded knowingly, “Secondly, Oliver lets you get back on the bike with you being…” he closed his lips tightly and made a half circle shape over his stomach. “It took some persuasion, but I just showed him all the books that suggested a babymoon in the second trimester and we’re almost there,” Felicity nattered, relishing the freeness of not needing to speak in code around the office, knowing there wasn’t another soul there who cared to hear it.

“You’re really going for two whole weeks?” Curtis pouted, “You’ll be huge by the time you get back.” Felicity slapped his arm, “Thea is looking after Jax at my apartment, which, by the way, looks like Christmas and Hanukkah’s love child,” she jested, “And Oliver and I are just going to drive the coast until we run out of road,” she answered with a far off look in her eye. The very idea of it was making her sigh wantonly. Just them, the bike, the wind at their backs and the salty air licking their faces – she couldn’t imagine anything else sounding better.

She shuffled Curtis out of her office and closed the door, taking a moment to relish the sound of the click. The back end of the year had been a crazy rollercoaster that the years beforehand could never have prepared her for, but Felicity was happy for it because she’d found something irreplaceable – another piece of herself.

Felicity was ready to face the next year with a company she believed in, a man she loved and a baby she would treasure. She would have it all and the killer heels to match.
“Before you go, I have a gift for you,” Curtis cheered as he plucked a small bag from his desk and held it out. “We already exchanged gifts,” Felicity side-eyed him as she reluctantly took the bag. “I know but this one isn’t technically for you, so…” he clapped his hands together in excitement, “open it.”

Felicity opened the bag with a smile flared at the corner of her lips. Her hand delved in and returned with a baby rattle a little larger than her hand. It resembled a pewter dumbbell with a gently sloped bar and a bulb on either end.

“This is gorgeous Curtis,” Felicity gushed as her eye swelled up. He skipped forward as he gestured excitedly, “I made some enhancements. It’s a prototype for my future line of baby accessories.” “I’m so glad my baby is your test subject,” she smirked before she laughed softly.

Curtis was too enthused to pay any mind to her sass. “It reads frequency of cries and correlates with possible reasons, which can be sent to you by Bluetooth,” he chatted with vigour, “it can take the baby's temperature, measure their heart rate, Oh! It also has Wi-Fi.” “Is that all?” she teased. “It also has a tracking system, ‘Dude Where's my Rattle’,” Curtis laughed, unashamed, at his own joke. “You’re going to track my baby?” she questioned with an arched brow and a tipped smile.

Curtis let out a nervous laugh as he rolled his hands over each other, “I was thinking more like in case the rattle got lost at the park, but now it sounds a little creepy,” he grimaced before a lightbulb illuminated his expression, “but it isn’t creepy when it’s from your baby’s cool godfather,” he quipped as he pointed to thumbs into his chest. “Who said you were the godfather?” Felicity said coolly, holding a straight face for long enough to make Curtis shift his weight from one foot to the other with an uncomfortable expression before she broke character and laughed brightly.

“You cut me real deep,” Curtis lamented as he pressed an imaginary knife into his heart. “You’re strange.” He shrugged, “I know.” “Thank you,” she smiled as her thumb ran across the ‘Smart’ rattle. “You’re welcome,” he trilled before the two friends hugged.

“Want me to wait with you?” Curtis asked as the two friends stepped out into the biting cold late afternoon. “No, it’s fine, he won’t be long,” Felicity assured as she waved and nodded across the road and up the street a few cars, “Paul is waiting, go, enjoy your husband and your well-deserved break.” “Take care Felicity,” Curtis almost warned before he ran across the road, dodging the cars that were still out and about.

Paul kicked off from the hood of car as Curtis approached, “I got something for Felicity’s baby, I might go...” “You can’t give her baby presents,” Curtis interrupted. The shorter man crossed his arms and asked curiously, “Why?” Curtis smiled pitifully, “Because she doesn’t know I told you about the b-a-b-y.”
“Why did you just spell it?”
“I don’t know.”
Paul smoothed his palms down the front of Curtis’ suede blazer, “You weren’t supposed to tell me were you.”
He tilted his hands and shrugged until Paul looked back across the street at Felicity, at the same instant a honey-blonde in leather ran up to her.

“Who’s that?” he asked curiously.
Curtis turned until he saw what his husband had, “I have no idea.”

---

Felicity was surprised when a hand gripped her shoulder. She stumbled back and shot the intruder an annoyed glare until their face came into focus.

*Laurel?*

“Aurel?”

“You have to come,” Laurel cried, her hand shaking as she reached her thin, branch-like fingers towards Felicity again.

“Wh-what?” Felicity stuttered as she was still trying to make sense of what Laurel was doing here, talking to her.

“There was an accident.”

Panic set into Felicity’s eyes but she couldn’t open her mouth to speak.

“At the shop, Oliver, there was an accident,” Laurel huffed out the stunted sentences.
A sudden gasp of air filled her lungs, “Wait, what, is he okay?”
Her heart raced as Laurel shook her head frantically, “He’s at the hospital.”

Felicity couldn’t breathe and her legs suddenly felt like lumps of concrete where her knees felt like jelly, an unholy mix.

“You need to come now,” Laurel urged, “I have a ride.”

Hindsight wasn’t the type of thing a person is blessed with until *after* a series of events happened, no matter how much that same person may have thought themselves able to deal with moments of unguarded surprise.

Even the highest IQs didn’t escape moments of fogged and snapped decisions, and so where Felicity might have once asked a series of careful and methodical questions to get a full picture, in this instant, sudden and crippling panic stole every last one of them.

It was with that mind-set that Felicity followed Laurel to a nearby deep metallic grey van with blackened windows.

*Because hindsight was for after.*

---

Curtis watched Felicity follow the frantic stranger towards a parked grey van for barely a minute before he made the decision to go back across the street.

“Everything okay?” Paul asked.
Curtis squinted to see if that helped, it didn’t, “I don’t know, I don’t know who that woman is.”

“Well, go see if everything is alright,” Paul encouraged before he reached into the car and took out a small present wrapped in rainbow paper, “and take this.”
Curtis glanced down for a few seconds at the parcel now in his hands and when he looked back across the street, the ominous dark van and the two women were no where to be seen.
He was staring at an empty space.

~To be Continued~

Chapter End Notes

Author Note:
I don't generally do this but I wanted to ensure everyone reading that I will, in no way, be going the route where there is any harm to that unborn baby, 100% that bub will be born happy and healthy. There won't even be any suggestion otherwise so if this is something that is triggering for you, please be assured that there will be no pregnancy related angst. Xox.

PS: there won't be an update next week, so enjoy sweating it out in the comments ;)

PPS: if you read my fics are on Twitter and don't follow me, can I ask why? Is it because I'm a bitch? Hahahahahaha okay, but seriously, I love you all xox
Felicity couldn’t breathe.

There was a strange taste in her mouth, almost metallic, and the stench of motor oil and dirt was the only thing she could smell. Her eyes blinked into the darkness, struggling to make pictures out of the shadows until she realised there was something covering her head.

She was pinned against the floor with a heavy weight pressing into the lower half of her spine. It was onerous and each attempt she made to move drove it deeper into her body. She gathered her thoughts in the fog as best as she could.

Firstly, she was on the floor – she twitched her fingers and found them loose, but her shoulders throbbed and, as her head slowly tried to make order out of everything, she realised that they were pulled unnaturally tight behind her back, but she didn’t think they were bound – held maybe, but not bound.

Secondly, she was on her stomach – she sucked in musty air sharply as she reactively tried to take the weight off her front, but whatever – or whomever – held her in place wasn’t giving her an inch. She tried pulling her legs up in the hope that her knees could take some of the pressure off her stomach, but she couldn’t do anything more than scramble her feet in thin air.

Logically she knew that at this early stage lying on her stomach wasn’t considered dangerous but
that was all she could think about.

“Please, I can’t breathe.”
She wasn’t sure if the words even made it out of her subconscious let alone loud enough to be
heard until her arm was twisted and her fingers forced around something cold and cylindrical.
“Do you know what this is?” a rasped voice asked her angrily.

She felt a little down the shaft and nodded, “Yes.”
It was a gun.
“If you scream I’ll blow a hole in your kneecap,” a snicker, “understood?”
Felicity nodded and tried to steady her breath.
“Good, get her up.”

She was yanked up and instantly her lungs filled with air. Seconds later the cover was snatched
from her head and, even though she hadn’t been in darkness for long, her eyes fought to adjust.

*We’re moving.*
A *van.*
*A least 5 people around her.*
*A hard bench underneath her.*
*Windows painted out.*

For a moment she didn’t see Laurel and she wondered if she had been caught up in whatever this
was, until she turned and saw her sitting one gang-banger away, running her hand idly through her
hair.

The other faces were strangers, except for one. Sitting on the planked bench that ran down the
opposite side of the van to where she sat was Malcolm Merlyn, rolling the cylinder of his gun and
sneering.

“Where is Oliver?” she asked as her arms instinctively wrapped around her stomach and clutched at
her waist.
Malcolm looked up, his eyes dark and his smile thin and humourless, “You’ll see him soon
enough.”

~*~*~*~

Curtis dodged a taxi and a bike messenger as he ran across the road and skidded to a halt at the spot
Felicity had seemingly vanished from. His head twisted and turned, looking for anything in the
distance until they fell to the curb and he gasped reactively.

Sitting, cracked and discarded, was her cellphone – the one Felicity was never less than five feet
from at all times.

Paul caught up and studied Curtis, with one hand tied around his waist, as he bent down and
collected the phone.
“Something is wrong,” Curtis said ominously as his grip tightened around the phone’s edges.
*Very wrong.*

Felicity didn’t know how long they had driven but she had memorised what she could, though the
first few minutes were a veritable fog of memories, after she had been let up off the floor they
turned right twice, left one and then straight at some speed for maybe twenty minutes, before it
slowed, veered off, took a right, then a left, slowed even more before it felt like the van pulled into a driveway.

*A gravel driveway* she corrected as she listened to the sound of it being crushed under the weight of the tyres.

It was almost two full minutes before the van finally stopped. She didn’t dare move when the side door opened but the air suddenly reeked of diesel to the point where it made Felicity splutter out a cough.

Footsteps echoed outside the van and she quickly reasoned that they were inside a warehouse so even if she *could* move deftly past the hulking skinhead to her right, she probably couldn’t run away from this situation.

Malcolm put the muzzle of the gun to her shoulder and plugged it deep into her muscle as he leant into her space and menacingly shadowed her, “get out.”

She tentatively moved as she kept her eyes affixed to his and her lips terse – he wouldn’t get any sick satisfaction from scaring her – *that much she could control.*

She stepped out from the van and took in the dreary surroundings. She had been right, it was a warehouse and large barrels lined the walls. A quick glance behind her and she could see two roller doors, a height and width that would accommodate trucks, and a smaller door to the left.

The lights in the expansive warehouse were florescent and were hung high. There wasn’t a single window that she could see.

She was walked, or rather was pushed, around the side of the van and towards another secondary room, through a large wooden sliding door. While she contemplated trying to run, her logical side still remained enough in control to not – after all she couldn’t even be sure that outside the roller doors or the small door alongside them, was even *outside.*

So she walked, as directed, listening to the sound of her boots scuffing over oil-stained concrete and breathing in the potent fumes that permeated the air. As they rounded the corner into the second room her feet halted and she gasped in a breath of the rancid air.

Oliver was bound and slumped forward on an old metal chair. Threads of logic left her and Felicity ran towards him, terrified of what she might find once she got there.

Her hands touched his face first as she dropped to her knees beside him. He was warm and clammy and her fingers felt the remnants of something sticky along his hairline. She crouched lower, her breath broken and rasped, as she tried to see his face.

An audible intake of air echoed in the smaller room when she managed to lift his face just enough to see it; his eyes were shut and a large gash was open and clotted across his cheek. His lips were battered and swollen and dry blood outlined the lower one.

“Oliver,” she whispered softly while her thumb stroked his cheek and her heart begged him to wake up.

She was pulled back roughly and out of instinct her shoulders curved and shrouded in around her chest while her forearm banded over her stomach.

“What did you do to him?” she scathed, her words like venom and her eyes like daggers.
“You get in in blood, you get out in blood,” Malcolm replied, a cavalier laugh dripping from the edges of his thin lips, “Wake him up,” he called to one of the other five men in the room, none of whom Felicity recognised.

The same hulk who had boxed her in in the van scooped a tin bucket through a half-barrel trough that was filled with stagnant water and dumped it callously over Oliver’s head. He woke up with a start and Felicity felt her entire body tremble in both relief and panic.

She tried to run back to him but her arm was locked in the grasp of another man much larger than her and fighting him would have been a fool’s errand she wasn’t prepared to risk, knowing what she was carrying.

“Oliver,” she whimpered impulsively.
He fought the pain in his right eye to open it as the taste of old blood floated around his mouth. His breath was laboured and his chest throbbed as he struggled to steady his breathing and focus his vision.

*Oh god, no.*
Seeing her there, her eyes wide with terror and wet with concern, hurt him more than every other scar, wound or bruise he carried on his worn body.

Getting out of the Lost Souls wasn’t a rite that was easy; you entered the fold in blood so you left it the same way. Oliver had prepared himself for it much like his father had years before, and he had every intention of telling Felicity about the need for it once they’d passed over state lines.

But when he was jumped collecting her helmet from Verdant, he soon realised he wasn’t going to get a choice in the timing.

But she wasn’t supposed to be here.
She wasn’t supposed to see this.

“You fucking son of a bitch,” Oliver spat a clot of blood near his feet, “you leave her out of this.” Malcolm laughed, the kind of sinister laugh that was waiting for the other players to realise they hadn’t been playing the same game.

“You should have got me what I wanted Oliver,” Malcolm paced in front of him as Oliver fought his restraints, “I would have had more time to organise and plan things.” Oliver gritted his teeth until his jaw ached with the tension, “I will kill you.” It wasn’t a threat insomuch as a promise.

Malcolm scuffed his steel-capped boots against the dusty concrete and through the old blood of fights long ago before he kicked the leg of the old steel chair and jerked Oliver’s body along with it.
He leaned down and ran a finger along the barrel of the revolver, “I’m the one holding the gun and you’re tied to a fucking chair,” he chorused with a laugh before he straightened up and cracked the handle of the gun across Oliver’s cheek.

The pain ricocheted through his face as Oliver’s mouth filled with fresh blood, but it didn’t hurt nearly as much as seeing Felicity recoil and hearing her sob out a scream.

Felicity watched as Malcolm raised the butt of the gun a second time, “Wait,” she cried out, lurching her free hand towards them, “What do you want?” “Good,” Malcolm smiled as he tussled Oliver’s hair, “One of you is smart.” He walked over to a steel table with rusted legs and collected a folder which he feathered the edge
with his finger before he carried it back to Felicity, “I want this.”

She looked down at what he offered and tried her best to swallow her surprise as she read the label on the front, *Operation Rudolph.*

The wooden door slid open with a heavy rumble and Felicity’s head jerked around to see Thea, being held in the same manner she was, being walked in alongside Laurel and a man who undoubtedly weighed three times what the younger Queen did.

Thea’s eyes landed first on Felicity and an audible and shivered gasp leapt from her mouth, “No, what are you doing here?” her words were trembled, frightened and surprised before she looked towards Oliver and her entire body shuddered, “Oh God,” Felicity heard her whimper.

“What did you do?” she screamed at her father, her cheeks red with rage as she wrestled the her arm free from the giant’s grasp, “You promised me if I got it for you that you would leave them alone.”

Felicity’s heart sunk, Thea had toyed with something she didn’t understand, something Oliver had bled and hurt to protect.

Thea’s finger jabbed into Malcolm’s chest as she stood high on the balls of her feet before he swatted her away.

“That had been my intention,” he scorned, “but turns out I inadvertently lied.”

There wasn’t an ounce of empathy or regret in his voice, Felicity heard only malice.

“There is nothing in this for you,” Felicity added, matching his stare with one of her own, even though she could see the gun rocking like a pendulum in his hand.

“Oh but I think there is,” he smiled as he dragged the front sight of the gun slowly down her arm, “I’m not quite as stupid as you might think.”

The sound of metal scraping on concrete was Oliver fighting his binds and he watched Malcolm with unbridled hatred.

Malcolm’s reply was to brush his hand through Felicity’s hair in a way that made her wince reflexively and Oliver echo out a growl, like a protective dog fighting against a muzzle and restraint.

Malcolm’s face was near hers, his breath misting hot air against her cheek, but Felicity didn’t blink or allow her stance to waiver, “And you’re going to get it for me,” he whispered with his cheek brushing hers.

“I can’t,” she replied, stoic and resilient.

He pulled back but she could still feel each breath he took, “You will.”

Her eyes scathed his, “I didn’t say I wouldn’t, I said I can’t,” she replied tersely, “If you’re as smart as you consider yourself and you actually read that file you would know I don’t control that truck, it’s a big fucking remote controlled car and I don’t have the remote.”

She could feel her heart as it thumped like a locomotive behind her chest while adrenaline coursed through her system. She dare not look at Oliver though, afraid she might find his eyes begging her to retreat.

If she had looked though, she would have seen quite the opposite – Oliver was, swollen lips and all, almost smiling at her tenacity. She had a spirit he would never attempt to extinguish.

Malcolm however was less appreciative, “Get the remote then,” he hissed, his eyes like tight slits.

“It’s not that simple,” she shot back, before she then calmed herself with a steady breath,
remembering Caitlin’s advice not to let her heart rate get too high at this stage, “I should know. I can’t get control of it because I was never supposed to control it. I only built the mechanics.”

Malcolm’s breathing became heavy and ominous and for a brief moment Felicity considered that a man like him wouldn’t be above hitting her. But he didn’t and instead the tips of his lips twisted into a smile that was verging of psychotic as he walked a direct line to Oliver.

He raised the gun, click, click as he rolled the cylinder and counted the bullets. Five shots, two bullets he counted out loud, “the odds are in his favour,” he smirked as he butted it against Oliver’s temple.

Oliver gritted his teeth.
Felicity reacted with a trembled, “I can’t,” as her eyes finally met with Oliver’s.
Click as he rolled it out of the frame like Russian Roulette.
Thea screamed, “Please, don’t.”
Oliver could smell old, spent gun powder on the muzzle of the gun as his forehead creased and he kept his eyes trained on Felicity.
If he was going to die, he would die with her image embedded in his brain.
Click as he snapped the cylinder back into the frame.
Malcolm’s finger flirted with the trigger guard before his index finger stroked the trigger.
“I can’t,” Felicity sobbed.
He pulled it and an empty shot rang through the air and the gun reverberated against Oliver’s temple.

Oliver’s heart dropped into his chest as his mouth gaped involuntarily.
“You want to test his luck again or do you want to think up a way?” Malcolm said tersely as he spun the barrel again.

Felicity squeezed her eyes shut and pulled everything she had to calm her pounding heart – there was only one way, an impossible way.

With her eyes still sewn closed, she breathed softly, “There is only one way,” her eyes blinked open, “You need to get in there to take control of it,” a short, sharp inhale, “But it needs to still be moving.”

Her head shook as she considered the parameters of what she was saying, it had been the only fault Felicity had seen with Curtis, but it was a fantasy, a blip – an impossible opening.

“It’s not possible,” she had made it so, “to jump onto a moving truck, get inside and override the system before they know what’s happening,” her hair tumbled over her shoulders as her head shook.

“Oliver can do it,” Malcolm retorted with a snide smile pointed at Oliver.

His chest broadened and his shoulders lifted as he still fought the restraints, “Fuck you,” he spat as anger enveloped him, “I won’t help you, you piece of shit.”

He watched Malcolm fill the revolver with bullets – the next shot wouldn’t be an empty – before he snapped it back into place and polished the shaft on his shirt sleeve. Oliver knew all Malcolm would have to do was point it at Thea or Felicity and he would recant his refusal.

Felicity’s façade was beginning to fade and he saw just a tinge of fear in the brilliant blue of her eyes before she closed them with her lashes splayed over her porcelain cheeks and a single tear slipped from the corner of one.

“You let them go first,” Oliver swallowed just enough anger to get the words out.
Malcolm’s raucous laugh bounced from the walls, “I still need her to override the system,” he quipped as his hand grabbed a clump of Felicity’s hair and yanked it hard enough for her to yelp reflexively.

With a burst of anger-tipped adrenalin Oliver tore at his binds, ripping the skin from his wrists, but they wouldn’t break, “She has nothing to do with this world and you know it.” “But she did the moment you brought her into it.” Oliver’s face was etched with pained lines. “Let them go,” his voice was broken, his fight cracking. He just needed Thea and Felicity safe, whatever price he had to pay.

Felicity swallowed down the sadness she found in Oliver’s eyes before she spoke, “We can get you what you need, but I need to go to my storage to get some equipment.” “Fine,” Malcolm dropped her hair from his twisted fingers, “but if you try anything I will shoot him and then her,” he nodded first to Oliver then to Thea so his threat was made clear.

He raised the gun to whack Oliver like he had before and without thinking Felicity caught it mid-air in the palm of her hand. The pain vibrated down her arm but her face stayed stoic, never giving away that fact. “If you intend to make him jump onto a moving truck I suggest you stop hitting him.”

Felicity let her finger linger on the cut that marred Oliver’s cheek until he winced and she pulled it away, returning to the task of carefully fitting his earpiece.

Time had lapsed so quickly, almost like someone had pressed fast forward on the evening and plunged the chilly December night into early darkness.

Malcolm was watching them with beady eyes as the others unloaded the equipment Felicity had collected from her storage unit. It wasn’t everything she would wish for and nothing about what Malcolm was asking was going to be easy, but Felicity wouldn’t allow herself to dwell on that, not right now.

“I’ve mapped out the best place for you to attempt the manoeuvre,” the stunt that will probably get you killed, “the only time you’ll have enough gap between the truck and the escort is on the highway.” Oliver nodded as his fingers gently pinned back her hair while his eyes searched for any harm done to her, despite his own beaten body.

“They have to take out the escort at the same time as you get onto the truck or it won’t happen,” she watched him continue to nod, though she couldn’t be sure he understood the absolute importance that it had to be simultaneously.

“You can access the front seat of the truck via a roof access panel, it’s open because it’s the only connection out of the barrier. Snapping the antenna will buy us a little time, but Oliver,” she stilled his hand as it gently stroked her cheek and bore into his eyes, - he was listening now, “you need to strip the wire under the dashboard and connect this,” she explained, holding up a router no larger than a USB stick, “so I can override the system and take control, and...” she breathed heavy and pained, “you need to do it in 45 seconds or it will blow up.”

“I understand,” he whispered as his other hand rested on her waist with his thumb drifting over the edge of her stomach.
“Oliver,” she spoke with quivering lips she couldn’t seem to still and tears forming behind her eyes, “Come back to me.”
“What’s inside the truck?”
She folded her lips and shrugged lithely, “I don’t know, but nothing good.”
She watched him swallow and before his mouth opened, she knew what he would say.
“He can’t get that truck, you and I both know that Felicity.”
She hated him in that moment, his selflessness, his courage and his willingness to risk himself if he needed to.

“But I love you,” she cried, closing her eyes as her head rested in his palm and her tears fell into its creases.
“You know I love you too,” his thumb stroked her stomach as he spoke make her body shiver at his touch, “If you find a way of out this place, a gap, a moment, you need to promise me you’ll take it. Otherwise when the time is right, I’ll make a distraction for you and you’ll take it.”
Her eyes flung open, glassy and wet with unspent tears, “Oliver, I’m not leaving you to do this alone, you need me.”
“I need you to be safe.”
She furrowed her brow and nibbled the centre of her lower lip, “I don’t want to be safe, I want to be with you.”

His shoulders slumped, heavy with burden, but his eyes were soft, filled with love.
“Baby, the only way I get through this is knowing that you’ll be safe. So if you have an opportunity, take it,” he begged, “if not for you, then for our little lime.”

His forehead leaned into hers as they breathed the same silent air.
“Tell me what fruit they’ll be next week,” he whispered, a smile caught in his tone.
Her eyes fell closed as she tried to remember, “A plum,” she answered softly as a smile crept up onto her lips.
She listened to his sighed exhale as she breathed in his warm air.
“A plum,” he repeated in a barely audible whisper.

“Promise me Felicity,” he said as his head pulled away from hers and she looked up at him, almost defeated.
“I promise.”
*He was right.*

He smiled before he pressed his lips to the side of her forehead and kissed her gently and unrushed, “Good,” he ghosted against her skin.

As they broke away, the door rumbled open and Roy appeared, confused and jostling his arm free from the grip of one mammoth biker.
“What’s going on?” Roy questioned as his eyes moved from Oliver and Felicity to Thea who was sat, slumped, in a chair.
“It’s time for you to pick a side pledge,” Malcolm grinned, “I don’t trust you just yet so you ride with Oliver or you sit your ass down here with me.”
Thea looked up and blinked through her tears.
“Go with Oliver, I’m okay,” she pleaded softly.
Her brother was about to jump onto a truck hurtling down the highway – she considered he needed all the help he could get.

Ten minutes later and there was an eerie silence in the warehouse as Malcolm, Laurel, Thea and
Felicity were the only ones left in the room.

Felicity was at her makeshift desk with Thea sitting a little ways behind her and Laurel leant up against the back wall. Malcolm was hovering and Felicity was aware that there was at least another two men in the building somewhere, though only a lanky man with a missing front tooth and narrow eyes made himself ominously known by skulking in and out of the room.

“I’m so sorry Felicity,” Thea softly sobbed, her words only slightly muffled by the tears, “I just wanted you and Oliver to be together.”
Felicity twisted her head over her shoulder and offered the young Queen a placating smile. She may have made a deal with the devil, but Felicity didn’t doubt her intentions.

“Oliver was happy with you,” she continued as a limp hand brushed away hot tears from her cheeks, “He’s always given that up for me, but he deserves to be happy with you, with…” she stopped her words short, holding onto the secret when Felicity’s eyes begged, “with you.”
Malcolm shouldn’t know about their baby, he didn’t need more leverage.

“It’s okay Thea,” Felicity offered with sincerity and for a moment it eased the young girl's burdened brow.

“Will it work?” Malcolm interrupted bitingly as he waved the gun in Felicity’s face. He was getting agitated and it was showing as irrational and jumpy in his demeanour.

Her head snapped towards him and the smile completely vanished, “I don’t know, have you tried hacking a private defence contractor before?” she quipped, her tone a scratchy one she couldn’t seem to disguise, “They have firewalls for their firewalls and I can only slow them down at best, two minutes before I need to take complete control, so you can wave your gun around all you want, but I just don’t know.”

He put the gun to Thea’s head and his lips pursed into a tight-lipped growl, “You’ll make it work.”
Thea’s eyes screwed shut as Felicity’s became enraged.

“That’s your daughter you sick son of a bitch,” she stood up, banging her first onto the metal trellis table as her chair skidded backwards, “You don’t come back from pointing a gun at her so if you feel the need fucking point it somewhere, then you point it at me.”

“Fine,” he laughed as he turned the gun and held it barely three inches from her face.

“Felicity no,” Thea yelped, “the baby.”
The regret on her face was instant but her reaction to cup her hands to her mouth was two seconds too late; Malcolm now knew.

“So,” a smirk flirted with the left side of his lips as he took a step closer, “Oliver knocked you up,” a cackle as he drew the gun down her cheek, “smart man.”

He sighed as he dropped the gun to his side and straightened Felicity’s chair. He gestured her down and she folded into it wordlessly.

The grating sound of the metal feet dragging against the concrete filled the room as he pushed her and the chair closer to her desk.

“It is a pity though,” he added before he leaned in, so close to her face that Felicity could smell the spent cigarettes on his breath, “I was hoping to do that,” his lips touched her ear, “just like I did to his mother.”

The words froze her with her hands hovered over the keyboard and her eyes glued to the monitor though she saw nothing but black until Malcolm pulled away.
“But,” he sneered with a rasped laugh, “We could still have a little fun.” Felicity turned and spat without forethought, directly at Malcolm, catching his cheek.

Silently he cleaned it with the cuff of his shirt while a tormenting smile stayed on his mouth. He took a deep breath in and then out almost immediately, before he raised his hand and slapped Felicity with a crack that felt like a whip across her cheek.

“Next time I won’t be so restrained.”

Felicity couldn’t hear his heavy footprints over the ringing in her ear as he walked away.

“If she moves,” Malcolm ordered the weedy man, “shoot her somewhere it’ll hurt but not kill her.”

---

It was now a waiting game. Oliver and Roy were where they needed to be as the transport time grew closer. Malcolm hadn’t returned and the weedy man was taking his assignment seriously as he hovered closely around Felicity.

Laurel handed Felicity a water bottle as she spooked the weedy guy away with a terse look.

“So is it true, you’re pregnant with his baby?” Laurel asked as she leaned her weight against the table and crossed her arms over her chest.

“Yes.”

The brunette’s lips softened into a smile that Felicity wasn’t sure she’d ever seen before, “I always thought he’d make a good dad,” she turned to Felicity and lifted one shoulder into a shrug, “I didn’t know, sorry.”

“Would it have made a difference?” Felicity asked poignantly.

Laurel dropped her chin to her chest and admitted, “I don’t know.”

A Felicity blew out a soft laugh that was more circumstance than amusement, “At least you’re honest.”

Silence hung heavy in the room as Felicity felt the distant stare of her watcher tunnelling into her neck. Absently she brushed the back of her neck while she prayed for some way out of this.

“Oliver told me about Tommy,” she sighed as she looked up at Laurel with her shoulders now slumped forward, “how you three were close.”

She saw the edge of Laurel’s mouth fray at the mention of Tommy.

“He told me how Tommy didn’t want this life.”

The other woman wouldn’t look at her, bouncing her eyes instead from the floor to the wall and even to the ceiling.

But Felicity kept pushing, “So why do you?”

“It’s all I got,” Laurel shot back, a bitterness tainting her tone.

“It doesn’t have to be.”

A breathy but silent laugh passed over Laurel’s lips, “What would you know? I bet you had ponies and a nanny growing up.”

It was Felicity’s turn to laugh almost indignantly, “No, my mother worked two jobs to keep a roof over my head when my father left to find himself,” she remarked, unable to mask the disdain in her voice, “I counted tips for waitresses in a cocktail bar at five years old and I did their tax returns at age ten. My best friend was a bouncer named Grant.”

While her childhood had been filled with tough times, Felicity was always safe and surrounded by a village of eclectic people who loved her.

Her eyes anchored in Laurel’s, refusing to let them blink away, “I might not understand your struggles, but I had my own and I know this life doesn’t have to be your epitaph.”
Each word resonated with Laurel and for a few moments Felicity thought she recognised regret in her dark eyes.

“Malcolm isn’t letting us out of this alive is he?” Felicity asked, her voice soft enough to not carry to Thea who was sitting a stone’s throw away.
Laurel didn’t need to answer, the droop in her expression said it all – no.
Felicity swallowed down the realisation she hadn’t been willing to accept earlier even though she’d known it all along, “You need to get Thea out of here. She was Tommy’s sister too.”
“I can’t,” Laurel closed her shoulders inward, “I can’t.”
“Laurel,” Felicity whispered firmly, “you have to try.”

“Look, is there anything else you need?”
It was strange how the idea occurred to Felicity, it was hardly relevant in the circumstances but the request simply slipped from her mouth, “I need to take my prenatal vitamins, they’re in my bag.”

Laurel retrieved Felicity’s handbag and, after a quick rummage to make sure there wasn’t any surprises in it, she handed it over.

Felicity took the vitamins with a swig of the water before he eyes blinked down to the small rattle in her bag.

“It also has a tracking system”
“You’re going to track my baby?”

“Dude where’s my rattle,” she breathed, barely above a whisper.
“What?” Laurel questioned with a high-arched brow.
“Nothing, it’s just a…” Felicity carefully took the rattle out from her bag and ran her fingers along the underside of the base until her finger ran over what she was looking for, a miniscule switch, “it’s just a rattle,” she smiled as she inconspicuously turned it on and placed it on the desk beside her keyboard.

“It’s cute,” Laurel casually remarked.
Felicity nodded as she tried to contain her relief, “it’s perfect.”

A moment later Malcolm walked back in the room, “it’s time.”

~*~*~*~

Curtis paced as he slapped a palm against his leg and pinched his brow between a thumb and forefinger. There was nothing the Starling Police were going to do on Curtis' hunch and a broken phone, he would have to wait 48 hours to file a missing persons report, thank you and Merry Christmas.

Oliver wasn’t answering his phone and neither was Thea.
Paul placed the fresh mug of tea on his desk before he rubbed his hand down the much taller man's back, “We'll find them.”
It was an empty thought with little to no collaborative evidence, but neither men were willing to acknowledge that reality.

“I know Thea has a boyfriend, Ray, or Rob or...”
Paul shrugged absently, “Roy?”
Curtis’ eyes flung open, “Yes, Roy,” he announced gingerly as he collected his phone from beside the untouched tea from an hour before.
His fingers hovered over the numbers of his phone before he sighed out an agitated exhale, he didn’t know where to start looking for a Roy.

“I could try Malcolm’s known associates and then...” he stopped speaking abruptly.
“And then?”
“Felicity you brilliant, beautiful angel,” Curtis cheered as he walked around to his computer.
“What?”
“She turned it on,” Curtis’ hands were shaking as he prayed his prototype lived up to his expectations.
Paul's pinched brow was lost.
“The baby rattle I gave her, it has a tracker,” he waved his phone under Paul's nose, “and that remarkable woman turned it on.”

“You put a tracking device in a baby rattle?”
“In case it got dropped at the park,” his broad shoulders shrugged, “but not the point, I can find her.”
“And when you do, what then? The police don’t care.”
“Then we make them,” Curtis answered resolutely as his fingers tapped the keys in a quick blur, “Felicity’s back door traffic manipulator...” he trailed off as he thought around the hack, “if I can alter it to piggyback a emergency response hack, I can force them to care.”

“Oliver?” Felicity spoke into the mic.
“Hey, are you okay?” came his crackled reply.
She licked her slightly swollen lip, “I’m fine, and you?”
“Just out for a late night ride,” she could hear the smile in his voice, he was trying to keep her calm.

“And lime?”
She smiled at his code and her hand instinctively brushed her stomach.
“Good.”
“Good,” he sighed, the relief clear in his tone, “I can see the truck.”

“Oliver you only have...”
“Forty-five seconds, I know baby, I was listening,” he crooned.

The biting wind chilled the tips of his fingers as he tried to keep his focus, he knew what he had to do, but that didn’t make it any easy and he prayed the distraction would give Felicity and Thea the distraction they needed.

Everything that happened after that moment played on high speed through the comms system in a haze of rasped and stunted breathing, gun shots and screeching tyres, before virtual silence overtook the room.

Felicity was counting the seconds in her head, thirty....thirty one...thirty two
She could feel her chest begging for air but she couldn’t focus on breathing, thirty five...thirty six...

“I’m in, device in place,” Oliver huffed as he pulled his shaking hand back from the stripped wire.

The moment he jumped was written in third person in his mind and he clutched his chest as it replayed each adrenaline-charged moment.
Lifting himself onto the bike.
The wind slapping his face.
The shudder in the wheel.
The moment he leapt.
The thump as he hit the metal.
The fear as his one grip faltered.
The pain throbbing through his arms as he dragged himself up.
Ripping the panel open.
Falling inside.
Trembling fingers cutting the casing.
This moment.

Felicity typed between two different keyboards, one that was trying to gain control while the other fired off anything that would slow Argus down.

~*~*~*~

“There,” Curtis shrieked as his finger tapped the little red dot on the monitor.
“Why would she be out in the old industrial area?”
“Not for anything good. Hang on Felicity, the cavalry is coming.”

~*~*~*~

“Argus are out, Oliver you have control of the truck,” Felicity sighed as she slumped back in her chair and finally expelled the breath she’d been holding.
“Drive it back here,” Malcolm ordered.

Oliver’s fingers curled around the steering wheel as he slowed his breathing, it was time.
“Are you there baby?”
Felicity sat up, “I’m here.”
“Is Thea okay?”
She looked over her shoulder at Laurel, who nodded.

“She’s okay.”
“I love you.”
She bit her lip inward, she knew him...knew what he would do.
“I love you too Oliver,” her voice trembled as she spoke.
“It’s your moment.”
Her eyes blinked heavily, no.
“Felicity?”
A whispered, “Yes?”
“Ride or die princess.”
That was it, the code for the self destruct.

“Oliver,” she pleaded so much with only one word.
“It’s okay, you’re my forever,” he was calm, collected, sure, this was what had to be done, “Do it.”
“What is he talking about?” Malcolm called across the room.
Felicity punched the code, pausing on the enter.
Laurel smacked the unsuspecting weedy guy over the head with a discarded iron rod, knocking him out, before she grabbed Thea and ran her towards the door.
“Wait, Felicity,” Thea scrambled backwards.

Malcolm was bearing down and Felicity was out of options.
“I love you,” she cried.
“I love you too.”
Her finger hit *Enter* just as Malcolm reached the desk.

Second later a shattering explosion overtook the comms and resonated through the room. *Ride or die.*

Thea screamed, a soul-shattering scream that would ring in Felicity’s mind long into the future, she’d just lost her world – they both had.

Felicity scrambled away from the desk before catching Thea and running her, with Laurel towards the door.

But Malcolm moved just as fast and when they hesitated trying to open the heavy sliding door, he was on them much quicker than anticipated.

“You bitch, what did you just do?”
Felicity pushed a sobbing Thea behind her.
“You lost,” she stood, firm and unflinching just as the sound of distant sirens grew closer. *Thank you Curtis.*

“And that will be the cavalry,” she added resolutely.
Malcolm pointed the gun at Felicity and she stared it down, he would not make her crumble. Sorry Oliver.

“Wait,” Laurel bleated, “you don’t have to, just leave before the cops get here.”
Malcolm smiled as he turned toward Laurel, towing the gun along with him before he unceremoniously pulled the trigger.

Felicity didn’t register the sound until she felt Thea jump behind her and saw Laurel collapse to the side of her. Blood stained her trembling hands as Laurel clutched her chest.
“No witnesses,” Malcolm said callously as he turned the gun to Thea.

“No,” Felicity screamed before she lunged forward and wrestled with the gun.
The second time it went off, Felicity reacted immediately and stepped back while Malcolm crumpled to the floor.

Felicity looked down at her hands, bloodied and holding the gun. She threw it across the warehouse before she dropped to her knees beside Laurel.
“Come on, let’s get you...”
Her body slumped in Felicity’s arms.

“It’s okay,” Laurel shivered, “I’ll tell Tommy all about you Thea,” she offered as the colour drained from her cheeks, then turning to Felicity she continued, “and I think he’ll be pretty glad Oliver found you.”
And then, just like that, she was gone.

“We need to go,” Felicity urged Thea just as sirens surrounded the warehouse.
They walked out into the flood lights of the Police cars with their hands raised in surrender.
*It was done.*

And then Thea asked the question Felicity couldn’t, “Is Oliver dead?”
“Are you sure you don’t want to see?” Caitlin asked as Felicity banded her forearms across her face while she lay perfectly still on the reclined examination table in the dimly lit room that smelled like bleach and rubber gloves.

Felicity couldn’t manage words to express her decision so she simply shook her head against the padded leather head rest and tried to bite back the tears.

She didn’t want to think about Oliver, but his last words echoed through her head all the same. She didn’t want to recall Laurel’s blood leaching into the creases of her palms, but the scent of death still lingered despite been scrubbed clean and she didn’t want to feel the menacing breath from Malcolm against her cheek but her skin was invisibly scolded by it.

Those things were all outside of her control but this one little thing wasn’t; so as ridiculous and foolishly hopeful as it might seem, after all she had heard the explosion herself – Felicity wasn’t going to see their baby for the first time without Oliver, even if it was only the size of a lime and she probably couldn’t pick it out anyway… all she needed to know was that their little lime was fine.

“Not without him,” she finally managed to whisper as Caitlin gently lifted her top and spread the cool gel across her stomach. Felicity had expected herself to wince when the cold sensation tickled her nerves, but she didn’t
because every part of her was numb. Shut off. Broken.

Ride or die princess.

“You didn’t need to come,” Felicity spoke in slow, stagnated words, “the hospital would have…” Caitlin silenced her with a light press of the wand on her stomach before she spoke, “I’m sure the hospital would have done just fine, but it was on my way.”

“You were at home, on holiday and in bed,” Felicity sighed, just the hint of a smile tickling the corner of her lip for a second before it fell away.

“I’m here now, that’s all that matters,” Caitlin soothed as she gently began the exam.

The silence was probably only seconds, but for Felicity it felt like a lifetime where she could hear each and every breath she took and she could feel the tortuously slow roll over her burgeoning stomach.

“Please, just tell me,” the words crept tremored from her mouth, she needed to know.

Caitlin, despite her years of experience in both the good and the bad let herself drop a sigh of relief when she saw what she needed to see, “Your baby is fine.”

Felicity’s shoulders shock forward as she sobbed out a desperate, “Are you sure?”

“I’m sure,” Caitlin effused, “the sack looks perfect there is no fluid loss and they’re doing somersaults in there,” she chuckled warmly as she watched the lime-sized bean float carefree and wild, “I promise you everything is fine.”

Felicity closed her eyes and let the tears she’d been holding back fall freely like a deluge down her cheeks. Their lime was fine.

“I want you to rest though and any sort of pain or feeling off in anyway just call me up,” Caitlin continued as she made a few notes on the scans.

“It’s Christmas, you and Iris should be…” Caitlin stopped typing to squeeze Felicity’s hand, “we are your friends and I’m exactly where I need to be.”

She shut off the machine and wiped the gel from her friend’s slightly rounded stomach before Felicity finally unwrapped her eyes.

“I should go find Thea,” Felicity lamented as her chin dropped to her chest and her eyes became a turbulent storm.

“You should lie down and rest,” Caitlin gently eased Felicity into the padded back behind her, “Thea is being asked a few questions and she has Curtis with her.”

“But I …” Felicity fought back fresh tears as best she could, but she had lost the battle within seconds, “I pushed the code Caitlin.”

“Because you didn’t have a choice,” Caitlin shot back defensively.

“We could have let Malcolm have the truck,” Felicity shrugged as her tears made rivers down her cheeks, “maybe he wouldn’t have known what to do with the things inside.”

Caitlin folded one arm disapprovingly over her chest as the other held tightly to Felicity, “Let’s say you did just let him have them, which realistically you would have never done because you’re you and that would have gone against every fibre in your being, but what then?” she pestered gently, “Malcolm would have a shit load of whatever bad things were in that truck and you, Thea and Oliver would all be dead.”

Felicity nodded, she’d known before Laurel as much as confirmed it - Malcolm wouldn’t have let them go.

“But Oliver…” she whimpered, unable to temper the shake in her voice, “I did that.”

“He asked you to because he knew just as well as you do what could have happened otherwise. He
did it to save you, your baby, his sister and frankly everyone else in this City, so I’m pretty thankful to him and you right now."

Felicity fought against the invisible restraints that held her to the table, “I need to go see if she’s alright.”

*If she will forgive me.*

“Please just *lie down,*” Caitlin begged, her desperate doctor’s voice willing Felicity back down, “I will go and see if I can find her, deal?”

Felicity knew it was that or she would end up wrestling Caitlin in the doorway – and she knew the sprite was stronger than one might assume. So she accepted the compromise with a small nod.

Before Caitlin could make her way across the room there was a small, timid knock on the door. After striding the last few steps, Caitlin opened the door and smiled, “found her.”

“*Thea?*” Felicity gaped as she instantly sat upright.

“*Lie down,*” Caitlin barked over her shoulder.

Felicity hunkered into the pillow obediently.

“I just wanted to see if everything,” Thea twisted her fingers around each other as Curtis hovered barely a foot behind her, “if you and the…”

Thea’s brow furrowed as she realised quite quickly she couldn’t bring herself to ask a question where she was too afraid of the answer.

“Your little niece or nephew is fine,” Felicity smiled gently as she brushed back yet another tranche of fresh tears.

Thea sighed, the relief so visibly apparent on her face, “Thank god. Should I…” she started as she pointed behind her, “go?”

“No, please come in, both of you,” Felicity begged.

“I’m going to speed up your blood work just to be extra vigilant,” Caitlin spoke back to Felicity before she turned her attention to Curtis, “Please, just make sure she lies down,” she behest as she left the room.

“Curtis you brilliant crazy genius,” Felicity thanked with wide and glassy eyes.

Curtis smiled tentatively, “Funny, I called you the same thing.”

“You found us.”

Her gratitude, while deeply honest, was tinged with sadness, because this time the us didn’t include Oliver.

“Of course boss.”

“And you sent the response.”

Another reserved smile flirted with his mouth, “Well technically yes but it was your hack, I just…”

“…you piggy backed an auto response?” Felicity finished, “that’s genius.”

“I learned from the best,” he hesitated with his next words before he asked them in almost a whisper, “any word on Oliver?”

Felicity shifted a little on the white cotton sheet as she sat up despite Caitlin’s orders and reached out for Thea’s hand. The young woman took it almost immediately once offered.

“I’m so sorry Thea, what I did…” Felicity started, each word like an agonizing scrape up her throat.

“…was exactly what Oliver asked you to do,” Thea finished with a soft and trembled voice that painfully showed her youthfulness, “If it wasn’t for me trying to…” her words broke off into a silent sob.

Felicity pulled the young girl into an embrace and wordlessly they felt each other’s regret and pain.

Caitlin opened the door just as the two women broke apart, “I found this guy ranting at the front desk that he needed to find you two, I assume you know him?”
Roy tugged the sleeves of his red hoodie down over his bruised knuckles as he stepped around Caitlin into the room.

“Roy!” Thea exclaimed in a flood of tears as she ran up to him and fell into his open arms.

Felicity stood up slowly with eyes wide and her lips slightly parted – a question hung on the edge of them.

“Did you see the truck explode?”

He held Thea to one side with his arm still wrapped around her and answered softly, “I did.”

“He smiled, “not exactly.”

Thea looked up at him with bright eyes and a furrowed brow, “What?”

“Come with me.”

Felicity looked across the room at Caitlin who was undoubtedly preparing a speech on lying down, but it would have been lost on Felicity – she would have wrestled her way out of that room if she needed to.

“I have to go.”

Down the hall the small group took a left turn into another hall that seemed to stretch for miles as Felicity anxiously sucked on her lower lip. She could taste the remnants of the dry blood there and the smell of the sterile hospital filled her lungs as she listened to the echoing squeak of her shoes on the polished linoleum floor.

She wanted Roy to hurry, to run at whatever speed was necessary to get wherever he was taking them a second or two faster – it didn’t matter – until he stopped outside a room and Felicity realised she needed a few seconds more.

Thea walked in first and Felicity listened with her head tipped against the wall, to the young girl’s sobs of relief. She closed her eyes, wondering if everything about this moment was a dream – nothing more than a cruel twist of fate that would have her believing in the dream that Oliver somehow was still alive.

But when her eyes opened and she was still standing there, hiding from the room, and gnawing at her fretful lip, she knew it wasn’t a dream.

But she still couldn’t move.

What if he’s hurt and she gasps or cries, unable to stop herself cowering away like a wretched woman?

What if he’s mad at her because that wasn’t what he meant?

What if he doesn’t know her?

Doesn’t want her?

“Thea,” his voice was thin and even that small word sounded painful.

Felicity imagined the young girl hugging him with inhuman strength, but she still couldn't move.

“Where’s Felicity, is she okay? Is the baby...”

Her feet finally moved and she rounded the corner.

She didn’t gasp or cry and her eyes gazed on him with nothing but love and pure adoration. His face was grazed a furious red in parts and a deep crimson where the wounds were deeper. He had a black cast on one forearm and the other was wrapped tightly in a gauze bandage that completely swallowed his hand.

But he was sitting up with a crumpled white sheet at his feet and a blue hospital gown where he
once wore leather riding gear.

Felicity took it all in, slowly and methodically memorising each wound and imagining what more his body might be marred with as she took another step closer.

He watched her walk diffidently into the room, no doubt photographing and categorising everything she saw into her mind and he shifted towards her before the movement made him wince in pain as the taste of gravel filled his mouth and the smell of singed flesh engulfed his senses. He shook it free before the memory could take root – he would bury that all for another day because right now he needed to know only one thing.

“Please don’t, please,” Felicity pleaded as she reactively ran forward to close the gap between them herself and ensuring that Oliver wouldn’t cause himself any more pain trying to, “How did you?” She blinked, her lashes like fans across her paled cheeks and her eyes like saucers that trapped thoughts of disbelief – like she imagined she might be dreaming, hallucinating or both.

“Son of a bitch jumped out of a moving van a second before it erupted,” Roy quipped before Oliver could attempt to soften the realities of his escape.

Felicity touched his face gently, still unconvinced he was real and here, in front of her. His eyes pulled closed at the feathered touch.

“Baby,” she whispered, her voice tugging his eyes open, “You really are a crazy son of a bitch.”

A soft laugh bled from his bruised lips before his eyes settled on her and their hands entwined.

“Are you?” he asked with a delicate tone that made his inference clear.

“I’m fine,” she appeased his frowning brow as she tucked her cut lip into her mouth.

“The baby?” the worried lines appeared deeper than before.

“The baby is fine Oliver,” she took the tips of his fingers and placed them onto her stomach, “our baby is just fine.”

The relief on his face could have been bottled and sold as the most purest of its kind.

Before Oliver could express his relief in words, the door to his room opened and an ebony-skinned woman in a tailored pants suit with a laser-focused stare commanded the room with nothing more than the sound of her clearing her throat.

Oliver went to lurch off the bed to put himself between the stranger and Felicity but with an appreciative huff and her hand on Oliver’s shoulder, Felicity forced him back down into the pillows.

“My name is Amanda Waller, I’m from Argus.” Felicity nodded, while she’d never met the woman and she hadn’t heard her name come up in any conversations, she wasn’t surprised by her presence – only that it took this long.

“I’m sorry about your shit,” Oliver remarked, still reeling from the pain he’d caused down his bruised torso and broken ribs.

“Not to worry, it can all be replicated,” she spoke briskly, as though each unnecessary word would use more time and energy than she cared to outlay.

“You,” she continued as she turned towards Felicity, “you managed to hack our system quite spectacularly.” Felicity curved her shoulders inward and offered an apologetic shrug, “I’m sorry?” she said with an inflection that turned the apology into more of a question.

At least she hadn’t crippled their system entirely like she could have.
A chuckle bubbled from the woman’s burgundy lips in a way that didn’t seem like a regular occurrence before it stopped just as abruptly as it had started, “Don’t be, our people were very impressed. I was very impressed.” It was as though those last four words held more importance than any others.

“Have you ever thought about changing jobs?” the woman asked as her chocolate-hued eyes ignored everyone but Felicity.
With her arms banded around her waist, Felicity brushed her tongue across her teeth before she asked, quizzically, “Are you offering me one?”
“Perhaps,” came the to-be-expected diplomatic answer.
But Felicity didn’t really need an answer because she already had one of her own.
“Well I admit that I’m intrigued,” she started as she reached instinctively for Oliver’s hand, “I started Smoak Tech for something else and I’d like to focus on that,” she looked down at Oliver before touching a fingertip to her stomach in a message only meant for him, “and this.”
Amanda accepted the rejection with a smile, “Well, the offer is always there. Perhaps we could work together on a project one day.”
Felicity smiled graciously, but her tongue replied somewhat ungraciously, “I don’t want anything to do with weapons.”
Another soft chuckle lit up the older woman’s face, “I appreciate your tenacity.”
Felicity smiled although she was certain she owed that sudden snip to the hormones coursing through her body more than anything else.
Amanda continued, “And while a large portion of our work is of the defence nature side of things, not all our work is. You might be surprised Miss Smoak.”

Thea interjected with a loud clearing of her throat as her patience was wearing thin, “Sorry, but are you going to arrest my brother or…?” she asked unapologetically terse as she raised both brows towards her hairline and popped her hip into a take no shit stance.
“No,” Amanda answered without a moment’s hesitation, “we’re actually more curious as to how Mr Merlyn knew.”
Thea didn’t blink, “I told him.”
“Before you told him Miss Queen, he knew. We planted information with you, with Kord and within Argus itself to see what he acted on, he acted on information he got within our ranks, not yours,” she explained succinctly, carefully choosing her words as she spoke, “We have long suspected that we have a mole in our organisation dealing with the underbelly of society, we aim to flush them out and we were hoping Mr Merlyn would give up his source.”

“Well he’s dead now,” Thea answered bluntly, but her eyes fell to the floor and her shoulders closed around her.
Felicity too retreated into herself as the last few moments replayed in her head. She knew what she’d done; they may have fought for control of the weapon and to anyone watching maybe they couldn’t be sure, but Felicity knew, she had felt the trigger with her finger and, as if the moment slowed time, she pulled it… for Moira, for Robert, for Thea, for Oliver, for their baby…and for her, she had squeezed that trigger with every hope and intent that it would kill him.

And with absolutely no regret that it did.
Until now.
Until she heard the threads of a young girl now realising she had lost yet another part of a family that she had so very little to spare.

Felicity could feel Oliver’s eyes on her and she could hear the sudden intake of air that he took in
seconds after Thea spoke.  

*Disbelief or relief* – she wasn’t sure she wanted to look at him to find out.

“Only one body was recovered at the scene,” Amanda remarked, as casually as one might read out a shopping list, “a woman in her early 30s, blonde, about 5’8.”  
Felicity closed her eyes as Oliver reached her hand and squeezed it – without needing an explanation right now, he knew she needed that reassurance that he was right there, with her.  
“Her name was Laurel, she tried to…” Felicity’s voice trailed off, “Malcolm shot her. He pointed the gun at Thea and I fought him for it, the gun went off and…” she brushed a hand anxiously through her hair, “I left him there.”  
It had been the same story she had told the Police and the same one that replayed in her mind every time she let it in.  

“We found a significant amount of blood, but no body.”  
Felicity’s eyes recoiled and her brows pinched inward.  
That couldn’t be.  
“No, I left him there, dead on the floor,” she answered fretfully with ribbons of anger tainting each word.  
“Are you sure?”  
Was she?  
“We just ran,” Thea panted, the fear in her voice apparent.  

“We believe he is injured and has gone to ground. Apparently he has more friends than we anticipated.”  
“He’s still alive?” the panic in Thea’s words echoed Felicity’s thoughts.  
“We have more friends than he’s anticipated too,” Amanda answered calmly, and Felicity got the distinct impression there was little that could rattle this women, “Our intel is that he will skip the state and now that he has caught our eye he won’t slip past us getting in.”  

Felicity wanted to find some sort of reassurance in her words but they did very little to quieten the dark thoughts assaulting her, the only thing that had any effect was when Oliver’s fingers squeezed her hand a little tighter, and even though that made the roughness of his cast graze her sensitive palm, her thundering heart rate finally began to slow.  

“We have been working with people who can keep you safe, both of you.”  
Oliver’s bravado peaked out for a moment when he answered briskly, “I’ll be just fine.”  
Felicity knew what that meant – *if Malcolm wasn’t dead, he would be soon* and Oliver didn’t want the prying eyes of someone else watching over his crusade.  

“I was talking to Miss Smoak, and her baby.”  
Felicity tucked her free arm tighter around her waist and backed up, knocking the IV pole beside the bed.  
“How did you know?”  
There were infinite possibilities and most of them were fairly legitimate ways in which she could know, but the fact that she did still startled both Felicity and Oliver.  

“We make it our business to know,” came another diplomatic response.  
“So when you know where Malcolm is, let me know and I’ll take care of the problem myself,”  
Oliver replied, the grit in his voice highlighting the malice with which he spoke.  

Felicity wanted to stop him, to tell him that he shouldn’t talk that way and he wasn’t going to walk that path – he was better than that – but all she could think about was her own wish to see Malcolm dead and her heart and lips felt heavy with guilt.
“That won’t be necessary Mr Queen, we can offer you protection.”
Oliver blew out a laugh, perhaps one partially induced by the strong pain medication coursing through his veins, but he didn’t know the woman standing in front of him in pleated pants and wearing a heavy smile.
*He’d find Malcolm and he’d kill Malcolm, like he should have done years ago.*

“Argus has been working closely with an FBI taskforce Mr Queen, I assure you we can.”
“And why would I trust them any more than I trust you?” Oliver asked poignantly – his rap sheet alone testified to his long-standing issues with the law and while he meant to do well by Felicity and their baby now, he was under no illusion that his past wasn’t one marred with trouble and tainted with mistakes.

“Because you know one of them,” she left her words open-ended as the strong and stoic woman sighed, “against both his superiors and my advice, he believes that you should know of his existence.”

Oliver ignored the shooting pain down his ribs as he sat up and furrowed his brow… who?
“Who?” he echoed his thoughts.

Heavy footsteps answered his question moments before their owner stepped into the room.
“I believe you know Mr John Diggle.”

“You?” Oliver startled, leaving his lower jaw hanging free and wide.
“Can we have the room?” John asked as his eyes stepped around the room to everyone but Oliver.

With a cloud of shock hanging over them, Curtis, Thea and Roy wordlessly walked towards the door, although in Thea’s case, her narrowed eyes and pursed lips said exactly what she was feeling. As Felicity dropped Oliver’s hand and started her own path towards the door, Oliver stopped her with a boomed request, “She stays.”

Felicity opened her mouth to argue the point, Oliver and John were like brothers and they needed to clear the air like brothers.

“Felicity, please stay,” John said calmly before he walked to the door and closed it.
“How long?” Oliver bluntly asked, his heavy set brow in no mood to dance around the difficult questions.
“Since you hired me,” John answered while he walked back towards the centre of the room. Oliver shook his head with his lower lip snagged between his teeth before he hissed it out.
“Four-fucking-years?”

Felicity watched Oliver brace himself to sit and she rushed to lay her hand on his shoulder, “baby, you’re going to hurt something,” she pleaded as she looked around at his multiple injuries.
“I know this seems like a betrayal Oliver…”
Oliver cut him off with a snarl, “You’ve been spying on me, feeding information to the FBI.”
“At the beginning yes. We tried to go to the Souls themselves, but Malcolm wouldn’t take any of our people on, not without someone vouching for them.”
“And that’s where I came in?” Oliver huffed out a sigh as he raked his fingers through his hair, he already knew the answer.
“We were aware of your father and Malcolm’s connection as well and Thea’s…”

Oliver gritted his teeth when his friend mentioned the sister he’d spent a lifetime protecting, “don’t you bring her into this.”

“John,” Felicity interrupted as she kept her hand on Oliver’s shoulder, “could I have a minute to talk to Oliver?”

John nodded and left the room the same way he’d entered it; on heavy footsteps.
“Firstly you need to keep yourself on the damn bed,” Felicity warred as her smile pulled into a tight frown. “Why am I getting yelled at?” Oliver grunted. “Because you just jumped out of a moving truck after I blew it up,” Felicity retorted, a sentence she would have never expected to say, and yet… “and I need you to not hurt yourself any more today, are we clear?”

He opened his mouth to argue, but when he was met with an arched brow he snapped it shut again and nodded.

“Secondly, John didn’t have to out himself to you Oliver,” Felicity spoke pointedly as she gently fluffed the larger pillow under his arm. “He’s here because he wants something,” Oliver grumbled as his forehead became a washboard of frustrated lines. Felicity dropped her head to the side and studied Oliver for a moment, she could tell he didn’t really believe what he was saying, but his petulant side was warring with his emotions, “He’s here because he’s your friend.

He huffed out a momentary laugh, “He was playing my friend.” “I love you,” she remarked as she bent down and met him at eye level, “but you are being stubborn.” “From day one, Felicity.”

She could see the pain in his eyes and her frown softened before she gently combed her fingers through the lengths of his hair, an action which saw his eyes gently close and a soft breath leak from his parted lips. “I just think four years maybe means you should at least hear him out and then decide,” she spoke with a soothing tone that saw the tenseness in Oliver’s throat melt away. “And then what?” he asked with his lashes still flush against his cheeks and a slight rasp in his nearly whispered voice. “I don’t know, but I know we’ll do it together,” she sighed, hopeful, as she took his hand into hers and brushed the back of his bruised knuckles across her lips, “Oliver Jonas Queen, I love you so I’m asking you to at least hear him out, for me.’

Oliver’s eyes opened slowly, a softened expression now sat in place of where a terse one was minutes before. “Kiss me,” he asked while his eyes stole hers.

She leaned forward and pecked her lips to his slightly chaffed ones before soothing the cracks with the tip of her tongue as he hummed contently. “Okay,” his words ghosted over her lips.

Felicity opened the door and gestured John, who had been pacing a short area of the hallway, back in. “Start from the beginning,” she encouraged as she closed the three of them in the room.

John went on to explain that because of Oliver’s family connection to Malcolm, the FBI had decided that was their way in. When Tommy died and Oliver stepped away from the gang, John realised that he wasn’t getting in the Souls that way, and that, hand on heart, he’d come to respect Oliver and care about Thea. He stayed on in the hopes that an opportunity to help and take down Malcolm might present itself.

“I wanted to see you guys out of Malcolm’s hands, but if I told you who I was and compromised myself, they’d pull me out,” John finished, his eyes glistened with emotion that would only come
from a person who meant *every last word.*
“So what’s changed?” Oliver questioned, the anger in his tone now dissipated and replaced instead with a caution-laden hope.

“You got out,” John answered with a simply shrug, “As we speak the FBI are raiding the Clubhouse, the Souls are disbanded and Malcolm is in the wind. I want to help you find him and put him where he belongs.”

Felicity assumed John meant jail, but it was clear by the expression on Oliver’s face that he would only settle for *six feet under.*

John continued to talk as he took a wary but optimistic step closer to Oliver’s bed, “I meant what I said when I told you that you were better than this life. I count you as my brother,” he extended his hand to where Oliver could reach it, if he chose to, “I hope you can still count me as yours.”

Oliver carefully weighed up the gesture with the own emotions he kept caged behind a wall of blue eyes and muscles, “And if Malcolm comes back?” he looked across at Felicity – at what he had left to loose; at what he would give a life – or take one – to protect.

“Then we’ll catch him together,” John answered with a resolution that clung to each and every word.

Oliver took his hand and shook it. Today he was going to trust what his heart told him to and John Diggle was a friend. *A brother."

[31 December 2012]

It was New Year’s Eve, a little before midnight, 11:51pm to be precise, and Felicity was wandering around the apartment in fluffy socks that housed feet that just would not stop moving.

She didn’t know why she couldn’t sit still; her eyes felt like fire underneath her glasses and she hadn’t stopped yawning periodically for at least two hours, but every time she tried to sit down the urge to stand up again overtook her.

She had already organised all the CDs, had two flutes of ice tea in some hopeful, but ultimately pointless, attempt to pretend it was champagne and organised her shoes ... three times.

“Can I get you anything, another pillow or?” she mumbled out the question as her fingers incessantly twisted around each other while she looked down at Oliver.

He had been released from the hospital early the day before last under strict instructions from the doctor to *rest.* Felicity had taken that to mean he needed to lie on the couch indefinitely and every time he so much as *looked* like he was going to sit up – let alone stand up – she would force him back down with a tempestuous stare from her vividly blue eyes until he relented and lay back down – or begged to be at least allowed to go to the bathroom in a handful of cases.

Oliver reached out a hand and restlessly Felicity took it before he pulled her fluidly towards the edge of the couch, “Will you please stop,” he pleaded as his fingers wove into hers, “I should be looking after you,” his thumb grazed her stomach, “both of you.”

Felicity pouted as their hands swayed together, “Fractured wrist and broken ribs trump pregnancy, so I’m your nurse for the foreseeable future.”

Oliver was going to argue but he knew the look in her eye and he knew it wasn’t an argument he
would win, “At least lie down with me then.”

Felicity scouted the space on the wide couch cushion and frowned to herself before Oliver stole the thought from her head with a shortlled, “you’ll fit baby.”

“Fine,” she laughed, feigning a perturbed huff, before she settled onto the couch next to him.

His legs instantly entwined with hers despite the dull pain that thumped in his chest, because he was going to hold the woman he loved as tightly as he could – broken ribs or not. He blanched her forehead with speckled kisses as they lay with their faces so close together that they shared the same, lightly warmed, air.

She could feel his cast heavy against her spine while his thumb brushed hair back from the very tip of her jaw and pinned it back behind her ear.

“Seafoam,” he whispered with his eyes buried happily in the azure pools of hers. She blushed under the intensity of his stare, “What?”

“Your eyes,” he sighed with a happy thread lifting the corners of his lips, “there is a shade of seafoam in them.”

She looked at him puzzled, her eyes entreating him to explain.

“They were all I thought about Felicity,” he reminisced, the recall evoking tears to form behind his eyes and glass them over just enough for Felicity to see herself more clearly reflected in them, “I told myself that if I got out of that truck alive that I would memorise the colour of them a little more each day.”

She blinked down, holding her eyes there as she bit back tears she wouldn’t allow herself to shed just yet, “I’m so sorry,” she whispered, barely louder than a silent breath.

Oliver’s finger tipped her chin up, making her tear-tipped eyes open and meet with his, “Princess you did what I asked you to do, and I’m sorry to have asked it,” he spoke, the dulcet tones of his voice smoothing each crease across her expression and heart, “but we’re okay, our whole little family is okay.”

He pulled her closer and pressed her head to his chest as he listened, for as long as she needed, to the soft sounds of her tears.

As the clock turned over to 11:58 and the festivities on the TV just ahead of them started to rev up, Felicity wiped the last few tears from her blushed cheeks and nuzzled a kiss into the threads of Oliver’s throat.

“We have to tell your parents Felicity,” Oliver smiled against the crown of her head while he happily breathed in the lusciously-fruity aroma of her shampoo. Felicity let out a morose groan, “Whhhy?”

“Because,” Oliver smirked as she pulled her head from his chest and blinked innocently up at him, “it’s starting to become a little more obvious.”

They both traversed their bodies until their eyes settled on her tiny belly, making a sloped peak in the tight cotton top she was wearing.

“Can’t we just have the baby and surprise them with it after?” she pouted, “I’ll just walk around with a big bag or a potted plant in front of me like they do in TV shows.”

Oliver brushed back her hair and placed three rabid kisses against her lips before he settled his head back into the throw cushion, “They don’t have to like it, baby, but they should know.”

The crowd on the TV behind them started the infamous countdown as Felicity flushed her nose against Oliver’s, “I’ll tell them next year,” she smiled, just as the chant began.

10

“I love you,” Oliver breathed, their lips so close but not touching.
“I love you too,” warm air passed between them.

He smiled, entrenched in her eyes, “We’re going to have a baby next year.”

“We are,” she smiled as her head dipped into a slight nod.

Oliver sighed as his contentment lifted the edges of his lips into a smile, “I’m going to marry you one day,” he admitted, without a hint of fear or irony.

“I know,” she replied, equally as sure and sincere.

“I love you,” Oliver said, a simple promise.

“I love you too.”

Fireworks cracked in the distance and lit up the blackened night outside their windows, but neither of them blinked from the other.

“Happy New Year Princess,” he whispered as he pushed his lips a little closer to hers.

“Happy New Year Ruffian,” she answered, in the same breathy whisper, before she met his lips with her own and they spent the first minute of 2013 wrapped in each other’s arms with their lips caressing, and their baby settled between them.

A few days later

[12 weeks: A Plum]

Felicity couldn’t help but be enamoured by Oliver’s sheepish grin and nervous shoulder shuffle as he gripped her hand while they walked towards Caitlin’s examination room. Felicity had spent most of the morning trying to convince Oliver that her very good friend and OBGYN wasn’t going to hit him over the head with some medical implement for getting her ‘knocked up’ and that Caitlin wasn’t the one he had to worry about… Iris was.

Her chuckle after that didn’t seem to settle the creases across his forehead and as he flicked through a magazine in the waiting room he looked a lot less like the cocky guy with a toothpick hanging from his mouth and a lot more like a deer caught in the headlights.

She had offered him an out, said he didn’t need to come, but Oliver had looked, frankly, mortified at the suggestion and recounted to Felicity that he wasn’t going to miss a single moment, and he was fully prepared to take whatever beating (verbally or with a surgical steel implement) that was coming his way.

“You alright there?” Felicity smiled as Oliver’s eyes bounced from poster to poster while they walked the halls she was all too familiar with.

Oliver nodded and spluttered out an “I’m fine, are you… are you okay?”

He looked her over with worried eyes and a creased forehead before she dragged her nails through his scruff and laughed, “I’m perfect.”

She knocked on the door before she turned to Oliver and whispered, “Don’t fret, Caitlin is a sweetheart and you’ll win her over in no time, Iris is a little tougher but she won’t even be…”

The door opened and Felicity was met with the beautiful chocolate complexion of her friend Iris,
“Felicity,” Iris squealed as the two embraced, although Felicity’s hug was a little reserved from shock.
“Iris…” she could hear Oliver’s breath drop, “I didn’t expect you to be here.”
The two friends broke apart and while Iris looked cutely at the little rise in Felicity’s top before she shrugged her shoulders and smiled, “I’d just met Cait for lunch, she said you were her next patient and I thought I’d stay around to say hi,” Iris looked up with a stunning smile, “so hi.”

Her almond eyes turned towards Oliver and her smile tapered off just a fraction, “You must be Oliver.”
Oliver ran one clammy palm down the side of his dark jeans and nodded, “Yes ma’am.”
“Okay.” Iris nodded out a shrug, “I see the appeal, great bone structure, nice physique and big feet.”
Felicity sucked her lips in to stop from smiling as Oliver looked down at his own feet perplexed at which time Iris straightened her shoulders, wrapped one arm across her chest while the other hung free and zeroed in those large brown eyes on one, solitary target – Oliver Queen.
“Iris what are you doing?” Felicity warned through clenched teeth.
*She knew exactly where that look on her friend’s face was heading.*
“Why did you break up with her?” Iris asked as bluntly as a sledgehammer.

Oliver swallowed, once and then once more for good measure, as the feisty woman not much taller than Felicity and still much smaller than him, matched his stance toe for toe and eyeballed him.

“You can’t ask him things like that,” Felicity interjected.
Iris didn’t turn towards Felicity, but kept her eyes locked on Oliver, searching the recesses of his sapphire eyes while she sought out a weakness, “I’m a journalist, it’s my job.”
Felicity grasped at her friends charcoal blazer just above the elbow and spun her around, “I’m not your piece Iris, I’m your friend.”
Iris’ terse lips softened as did her laser sharp eyes, “That’s even more reason for me to ask the hard questions.”
“No, he doesn’t need to answer your questions Iris, he’s already answered mine,” Felicity replied, her tone slightly brusque – a tone a journalist like Iris understood.
“But did you ask him that one?”
Felicity opened her bubble gum pink mouth to throw a less than sweet reply back at her friend when she felt the squeeze of Oliver’s hand around her own.

“I was trying to keep her safe,” Oliver replied stoically, making both women stop their bickering to look at him while Caitlin stood up.
“All I could think about was that I couldn’t keep her safe with me, so I hurt her more than she ever deserved,” Oliver continued while his glazed eyes looked only at Felicity, “I knew I was weak and that I would want to come crawling back to her but that she was strong and she wouldn’t take me back, not after what I said.”

He was shaking and his chin dropped to his chest while Felicity held onto him with both hands,
“There isn’t a moment I breathe in this life or the next that I won’t utterly hate the words that came out of my mouth that day,” he looked up at Iris, ready for whatever she felt he deserved, “but I didn’t know what else to do.”
“Oliver,” Felicity sighed, it wasn’t that the recall of his words didn’t still hurt – they did – but she cared for him, pure and simple and she knew his heart and it was good and kind and most of all, she loved him, for better or worse.

“You have people that love you Felicity,” Oliver’s smile quaked as he spoke, “and if they love you
and our baby then I’ll answer them whatever question they ask and take whatever they think I
deserve because you and our little plum,” he paused to settle his lips with his tongue, “You mean
the world to me and they deserve to know that I mean that.”

“Well shit,” Iris huffed as her shoulders rounded and her stance softened.
They both looked at Iris who was carrying tiny tears in the corners of his eyes, “That was about the
sweetest thing I have ever heard,” she dabbed her index finger at one tear, “I was about to rip you
apart with my mad questions but now I just want to hug you.”
“So no more questions?” Felicity asked with an arched brow.
Iris shifted her weight from one foot to the other, but her terse lips never returned, “Just one,” she
turned to Oliver with a half-smile and asked it, “Do you love her?”

The breath Oliver expelled was one of relief – she had just asked him the simplest question in the
world for him to answer.
“With all my heart,” he answered softly, his lips forming around a smile as he looked down at
Felicity.

“Okay,” Iris sighed blithely as she reached up and smushed Oliver’s face between her palms, “You
are welcome here,” she patted his cheeks as her hands moved away, “Now, go see your baby.”

Iris left with a wink at Felicity and a smile on her face.

“So that was my partner Iris,” Caitlin laughed awkwardly as she waved them deeper into the room,
“Are you ready to see that little baby?”
Felicity took her seat on the examination chair while Oliver scooted a white vinyl chair as close to
her as he possibly get.

Caitlin tapped quickly on her keyboard before she silently counted something out on her left hand,
“So, we’re at twelve weeks and four days,” she nodded to herself as she ran through some basic
questions.
Felicity answered each one as it came, no bleeding, a little tightening across the stomach, nausea
was subsiding, she hadn’t experienced any light-headedness, but she was still a little tired.
“I’m not surprised,” Caitlin remarked after the last question as she measured Felicity’s stomach and
typed the measurements onto her chart.

“You’re measuring a little ahead of twelve weeks, but because we’re going from contraception
date,” Felicity stifled a laugh as Oliver’s eyes dropped to the floor like a child who had just been
cought with his hand in the cookie jar, “that isn’t surprising either,” Caitlin finished with a smile as
she readied the ultrasound.

“There is a small chance that we may be able to see gender today, especially if it’s a penis,” Caitlin
talked as she absently went about her task of turning down the lights and turning on the monitor
hung from the ceiling, “is that something you want me to point out?”

“No,” Felicity answered at the exact same moment Oliver replied “Yes.”
They looked at each other wearing almost mirrored expressions of curiosity.
“You want to know?” Felicity marvelled.
Oliver blinked systematically, “You don’t?”
“It should be a surprise.”
“It will be,” Oliver smirked, “it’ll be a surprise right up until Caitlin tells us.”

Caitlin chuckled to herself as she held her palms up in surrender, “I don’t expect to tell this early
on, so go home, think about it and ask me next scan. I won’t point anything out, fair?”
Oliver and Felicity looked at each other before they both nodded and Felicity answered vocally, “Okay, fair.”

Felicity winced as the gel splashed onto her bare stomach. “Does it hurt?” Oliver asked, worry teasing his brow. Felicity laughed as she reached for his hand and he took it, “No, it’s just cold.”

To Felicity it felt like only a second but to Oliver it felt like a lifetime until the wand stopped moving and Caitlin smiled, “there is your little baby.”

For much longer than she would admit, Felicity had been worried that she might not have recognised the kidney bean shaped form on the black and white TV, but she saw it all, a proportionately big head and tiny, flailing limbs.

Once she had taken it in, she turned to look at Oliver to experience the expressive glow that took over his face, it was euphoric and childlike in its wide-eyed wonderment and when she saw the tears glassing over his eyes, she squeezed his hand a little tighter.

“Measurements are fine,” Caitlin prattled as she took the photos and let the couple enjoy the moment, “he or she is just over two inches, so nice and tall, nuchal fold is perfectly in range so no worries there.”

Both Oliver’s eyes and Felicity’s followed the grainy black and white form as it turned and twisted. “This baby is very active but we have two arms, two legs and a cute little tooshy. Spinal cord looks great, honestly, you have the best looking foetus I’ve seen in a long time, I might be biased but I don’t care,” Caitlin gushed while Felicity put a trembling hand to her smiling lips.

“So everything is alright?” she asked. Caitlin nodded as she looked up at the screen then down to the two expectant parents, “Absolutely cookie cutter perfect. We won’t adjust the dates so you can expect to have your little baby in your arms mid July.”

Oliver put Felicity’s hand to his lips and gently kissed the back of her knuckles as he breathed a shaky, “Thank you.” “For what?” Felicity asked, unable and unwilling to let the smile drop from her lips. “For not looking when you stepped off that curb,” Oliver remarked, his eyes smitten and his face awash with adoration.

---

**[14 weeks: A Peach]**

Her baggy clothes were becoming tight and she huffed as she rummaged through her wardrobe, pulling things somewhat wildly from their hangers in annoyance. Despite their New Year’s resolution that they needed to tell her parents, she had continued to put it off and almost three weeks later, she was still trying to hide behind chunky jackets and loose blouses.

“Call in sick today,” Oliver remarked as he lay on their bed, naked, with just a sheet scarcely covering his hardening erection as Felicity moved around the room in a simple scarlet-red lingerie set.

She turned to him and smiled gruffly, “I can’t, I have a meeting today.” “With your dad,” Oliver finished the words Felicity didn’t want to.
She grumbled incoherent words as she threw her head back and cursed at the ceiling.

She hadn’t told him anything about anything and well it felt like some sort of lie by omission to her mother, the FBI had asked them to not talk about it – and one didn’t exactly disobey a direct request from them.

She sighed as she lowered her head and began to dig through her drawers, “I know it’s the miracle of life and all that,” she muttered as her fingers latched onto a grey knit dress; it wasn’t her usual style, but with leggings underneath and a jacket over the top she was fairly certain she could look not pregnant today.

She slinked the dress onto her body and scowled into the mirror – at least it didn’t look like shrink wrap around her stomach.
“But I look like a potato,” she hummed as she brushed back her hair with her fingers.

Oliver slinked around behind her, kissing the ribbons of her neck as his broad and muscular frame enveloped her and made her smile at the reflection it made. As she rolled her hands down the small slope of her stomach she could feel his naked erection straining against her ass.
“I suddenly feel very attracted to potatoes then,” Oliver hummed, his breath warm against her skin as he looked up to the mirror, catching her stare.

Her phone on the dresser nearby sparked to life and her hand moved instinctively to answer it.
“Curtis, I’m just getting ready, I’ll be in around…”
Oliver took the phone from her grasp and held it to his ear, “Felicity is going to be an hour late, she’ll see you when she sees you.”

And with that, he hung up and put the phone back on the dresser before his lips returned to her neck.
“You shouldn’t do that,” she pouted while she turned around in his arms.

He kissed her mouth, hard and hungry, his tongue slicing between her lips before they fell open and vulnerable to be pillaged by it.

She didn’t even realise she was doing it until Oliver groaned helplessly against her lips, but her dress was now straddling her waist and she was bucking his cock between her thighs.
“Bed,” he growled against her full mouth before she trapped his lower lip with her teeth.
Her leg twisted like a vine around his, “No, here, now,” she sighed wantonly as her sudden and engulfing urge was not willing to be waylaid a moment longer than absolutely necessary.

She moved until her back was against the wall and sandwiched between the mirror and the dresser before she lifted her body onto her tippy-toes and curtained back the thin red lace of her panties.
Her free hand felt blindly between them until she found his cock and began to pump it with a tight grip while her thumb rolled over the damp slit – her stimulant was unnecessary though as Oliver was already willing and rearing to go.

He grabbed a handful of her ass and lifted her up the wall. She huffed out air laced with a moan as both her legs clambered up his waist and tied themselves around him. His cast grazed her hip as it slid under her draped dress, but rather than dulling her urge the slight pain actually heightened it.

Her palm slapped the top of the dresser as Oliver lifted her a little further up the wall, scattering her neatly ordered nail varnishes, while her other hand guided his cock between her thrumming, fleshy folds. Braced at her entrance he tipped his head up and caught her lips with a quick kiss.

“You alright princess?” he smiled before he kissed her a second and softer time.
“Oh I will be,” she hummed into his mouth as she sunk onto his cock, pushing him inside.

She gasped as Oliver slid slowly but without pause into her until he was seated deep inside her. He brushed her chin up to make sure her face wasn’t weathered by pain or discomfort, but he found only a parted smile and wildly playful eyes.

“This might be the last we do this position,” his lips formed a lopsided smile as he tipped her hips and pulled them away from the wall so just her shoulders braced her body against the embossed wall paper.

She wasn’t really listening as she ground her hips in tight circles that brushed Oliver’s cock against her thrumming walls. He stilled her hips with his thumbs as he kissed her chin, “Princess,” he growled behind chattering teeth.

She looked at him with wide, doe eyes full, “Mmm?” she quipped before she flirted her tongue between her lips and started her hip swing once more.

“I need you to stop doing that,” his voice was strangled, each word more like a beg than the one before.

“You don’t like it?” she blinked wearily and a little dazed.

“That’s definitely not it,” he smirked as his cock twitched inside her and Felicity gasped a silent surprise and just how well she could feel that, “It’s quite the opposite,” he paused to kiss her for no other reason than his lips needed to, “if you keep doing that I’m going to lose my control.”

She smiled at the gravelled whisper against her ear, “Good.”

“No, not good.”

He looked down at her, naked legs around his waist, red lace bunched to one side of his cock with a warm blush colouring the tops of her thighs and sweeping up her mound until his eyes rolled over the slope of her stomach. He hadn’t forgotten about the bruised cervix and this time there was a baby on the other side of that cervix.

“Let’s just slow it down,” he pleaded with frayed resilience.

She huffed, but when he gently withdrew an inch and glided slowly in back inside she cried out a stunted “yes um okay” to his proposal.

He shadowed her angled body with his own before his tongue gently traced the line of her collar bone, tasting the sweetened remnants of her earlier shower that still trickled across her skin, which made shivers ripple down Felicity's spine as her eyes rolled back and she swallowed a heavy moan.

“Say it Princess,” she could feel the smile in his voice and against her prickled skin as he continued to slip his cock slowly in and out of her slick sex.

The pace was killing her, too slow for her feel the numbness down her spine but not slow enough to let her catch her hitched breath with each lunge forward.

Whimpered moans began to fill the room as Oliver took delicate nips of the silken skin along her décolletage.

“A little faster,” she rasped and when Oliver did as she asked her eyes screwed shut.

She was warm and wet and tight around him and with each thrust he felt her body squeezing his shaft as his muscles jerked against his self-imposed speed limit.

Her hands splayed across his back as her fingers traced the clefts of his brawny muscles while tiny, panted breaths wet and glistened her lips. Her moans echoed in his head, along with her stunted and begged cries for “more, Oliver, please.”
His resolve was hanging by a thread that snapped when Felicity met his thrust with one of her own that took him deep inside her at the exact moment that she shoved her hand between them and feverishly rubbed her pearled clit before massaging his balls.

“Fuck, Jesus Fuck,” Oliver howled as he pulled her hips down onto him, impaling her on every inch he had to give her.

Felicity alternated between his tightening balls and her taut little nub, teasing and rubbing until her eyes became a dazzling kaleidoscope of colours and her walls trembled and clenched around him.

“So...so...cl...” the word stopped abruptly as Felicity felt the next thrust of Oliver’s thick rod at the same time as she pinched her clit and completely came undone around him.

Oliver felt the moment she came like a tremor around his thumping cock that held him tight and made even the smallest thrust he gave feel even more intense than the last 10 minutes had felt. Her juices blanketed him in warmth as he watched her orgasm flush her entire face in a veil of beautiful sweat.

He would never get over just how thoroughly good sex looked on her.

When she reached for his balls once more, with fingers wet from her climax, it was all Oliver needed to follow her quite completely over the ledge with her name on his lips and her reflection in his wide eyes.

And Felicity smiled, tired and spent, but looking at the face of a man she would never grow tired of loving.

Felicity sat up on the edge of the bed with the sheet pressed to her naked chest as she scanned the room in search of wherever Oliver had flung her bra during the second delay they had had.

“Baby,” he said warmly as his fingertips slalomed down her spine.
She ran a comb of fingers through her slightly tangled hair and hummed, “Yes?”
“We need to tell your parents, sooner rather than later.”
She sighed forlornly, she knew Oliver was right but she dreaded that conversation more than being forced to eat Brussel Sprouts.

“I know it’s just because shaving is a little hard right now, but if you could keep that goatee of yours a little longer,” Felicity smiled, changing the subject as she reached over and feathered her fingers through the inch-long growth from his chin, “I would greatly appreciate it.”

Oliver licked his glistening lips and winked cockily, “I heard you already request that when you came in my mouth.”
Felicity blushed a sudden and bright shade of pink across her cheeks and down between her breasts, *she had been rather vocal about that.*

“Why don’t we go see them tonight?” he soothed the words between kisses he dotted along the back of her silken shoulder, he wouldn’t let the topic change that quickly.

“You don’t have to Oliver,” she spoke morosely as she stared across the room at her phone, *she needed to rip the bandage off.*
His hand snaked around her waist and warmed her blossoming stomach. “It’s us now Princess, you’re not alone and I’m not going anywhere.”

She didn’t know how Oliver knew exactly what she needed to hear at that moment, but that was it – word for word.
Felicity stared, annoyed, at the take out cup of decaf as she walked the hall back to her office holding the morning’s coffee run. She could smell the rich roast of Curtis’ double shot and she, briefly, considered switching the two orders long enough to get at least half of that delectable elixir down her throat before Curtis noticed.

She sighed as she shook out her loose, curled hair and rounded the corner to find Curtis with his back to her, the cord of his desk phone wrapped around him as though he had spun in his chair while holding it.

She went to clear her throat to announce her presence, given the last time she had found herself in this predicament she had overhead some rather saucy bedroom details between Curtis and Paul and she really would prefer not to be embroiled in that this morning. But before she could, Curtis carried on with a conversation that pricked Felicity’s attention and sewed her lips together.

“I can do that, absolutely…” a pause where the person on the other end was obviously talking, “How about at one, she won’t ask questions if I leave then.”

Felicity stepped fractionally back around the corner, skulking behind the chrome moulding on the edge of the wall.

“Can you make it that time?” another shorter pause, “Do they have motorbike uber?”

Was he talking to Oliver?
Nervous laughter bubbled from Curtis’ mouth, “Of course it’s not a thing, I knew that.”

Felicity felt the bite of guilt, *she really shouldn’t be eavesdropping like this.* She stepped out from around the corner on heavier footsteps just as Curtis continued, “My lips are…”

The heavy *clunk* of her court shoes on the marbled floor did the trick and Curtis spun around in his seat, wrapping the cord one more lap around his body, “…big and beautiful like any good African American’s man’s lips should be, thank you, I’m glad I took this survey.”

He abruptly hung up before he lifted the receiver to uncoil himself from the twisted cord, almost falling out of his chair in the process.

“Who was that?” Felicity asked as she put the cup of caffeinated goodness on his desk. His lips shrugged before he answered, “Survey people.”

“What are you trying to say? You don’t think I have nice enough lips to take a survey?”

Felicity cracked a wider smile before she backed away from his desk with her eyes pinched and her brow furrowed, “Nothing, Curtis, Nothing.”

Just as Felicity walked through the threshold of her office the phone in left jacket pocket sparked to life and vibrated against the top of her thigh.

“Hi mom,” Felicity answered as she kicked her office door closed behind her.

“I just needed to know whether Oliver had any allergies for tonight’s dinner,” Donna chatted happily down the phone, she actually sounded happier at that moment than Felicity had recalled her sounding in the few months prior.

Felicity couldn’t remember ever discussing allergies with Oliver, but she wasn’t about to tell her mother than a fair share of their earlier relationship was less talking more fucking, “Nope, I don’t think so,” she simpered.

That answer would do for now and she made a mental note to check with Oliver before tonight.

“What about you?” Donna hummed.

“Is that all?” Felicity could sense that it wasn’t, and one short sip of air later she was proved right.

“What about you?” Felicity could hear the slight rise in her mother’s voice because it was one of those questions that appeared to be about one thing but was actually about another thing entirely and she got the distinct impression her mother already knew.

She touched her stomach instinctively, she hadn’t seen her mother since the last dinner and while they had spoken on the phone, she was pretty sure Donna’s *baby sense* could stretch to a cellular level.

She wanted to answer *no*, her mother already knew that, but the truth was there was a list of things Felicity probably shouldn’t eat and another list of things she had thrown up so much of the first trimester that she couldn’t stomach the thought of them even now.

So she opted for a different approach, “What were you planning on making?”

“Nothing fancy,” Donna chuckled, “just minted lamb.”

“Well I’m sure that will be fine,” Felicity said as she ran through a check list in her head – lamb was fine to eat and thinking about it didn’t give her a sudden wave of nausea, “Are you making it?”
Donna laughed so boisterously that Felicity couldn’t help but join in, “No, oh lord that would be terrible, Poor Oliver.”
“I don’t know,” Felicity spoke with a smile tapped to her rosy lips, “you used to make excellent grilled cheese using an iron.”
“You remember those?” Donna asked, her tone peaking with her surprise.
“Oh of course I do.”

Those were some of the happiest childhood memories Felicity had – eating grilled cheese toasties with the imprint of an iron (they didn’t use it for anything else) on each side by candlelight with a table cloth stretched out over the rug in front of the TV in that tiny little apartment while they pretended it was a fancy five-star affair and her mother regaled her with her weekly report of *Diary of a Cocktail Waitress*.

She had learned many a thing during those Sunday night excursions from reality.

“I hope you don’t tell Oliver,” she could hear her mother still smile, but it was more subdued than before, “imagine what he’ll think.”
“He’ll think what I think,” Felicity replied softly, “that you were a single mother just doing what needed to be done to raise a happy daughter, which I was.”

The silence between them didn’t linger but the moments spent in it were poignant. With an almost silent sigh, her mother put back on her bubbly façade, “I’ll make sure we have some of your favourite wine chilling for you.”
Felicity answered before she had time to consider, “Oh, I can’t.”

“Why?”

*Shit.*

Had she have taken the time, she would have just thanked her mother for thinking of her because nothing else needed to be said right now; all going according to plan, tonight Oliver and her would tell her parents about the baby and that would iron out any questions about alcohol without any further clarification.

But now she had opened the door for more questions, and Donna, like her daughter, would keep pulling the thread until she got answers.

She could tell her mother the truth right now, but the idea of doing that had Felicity’s stomach in knots, so she haplessly answered something quite different, “Detox,” she blurted, “It’s a silly New Year’s resolution I’m still trying to stick to.”

Lying to her mother right now hadn’t been part of the plan, but neither was telling her over the phone without Oliver’s support. “Oh, you can have one night off.”

“Shoot, mom, I have to go, sorry I forgot I have a meeting, love you bye,” she gurgled out before she abruptly severed the phone call and stared down at her phone with a cringe laced through her lips.

“Please don’t call back,” she whispered as she watched the display fade away and made a mental note not to answer her phone again today.

She briefly checked her messages to see if Oliver had sent any, knowing that he was due to get his cast off that morning; at least that was one thing she didn’t have to try and explain to her parents, but he hadn’t sent anything or called, and she tucked her phone into her drawer and tried to focus on something other than the looming dinner.
The end of the day rolled around with that half-drunk cup of decaf still sitting where Felicity had left it and an empty single-shot in her trash can next to a concoction of food she ate for lunch, which consisted of a handful of crackers, a punnet of berries, half an apple and a chocolate bar she had sequestered from Curtis’ drawer when he was out gallivanting with his lunch date.

It was hardly a lunch made for a pregnant goddess (a term the magazines were so fond of using) and Felicity vowed to eat better tomorrow, minus the decaf.

Curtis tapped on her door just as Felicity was making a mental note to buy bagels and cream cheese for tomorrow, and let himself in when Felicity looked up from her desk with a smile.

“Your hot boyfriend and…” he skulked closer to her desk and cupped one hand around his lips, to whisper “…baby daddy,” he straightened up and returned to his normal volume, “is downstairs in the lobby for you.”

Felicity checked her clock, he was a little early and they hadn’t made plans to meet here, but frankly she had been nursing a certain itch all day and it seemed Oliver’s earlier arrival might just be able to scratch it.

“Right,” she stood up and straightened the knit dress, now sans leggings as the waistband had become infuriatingly annoying, “wish me luck.”

She tapped her cute black court shoes on the floor before she gathered her bag from the floor and her phone from the drawer.

“Good luck,” Curtis smiled with his thumb in the air before he walked with her to the elevator, “but if they can’t find a way to be happy for you then you don’t need them,” he continued sternly and Felicity knew he was right.

This baby didn’t need blood relatives to be loved, not when they had a whole village behind them.

Felicity looked around the foyer of the building, carefully studying the faces and heads of those that sat just above her eye level as she walked closer. He usually waited at the security desk, now friends with the large stoic guy he had once sassed on the first day they met, but there was only one guy there, leant up against the speckled stone countertop with his back turned to her sporting a well-fitting navy sports coat and cropped hair.

Her eyes searched fruitlessly for Oliver’s mop of dirty blonde hair, likely pulled back neatly, and his never leave home without it leather jacket, but despite searching the sea of people moving and mulling about at least three times, she saw neither.

It then occurred to Felicity that Oliver might be waiting outside, letting the cool wintery air brush against his cheeks. It had become a bit of a habit for him in the weeks he’d been unable to ride with a broken wrist. While she never got the sense Oliver wanted to be free of her, she could sense his anxiety at not being able to do what he had always found great solace in doing – riding free.

Because Oliver was no longer keen to sit his second-trimester-goddess on the back of his prized hog and ride off into the sunset with her, Felicity hoped the surprise she carried in her handbag would be a more palatable choice.

Her shoes clipped on the floor as she headed towards the large doors with her eyes still roving about as she moved.
“Felicity.”
Her name and the familiar voice stop her dead and she turned around to a hand on her elbow. A hand that was attached to a wrist which was cuffed with a navy sports coat that covered bulky arms, which then turned into broad shoulders, a solid jaw, a tiny dimple, a slightly wild goatee, lips she knew and then finally eyes she could never forget – it was Oliver.

It was Oliver.
“OHMYGOD,” she practically screamed, her voice echoing off every nearby surface as the surprise made her stumble backwards.

Oliver caught her with his arm banded around her waist and held her until he was certain her feet wouldn’t give way.

She blinked furiously as she tried to make sense of the sight in front of her.
“YOUR-HAIR-IS-GONE.”
She was aware she was running the words together but she could barely settle her breathing let alone make calm and considered sentences out of it.

Oliver ran a comb of fingers through the cropped hair on his head and nodded, the last time his hair had been this short he was 14 and his mother had taken him to the barber and bribed him with $50 to lose the mop of hair he’d grown.

“Did you do this for me?” Felicity sobbed quite unexpectedly as she lightly grazed his trimmed sideburns, “because you didn’t need to Oliver, I loved you just as you were.”
He smiled as his hands sunk around her shoulders and he dove his eyes into hers, “baby, I know you did. It wasn’t for you.”
At least not entirely.

“Was it for my parents? Because I don’t care what they think…” she sniffed, the sudden flood of tears now subsiding.

He quietened her mile a minute mouth with a soft peck on the lips.
“I’m going to be a dad,” he said softly as his forehead pinned hers, “I thought maybe it was high time I looked like one.”

Their noses brushed when he pulled back and coiled his fingers around the strands of hair that framed her face as he brushed back a tear with his thumb.
“Do you like it?” he asked.
She squinted, considering the change, taking it all in, scrutinizing it carefully, until she landed on his eyes and she realised those were what she loved the most.
“It’s different,” she spoke softly while her fingertips played with the slightly longer layers on the top, “but you look very handsome, and there is still enough for me to grab,” she finished with a sly wink and a snagged lip.

Her fingers wandered down to his beard where they tussled through the twisted mottled blonde strands of it, “You kept this?”
Oliver’s tongue peeked out between his lips as he answered impishly, “You did ask me to.”
She smiled puckishly as her eyes grew wider, “I like how it feels,” she hummed, her mind recounting the tickle between her thighs that, the closer she drew to climax and the deeper Oliver’s tongue went, evolved in a deliciously rough friction between her folds.
Oliver brushed his thumb over her lip, “I remember, I can still taste how much you liked it,” and then his tongue licked the full circumference of his mouth while his eyes stayed locked on hers, entirely on fucking purpose.

She grabbed his hand tightly and walked on hurried steps back towards the elevators.
“Where are we going?” he laughed as he allowed himself to be dragged along behind her, “the door is the other way.”
She ignored his question and pulled him into a supply room closet – the same one she had pulled him into what seemed like a lifetime ago when she thought the ruff-looking biker wanted to extort money from her and she was fully prepared to low ball him.

Before Oliver had a chance to take in the familiar room her lips pounced onto his and began feverishly kissing him with parted lips and tiny slips of her playful tongue.

“How are we doing?” he smirked when they took a second to gasp for air.
“Do you remember this room Oliver?” her words were smoky as a lopsided smile flirted with the edge of her lips and her palms slid down his tight chest.

She remembered his hand touching hers, calloused against soft and as a sigh left off her parted lips and warmed his, she now knew what Felicity from 7 months ago didn’t – just how fucking amazing those calloused hands felt on other parts of her body.

“You thought I wanted money,” Oliver rasped out a chuckle.
Her fingers slid under the hem of the slate grey crew neck tee he wore under the tailored blazer to tease the warm skin underneath, “And you ended up with something quite different.”

He leaned closer and took her lips onto his in a slow grinded kiss that had her body melting against his until a hand splayed at the small of her back held her upright.
“Something better,” he said, ghosting the words against her puckered lips while her eyes stayed lidded.

Her fingers slid further up his stomach, making the taut muscles twitch under her advances as she whispered against his lips, breathy and thin, “Did you think of me like that back then? Did you think about me naked?” her eyes fluttered open, capturing his indefinitely, “like I thought about you.”

Another kiss, more hurried than the last.
“Our first night together,” she hummed before she kissed the bow of his top lips, holding it languidly between hers.
She dragged her kiss across his dimple, along his jaw and to the seam of his ear, “You know it still makes me wet just thinking about it.

Her hands slipped out from underneath his top and pushed his sports coat from his shoulders and guided it down his arms before it fell into a crumpled heap on the floor.

“I think about that spark in your eyes,” she continued, as she gently tugged down on the hem, twisting her fingers in the soft fabric, “about how you knew what I wanted,” a peck to his nose made Oliver sigh, “what I craved.”

She pulled the shirt over his head without any resistance and discarded it on top of his blazer before her lips fell to his sinewy chest and she began stroking the outline of each taut muscle with her tongue.

“How are we doing?” Oliver breathed as his head fell against the wall.
She nipped at his abdomen, “I love it when you call me that.”

He could do little more than moan when her hand first slipped down his pants before Oliver finally grasped some semblance of cohesive thought and remembered where they were.

“Baby,” he growled as stopped her by the wrist.
“What?” she wrestled her wrist free and delved it deeper into his pants, Oliver now helpless to stop her, “The old Oliver would,” she finished with a smirk.
Oliver eyes slammed open as a sudden, wicked, thought twinkled there.
“The old Oliver would hike that dress up past that perfect ass of yours, turn you around and fuck you against that wall until you came, twice.”
Felicity didn’t stop the squeal of excitement or the gasped sigh that followed.
“So let’s do that.”

He stilled her curious hand at the elbow this time before he leaned in and chastely kissed her pink cheek, now glossy with a thin veil of sweat.
“But the old Oliver didn’t appreciate you like I do.”
Felicity pouted as her fingers skimmed the base of his cock.
“I will do all of that tonight, in our bed, when I can take my time to love and spoil every inch of you.”

Her frowned pout remained even as she withdrew her hand from down his pants.
“You say all the right things,” she hummed, hapless, while her fingers explored his naked chest,
“So I guess I should put my underwear back on then?”

“What?” Oliver choked on a sharp intake of air.
Felicity dipped her hand into her bag and pulled out a pair of scarlet coloured lace panties to dangle on her finger.
“I took them off in the elevator to expedite matters,” she answered with a shrug.

“You don’t have anything on underneath that dress?” Oliver stammered, his eyes wider than Felicity had ever seen them.
“Nope,” she swayed her hips from side to side, “free as bird down there.”
She twisted the thin fabric around her finger and rolled her lips, “But you’re right, we should go.”
She moved towards the wall for balance.
“You were wet?” Oliver mumbled, his eyes following her like they were a dragnet.
Felicity laughed, bubbly and coquettishly, “You know you have that effect.”
Oliver smacked his lips together suggestively, “So the top of your thighs might have a little...” his words dissipated as his mouth hung open.

“Something wrong?” Felicity teased,
She could see his jaw tense and relax as he swallowed and breathed and she knew that look, all too well.

“You know,” she hummed softly as her finger tangled in her hair, “we could still...”
That was all the encouragement that Oliver needed and the next moment his lips were hungrily devouring hers as the heel of her shoe scraped against the wall while she tried to gain some height on him.

She shimmied her dress up around her waist and guided his hand between her legs making Oliver groan into the kiss when he discovered her warm, naked flesh.

His fingers sliced between her folds and Felicity reactively moaned out a slither of his name as Oliver coated his middle finger in her juices.

“You weren’t kidding,” he grinned against her lips as his fingers slid frictionless between her folds, skirting her entrance and circling her clit.

Her palms slammed against the wall as she straightened her back and tried to gain some leverage while their lips smacked together in heated and fervent attacks.

She wasn’t one for begging but every inch of her was shaking with need and she would soon find
herself thrusting her own fingers into her body if Oliver didn’t stop toying with her.

“Oliver please,” she whimpered before she shucked his pants and briefs down his thighs and left them gaping at his knees.

She turned a split second later and pressed her rear into Oliver’s hardened shaft as she steadied her palms against the cold concrete wall and arched her back.

“This way,” she smiled over her shoulder before she bucked against him a second time.

He worked his length between her swollen lips as his other hand snaked around her waist and teased her coiled nub. She was becoming restless and when he leant down to kiss the back of her neck, Felicity sobbed out a “please.”

Acting on her plea, Oliver lined the head of his throbbing cock with her entrance, waiting only a moment before he slipped himself an inch inside.

Felicity gasped and raised her feet onto her tippy toes as the relief washed over her. Oliver could feel each clench her body made around him, feeding his cock deeper inside her without him exerting a single thrust until he was seated as deep as he could get in this position.

He let himself sit there, motionless, to allow Felicity to take in the sensation of fullness and let her body adjust and stretch around him. He kissed the seam of her neck as he waited for her signal and enjoyed the way each tiny twitch her body made ricocheted down his shaft.

He could stay like that forever and the smile he was wearing right now would never leave his face.

A soft moan bled from between her closed lips before Felicity scooped her hips and rolled her ass into his stomach – she was ready.

One hand stayed between her legs, rubbing and teasing her nub with a pattern of circles and lines, while the other hand tethered to her waist. His thrusts were slow at first, gently easing out of her all but an inch, before he slid back in without pause. Each progressive set of thrusts grew quicker when her coquettish moans spurred him on, until he needed both hands at her waist to steady her.

In a matter of minutes Oliver was thrusting with such vigour that Felicity’s hands were shaking against the wall and her eyes were wet with elated tears.

“Fuck Oliver, fuck,” she stammered as she screwed her eyes tight, unable to focus on anything other than the rip of pleasure down her body.

His fingers felt like fire on her waist and his breath like molten lava on her neck as every nerve ending in her body fluttered.

Her toes curled in the inside of her shoes while her nails embedded in the concrete and her core coiled up like a wound spring.

And then it hit, in an animated string of curse words and syllables of his name, an orgasm that would have had Felicity fall to the ground if it weren’t for Oliver’s hold on her.

Her walls trembled and then crumbled around his cock before her warm release blanketed him as he kept on pumping until, like the memory Oliver had never allowed himself to forget, Felicity clenched and Oliver came with a panted, “I love you,” against her neck.

She pressed her cheek to the cool wall, instantly taking some of the fire from underneath her skin, as Oliver continued to gently ease them both through their mutual release with slow and rhythmic thrusts until he was all out of stamina and she was all out of breath.
“We’re…still doing….what you promised…..tonight though….right?” Felicity asked in breathless stunted words.
Oliver kissed a small bead of sweat from the crook of her neck, “No maybe about it Princess.”

Felicity couldn’t stop playing with Oliver's shorn hair the entire cab ride to her parents’ swanky house and taking her hands from it during the short walk up the river stone path to their doorstep proved equally as challenging until Oliver stopped midstride and blinked up at the overbearing two storey stucco facade.

Of course they lived in a house like this, the realisation of it shouldn’t have surprised him, but at that moment, standing in front of it, it dawned on him that their child would be bridged between two very different worlds.

“A big house doesn’t make a home,” Felicity remarked as she threaded her fingers into his and read his mind, “love does.”
His eyes softened as his smile grew and he said the only thing on his mind at that moment, “I love you.”

Felicity took two backwards steps towards the door as she swung their hands between them, but before she could answer with a coy I know the front door opened and her mother appeared on the doorstep with a happy shriek.

After hugging her coat around her stomach Felicity met her mother's gleeful hello with a smile and a dubious few steps closer. Donna threw her willowy arms around Felicity and squeezed like years had separated them before she looked across at Oliver and smiled broadly.

“Mom, you remember Oliver?” Felicity introduced.
“The man that made my daughter blush like Catholic girl at a strip club, of course I do.”
Donna ran on towering shoes towards Oliver before she practically wrestled a hug from him.
Despite the fact that Felicity had gone a mortified shade of scarlet, for a brief few moments Felicity was overjoyed to have glimpses of the carefree and crass mother that Starling had yet to suffocate out.

At least until her stoic father appeared on the doorstep and ushered them inside so they didn’t “make a scene”.

With her arm locked through Felicity's, Donna walked with them into the house before she ruffled a gold-tipped set of nails through Oliver's hair, “Your hair, it looks different than the last time I saw it,” she remarked.
Oliver shrugged, his eyes wandering instinctively to the arm banded around Felicity's stomach, “New beginnings, new year,” he simpered.
“Well I like it,” Donna effused as she closed the door behind them, “take off your coats, the fire is cranking out the heat.”

Oliver dutifully shrugged his from his shoulders but when Donna looked across to Felicity she smiled weakly as shrugged, “I’ll just leave mine on.”
Donna’s right eyebrow plucked upwards and the same side of her lips followed.
“Have you been to a spa lately?” Donna asked, that same lopsided smile now locked to her lips.
Felicity tangled her fingers together as she felt the intense heat of her mother's curious eyes.
“Nope,” she sputtered.
“Your skin is glowing.”
Felicity felt her breath constrict in her throat, she was going to word vomit the truth...any minute
now...until she heard the sweetest three words she could have.

*Dinner is Served.*

Halfway through the meal the conversation had steered towards Oliver and what he was doing after the papers had splashed around the demise of the Lost Souls, though it left out most of the nefarious reasons for the schism.

“Oliver wasn’t affiliated with them anymore,” Felicity’s eyes narrowed at her father down the mahogany table, “he hadn’t been for a long time.”

“But the shop you owned, the one the police found drugs in, that was affiliated, wasn’t it?” Noah interrogated.

Oliver shifted in his seat at the candid question that he imagined himself asking if the roles were flipped.

“It was but I’m looking to start up another workshop fresh,” Oliver politely replied.

“Is my daughter funding this pipe dream?”

“No sir, I’ve always earned my way in this world, this isn’t any different.”

Felicity held her tongue as she let Oliver take the helm, knowing he’d assured her in the ride over that despite hers being the only parents he’d ever met he wasn’t afraid of the hard questions and even in the face of Felicity’s insistence that her father ought not get any kind of say in the matter, Oliver wanted to answer any question that came.

And so far, Felicity had managed to allow the snide comments about jail pass and she had bit her tongue with each progressively pointed question, *until...*

“So where did this money come from? Selling drugs?”

“Really?” Felicity exploded as she dropped her fork onto the rim of the bone China plate. Oliver reached out and touched her hand, swirling his thumb over the back of her knuckles.

“Oliver you don’t have to answer that ridiculous question,” Felicity spat as years of burying the hatchet started to burn her throat, “Playing the protective father really doesn’t suit you Noah,” she added with a scathing tone she couldn’t mask even if she wanted to.

“You’re my daughter,” he shot back.

“I was your daughter 23 years ago, now I’m just your show pony,” Felicity pressed the napkin to her lips and stood up, “I don’t know why I bother with you.”

“You wanted to come here, please can’t we just have a nice dinner,” Donna pleaded across the table as she tried desperately to keep this fractured family together.

“This was Oliver’s idea, not mine. He thought you should know.” Donna’s eyebrow piqued with her interest, “Know what?”

Felicity sighed hapless, this wasn’t exactly the calm and happy moment she allowed herself to imagine, but it was the more realistic one.

She opened her jacket and rode her hands of the small protrusion, “I’m pregnant.” Oliver took her hand and squeezed it, “We’re pregnant.”

She smiled at the affirmation and affection in his voice, *he wasn’t going anywhere.*

Donna cheered as she sprung to her feet and slapped her hands together effervescently. But Noah’s response was the polar opposite, “What were you thinking?” he gritted.

“Don’t you remember how babies are made?” Felicity replied with a snarky quip, “my memory is a little foggy but I’m sure I was thinking how good sex feels.”

Oliver bit back a smile, but Donna didn’t even attempt to suppress her laugh.

“Felicity,” Noah huffed.
“What? Now you’re going to protect my virginity, or your business model?”
“You have a company to run,” he chastised.
“And I will run it.”
“Why would you do something this reckless?”

Donna snapped her palms against the table as she rose from her chair, “Now hold on just a minute, are you saying my daughter isn’t capable of being a mother and a CEO?”
Noah threw an annoyed sigh at his wife, “You know what this will mean to the board.”
“Since when does her vagina attend board meetings?”

Oliver couldn’t stifle his smile and Felicity refused to dampen hers in the slightest, that was the mother she knew.
“My daughter is the smartest, strongest woman I know, she can do both.”
“You mean that?” Felicity asked as she blinked across the table at her mother.
Donna nodded with a full smile, “No doubt about it.”

She turned to her husband And the smile dropped, “And don’t you dare try to say otherwise.”
“Thank you,” Felicity breathed, “I had a good role model.”

Felicity and Donna walked away, dinner was over, but Oliver waited with tight lips and a furrowed brow until just him and Noah were left.

He stood up and lay his napkin onto his empty plate.
“With all due respect sir, if you keep acting like an asshole then you’re going to lose your daughter and she’s pretty amazing so I wouldn’t want to risk it.”
And with those wise words, Oliver left the room too.

Felicity had given the cab driver another stop but Oliver had been too engrossed in resting his head in Felicity's lap, listening to her breathe, until the car stopped moving. He sat up to the sight of a familiar street.

They were outside Raisa’s house.
“Why are we here?” he asked softly as Felicity paid the driver.
“We told my family, let’s tell yours,” she smiled, blood didn't make you family, love did, “and if you want tomorrow we can go tell your parents.”

Oliver looked at her with glistening eyes as she scooped his hand into hers, “I’d like to go with you if that’s okay.”

He nodded, because he had no words that could truly express what that meant to him.
“I love you Oliver.”
And she did.
No maybe about it.
“Do you think she’ll mind?” Felicity asked as she hugged Oliver’s arm while they waited on the front porch. The light above them sprung to life, casting its flickering white light over them. “Well if she gets really mad I’m going to have to blame you,” Oliver teased with a wink before Felicity kicked the outside of his ankle in protest, “Fine, fine,” he chortled, “I’ll assume all the blame.”

They heard approaching noises on the other side of the door before Oliver leaned down and kissed the crown of Felicity’s head, “Don’t worry princess, this isn’t the craziest time of the night I’ve shown up on her doorstep.”

Before Felicity could answer, the door behind the security screen creaked open a few inches and a suspicious eye peered through. “Babushka!” Oliver greeted and the door flung open with an excited litany of Russian words. “Come, come, come, come,” Raisa cheered as she gestured them inside where the lights were dimmed to a warm yellow and a small fireplace in the corner was licking bright orange flames against the glass door.

“I’m sorry did we wake you?” Felicity asked as the older woman shifted her warm fleece robe on
her shoulders. “No, no, I was reading my stories,” Raisa replied with a kind smile as she nodded to the nest of blankets and pillows on the couch and a tended book next to a steaming cup of something that smelled like liquorice.

“Is everything alright?” the older woman asked as she ushered them all closer to the fire, deciding they needed warming up from the chilly night air. Oliver looked at Felicity and smiled, *everything was better than alright.*

Raisa’s eyes lifted and her smile grew as she looked at Oliver and asked him a question in her native tongue, “Beremennaya?”

Oliver laughed as his head shook in disbelief. “What did she say?” Felicity asked while Raisa seemed to already have her answer.

He stilled his laughed, blowing the last of it in a sigh through parted lips, “She asked if you were pregnant.”

Felicity’s eyes widened before her brows puckered inward, “How did she…?” turning to the grinning woman, “…how did you?”

“So yes?” Raisa asked for clarity alone.

“Yes,” the word erupted from Oliver like a rocket. She cheered loudly as she slapped her hands together while tears instantly sprung from the corner of her eyes. She embraced Felicity first, the happy tears wetting her cheeks, not that Felicity minded, it was after all in beautiful contrast to the way her father had reacted; before she moved onto Oliver, throwing her arms around his neck and pressing her palm into the back of his head.

When she finally released him, her cheeks were a flood of tears that curved around plump cheeks and a luminous smile. “I am so happy for you both,” she said, her words choking up her throat as she squished Oliver’s face between her palms.

The sudden urge to pee had Felicity tightening her legs to let her enjoy this moment just a little longer, before she was afraid she couldn’t hold it any longer, “I’m sorry, can I use your bathroom?” Oliver answered for her, despite his lips being squashed into something that resembled a fish, “Second door down the hall.”

“Is this why you cut your hair?” Raisa asked as she finally relinquished Oliver’s cheeks. He patted them flat with his fingertips before he answered with a slight bob of his head, “It was time for a new start.”

For him it hadn’t been just about hair, but more about what that represented – a part of his life he wanted to fully distance himself from. That wasn’t to say it wouldn’t one day return to what it had been, but cutting it off *now* for Oliver was symbolic and freeing.

“It suits you,” she remarked kindly as her fingers plucked the tips, “You make an old woman proud and your parents,” she paused to breathe out a smile, “they would be proud too.”

“You think so?”

“If they could see the man you’ve become and the father I know you will be, then yes, they would be. You are a good boy Oliver you just lost your way until you found your light.”

Oliver’s smile softened as did his eyes, blinking off into a distance that felt like the embrace of a warm spring day, “I think she found me,” he breathed softly.

“Maybe,” she cooed, “you found each other.”

Felicity came back to the warm scene and moments later Raisa had taken Felicity’s hand and pressed it between both of hers, “Spasibo,” she spoke quietly.
“She said thank you,” Oliver translated. 
Felicity looked at Raisa with a slightly puzzled brow, “For what?”
She felt the older woman’s hands tighten around hers and she watched the smile brighten her tear-sodden face, “For loving him just as he is and as the person he will be.”

Felicity looked across at Oliver and warmly repeated the Russian word, “Spasibo.”
“For what?” Oliver laughed lightly.
“For making it impossible for me not to love you.”

They stayed a little while longer and Raisa showed Felicity photos held in photo albums with browned corners and worn edges as Oliver sat beside her appreciating every little plucked smile that coloured her expression.

They were memories he was often too scared to revisit, but when photos of his parents, not long before their death, appeared on a page turn, Felicity must have sensed it and took his hand instinctively and wordlessly into hers.

As they were walking down the path with Oliver carefully watching each step Felicity took in her court shoes on the cobblestone, his arms poised and ready to catch her at any moment if she stumbled, Felicity decided now was as good a time as any…

She stopped walking and Oliver flinched, his arms tensing to brace or catch her.
“Let’s go away,” she declared matter-of-factly.
Oliver’s muscles relaxed when he realised she wasn’t about to fall, “Away?”
“Thea is settled in at college out of state and Roy is with her,” Felicity shrugged as her voice grew a little higher and excited, “I can still fly and Caitlin doesn’t need to see us again until week 19 or 20 as long as I check in via Skype so…” she paused to take a breath, “let’s just go.”

Oliver pecked her cheek, unable to resist the way it blushed and plumped.
Pulling back just enough to see her eyes, he asked, “Where do you want to go?”
“Aruba,” she answered definitively.
“What about Jax?” the question worried his brow before he looked back down the path at Raisa’s house, “I suppose I could ask…” he started one step towards the house before Felicity caught his arm and spun him back around.
“No,” she chortled, “See, that’s the best part.”
“What?”

She fossicked in her handbag for only a moment before she pulled out two plane tickets which, when she fanned them out, had another sheet of paper tucked in behind them, “I got him a ticket too.”
“You already…” his words tapered off as he looked at her mesmerised.
“Don’t be mad,” she squeaked, her face screwing up with her shoulders quite adorably.
Oliver eased her with a smile before he lifted her chin and planted a tender kiss on her lips.
“When do we go?”
“We fly out in three days and Jax has a date with the vet tomorrow.”
The tip of his nose brushed against hers as he held himself back from kissing her again.
“I just want our family – our little bubble or cocoon a little while longer,” she blinked back melancholy tears, reality would undoubtedly hit them soon enough and she was well aware of the scrutiny she would face at the company, but that didn’t have to be yet, “Plus I happen to love you and your dog,” she added with a bright smile, “to new beginnings.”
The morning sun hid behind the grey clouds, dampening the air of the new day as Felicity walked through the cemetery gates half a step behind Oliver but with her palm pressed to his and their fingers entwined.

As she breathed in the heavy air and her eyes lifted to the thickening clouds she felt his hand tremble in hers. Wordlessly she squeezed it and Oliver tipped his head over his shoulder to thank her with a soft smile; he’d never brought anyone here, afraid they would see past the exterior of high walls and barbed wire fences he’d built around himself to the kid that missed his parents, but that fear wasn’t there that morning, not with her.

“They’re just over there,” Oliver said softly as they met with the fork in the path where a worn wooden bench sat under an evergreen.

“I’ll wait here,” Felicity smiled gently, sensing that Oliver needed the time alone, an assumption she was right about.

He left her holding a naked bouquet of flowers with a kiss on her cheek before he walked towards the small neighbouring plots he knew well.

He took a crouched position with his hand on the small gravestone they shared and hung his head low.

Every visited started that way, and today was to be no different.

From his mind he pulled out some of the last images of them he remembered, Thea clinging to their mother's leg as his father and him worked on an old chopper, long since discarded in a wrecker’s yard somewhere. He could feel the warmth on his face from the midday sun and he could see the drops of condensation forming on the jug of lemonade nearby. It must have been spring because he could smell flowers fresh in bloom.

Thea was giggling with the reckless abandonment of a young child and Oliver's hands were dark with grease. A smile bled onto his lips as he held that memory in place.

He grew into the man that he was now, while the others stayed locked in time and memory. He wiped his hands clean on an oily rag and embraced his mother. She seemed surprised by his embrace but only seconds later she was rubbing his back like she once had.

Are you happy? Her apparition asked in a voice Oliver hadn’t heard in so many years, and although he knew he wasn’t really hearing it at that moment either, it was enough.

Yes his eyes grew damp with tears.

Then why are you sad my baby boy?
I wish you were here.

He felt the gentle breeze brush his face and for a moment Oliver allowed himself to believe that was his mother's hand reaching out to touch his cheek.

We’re here now, tell us about her.

Oliver imagined his father walk closer with a smile hidden behind his greying beard as he wiped the oil from his hands.

She’s strong and brilliant and feisty and kind. She's a light in a room that once only held darkness.
And you love her?
With everything I have.
Then she must be something very special.

He watched as Thea grew before his eyes, changing from a child to the young woman he knew today, though she stood smiling at a distance from them. 

You've done so well son his father assured him.

I haven't always kept her safe.

But you have.

Oliver bit back the tears, Thea was hurting and she had learned to build walls like him, but the night Roy picked him up off the road, the young pledge tossed his patch into the fire and swore to Oliver he’d never let a thing happen to Thea, and Oliver believed him.

She will be the best of us all because of you Oliver his mother soothed before both his parents took a step back. It was time for them to go, although he didn’t think himself ready.

Live your life Oliver. You found your light so love her and love your child.

We'll always be with you.

He steadied himself as a single tear escaped from his closed eyes like a burden lifted off his shoulder.

Love her Oliver, completely and honestly.

He would.

Oliver walked back to Felicity and pressed his lips to her forehead in a languid kiss.

He was ready for the next chapter.

[Aruba: 15 Weeks - A Navel Orange]

It was another day in paradise and for the fifth morning in a row since they had landed, Felicity woke up sometime around 8:30am to the bright and warm morning sun streaming in through the patio doors that she would soon draw completely open to feel the perfect salt air brush against her cheeks.

Letting her eyes slowly adjust to the view of the brilliant blue water crashing into white caps where the ocean met with the coral reef, Felicity stretched in the large bed, trying in vain to touch her toes to the end of it.

The one-bedroom cottage was part of a resort but looking out into the oasis of lush green foliage and brilliant blue aquatics, it felt like an island that belonged to them alone.

She patted her lips together in a soft yawn as she slowly worked her body up the bed, holding the white linen to her naked chest as she moved. Her brow furrowed as her eyes roamed around the eerily silent space.

“Oliver?” she peeped, the sound of her voice echoing of the sandstone tiles.

Her eyes lowered wearily until they fell onto a note stuck under an apple on the table next to her side of the bed.

She lifted the apple and read the note:

Taken Jax for a run.

Eat the apple and I'll bring you coffee in bed.
She smiled whimsically at the juicy red apple in her hand before she pressed it to her nose and breathed in the smell of it as deeply as her lungs would allow.

It was a new thing, but after practically hating the smell of everything early on in the pregnancy she now couldn’t get enough of almost every aroma. The ones that smelled the best were pretty much any fruit, vanilla hand soap, malt beer, white bread and – this one was a little weird – Jax’s dog food; not that she had been tempted to actually eat it, just sniff it.

She bit into the delectable fruit and sighed gratuitously as the juices of it ran down her chin just as Oliver strode through the stone archway, leaving Jax to find a sunny spot next door on the living room floor, from where – if past behaviour proved an accurate prediction of future behaviour – he would only move from when the sun moved.

“Who won?” Felicity asked, knowing the high likelihood that Oliver and Jax had participated in a sprint down the beach like they had done almost every morning. Oliver pouted in defeat as he walked around to Felicity’s side of the bed.

“You’ll get him next time, I believe in you,” she teased as he collected a drop of apple juice on the tip of his finger. He slipped it through his soft lips as Felicity breathed in the deep musk of his sweat while her eyes traced the beads of it across his forehead and the lush red colour under his cheeks.

She dropped the sheet from around her chest as she sat up onto her knees and pulled Oliver downward into a deep kiss.

“Baby I’m sweaty,” he whispered against her lips.

“I know,” she hummed before she dropped her lips to the crook of his neck and inhaled the round of his shoulder, “it’s delicious.”

She pressed her naked body against his drenched green hoodie as her fingers fossicked underneath it, slipping and sliding over the taut muscles near his pelvis.

“What did 15 weeks say about sex drive?” Oliver teased as he left her hands to fawn his body and her lips to devour his neck.

“It said…” her tongue weaved up the cords of his neck, “you needed to…” she paused to kiss his bristled jaw, “…give your ‘pregnant goddess’…” her lips met with his in two soft pecks before she drew them back and blinked wantonly up at him, “…whatever she wanted.”

“And what is it that you want?” he asked as he dragged his fingers up the inside of her thigh, drawing closer to the heat he could feel radiating off her sex.

“I want you naked,” she hummed as she bucked into him and the knot in the drawstring of his shorts pressed into the tip of her sex making Felicity gulp down air and shudder against his body.

It was at that moment a mischievous thought hit her and a naughty little smile flirted with the corner of her lips.

“Actually, I want you to get naked for me,” she corrected as she withdrew her hands and nestled her body back into the bed.

“Meaning?” Oliver chuckled as he straightened the shoulders of the clothes Felicity had been tugging on.

She looked up at him with saucer-wide eyes and full, wet lips as her tongue bathed them again.

“I want you to strip for me Oliver,” she winked before her finger pointed to the foot of the bed, “over there please.”
Felicity found the media remote in the drawer beside the bed and tossed it down towards him, “You can pick the song.”

Oliver smiled at her with his head cocked to one side and they both knew there was no way he could say no to her, regardless of the request. But, he tossed the remote back up the bed and grinned as Felicity pouted. “I don’t need music baby,” he said with a smoky rasp before his tongue lapped his lower lip and his teeth stapled it just long enough to make his point, “just the sound of you moaning.”

Felicity sucked her lower lip into her mouth and rolled her shoulders when she felt her nipples tighten and graze against the sheet in a little spark of friction as she shuffled closer to the end of the bed.

He wiped the back of his hand across his brow and Felicity licked the inside of her teeth as she watched the sweat splay out in glistening trails.

His thick fingers toyed with the white zipper tag of his hoodie, twisting and spinning it in a way that was deliberately close to how Felicity knew he worked her clit into a frenzy most nights.

His eyes were a light and mischievous blue that mimicked the deeper hues of the ocean behind him. Her body was already tickled with goose bumps as she pulled her knees up under the sheet and against her chest to close her legs up tight in an attempt to dampen the arousal between them.

Finally the first click of the zipper being pulled down echoed off the walls and Felicity didn’t even try to stifle the breathy moan that dripped from her lips reactively. In a moment that seemed to take an eternity she watched the zipper slowly open, spreading like she wanted her legs to.

Her fingers feathered through the tendrils of hair that fell over her bare shoulder as her teeth sunk into her bottom lip. She wanted him to speed up just as much as she wanted this to move in slow motion; a juxtaposition of desires. Finally the zip came free and Felicity sighed out a breathy groan as her tongue pushed into the roof of her mouth.

Oliver watched the excitement build on her face as he shrugged the hoodie from his shoulders. The shirt underneath was light grey and Felicity could see the places where his sweat has coloured it dark; under his arms, a V down his chest and in patches that outlined his abs. “Fuck,” she cursed beneath a moan before Oliver cracked a smile.

He fisted the hem of his tee and lifted it just enough to show her the glistening slopes of his stomach. The sudden urge to lick it had Felicity peek her tongue through her lips and expel a wanton sigh as everything from the apples of her cheeks to the balls of her feet felt warm with arousal.

Her nipples were so tightly coiled that when she ran her hand quite absently over the sheet that shielded them she gave herself a titillating pleasure that sent shivers down her spine.

Sensing her heightened arousal, Oliver teased his tongue along the bow of his lips before he rolled his stomach into a crunch that rippled his taut muscles and made Felicity’s walls clench around a void before he dropped the shirt and she whimpered at the loss.

He crawled his hands up the bed until his lips were almost touching hers, silently sharing the same air for a moment before he moved to the left and pressed a languid kiss just below her ear. “Moan for me Princess,” he growled into her ear, his voice thick with gravel.

Without even pausing to tease out his request, Felicity did and when Oliver stood back up his fingers were pulling on the drawstring of his shorts until the knot pinged free.
She twisted the sheet around her breasts before she crawled down the bed towards him, her eyes never leaving off his until she blinked down and her eyes were in line with the bulge building behind his shorts.

She wanted to nibble it, to feel his body flinch under her attentions but keep his feet anchored where they stood, trusting that she wouldn’t hurt him, but she simply let that idea sit in the back of her mind and turn the wingtips of her lips up into a smile as she sat upright and let her legs dangle over the foot of the bed.

With her legs crossed at the knees and the skewed blankets haphazardly covering her in all the right places, Felicity beckoned him with her eyes to please continue.

He rolled his hips and his sheathed cock moved in front of her making her teeth sink into her lips so heavily that they instantly reddened. She was so close now that his heady scent radiated off him and danced like fire across her senses, making her gasp for air. She smiled impishly at the tented fabric in front of her, knowing that she would barely need to crane her neck forward to bury herself between his legs and inhale him, if she chose to.

A playful hand reached out and fumbled over the waistband of his shorts, pulling it out before letting it go and making a salacious slapping sound against his hips, but when Felicity went to do it a second time Oliver stopped her hand at the wrist.

“No touching,” he grinned, his touch electrifying Felicity’s skin as he leaned a little closer and his breath misted her lips, “That’s extra.”

“I’ll pay,” she answered with a smoky laugh.

An insatiable glint in his eyes and a smile were all the answer she got before he tucked his thumbs into his waistband and rolled it down over his hips and the hump of his ass. His erection became far more prominent behind his white briefs as it strained against the cotton and Felicity couldn’t help but widen her eyes and gulp down a silent moan.

His eyes reprimanded her for silencing the moan and seconds later she let another one free in recompense while Oliver rolled his hips in time with it; and when she moaned a third time, he matched that one with a slow thrust.

She could feel herself wetting the linen between her legs as her fingers twisted in it to still her urge to claw at the clothing still on his body.

“Louder Princess,” he encouraged as he teased her with a slither of his chest when he raised the corner of his tee again.

She moaned and groaned and hummed and made sounds from her throat she had never heard before as each one made him pull the drenched tee a little higher up his body…

…Until she whimpered his name in broken syllables, “Oh-luh-verrr,”

And he tore it the rest of the way off and dropped it to the floor.

Felicity lost all sense of composure as her breathing became panted and erratic and her eyes travelled over each delectable muscle, glistened with his heady sweat.

He took her hand and played with each finger tenderly before moving to hold her at the wrist while he guided her splayed fingers to the centre of his chest and ran them down the slip stream of sweat.

“I thought touching was extra?” Felicity coquettishly whispered.

Oliver leaned in a little closer, making her nails dig into the sinewy lines of his stomach as a wicked smiled flirted across his lips, “For you I’ll make an exception,”.
She ran her fingers tentatively down his body before her hands gripped his waist and she pulled him to top of her as she fell backwards onto the mattress. His arms strained, a canvas of rippling muscles and twisted veins dripping in sweat, as he held himself above her, careful to make sure not even the lightest weight pressed into her stomach while his knees teetered on the edge of the bed between her legs.

“I haven’t taken my briefs off yet,” he playfully chastised. Felicity’s hands glided around his waist until her fingers found the indentations at the small of his back. Slipping her thumbs under the band of his briefs she eased them over his ass while she looked at him with hungry eyes, “I think I can manage those.”

She moved his briefs as far down his thighs as she could before Oliver shuffled them the rest of the way down. His cock sprung free and brushed between her legs making Felicity’s back arch off the bed to seek it out again.

He kissed along her collarbone, his mouth following the rosy lines that trickled down her body like the lithe roots of a tree, all culminating at the blush-pink folds of her thrumming sex. Her legs twisted around his waist, pulling Oliver closer while her hips bucked deliriously into his cock, satisfying her lust for friction.

Her fingers traced the taut muscles of Oliver’s arm; firm, twitching, tight before one banded underneath her and lifted her at the same time as he spun and, like a perfectly choreographed dance, he was now sitting on the edge of the bed while Felicity straddled his lap.

Fervently she kissed his lips, his jaw and his neck, hungry to taste every inch of his salty skin as her palm rolled down his hard shaft. Slowly he lowered himself onto the mattress and billowed the blankets around them as Felicity nipped at the protrusion of his collarbone before her hands pinned him to the bed by the rounds of his shoulders.

She lifted herself onto her knees just enough to pass the head of his cock between her folds, coating him in her decadent arousal before she circled her hips and lowered down onto him, plunging his cock into her warm recess and making him growl her name from the very depths of his stomach as her tight and warm body encased him.

It was a slow descent, one they both stole moments behind closed eyes to enjoy, until he was fully seated inside her. It was then that Felicity leaned over him and captured his lips with her own. He surrendered them without fight, letting her dictate the speed and pressure of the kiss; slow and deep and making his head lift off the bed until she dropped it free with a smile.

With a slow and measured rhythm Felicity rolled her hips and began riding Oliver’s shaft while she sat upright above him. Her pelvis twisted and titled and her hands moved to his thighs to balance her weight as Oliver’s hands drove up her body.

He cupped each breast, watching her eyes flutter as he gently kneaded them into his palms. He took his every signal from her and as her breath quickened and she titled him deeper inside, Oliver gently tweaked each nipple between his thumb and forefinger.

“Do you love me?” she asked, throaty, though she wasn’t sure why.

He put his thumb to his mouth and gently wet the tip with his tongue before he brushed it against her broiling nipple.

“More than I’ve ever loved before or will ever again, you’re it for me baby,” he answered her softly.

“No matter what?” she whispered as her lips lowered to his and her hips ground against him, pushing his cock deep into her walls.
He cupped her face, her cheeks now red with exertion, “No matter what.”

She smiled willowy and with her lips wet from her tongue as she pushed herself back up and braced her arms against his chest. Her hair fell like a curtain of gold over her shoulder and arm and the ends tickled his chest as he watched enthralled while Felicity took exactly what she needed from him in those slow, long strokes of her body until the morning air filled with the sounds of her heightening pleasure.

He loved watching her, giving her what she wanted, what she needed even as the aching urge he had to thrust himself inside her almost became too much. This moment wasn’t about him, not that her grinding her clit into his mound and rolling his cock around every part of her clenching walls didn’t feel fucking fantastic, because it did, but this was about her pleasure, and what he got from seeing it written all over her beautiful face.

“Oliv-ah,” she moaned, albeit stumbled, as her body slumped forward and her head fell onto his chest while he felt every inch of her tremble around his shaft.

“Please,” she whispered into his clammy skin, her orgasm so close but just out of her reach.

“You want to come Princess?” he uttered as he kissed a path across her forehead.

She looked up his chest, her eyes wild and her lips snagged in her teeth as she nodded, “Mmhmm, yes.”

They turned fluidly a second time and Felicity rasped another “please,” before she found herself underneath him and Oliver still sitting halfway inside her.

With his forehead against hers he thrust forward, plunging his cock inside her as his knees pivoted on the bed. Her legs spread wider, hooking one around his waist as his hips jerked against her.

Their lips tangled with each other in a frenzy of teeth and tongues and lips that neither cared to control or relinquish as they moved together, thrusting and grinding until the room became thick with their moans.

Her lips broke free of his as her eyes dove deeper into his eyes than they ever had before, “Tell me you love me Oliver,” she pleaded, her eyes wet with emotion and her cheeks flushed with passion. He pushed himself deeper, making her whole back lift off the mattress as he too tethered his eyes to hers, “I love you,” he whispered, but she heard it, and her climax came with those words echoing through her heart.

And when her swollen lips turned up at the corners into the prettiest smile he’d ever seen. Oliver came too.

Felicity stretched her legs out under the bamboo table as strung lights swayed above her in the gentle Caribbean breeze and her eyes lapsed closed to the band’s lively music, that you couldn’t help but sway your head and hips along with.

Oliver had dutifully made the walk to the desert table across the restaurant to gather Felicity an array of fruits that she had come to crave over the last week. Her lips smacked together as she dreamt about the delightfully sweet-and-sour pulp of a tamarind or the deliciously juicy, jelly like pulp of a quenepa. The process of eating one of those had become almost as enjoyable as eating the fruit itself as it required biting into the brittle skin, separating the fruit from its covering and working the pulp around your mouth to suck it off the seed. If Oliver had any sense he would return to the table with bunches lining his pockets.
She smelled the aroma of rum moments before she felt the presence of someone, and, unless Oliver had taken a bath in rum, she was fairly certain when she opened her eyes she would find a stranger.

One eye plucked open and she was momentarily proud of her conclusion before it shifted to an uncomfortableness at finding another man in Oliver’s chair.

“I think you have the wrong table,” she said politely, trying to make as little eye contact as possible, though she managed to steady her breath as she convinced herself of the fact it wasn’t Malcolm and for that she should be grateful.

“Don’t think so,” he chomped on his lip as he spoke, a mannerism Felicity found both annoying and grotesque.

“I don’t know you,” she answered brusquely, “and that seat is taken.”

*By a man who could knock you out with one punch.*

*By a man who jumped out of a moving truck.*

*By a man who didn’t chomp when he spoke.*

“Dance with me.”

It wasn’t a demand as such, but the assumption that he didn’t even need to phrase it as a request made Felicity's lips purse and her eyes roll towards the star-speckled sky.

“No thank you,” she replied with almost none of charm or pleasantry that she usually spoke with.

“Dance. With. Me.”

Saying it slower like she hadn’t understood what he’d wanted the first time infuriated Felicity and the exacerbated sigh she blew out should have signalled that to him, but he still sat there, with blood shot eyes and a slurred smile.

“I said no,” she answered tersely as she thought about forgoing the table to the tipsy idiot.

“What’s wrong, why are you acting like a frigid bitc...”

“Go on, finish that word. I dare you,” Oliver snarled as he stood intimidatingly close to the man’s shoulders.

Felicity watched the man gulp as his eyes traversed the intimidating figure Oliver cut in dark trousers and a leather bomber jacket one hand clutching Felicity's plate while the other fisted at his side.

His brow was heavy and his eyes ominously shadowed and wild.

“Meet my boyfriend,” Felicity quipped, “You're in his seat and I don’t think he likes you very much.”

“Sorry man,” the dark haired stranger apologised with a distinctive quiver in his words, “I didn’t know she was with you.”

Felicity watched the snarl twitch the corner of Oliver's lips, “And if she wasn’t with me that would give you the right to bother her?”

The man stood up with shaky hands he couldn’t attribute to the drink alone, “I’m sorry man,” he repeated as he took a step away from the table.

“The fuck are you apologising to me for? It’s her you owe it to,” Oliver gritted and Felicity could tell he was just waiting for the guy to give him a reason to use his fist of white knuckles.

“I’m real sorry,” came a fragile reply directed at Felicity.

She smiled sarcastically as she stood up and ran a slow hand over the burgeoning bump underneath her flowery dress.

“For the record, I’m definitely not frigid.”

She watched his mouth taped before he swallowed enough air to fill both lungs, “I’m really...,” he kept backing away Oliver flexed his fist, “I’m sorry.”

The stranger scampered away, in all likelihood back to his room for a fresh pair of pants.
“I’m sorry,” Oliver sighed as he put the plate of food in front of her like an appeasement offering, “I know you don’t need me protecting your honour.”
Felicity lifted onto her toes and placed a hard and crazed kiss against his mouth and two frenzied ones against his jaw.
“Take me home and take me,” she growled, her temperature spiking as her cheeks flushed scarlet to match her lips, seeing him hulk out over her honour had been like an aphrodisiac on speed and Felicity was almost prepared to demand he take her right there and then on the bamboo table, if it weren’t for possible splinters.

Felicity kicked her sandals off as they reached the sand and scooped them into her hands as the soft sand granules gave way around her feet. She looked out across the pristine beach, now a deep shade of blue as the evening fell late and heavy around them. It had been a leisurely 20 minute walk to the restaurant that night but the desperate urge to be filled by Oliver would wait no more than 10 minutes tops.

“Race you,” she winked before she took off towards the lapping ocean where the sand was more stable.
“You're not even going to count it in?” Oliver laughed as his large strides had him caught up to her in less than half a minute.

She swatted him away with her shoes as she laughed and swerved around the lapping water that washed against the shore.

Felicity swore she was in a full sprint as Oliver looked like he was somewhere around a comfortable jog, but somehow exactly matching her pace.
“You have longer legs, that's cheating,” she wheezed before she missed avoiding a wave and shrieked when the cold water covered her ankle.

With cat like reflexes Oliver, afraid she would lose her balance, scooped her into his arms and carried her without missing a step. The air was electric with the sound of her effervescent laugh and Oliver swore to himself that he would religiously try to make her laugh just like that every day from here on out.

“Wait. Baby wait,” she laughed through stunted breaths as her hand slapped his chest.

He put her onto the sand, his eyes scouring her as he looked at her with worry laced through his expression.

Felicity bent in half to catch her breath before she pushed Oliver toward the ocean and took off running with her shoes flapping at her side and her hair caught on a breeze that whipped it around her face as she turned back to look at him with a brazen smile.

Oliver stared down at the cuffs of his pants, now sodden as the ankle high water lapped against his legs, “Oh now you’re in trouble,” he grinned before he took off after her.

It didn’t take long for Oliver to catch her, even as she weaved up the beach onto the softer sand, and when he did he collected her around the knees, lifted her into the air and held her, squirming, against his chest and ran towards the tussock grass that edged the beach.

Felicity managed to wriggle free before she pounced onto his back and wrestled him to the ground, absolutely because Oliver let her, but she lay on his chest proudly, regardless because he was her
prize and she peppered his lips half a dozen times to prove it.

The last kiss though lingered and soon Felicity found herself rolling her tongue across his lips before nipping the edge while her hands fisted into his Henley after spreading his jacket open.

“Here?” he growled into the shadowy night as they lay under a wind-tipped tree. Felicity bucked hips into him, catching his forming erection in a way that made Oliver inhale sharply through clenched teeth. “Here,” she cooed.

She lifted the top half of her body off him and wriggled herself down to his lap when her eyes noticed something a short stone's through away. “Oh my god, look,” she whispered as she rolled off him and nodded up the small embankment ahead of them.

There, on the patio of a small grass-roofed hut not far from them, where brightly coloured paper lanterns tied between poles swung lazily in the gentle wind, were two people caught in the light of the lanterns’ warm glow, a man and a women, with the man most distinctively down on one knee. “He's proposing,” Felicity squeaked before she folded her lips inward at the thought that, had they continued, their knack for not being able to be quiet would have forever changed this moment for this couple. “Should we go?” Oliver whispered. Felicity considered they probably should but if they stood up they would have been spotted for sure.

The woman must have said yes because when he stood up, the pair embraced and he twirled her around the patio joyfully.

Felicity looked over at Oliver and snuggled her chin in between his shoulder blades. “I know we’re doing things all out of order, but I think that suits us,” she sighed whimsical as the salty air brushed against her cheeks. “You don’t want that right now?” he asked as he turned to face her as she lay her head into the crook of his elbow instead. If she said yes, Oliver was prepared to search that beach from end to end to find a shell that would fit her finger. Felicity touched her fingers to his bristled cheek and smiled, “I want exactly what I have.”

A few moments of silenced lapsed between them as the soft sounds of the night were all they shared before Felicity spoke again, “Plus, we have to wait until your hair grows back,” she teased as her nails raked over his scalp. “Why is that?” he asked while he pulled her into an embrace. “Because,” she grinned, “That’s the man I fell in love with.”
9 Months preparing to fall in love for a lifetime.
The stars were more vivid against the rich midnight sky, more clear in fact than Oliver could ever recount seeing them – even on those few occasions that the Queen family had taken a trip away from the harsh artificial lights of the Starling night; he never remembered the night looking as tranquil as it did at that moment while the sand under him formed around his body and Felicity, cradled in his arm, sighed her warm breath against his neck.

“Why?” Oliver asked, just over the melodious sound of the waves lapping at the shore. Felicity walked her eyes up to his, skimming her nose against his jaw “Why what?”

“Why do you love me?” the question had stagnated in his mind long enough, “You’re everything a guy like me doesn’t deserve?”

She watched his lids sink further down his eyes and the way his lips trembled at the corners – he truly believed that.

“Oliver,” she breathed as her fingers lightly guided his face to hers, “Do you even know what kind of guy you are? How I see you?” she asked before she sat up, her knees tucked against his side and
a smile laced through her lips.

Her thumb stroked up the hollow of his cheek while her other hand lay flat against his thumping heart.

“When I look at you I see a man not afraid to fight for the people he loves,” she continued as their eyes tethered, “I see a man who knows the sting of death so will always choose life, a man who loves with his whole heart,” her voice cracked and she paused to let renegade tears slip from her glassy eyes before she continued with trembling words, “I see a father who will protect our baby with everything he has and I see a good man willing to adapt and evolve into a great one,” her hand took up his hand and threaded their fingers together, “and I see you Oliver, my future.”

He held her hand to his chest and squeezed before his eyes fell back to the stars and he spoke something in an ominous whisper, “If they find him Felicity, I’m going to kill him.”

She watched his eyes cloud over with pain, anger and regret and she didn’t doubt him for a moment, but she wouldn’t have him travel that path and allow Oliver to surrender to the dark thoughts that tortured his soul.

“You don’t have to Oliver” her voice was warm and soothing as she stroked her hand across the edge of his forehead.

He curled in towards her, his long legs drawing in towards his chest as he lay his head on her lap, his eyes wet with tears and his soul vulnerable.

“I don’t know how not to,” he admitted, his voice hushed and thin; almost frail.

It was as though Oliver saw a path mapped out for him where he fell back into the darkness and away from everything he loved, because he knew, if he did that he wouldn’t want her light or their child anywhere near him.

They deserved better.

“Let’s not worry about that tonight,” she spoke softly, her words like a salve to the ache in his chest.

He shifted so his eyes looked skyward again before they found enough peace to close.

They stayed like that, in motionless silence, for some time, just listening to the sounds of the night and their slow, mingled breathing until Felicity’s legs became numb and she shifted them slightly underneath Oliver’s head.

“We should get back,” he smiled as he sat up and something Felicity hadn’t noticed before made his eyes puzzle over.

“What’s in your pocket?” she chuckled as she reached out to touch the bulbous pocket.

His trademark smirk appeared on his lips as Oliver reached his hand into his pocket and returned with a bunch of quenepa.

“As if I couldn’t love you more,” she sighed as he held them out to her.

She took one from the bunch and rolled it gingerly between her palms.

“Aren’t you going to eat it Princess?” he said as he tapped his elbow into her arm.

She stopped rolling the fruit as her lips turned up at the edges and her eyes impishly blinked at him.

“Actually, let’s take these home,” she answered before she stood up and brushed the sand off the back of her dress, “and I’ll eat them off you.”

Oliver bounded upright faster than even he had anticipated and, after stumbling forward a bit, he grasped her hand and started running, trailing Felicity and her exuberant laugh along behind him.
The next morning seemed no different to a handful of ones that had come before, the morning sun was bright and while not warm yet, it gave off its own sense of warmth at merely seeing the rays of it spreading out through the room.

The sheets ruffled beside her hand as Oliver took it from his chest, sat up and brushed the back of her knuckles with a gentle kiss.

“Where are you going?” she pouted as her hand drifted to the mattress while Oliver slipped out from between the sheets.

“I’m going to have a shower and then I’ll take Jax for a walk down to the market and get you breakfast,” he replied as he padded around the cool tiled floor, taking a moment to stand, stark naked, looking out towards the ocean nursing some fanciful dream that they could stay like this forever.

It wasn’t the first time since they had arrived that he had considered it, in fact on one of his morning jogs he’d come across a semi-dilapidated auto shop, where the rusted out sign in both Spanish and English hung from only one chain and the front window was boarded up with tagged plywood, and for just a moment he had allowed himself to imagine a fixed up building bearing his name only a short walk from a little cabin near the ocean where they lived – where he could keep them both safe, away from a dark path he wasn’t sure he knew how to avoid.

“And some pastechi?” Felicity asked as her hands fawned over his pillow before tucking it tight to her chest and inhaling the smell of Oliver that still lingered there.

He turned around slowly and her smile brimmed as his semi-erect cock bounced with the movement.

“And pastechi,” Oliver’s shoulders jostled as he laughed making his taut chest ripple with the same motion.

Felicity whimpered out a breath before she licked her tongue across her lips.

“And then what?” she purred as she watched him walk back towards the bed, each muscle flexing and relaxing as he moved.

“We’ll eat breakfast outside in the sun,” he answered before he leaned down putting his mouth a hair’s breadth away from hers, “and then I’m going to take you back to bed so don’t bother getting changed.”

He pulled back and Felicity’s entire body shivered with aroused anticipation, “Duly noted.”

Once Oliver had closed himself into the bathroom Felicity slid to the edge of the bed, reached down and collected her laptop from underneath it.

She listened to the hum of the fan kicking into life, smiling at its familiarity until it was ready to use. She decided to start with her emails and quickly distinguished between what she needed to read and what seemed like it could wait.

The meeting after lunch with two investors interested in some Smart home tech was still on, noted and she would review the information Curtis had emailed through on it just before the meeting, check.

There was another email from Curtis with the subject “Read Me, I’m Gossip” which she skimmed with a smile as she chewed the edge of her thumbnail. There was nothing all that scandalous, but Curtis’ last paragraph was about her father. He had been moping around the office and tersely slamming doors for no apparent reason. His PA had told Curtis that she was pretty certain there was some “trouble at home” because she hadn’t taken any calls from Donna for a week.

Felicity sighed before she nibbled on the inside of her lip. She hadn’t missed any messages from
her mother and when they spoke last week Donna had seemed cheery enough, but it was well within her mother’s ‘daughter above mother’ motto to keep Felicity in the dark in order to not ruin the holiday, and she made a mental note to call Donna later and press her for the truth, if there was anything to Noah’s PA’s assessment.

The sound of the shower running in the bathroom just to the side of the bed echoed off the walls and a gentle breeze toyed with the thin, white curtains as Felicity continued to scroll until a pop up for a video call invaded her screen; it was Caitlin.

She slipped out of bed and wrapped her silk kimono robe around her body making sure no cleavage on her swelling chest would make a surprise appearance before she carried the laptop to the table near the patio doors, set it down near the edge, sat herself on the chair with her back to the rest of the room, and answered it.

“It’s safe, she’s dressed,” Caitlin leaned back and called out before Iris appeared from the side and shuffled Caitlin over so they could share the black home-office chair.

“Did you actually think I would actually answer a video call naked?” Felicity gaped as she shook her head in disbelief. Iris shrugged playfully, “I thought you might be so drunk from sunshine and love-making that you forgot to put clothes on and I didn’t want it to embarrass you.”

“Well then, thank you for your concern,” Felicity chuckled, it wasn’t actually too far from the truth, she was fairly certain they had spent more time naked than dressed, “What are you guys doing calling anyway, isn’t it like…?” she paused to do the math in her head, “...7am on a Saturday right now?”

Iris’ lips pursed as she nodded, she wasn’t a morning person, and Caitlin answered, “We’re heading out for the weekend, but I wanted to check in with you first.”

“That’s very kind, but you guys don’t need to worry I’m fine.”

“Strictly professional,” Caitlin spoke before she cleared her throat and clicked her pen, “Nausea?”

Felicity shook her head lazily as she answered, “All but gone, now I just get really, really stuffed when I try to finish my plate.”

Caitlin was writing but she looked up from her notes to smile, “Perfectly normal just try to eat smaller meals more regularly.”

“Noted.”

Caitlin returned to her notes, “Any stomach pains?”

Felicity touched her stomach over her robe and thought about it, “A little tightness sometimes, but it’s not painful.”

“Like a pulling sensation?” the brunette inquired watching Felicity’s expression for her answer.

“Yeah, more like that.”

Caitlin nodded and Felicity thought a she saw a slight sigh brush over her expression, “That’s perfectly normal, it’s just your ligaments stretching in preparation,” Caitlin’s tone changed to one a little more serious as she continued, “You will start to get a little loose in your muscles from here on out so be careful on uneven paths or rocks, okay?”

Felicity nodded, the books she’d read online had warned about that and Oliver never let her forget it when they walked anywhere that had uneven terrain with his watchful eyes and ever-ready arms.

“Any swelling?”

“Nope,” Felicity answered with a pop of her lips, “hands and feet all normal,” she added as she held out her hands as proof.

“Have you peed on the strip this week?” Caitlin asked, referring to the box of strips designed to detect protein in urine, among other things.
“Yes, no scary colour changes.”
“And…” Caitlin started

Felicity never heard the shower stop or the bathroom door open.

Oliver wandered into the bedroom, his eyes a little hazy from the steam that followed him out of it. He saw Felicity only briefly out of the corner of his eye but his head never turned towards her as he headed for the drawers near the bed in search of clean briefs.

“Oh,” Iris gaped with a strangled voice just as Caitlin looked up from her notes.
“What?” Felicity squeaked, suddenly afraid that she had somehow read the box on the testing strips wrong and the little squares were supposed to radically change colour.

“Oh sweetie,” Iris started to giggle as she reached a hand across Caitlin’s face and covered her girlfriend’s eyes, “Behind you.”

Felicity turned in her chair and was face with Oliver’s very nice, but very naked, rounded and pert backside, slightly twitching on the left side and glistening with a few drops of water left to sink into his skin as he searched the beech wood dresser.

“OHMYGODOLIVER,” she yelped which made Oliver spin around before Felicity could throw her hand over the laptop camera and she could practically hear Iris’ eyes widen.
“Fuck,” Oliver choked as he quickly realised what he’d stumbled into before he scrambled out of view and into the bathroom.

Felicity’s head hung in her hands as Iris took her hand back from Caitlin’s face.
“You know I’ve seen a penis before right? I am a doctor,” Caitlin said as she teased Iris’ rich-cocoa cheek with her finger.
Iris nodded, “Yes, but I guarantee not like that one,” she replied as she blew out a flustered sigh, playfully fanning her hand in front of her face as she leaned back against her half of the chair, “As someone who has experienced and can appreciate both genders, you are a very lucky lady,” she added with an impish smirk.

Felicity could feel her cheeks growing hot under the skin and she could only answer in a mouse-like squeak.
“How are you not limping?” Iris continued with her willowy arms wrapping around her chest and her head tipped to the side.
“Really, ladies do we need to have this conversation?” Felicity managed to speak, touching her fingers to her scorching cheeks.
“No more bruised cervixes,” Caitlin teased, barely stifling a laugh.
Iris’ jaw hung wide, “That was her?!!”

Felicity head dropped back into the palms of her hands before she mumbled, “Don’t you both have somewhere else to be?”

“Okay, final thing,” Caitlin started and Felicity retracted one hand just enough to see her two friends, “Relax, drink lots of water, any sign of swelling call me, don’t spend too long in the sun and enjoy yourself.”
“Did you see the size of her man’s penis?” Iris chortled.
“No because you covered my eyes,” Caitlin shot back.
Iris shrugged, “Anyway, of course she’s going to enjoy herself.”
“Okay, Bye ladies, love you,” Felicity stammered before she abruptly severed the call and exhaled a heavy sigh followed by a mortified groan.

She heard the click of the bathroom door and she turned to see Oliver cowering behind it.
“Is it safe?” he asked wearily.

“Yes,” she grimaced apologetically while she closed the lid of her laptop. But it was Oliver that came out of the bathroom with the first, “Sorry.” She smiled as she stood up and met him halfway. “You have nothing to be sorry about,” she smiled as she blinked down to his tented briefs, “Absolutely nothing.”

She took his lips by surprise and Oliver stayed motionless to them for a few moments until her curious tongue sweeping across his seam awoke him and he kissed her back with a flourish of hard and soft and his own delicate twist of his tongue.

Her lips were not new, far from it as he considered perhaps the hundreds of times he had tasted their slightly fruity flavour or played with her spritely tongue, but each kiss felt like a beautiful rush of something exhilarating and new and Oliver knew even when the number was in the thousands he would still feel the same way. He would never tire of kissing Felicity.

His hands fist in her rear, making her mouth drop open against his, before he hoisted her into the air and carried her the short distance to the bed.

He broke their kiss with a carnal growl that rumbled from his core before he lay her gently onto the bed. Felicity scurried backwards up to the top of the bed while Oliver crawled onto it, his eyes hungry and almost a replica of the ones he’d worn the night that had changed their lives forever – the hungry lion seeking his prey had returned; with a little less grease of his face, shorter hair and smelling less like motor oil and more like the lick of a tropical breeze; but still as animalistic as she remembered and she found her legs opening in response.

“I thought you were going to get brunch,” she whispered as his body shadowed hers and his lips stilled barely an inch from her own, which were wet with anticipation.

A devious smile tickled the edge of his lips as he leaned back on his arms and took one side of the tie on her robe between his teeth and gently tugged it open. The silky fabric in a pattern of black and ivory spilled open and Felicity gasped as every inch of her was exposed to his hungry gaze.

She would never tire of the way his eyes devoured her and that moment was no different as she watched his breath deepen, his chest broaden and his tongue slowly sweep along his lower lip. She smiled as she remembered fondly the back and forth they had had the night they swore would just be the one in the small bedroom at the back of Oliver’s garage on the bed with the perfect box folds. The way he had dropped the condom on her chest and teased her with the pet name he used now so fondly, *Princess*.

Her body pined for him as his lips dropped between her breasts and her back arched off the mattress. She whimpered with each delicate kiss he placed against her clammy skin, each one more tortuously close to her aching sex than the one before.

And then he stopped, just above her belly button where her stomach no longer lay flat, and looked up the centre of her body to her eyes, a brilliant blue etched with seafoam green and hooded under furrowed brows that spoke of her desperation just as her heady arousal tickled his senses. “I’m going to eat first,” he smiled, deviant and roused.

The first moment his lips touched her on the crest of her mound, Felicity buried the back of her head into the billowing linen and twisted a hand into the same while her other hand lithely sought out Oliver.
His tongue teased her lips, delicately parting them as he moved slowly up one and down the other. Everything felt like fire and Felicity found herself humming sweetly and her own tongue mimicked his tracks in her mouth. His hands ran up her thighs just as slowly as he gently opened her up. His palms were soft but his fingertips were slightly rough from years of use and Felicity couldn’t help but buck into him as his hands grew ever closer to her apex.

He pressed her hips gently back into the bed, growling “Not yet Princess,” into the fleshy folds of her sex.

She could feel her spine shivering and her breath tightening in her throat, as if she had forgotten what to do with it, just as Oliver’s lips curved around her clit and a whimpered “Fuck,” stumbled from her mouth.

She could hear him chuckle and she felt the warmth of his breath tickle her folds at her outburst but she couldn’t think about anything beyond the sweep of his tongue over the tip of her clit while he grazed the soft, twisted hair on his chin against her sex.

His mouth pulled her into him, inhaling her and letting the taste of her blanch his lips, but no sooner had Felicity felt the dizzying heights of pleasure engulf her, Oliver pulled away, dropping her completely from his mouth and making her sob out a gasp.

She looked at him puzzled but all he gave her in response was a smile before he sat back on his heels and lifted her foot towards his mouth. His tongue found her ankle first and circled it slowly while he kept his eyes trained to her.

Felicity had never considered the ankle erogenous, but at that moment, with her body on the precipice of climax it was like erotic torture and her tiny bleats begged for more.

His lips ran like feathers over her skin, now rife with goosebumps and warm with arousal, until he reached the inside of her knee where he took his time to caress the soft, supple flesh he found there with seductive kisses and swirls of his tongue that revelled in the sweet taste of her sweat that now misted her body.

When his mouth finally met her thighs he took a gentle bite that had Felicity practically convulsing into the mattress as he played his small games of anticipation.

She could feel her breath hitching in her throat and her entire body starved for air as her desperate need trembled from her lips, “Oliver, yes, please.”

She wasn’t sure how much more she could take but Oliver was, thankfully, of no mind to test her, his own need to dive face first between her legs and feast on her arousal had his cock throbbing behind his briefs.

And so dive he did.

He grazed her sex as the bridge of his nose nuzzled her clit and his tongue bathed her labia in strong, slow licks that tasted and savoured her like his favourite flavour of ice cream. Her whole body shivered and bucked against his face making Oliver move with her, kissing and licking at different speeds, pressure and angles.

As she neared her climax Oliver added two digits, slipping them into her wet canal where he slid and twirled and rubbed them against her cushioned walls like an artist painting with his fingers.

Her knuckles whitened and her eyes blew open, though she saw nothing more than a haze of light on the ceiling. He sucked her excited clit into his mouth and rolled it over his lips, humming them
together in slight echoes of her name to heighten the pleasure she experienced. He nibbled her pearl
deeper into his mouth until the tip of his tongue could rub against it.

Up and down he teased her, swapping to soft circles when she cried out trembled moans, and then
back and forth like tiny slaps of pleasure that shuddered through her body all while his free hand
stroked her thighs with widespread fingers, making Felicity feel the primal heat of his raked fingers
pulling her into his face.

Her walls tightened around his fingers and Oliver dropped his mouth to her entrance, slipping his
tongue inside her seconds before Felicity's entire body convulsed; her toes curled in the sheets, her
mouth gasped for air and her fingers trembled down the line of her body until they brushed where
their bodies met and then she erupted into a climax so enveloping that all her limbs sudden felt
weak and heavy and her voice was nothing more than throaty moans for what seemed like a
lifetime.

Oliver smiled gleefully when he finally emerged from between her legs with lips that glistened
with her spend before he wiped them clean with his tongue.

“Good morning Princess,” he winked before he carefully tied her robe back up and stepped off the
bed.

With her body still flushed pink, Felicity rolled onto her side and caught his wrist.
“We're not finished yet,” she said with an impish smile.

While her body might have wished for that rush of the new and exciting moments or strangers
fucking for no other reason than their bodies so desperately wanting to, she knew she wouldn’t
give up – not even for a moment – the intimacy, trust, security and love that now came with sex.
Because it made it that much better.

It was late in the evening and with the meeting with the prospective investors having gone well,
Felicity had been on top of the world the rest of the day. They were interested in investing and
collaborating on a smart home system that was in development stages – one of Felicity’s own
designs in fact – that could link in all electronics around the home and make them controllable
through one device; it wasn’t going to change the world by any degree and might just make rich
people lazier in reality, but it would help Smoak Tech get their foot in the door of those luxury
homes, which would in turn line the company’s pockets well enough for Felicity to fund the stuff
she actually cared about.

The type of project that would give transplant patients a better chance at survival and longevity
without the need for further transplants or the risk of rejection. Something that fused the biology of
humans with the mechanics of machines and could – one day – potentially create something
“artificially-real”; a machine built within the constructs of real organic material that was
genetically identical to that of the patient.

It was the thing dreams were made of, but Felicity always believed one had to aim high with their
dreams so you didn’t accomplish them too earlier on in life’s path.

After the meeting, they had wandered through the charming city of Oranjestad with its pastel-hued
buildings that boasted a Spanish and Caribbean twist and jostled along the tidy brick streets.
No one harassed her at dinner and they hadn’t stumbled upon any more proposals on the walk home. And now, as it was nearing 9pm, Felicity flopped down into the embrace of the soft couch and decided to call her mother.

Jax followed her to the couch and sat stoically on the floor beside her with his head near her lap and his eyes roving side to side, wide and watching as though he was on lookout duty, until Oliver entered the room and he was dismissed to flop onto the floor and bury his snout under his front leg after one, loud, growled chomping-yawn.

Oliver ruffled Jax’s head in a wordless well done before he handed Felicity a glass of water with two slices of lemon floating in it. She thank him with a smile before she took a sip and then set it onto the table just behind her head while Oliver sat at the other end of the 2seater and lifted her feet onto his lap.

The instant his strong fingers massaged into the balls of her feet, Felicity reacted with a happy moan.

“Don’t start that unless you intend to stay there doing it for at least an hour,” she hummed as her head lolled on the cushion behind her.

“I have nowhere else to be,” Oliver said with a wink, “make your call.”

Felicity waited with lightly furrowed lips as she considered how she might broach the subject of her father with her mother as she listened to the ringing on the phone pressed to her ear, but when it finally connected the loud background noise startled all her thoughts from her head.

“Hey hon,” Donna called down the phone with two fingers plugging her other ear as the party happened around her.

“Mom, where are you?” Felicity found herself unnecessarily yelling the question.

“Vegas,” her mother answered before an eruption of cheers, hoots and screams echoed down the line and straight into Felicity's ear.

She pulled the phone away and turned it so the microphone was the only part near her face.

“What are you… why?”

“Because baby, I want to be,” Donna cheered.

Felicity pressed a fingertip into her temple and moved it in small circles, “Are you drunk?”

Her mother answered with a laugh, “Not at all, hold on, let me get somewhere a little quieter.”

Donna moved through the crowd and found a quieter corner of the strip club before she put the phone back to her ear, “Are you there hon?”

“Yes,” Felicity sighed as she flipped the phone back, “that’s better.”

“How is Aruba?” she asked with a pep in her words, but Felicity was too confused to notice it.

“Warm and tropical, but more importantly, what are you doing in Vegas?”

“I needed to get out of that stuffy Starling, stretch my legs and let my hair quite literally down,” she chirped.

Felicity let the question dangle on her lips for as long as she could, but she couldn’t stop it, “Is dad with you?”

The pause that followed was painful.

Donna ruffled her hand through the lengths of her hair before she blew out a sigh and answered honestly, “Felicity, I left your daddy.”

“In Starling?” she knew that wasn't the inference.

“In life.”

She wasn’t surprised, but an “Oh” snuck out anyway, “Mom, if this is about what I said, I’m sor...”
“Felicity, I’m going to stop you right there,” Donna interrupted sternly, “you have nothing to apologise for in this baby girl. You were right, I lost myself in what he wanted me to be and I think I was okay with that as long as you were happy, but when I saw how little he knew you and knew what you were capable of, I realised you had outgrown the man years before and it was time I did too.”

Felicity didn’t know how to feel, there was a sense of pride that her mother had decided to finally see that she deserved more, and so much better, than a man set on caging her in designer dresses and polite conversation. But at the same time, she knew her mother had been tethered to him for so many years, walking away wouldn’t be painless.

“Are you okay? Do you need me to fly home?” Felicity offered, her voice warm and comforting. “No baby, I’m fine, I have friends here and you don’t have a thing to worry about,” Donna assured her and, for now, Felicity didn’t find any reason to doubt that. After all, she was clearly out, having fun and her mom was the exact opposite of naive when it came to Vegas. “And dad?”

Donna must have sighed loudly as the sound of it carried down the phone, “Well that’s up to him Felicity. I’m not saying I don’t love the man, but I’ve seen how you and Oliver are.” Felicity smiled as she looked down the couch at Oliver dutifully rubbing her feet with the careful consideration of an artist.

“That boy loves you and supports you, that’s what we all deserve and I think that includes me,” the peppy older woman spoke. “It does include you.”

“Now, the important things,” Donna chortled, “How is that grandbaby of mine cooking?” “Very well, I’m sure I’ll have an actual belly when we get back.” Donna squealed in glee, “Good and Felicity, honey, you will be an incredible mother and CEO, don’t you ever doubt yourself baby.” “I know, I have you to look up to,” Felicity gushed.

Donna choked back a flourish of unexpected tears, “You’re going to make me cry and my mascara will run,” she sniffed. “Are you sure you’re okay mom?” “Absolutely, now put that son in law of mine on the phone.” “We’re not married,” Felicity corrected. Donna laughed, “Just checking.”

“She wants to talk to you,” Felicity remarked as she held her phone out to Oliver. He wiped his hands down the front of his pants before he took the phone and Felicity listened on to the side of the conversation she could hear.

“Hello Mrs Smoak.” “Donna,” he nodded. “Yes, she is.....Yes, I am.....You don’t have to worry about that, I will,” Felicity studied Oliver as he kept his eyes to the ground and a smile threaded across his lips. “Understood,” a pause and a nod, “I appreciate the warning.” He finally looked up at Felicity and she realised even his eyes were smiling. “I will...Thank you,” he kept his eyes locked to Felicity, “Bye.”

He shuffled down the couch under her legs until Felicity was almost sitting on his lap before he put her phone beside her glass of lemon-tinged water and brushed a chaste kiss against her cheek, “That was from your mother.”
“What else did she say?” Felicity asked while her fingers idly teased the hair near his nape.
“That if I ever hurt you she’s going to see that I’m haunted by every ancestor she has.”
“Including Great Aunt Tabitha?” Felicity playfully recoiled in horror.
“Especially her,” Oliver sighed with a feigned helplessness.
“Phew, you better treat me good then,” she chuckled.
“With or without the threat of being haunted, I intend to,” he cupped her cheek with his large hand
and with the tips of his fingers brushing into her curtain of golden hair, “I’m never going to hurt
you Felicity. Not ever again.”
“I know,” she breathed, she did,
“We both know,” she added, brushing her hand against her
stomach.

No doubt.

[17 weeks: Pomegranate]

It was their last day in Aruba and they were making the most of it. The afternoon sun was high and
warm and the deserted beach had been theirs most of the day aside from a few passing joggers and
curious flamingos.

Oliver was wading through the azure blue water that lapped against his pecs, towing Felicity on his
back with her legs floating behind her.

He stopped walking and turned in Felicity’s arms to face her as his arms wrapped around her waist.

“Everything alright?” she asked after she pecked a kiss to his cheek.
“Perfect,” he smiled as he nudged his nose against hers.
“So, are you going to cook for me when we get back?” she chuckled as her fingertips explored the
smooth slopes of his back.
Oliver’s hands massaged into her rear, “Of course.”
“Are you going to be one of those people who says I can only eat a plate of vegetables?”
Oliver gritted his teeth, “That’s a terrible idea, firstly because you don’t put a healthy pregnant
woman on a diet,” his face softened, “secondly you’re growing a baby you need more than a plate
of vegetables, you need protein and iron and carbs and dairy.”
Felicity laughed effervescently, “You’ve been reading up.”
Oliver nodded, “And finally, no man should ever dictate what a woman eats.”
“I am keeping you,” Felicity hummed as she snuggled into his neck.

“This is our last night,” she continued as her lips kissed away tiny beads of salt water from the crest
of his shoulder.
“I know,” Oliver breathed softly as his eyes lapsed closed to the sensation of her warm lips on his
skin.
“Let’s go back to the cabin,” she purred as she rode her body up the taut and slippery lines of his
chest.
“Not just yet,” he answered, his lips curving into a smile that fluffed up his cheeks.
“Oh-luh-ver,” she growled as she dragged her lips towards his mouth.
He opened his eyes, and they were smiling too, filled with a curious glint she had seen before.
“You’ve got something planned don’t you?”
His lips caught hers as his arms held her tight into his chest and when she rolled her hips slightly
her sex caught a most delicious burst of pressure.

“Stop trying to distract me with your mouth,” she sighed as they parted from the kiss, their lips
paused barely a hair’s breadth away from each other.

“Why is it not working?” Oliver rasped before Felicity pushed off from his shoulders.

He watched her arms disappear under the water while she kept an impish grin on her lips. Her hands emerged from the water a minute later holding something in one that Oliver immediately recognised.

She floated back into his arms and slapped the bottom half of her bikini onto his shoulders.

“I might need a little more distraction,” she whispered coquettishly.

“I think something can be arranged,” Oliver grinned with a hint of gravel in his words while his hand snuck between her legs and teased her naked folds.

“Good,” she said before she sucked her bottom lip into her mouth and gave her body over to Oliver, safe in the knowledge that he knew exactly what to do with it.
Oliver was leading Felicity up the small cobbled path just before sunset when an aroma, caught on a gentle breeze, tickled her senses as it floated over the hedge of shrubs that shielded the cabin from view. Jax ran up ahead of them, huffing out warning barks to anyone who might be there before Felicity stopped at the bottom of the 10-step flight of box-wooden stairs and tugged on Oliver’s arm.

“What did you do?” she asked curiously, her eyes dancing with the final glints of sunbeams before it started its decent down the horizon.

He tugged her hand, pulling her up to the first step, with a smile teasing the edges of his lips.

“You’ll have to trust me Princess.”

Her smile softened as she looked up at him, one step above her, “I’ll always trust you Oliver.”

He lifted her hand towards his lips and kissed her once on the back of her ring finger before he led her up the rest of the stairs.

When she cleared the last step, and with the fragrant scent of flowers now in full bloom on the breeze, Felicity saw the culprit – a large, round stone bath built into the patio floor, which they hadn’t used during their stay, filled with hundreds of tiny flowers in an array of pinks, purples and yellows completely covering the surface of the warm water that steamed in the early evening air, coiling around her and inching her closer.
“You did this?” she asked, her eyes blinking slowly to take it all in as she noticed a platter of fruit and grape juice.

“Well the resort did,” he smiled as his finger circled the air.

“But you arranged it?” she continued as she stood up onto her tippytoes and coiled her fingers around the short hair at the back of his neck with full and puckered lips curved into a smile and one brow hitched towards her hairline.

Oliver licked his lips as he felt her body press closer to his, “Yes, do you like it?” he answered with a gravelled tone.

“Drop your pants and I’ll show you how much I like it,” she grinned as her nails raked over his shorts and up his inner thigh.

He laughed briskly at her coquettish suggestion, “However amazing that would be,” he sighed as he brushed his hands either side of her face, “how about you just enjoy it.”

She tiptoed to the bath and with her back to Oliver she stooped down to dip her fingers into the warm water before she gently swirled them through a gathering of flowers. As the flowers separated and floated into other clumps, Felicity stood up and slipped her beach robe off her shoulders, seconds before Oliver stepped forward and caught it before it hit the timber floor.

He draped it over a nearby lounger while Felicity curtained her hair onto one side of her neck, glanced over her shoulder with come hither eyes and purred, “Can you please undo me?”

His fingers lightly grazed the outline of the clasp on the black halter tank that had bunched up slightly just under her ribs, before he flicked it open and the straps fell forward over her chest.

Squeezing the fabric in his fingers under her arms, Oliver worked the bodice down her body as his thumbs grazed her ribs and his fingers became wet from the water that leaked out. He slid it over her hips and down her curved pins before it became a black puddle on the floor.

Felicity kicked it free from her feet as Oliver’s fingers traced down her spine and the back of his knuckles grazed back up it.

She turned in his arms causing his fingertips to float to either side of her ribs, while his thumbs stroked the underside curve of her breasts.

Without looking away from his hooded eyes, which were swirling with lewd thoughts about her that she could read quite easily, she tugged on the ties at either side of the bottom of her swimsuit and let it fall to the floor without any fanfare.

“You’re naked,” Oliver smirked, a subtle rasp in his tone as his body shadowed her from the path, in the unlikely event that someone ventured up there.

She looked down her body, only a few inches away from his and shrugged, “I guess I am.” Her eyes walked back up his legs, over the column tenting his shorts, and onto his chest, where each muscle glistened with tiny beads of sweat and salt water that hadn’t been towelled off.

“Get in the tub with me Oliver,” she smiled as she glanced over her shoulders at the hazy water, no doubt richly soft with oils.

“It’s yours Felicity,” he answered, his lips rippled with a growl.
She pouted her full lips as her head dropped towards her shoulder, “Do you want me to enjoy it?” she enquired puckishly.
She pressed her breasts into his chest and looked up, doe-eyed at him.

“Yes,” he replied, his tone smoky and thick.

“So,” she tugged open the tie on his shorts, “get in the tub.”

Oliver undressed without further argument and got into the tub first, the luxuriant and blissfully
warm water sending a flurry of goose bumps up his spine before he settled into one end of it with his legs spread wide.
He offered her his hand which she took as she stepped down into the bath. She was right, it was rich with decadent oils making the water seem thicker and like silk between her thighs as she nestled her body between Oliver’s legs.

She tightened the topknot on her head before she settled her shoulders against Oliver’s chest and tipped her head to one side of his. He brushed a kiss to her temple and she sighed, content, as she felt his shaft push up against her rear just as the sun began to set.

They stayed silent, with only their soft breaths coating the air with any sort of noise, as they drunk in the way the colour palate of the sky slowly changed from bright and vibrant blues to richly seductive oranges and pinks.

“If we could stay here, would you?” she asked softly, letting the words float from her mouth on the tip of a sigh.
His arms tightened around her body with his forearms sitting under her breasts, “In a heartbeat.”
“Then maybe we should,” she whispered, letting the passing thought drift from her mouth.
With his rugged arms hugging her tight, he kissed his answer against her temple, “You know we can’t.”
She shifted under the lid of flowers, making the water ripple as she questioned his response “Tell me why we can’t Oliver?”
“Because you wouldn’t be happy here princess,” he sighed, his breath misting her temple as his lips stayed glued there.
She turned to the side until her knees were rubbing against the side of the large tub, “I’d be happy wherever you were, and Jax,” she added with a smile.
“You can’t run your company from a little island in the Caribbean,” Oliver lamented, though his lips stayed smiling, simply because he was looking at the love of his life.
“I don’t need it,” she declared with a subdued shake of her head as she tried to convince herself of the same.
“But you deserve it,” Oliver argued back immediately, “You’re brilliant as much as you are beautiful and our baby should see that, see you take the world by storm.”

She bathed his lips in a flurry of kisses before she settled the side of her head back against his shoulder and let her fingers trickle down towards her belly, “Do you think they know how loved they already are?”
Her hand stroked over the blossoming curve, *there would be no hiding it now unless she could convince everyone the food in Aruba was making a baby in her stomach...*

As her fingers lifted off her smooth stomach, slick with the oils it was submerged in, she felt a strange *whoosh* beneath the surface, like air rolling around or the fluttering of a dozen butterflies making her eyes widen and her lips part in a silent gasp.

“Is everything alright?” Oliver asked, a slight panic in his voice that Felicity remembered to find adorable later.
“The baby…” she concentrated her eyes on the spot where the movement came from, “I think they moved.”
His concern turned instantly to excitement, “Are you sure?” he enthused.
She sucked her lip into her mouth, she was certain that was *wholly different to anything else she had felt.*

“I’m sure, it was like…,” her words stopped when the same feeling was reproduced, “…there, it happened again.”
Her brow furrowed as she tried to pinpoint exactly where it had emanated from. Once she had decided on a spot, she grabbed his hand and pressed his fingers into her tight skin, puckering it in claw-like lines.

The third time it happen, Felicity squealed and looked expressively at Oliver, “Did you feel that?” He shook his head reluctantly.

She sighed as she moved his hand further down to the cusp of the underside and a little closer to the middle, but when he didn’t feel anything the next time either, Felicity grew frustrated.

“You can’t feel that can you?” she grumbled as she stared down her stomach.

“If I say yes will you stop pouting?” Oliver teased as his thumb stroked her belly.

“Only if it was true,” she reprimanded him with a playful smile.

He kissed the edge of her anxious smile as the gathering breezes started to twist the flowers into tiny whirlpools.

“I’m sorry,” she bemoaned, “I thought you might be able to.”

No sooner had she finished her sentence, Oliver’s startled eyes shot up to hers.

“I, ...” he stumbled over breaths as his tongue fell to the back of his throat.

“You felt that one?” she asked with an eager squeak in her pitch.

He nodded, unable to speak in anything more than a grunt.

“You’re not just telling me that?”

“No, I, it was like a pinch under your skin, really faint but, I...” he bumbled over his words, his tone wracked with emotions, the same ones that began to grow tears behind his eyes, “We made that,” he breathed in awe.

“Accidentally,” Felicity chuckled.

Oliver’s brows furrowed and his lips tightened, “Sssh,” he chided.

“They’re probably going to want to know one day you know,” she hummed, enjoy the way the lines on his brow were tensing and the vein at his temple was beginning to pulse.

“Then we’ll lie,” he quipped with a bounced nod.

“Oliver Queen are you suggesting we lie to our child?”

“I’m suggesting we don’t tell them that they were conceived during a heated fuck on the skirt of a carved grim reaper because I didn’t throw away an expired condom,” he said with a smirk before he leaned down and stole a languid kiss from her lips.

“We have the anatomy scan when we get back,” she sighed when their lips finally parted – they could argue about what to tell their future child about their conception if asked, at a later time, “Do you still want to know?”

He shrugged in a way that was trying to put out that he didn’t mind, but Felicity could tell by his eyes that his first instinct to want to know was still very much there.

“Well I still don’t,” she said as her hand emerged from the water and two fingers walked up the centre of his slick chest.

He looked down at her and smiled, “So we don’t.”

While she admired his desire to bend to her wants, she had another idea.

“You could,” she spoke simply as her fingers reached the damp curls of his goatee

“I would know and you wouldn’t?” he clarified, his chin moving making the ends of his goatee tickle the back of Felicity’s knuckles.

“Sure, why not? I trust you to not spoil it,” she answered astutely, “You weren’t there the first time I heard the baby’s heartbeat, so I want you to know this.”

“Felicity, you don’t owe me anything,” he remarked, sadness tinged his words as he thought about how close he’d come to losing her completely if it wasn’t for her allowing him back.

“I’ve already decided,” she chirped as her fingertips brushed over his chin, “If you still want to, I
want you to.”
“Yeah?”
“Yeah,” she smiled before she tugged his chin down and met his lips with hers in a soft and tender kiss.

The kiss soon turned from tender to heated before Felicity turned in the water again, this time to face him while she used her legs to close his tight until his cock pressed between her folds and when it began to harden beneath her she bit her lip at one end and lifted the other into a lopsided smile that bled up into her eye.

“Baby,” Oliver growled when she tilted her hips down which pushed his shaft deeper between her folds.
“Yes?” she answered impishly.
“Here?”
She nodded with a mischievous chuckle.
“Turn around,” he ordered.
She looked at him curiously and didn’t move.

He spun his upside down finger in a circle, “Turn around,” he repeated, this time with a tone a little more gravelled and hoarse.
She turned and pressed her back into his chest with her legs stretched out, floating above and parallel with his.

One of his hands cupped her breast while the other snaked around her waist and trickled fingers down between her legs.

“What about you…” she stumbled with the words as his fingers dipped between her folds and spilled warm water against them while she fumbled behind her back for his cock.

He pulled it back from her grasp and nestled it between her ass cheeks.
“I don’t think you realise how fucking rewarding it is for me when you come Felicity,” he growled her name at the same time he kissed her neck wet and languidly and his thick index finger dipped into her entrance.

“Is it?” she hummed, her breath almost turning into a moan as he continued to skirt her clenching hole.
“Fuck,” he rumbled the word in the back of his throat, “Baby it’s beautiful. You always bite your lip right here,” his tone was creamy and fluid as the hand from her breast emerged and a finger touched the edge of her lower lip while his other hand gently lifted the hood of her clit and stroked smooth circles around it.

“Do I?” her lids grew heavy as a breath hitched in her throat.
“Mmmhmm,” he virtually howled into her ear, “and your neck always turns a little pink here,” he continued while he stroked just one finger to the left of her throat all the way down to the rise of her breast before all his fingers trickled like raindrops down to her nipple where his finger made tight circles around the bud, his lips smiling as the skin constricted under his ministrations.

“That first night I saw you, the way the blush stroked down your body, fuck I almost came right then, knowing that I did that,” he spoke whispered words followed by a sigh as his thumb pressed into her clit making Felicity reactively groan.

She could only reply in tiny keening moans and Oliver answered each one with slow and measured sweeping circuit of her sex, from her aching entrance to her thrumming clit, now wound tighter than a spring set for release.
“You always look so fucking drowned in pleasure baby,” he said in a low, smoky tone that deliciously wrapped around Felicity’s ear, “You wear sex so beautifully,” he continued before he sunk a digit into her.

Felicity arched against his chest, seeking out a deeper penetration before Oliver teased her nipple with tiny pinches and lazy circles while his finger found and even pace of sliding in and out of her cushioned cave.

“It's like a work of art,” he howled lowly into her ear before he snapped his lips around her lobe. “You want another finger baby?” She nodded haphazardly as she chewed on her lip, turning it scarlet in placed just as Oliver predicted she would.

He slipped a second digit into her soft and pulsing sex before he wove them in an intoxicating mix of twists and turns and splits until Felicity was panting out nearly silent pleas for more. He answered every one as they spilled from her mouth.

First faster found Oliver quickening his thrusting pacing in time with the thrashing of Felicity's hips beneath the water. Then deeper; and Oliver plunged his two fingers completely to the hilt every second thrust, with such exquisite satisfaction of her need that it lifted her from his lap each time.

Finally, her keen cry for more had Oliver combined the first two with the added pleasuring-stretch of a third finger that Felicity reacted too with fervent cries of his name.

“Come baby, come for me, let me see it,” he encouraged her with a delectable swipe of his tongue across her scolding throat and galloping pulse point.

His three fingers swarmed her trembling walls, skimming and sliding and twisting until they crumbled around in him in a gush of warm release.

Oliver turned her head towards him the moment her climax hit and relished the look of sheer, unadulterated pleasure that erotically blanketed her face in both a blush and a veil of glistening perspiration.

“Perfect,” he admired her, completely wrecked and quaking around his pumping fingers, “Fucking perfect.”

He carried her through her climax with slowing thrusts and gentle patting of her knotted clit until the colour started to fade from her cheeks.

“Do you remember what we did in that hotel room the weekend you taught me to fly?” Felicity asked, her voice thin and soft as her climax still radiated off her skin and honeyed her cheeks. “I never forget any of the moments I’m with you,” Oliver answered, kissing each word into the back of her neck while his fingers still explored every curve of her body he could reach without moving.

She turned in his arms and guided his hands to her ass. “I’m talking specifically,” she said before a flourished smile broke across her lips and she rolled her ass in his grip, “do you remember?” He kneaded his fingers deftly into the rounds of her ass, “Yes,” he rasped. “I want to do that again,” her tongue flirted out between her lips as Oliver slid a finger down her crack, “Tonight.”
He kissed her roughly, making her moan into his mouth, while she pressed her chest tightly against
his and his finger teased her puckered hole.

“That’s what you want?” he asked as he gently nudged the tip of his finger inside.

She moaned reactively, filling the cloudless night with her answer, “Yes.”

He smiled as her body instinctively rubbed against his stomach, heightening her pleasure while he
slid the same finger up to the first knuckle, “Well okay then,” he added with a smile.

*What his princess wanted, she got.*

It was Oliver who woke up a few hours before dawn to an empty bed and after squinting into the
darkness he found Felicity standing on the patio and staring into the darkness.

He padded out silently, dressed only in his briefs, until she was within arm's reach.

“Baby, are you okay?” he asked quietly, careful not to startle her.

When she turned around Oliver saw her ruddy cheeks drenched with tears.

“Princess, did I hurt you?” he sobbed as he reached out to her.

Their love making had been robust and just as Felicity had asked and while she had climaxed twice
after the bath, his first thought had been about it whether it had being too much for her.

She stepped closer as she shook her head and brushed his fingertips against her arm.

“Oliver,” she spoke his name with quivering lips, “There is something I need to tell you,” she
paused to wipe new tears from her cheeks, “I should have told you before, but I, I,...” her voice

cracked as her shoulders collapsed forward.

Telling Oliver about what Malcolm had said could plunge Oliver into a bleak, unbreakable,
darkness that terrified Felicity, but she also couldn’t keep it from him, he had the right to know.

“You can tell me anything,” he assured her while he cupped both of her shoulders.

She squeezed her eyes closed and took a steadying breath before she looked up at him, *it was time.*

“I don’t think your mother had an affair with Malcolm,” she started softly.

Oliver laughed gruffly, “Thea is proof she did.”

She swallowed the reservations hitched in her throat as she continued, “That’s not what I’m saying
baby,” she spoke with soothing words, “I’m saying I don’t think it was as a result of an *affair*.”

Her eyes begged him to understand without her having to actually say the word that burned her
throat. He did and his brow furrowed angrily as his lips tensed and his entire face shifted from the
light-hearted worry it had been minutes before.

“Why do you think that?”

His voice was thin and cracked and she pondered if that was something Oliver had often wondered
about but never spoke of.

“Something he said when he found out I was pregnant, about wanting to do to me what he had
done to your mother,” the words trembled out of Felicity’s mouth.

Oliver paced with angry steps and clenched fists.

The cry that came from him was tortured and broken as he vented years of pain into the early
morning before he collapsed to his knees and cried bitter tears.

“Oliver, baby,” she rushed to his side and he wrapped his arms around her legs and pressed his
head into her lap.

For what felt like a lifetime they stayed that way, Oliver on his knees in front of Felicity, silent and
tortured until he stood up, stoic and stone-faced.
“Did Thea hear?” he asked as he buried his pain deeper into the pit where he kept the worst of the darkness.
“No,” Felicity whispered as she watched him piece himself back together.
“She can’t know.”
Oliver started to walk away when Felicity caught his arm and pulled him around.
“Please don’t shut me out Oliver,” she sobbed.
Oliver leaned down and kissed her sodden cheek, “I think in some way, I always knew,” he whispered as he pulled back, “But I still need time to process it, please.”
She nodded softly, she could accept that.

[20 Weeks: A Banana]

“Aren’t you sure you want to do this?” Curtis asked as his fingers anxiously flicked the edge of his yellow tartan bowtie.
Felicity looked into the distance at the door of the boardroom where she had gathered all the powers that be of the company she still had to answer to. It was time.
“I’m not ashamed of being pregnant,” she answered him as she straightened the last loose-fitting top she would wear to hide her swelling belly.

“They’re all in there?” she asked before she took three, conviction-inflating breaths.
Curtis nodded, his anxious fingers now migrated to the cuffs on his pale-yellow shirt.
“How do I look?” she asked off-handedly while her fingers feathered through the ends of her sleek ponytail.
He studied her religiously for 30 seconds before he reached her shoulder and plucked a single strand of hair off the black chiffon, “Glowing,” he remarked with a smile.
And that was all she needed.
“Alright then, let’s do this,” she chirped as she strode to the door and opened it.

Ten minutes later and Felicity was well into the roll of her presentation on the financial and project viability of Smoak Tech. It was a necessary undertaking in a company where most of the board members thought she should simply be developing fun doorbells and phones that were exactly the same as ones already out on the market but in brushed gold and maybe with a few more megapixels in the camera; they couldn’t see the bigger picture if it was staring them in their wrinkly faces – or at least that had been Curtis’ gripe as he was helping Felicity put the presentation together.

“We have backers for well over half of our current projects and another 70% of that are in talks with potential ones,” Felicity spoke eloquently as she stood at the head of the table, to the side of a screen projecting graphs and statistics to a room of people who mostly just saw dollar signs, “Our numbers are up, and have been so consistently since Smoak Tech was started.”

She clicked through to another slide as she glanced down at her notes, stealing a look at the baby she knew was moving around in there – awake and listening to be Boss!Mom.
“We have an innovative and resourceful team and these sorts of climbs in profit are almost unheard of for a fledgling research and development company,” she took a deep breath in and held it for less than five seconds before it floated effortlessly from her lips, “So as you can see we take almost next to nothing from Company’s pocketbook to sustain us and by this time next year, I really believe that we will be a self-sufficient branch of this firm.”

She paused for applause but it was fairly lacklustre – which she had come to expect – with only her father and Curtis making any sort of tangible noise.
She cleared her throat, rolled her shoulders and straightened her back, "it was time," "On an unrelated note and simply in the interests of transparency, I am currently twenty weeks pregnant. My baby is due in July and I will be taking maternity leave from 2 weeks before my due date until approximately three months following, after which time I will be working both in the office and from home for another nine months," she announced, making sure to keep both her eyes and her chin lifted – there was no way she was ever going to give the illusion of being ashamed by this because she wasn’t, not in the slightest.

“My assistant, Curtis Holt,” she continued as she gestured to him seated on her right, “will manage things for the three and a half months while I’m on leave. He and I have worked together since we started Smoak Tech and I trust him implicitly to manage the helm in my absence.”

The silence in the room was almost palpable, but at least she could feel Curtis beaming proudly at her and her and Oliver’s baby, she imagined, was applauding in a sack of amniotic fluid.

“So back to our charts,” she continued after a few settled moments, “Are there any questions?”

“You’re not married,” a croaky voice quipped from the other end of the room.

The statement took her by surprise which she pinned in her brows, although it really shouldn’t have.

“That wasn’t a question nor does it have any relevance,” she answered brusquely, they had been given all the information she was willing to part with.

“We are a family business so people who invest with us do so because of our image.”

She looked down the table at his smarmy smile and contemplated how hard she would have to slap him to smack it right off his face.

“Well your investors aren’t mine Mr Grant, so it shouldn’t be a problem,” she answered through a clenched jaw.

“What about between now and when you leave?” another question from the left of the room.

“I don’t understand the question,” Felicity remarked, but she did see the disdain on his face.

“Who will run things between now and then?”

She blew out a disbelieving chuckle before she answered, “I will. I’m pregnant Mr Dunkirk, not sick or incapable of going to meetings. If anyone who would see my pregnant stomach as something of an infirmity isn’t really a person I see myself doing business with.”

“Who’s the father?” back to Mr Grant.

Felicity watched at least some of the others in the room tense in their seats, even to them that question crossed a line.

“That is none of your business,” Felicity replied sharply, what little restraint she had decided to show was now all but gone and he was about one question shy of having her shoe thrown at his head.

He sat back and folded his arms across his chest like he wasn’t going anywhere, “I think it is.”

Noah reacted before Felicity could reach for her shoe, standing upright from his seat sending it skittering backwards before his palms slammed down onto the glass table top, “That’s enough!” he boomed, his voice bouncing off every surface in the room.

“How does she expect to run a company in her condition? I say we sell the shares and swallow the staff, I’m sure IT could use some more squints down there,” Mr Grant continued, his grey whiskers twitching above his lip as he spoke, “Just cut our losses now.”

“What losses? This company MAKES money,” Curtis fumed and for a minute Felicity thought he was getting ready to tear off his shoe and hurtle it across the room too.

“Well it won’t after this,” the man’s hand flung in the air towards Felicity
“I suggest you close your mouth and sit on your hands,” Noah said tersely.
“Noah, this can’t be serious,” Mr Granted responded, swapping the anger in his for an indignant one.

“Did any of you graduate summa cum laude from MIT at 20 after being ranked second in the National Information Technology competition?” Noah chided, “No, no hands?” he continued as he sarcastically looked around the room, not a single hand other than Felicity’s was raised.

“If there is anyone in this world that will excel at both motherhood and running a company, it’s this woman right here. It took the real estate arm of this company almost eight years to break even, my daughter has done it in three,” he smiled down the table at her as her lips quivered out a smile of her own, “As the majority shareholder in Smoak Tech the only way I’m selling my shares is if you pry them from my cold dead hands or my daughter asks me to.”

He turned to do a sweep of the room with his eyes, “Now if no one here has a legitimate question about the actual innovative work they do in that branch then we can call this meeting adjourned.”

“That’s going to make you public enemy number one,” Felicity sighed through a smile as the room was cleared out ten minutes later of everyone but herself and Noah, Curtis waiting just outside the door for her.

“Fuck them,” Noah remarked before he chuckled out a laugh.

“Fuck them,” Felicity mirrored his words and his laugh, “that sounds like something…”

“Something your mother would say,” Noah finished her sentence sadly.

She nodded and offered an apologetic smile, “I’m sorry about it all, really I am.”

While Felicity still held a raft of mixed emotions about her father, she couldn’t believe in Oliver’s ability to change from the gun-toting, drug smuggling, vice president of a motorcycle gang without at least affording her father the same chance to change.

If her ruffian could change, then maybe her stiff upper lip father could too.

“No,” he rocked his head slowly side to side, the anguish clear in his tone and it was one Felicity never recalled hearing coming from him before, “I’m the one that has a lifetime of apologies to make,” he looked at her with punished eyes and she offered him a small smile to continue, she was listening, “I’m not very good at this dad thing, I’ve spent the last few years trying to mentor you but you never needed that and I spent those same years thinking I needed your mother to be like every other stepford wife in the town,” he sighed, troubled and honest, “When what I love the most about her, is that she isn’t.”

“That’s what I love about her most too,” Felicity offered with a mild voice.

This wasn’t forgiveness, but maybe it was a start.

“I never apologised to you for leaving you Felicity, not really,” he spoke honestly the words she had waited so long to hear, “I chose money over my family and I chose wrong. You were a child and I should have never left, there is no excuse that will ever validate that choice.”

The tears welled up behind her eyes, she had wanted that acknowledgement for so long that hearing it now seemed almost surreal. It was a start.

“Maybe this is something we can open a dialogue about,” Felicity spoke quietly, there was a lot that needed to be said and none of it would be easy for him to hear, but they both needed it – just not right now, “another time maybe?”

He nodded and gave her a gentle smile, he understood there was no immediate fix to years of
“Have you heard from your mother?” he asked hesitantly, unsure if she would give him an answer, let alone whether he deserved the consideration of one.
“I spoke with her last night,” Felicity answered him.
“Is she okay?”
“She is.”
A sigh of relief left off his lips, “Good.”
“I’ve learned that you can’t change the past Noah, the good, the bad and the ugly, it’s already done and cemented, but the future isn’t,” she implored as she gathered her things from the table, “You haven’t done anything you can’t come back from. Maybe all she wants to see is whether you’ll fight for her.”

She offered him a small shrug before she headed towards the door.
“Felicity?”
She turned with inquisitive eyes.
“Your mother was right,” his smile broadened, “you can do whatever you set your mind to and you will do it brilliantly.”
“Thank you,” she mouthed before she left the room.

Later that afternoon Felicity was lying on the reclined examination chair, staring at the blobby black and white image of their baby behind a fog of happy tears, today it looked like a actual baby, albeit it a tiny one.

“So I’m just telling Oliver?” Caitlin clarified as she took a few pictures of Baby Smoak.
“Mmmhhmm,” Felicity bobbed her head along for double the reply.
“And that’s not going to drive you to pester him until he tells you and then you’ll be mad he told you?”
Felicity gaped, aghast at the scenario suggested.
“Because remember Cloverfield? You made me swear to the no spoilers and then you asked me questions and I told you and then you yelled at me for spoiling it,” Caitlin said obstinately.
“That was 2008,” Felicity remarked as she rolled her eyes.
“You called me weak,” the brunette pouted.
“And I apologised afterwards,” Felicity teased, “Anyway, it’s fine, it was my idea.”
“Ooookay,” Caitlin sighed as she stood up and walked the few steps to Oliver, “good luck with her, stay strong,” she winked before she leaned in and whispered something in his ear.

Oliver’s smile filled his entire face, his lips were wide and grinning, his cheeks puffed with joy and sheer delight overtook his eyes. For a moment Felicity tried to guess based on his reaction, but she assumed it would probably be the same either way.

“Tell me,” Felicity squealed as she wiped the gel from her stomach.
Oliver looked at her with glassy eyes and a dopey smile, “It’s a...”
She slapped his arm with the back of her hand, “That was a test Oliver Jonas Queen and you almost failed.”
He rubbed his arm as Caitlin shook her head.
“You don’t tell me, under any circumstances, understood?” Felicity quipped as she slid off the chair.
Oliver nodded, lesson learned, “Understood.”

“So, what are we having?” Felicity casually asked as she slipped he shoes back on.
“A baby,” Oliver answered, which got him a high five from Caitlin.
“Good,” Felicity grinned, “Right answer.”

A knock on the apartment door that night found Oliver prying himself off the couch where he had been sitting with Felicity, to trudge his way to the front door and, after looking through the peephole, he opened the door to John Diggle.

“What’s going on?” Oliver asked as he ushered John into the apartment. Felicity muted the TV as she watched John walk into the apartment and Oliver close the door behind him.

“Narcotics picked up some guys bringing drugs across state lines,” John explained as he stood a few feet from the back of the couch Felicity was peering over, “They’re from a rival gang in California, they said they knew we were looking for Malcolm.” Oliver rolled his lips as he considered what gang John might be referring to, there were at least three down there that weren’t fans of the Souls.

“They know where he is?” he asked before he chewed reactively on the inside of his bottom lip.

“They pointed us to someone who might.”

“Slade Wilson. You know this guy?” John asked after he buried his hand in his tan leather jacket and returned with a picture clasped in it. Oliver took the photo from him and stared at it for longer than he needed to, he knew exactly who he was, “Sure, I think he shot at me once or twice.”

If Oliver remembered correctly, it was more like twenty times, if you counted the bullets from an automatic rifle, but Felicity was in the room and he toned it down for her benefit.

“He has some information,” John continued as he slotted the picture back into his pocket. “Well if you’re going to walk through his club door and ask him,” Oliver rolled a toothpick around his mouth before sucking in a breath of air, “You might want to keep your guns up and fully loaded and have a person who can talk to dead people on standby.”

“We know he won’t talk to us,” the older man acknowledged as he ran a finger across his nose and shifted from one foot to the other.

“You think he’ll talk to me?” Felicity stood off the couch and padded her sock-clad feet over towards the two men, “Oliver, you just said he shot at you once or twice.”

Or twenty times Oliver grimaced to himself. “Look, they know enough on the street to know you and Malcolm have beef. Their issue was with Malcolm not you initially.”

Oliver took the toothpick from between his lips and gently pricked it into his thumb as he contemplated what John was saying “You think they’ll roll out the welcome mat for me?”

“I think they might,” John replied, though there wasn't as much confidence in his tone as Oliver would have liked.

“Alright, say I do,” Oliver answered with a resolute nod. He didn’t dare look at Felicity but he could hear her walking closer.

“I’ll be with you the whole time as your backup,” John added, though Oliver felt that information was more for Felicity’s sake than his and he could only imagine the death glare she was giving John Diggle right now.
That’s why he wouldn’t look at her, because he knew she’d have one for him too. Once John was gone Oliver was absolutely going to discuss this with her, but for now, he needed to find Malcolm or it would consume him.

“No,” Oliver denied the offer swiftly.
“What?”
“They’ll smell a cop a mile away, I go alone.”
If he walked John into the clubhouse, neither of them would walk out.
“Fine, I go with you to Pasadena though.”
As long as he kept his head down, they wouldn’t notice him.
“Okay,” Oliver extended his hand and John shook it, “Felicity and I need to talk.”
“The sooner I get your answer, the better,” John sighed, he knew what he was asking of a friend, but he also knew how quickly leads could go cold, “I’m sorry to ask it of you both,” he added as he looked regrettably at Felicity who could give him nothing more than a pursed smile.

Oliver showed John to the door.
“I’m not getting that God parent title now am I?”
Oliver could only shrug as he slapped his friend’s back, “She’ll understand.”
He hoped.

“You’re not actually considering this?” Felicity’s voice jarred Oliver around once it was just them in the apartment.
He could see the pain and fear written across her face as she kept one hand on her stomach while the other brushed away tears.

“He’s still out there Felicity and if he’s in California then he’s closer to Thea then I will ever let him get again,” Oliver spoke coarsely at just the mere mention of his sister and Malcolm in one sentence.
“But why does it have to be you?” she pleaded as her fingertips glided down his arm, anchoring him there, with her.
“If I can get him...” his words faded as his eyes drifted down to her stomach, their baby wouldn’t live in a world were Malcolm walked free.

Felicity saw it in his eyes, the darkness was swallowing him and consuming his thoughts. She couldn’t lose him to it, not now, not ever.

She linked her fingers with his and, as tears weaved down her cheeks, she asked him a question, “When do we leave?”
Oliver’s lips tensed immediately as he squeezed her hand, “We?” he coughed out.
“I’m going with you,” she resounded.
“No you’re not,” he argued as he plucked her fingers from around his.
“Oliver,” she pleaded while she followed him around the front of the couch.
He turned back to her and she saw the shadows in his eyes as he answered with a clenched jaw, “You’re not going.”
“You are not the boss of me Oliver,” she snapped back, she wasn’t done discussing this.
“You’re 20 weeks pregnant Felicity, I’m not taking you to a fucking patch meet and greet.”

Jax stood up from his slumber and growled at the raised voices.
“I’m not leaving you to do this alone,” Felicity dug her nails into her forearm as she spoke, she knew it was nothing short of insane for her to go with him but she couldn’t shake the feeling that she just needed to.
“No, Felicity, no,” he growled loudly, the loudest voice he’d ever used for her.
Jax barked at Oliver as he moved to Felicity’s feet.
He’d chosen a side.

Oliver raked his fingers across his scalp as his face twisted in pain. “Baby, I’m sorry,” he whimpered and when he raised his head again his face was covered in rivers of tears, “I can’t lose you, please.”

“How long will you be gone?” she asked, barely above a whisper. “I don’t know, a week, maybe two,” he answered softly. “I know you don’t want me to go, but if I can get Malcolm off the street…” he trailed off but she understood how much it tortured his soul.

She knew he hadn’t been sleeping well, he’d always been an early riser but after the kidnapping it was so much worse, he woke early and methodically checked every lock at least twice before he would sometimes go back to bed just before she woke up so that she found him there, but Felicity knew that he’d spent hours pacing the living room. The only time she had felt him at ease was in Aruba and she longed to be back there.

There was no easy choice.

That night sleep eluded Felicity and she found herself staring into Oliver’s back, watching it rise and fall with every breath he took. He had made the call to John and accepted the assignment, they would leave in the morning.

He had tried to placate her with promises and assurances he really had no surety of keeping but for his own stubbornness and while Felicity lay naked in his arms, her body soaked with his kisses and her sex aching from his prowess, she found herself feeling hollow at the thought of losing him to the black.

As the morning began to break Felicity stared at the eagle in flight tattooed on his back, with its spread wings across the tops of his shoulder blades. She knew it represented him, he had told her about each of the tattoos that inked his body and that one had been him, ‘flying’, free on his bike with his fingertips like feathers brushing the wind. But all Felicity saw in that moment was an eagle who look so tired of flying as she wondered if there would ever be a time it might land, a time her eagle might finally find true peace; and if flew away this time would he be able to find his way home again?
“So that’s it?” Felicity spoke as she ran her fingers through her hair, still damp from the shower, while Oliver zipped up his duffle bag and slipped on his riding gloves. The tips of his fingers brushed down her cheek and the rough leather grazed the side of her face, “You know I have to.” She closed her eyes to savour the feel of him touching her skin as she placed her hand on top of his. “You don’t have to do anything,” she whispered while her eyes slowly opened, the blue of them now reflected behind pooled tears. “If he’s out there,” he winced as his free hand instinctively clenched into a fist, “if there is a chance I can…” his voice trailed off as his hand slipped away from her face. “Kill him?” she finished his thoughts for him as Oliver threw the bag over his shoulder. His lips tightened, keeping the word yes sealed behind them, even though his eyes gave him away. “Oliver, if there is a chance for you to kill him,” she started as her shaky hand trembled down the side of her neck, “will you kill him?” He still couldn’t answer her, unwilling to show her just how deep his darkness went, afraid that if she saw it, it might darken her world too. She stood in front of him, her hand slipping down over the cusp of her shoulder and tugging down the strap of her white cotton tank, “And if you do, what will become of you?” she asked, her eyes begging for an answer he didn’t know how to give. “What he did to you to Thea; my mother…” he gritted the words through a clenched jaw as his
knuckles whitened around the strap of his bag and his heart felt like fire beneath his ribs. She reached for his heart and placed her hand against the spot where the fire burned the hottest, “Oliver, I can’t begin to imagine where your head is and how it hurts you,” she whispered, each word like a salve to his ears, “but I need to know that when you leave, you’ll come back to me the same man.”

Her hand drifted from his chest up to his face where she held him tightly and kept their eyes focused only on each other, “I need you to come home to us baby, just as you are.” He kissed the inside of her palm as he slowly pulled it from his face. “I will,” he promised.

“Tell them too,” she quivered as her eyes dropped to the round of her stomach. Oliver knelt in front of her and lifted up the cotton top to place the side of his head against her skin and, as he listened to her breathing, his eyes drifted closed in a moment of tranquillity. “I’ll come back little one,” he whispered while his hands grappled to keep Felicity close, “Try not to kick your momma too much while I’m gone.”

Felicity’s lip quivered as he spoke while her hand raked across his scalp before he touched a lingered kiss against her stomach and stood up from the ground. He brushed a second kiss against her cheek, his lips folding around a tear that had been left there, before he lifted the bag back onto his shoulder and headed for the door, patting Jax’s head on the way.

“Oliver wait,” Felicity sniffed as she jogged from the bedroom, her sockless feet skidding across the varnished floors. Oliver stopped a few feet from the front door of the apartment and turned back to face her. “Before you go,” she smiled as she brushed back the tears so that the face he saw before he left was the one that told him what to come back to, “what are we having, a girl or a boy?” A smile sparked across his face and his eyes silently thanked her for the welcomed moment of brevity. “You don’t want me to tell you,” he smirked as he opened the apartment door. “A hint?” she asked, following him to the door. “It’s definitely one of the two,” he answered with a wink as he hung from the door. She slapped his shoulder, “That’s not a hint,” she pouted. “I love you,” he hummed before he took the first step out of their home. “A girl or a boy?” she pestered with a playful grin. Oliver leaned in and kissed his smiling lips against her rosy cheek, “Absolutely one of those,” he whispered once his lips had pulled away.

He took a few steps down the corridor before he turned back and smiled at her in the doorway. “That wasn’t an answer Oliver Queen,” she chided with an exaggerated huff just as Oliver slipped into the elevator.

Moments before the doors stole him from view, Oliver blew her a kiss and shot her a wink, and once she was staring at nothing more than the brushed chrome doors, she touched the cusp of her stomach and sighed, “Come back to us Oliver.”

Three days after he had left, Felicity found herself sitting in bed with Jax curled against her legs trying to talk about her day with Oliver like it didn’t hurt to be away from him. He sounded tired and she could hear the strain in his voice; and all she could think about was his head lying on her
lap while she drew delicate lines from his temple to the crook of his neck to settle his wild heart.

What she couldn’t see was the black eye and the split lip that he was nursing underneath a cold press of ice wrapped in a dishtowel, both of which he got for asking too many questions.

“How much longer?” she asked as her thumb fretted with the corner of her lip. Oliver sighed, wincing at the pain that caused across his damaged lip, “I don’t know.” “If they hate him, why aren’t they just telling you?” Her slight raise in tone had Jax looking up from her lap incredulously.

Oliver moved the ice from his lip to his eye as the pain throbbed through his temple, “Every secret around here is a bargaining tool baby.” She pursed her lips before she blew out a soft breath, “So what do they want from you?” “I don’t know,” and he didn’t, “I’m not dead though,” he added with a chuckle which was an attempt to lighten Felicity’s burden of worry.

A failed attempt.

“Is that supposed to make me feel better Oliver?” she snipped, making Jax growl as he lifted his head completely to attention. “I’m sorry,” Oliver grimaced, while it was true – he’d half expected not to be around to even have this discussion with her – he should have known she wouldn’t find any sort of humour in that dark comedy.

“Maybe they don’t know anything and they’re just,” she looked down at her stomach before she whispered the next word, “fucking, with you?” “They do, I know they do and you just have to trust me,” he pleaded while he moved the ice to his throbbing jaw. “I do trust you, but every minute that you’re there and I’m here, I…” she sobbed out a breath that made Oliver’s heart sink, “I just feel helpless,” she finished softly. “I’m sorry.” Those were the only words he could say.

“Don’t be sorry, just come home,” she pleaded as her eyes closed and a tear escaped from them. “When I’m done baby, I promise,” he offered, though he knew it would hold little consolation to her right now. “I don’t want to lose you,” her voice quivered as she spoke while Jax budged his head against her shoulder for comfort. “You won’t,” Oliver promised.

A few moments of silence lapsed between them before Felicity spoke up, “How bad is it?” “What?” Oliver asked bemused. “The black eye or broken nose that you’re not telling me about,” Felicity answered bluntly, she had noticed the slight lisp he spoke with, the three times he’d groaned while he talked and the sound of ice clinking together as he moved it about his face. “Shit, John told you?” Oliver growled, looking at the shared wall between them with laser focus. “No,” Felicity lamented, “you just did.”

Oliver squeezed his eyes shut and reprimanded himself silently. “It’s just a black eye and a split lip, it’s nothing,” he admitted, his voice soft like a scolded child. “And you really think they’re going to help you?” She rested her head on her tented knees as she struggled to make sense of this world Oliver had navigated for so long. “It’s all part of it, but this got me a meeting with Slade tomorrow at his haunt” he replied quietly,
there really wasn’t more he could say on the matter. None of it really made sense except in a world where you spoke with your fists and a man took his beating as and when it was required.

Felicity didn’t know how to answer, the pieces belonged to a puzzle she couldn’t begin to understand, and nor did she really want to.

“What is our baby this week?” Oliver asked tenderly, desperate to hear her voice a little longer as his eyes grew weary and his mouth let out a silent yawn.
“You want to change the subject?” she inquired in a softening tone.
“I want to talk about what really matters,” he remarked with vivid clarity.

She couldn’t be mad at an answer like that, even if she wanted to be.
“An endive,” she answered as she looked at the app on her phone, “I don’t even know what that is,” she added with a perplexed brow.
“It’s like a radicchio,” he offered without pause.
Felicity chuckled as she set her head back against the headboard, “I don’t know what that is either.”
“It looks like a closed up lettuce, they taste great grilled with olive oil.”
Felicity let her chuckle evolve into an effervescent laugh as her eyes brightened with a smile.
“What’s funny?” he asked, blithely unaware of the joke.

“I’m 21 weeks pregnant sitting on the bed with your dog eating frosted flakes with a soup spoon while I watch True Hollywood Stories and you are nursing a black eye in a musty motel room telling me what an endive is,” she answered, giggling at the absurdity of their lives at that moment.
“Well,” Oliver started, a laugh colouring his words now too, “When you put it that way.”

No sooner had the words left his mouth there was a knock on his motel room door. He looked up from the bed and his smile dissipated.
“I should go baby,” he sighed, watching John’s outline through the window – they had some things to discuss.
Felicity let her laugh die away with a few breaths before she finally replied with a soft, “I love you.”
He replied almost immediately, “I love you too.”

[March: 21 Weeks: An Endive]

He was going to be mad.
Furious even.
But Felicity would have a few more hours today to come up with ways to get him over his initial anger at it. Granted, it might have been far better to come up with these things before she pulled alongside a curb outside this red brick apartment complex, but she hadn’t exactly been thinking all that straight this morning when she went to Curtis’ dropped off Jax ‘for a visit’ or when she asked him to drive her to the airport.

That part wasn’t completely insane.
The fact she then flew to Los Angeles where she rented a car and drove here – was.

But she would figure that out later, right now, as the midday sun dropped a little in the sky, Felicity had a favour to ask.

She climbed the four flights of stairs until she reached, slightly puffed, Apartment 405. After she
rolled her shoulders back and caught her breath, she reached out and knocked on the door before she waited on anxious tiptoes for her knock to be answered.

The door opened and Thea appeared with a spoon in her mouth and wearing one of Roy’s football jerseys as a dress. Her smile widened when she slipped the spoon from between her lips and greeted Felicity with a surprised “Felicity!”

“Did I catch you in the middle of…uh… something?” Felicity asked cautiously as she half expected Roy to appear behind her clutching a pillow to his groin.

Thea looked down at her outfit and laughed, “Oh no, I’m just studying, Roy’s at work, but he should be home in a couple of hours,” she answered as she swung from the door handle before she realised Felicity was still in the hallway, “Shit, come in though,” she laughed as she gestured Felicity inside the small apartment.

Felicity walked in and immediately took in the surroundings, it was a cute place, a small living, dining and kitchen rolled into one room with two doors off it. Nothing fancy but it looked like a house Thea and Roy had made a **home** and that brought a smile to Felicity’s face.

“Don’t mind the mess, it’s laundry day,” Thea chirped proudly as she took a laundry hamper off the couch and offered Felicity a seat, “is my brother with you, or?”

Thea’s face dropped as Felicity imagined a barrage of thoughts ran through the young brunette’s head.

“He’s not, but we’re fine, everything is fine,” Felicity said as she took a seat at one end of the couch while Thea perched on the arm of the other, “I just…”

Felicity went on to tell Thea what Oliver was doing – looking for Malcolm – and although the younger Queen appeared a little on edge about the idea, she knew that Malcolm had contacts dotted all around the place and that it would have been naive of her to think he wouldn’t have ones in the state she had relocated to.

“I just can’t shake the feeling that I’m supposed to be here with him,” Felicity sighed as she twisted her fingers through her sleek ponytail, “that if he does this alone, I might lose him to a darkness he won’t come back from.”

Thea nodded, she understood, on some level she had been through a similar thing as Felicity was now, only years before and too young to know what to do about it.

“Do you need to know where he’s staying, Roy could probably…” Thea trailed off as she picked her phone up off the nearby coffee table.

“No, I know where he is and where he’ll be tonight, I was actually hoping,” she stood up and ran her hands down to the hem of the cute sundress she was wearing, “You could help me fit in a little better.”

A smiled brimmed across Thea’s lips as she nodded, “MC lady chic,” she grinned, “This is going to get a little wild.”

Four hours and a dent in her credit card later, Felicity was standing in front of a mirror in Thea’s bedroom scrutinising this ‘new’ look she’d adopted. It looked eerily familiar to that phase she went through in college, only this time it was her blonde hair that was threaded with streaks of colour.

“So, am I ready to pretend like I know this lifestyle?” Felicity remarked as she jostled the leather jacket onto her shoulders, over the *Ramones* tee.
“You look the part, but…” Thea hummed as she tussled Felicity’s hair through her fingers, making it a little less neat.

“But what? Is it the pregnant belly?”

Thea laughed boisterously, “Actually that and the fact you’re not wearing a wedding ring, fit right in.” Felicity slapped the teen’s arm in jest before she continued, “I was thinking more about the way you look at Oliver.”

A crinkle worked its way across Felicity’s nose, “I don’t understand.”

“You can’t go in there with big love eyes like you two walk around with,” Thea argued as she swiped the deep plum lipstick across her own lips and pouted in the mirror.

Felicity packed the last of her new outfits into her suitcase before she quipped, “Why not?”

“Because,” Thea sighed as she turned away from the mirror and towards Felicity, “bikers fuck and they have old ladies and most of the time they treat them right, but they don’t have heart eyes.”

“And I have heart eyes?”

Thea’s loud laugh bounced off every surface in the room, “You have pretty bad ones,” she snorted, “but his are much, much worse.”

The younger woman walked to the bedroom window and pulled back the netting before she added, “Also we need to get you a different car?”

“What’s wrong with my rental car?” Felicity asked as she too looked at the window to the very practical VW Jetta, which had been the only car available at the kiosk she’d gone to.

“Yeah,” Thea grimaced, “you shouldn’t have to ask that. You can take Roy’s car, it’s a rusty piece of junk, but it’s solid and it’ll fit in.”

“Oliver is going to be mad huh?” Felicity heaved as she stole another look at herself in the mirror; tight leather pants fit snug around her legs and tucked under her stomach, an oversized tee, faded and knotted low on one side, hung loose like a tunic that only pulled across her stomach and the look was completed with a beaten-leather jacket and half-laced Docs. Her hair was still the same honey blonde, only now it was weaved with clip in sections of a dirty royal blue and an almost blackish purple that nearly matched the colour on her lips. She blinked her midnight lashes, taking it all in, as her eyes looked piercingly blue surrounded by the deep ebony liner.

“Probably,” Thea shrugged as she handed Felicity the plum lipstick, “and if he asks I’m going to tell him I was tricked into helping you.”

“Sounds fair,” she answered with a smile, “And what do you think? Do you think this is crazy?”

Thea pondered for a moment before she drew in a breath that pulled her shoulders back and her chest up, “No,” she dropped the air from her chest, “I had a brother once who smiled and laughed and didn’t have any real care in the world, then our parents died and he took everything on his shoulders and I lost that brother for a good long while,” she lamented as she paced across her room, “Don’t get me wrong I love him, always have and always will, but I saw the light and the joy just slip away and I couldn’t stop it.”

She paused to place a hand on Felicity’s shoulder, “You gave it back to him and I don’t want to see him lose it again.”

The two women shared a smile and a nod, they came from different places but they both understood each other more than words could say.

“So…” Thea breathed cheerfully, “Roy will drive down with you to make sure you get there safe and when you get there, here is what I want you to do….”
Four fingers floated to Oliver’s shoulder one by one before a redhead with a glossy pout and a raspy voice purred in his ear, “You wanna fuck?” He peeled her fingers off before he brushed her hand aside, “Not interested,” he grunted as he kept his eye on Slade and his hand on the handle of beer on the chipped oak bar.

Without missing a beat, Oliver continued, his words directed at the scowling face of a man who every now and again liked to lift the edge of his leather vest to remind Oliver he was packing heat. “So, are you going to tell me shit or am I just wasting my fucking time?” Oliver growled before he chugged back half the mug of beer, his second for that night.

“I don’t know why you’re here yet kid,” Slade replied as he rolled an unlit cigarette across his lips. “I told you,” Oliver grunted, tapping a frustrated finger on the rim of his mug, “Malcolm fucked me over so want to have a little chat with him.”

Slade leaned back in his stool as he folded his large arms across his broad chest and narrowed his eyes, he was weighing Oliver up. “You don’t even like the sonofabitch, why do you care?” Oliver spoke with a heavy gravel in his voice.

“Oh I don’t,” Slade answered with a casual but almost menacing laugh, “but if you’re here to give information to the cops, then that is a real problem no matter who you’re fucking with, I need to know your motivation.”

“Oliver fucking Queen, this is where I find you?” a voice broke through the sound of the stereo in the corner and the clunking of pool balls nearby, before the room turned almost deathly quiet. Was that?

He turned in the stool and blinked, rapid fire, Fuck. Felicity stormed over to Oliver, with her heavy boots scuffing the bar's dusty wooden floors and whacked him with an open palm across the back of his head. “You tell me you’re going out for a couple days and I fucking find you here drinking with whoever the fuck these people are while I’m at home cooking this,” she raged as she pointed to her burgeoning stomach, “So, which one is keeping you warm at night?” she asked as her lips smacked together and she leaned back on her heels.

“She with you?” Slade asked before his lips turned into a bemused smile.

“She has a name, it’s Felicity,” she snipped with a pop of her dark lips, “and yes I am with him, who the fuck are you?”

Oliver choked on his own tongue as it fell to the back of his throat before he tightened his hand into a fist and prepared himself for the very high possibility he was going to have to fight his way out of this situation.

Slade’s eyes narrowed at Felicity, but she didn't bat an eyelid, sure he looked like a goliath next to her and his muscles probably had muscles, but if being a woman in the business world taught her anything, it was to never, ever, blink away.

It was in fact Slade who blinked first, moments before he slapped his hand across his knee and started laughing, at which time the bar returned to it’s rumble of noise, “I like her,” he spoke with a smirk, “she’s spirited.”

Oliver relaxed his fist, but his lips remained terse as he looked at Felicity, “Babe, what are you doing here?” Felicity rolled her chewing gum around her mouth and ruffled a hand through her long tresses, “Making sure you don’t catch chlamydia,” she answered with one brow raised towards her hairline.

Slade laughed a second time, even louder than the first, “Holy shit, Felicity do you have any
She flirted a smile across her lips, “Naw, I could probably rustle up some lookalikes though,” she finished with a wink.

“A word babe?” Oliver growled before he took Felicity by the hand and led her away to a deserted corner of the bar.

“What the hell Felicity?” he gritted under his breath and between a clenched jaw.

“You can be mad later Oliver, but I told you we’re a team now, where you go, I go,” she answered with her shoulders pinned back and hers eyes glued to his.

“It's not safe here for you,” he sighed as his fingers tracked across his scalp.

“Then I’ll be unsafe with you,” she smiled softly until she watched hid brow furrow, “I can fit in here Oliver, I’ve got this and your friend thinks I’m hilarious. I just thought if they saw what you were fighting for,” she sighed as her words trailed off.

Oliver looked over his shoulder at Slade who was keeping one eye on them.

“Okay, you think you can sell this?” Oliver asked as his eyes wandered down and back up Felicity’s body, taking in every inch of her and, for the first time, truly marvelling at what a difference clothes and make up could make.

Felicity looked at Oliver surprised as her tongue brushed her lips, “Okay? Really? Because I had a whole speech prepared.”

“No, you’re right, he wants to know why I want Malcolm...” he remarked as his mind ticked through the answer, “so do you have this?”

“Absolutely,” she announced with a half-cocked smiled, “but you need to fix your eyes.”

“What’s wrong with my eyes?”

“They’re all heart-y,” she said as she circled a finger in front of his face, “You need to treat me like a biker would his old lady.”

“And you won’t get mad?” he asked with narrowed eyes.

She shook her head in response as she tried to hold back a smile.

“Alright then,” he gestured for her to go first and once she was in front of him, Oliver slapped his hand onto her ass and grabbed it roughly.

“Everything good?” Slade asked after he finished off the dregs of his drink and thumped the glass onto the bar counter.

“You wanted to know why I wanted Malcolm,” Oliver spat the Soul's Patriarch’s name like vitriol, “Well that piece of shit pointed a gun at her and the kid so when I say I have some words I want to say, I mean I’ll have them engraved on the bullet I’ll put in his head when I find him, so either you give me what I need or I’ll find someone who can.”

Slade nodded slowly as his eyes wavered between Oliver and Felicity, until he slapped the bar hard enough to make the glasses on it rattle and abruptly stood up.

“I think you and I should talk,” he announced as he gestured towards a ‘member's only’ door.

Turning to Felicity he continued with a softened expression, “Don’t worry, I’ll bring him back.”

“You better,” she said with a smirk before she planted a rough kiss against Oliver’s bristled jaw, “Cause I ran out of batteries at home and you can’t deprive a pregnant woman her dues,” she finished with a purr while her fingers trickled down to Oliver's belt buckle.

Slade grinned as he pointed to the stocky bartender with a shaved head and a beard that would tickle his nipples if he shook it, “Mick here will make sure no dirty fuckers hit on you, he’ll protect you.”

Felicity perched on the barstool Oliver had just vacated and smiled, “Alright, but who’s going to protect the dirty fucker that tries to hit on me?”

The older man laughed as he slapped Oliver's shoulder while they walked away.
“She's something.”
Oliver glanced over his shoulder as Felicity spun in the stool to order a soda, “You have no idea.”

A minute or two later and Oliver found himself in a room that appeared to be an office, only he was in no doubt that the filing cabinets that lined the walls were full of weapons, ammunition and narcotics.

“Sorry about the pins,” Oliver remarked as Slade sat and kicked his feet up onto the desk, “I wasn’t expecting her.”
“No, see that’s what I needed to see,” Slade chided as he put a cigarette between his pursed lips and struck a match from the desk drawer, “your motivation,” he continued with the, now lit, Marlboro drooping from his mouth, “the kid and your lady, Malcolm fucked with that.”

He blew a halo of smoke before he continued, “That’s a man I can appreciate,” he finished by pointing the stick at Oliver before it went back into his mouth and he started again.

“So you’ll give me what I want?” Oliver asked gruffly while he jostled his crossed arms.
Slade took a slow drag on the cigarette before blowing the smoke out at the edge of his mouth, “In exchange for something,” he quipped as he leaned further back in his chair and tacked his eyes to the familiar bullet holes in the ceiling.
“If you say Felicity, I’ll gut you where you stand,” Oliver replied, wearing a smile but there wasn’t even a tiny bit of him that was joking.
Slade laughed out a cloud of smoke, “No, I respect a man’s old lady, but if she ever leaves your sorry ass,” he said with an expressive smirk.
“So what do you want?”
“I got a fight tomorrow,” his feet clomped off the desk before he stood up, “I was going to have to pull out of it because my idiot man got himself locked up for buying pussy on the street,” he laughed, but Oliver would bet money on that same guy nursing a broken nose and four cracked ribs once he got out of lock up for his stupidity, “I need you to step into the ring.”

Oliver kept his expression to nothing more than a subtle roll of his lips, Felicity would hate that.
“Win it for me and I’ll tell you everything I know,” Slade dangled the information as he flicked the embering cigarette between two fingers.
Oliver wasn’t biting just yet, “Which is?”
Two short puffs later and Slade ground the butt into an ashtray on the desk, “It's enough.”

He extended his hand and, one decisive decision later, Oliver shook it in acceptance.
“9pm tomorrow night in the back alley right outside,” he explained before his eyes shadowed over, “but if you don’t show up, Malcolm Merlyn will be the least of your fucking problems.”
Oliver bobbed his head twice, he understood.
“Now take that sweet lady of yours home and make her forgive you.”
Oliver smirked broadly, “I’m counting on it.”

“Don’t look so pleased with yourself,” Oliver remarked as he followed Felicity into the small motel room and kicked the door closed behind them, “I’m still mad. That could have gone badly,” he finished before he put his helmet on the table with a thud.
Felicity shrugged off her leather jacket and hung it over the back of one of the mismatched chairs
by the tiny table.
“But I helped,” she hummed as she feathered her fingers through her hair and unclipped the coloured extensions.
“He’ll tell me what he knows,” Oliver relented as his hands slid around her waist, slowly to savour the feeling of touching her, “babe,” he added with a smile flickering over his lips.
Felicity slid her hands down the back of his loose jeans, and her nails pushed into the rounds of his ass, “Is that what bikers call their ladies?”
He kissed her briefly, nipping the pouted centre of her bottom lip before his tongue slid across it, “couldn’t exactly call you Princess, could I?”

She mirrored his kiss with identical one of her own, but holding his lip between her teeth for a little longer until she pulled away.
“So we can go home?” she asked softly before she folded her lips over his bottom lip, as lightly as a feather brushing around them.
He sighed as his lids hung heavy over his eyes, “Not yet.”
She studied him for a minute, watching the blue of his eyes shadow as his brow threaded with worry.
“What aren’t you telling me?” she asked as she glided her hands either side of his face.
He took her hands, one by one, from his face and kept them balanced on his palms.

“I have to brawl,” he answered, framed with a sigh.
“What?” she shot back, pulling her hands from his in disbelief.
“It’s just a little street fight baby,” he breathed, wrestling one of her hands back between his, “I’ve done plenty of them before.”

“When is it?” she huffed, her mind rolling over a million different scenarios that might see a way out of this ludicrous idea.
“Tomorrow night.”
Every thought she had scattered to the wind, “That’s absurd,” she spluttered.
He ran a cascade of fingers down her cheek, neck and across her shoulders, “Princess it’ll be fine.”
“Because you’ll win?” she asked pointedly.
“Sure.”
From what Slade had told him the guy had both weight and height over Oliver, but it wasn’t like he hadn’t faced similar odds before.

“You can’t come though,” he added as his fingers trailed down her arm and dropped off at her wrist.
“Why?” she inquired with one brow hitched into a quizzical arch, “you just said you’ll win.”
He idly toed off his boots and kicked them back towards the door, “But I’m going to have to lose a little first,” he admitted.
“What?” her eyes were wide with disbelief as she waited for an expected smirk to fire up across his expression while he laughed at her worry.
But Oliver wasn’t joking.

“The guy is big Felicity,” he remarked while he tugged down on his zipper jacket and wrestled it from his body, “he’s big and fat and slow, but all that can work against him if I wear him down, run him around a little and take a few hits.”
Felicity watched as he chuckled his heavy leather jacket onto the same chair where hers was neatly draped, still waiting for a moment where he would say he was kidding and that this other brute wouldn’t get anywhere near him.

But still nothing came.
“I don’t want you to see it,” he sighed, his brow restless and his teeth agitating the inside of his lip
before he unbuckled his belt and jostled open the fly on his dark jeans. She stopped his hands with her own, desperately needing his attention and a truthful answer, “How bad will these ‘few hits’ be?” Oliver wouldn’t sugar coat it, if he’d learned anything about the woman that he loved standing in front of him it was that, above all else, Felicity Smoak valued honesty. “It will be rough, they always get a little sloppy when they think they’re winning.” She swallowed down his answer with a few unspent tears as she willed her lips to stop quivering and her shoulders back. “Then I’m going to be there,” she said resolutely. Oliver sighed as his head shook slowly side to side, “I just asked you not to.”

A coy smile lifted up one side of her lips as she slipped her hands into his pants and guided the denim down his thighs, “You also asked me to stay at home,” she hummed as her shoe caught the crouch of his jeans at the knee and pushed them the rest of the way down his legs, “and here I am. I have a tendency not to listen to you.”

He kissed her roughly making a playful scream wrapped in a laugh bubble from her mouth as they stumbled together towards the bed. “I fucking missed you,” he growled against her lips, his voice rasped and hoarse with desire. She cupped his erect cock behind his briefs and massaged the tip of it into her palm making him moan coarsely. “Show me,” she whispered as she crawled backwards up the bed. “My tongue is going to show you first,” Oliver grinned as his hands gripped the waistband of her snug leather pants moments before he yanked them down her legs.

He licked his lips as his eyes wandered up her milky thighs to her small, green cotton and lace panties. With her pants bunched up at her ankles, against the tops of her boots, Oliver perched over the top of her body for only a few seconds before he plunged his head between her legs and inhaled her with a deliriously loud and wholly immoral howl while his nose pressed into the warm fabric, dripping with her heady scent. Felicity screamed far more loudly than she ever would have intended too, but three days completely untouched by Oliver and with her hormones on overdrive, just the sudden pressure of his nose against her clit and the delicious friction of his rough beard against her thighs was almost all she needed to climax, although she did manage to hold it back, just barely for now.

****

John Diggle put his book down and squinted his eyes into the stillness of his motel room. He wasn’t looking for any movement on that end of the room, but staring vacantly at a spot seemed to always help him hone his other senses, and right now that was his hearing. He’d passed the first one off as nothing, the second noise he’d decided could have come from somewhere other than the room behind his, but the sounds, now frequent and clear, were becoming much harder to excuse away.

He had heard the familiar sound of Oliver's bike pulling into the motel, and he had watched through a crack in the eggshell curtains as his friend parked in the same spot he had the other nights and stepped off his bike. But tonight a car pulled alongside Oliver's bike. The lights in the car park were virtually useless and John couldn’t decipher out the model or make of the vehicle except to say it was old and the door to it shut with a heavy crash.
He saw Oliver's frame shadowing whoever the visitor was and John slinked back into his room, expecting that Oliver might be getting information from whoever it was in the car that followed him there.

The voices had been quiet and muffled at first so John couldn’t make out any of the words, but he was professionally certain that the other voice was female. That in itself didn’t prick John's attention for longer than a passing thought, given he knew what Felicity meant to his blonde comrade, but when the muffled voices evolved into giggles and then playful screams and now had reached the definite sounds of sex, John couldn’t ignore it a moment longer.

“Not on my fucking watch,” he growled at the spot on the carpet where he’d been focused before he sprung up off the bed at tore through his motel room door.

****

The thundering knock on the door, which made the window panes along the same wall shake, also made Oliver poke his head up like a Meerkat from between Felicity's ivory legs, the tops of which glistened with her first climax moments before.

Felicity kicked him from the bed and threw a blanket over her bottom half which was now completely bare, damp from her orgasm and tingled with grazes from Oliver's facial hair.

With his cock tenting out the front of his briefs, Oliver scampered over to the window and peered out it, it was John and he looked intensely pissed off.

“Is everything okay man?” Oliver asked as he opened the door a few inches, enough to see John's face but shield Felicity from the older man's view.

John kicked his foot into the door which jarred it out of Oliver's hand as he spat angrily, “Who is sh...” his words stopped abruptly when he saw Felicity waving from the bed, a blanket shrouded around her body, “Oh thank fuck,” he sighed as he wiped the back of his hand across his brow.

“Wait did you think Oliver was with another woman?” Felicity asked, her attention well and truly piqued.

John sheepishly ran his hand over his head and rubbed the base of his neck.

“Is everything okay man?” Oliver asked, her attention well and truly piqued. John sheepishly ran his hand over his head and rubbed the base of his neck.

“Ah, I'm out,” John remarked, his cheeks warm with embarrassment.

“Night man, we'll talk tomorrow, I got a few things to tell you,” Oliver said as he leaned against the door frame.

With an embarrassed nod John left and Oliver closed the door, bolting it.

“Now where were we Princess?” he cooed with a sinfully rich gravel that had Felicity wet between the folds almost instantly.

“I feel bad he can hear us now,” she pouted as she watched Oliver skulk closer like a lion. A shaky sigh dropped from her mouth as the bed buckled under his weight when he slowly climbed on.

“Then you better find something to bite down on baby,” he huskily teased as he handed her a pillow, “Because I got three days to make up for.”
So, I'm back. Drama aside, I love writing and for now that is enough.

It was just after half-eight when Oliver stood at the edge of the alleyway, listening to the bustle of the world a short walk away. It was eerily familiar, from the lingered stench of weed to the heavy taste of petrol in the air, it was a world he had been baptised into so long ago now that each heavy clunk of a boot on concrete and every thrum of a revved engine in the distance sounded as common to him as the sound of a bird song would be to an ornithologist.

But for one thing.

He look down at the hand in his—alabaster skin, almost translucent from the glow of the nearby fire barrel, long slender fingers and nails painted a pearlescent black. She was different, so apart from this life and so much better than whatever he thought it could once offer.

His heart lifted at the thought of her before it plummeted at the thought of losing her while his eyes travelled down her body and over the growing bump beneath a black tee emblazoned with the Rolling Stones icon.
“Are you sure you want to be here baby? I can take you home right now…” he started as his eyes darted between the spray painted walls.

He watched her draw in a long, steady breath and hold it for only a moment before it fell from her lips like a sigh, “Just win,” she pleaded softly, with tears hidden behind fragile eyes.

She bit the inside of her lip to stop it quivering and forced her eyes to watch the orange flames lick up the side of a partially rusted barrel in the hopes its heat might dry the tears that threatened to fall.

He could offer her no more assurance than a soft bob of his head and eyes that promised her in silence that he would.

“Hey kid,” Slade spoke, both words creaking out almost like a snarl at the tip of his lips, “Felicity,” he added, lightening his tone.

All animation dropped from Oliver’s face, leaving only a stoic stare, “We’re here.”

“Go with this guy and he’ll help you wrap your knuckles,” Slade insisted as he nodded towards a slender guy with a shaved head and eyes that bounced around of their own volition, “Felicity can stay with me, you have my word she’ll be safe.”

Oliver’s lips tightened, Slade’s word meant almost nothing to him and he was in no mind to leave Felicity anywhere he wasn’t. Sensing his hesitancy to leave her, Felicity pressed her hands against his chest, raised herself onto the tip of her toes and brushed a kiss along his jaw, stopping only when she reached his ear.

“I’ll be fine, you’ve got this,” she whispered softly, “I believe in you.”

Those words held some sort of indescribable magic within them because when Felicity stepped back, Oliver felt an encompassing warmth that touched every inch of his being.

“I’m going to need you to win this,” she added while her eyes stayed locked to his.

“If it’s you asking,” he replied, a warm smile threaded across his lips.

He left after he brushed his hand affectionately across her warm cheek and gave her a playful wink.

“I got you a chair and everything,” Slade remarked as Felicity watched Oliver walk to the far side of the grim looking alleyway, now bathed in the amber hues of lit fires and a few scattered lights from the buildings that backed onto the makeshift arena.

Felicity swallowed down the nervous lump in her throat and placated her lips with a forced smile, “Still hoping to get my mother’s number?” she teased as she followed Slade to the chairs that someone had clearly just dragged out from the bar.

“Still no chance?” he laughed as he offered her first pick of the seats.

Felicity sat on a chair a few feet away from the crude edge of the ring; being a frayed rope tied between two traffic cones, “Will that make you call this off and give Oliver what he needs?” she asked as Slade took up the seat next to her and leant sluggishly back into it.

She felt anguish building inside her as her eyes tracked from a puddle of stagnant water on the ground to a stain that could have been anything but she only saw as blood. Perhaps she had made a mistake coming tonight. She closed her eyes softly and touched a shaking hand to her stomach, maybe there was something else she could offer to stop this.

She swallowed down the urge to vomit and blocked out the voices in her head screaming about how much Oliver would be furious at what she was thinking – and about to suggest – but her artificial bravado aside, she would give anything not to see Oliver have to do this.

“Maybe I could give you something else?” she spoke quietly, before her eyes tipped back towards Slade and her inference was made clear, “Something else you might want?”
His smile was almost immediate and the lopsided smirk of it told Felicity he knew exactly what she was suggesting – what she was offering.

“You have a beautiful set of lips,” he rasped, edging himself closer to her. At any other time or place Felicity would have moved away, but for now she stayed, her chin lifted and her eyes focused, ignoring every inclination she had to take it all back, “And a fucking fantastic ass,” he continued with his eyes roving across her like a menu to be studied, “but money comes before an ass and if your man can win this, it’ll get me enough money to buy that ass.”

“My ass isn’t for sale, but I’m sure you won’t have to look far to find one that is,” Felicity snipped as she pulled her jacket tighter across her body and snapped her head forward.

She let the ambient noise surrounding her fade into oblivion as she focused, transfixed, on the way the rope swayed in the evening breeze. It wasn’t cold, or at least not enough to penetrate the layers of clothing she had on, but her lips were numb and dry, even when she swiped her tongue across them. The air was heavy and the night sky was clouded over, with a quarter moon hidden beneath them.

Each breath Felicity took tasted damp and unsurprisingly a light drizzle of rain began to mist the air. She watched the remnant puddles glisten with the nearby lights as she bottled every emotion welling up inside of her because she knew that Oliver needed that from her right now, he needed her calm smile and her clear, tearless eyes. He would need to know she was okay – and she was going to give that to him.

Because, ride or die.

She didn’t hear what the person said, only the loud boom of his voice cut through her thoughts and forced her head up. Oliver was shirtless and each ripped muscle was firing like he’d just lifted weights to startle them awake. He turned his head towards her and offered her a nod that said he would be okay, he had this and she offered him a smile in return that simply said I know.

The other man was a goliath with a cropped haircut and a beard of red, wiry hair that looked like flames waving from his chin. He was taller than Oliver by at least a foot and his shoulders were wider than a standard doorway. He was heavy set and where Oliver’s chest was rippled with taut muscles, the Goliath’s was undefined but solid. She watched him as he walked, he was sluggish and slow and walking the length of the ring made him appear out of breath.

She didn’t know what started the fight, but the first punch was almost instantly after the call to fight was made. It sliced through the air and missed the cusp of Oliver’s shoulder by a few inches at most. He kept his shoulders in tight and his fists up close to his face as his feet moved fluidly across the concrete, only occasionally scuffing the sole of his boots.

The first time Goliath’s fist made contact it sounded like nothing Felicity had ever heard before and like nothing she cared to hear again. It jabbed into his chest with a thud that echoed off the surrounding brick walls. Oliver’s body concaved, reeling into the jarring impact before he straightened himself up and returned to his stance.

He wasn’t swinging, he wasn’t even attempting to, and the crowd began to incite the fighters with their ruckus chants. The second blow came with a third immediately after and both were to Oliver’s lower torso.

Felicity cupped her hand to her mouth when the forth one caught the side of Oliver’s face as his arms instinctively dropped to his waist from the punches moments before.

Her façade broke and her eyes welled up with hot, raging tears as her chest felt tight with air she couldn’t expel for fear she would sob it out loudly and pull his attention away from the fight.
Time passed like someone held down the fast forward button and minutes felt like only seconds before another two blows, one to his temple and one to his forearm as he raised it finally to guard his head, had Felicity breathing in ragged breaths and the baby inside her jolting frantically – as though they could sense what was happening.

Sweat poured down Goliath’s face before he wiped it clear, giving Oliver a moment to hammer his lungs with a barrage of tiny punches, designed to make breathing just that little bit harder before the behemoth charged back.

He was tired already, less than 20 minutes having passed, and his face was full of pride as Oliver looked the worst for wear. Another blow found Oliver spitting blood onto the concrete and for the first time, with one arm leant on the rope and the other hung limbless at his side, he looked across at Felicity.

She tried to smile, to offer him her allegiance, but her face refused to falsify one a moment longer. So, with her eyes taped to his, she mouthed one simple word as Goliath approached Oliver from behind, “enough.”

With one arm slack and a sneer on his lips, Goliath leaned over Oliver, who was doubled over with his eyes stilled trained on Felicity and savouring each slow breath he took, and jeered, “Is that pretty blonde your bitch? Do I win her for a night if I let you walk out of here?”

A smile blossomed across Oliver’s face, enough.

And then Oliver was on him, his punches relentless and in no sort of pattern that Felicity could make out or that the larger man could pre-empt and block. Each punch met its target as he pummelled the man into a state of daze that had his arms limp at his sides and his feet tethered to the concrete.

It was only a minute or two later when Goliath crumbled to his knees and without giving him a moment to recover, Oliver brought his knee up and pushed his opponent’s head down simultaneously, which resulted in a crack that sounded like thunder as the crowd fell silent and culminated in the man crashing like a felled tree to the ground.

With his boot against the man’s throat Oliver leaned closer and seethed, “You want to say that again?” he whispered, malice woven through each word.

Felicity could see the darkness narrowing his eyes and his jaw tensing at the edges. His mouth was bloody and his chest was smeared with the same; and it took everything she had not to stand up and beg him back.

The crowd rallied up again, chanting for Oliver to finish him, and for a moment Felicity worried that it might have been within him to do just that, until he put out his hand and urged the man to slap it, “Yield,” he ordered.

With no other option, the man slapped Oliver’s hand – he was done.

Oliver took his foot from the man’s throat and Felicity sobbed forward in relief before she forgot everything Thea had told her about disguising their love and ran towards him. He was bruised and battered and his body was smattered with blood – some of it his, some of it not. He slumped forward, breathless and broken, and Felicity caught his head against her chest before Slade approached them, slowly clapping his hands.
“Am I done here?” Oliver rasped, as he listened the beat of Felicity’s heart against her chest. “You can take a beating kid,” Slade remarked, “you could make some money doing that.” Oliver gritted his teeth and repeated, “Am I done here?” “Fine,” Slade shrugged before he handed Oliver a folded scrap of paper with an address scrawled on it, “He’ll be there tomorrow 11am.”

Oliver nodded before he lifted himself off Felicity’s chest and stepped over the drooping rope. “Let’s go home,” he breathed, his voice thin and stretched, into her ear.

They didn’t say a word as they walked towards the edge of the alleyway, where Oliver took a deep inhale and let out an even deeper sigh while he clutched the address in his palm.

“Take a moment,” Felicity urged as she nodded towards the wall. Oliver didn’t argue and happily braced himself against it while his eyes lapsed closed for a few stolen moments.

His eyes opened just in time to see a hand come out from his peripheral view and grab at Felicity’s chest. But she saw it too, and acted on an impulse that made Oliver grin.

Her fist thumped straight into the weedy guy’s face and he fell backwards into a pile of trashcans and bags that clanked around him before Oliver grabbed Felicity’s hand and walked her away.

“You don’t get to touch me, ever,” she yelled over her shoulder as she shook the painful vibrations from her fist. “When we get home,” Oliver smiled proudly while his thumb smoothed over her knuckles, “Remind me to show you a better way to throw a punch,” he finished before they disappeared into the night.

“You look like shit,” John remarked as he hung from the edge of his motel door. “Thanks for noticing,” Oliver replied sarcastically as he held his balled up singlet against his cut lip. John ushered them into the room before he closed and locked the door behind them. He had made no secret about how foolish he thought this idea was, but he was relieved to not be receiving a call from the emergency ward.

“Did you get what he promised?” John asked, eyeing Oliver's swelling eye. Oliver placed the address in John's hand before flashing his a cocky grin, “If you think I look bad, you should see the other guy.”

John read the address on the paper, nodded and folded it back up, “I’ll get a team out there,” he commented succinctly. Oliver hobbled to John, his bruised core making walking normally more pain than it was worth at that moment, “No,” he said brusquely. John coughed out a surprised “What?” He perched on the edge of the small table and ran a hand over his sandy locks, “Malcolm wont be there,” Oliver lamented. “What? But Slade...” John’s voice faded out as he stomped a frustrated path at the foot of the bed. Another sigh trickled from Oliver's lips, “Slade is testing me.” “I don’t understand.” Oliver pulled the singlet back from his lip and touched the tip of his lip to it to ensure it had stopped bleeding, “You surround that place with cops and Slade will know we were working for you, guarantee it,” he spoke with turbulent eyes, “we’ll lose him and whatever information he has.”
John’s hands hung from his head, “How can you be sure?”
“Because,” Oliver’s eyes drilled into the older man’s, “it’s what I would do.”

Felicity opened John’s laptop while the boys exchanged heated words, easily bypassing his password, so easily in fact she made a mental note to order him to change it. A few keyboard strokes later and she had the schematics of the building on the screen.

“I think Oliver’s right,” she interjected as her eyes bounced around the information on the screen. “I think he has a concussion,” John murmured.
Felicity tapped a nail against the screen, “This is the building.”
John's brow pinched tightly when he realised she was on his, supposedly-secure, laptop, “How did you get on that?”
She sighed while her lips pressed together, “Don’t ask questions it’s best you don’t know the answers to,” she advised before continuing, “as I said this is the place and it’s deserted, like hasn’t pulled any power from the grid for almost a year deserted. I don’t see Malcolm roughing it do you?”

She watched as the older man tapped his fingers against his temples in thought, “John, Oliver knows this life better than we both do, I say we listen to him.”
Oliver passed her a thankful smile across the room.
“So what do you propose?” John asked, at least resigned enough to listen.
“I go in alone,” Oliver started.
Felicity pinched the bridge of her nose under her glasses, “I’m going with you.”

Oliver pushed off the table and crossed the room to stand just in front of her, “No you’re not,” he argued softly, but sternly.
“Oliver?” her brows furrowed and her lips pursed.
“No, baby no,” he pleaded as he got down on his knees in front of her, sweat wetting his forehead and desperation woven in his expression, “because if I’m wrong and Malcolm is there...” his words dropped away as his chin sunk to his chest and his hands encased hers, “If I’m wrong you can’t be there, please don’t fight me on this.”

Felicity looked at him, his face turbulent with emotion and his words wracked with fear, he’d fought enough tonight, she wouldn’t give him another one.
“Okay, but...” he looked frustrated before she continued, “I still think I can help. This building has surveillance, let me just...” she blinked down at the laptop and rapidly typed out commands Oliver didn’t dare to try and understand, “there, I’m in.”
“How are you doing that?” John piqued.
“John, really?” she laughed out a sigh, “If Malcolm is there tomorrow, I’ll see him.”
John stepped closer and offered his hand to Oliver, who took it as he lumbered off the floor.
“I’ll be outside, and I’m not arguing this with you,” he said sternly.
“I can use this,” Felicity said as she held up coms link from John's briefcase, “If I see Malcolm, I’ll let you know and you can go in after Oliver.”

Oliver looked between the two partners, “Alright then.”

Moments after Oliver closed the door to their room, locked it and pressed his back against it as the evening's perils drained off him, Felicity reached out her hand and slipped it between his. They stood there, motionless and silent, as the drizzle of rain that had fogged the air before was now a rain shower that tapped against the thin window pane behind the threadbare curtains.

He turned her hand in his and lightly smoothed his thumb over her reddened knuckles and only
when he was satisfied she hadn’t hurt herself did he speak, “Are you okay? They’re a little red but each one feels fine.”
“I think I should be asking you that,” she spoke softly as her hand slid from his and danced a light touch against his cheek.
He winced but attempted to hide it, “it’s nothing baby.”
Felicity pursed her lips, they had already exhausted this conversation, but one more try wouldn’t hurt, “I can’t convince you to go to the hospital can I?”
He shook his head, his lips still wearing a smile, “It isn’t the way, I’ll just sleep it off.”

He rolled his jaw, it wasn’t broken and any pain he felt was superficial and would be gone in a week. Felicity crossed the motel and opened a few cupboards in the kitchenette until she found a stainless steel bowl.

“At least let me clean you up,” she sighed as she filled the same with warm tap water.
Oliver offered no objection and a few minutes later they were both sitting on the bed, Felicity near the headboard with the bowl on the side table close by.

“How many times?” she asked after she dabbed the warm, wet cloth against his grazed cheekbone. He looked at her confused while he managed to hold back a wince at the sharp stab of pain.
She rinsed the hand cloth in the bowl and watched the blood stain the water just enough to make it an eerie pink hue, “How many fights like that have you been in?” she enquired while she lifted his chin to clean the small cut on his jaw line, a nick likely made with one of the rings his opponent was allowed to keep on.
Oliver gritted his teeth and sucked in air through them before he answered as nonchalantly as he could, “I don’t know, fifty, maybe more, maybe less.”
She tried to hide her recoil, but Oliver saw it the instant it touched her expression.

“You can stop,” he breathed, halting her hand with a touch on her elbow, “I don’t want to upset you.”
She bit her lip to stop it from dropping and shaking as she silently counted to three and willed herself not to cry, “You just deserve better than this.”
Her eyes instinctively squeezed closed as she dropped the cloth into the water, and a tear broke free from her embargo and slid silently, but powerfully, down her wind-chaffed cheek.

“I survived Felicity,” he comforted, his hand holding onto hers and feeling it shake in his grasp, “and I wont go back.”
“Are you sure?” she sobbed, the first tear having paved the way for an avalanche she couldn’t hold back, “Because I can’t watch this life consume you Oliver.”
“It wont.”
His words were strong and his eyes never blinked from hers, but...

“And if you find Malcolm tomorrow?”

She watched him behind a haze of tears as he raked a hand over his scalp.
“Seeing me like that, it scared you?” It was a question, but he already knew the answer.
“No,” she lifted one shoulder as she spoke a half truth.
“It’s okay,” he raised her chin and pressed his forehead against hers for a solitary moment.

“I’m scared of losing you,” she admitted with a voice thin and fragile, “and if you kill Malcolm tomorrow I just might.”
Her chest hurt and he felt her tears brush his nose as they tracked down her face.
With his hand on her stomach and his eyes closed, feeling her fear pulsing from every part of her silently sobbing body, “I won’t risk losing you,” he whispered before his eyes cracked open and he looked at his hand where it lay atop their baby, “risk losing you both.”
Her lips met his in a shaky kiss full of uncertainty and reluctance for only a few seconds before he kissed her back, tasting her salty, spent tears where they fell over her mouth. Oliver made himself a promise in that moment, to remember the taste of her tears and never be the reason for her to cry them so deeply again.

When she shifted, he moved with her, lips against lips, warm and wet and slowly deepening with every moment they were caught in an embrace, until she was on the edge of the bed and Oliver was towards the middle.

She eased him down until his shoulders were against the mattress before she climbed between his legs and widened his stance while his knees hung off the bed.

Her lips slipped off his, like a feather being moved by the lightest of breezes, before Oliver realised his eyes had drifted closed. As they opened, he watched her fingers deftly move down his chest, unbuttoning the plaid shirt he’d thrown on in the car.

Once she had reached the bottom her thumb and forefinger on each hand drove up the edges, peeling his shirt open. Her nails trawled down his chest on their return, swerving and sweeping over the lines of his taut muscles and perfectly avoiding the few tender places where Goliath had landed a punch.

His hand cupped her cheek as her hand reached down between his legs and began massaging his cock through the heavy denim. The sound of it rustling melded with the sound of his low, but soft, pants of air.

“We don’t have to tonight,” he said, almost painfully breathless as he raised his shoulders a little off the bed.

“Lie back and let me do this,” she hummed as one hand nudged his shoulders back down.

With just the pad of her finger she moved softly down his chest, mapping each spot she had seen him hit with a feather-light kiss.

When her trance-like kisses met with his lower left abdomen, she gently swirled her tongue over the tender spot until his eyes lapsed closed again, his shoulders relaxed and the tension faded from every part of his body. His breathing soon became uneven and shallow, and when he heard the sound of his leather belt slapping against his buckle he moaned quite accidentally, the sound of which made her smile against his hard, brawny stomach.

He wasn't sure how she’s managed to do it, but the next moment he could feel his jeans draped around his ankles and he could feel her fingertips as they traversed the length of his naked shaft.

His eyes opened just as her lips enveloped the tip and when he blinked up fractionally he caught the whimsical and playful glint in her eyes. She licked the shaft from the base in one, straight line to the tip before the tongue teased his slit.

“Fe--lic-ity,” he growled her name, and it was far more carnal than he meant it to be.

He almost apologised but when he looked down his body at her he noted that she was wearing a smile just as her movements quickened, and before he found the words to do so, his cock was pressed to the roof of her mouth and her tongue was slaloming down the underside of his shaft.

Her cheeks hollowed and the suction around him made the corners of his eyes water and his lips part with a pleased sigh. His fists tightened in the bed linen, creasing the pinstripes into hazardously jagged lines. He could feel his tongue lapping against his bottom lip and in his mind’s eye he could only imagine how ritualistic it must look with her crouched between his legs, her head
bobbing up and down his length while his eyes spasmed between open and closed and his knuckles turned ghostly white.

Felicity paused with a mouthful of him as she gently worked her tongue between his slit to gather the salty beads of his arousal. His musk permeated her senses as it radiated from his skin and in a haze of some primal urge, she found herself desperately attracted by it and pulled by a need to touch herself. But she didn't and instead she enjoyed the dull ache of having her body crave something that it wasn’t instantly given.

As she slid his shaft between the smooth but rigid roof of her mouth and the pliable curve of her tongue, Felicity could feel her sex dampening with her own arousal as she collected his. She felt his thighs tighten under her palm while her other hand roamed over his chest, swerving across his rippled muscles and tricking down the deep cut of his pelvis.

When she paused with him as deep as he could possibly go, his head tickled against her tonsils, she felt his blood pulsing against her lips, and she knew he was close.

She dropped his cock from her mouth and caught it with her hand, keeping the same rhythm between both. Oliver looked down his centre, now dusted in a light gloss of sweat, to catch Felicity’s wicked smile, her tears now dried and replaced with a dazzling kaleidoscope of blue.

“Do you miss this world Oliver?” she entreated as her hand tugged him gently to keep him on the precipice.

His eyes were blown wide as he wet his bottom lip in two slow sweeps of his tongue, “It was all I knew for so long,” he answered honestly, smoky and whispered.

He watched her brow furrow as she no doubt thought through his answer and carefully considered her next words.

The truth was Felicity saw it in him tonight, how easily he slipped into a part that he had played for so long and she had seen the turmoil in his eyes as he tried to hold himself just at the fringes, he was afraid of losing himself to the darkness too.

Perhaps, she considered, she could give him a little of both.

“Where?” she asked before she caught her bottom lip between her teeth.

“Where what?” Oliver questioned, with a rasped threaded around his words, his throat dry from his rough breathing in the moments before.

“If I was your old lady, and your old life was our life, where would you finish?”

Her eyes were so innocent but the words coming from them were anything but.

“Felicity,” a growl.

She rolled her palm over his head and juggled his balls with the other, “Where?”

He sighed as he dragged his finger down the neck of her black tee until it stopped between her breasts. “Maybe here,” he breathed, thin and scratched as her hand brought him to within seconds of an orgasm.

Pausing for a moment, she released his cock and tore the tee over her head. Her breathing was rapid and her breasts pushed tightly against the baby pink bra that was barely holding them in.

“Okay, I can’t say I’ve ever thought of that as sexy, but okay…” she stumbled over her words as she tried to warm herself up to an idea she had once considered only for medieval romance novels, college kids or porn stars.

But maybe this would bridge Oliver's past life with his future.

“Felicity…” Oliver hummed while his hands caressed the sweeping curve of her waist.
“So do I lie down or do you stand up?” she asked, pausing to chew on her lip.
“Felicity,” he repeated through smiled lips.
“Should I take my bra off?”
He sunk his hands into her hips, “Stop,” he urged.
She looked at him with one quizzical eyebrow raised, “But I thought.”
“This life, this world, was my life for a long time Princess, but...” he sighed with utter contentment,
“this new life you’ve shown me, it’s so much fucking better. You mean more to me than some old lady in a musty cheap hotel room, so I’m not going to do that.”
She smiled as she reached for his slightly softened member, “So where?”
He stopped her hand before it reached his cock.

“Lie down with me,” he cooed, “my body against yours and let me kiss your neck until you fall asleep, that’s the life I want.”
Felicity smiled as she leaned down and kissed his lips tenderly.
“Oliver, you’re a big softy” she breathed the words just above his mouth as her nose nuzzled his cheek.
He cupped her face and brought her lips back down onto his, “Only for you.”

Oliver had been right. Malcolm wasn’t there. The warehouse was empty and even with Felicity scouring every security feed she could pull from the building and any in the vicinity, he was no where to be found.

After four wasted hours, Oliver burst through the bar doors looking for Slade with Felicity a short pace behind him, despite his angry request that she stay in the car.

He may have expected Slade to have lied to him, but even that knowledge didn’t stop his blood throbbing the vein on his temple or the trouble brewing in his eyes.

“You think you can play me?” he yelled as his footsteps thundered through the scarcely occupied bar.
Slade lifted the pool cue from the table and leaned against it, “I had to make sure you were on the up,” he answered as he smacked his lips casually against each other.
“So I wasted my day in an abandoned fucking warehouse?” Oliver spat, venom lacing each heated word, even as Felicity held one throbbing arm back by his wrist.
Slade was unbothered by the display, “You passed the test,” he replied with a shrug.

“Where the fuck is Malcolm? You owe me that,” Oliver yelled before he slammed his fist on the pool table, hard enough to make even Slade’s shoulders jolt up.

“Malcolm isn’t here,” he offered, “He passed through a couple of weeks back. Just patched himself up and moved on.”
Felicity could feel Oliver's wrist tensing.

“But, I know where he went,” Slade continued, “Mexico.”
“And why would I believe you?” Oliver asked through gritted teeth.
“I’ve got someone there looking for him,” Slade assured, “I’ll find him, he can't hold his breath under the radar for that long and when I do, he’s yours.”

“And I’m just supposed to believe that?”
Slade unclipped the gun in his shoulder holster and handed it to Oliver, “You have my word, or you can shoot me.”

Oliver gripped the gun at its engraved ivory handle and for a moment he considered how easy pulling the trigger would be when it was pointed at Malcolm.

He handed the gun back.
“When you find him, he’s mine.”
Slade nodded before Oliver turned to Felicity, “Let’s go home.”
The three words she needed to hear
Felicity, sitting up in the bed, stared wide-eyed and fixated on the date of the journal spread out in front of her as she drew lacklustre circles around the date on an endless loop. Twenty weeks ago July 20th seemed so far away but now it was thundering ever closer and she didn’t feel anywhere near prepared for it.

The return from California last month had allowed them to live in virtual bliss for those four weeks, well, if she was going to be accurate more like two weeks because Oliver had spent the first two weeks wound a little tight – even though he had tried to hide it. He returned to early morning rises and carrying emotional weight across his broad, but tired, shoulders.

But when days turned into weeks with no news from Slade, some of that burden lifted and in something that was almost unheard of during the 10 months they had shared a bed (in some form of another) Felicity found herself awake before him a few times and in those silent waking moments she had looked down at the growing bump and told their child that daddy was at peace because of them, because of the anchor that little cauliflower-sized baby gave him.
That Saturday morning, with a warm early sun glowing across the skewed white linen of their bed, had been one of the mornings that neither of them had set foot out of the bedroom just yet and Felicity had found herself counting how many weeks they had left to wait.

“How does Caitlin know that’s the right date?” Oliver asked as he laid close against Felicity, and splintered his words with soft kisses flourished near her hip.

Felicity shook a hand through her bed tossed hair and hummed along with the gentle rhythm of his lips against her skin, “Well, it’s really just a guess based on the first day of the last period I had which was a week after-,” – she stopped abruptly and sucked her lower lip inside her mouth, because dredging up that afternoon in the workshop wasn’t how she wanted to spend this lazy Saturday morning.

A moment and one short inhale later, she continued, “Between that and the night we…” she closed her mouth again because now talking about the night they had engaged in rabid unplanned break-up sex on the table in the Lost Soul’s chapel, didn’t exactly need remembering either.

Even if it was the second best sex she’d ever had – the first being that one night stand with the ruffian and his shoulder-tapping hair.

In fact, if she gave herself a moment to consider it, bar a college tryst with her then-boyfriend behind a fortune teller’s tent at a carnival, Oliver now held nine of the top ten spots of her most explosive sexual encounters.

But she really shouldn’t allow herself the time to think on that right now – maybe later.

She shook the thoughts from her head for a moment before she carried on, “Ovulation is about two weeks before my period is due, so really not the best time to be using an expired condom,” she laughed as Oliver’s laugh tickled the top of her thigh, “anyway, between those two dates is a window of a week or so but considering it’s all just guess work…” she looked down at him, his blue eyes slightly squinted and his brows tugged inward.

“This is all going over your head right?” she asked with a buoyant laugh.

“Pretty much,” he nodded before he offered her an apologetic shrug.

“Let’s just say,” she started while her body shifted in the bed and Oliver sat up on his elbow beside her, “that we have impeccable timing,” she finished with a grin as her hands tumbled over her stomach.

She sat the journal on the bedside table before she slipped from the bed, trailing the top sheet along with her.

“Wait,” Oliver sighed, his eyes blowing wide as the sun caught the stunning silhouette she made. She looked over her naked shoulder at him with her hair a tumble of natural waves over her porcelain cheek, “What?” her voice was ethereal and whispered and it anchored Oliver in place for a few beautifully lost seconds before he stretched out his long, sinewy arm and picked up the polaroid camera he kept in his drawer beside the bed.

He watched as a familiar blush coloured her cheek and she blinked shyly away from his lens before he captured the unscripted moment.

“Oliver,” she whispered, her teeth lightly scratching the edge of her lip as her eyelashes fluttered across her cheeks, “you’ve been taking photos of me every week.”

“I know,” he sighed wistfully while he took another, just in time to capture her lips curving into a smile, “You look beautiful.”

And she did.

From her luscious hair, which felt like silk when he ran his fingers languidly through it, to the
translucent glow that made her alabaster skin look like a pearl caught shimmering in the sun, but most beautiful of all was the fact that inside her she grew their child. *Their little baby*...

“Well I feel huge and I am officially in maternity clothes,” she interrupted his thoughts with a playful canter of words, “So you can come shopping with Mom and I to remind me that I don’t look like a swollen plum in a Mumu.”

“You look beautiful,” he spoke, his voice utterly enraptured in her as he crawled to the edge of the bed and took her hand into his.
“You have to say that,” she retorted with a chuckle.

His lips brushed over the back of her hand and over her wrist in tiny dotted kisses. A smile washed over his face as he looked up the length of her dainty arm, “Come back to bed princess,” he crooned, threads of a deep rasp woven deliciously through his words.

She pouted down at him but never attempted to retract her hand from the pedestal where he’d placed it, atop his, “Oliver we have things to do,” she teased him with rolling eyes.
He tugged her towards the bed, although not hard enough to pull her down.
“All of that will wait.”

And it did.

---

Felicity walked lithely around her mother’s small dining table in the modest apartment she now called home, just a short walk from the building where Felicity and Oliver lived. It was a nice apartment, without any of the ostentatious trappings of what Donna could probably make Noah pay for, if she was that sort.

It overlooked the bustling city and backed onto one of Starling’s pleasant greenspaces and the simplicity of the quaint one bedroom apartment suited Donna Smoak – or at least the one Felicity knew – quite well.

They hadn’t spoken about her parents’ relationship since Donna had returned from Vegas, declaring that she would be around for her “first grandbaby” even if it meant returning to a city that she held very little affection for.

“I’m not sure where my phone is,” Donna called out from the bedroom as Felicity waited patiently by tapping out a tune on the lip of the oak table.

Her eyes tracked downward to her mother’s phone sitting near the edge of the table slightly obscured by a knitted scarf.

“It’s on the table,” she started as she tugged it free, but accidentally caught some of the loose papers underneath it.
They scattered to the floor just at Donna appeared in the doorway.

Felicity stooped to collect them, but her hand froze over one that she couldn’t help but read – it was a petition for a divorce.

Donna scooted alongside Felicity and gathered the papers quickly to her chest, but it was too late, Felicity had already seen them; and the silence that fell between the mother and daughter was evidence of that.
“I didn’t want you to see those,” Donna sighed as they both straightened themselves and she neatly laid the papers back on the table.
“Divorce papers?” Felicity asked despondently, even though she knew the question was redundant – that’s exactly what they were.
“Yes,” Donna sighed limply, “But hon, please don’t get upset.”

Felicity pinned a few tendrils of fine hair behind her ear and she shook the look of surprise from her face and replaced it with a soft smile.
“I’m not 8 anymore mom, you don’t have to protect me from every little thing,” she spoke kindly as she handed the older woman her phone, “I just don’t want you to do this for me.”

“Oh honey, it’s not,” Donna spoke, listless as tears welled at the corner of her eyes, “it’s for me and I probably never should have married him.” She shrugged as she turned and tapped her fingers to the side of her leg, “I love your father,” she continued, though her voice was thinner, “I always have and I’m certain I always will, but I don’t know if we’re the right fit anymore, or if we ever really were.”

When she finally turned back to face Felicity, the brimming tears had let one free and it was slowly making its way over her rouged cheek.
“So that’s it?” Felicity asked, she wasn’t sad, or happy, it was a strange level of inertia.

Donna shrugged, and Felicity could tell her mother didn’t want it to be, “I haven’t signed them yet,” she huffed out a sluggish sigh, possibly annoyed at the threads she was still desperately hanging onto, “I guess a part of me still thought I might get the old Noah back.”
Felicity wrapped her arms around her chest, ignoring the slight rolling the baby was pushing against her forearms as she looked sadly at her mother, she understood.

“I don’t remember him,” Felicity revealed forlornly.
She wished she did.

“Oh baby,” Donna’s face lit up despite the burgeoning tears, “he wasn’t all that different to Oliver, a little rough with long hair and bright blue eyes,” Felicity watched as her mother spoke fondly of the man that she’d fallen head over heels in love with long before Felicity was even a twinkle in either of their eyes, “he loved rocked music and we’d spend hours just holed up together.”

None of that seemed like the man in the pressed grey suit and black Oxford shoes that roamed the floors of an office tower looking for a reason to be sullen.

“What happened?” Felicity asked, taking a sharp breath in while baby cauliflower seemed to use her bladder like a trampoline.

“He wanted more than he had,” Donna shrugged, as though it was a simple equation, “He wanted a big house and a fancy car. At first he thought that was what I needed, what we both deserved,” the word dripped from her lips with a distaste that didn’t go unnoticed, “I started losing him then and I never really got him back. After you were born,” Donna breathed lethargically as she shook her head, she didn’t want to recount those days, months and years of struggles.

“Even after we came here and after the wedding…” her eyes dropped before they slowly raised with a fresh glint of resolution, “I keep thinking that the man I loved would be in there somewhere, but I just don’t know if he is anymore.”

“Just because you forgive someone, it doesn’t mean you have to stay a part of their lives,” she added with a whimsical shrug, like she’d read that on a fortune cookie.

“Anyway,” she wiped the stray tear from her cheek and shook the other’s back, “give me a few more minutes to tidy myself up and then we can go. Is Oliver meeting us there?”
Felicity smiled, hidden beneath the quaffed hair and the shrink-wrap dresses, Donna Smoak was a smart, tenacious women – she was her mother.

“Yeah,” the younger woman bobbed her head in a soft nod, “he got a call about a shop premise that he’d been looking into so he was going to swing by first to have a look and meet us later.”

She wasn’t sure if Donna was actually listening, but her mother graced her with a pleasant smile and a soft “Okay,” before she trotted off to finish getting ready.

Felicity ran a slow comb of fingers through the ends of her hair as she slipped her phone from her pocket and stared down at it – hoping it would give her an answer.

It didn’t, but she made a decision anyway.

If you still love her, now is the time to show it.

The message floated away when she pushed send, whether or not he had any conniption to act on it, would be entirely up to Noah.

Donna and Felicity walked out of the nail salon with freshly lacquered nails to where Oliver was waiting for them. A chaste kiss on Felicity’s cheek and a smiled good morning to Donna was given before the trio started down the street.

At least until someone calling Donna’s name made them stop. It was Noah, wearing a dishevelled suit and panting as he ran towards them.

“What are you doing here?” Donna quipped as Felicity sunk back against a wall.

“Doing what I should have done the day I got you back all those years ago,” he panted, before he doubled over to catch his breath, “I’m sorry.”

Donna banded her arms across her chest before he continued.

“I never realised what I had until I’d lost it. I tried to change you when I should have realised that you’re already perfect. I don’t want to lose you and if you’d just give me another chance, I’ll show you.”

“Noah, I don’t know, I….” she sighed sadly.

“Remember the little cabin by the lake?” he asked.

“How could I forget?”

He plucked a key from his pocket and dropped it into her palm, “Let’s go. Give this another chance, I’ll get down and beg.”

He looked down at the ground, fully prepared to drop onto the filthy concrete.

“I’m shopping with Felicity,” she whispered as she backed towards Felicity with tortured eyes.

“Mom it’s fine, you deserve to know, either way,” Felicity encouraged just out of Noah’s earshot, “If there is something worth salvaging then you owe it to yourself to know and if there isn’t then you owe it to yourself to know that too.”

“How did you get to be so wise?” Donna quipped.

Felicity smiled as she shrugged, “I think you probably had something to do with it.”

Moments later, Felicity watched her parents leave together. She didn’t know what would come of that or really how she felt about it. But she was happy, maybe they deserved a chance to see if they could be too.

Felicity blew out an exacerbated sigh as she stared down at her arms like they were committing some form of mutiny. The dark navy dress she had shimmied into was stunning, the ruched sides
clung to her waist and hips and didn’t – even slightly – resemble a Mumu. However, there was one glaringly obviously problem with this dress; or at least with Felicity putting on the dress, and that was the zip that started at the midway point of her ass and mirrored her spine all the way to the base of her neck; or at least it should have.

And if it wasn’t for her arms which seemed to have decided to be achingly stiff at the shoulders while simultaneously been limp and weak at the elbows, Felicity was certain she would have had this dress at the till by now.

Caitlin had warned her that her ligaments might become ‘stringy’ and be a little more willowy than they once were. What she wasn’t expecting though was limp limbs that were no longer limber enough to reach around and zip herself up.

“What kind of voodoo magic is this?” she grimaced as she strenuously reached behind her back for the zipper tag but after an exertion that made her cheek fuchsia, she had only managed to move it an inch at most.

The mechanics of it seemed illogical but when she turned to the side to narrow her eyes in on the troublesome zip, there was no mistaking the fact that the entre back of it was gaping open and taunting her.

With one more sigh she gave up and opened the door a fraction to see Oliver dutifully sitting on the white cushioned bench seat surrounded by bags from their previous stops and staring at his boots. She licked her lips as she voyeuristically watched him.

It had been pointedly obvious that when he walked in the shop with her at least two of the sales ladies, with their slender pencil skirts and their perfectly fashionable hairstyles, took notice. It was also pointedly obvious that Oliver, bless his deliciously sexual self, hadn’t even glanced towards them.

Every second they had spent out on this shopping excursion had been focused around her and the heart eyes that Thea had teased them about had been unashamedly on display the entire time.

Felicity lowered her eyes along to the firm mountains of muscles at the cusps of his shoulder with a soft hum filling her throat before her eyes continued down over his stretched Henley as the grey knit cotton tried it's hardest to keep his firm, ripped muscles enclosed behind it.

She found herself whimpering when he clasped his hands together idly and the reverberation up his arms had each of those delicious Everest muscles dancing. Her eyes narrowed in the twisted veins that grew like vines down his arm until she reached his thick wrists.

An overwhelming urge to moan washed over her as she rode her tongue back and forth over her lip and absently smacked her lips together all while she imagined following those twisted paths slowly with her tongue.

She clamped her legs closed when she realised that her lips weren't the only thing getting wet and she helplessly let out a soft groan that was just loud enough to catch Oliver's attention.

He looked up at her, his forehead wrinkling in a way that she found irresistible for ways she couldn't reason on even if she tried.

His mouth formed around the words you alright? And Felicity nodded more effervescently than needed before she begrudgingly shook her head, because she wasn't, she was being tormented with a gold zipper and mutinous arms.
He rose instantly and it would have been a sprint if he'd walked across the room any faster.

His face wore far more worry than the circumstances required and as such Felicity found herself blushing through a laugh at how utterly *first world* this problem was.

“Are you sick? Is the baby…”
She hushed him with a graciously apologetic smile, “could you zip me up, apparently I've lost the ability,” she huffed as she opened the door a little wider and ushered him in.

When the door had them locked inside the 5 foot cubical, felicity turned and brushed her hair over one shoulder.

Oliver took a moment to appreciate her in the mirror as she held her hair to the side and lowered her head, her sleek neck dusted with just a little perspiration. When he touched the zip and his knuckles grazed the skin just above her red lace panties, Oliver let out a soft moan.

He swallowed down another moan as he gently tugged the zipper upwards. His cock throbbed behind the closure of his khaki pants while his fingers skimmed over the back of her matching bra. Her skin was smooth and smattered with a scattering of the faintest freckles that Oliver now knew by heart. His eyes devoured every inch of her, thrumming a moan in the back of his throat as he watched the trance-like way the air con above them blew the soft hairs at the base of her neck.

“Felicity?” his voice was strained and rattled deep in his chest.
She looked up to his reflection, just as he finished zipping her dress. She smiled, her cheeks lightly blushed and her lips full and glossy, before she dropped her hair and it spilled over his hand.

“How does it look?” she asked as her hands rode down the sides of the dress.
Oliver slid his arms through hers and delicately lay his hands on her stomach with his chin on her shoulder.
“Beautiful,” he hummed.

Felicity let her eyes travel down the dress and over all the new curves she had developed, especially in the last few weeks. Her body was changing, and while sometimes she found herself unsure about the reflection in the mirror, when she blinked up and saw the absolute adoration in Oliver's azure eyes, she knew she never needed to worry about how he saw her.

“Okay, unzip me,” she cheered, she was sold on the dress.
Oliver kept his eyes locked on her as he breathed in the scent radiating from her neck, “I can't do that?” he sighed.
She smiled at the mirror, “What?”

He licked his lips, salaciously slow, “Wear it home,” he rasped.
“I don’t think I can,” her brows pulled inwards as she chuckled softly.
“I need to take that dress off you in a place where I can kiss every inch of you while I’ll peel it away,” he purred against her jaw, watching as a sigh bled from her lips.
“And you can’t do that here?” she asked coyly.
A smirk lifted his lips, “I don’t think you can be quiet enough.”
“Try me,” she pouted at his teasing.

Never one to shy away from an invitation from her, Oliver guided her wordlessly down onto a small white ottoman that had been placed in the corner of the changing room for an entirely different purpose than what it was about to be used for.

He knelt down in front of her and braced his feet against the side wall before he sat back on his
heels. His large hands wrapped around each of her ankles, pausing there for a moment while his thumbs circled the inside of the knobby bones. He watched her teeth nibble her lip while her eyes grew wide with anticipation.

He lifted her leg deliberately slow and Felicity found herself clutching her freshly painted nails into the side of the white leather fabric as it neared his mouth, lips already butterflied out. When the first kiss landed on the side of her calf, barely a hand span from where he still held her ankle, Felicity bit back a moan.

Her tongue swept lines across her lip, to soothe where her teeth had unceremoniously gnawed while a shiver jolted down her spine and shuddered down between her legs. Another kiss, an inch further up her calf had Felicity gulping air and the next two, which wound around to the inside of her knee had her practically shaking while she attempted silence.

But when his tongue snaked a circle over her silken skin, no amount of gulping or lip biting could keep her silent and Felicity panted out a loud, “Fuck.”

She clamped her hands over her mouth to regain some composure before she slipped her leg out of Oliver’s hand, “Yep, we need to leave,” she chirped as she stood and tapped his cheek, “Now.”

“You never told me how the meeting went this morning, I forgot to ask,” Felicity asked warmly as she nestled her cheek into Oliver’s clammy chest and swam her fingers over the mounds and trenches of his defined stomach.

He idly brushed his fingers through her hair, the rest of his body content and spent. “It went good, but it won’t work, he sighed quietly, relishing the way her warm breath misted his skin.

“Why?” she lifted her head from his chest, her hair a perfect tumble around her nude shoulders, “Was it not big enough?”

“No, it’s the right size, its actually pretty perfect,” he lamented while his fingers trickled over the tiny red blotch on her right breast where his beard had clearly rubbed it a little raw. “Is the commute too long?”

He shook his head against the duck-down pillow, “No, it’s only about twenty minutes away from here.”

She sat a little higher as she held the sheet across her body, “So what’s wrong with it?” she quizzed.

His lips and brow furrowed, he hadn’t wanted to bring it up, but he also knew she wouldn’t drop the matter without a satisfactory answer. “It’s too much money,” he began while he sat up and puffed the pillow against the headboard, “by the time I replace what I can’t get from Verdant because the cops confiscated it all, I don’t have enough to pay the lease.”

It only took a moment of Felicity’s thinking face for her to say exactly what he knew she would, “Then I will, the bank will lend me what you need.”

A resolute bob of her head sealed the decision in her mind.

But not in his. “No, no,” he breathed as he carded his thick fingers through his hair. “Oliver why not?”

He looked at her puzzled eyes, but he had no more of an answer than, “Because.”
Her dainty hand rested on his shoulder as Felicity took a slow and measured breath, “I know that you have spent your life not asking anyone for anything but this isn’t about you asking me for money Oliver, this is about you and me building our lives together. This is about us, and our baby,” she explained calmly with eyes that never dipped off his. But still worry etched his expression, “It’s a lot of money Felicity,” he cautioned. A smile warmed her features. “But it’s only money Oliver.”“Show me the place, please, at least do that,” she pleaded before excitedly slapping his chest, “Our baby wants you to show me Oliver,” she added with a smirk. “You can’t use that for everything,” he tried to say sternly, but it barely lasted half a minute before his face gave itself over to a smile. Felicity playfully raised her brows, twice in quick succession. She still had four months to go and she would make the most out of that reasoning until then. “Alright,” he sighed, resigned to the fact he couldn’t say no to her, “I’ll show you two, but no decisions.” She nodded happily, but Oliver felt somehow it wasn’t going to be as simple as that. 

“Oliver it’s perfect,” Felicity squeaked as her eyes roved around the large empty industrial garage, while her feet scuffed on the concrete trying to decide where to walk first.

It was vacant, but for a few remnants of the last tenant’s old, rusted signs and the surfaces were coated in a blanket of dust. But it wasn’t far from a nice, middle class neighbourhood in one direction and a slowly expanding young professionals' borough in the other. The heart of the city itself was a short subway ride away, or even a relatively easy hour-jog if one felt so inclined. Wooden benches lined two of the walls and floor to ceiling shelving ran most the length of the third. A corner in the back left of the warehouse had a wall of double plated glass that housed an office behind it and a break room and bathroom were housed in an area that jutted out from the main building with the doors for both in between the wooden benches.

Felicity scurried towards the right side of the space and swung her hands around gleefully, “That thing that lifts cars up, that can go here,” she chortled with saucer eyes. Oliver, arms banded across his chest and biceps instinctively flexing, smiled at her exuberance, “a car hoist?” She shrugged before she scooted off towards the office, “And you have an office there, and you could build a little play pen just there,” she grinned while her feet scuffed X's in the dirt, “Imagine our little...” she paused and raised an eyebrow at him. “I’m not telling you the gender Felicity,” he affirmed. “Fine,” she playfully huffed, “but think about it Oliver, this place is close to home and my office. It’s perfect.”

They walked to the open roller door together just as a 1968 Ford Mustang in sleek black drove past. Felicity noticed the way his eyes lit up like a child on Christmas morning, and when Oliver noticed she noticed, he shrugged softly and chuckled through a brim smile. “My father had one just like that,” he remarked sheepishly, “he and I would spend hours working on it.” She slipped her hand into his, a welcomed gesture. “Where is it now?” she asked as she tipped her head against his shoulder.
He sighed heavily, “Gone.”
“If you could get it back, would you?”
They walked a little further towards the street front together, even though the car had now
disappeared from view, “Someone probably already fixed it up,” he concluded, little strokes of
sadness in his tone.
“So you’d want it broken?”
He laughed at the quizzical expression on her face, “Part of the joy of owning a car like that, is the
sweat you pour into building it.”

She nodded, in some respects she understood, there was nothing quite liking building your own
computer.

“You know,” he started, taking a few lonely steps towards the road before Felicity followed, “the
lofted building just across the road, and down a little,” he stretched his arm towards a building you
could hit a baseball to without much difficulty, “That’s for sale too.”
“You want to work in a loft?” she quipped.
“Noooo,” he replied, drawing out the O.
“Live there?”
He shook his head.
“I don’t understand,” she said as she pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose.
“Imagine it with your name on it,” he soothed his hand across the air in front of them.
“I already have that,” she jested as she slapped down his arm, though it didn’t move.
“No, you have your hands tied behind your back by old men who are shit scared that you’ll be so
much more successful than them,” he argued bluntly.

She sighed, and even though she knew he was right, “I can’t.”
“I’m not saying you should right now, but you deserve more than board meetings and office
politics and making fancy cell phones for spoiled rich kids,” he pleaded while he lifted her chin
with his fingers, “When I met you, you had that chip and a big dream and I know you still do, but
you and I both know they will hold you back.”

She blinked down before looking back up slowly, “I haven’t thought about that chip in months,” a
sigh blanched her lips, “I just wanted to make a difference.”
“And you will.”
There wasn’t a single thread of uncertainty in his voice.
“How can you be so sure?” she asked.
“Because,” he wrapped his arms around her waist, “you’re you.”

“Take this place Oliver,” she mused, “and then every time I visit you here, I’ll look at that building
until the day my name is on it.”
He looked back towards the building, “You really think so?”
“Absolutely. This year is ours, lets take it.”
“It's too hot here,” Thea groaned, her voice echoing through the speaker as Oliver's phone lay in the middle of the table while he sat nearby idly turning the pages of the ‘done deal’ lease for the new shop.

“It's only one state over,” Oliver remarked, a chuckle tacking onto the end of his words.

“Well it feels like the desert here,” he listened to her exacerbated sigh as Felicity set down a cup of coffee next to Oliver's hand, bent over as best she could and inhaled deeply.

Her love for the smell of coffee had returned with a vengeance but her taste for it however had all but disappeared, it now tasting almost metallic to her ever-changing taste buds. She had however developed a love of smoothies and she put a particularly vivid purple one down on the table before she sat on the chair beside Oliver.

“Well it will be fall soon so the weather should mild out,” Felicity advised before she took a sip through her straw and Oliver watched her eye float back in a sort of smoothie-delirium that he had become accustomed to seeing now.

“Ha!” Thea blurted, “I don't think this state even has fall, or winter for that matter.”
Felicity smiled, she knew what Thea was trying to convey without words but when she looked at Oliver with expressive eyes, he seemed to have no idea why she was giving him said look.

*Thea wanted to come home.*

Even mouthing the words didn't help and Oliver remained oblivious until Felicity took matters into her own hands. “You could always transfer back to Starling, I'm almost sure it would be okay,” she said casually as she watched Oliver’s brow slowly climb up his forehead at though he was finally piecing the puzzle together.

The relief in Thea's voice was palpable. “Would, that...,” she paused to settle her racing heart, “would that work?”

The truth was that as happy as Thea had been when Felicity had visited a little while ago and even though she had Roy with her, she felt a loss without her brother close by – they had only ever had each other for so long that being without him seemed so foreign and, eventually, so lonely. “What about Roy would he be okay?” Oliver asked before blowing over the steaming coffee, “he only just started his new job?”

He took a sip as the phone went silent.

It was almost as though he could hear his little sister biting her nail while she tried to fashion a response, and then a sigh as she resigned herself to giving the only one she could, “Roy lost his job a couple weeks back. He's been doing whatever he can to pick up odd jobs, but I don't think...,”

Oliver could hear her bite back the tears – she wasn’t all that different to him in so many respects and her trying to put on a brave face in spite of *whatever* was definitely one of those.

Felicity stretched her hand out to Oliver’s and laid it silently atop his as she sensed the anguish in his eyes – *he hadn’t known.*

“Why didn't you say anything?” he asked, his voice croaky and stretched as he bit back emotions of his own.

“You have a baby on the way Oliver at some stage you shouldn't have to look after me too,” she stammered, her voice a mix of emotions almost impossible to read one from the other.

Oliver took a stilling breath before he answered succinctly, “You're family Thea. Come home.”

Felicity smiled over at Oliver and nodded as she echoed his sentiments, “Come home Thea, we’ll make this work.”

Thea brushed back a deluge of tears, “We can get jobs, scrape some money together, I swear we'd only need to stay may be a week or two until Roy finds a job,” she said, her words trembled through her quite sobs of relief.

“No,” Oliver answered her, the word popping out from his mouth like a bullet.

Thea sniffed, and swallowed down her tears before getting out a shaky, “Oh.”

“He doesn’t need to find a job, I have one for him. Great new place, boss is kind of an a-hole but I’m told he’s a good boss,” Oliver explained, his wide smile pointed at Felicity who was grinning right back.

“Where?”

“Queen Motors.”

His sister gasped. “Oliver you...your...you...” she couldn’t make cognitive sense of her words but they understood her question all the same.

“Yup. Just like Dad would have wanted,” he spoke softly, his eyes giving way to two tears that glided over his cheeks, unashamed and honest, “So come home.”
Two weeks passed and Thea had begun making arrangements to transfer back to Starling U for the new semester, finishing her current semester in May and picking up a few classes through the summer to ensure she would be on tract to start in the fall.

Queen Motors was in the midst of the fit-out stage and much of Oliver’s time was spent there. Word had spread quickly and with no one else as dedicated to some of the vintage classics like he was, work was already starting to come in, despite not having anywhere to do it just yet. Felicity had taken no shortage of pleasure in reminding Oliver that opening the business had been by far a wonderful idea. He could only agree, things were definitely looking up.

For her part, despite the Board’s clear lack of confidence in her ability to run and grow Smoak Tech at the same time as she grew a tiny human, she had not let that stop her and new work, together with growing realms of current work, had Felicity’s hands full.

But, sitting on the floor of their apartment’s second bedroom staring at the very modern and aesthetic grey wall in front of her while Jax sat alongside her, doing his best to figure out what she was staring at, Felicity couldn’t think of anything other than how much she hated the colour grey right now.

“It’s just not right is it boy?” she chatted away to Jax as one hand rested on her stomach and the other rubbed down his nape.

He looked auspiciously up at her with his wide soulful eyes and his head a little cocked as though he knew completely what she was saying.

“I thought I might find you both in here,” Oliver said from the doorway where he stood holding a plate of still-warm pancakes.

Felicity patted the wooden floor beside her and dutifully Oliver padded over and sat down, smiling as he realised the humour in the fact she had both him and Jax sitting obediently either side of her.

She took one of the pancakes off the plate and tore it in half, before handing one half to Jax who swallowed it in three chomps of his jaw.

“What are we looking at?” Oliver enquired, his voice almost a whisper as though they were lost in some kind of a meditative state.

Felicity nibbled around the edge of her pancake half before she answered with a sigh, “I don’t like the colour of the walls.”

Oliver chuckled, lightweight and worlds apart from a time where he’d never found anything to laugh about – a time before her.

“So let’s paint them,” he offered without a second thought.

She sighed, listless, a second time. “I don’t like the walls.”

Oliver let his eyes rove up and down and from left to right trying to decipher what it was exactly that she didn’t like about them, but aside from the colour and the few scuff marks Jax had made in a fit of boredom, he could see nothing apparently wrong with them.

“They’re just walls,” he quipped before he took a mouthful of pancake and chewed, his eyes still trained to the wall just as hers were.

Oliver let his eyes rove up and down and from left to right trying to decipher what it was exactly that she didn’t like about them, but aside from the colour and the few scuff marks Jax had made in a fit of boredom, he could see nothing apparently wrong with them.

’elle whispered, a deep sadness threaded through her words.

Oliver took a breath inwards as he nodded, he finally understood what was wrong with the walls – they were in the wrong house.

He stood up and left the plate of pancakes beside her before he walked, wordlessly, from the room
and returned a minute later carrying her tablet. He sat back down beside her and offered her the device. “What’s this for?” she asked as she looked at the small piece of equipment quizzically. “Let’s find somewhere that does feel like home.”

Thirty minutes and three real estate agent’s websites later, Oliver was lying with his head on Felicity’s lap while she continued to flick through countless options, none of which had struck her with any sort of home-like epiphany.

But it was Saturday, they had all day. “Anything yet?” Oliver asked as his cheek pressed to her rounded stomach and his eyes looked up her body just as she glanced down.

Before she could answer Oliver was met with a kick to the side of his face that was unmissable. “I think our baby wants to say hello,” Felicity laughed. “Or goodbye,” Oliver added as he playfully rubbed his head. Felicity put the tablet to one side before she floated her fingers through his hair, now long enough to cover them completely, “You should read to the baby, that always calms them down,” she sighed happily, her contentment softening her eyes and plumping her cheeks.

Oliver left the room without a word, and a moment after Felicity got to her feet and shook off the slight pins and needles that had begun to numb the backs of her legs. She wandered over to the day bed in the corner of the room and set the lacy pillows against the wall before she clambered on and shuffled the pillows behind her back until they were just right. She crossed her legs at the ankles as they hung over the side of the bed and went back to scouring the ‘For Sale’ pages.

Moments later Oliver returned with the book he’d brought her the night she gave him a chance, *Oh, the Places You’ll Go.* Oliver settled himself onto her lap once again, only this time his long limbs hung over the end of the bed. He opened the book and began to read. “Congratulations! Today is your day. You’re off to Great Places! You’re off and away!”

Felicity smiled as she felt waves rolling through her stomach and tiny feet or hands pushing into her other organs. Their baby may have only been the size of an eggplant, but there was now no mistaking the feelings bouncing around her stomach.

Their little eggplant was awake, alert and listening. “Have you thought of names?” Felicity asked whimsically as the thought took her when she realised that despite the hours they had spent talking that topic hadn’t yet surface in any great detail, “would you want to name the baby after one of your parents?”

She combed her fingers through his hair as he sat the book open on his chest, “No,” he replied softly, as much as he loved his parents he wanted a better legacy for their grandchild, “they deserve a name of their own, a chance for them to make their own stamp on the world,” he added, a genuine smile folding across his lips as he thought about that day he’d hold their baby and tell them something just like that, *the world is yours little one, make your mark on it.*

“How about Evelyn for a girl,” Felicity spoke as the name conjured up the images of a little blonde girl running through the grass, laughing as it slaps her cheeks while she moves, from an era long since passed but rich with wonder. “That’s pretty,” was his quiet response, “And if it’s a boy?” Felicity pursed her lips as she thought, running through every name of every boy she’d ever met but none of them were right, none of them saying what she wanted them too and when she had all but lost hope of finding something that stirred up an image just as the name Evelyn had done, she
saw an image of Oliver wiping his hands on a cloth and smiling down at the cherub face of a little boy with wonder in his eyes, “Reed,” she breathed.

“Like the book or like the plant?”

She slapped Oliver’s arm playfully, “Like the plant, R E E D.”

She couldn’t tell if his face was one of confusion or disgust, “You hate it?” she pouted.

“I don’t hate it, it’s just a little different,” he smirked.

“It’s a strong name,” she quipped proudly, although now it had become a matter of principle more than anything else.

Oliver plucked her tablet from the bed and handed it back to her with a smile, “find us a house Princess,” he winked.

Felicity took the device from his fingers and chuckled, this discussion could be saved for another time.

She scrolled through the page, mindlessly expecting to hate all the ones on that website just as she had for the others, when one picture caught her eye.

“I think I just did,” she announced excitedly.

The very next day they were standing at the edge of a cobble path that wove through something akin to an enchanted garden, that hid a house that looked like it had been pulled from the English countryside and plonked in the upper suburbs of Starling. Where every house was a carbon copy of the one next door, this house might as well have been from Narnia. With their fingers entwined they walked the path a few steps behind the agent.

“This house is a real gem, you won’t find any other like it,” he remarked as they rounded the overgrown vines and came face to façade with it.

It was two storeys with the deck of a Georgian home and the intricate trim of a bygone era. The white paint was cracking in parts and the patio floorboards looked tired and buckled in places. The stained glass door stood proudly even though it’s own paint had blistered and dried and a few of the panes were cracked.

“It’s an estate sale, so the buyers are willing to move on any reasonable offer,” the agent continued as he clomped up the sturdy front steps.

“Who built it?” Felicity asked, her eyes wandering from the oak tree where a rope swing hung broken and unused to the garden path lined with river stones that had started to lift from the ground.

“My father did,” a soft, decidedly English-accented voice spoke from behind them.

Felicity turned to see the woman with a gentle smile on her face and eyes glassed over with fresh tears.

“He built it from the foundation up, not as a house but a home,” she continued as her sensible court shoes tapped the path towards them.

“May I ask why you’re selling it?” Felicity enquired.

The woman stopped and looked over the lush gardens her mother had spent countless moments tending, “It was what they wanted, my parents wanted another family to live in it, to make it their own.”

She brushed back a few stray tears, but she was still smiling, “My brothers and I all moved on across the world, it’s time for someone else to see their lives here. It’s what our parents would have wanted. I’m Agatha by the way.”
She offered her hand and Felicity shook it, “I’m Felicity, this is Oliver, and this,” she looked down at her stomach and smile, “Is due in July.”

Agatha laughed warmly as a hand floated through her greying hair. “The agent can show you inside if you like, I only came to collect a few boxes from the garage.”

“I wouldn’t mind if you showed us, I’d love to know this history,” Felicity said with a soft smile. Agatha nodded, “I would love to.”

The inside was decorated with warm cream walls and soft wooden floors, many areas needed a little painting and some bricks around the fireplace had chipped and were never replaced. There was very little furniture occupying the space but it still felt like a home. On the ground floor each room swept into the other and then out into a rolling backyard that was lined with lush green trees. It was a slice of paradise hidden in suburbia.

The house had four bedrooms on the top floor and three bathrooms, with a studio cottage out the back of the property that her father had built for her as a teenager.

After seeing every space the house had to offer, from the little cupboard under the stairs to the kitchen that had been built for his ‘beloved wife who adored to cook,’ Felicity walked back into one of the smaller bedrooms just across from the master and looked out the slightly dusty window panes to the colourful garden. The walls were a faded green and the carpet was a little worn, but this was it.

These were the walls.

She felt the familiar fluttering in her stomach as she looked over at Oliver, took his hand and placed it on her belly.

“I think we're home,” he whispered.

---

[May 5 : 29 Weeks]

“You did good big brother,” Thea said proudly as she kicked around the garage floor. “I couldn’t have done it without her,” Oliver remarked as he looked across the large space to where Felicity was busy taking a call from Curtis.

“You still would have,” Thea quipped before she punched his arm twice for good measure, “but it might have taken a little longer and sure as shit wouldn’t have looked this pretty,” she teased, punching him a third time in the chest which he took with an ooff.

“Felicity is the best thing that has ever happened to me,” he praised, utterly unashamed of just how much he loved her.

“Do you think they would be proud of us Ollie?” Thea asked, her eyes pooling up with tears, “you knew them better than I got the chance to, do you think…?” her words trailed off as she bit back tears with her bottom lip snagged between her teeth.

Oliver rested his large hands on her willowy shoulders and met her worrisome expression with a smile, “they are proud of us Speedy, they would have loved to see you grow to who you are now, I know I have.”

Thea brushed back the tears from her cheeks that she let fall from her eyes. “So what’s the money in the safe going to be for?”

Oliver lifted nervously onto the balls of his feet before dropping back down.
“Come on Ollie, I know you have something you’re planning to squirrel away money for, you always do.”
Oliver looked over at Felicity as a smile eclipsed his face.
There was something.
“Can you keep a secret?” he asked, like it was a decade before and they were both children, eagerly swearing an oath.
Thea stuck out her pinky finger and nodded with a serious expression scribbled on her face, “Pinky swear.”
Oliver smiled as he hooked her little finger with his own and they shook on it.
“I’m saving it to buy a wedding ring for Feli...”
Before he could finish his sentence Thea screamed jubilantly, loud enough that Felicity looked up from her phone call across the other side of the garage and smiled, bemused.
Thea quickly clamped her hands over her mouth and continued to squeal behind them. When she had finally gotten it out, she peeled her hands away slowly to reveal a bright smile, “You’re going to get married,” she managed to both whisper and giggle at the same time.
“Eventually, when I have a ring she deserves,” Oliver nodded, unable to quash the soppy smile taking over his face.
“You know you could put a metal washer on her finger and she’d still marry you.”
He didn’t say anything, but he did nod. He knew Felicity wouldn’t mind, if they were ready, she would say yes, but he wanted to get her the perfect one all the same.
“Jax is going to be your best man isn’t he?” Thea moaned just as the four-legged friend barked his approval at the suggestion, “Unbelievable.”

It was another week later and Felicity was standing at the edge of that cobblestone path again with Oliver's hand across her eyes and Thea bubbling with excitement behind her.
“There is still work to be done on the other bedrooms, but ours is done and everything is clean and all the boxes are in the house,” Oliver chatted proudly as he carefully walked Felicity towards the door.
“Then why the big reveal,” she chuckled as she followed where he guided her.
“You’ll see,” he stopped her at the edge of the stairs where she listened to him take a deep breath. He pulled away his hand and Felicity's mouth gaped. In the few weeks since they’d bought the house and he’d asked her to stay away, Oliver, with help, had completely rejuvenated the outside. Fresh white paint coloured the walls and the floorboards looked practically brand new. The overgrown vines had been cleared back and the river stones had been reset, and, she noticed with a smile, the swing had been rehung.
“I hope you like it,” he beamed as he watched the tears fill the corners of her eyes, “the rest we can do together,” he added, folding his hand into hers.
“I love it,” she sobbed as they walked together up the three front stairs.

“Are you coming in?” Felicity asked Thea who still stood at the bottom of the stairs with Roy.
“We thought we might go unpack,” she smiled in reply as she nodded towards the cottage in the backyard where they would be staying.

When they were alone, Felicity reached her body up against Oliver's and pecked his lips. “I love it,” she echoed as he reached for the door.

He opened it wide, but stopped her when she went to walk through it.
“I’m going to carry you,” he said definitively as he stooped to band one arm across the back of her knees.
“Oliver!” she squealed as he tipped her back and lifted her into the air, “I’m in the third trimester,
you’re going to break something.”
“I’m fine,” Oliver huffed, though his cheeks were a little redder than before.
He whistled for Jax who dutifully came inside before he gently closed the door with his foot. He
looked up the stairs and then down at Felicity.
“Okay, I’m through the door, you can put me down now,” she laughed.
“Not yet,” he smirked as he started up the staircase.
She clung to his neck as he carefully took one step at a time, “I’d carry you anywhere baby,” he
winked once he reached the top.
“Then carry me to the bedroom,” she breathed warmly.

A smile washed over Felicity's face as Oliver laid her carefully on the bed. A pleasant sigh dripped
from her lips as she looked up at the lights on the ceiling. Almost everything they owned was still
in boxes and the mattress she was lying on was only covered in a casually strewn comforter, but it
didn't matter. It would matter tomorrow or next week. It didn't matter now, all that mattered was
that this, finally, felt like home. Their home. The home she would come back to one morning near
the end of July with a new born baby in her arms.

That was what this house represented.

Nicks on the wall gauging each year their child grew. The smell of late Sunday breakfasts wafting
through the house. These were the walls that would echo laughter and hold up photos. Here they
would make memories they would keep for a lifetime.

*Here was home.*

Oliver crawled onto the bed beside her as he slowly hopped a path of feathery kisses up her bare
arm while his fingers entwined with hers.

“Three more months,” she whispered as she found herself breathing shallow and slow, instinctively
to lull their unborn baby to sleep.

“Three more months,” Oliver echoed just as his lips reached the cusp of her shoulder.
“Will you find peace here, with us?” she asked. It was a question that often tainted her happy
dreams, the worry that the eagle that slept beside her might never find a place to land. The further
along in the pregnancy, the more she dreaded her life would mirror her mother's, despite knowing
in her heart that Oliver wasn't her father, not even with the demons he carried.

He knew her words were asking a different question and so, propping himself up onto his shoulder
and gently cupping her face in his hand, Oliver answered the unspoken, "I won't ever leave you
princess, either of you."

He would hold his demons at bay. They would never control him again. Felicity and their baby,
their life that they would build. That would be his home. They would be his place to land.

Their clothes came off, not in a hurry but slowly, enjoying every moment that another item
dropped to the floor until they were lying down naked together.

Lying with her back to his chest, Felicity could feel each breath he took as her eyes drifted closed.
He kissed the round of her shoulder as his warm breath tickled her skin and a smile tugged up one
side of her lips. She could feel him shadowing her as the bed buckled around them as though he
was trying to see her smile.

His nails gently skated up the back of her leg, weaving a path until, near the top of her thighs, he
sunk between her legs and leveraged one off the other. Her legs fell apart at his command and the top one dropped forward as her hips twisted to accommodate the move.

Then a single finger swept through her heat, gliding between her folds from her clit to the edge of her anus. Her tongue swept across her lips, hungry for the slow and deliberate pleasure as mewls made their way from her parted lips and hums echoed in her throat.

He kissed the nape of her neck, deliberately slow, to draw out the moans she had been barely holding at bay. It still amused him that she tried to stifle them with her teeth even now, after all the time they had spent together and while, briefly, he considered reminding her that he loved the sounds she made, he also had to admit that watching her fight to keep them back was something of a sight too, and he would never want to lose that.

His fingers dragged up her body and intuitively she rolled her frame with him until his fingers dropped around her breast and slowly traced the curve of them.

“Mmm mmm,” she moaned as her brows flickered with excitement and she rolled her shoulders back against his chest, eager to stay close.

But... He missed her face and his brow furrowed as he tried to see over the top of her. It was a futile effort or, at best, a contortion and stretch on his body he knew he couldn’t continue for long and certainly not if they moved beyond this slow, languid foreplay.

Felicity's eyes plucked open when his hands dropped from her body and the mattress buckled beside her. Her head slowly rose from the pillow as she watched Oliver, engorged cock bouncing like a springboard in the air, walk around the bed and out into the hallway.

“Where are you...” she started to laugh but before she finished her question, Oliver returned holding something. He walked along the wall Felicity was facing and set it down before he stepped back and smiled.

And when Felicity smiled too, she caught her reflection in the mirror Oliver had just placed there. Wordlessly he climbed back onto the bed and snuggled in against her back as his knuckles smoothed down her cheek.

“This way is more comfortable for you and the baby,” he spoke softly, his lips so close to her skin she could feel each word against her neck, “but I miss your face,” he continued, pausing to kiss her lobe, “this way we get both.”

She watched his reflection in the leather framed mirror, from the way his lips pressed into her throat to the mischievous glint in his eyes and honestly, she had missed that too.

*This was better.*

She watched, with her tongue teasing the edge of her lip, as Oliver’s fingers glided over her body, barely touching and yet igniting a flame beneath her tempered skin. His finger slid down to her breast and, as he had before, gently traced the crescent.

Back and forth he moved that single finger as she watched on, noting how her skin flushed a warm pinkish colour in the fleshy mounds she barely recognised as her own. Blessed, or cursed, depending on how you looked at it, with pert B-cups, the engorgement of her chest to a full C-cup had become something of a sight. She felt her skin tighten as Oliver slowly dragged the back of his nail over the rise of her breast before weaving shrinking circles around the edge of her areola. She study her reflection, watching as the dark rose skin tightened and puckered while her nipple
stiffened.

The feeling itself was erotic but when combined with being able to see it and study the way her body reacted to him, it was nothing shy of tantric. His name fluttered like a chant from her pouted lips, once, twice, a third time, as her thighs became damp with arousal.

“Fuck, you're beautiful,” he purred against her clammy neck, glazed with a thin veil of sweat. His tongue swirled in deliciously slow circles as his fingers crept between her breasts.

Her eyes slowly dropped as her lips parted to expel a breathy sigh. Reaching her hand behind her, she dragged her nails lazily through his twisted stubble as she pressed her naked rear against his hard shaft.

“Soon,” he cooed while his hand swept down to her core. With gentle strokes, Oliver circled her stomach before he dipped his fingers between her legs. The moment his slightly rough finger grazed between her folds, Felicity crooned a needy sigh and rubbed herself against his cock making him growl into her nape.

“Is it soon?” she smiled, her eyes open but slightly glazed over, while she rocked against him again.

“Princess,” he stilled her hips with his hand, “I need you to stop.”

He leaned in and placed a tender kiss on her temple, “Or I’m going to make a filthy mess on your back,” he grinned at their reflection.

“We have a big shower,” she playfully shrugged.

His finger dipped back between her wet heat and swirled in her pooling juices, “baby, be patient,” he teased her nub with the flat of his thumb.

Felicity's body reacted on impulse as a shudder of pleasure fanned out to every limb and she cried out with a raspy moan.

Two fingers spread her folds open and the cool breeze made her shiver before he dipped one finger into her warm entrance, sinking it to the first knuckle.

“Watch,” he hummed and Felicity's eyes fluttered open without hesitating. When their eyes met in the mirror, Oliver pushed his finger deeper, making a gasp blow from her mouth, and before her lips could fall back together, he eased out and thrust back in.

Her lips folded around his name but only breathy sighs echoed around the room. He continued thrusting his finger into her warm, pulsing sex while his thumb rubbed slow circles and her clit. A pink glow tinged her cheeks and spread down her throat while he continued to push her body towards climax. His mouth folded around her lobe, chanting her name like a soft, coaxing prayer Felicity thought she was imagining until she realised her eyes had screwed shut again.

When they opened wide again, he hummed pleasantly against her skin, sending a scattering of shivers down her neck.

The blush beneath her skin had spread down over her breasts and tapered off near her core as her eyes navigated between the lusty expression on his face and the utterly needy one on her own.

Her walls tightened around his finger before he added a second and pushed them deeper, harder and faster with each salacious moan she blessed him with, until all she could do was whimper out his name as her thighs clamped down on his wrist and her nails dug trenches at the back of his neck.

Her eyes blinked as she struggled to keep them open, to see that moment as it washed over her, and she did, like a cascading waterfall that soaked his fingers in her warm, silky climax.
Oliver slowed his thrusts, easing her through her shuddering orgasm with gentle strokes against her cushioned walls and a gentle press of her sensitive clit before he sunk a lingered kiss to her temple. “Welcome home, Princess,” he smiled.

*Home.*
*A place to land.*

**30 Weeks : Zucchini**
AAAATAHBBBBH so, this week I made it to 80k hits and 4000 kudos. To say I'm blown away is an understatement. I just want to thank everyone who contributed to those numbers. ❤️❤️❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Oliver woke up the next morning alone in the bed with the sun peeking in through the curtains and a permanent smile on his face. He was happy. Once upon a time the very notion of being happy would have been incomprehensible and he had made his peace with that. Happiness was something reserved for people who weren’t him and the best he could have hoped for was a stability that saw Thea happy and kept the memory of the people he had loved and lost, alive.

Raisa had told him more times than he could recollect and count that he deserved to be happy too, all he needed to do was open his eyes to the prospect of it and maybe then he would see something beyond the cage he’d found himself in.

Thea had been late.
He had been frustrated at the fact he was standing there on the street curb waiting for his sister like
the world, and time, revolved around her.

Now, almost a year later, Oliver was eternally grateful for his sister’s tardiness.

He rolled over lethargically and squinted at the alarm clock beside the bed. It was almost 10am. He pressed his cheek into Felicity’s pillow and breathed in the flowery scent of her as his legs stretched out across the bed. A few moments later and Oliver was out of bed and shucking on a pair of grey sweatpants.

He ran his fingers through his messy hair as his bare feet padded towards the door. He stopped outside the private bathroom to listen for any sounds, but it was silent; Felicity wasn’t in there.

His feet took him out of the bedroom and towards the staircase, pausing momentarily to glance into what would be the nursery. As he slunk down the first few stairs with a heavy foot, he heard a familiar voice chatting away from the kitchen. He snuck down three more stairs to eavesdrop on the conversation.

“I don’t know why people say this is hard, I actually think it’s pretty easy,” Felicity prattled as she absently strolled around the kitchen on her toes, like she was stuck in a Disney movie. She blew the flour from her nose before she sneezed into the frilly pink apron she was wearing. Admittedly she had probably made more of a mess than other baking aficionados, but that was beside the point. Quite without thought, she swayed her hips slowly in time with the light jabs that were emanating from her stomach. She smiled once she realised her instinctive movement, but continued it all the same, as though it was some secret coded message between mother and baby.

“I’ll be even better at this when you go to school, I promise,” she chatted away to her stomach, “truth be told it’ll probably be your dad in the kitchen most of the time, but I promise not to embarrass you at school bake sales,” she hummed, pausing for a moment, “well, I’ll try at least.” She laughed softly at the joke that was, in effect, really only for her.

Oliver was smiling, so wide in fact that his cheeks were beginning to sting.
This was what happy felt like.

He floated down the rest of the stairs and stood silently in the doorway, just watching as Felicity moved about the kitchen, with flour war paint and bits of cookie dough in her hair.

She checked on a tray in the oven and cheered herself on with a little bum shuffle as she looked down at the perfect sugar cookies, almost ready to be slipped from the oven. There wasn’t a burnt or melted one amongst them.

She shuffled her feet backwards towards the kitchen island where she had been busy mixing up the icing for the cookies now chilling in the fridge. It was only when she looked up as she brushed a flop of hair back from her face with the back of her hand, that she saw him.

“Oliver!” she shrieked, dropping the wooden spoon to the floor.
“Jesus, fuck, sorry.” he stammered as he rushed towards her, “I didn’t mean to frighten you.” She slapped his arm, playfully aggrieved. “I could have had this baby right here on the kitchen floor,” she chortled as she held the two sides of her tautly-balled stomach.
“Well, I am getting a little impatient to meet h-,” he stopped himself short when he realised how close he had gotten to being the new Cloverfield.
Felicity’s eyes widened. “Him or her?” she pleaded.

“You don’t want to know.”
She pouted. “I do want to know.”
“You don’t want to know,” he retorted. She huffed loudly before Oliver changed the subject. “What are you doing?” “Baking!” she enthused, “I’ve discovered I can bake, well, cookies, and banana loaf and vanilla cupcakes.” Oliver looked around the room, slowly realising that virtually every surface of their rather large kitchen had some remnant of baking on it. “Jesus,” he gaped, “How long have you been down here?” Felicity rolled her lips over each other as she considered an answer, “Since 2am,” she shrugged calmly, “I couldn’t sleep.” She offered her explanation with a second soft shrug. “So you thought you would…” he continued looking around the room at the vast selection of baked goods. “Well, it started off by thinking that maybe some warm milk might help me sleep, but what is warm milk without cookies?” she nattered, moving her hands as she spoke. “Turns out, we didn’t have any cookies, so I did the most logical thing.” Oliver’s eyebrows flexed as he waited her for to continue. “I googled a recipe and I made some.” “Is that those ones?” Oliver asked, pointing at a tray of shortbread. She looked over and laughed as though that was the silliest thing he could have said, “No, silly, I made chocolate chip ones first,” she corrected as she dropped the wooden spoon into the sink. She turned slowly towards him with a guilty expression trembling her lips, “but I ate them,” she admitted. Oliver folded his lips together to stop from laughing at her furrowed brow. “To be fair,” she continued astutely, “it was only half a batch.” He walked around the room and nodded at a banana loaf cooling on a stool, “And how did you get from half a batch of cookies to all of this?” She tapped her finger to her lips, “I discovered I was quite good at the cookies, so why not?” He did have to admit that the kitchen smelled insanely delicious, to the point his mouth had begun salivating. “You just follow the instructions,” she pipped as she nodded towards her tablet, now caked in flour dust, “I don’t know why it took me this long to try it. It’s like math but with better end results.” She picked up a warm shortbread held it up to his lips after he had walked closer. It was only then that Oliver noticed the frilly pink apron she was wearing over her slightly oversized tee and, more importantly, the fact that that was all she was wearing. He took a bite of the crumbly circle and smiled as it melted into his tongue with a breathy “Mmmm,” bleeding from between his lips. “Felicity,” he smirked as he sunk his hands into her waist while she leant against the counter. “Mmm?” His wet his lips instinctively with his tongue as he blinked down to her shapely, naked legs. “Where are your pants?” She looked down just as her cheeks turned a warm scarlet and her eyes danced with a silent laugh. “There was an accident with the mixer and some dough and I took them off,” she answered, a chuckle colouring her tone. His fingers slid down to the hem that sat at the top of her thighs and slowly raised the lightweight cotton up her legs to expose her baby pink lace panties. He lifted her up easily and dropped her ass onto the cool benchtop, making her blurt out an effervescent laugh as a chill jolted up her spine and down her thighs. Her hands weaved down his naked chest, riding over all of the taut muscles as she created a path of
white confectioner’s sugar. They started kissing, slow and tentative at first until her tongue dipped into his mouth and twirled around his. His hands rode up under her shirt making her body roll into his chest as his thumbs just barely touched her sensitive nipples. The ache of them made her rock her sex into his stomach as the kiss became more wild and frantic.

Her legs coiled tighter around his waist as his mouth dropped to her neck, devouring every delectable morsel of baking that had found its way there. She hummed as her nails raked his back and her aching walls tightened around vacancy, desperate for something more.

He must have recognised her need as one of his hands slid back down her body and slipped between her legs. He was so close to her that he felt the heat radiating from her sex as her quite moans dragged his fingers closer to her.

The tip of his middle finger grazed her panties, and…

*Ding.*

“My cookies!” Felicity exclaimed as she pushed Oliver aside and jumped off the benchtop. Oliver laughed as he watched her proudly pull another batch from the oven and sashay her way over to the only clear bench space in the kitchen.

He didn’t mind the interruption. As far as he was concerned, they had the rest of their lives to enjoy.

---

May moved faster than Felicity had anticipated and before she knew, they were already in the middle of the month, staring down the other end of it and hurtling towards June. The warm Saturday morning found her sweating in places she didn’t recall sweating in previously as they stepped into the welcomed air-conditioned baby store.

After enjoying the cool air brushing her cheeks for a moment, Felicity looked around the boutique store and had a sudden urge to leave. She wasn’t ready for this. A sudden flood of panic drowned her as she realised they had less than 7 weeks to go. Seven weeks. She had vacationed for longer than that.

Seven weeks.
The math swirled around her head, days, hours, minutes.
*Oh god.*
Oliver squeezed her hand, as though instinctively he knew she needed that at that exact moment.

Every anxious knot in her stomach fell away. Her lips softened into a smile. Her breathing commenced, slow and silent.

Because, truth be told, any time Felicity felt herself utterly terrified of the prospect of finally meeting their baby, all she had to do was look at Oliver, his calm exterior, his relaxed smile and his furrow-less brow and the realisation that she wasn’t alone in this, not a single step, made everything feel *just right.*

*They* could do this.

Felicity smiled as she watched Oliver float around the baby shop, silently taking it all in though she
doubted he knew what half of the stuff was... she certainly didn't. He stopped at a white sleigh crib, draped in jungle themed linens and a dancing monkey quilt.

"Do you think our baby would like this?" She questioned with a smile flirting at one corner of her lips.

Oliver, knowing where she was leading, smiled as he answered with a "maybe," and a shrug.

"But is it too boyish or not boyish enough?" She pouted at his refusal to bite.

"Felicity, baby, I'm not telling you."

She popped an imaginary bubble through her lips, "I changed my mind. I want to know". Her head bobbed along with her words, decision made.

"You do?" His brow raised towards his hairline as he questioned her seriousness.

Another resolute bob of her head. "I do."

"Okay," he sighed as his brow softened, "we're having a little baby ..."

Felicity clamped her hand over his mouth as she blurted "lalalala," loud enough to catch a brief, perplexed look from the shop assistant.

She crinkled her nose as she looked at the smirk on Oliver's face. "I changed my mind."

"I see that," he joked after he peeled her hand from his mouth.

"I can't believe you were going to tell me," she playfully huffed, "you're weak Oliver Queen."

"For you," his arms banded around her waist, "I am."

"Yellow," she breathed as her eyes drifted towards a sunny gender neutral linen set. "Let's decorate the baby's room in yellow."

Oliver's eyes tracked to where hers were, "I think that's perfect."

It was a few days later and the soft, pale colour 'banana' was instantly warming the nursery as Oliver carefully painted the half-wall panelling that would sit below a wonderfully fun wallpaper with a cream base and silver 'cheetah' spots, all while Felicity watched on, imagining the way the room would come together once it was carefully decorated in the thoughtfully chosen furniture and sunny yellow accents.

"Oliver," she hummed as she bent down a dipped a spare brush into the paint tray.

Oliver turned but before he could say anything Felicity swiped the brush down his cheek and squealed, utterly delighted at her lapse into juvenility.

He stood with his lips pouted and his brow furrowed as he felt the paint drying into his skin.

He painted the tip of her nose midway through her raucous laughter, stopping it immediately. Until it made her laugh even louder. She dipped the brush a second time and as Oliver stood there, motionless, Felicity drew a giant 'F' on his chest.

She stepped back and admired her work, "perfect."

His lips creased into a smile as he watched the animated laughter fall freely from her perfect lips. She stepped backwards towards the door, watching as Oliver followed her slowly, a smile still flirting with his lips.

She turned and ran but he was on her within seconds, embracing her as they fell together against the wall. Her laugh tapered out as she dived into his rich blue eyes, tipped her chin up and delicately pecked his lips.

Felicity kissed him a second and a third time, just like that, but on the fourth kiss his lips held hers there as one hand twisted in her hair and the other held her at the small of her back.

She keened into his kiss and his touch, with a richly decadent voice like warmed honey until a tiny
growl rumbled against his lips and he knew what she wanted.

His hand moved from the small of her back around to the front of her thighs, brushing against the denim like fine sandpaper. His thumb toyed with the stretch cotton waistband of her maternity shorts before dipping between her legs and following the centre seam down to her sex.

Her breath caught in her throat as she nipped at his lips the moment his fingers brushed against her. Even through the fabric she could feel each stroke while her knees grew shaky and her kisses grew hungrier.

The bedroom was in sight, but she didn’t dare to move as her nipples roused beneath her grey cotton tee and her toes twisted against the smooth wooden floors.

But, as Oliver opened his mouth to usher Felicity towards the bedroom, the ordinarily pleasant sound of the doorbell echoing through the house broke them apart.

“That will be Curtis,” she sighed as her head fell to his chest and floated up and down with each deep breath he took, “I asked him to come over and go through some work things with me.” She blinked up with apologetic eyes and a pouted mouth, “I’m sorry.”

Oliver’s mouth brimmned with a smile as he combed his hands through her silky tresses, “Princess, it’s okay.” He kissed her mouth twice, once at each corner. “We have the rest of our lives.”

She slunk away from the wall and padded towards the stairwell, taking the first step down before she paused, turned back to Oliver and smiled coyly, “we’ll finish this later.”

They didn’t.

They had tried, but that night Felicity was exhausted and while Oliver was checking all the windows and doors were locked, she fell asleep and he simply curled up next to her, kissed the back of her neck and found his slumber soon after.

But it was okay, they still had forever.

The first Thursday in June saw Felicity sitting at her desk, legs crossed at the ankles and eyes staring wildly at the phone as she chewed on the corner of her thumb nail. Her cheeks were blushed and her throat was a streaked a warm scarlet. She took slow breaths but that didn’t help. She took deep breaths but that did nothing either. She took another drink of water, slowly letting the cool liquid glide down her throat, but that only made her want to pee, which, oddly enough added to the aching between her legs.

It had been over an hour that Felicity had tried everything to ignore the gnawing in her sex, but it had only grown with each passing minute regardless of how she’d had berated back the idea that she was once again considering.

She couldn’t possibly...

She picked up the phone and with her bottom lip snagged between her teeth, she dialled.

“So you need a burger delivered again?” Oliver answered with a laugh.

Not exactly.

“Whatcha doing?” Felicity asked with a pop of her lips and her thighs squeezed together as tightly as she could.

A gentle, rasped laugh that made her sex growl. “Working.”

Her eyes closed tight as she felt the heat burn the tops of her thighs. “Could you not be working?”
Oliver heard the slight panic in her voice as she strained each word. “What do you need?” he questioned, threads of worry lacing his words.
Felicity held her breath for a moment before she answered with a desperate hum, “I need you.”
He didn’t ask why and he barely paused between her request and his resolute answer, “I’ll be there in 10 minutes.”

“Hi,” Curtis said as he looked up from his desk surprised when Oliver rounded the corner.
Oliver tipped his chin up in the worldwide gesture for a man’s hello before he walked up to the corner of Curtis’ desk and leaned in, “Take your lunch outside Curtis,” he encouraged with a half-cocked smile.
Curtis, not getting it, shrugged off Oliver’s suggestion, “It’s after 2, I just got back.”
“Go again,” Oliver urged, his eyes thinning and his voice becoming a little raspier.
Curtis brushed a hand over his hair, his stomach protesting at the suggestion as it was still trying to digest his last meal, “I’m kind of full.”
Oliver pulled a $20 from his wallet just as Felicity appeared in the doorway.
“Curtis go to lunch,” Felicity huffed, her skin now a clammy peach tone.
“Why do I need to go to lunch? What’s going on? Are you planning on firing me?” Curtis fretted as he stood up from his desk.

“I’m about to have sex with my girl, who happens to be your boss in her office, which happens to be right beside yours… take your lunch break,” Oliver bluntly disclosed.
Curtis grabbed the $20 and jabbed it into his pocket. “Noted,” he quipped before he scooted around his desk, past the two of them and down the hall.

“If he reports me to HR,” Felicity started as she slunk back into her office, pausing just inside the door to turn and smile for Oliver to follow her, “you’ll be in trouble.”
Oliver walked in, kicked the door closed and frosted the windows. “I’m not scared of them,” he purred as he leaned in and brushed his lips against her cheek.
She fed her hand into his and walked him back towards her desk. “You should be, they’re terrifying,” she teased, her voice throaty and rasped.
Her rear brushed up against the edge of her desk before she pressed her palm into the smooth glass, steadying herself, while her other hand reeled Oliver closer.

Their legs touched and their lips were only a fraction apart, sharing the same air with each heavy and warm breath they took. He slid his arm through hers and anchored his palm to the desk, with their fingers overlapping. Her nose nudged his as his body hedged her in, slightly curving around the extra space her belly needed.

“I’m going to kiss you now,” he spoke with a guttural growl and deeply shadowed eyes.
“Yes, please,” she sighed as her chin tipped up, her lips floated apart and her eyes fluttered closed.
He pecked her lips more chastely than Felicity expected and she huffed out a sigh when after barely a few seconds his lips pulled off hers.

Her eyes opened as her brow furrowed, “I’m going to need more than that,” she quipped while she tugged on the lapels of his brown leather jacket.
His hands gripped her waist and lifted her onto her desk, a cool shiver prickling her spine and making her breath hitch in the back of her throat as her dress rode up around her waist.

Oliver leaned in and kissed a wet trail up to her ear. “You told me once that having sex in your office was unprofessional,” he cooed before his tongue swirled near her jawline.
“Did I?” she flustered, her breasts straining against the bodice of her tight grey dress as every inch
of her skin felt ablaze.
“Mmmhmm.” His hands spread her legs open, gripped her thighs.

She hissed as his thumb grazed the scalloped edge of her lace and cotton panties, a silvery pair if she wasn’t mistaken, applying just enough friction to her aching sex to make her rock back on her palms. Clammy and warm, her palms slid atop the glass desk making an unholy noise before Oliver caught her at the small of her back.

His thumb found her clit and rubbed small, slow circles over it, grazing the sensitive nub with the soft cotton fabric. She didn’t want to beg, but her body betrayed her as she stammered out a breathy, “Please.” She didn’t want to be toyed with or left waiting and desperate, Felicity needed to feel his fingers slipping and stretching and plunging into her until her urge to come in hot, wet flashes, was finally realised.

He could see the desperation in her eyes and Oliver knew better than to leave her wanting and whimpering for more. He curtained her panties to one side and grazed his knuckle between her folds, finding them slick with arousal. “I ne-ee-ed,” she stuttered.
He kissed her neck, feeling her pulse thumping beneath her tempered skin. “I know baby, I’ll get you there,” he whispered gently as he dipped his finger into her pulsing entrance.

Her head dropped back, her ponytail brushing against her knuckles, as a gasp escaped her painted lips. He buried his finger all the way and held it steady inside her, letting Felicity’s body get used to the sensation before he began sliding in and out.

When his finger was coated in her, he slid a second digit inside her. Felicity bit her lips closed to stop from screaming in delight as he twisted and thrust his fingers around her cushioned walls, opening and closing them to stretch her quite perfectly.

She barely needed a few minutes of that before a familiar warmth in the depth of her core had her sobbing out his name in breathy gasps.

And then the phone beside her left hand started ringing. “Ignore it,” he encouraged, but she had no mind to answer it as her toes curled in her shoes and her thighs squeezed around his wrist. With his thumb swirling over her clit and his two fingers jolting her body with each thrust, Felicity found herself so close to climax she could do nothing more than pant and huff and loll her head turbulently from side to side.

No sooner had her desk phone stopped ringing, her cell phone started up, vibrating across the desk. “Fuck,” she cursed as she screwed her eyes closed and honed her every thought to the fire brimming in her core. “Ignore it baby,” he chanted, and she readily agreed with a rapid nod.

Another minute and Felicity was right on the precipice where she saw in hazy light and her breathing was thin and weak.

Felicity came in a gush down Oliver’s fingers with shaking moans of his name as the tension and stress and aching melted away from her body, turning her legs to jelly and making her skin glossy with pleasure.

That hit the spot.
Her desk phone rung a second time, and in a post climax haze, Felicity answered it. “Hello?” she panted.
“Did you just come back from lunch?” Noah questioned, immediately hearing the strain in his daughter’s voice.
She tried not to laugh as she answered, “Sort of, What can I do for you?”
“I need you to come,” – he needed to stop saying that word – “with me to a prospective investors’ meeting, we leave in 10 minutes.”
“Am I allowed to meet with investors giving my hideous appearance?”
She could hear the snark in her own voice, so his next quip was to be expected, “Felicity.”
“I know, I know, it wasn’t you saying that,” she huffed, she should go, it could be good, “I’ll meet you in the lobby in 5 minutes.”

She hung up the phone and looked apologetically at Oliver. “I’m sorry, I have to go.”
“I heard and it’s fine,” he leaned in and kissed her forehead.
“At least you can go back to work now,” she chortled as he helped her off the desk.
“Not exactly,” he stepped back to reveal a very prominent boner, “I’m going to need to wait for this thing to go down.”
She laughed softly as she pressed her hands into his cheeks, “I better go clean up but I’ll make it up to you tonight.”

---

[Sunday 16, June 2013: 35 Weeks]

Oliver awoke to gentle prodding in the side of his ribcage. He smiled as his eyes stayed shut, but he couldn’t keep them closed when she leaned over and blew in his ear.

His eyes blinked open until her bright smile came into focus.
“Good morning,” he yawned before he patted his lips together. He had become rather used to sleeping in on Sundays, at least until the baby arrived. He had never imagined a time where he’d been able to find peace enough to do so.
“Did I wake you?” she teased as she sat cross legged beside his waist, her stomach now a beautiful globe that pulled the little pink dress she was wearing taut across her centre.

He smiled looking at it as he remembered fondly the night before, when she let him take a dozen shots of her clothes in a soft lace teddy.
Felicity leaned onto one elbow and awkwardly pushed one of her legs out before her lips met with the round of his sinewy shoulder. She feathered kisses across it before dropping languidly down his chest, swirling her tongue across his slightly warmed skin just as her hand slipped under the sheet across his waist and under the pants and briefs he was wearing; as Felicity neared full term, Oliver had decided to never sleep naked in case her labour happened like a movie at two o'clock in the morning without any warning. Felicity had laughed off the idea, but each night he checked her ‘go-bag’ was ready, that he had Caitlin’s number saved, petrol in the car and his wallet and keys beside the bed. Every night.

Her hand gripped his cock as she ran her thumb through the slit and looked up his chest at his delirious smile. At eight month's pregnant, nothing much could be done gracefully, but Felicity tried anyway as she moved slowly down the bed, kissing his chest as she went. Oliver shuffled up the bed as Felicity pushed the sheet from his body. His shaft hardened in her grip as she rolled over his slick head, until a tight pull stretched across her belly. Unwittingly she squeezed Oliver's cock.
as the false contraction stole her breath and her focus.

His eyes watered and he held his own breath for the few seconds where her hand was a vice around his erect member. Once the wave had passed, her grip loosened and they both sucked in air.

“Baby are you okay?” he asked, genuine worry touching every part of his expression. She looked up, her eyes a little glassy and her lips parted as she took in a few short breaths. “I’m fine,” her voice was thin and light, “Caitlin said this would happen at our last appointment.” She was nodding to assure herself, checking mentally that the pain hadn’t moved to her back or that it hadn’t gone over a level of “mild tightness”, whatever that meant.

He touched his hand to her cheek as they both sat upright. “How about we swap positions and I give you something else to think about,” he ushered as he patted the propped up pillow behind them and wet his lips in anticipation.

Felicity's lower lips quivered as she answered, “But I was doing this for you.” “You’ve already done so much for me,” he crooned as his thumb smoothed over her cheek. “It’s father’s day.” A soft sigh passed over her lips, as the sudden realisation that giving Oliver head while he lay in bed probably wasn’t happening for the next few weeks. He kissed her cheek, “I’m not a father yet,” he added with a wink.

She pulled back from him, her eyes vivid and slightly wild, “You are in every sense that matters,” she debated fiercely. “Just because our baby hasn’t seen you, doesn’t mean they don’t know you.” She took his hand and placed it on her stomach. “Talk.”

He slipped his hand under her dress and brushed his fingers over her tight, hard stomach. “Hey baby, your mommy is still trying to make me tell her whether you’re a boy or a girl,” he spoke softly as he kept his smiling eyes trained on Felicity, “but I haven’t slipped yet.” He kept his hand there, his thumb stroking soft lines, waiting for a moment until he felt a sudden jab from beneath the skin.

“Did you just high five me?” he laughed as he watched her stomach faintly roll. Felicity beamed proudly as she put her hands on top of his. “I think they did, because you’re their father Oliver, our baby knows you.” “Back at you little pineapple.” He watched a happy tear slip from her eye before she brushed it back. “I can’t do this without you,” she added, whispered. “You won’t,” Oliver promised.

Rubbing her bulbous stomach she sighed happily, “Can you believe this started as a sesame seed?” His hand cupped her cheek while he kept the other splayed on her belly, “All of this started with you blowing through those doors almost a year ago. I haven’t stopped thinking about you since.” She kissed the palm of his hand, “I love you Oliver.” “I love you too.”

This wasn’t a one night stand. This wasn’t a reckless moment pushed by lust and wanting. This wasn’t a no strings attached sexual relationship. This wasn’t toothbrushes or staying over. This was love. This was a lifetime.

“I have something for you,” Felicity chirped as she leaned over the edge of the bed and returned with a large grey bag, tied at the handles with a black chiffon-ribbon bow. “Baby…,” Oliver hummed as he pushed aside the black tissue paper and spotted the gift inside. It was a soft towelling bathrobe with blue and white stripes, the quintessential father's day gift, next to socks.

“Put it on,” she pleaded as she clapped her hands excitedly. Oliver stood off the bed and indulged her, sliding each arm into the sleeves before jostling it up onto his shoulders. He folded it over his naked chest and tied it at the waist. “How does it look?”
he smiled as his hands shuffled the waist band of his sweatpants underneath.
“It almost makes me want to tear it off you,” she answered coyly as she held her arms out and
Oliver carefully helped her from the bed. “But there is more.”
“Are there slippers?” he laughed.
She patted his rear before she walked towards the door. “Follow me.”

A few minutes later and they were outside, standing in front of a closed garage.
“What are we doing out here?” he asked, looking from Felicity to the roller door and back to her.
“I got you something.” She pulled the garage door opener from a pocket in her little dress and
clicked it once, sparking the door to life.
Within seconds the door had fully retracted and Oliver was staring at the back end of a Ford
Mustang in a burnt orange colour that was more rust than it was paint.

The back was sitting on concrete blocks with an exhaust dropped from the undercarriage. There
was no back window and no trunk door and it was missing the entire back bumper. Tree dander
coated every surface inside the car and the front sat on sad, flat tires. The bonnet door was missing
as well as anything that would constitute an engine. But, structurally, it was a thing of beauty.

“I’m sorry it’s not a 68 like the one your dad had,” Felicity spoke as she followed Oliver around the
car, watching his eyes light up like Christmas trees.
He leaned in and studied the sleek front panels, not for what they were at that moment, rusted and
dented, but for what they had been decades before and what he knew they could be again.
“This is a ’65,” he hummed, “How did you...?”
He couldn’t even finish his sentence.
“Curtis and Roy helped and Roy got it here last night while we were out, are you surprised?”
A breathy, “very.”
“Did I do good?”
He opened the door and leaned in as Felicity stood looking over the backseat. The leather seat was
ripped and foam was showing through but she had no trouble imagining a day where it wouldn’t
be, a day when her and Oliver were riding in it with their children. Oliver in the front seat, the
oldest child along side him, cruising down a deserted coast highway with the windows down and
the salty breeze blowing through.
“Felicity, it’s perfect.”
He didn’t have any other words for it.
“It’s unfortunate I don’t think I’m limber enough to climb into that backseat with you,” she laughed
coquettishly.
“That’s okay,” his arms swamped her waist, “we have the rest of our lives.”
“How about we take this back to the bedroom,” she suggested before she bit her plump lower lip
and tugged on his robe.

He wasn’t turning down that invitation.
Moments later they were falling into their bedroom, hands frantically touching, holding, grabbing
while their lips kissed in a frenzy.
Felicity huffed as a sudden urge to pee stole her libido momentarily.
“I’ll be right back,” she laughed as she stepped away.

Oliver watched her disappear into the bathroom before he padded around to his side of the bed, but
before he could expedite the process by shucking his clothes, his phone rang.

The number was unknown, but he answered it regardless. “Hello?”
“We found him.” It was Slade. “We found Malcolm. He’s in Mexico and he’s all yours.”
Chapter End Notes

Lovely, I’m away this week so no updates xox
Felicity stood in the doorway of their bedroom, watching as Oliver moved hurriedly around the room, throwing clumps of clothes into a knapsack and muttering through a rushed packing list in his head. The torment in his eyes had darkened the morning despite the glorious rays of sunshine that engulfed their sanctuary, their home.

Words and thoughts were tossed around her head like a turbulent sea in a violent storm, but every time she opened her mouth to say what she knew she had to, the fear of the words took over and she clamped her mouth shut again.

Finally coming back to the reality that he wasn’t alone in the room, Oliver looked up from the other side of the bed and offered Felicity a muted smile that could have been anything, *I’m sorry, don’t worry, I have to…*

She watched him as he looped the buckle of the knapsack and lifted it off the bed. She studied his solid frame as he swooped the same onto his shoulder and trekked towards her. And then she watched him as his shoulder brushed past hers when he left the room.

He was just as afraid of speaking as she was.

After Oliver reached the bottom stair and when his hand reached for the door, Felicity finally found the words, “So that’s it, you’re going?” It wasn’t revolutionary or radical but it stilled Oliver in his tracks all the same.
He turned slowly, the pain even more vividly etched into the lines of his face as his eyes glazed over with unspent tears. He sniffed them back and held his rasped breath behind quivered lips. “I have to.” Was all he could muster, together with a smile that looked unbearably pained.

She stepped closer and grasped his hand in her own. She wasn’t sure who was trembling more. “Oliver you don’t,” she whispered as she let a tear escape her own eye.

She saw the love of her life wrestle with who he once was and who he had become, neither side willing to surrender.

“I’m a month away from giving birth to our child Oliver” she continued, her voice cracking as she spoke his name.

“I’ll be back before then,” his hand sunk into her cheek while the other stayed holding her hand as tight as he could without hurting her, “I promise.”

She wanted to believe that promise and she knew in her heart that he wanted to believe it too. But this was about something else, something more.

“I can’t go with you,” she breathed, the words almost silent.

He nodded. “I know, I don’t want you to come you need to stay here.” His eyes travelled to her swelling stomach.

She peeled his hand from her cheek and left it to drop to his side. “No Oliver, that’s not what I mean, I mean I can’t...” the tears sprung unexpectected from her eyes, and while it was in her every instinct to brush them away, she didn’t. “I can’t go with you down this path. I can't watch you leave,” she sobbed, her voice now thin and stretched, breaking after each word.

Oliver’s lungs rose tight against his chest as he sucked in air. His throat tightened and his brow became tortured.

But she had to continue.

“You know that if you go after him that you won’t come back to me the same and I can’t watch you destroy yourself Oliver.” Each word felt like a knife in her throat and like hot coals behind her eyes.

“What are you saying?” he asked, despite seeing the answer in her eyes.

“If you go,” she paused to stop the shaking in her voice as her watery eyes held onto him for as long as they could, “I won’t be here when you return.”

Her words echoed from the walls before silence fell between them for dragged moments that neither sought to fill. She looked down at her growing stomach and smoothed her palm down it as her chin dropped to her chest.

“I won’t stop you being a father but I can’t do this, I can’t follow you and I can't watch you leave,” she sobbed, her voice cracking and stretching as the words tumbled out.

“Felicity please,” he begged with anxious hands that twisted in the strap of his knapsack.

She looked up slowly, the tears now free flowing as she left them to burn tracks down her ruddy cheeks.

“Look me in the eyes and tell me that if you find Malcolm that you won’t kill him?”

He wanted to tell her what she wanted to hear, but he couldn’t, because that would be a lie and he knew it.

“You’re not this killer Oliver. That’s not you anymore, and I can’t watch you become what you’re not,” she added as she choked back more tears and curved her shoulders inwards, subconsciously protecting herself and their baby.

Oliver’s lips pulled tight and his brow grew dark. “After everything he did, after what he tried to do,” he argued, his words more brutal and loud than he had intended but the hatred coursing through his veins saw only anger.

“I understand,” she lifted her arm and touched her palm to his face, softening the agony that tormented it, “I can’t begin to imagine the pain he’s caused you Oliver, and I know that he
deserves to pay for all that he’s done, but at what cost to you? How much of yourself will you give him?”

She touched her free hand to her stomach, making a loop of their family through her body, as the pain banded across it like firecrackers and her face winced with every crack.

“You once told me that I was your light,” she whispered, forcing herself to swallow back the tears and the anguish that were thumping at her chest.

“You are.” A soft and quivering smile broke across his lips.

She steeled herself a few moments longer, holding the ache in her throat. “I’m afraid that if you go down this dark path that it will consume you. That it will take everything good in your heart and turn it shadowed. That you will live with regret and pain, and that you’ll hide away in darkness afraid of your own hands.”

Her hand slipped from her stomach and was caught by his open and trembling hand.

“I’m afraid that I won’t be enough to bring you back from that. That I’ll watch you destroy yourself, piece by piece until there is nothing left,” Felicity’s lips quivered over every word, her eyes glassy and her breath shaking, “and loosing you isn’t something my heart will survive.”

She took his hand and laid it on her stomach, splaying his fingers over the taut tee. “You will always be their father. I will never take that away from you. But I can’t love you and watch you crumble. I won’t. I can’t.”

She dropped his hand, leaving it to sit on her stomach of his own volition before she stepped back and severed the connection. “And I can’t watch you now.”

Her voice cracked just as the last word left off her lips before she walked into the living room and braced herself against the wall. She held her breath as she listened to him breathing through the wall. Her eyes closed, waiting.

And then she heard it.

The sound of the door opening and closing.

She prayed it was a cruel twist of her imagination, but it wasn’t.

Seconds turned into minutes and the only noises to be heard in the house were the tiny sobs she let free. The sound of his bike driving away simply cemented what she already knew. She was alone.

She didn’t recall sliding down the wall, but she was soon sitting on the cold wooden floor with her head in her hands, sobbing.

Hours later found Felicity sitting as cross-legged as she could manage on the floor of the nursery watching the tips of the trees sway in the breeze outside the window. Her eyes were red and sore but dry. She had no more tears to give.

There was a sharp but fleeting pain tugging across the underside of her stomach and she found herself gently swaying with it as best she could while she tried to calm her breathing. In through the nose, out through the mouth. She repeated the mantra in her head as she tried to focus on remembering what they had learned in Lamaze classes, but all she could think about was how Oliver would miss the rest of them as he followed a vendetta that would likely claim his soul.

Her eyes misted with dry sobs as she also realised he would miss the baby shower that Thea and Donna had planned for the coming Saturday. She couldn’t bear to think about asking them to cancel it, knowing that they had worked so hard to make everything perfect.
She continued to sway slowly as her eyes lulled closed. She placed both hands on her stomach, either side, and sighed softly.

“It’s not you baby, don’t you worry, your daddy, he loves you,” she whispered, her voice cracking in parts, “He loves you so much.”

She folded her lips slowly into her mouth; in and out.

“He has his demons sweetheart,” she mulled quietly, “He tries to fight them.” Her voice broke as the last word shivered from her lips.

“He’ll always be there for you, I know that with all my heart little pineapple.”

Felicity’s eyes peeked open when she heard the faint sound of the front door open. She couldn't be sure if she was imagining it, desperately hoping it was Oliver returning to her, to them.

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

She heard the creak of the fourth stair but she was too afraid to move. Too scared to discover it was nothing but a cruel tease from her desperate heart.

She sensed a shadow enter the room; a presence swelling in the doorway. But she couldn't turn around, she wouldn't, terrified of being wrong.

"Felicity," his voice was soft and shaking and for a fleeting moment Felicity wondered if it was no more than a wayward breeze teasing her ears and torturing her heart.

Hot tears sprung from her eyes, stinging the creases as they pooled in the corners.

She unfolded her legs, quieted her thumping heart and turned slowly on the floor. It was Oliver.

The first thing she noticed was how small he looked. Ordinarily he would fill every part of a doorway that he stood in, but at that moment, as his shoulders were curved inward and his body was shrunken, he looked tiny and defeated. Just the husk of the man she loved. His eyes were trenches of dark shadows. His lips were dry and his cheeks wind slapped.

She wanted to hug him, to make sure he was real, but she was afraid to find out that he wasn't.

"Oliver?" she whispered as her hand absently stroked her stomach.

He fell to his knees in front of her; a broken man full of regret.

She reached out and touched his shoulder. It was real, not some apparition sent to destroy her.

"I promised you both that I would never leave, and I won’t, please forgive me." It was all he could say, each word spoken as a confession.

She could feel the baby moving, as though they were pushing against her stomach to be closer to him. He kept his head lowered. "You were right, I would have killed him."

His hands were shaking at his side and his tone was troubled and rough as though each word stung.

"I would take his life without a moment’s hesitation. I would watch him die. I might even relish seeing it drain from his eyes. I’m terrified of enjoying it, I need it. I want it. Until it was done and gone and I realised that I would have become exactly what Malcolm always said I was.”

Oliver hung his head low, the sigh that bled from his lips one that was strangled as distraught, calming only when Felicity sunk her palm against his cheek. “I wouldn’t have come back to you the same,” he admitted, both to himself and to her, “I would have stolen your light and dragged you into the darkness.” He choked back a wretched cry as his eyes slowly lifted to catch just a glimpse of her face. “I would have hated myself, watching my life destroy yours as well.”
Her hand grew wet with his sodden tears as her thumb smoothed over his cheek, urging him to look up, to see her, and to lay his troubles out there on the light maple floor. “This vendetta,” he breathed as she managed to coax his eyes upwards, “It wouldn’t have ended until one of us was dead.”

It was a truth he couldn’t escape. Revenge had become an addiction that blackened him with each hit. He’d always known that, but faced with the cost; the woman he loved and the child he desperately wanted, he realised it wasn’t worth the fee it demanded.

“I know that now, but I don’t want that,” he begged as he clasped his hand over hers, “my place is here, with you, with you both.” His other hand reached out and touched her stomach.

Finally, she spoke, “You were gone so long, I thought I’d lost you.”

He brushed back a solitary tear that was weaving down her cheek. “Baby I’m so sorry. I needed to do a few things, I gave John all the information I had.” He managed a weak smile, “And I told my parents that I was sorry I couldn’t do what I’d once promised to.” He sucked in the air as the smell of the oak tree in the cemetery lingered in his senses, “I told them that I finally had a chance at the life they had always tried to have. The life that I know they wanted for me, and for Thea. Not revenge.”

“And I had to do one more thing,” he said as he stood up and took her with him. She brushed her hands down her sides while Oliver unzipped his jacket. She noticed him wince as he worked the dusty leather sleeves slowly down his arms before it dropped to the floor in a crumpled heap. Then he carefully navigated the tee off his body and turned around, exposing his back and a large white bandage on his lower left shoulder blade.

“Oliver what happened?” she gasped, recoiling just a step. He rested his chin on his shoulder and urged, “Take it off. Princess it’s okay.” With hesitant fingers she carefully peeled back the top two corners of the surgical tape that carefully held the swab on.

It soon hung loose and exposed a fresh tattoo that was red and slightly inflamed around the edges. Her finger hovered above it, tracing the outline of it through the air. The design was a sun with flames like twisted petals reaching out towards the talons of his eagle, with a crescent moon at rest near the curve of his ribs. It was big, probably smaller than her balled fist.

“What is it?” she whispered as the lines of it mesmerized her. “It’s you.” He turned slowly until his face was just above hers, looking down, “The sun warms the coldest days and the moon can light up the darkest of skies, you’ve done both for me.” He held her hand, sandwiched between his. “The eagle flies towards you. I fly towards you and I won’t ever turn away from that. I will always stay with you. I will always protect you. I will always love you.” He took her hand and pressed a chase kiss on the back of her shaking knuckles. “I just hope it’s not too late.”

She shook her head slowly, “It's not.” And it wasn’t. “But are you sure?”

She asked the question needing to know that he wasn’t coerced or unsure. To know that he didn’t want the path, for himself, not just for them.

“I’ve never been more sure.” His eyes were soft, his mouth turned into the faintest of smiles. He was sure. “I’m happy. I’m finally happy because I’ve found everything I wanted in you. Malcolm will get his, in this life or the next but I won’t let him take this. I won’t let him destroy us too.” He danced another kiss across the back of her hand and up towards her wrist. “I’m not that man, because of you.”
She slipped her hand from between his. “No Oliver, you’re not that man,” she whispered as she placed her hand on his naked chest, over his heart, “because you never really were. Not in here, not where it matters.”

---

**[Tuesday]**

Oliver jogged up the front stairs of the house, stopping to inhale the delicate scent of the peonies in a blue ceramic pot near the front door as Jax shook off the pleasant evening jog. “You’re getting old,” Oliver teased as Jax lumbered up the stairs with his tongue flopping from him mouth.

He toed off his trainers inside the door as he ran the back of his hand across his forehead just as the clock in the entry announced the time, exactly 8pm.

Jax barked their arrival as he trotted off into the kitchen, either to find Felicity or a fresh bowl of food. He found both.

Oliver followed the playful yaps of the excited dog, who seemed to revert to a puppy when Felicity offered him a scratch behind his ear.

Oliver tugged down the zipper of his sweater as he entered the kitchen and found Felicity sitting at the breakfast table with Jax faithfully sitting with his head on her shrinking lap. But as he walked closer he also saw her eyes; puffy and red from tears long since cried.

His instant thought was the worst imaginable, but he had only been gone from the house for a little over 40 minutes.

“Baby, is everything okay?” he asked softly as he crossed the room quickly.

She looked up at him, slightly confused by his question until she touched her eye and suddenly recounted that she’d spent 30 of the last 40 minutes quietly crying alone at the kitchen table.

“I’m fine,” she sniffed before offering him an apologetic smile for the worry tarnishing his face. “You’ve been crying,” he pointed out as he pulled out a chair and sat just ahead on her, his knees brushing against hers. “Are you having second thoughts about us?” he whispered the question, for a moment afraid that the answer would be yes after Sunday.

Her smiled brightened as she shook her head immediately while she reached out a hand and laid it on his knee. “No, of course not,” she offered genuinely, “this is just something stupid.” Her cheeks flushed a warm pinkish colour as her bottom lip folded into her mouth.

“Tell me,” he goaded with a playful smile, the hitched breath in his throat now dissipated knowing it wasn’t second thoughts.

Her eyes stayed glued to the lip of the oak table as her fingers picked mindlessly at the bevelled edge. “After you left, I got hungry,” she lamented, which wasn’t something out of the ordinary. Given the shrinking size of her stomach as it got pushed into other organs and the latest bout of reflux she’d been cursed with, Felicity was eating smaller meals more frequently to keep the tricky balance between famished and overstuffed. “So I had a yoghurt,” she finished, blinking up at Oliver with troubled eyes.

Her eyes stayed glued to the lip of the oak table as her fingers picked mindlessly at the bevelled edge. “After you left, I got hungry,” she lamented, which wasn’t something out of the ordinary. Given the shrinking size of her stomach as it got pushed into other organs and the latest bout of reflux she’d been cursed with, Felicity was eating smaller meals more frequently to keep the tricky balance between famished and overstuffed. “So I had a yoghurt,” she finished, blinking up at Oliver with troubled eyes.

Oliver wet his lower lip with his tongue as his eyebrows ruffled while he tried to get from one fact to the other. “Was the yoghurt okay?”

Felicity shrugged noncommittal, “It was fine I suppose,” she answered cynically. A sigh broke out from between her lips before she continued, “But it wasn’t what I wanted.”

His eyes scouted the room, reading himself to leave at a moment’s notice to get whatever burger or fried chicken or dessert treat she requested. “What did you want? I can go get it.”
Her lips pouted out into a smile before her eyes became wet with new tears, “I really am turning into the cliché pregnant woman that has cravings and cries about silly things,” she huffed as she tried to suck back the tears before they became a flood.

“Just tell me what you want Princess.”
She brushed the back of her hand across her cheek. “You can’t get it.”
“Not if you don’t tell me,” he joked while his finger raised her chin.
“I miss Aruba,” she admitted, and in truth it was thinking about how happy they had been there that had actually set off the waterworks, it was merely compounded by the craving which came hand in hand. “I miss quenepa and I miss pastechi. And I can’t fly there.”
His fingers ran through her hair, still a little damp from the shower she’d had after work.
“No, I don’t suppose you can,” he laughed softly, “Your arms will get tired.”
She wacked his shoulder with the back of her hand before she sobbed out a laugh, “Are you telling terrible dad jokes now?”

He stood up and pulled Felicity into an embrace that gently rocked them both side to side. “Give me ten minutes to shower,” he said as her head rose off his chest and her eyes blinked up at him, “We’ll leave the curtains open tonight to let the moon in, and the window to let the breeze in, just like we did in Aruba.” He kissed her forehead gently before he added, “I’ll even put some salt water by the window so it smells like the ocean when the breeze comes in.”
She swayed slowly in his arms with her eyes gently closed. “And then what?” she asked softly.
“Then we’ll make love like we did in Aruba, and we’ll take all night.”
“All night?” she hummed.
Oliver kissed the lobe of her ear before sucking the supple skin just beneath it. “All night,” he purred.
“Skip the shower,” she said bluntly as she unravelled herself from his arms and walked Oliver towards the door.
“I’m sweaty baby.”
She lifted his shirt with two pinched fingers and looked over his glistening chest with playful curiosity. “I know, I like it.”

---

[Wednesday, 19 June 2013: 36 Weeks, Papaya]

It was a little before lunch when Curtis skipped into Felicity’s office and tore her attention away from the screen when he plopped a box onto her desk. It was a simple box, a natural brown and a little larger than a shoebox, bound in jute twine with a bright sunflower propped on the top.

“What’s this?” she asked as she pulled out the pen drooping from her lips.
“It’s not from me,” Curtis replied as he made himself comfortable on the chair.
Felicity lifted the flower and plucked a small card out from underneath it.

**Hope this helps, Love Oliver**

“It’s from Oliver,” she gushed, a sudden urge to cry barely held at bay as her fingers traced the fibrous string.

Curtis clasped his hands together as he leaned forward and hummed in anticipation.

“It’s from Oliver,” Felicity repeated, only this time with her eyes honed in on Curtis. He bobbed his head in acknowledgement. “I know.”

“The same Oliver who ordered you out of the office.” Curtis continued to nod, not catching Felicity’s hints that she wasn’t prepared to open the gift from Oliver in front of him.

She sighed with a smile teasing her lips. “Curtis, I love you like a brother, so I’m going to be perfectly blunt with you,” she tapped the lid of the box as she stood up. “There is a high chance this box contains something inappropriate for our boss/employee relationship, so I’m going to ask you to leave the room while I open it.”

Curtis laughed out boisterously for only a moment before the realisation dawned on him.

“Oh, right, shit, of course,” he mumbled as he stood, brushed his palms down his brown corduroy slacks and clipped his way back towards the door.

Once she was safely alone in the room, Felicity slowly undid the knotted string and picked the lid off the box. Half expecting to find some lingerie or something equally as scandalous, Felicity smiled when she was looking at a small tray of quenepa.

She picked up her phone and dialled his number while she brushed back a happy tear.

“They came?” Oliver answered his phone, the excitement in his voice palpable.

“It’s like you’re trying to make me blabber and cry,” Felicity sniffed, her words fragile and her breath choked up in her throat.

“I promised you anything you wanted Princess, just don’t asked what I had to promise and or threaten to get them,” he joked, the happiness in his voice warming her ear.

“I love you,” she answered, trembled and smiling.

“I love you too.”

A few moments of silence lapsed between them before Oliver spoke up again, “I’ll meet you after work for Lamaze class tonight.” It wasn’t so much of a question as it was a statement of fact. They had done so for the last four weeks, but Oliver mentioned it now to be sure that Sunday hadn’t changed that.

Felicity crinkled up her nose as her lips dropped into a frown, it was the week she had been dreading. “They’re going to show the video this week,” just saying the words felt slimy on her tongue, “the one of a live birth.”

“Are you squeamish?” he laughed.

She screwed up her face tighter, “Are you?”

She listened to his deep breaths down the phone. “You know how I feel about your cunt,” he whispered, rasped and gravelled and altogether so irrationally sexual that she felt her legs quiver and her sex spark to life.

“Oliver!” she snapped back, unwilling to admit just how turned on he had instantly made her. He shrugged, as though talking about it was the most natural thing he could imagine but knowing full well that at that moment her cheeks would have reddened and her throat would have been coated in a pinkish sheen. “You have the best looking cunt I’ve ever seen.”

She bit back a giggle. “Stop saying it,” she bickered.

“Mmmm,” he hummed salaciously in a move that he knew would have her gripping the edge of the table and breathing through a teased heat.

And he was right, she did exactly that, just with a narrowed brow as she decided to get her own
back. “A baby is going to come out of it,” she snipped succinctly.
But her plan to douse him with a bucket of reality didn’t seem too dampen his spirits in the slightest.
“Nothing could turn me off your cunt.”
“Oliver!” she retorted, brusquely but with a smirk.

He laughed, satisfied with her reactions. “I’ll see you tonight, we’ll go to class, meet Thea and Roy
for burgers afterwards and then I’ll take you home and show you just how much I enjoy your Cu…” his sentence stopped abruptly, before he spluttered out a replacement word, “cup.”
“Cup?” Felicity snorted.
“I really like drinking out of your cup,” he spoke dryly, and she could almost hear the cringe in his expression.
She propped her hand against her waist as she smiled, “Thea just walked into your office didn’t she?”
“Mmmhmm.”
“Not so tough after all.”
He sighed deeply. “I love you.”
“I love you too. I’ll see you tonight,” she paused to pluck a quenepa from the bunch, “My cup looks forward to it.”

Felicity spent much of the Lamaze class with her eyes squinting and her forehead wrinkled as she forced herself to appreciate the ‘miracle of birth’ regardless of how squeamish all that fleshy pink stretching and tendrils of violently-red blood made her. The fact was it was going to happen, whether or not she was unconvinced that her body could even do that. She had a little over four weeks to convince herself that biology wise, she could do this. Her body, or temple as the attractive older woman with a calm voice and soft grey curls running the class was fond of saying, was designed to do this.

Or at least that was what Felicity intended to inscribe on her hand in vivid when the day came.
“Your temple can push out a watermelon, no biggy.”

Oliver had taken it all in his stride. When she grimaced, he carefully embraced her, letting her lean into his solid chest while he sat behind her. When her eyes widened as the baby crowned, he let her squeeze the blood from his hand until his fingers turned white, without so much as a soft groan in protest.

He had been the doula’s star pupil over the weeks, perfectly suited to hold her weight in so many of the birthing positions without breaking a sweat. He drunk in every tip, every method and every word of encouragement, and as much as Felicity wanted to hate how insanely calm he was with all of this, having him not freak out over the act of giving birth would inevitably be in her best interests, because she wasn’t willing to wager on how calm she was going to be able to remain.

She felt him move behind her as he curtained back her hair from her cheek and brushed a soft kiss against her rosy apple.
“Did you want a drink?” he asked, his voice warm and soft as it tickled her ear.
She nodded as she looked over to the small drink station across the room. “Tea please,” she replied softly. Now that the novelty of decafe had worn off, Felicity opted for something that made her feel rather regal when ordering it.

Oliver made his way over to the table where a few mingling mothers-to-be smiled at him. Felicity found herself smiling as she drunken up the sight of it. Five weeks ago when they had first walked
into the room, a few minutes late, with Oliver in his riding leathers and his hands stained with faded grease, fresh from work as the nightmare traffic had seen him delayed, and Felicity dressed head to toe in polished corporate attire, due to a meeting that dictated the same, they must have looked like a strange pairing indeed.

A typical uptown girl with her downtown man, rebelling (in all likelihood) against a Catholic School upbringing and a silver-spoon life. It wasn’t true, but the puckish looks and the quiet mutters had alluded to that assumption. However by the end of the second class, Oliver was sharing organic muffin recipes with a handful of ladies and proving himself to be hands down the best birthing partner a woman could hope for and the benchmark the other pregnant ladies in the room were holding their partners to.

They stayed just long enough for Felicity to finish her tea and for Oliver to gain at least two new clients who were interested in buying a reconditioned bike from him.

It was almost 8pm when they stepped out into the night air. The ground was glistened with fresh rain but the skies had cleared enough that they could make the short walk to Big Belly Burger to meet up with Thea and Roy without an umbrella. It had become something of a ritual, one that had Felicity salivating at the thought of; dipping french fries into a strawberry thickshake.

It was almost another hour later, with her stomach full from the concoction, that the four of them stepped back into the brisk night air.

“Where did you park?” Thea asked as Oliver pulled his phone from his pocket, finally remembering he’d turned it off before going into class.
“Just over...” Felicity paused to get her bearings before she pointed west, “down there.”
Oliver stepped back from the huddle as his phone lit up with missed calls.

“We're going to a late movie,” Thea prattled as Felicity yawned at the mere mention of it, “so we'll see you back at home.”
The younger Queen looked up to say goodbye to her brother but found him standing a few feet away with his phone pressed against his ear and his brow furrowed.

Oliver was listening to the first of many voicemail messages left by John.
“We got him. Malcolm is in custody. We got the son of a bitch, but Oliver you need to call me back as soon as you get this.”
Next message. “Oliver, man, pick up.”
Third message.
“Oliver, shit, look, we have Malcolm, but we found something. He’s set you up, told The Scorpions that you did some shit. He’s had you and Felicity tailed. You need to call me back. We’ve got officers going to your house. I think you need to both get somewhere safe, Amanda has organised something...”
Oliver didn’t hear the rest of the messages as his hand, and the phone, fell from his ear while he looked across to where Felicity was standing with Thea and Roy.

His eyes caught sight of a single headlight, a motorbike, hurtling towards them and weaving in and out of traffic. As if in slow motion Oliver saw a hand lift off the handlebars on the approach and something metallic caught the reflection of the streetlamp above.

He knew what that was.
“Get down!” he screamed, his voice strained and curdled as he ran forward.

The four cracking sounds echoed off the pavement and thundered in the once still air. 
Felicity was in his arms as time lapsed. Her eyes were wide and scared, terrified. Roy had Thea on the ground and a sudden eruption of screams broke into the night.

When her hands lifted from her sides he saw they were covered in blood as her lips gaped. All he was thinking about was her. Nothing else mattered.

“Felicity, oh my god you’re bleeding,” Thea shrieked as she clambered up from the pavement, her elbows scraped and dirtied. Felicity shook her head. “No, No, it’s not me,” she stammered, her whole body shaking. “It’s not my blood.” She looked down at Oliver, her eyes distraught, “It’s Oliver’s.”

The pain hit him the moment the bullet hit his thigh, but it didn’t matter. All that mattered was that she was okay.

“You’re okay,” he whispered, relief glowing in his eyes.

Thea’s panicked sobs drowned out his steady breaths. “Oliver you’re bleeding.” His sister was beside herself as Roy held her tight to his chest, her svelte frame unable to hold herself up. Felicity was in shock. Her eyes were dry as she couldn’t make herself blink. Each breath she took was laboured as a sharp chill filled her lungs. But she couldn’t talk, words escaping her.

Oliver took her shoulders gently in his large hands. He wanted to pull her close, hold her tight against his chest and tuck her head beneath his chin. But his vision was choppy as blood ran down his leg and before he unwittingly passed out, he needed to know she was safe.

“You need to go home, John has sent some officers there,” he spoke concisely, with his eyes anchored to hers. “You need to stay with them and call John. Take Thea and go.”

Felicity blinked like she heard his every word but she didn’t respond.

Thea sobbed, “Oliver you need a hospital.”

“You’ve been shot,” Felicity whispered, her voice hoarse and trembling.

“I know, but baby it’s nothing, I’ve had worse than this.” The pain was excruciating but he forced a smile. He could feel the sticky rivers of blood as they began to clot down his leg, but all he cared about was making them leave. Everything else could wait. He could wait.

“Oliver we need to get you to the hospital,” his baby sister pleaded, her tone rife with fear. Fear she would lose him, just like they had lost Tommy.

He turned his head towards her, a smile softly lifting his lips despite his agony. “Thea, I’ll get to a hospital but first I need you and Felicity to call John and get somewhere safe. Are you listening to me?”

“No,” her head shaking became more forceful and her eyes a little skittish as she blinked down towards the pavement. “I need to go.” She stopped speaking to breathe a long and laboured breath, in through the nose, out through the mouth. “To.” Again. “The hospital.”

She looked directly at him, her eyes wide and unflinching. “My water just broke.”
“Look after her, I'm fine,” Oliver sulked in the back of the ambulance as the EMTs strapped him onto the gurney.
“You're bleeding,” Felicity snapped brusquely as she breathed through the building discomfort.
“And you're in labour,” he snapped back.
“Last time I checked my body is designed to get this baby out. Yours isn't designed to get shot.” He opened his mouth to retort, but he had no comeback and both the EMTs sniggered.
“So shut u…,” she paused to focus on the deep squeeze of a contraction, “…p and do what they
“say,” she finished once the contraction had passed. “Caitlin is meeting us at the hospital.”

“Just bandage it up,” he nodded to the EMT in the back with them as the ambulance pulled away from the kerb.

“Oliver don’t be…” she paused again, *breathe in, breathe out*, that one dissipated without pain and she sighed pleasantly at the reprieve, “…ridiculous.”

His teeth were grinding together as each bump in the road made the pain sear through his leg, but that could wait. He’d had worse. “I’m not missing this Felicity,” he puffed out the words as one of his fists knotted into his shirt at his side.

“You won’t,” she soothed as she leant back against the ambulance wall, trying to find a position that ease the dull ache in her back, “Caitlin will be able to stop the labour, it’s too early.” The words came out from Felicity’s mouth like gospel and Oliver wanted to accept them as such because neither of them were willing to admit that they couldn’t guarantee that.

He blinked lazily as a sudden wave of light-headedness hit him. He couldn’t think about the weakness of vision or the way he could feel the blood pumping into the wound despite the tightly wound gauze. Just fades of blurry white light and then thick blankets of midnight.

“Are you okay?” Felicity panicked, embedding her nails into his arm as she clung to him. His eyes blinked open, but everything looked and sounded so distant, as though he was seeing it all from underwater. “Fine,” he managed before he blacked out a second time.

He came too looking at Felicity's terrified face. He knew he was slipping in and out of consciousness but he fought every instinct his body was screaming at him. He wasn't going to miss a damn thing. Not today. *Even if it meant taping his goddamn eyes open.*

The sirens were blaring and the ambulance was swerving around traffic when he gritted his teeth and pushed his hand between hers. “I’m not going to miss a thing Princess, I promise.”

His head felt heavy as it tipped back against the headrest beneath him while his eyes dozed closed with the words replaying in his head. *I’m not going to miss a thing.*

Fifteen minutes later the EMT helped Felicity from the back of the ambulance just as Caitlin, dressed in an immaculately tailored ‘little black dress’ ran up on four inch Jimmy Choos.

“What the hell am I looking at?” she quipped as Oliver was wheeled out on a gurney.

“Oh just a normal Wednesday night,” Felicity joked behind a taut smile as another contraction hit. “He goes with them, you come with me,” Caitlin ordered before she grabbed Felicity’s hand and squeezed it reassuringly.

“I’m going with her,” Oliver objected while he tried to push himself up off the gurney. “Sir, you’ve lost a lot of blood and you still have a bullet in your leg, we need to take you to emergency.”

Oliver cursed his leg as it refused to offer any assistance in his attempt to stand up. “I’m going with her.”

“Oliver Queen, you have an open wound and you’re bleeding everywhere, if you think I’m letting you into a delivery suite like that you are straight up crazy,” Caitlin order as her narrowed eyes practically nailed him to the gurney.

Felicity took his hand into hers, it was cold and clammy. “Baby, you need to go with them, I’ll be fine,” she pleaded before she leaned in and pressed a languid kiss against his forehead. A thunderous rumble echoed through the night as a motorbike pulled up a few feet away and Thea
climbed off the back of it.
“I told you to go with the Police,” Oliver said sternly as Thea ran up to the growing crowd. The younger Queen shrugged as she pulled the helmet from her head. “And I chose to ignore you,” she remarked cynically.
“No one fucking listens to me,” he sighed irately.
“Thea, go with Oliver and Oliver don’t give them any trouble,” Felicity insisted and the siblings nodded obtusely.
“Try not to have this baby without me,” Oliver panted as he felt another slap of lightness. Felicity smiled, trying her best to ignore the building contraction she knew would only be seconds away. “I won’t. Caitlin will stop it, just get fixed up, okay?” She bit her lips together when it hit, muting the urge to cry out as Oliver nodded and they wheeled him away with Thea a few steps behind.

“How far apart are the contractions?” Caitlin asked as she helped Felicity towards the hospital entrance.
“About four minutes,” Felicity replied, getting the words out as quickly as she could. Caitlin stopped a few feet from the door and turned to face Felicity. “You know I can’t stop this labour Felicity, you’re already in active labour.” Felicity nodded slowly as Caitlin continued, “You will come out of this hospital with a baby, it’s just a matter of timing.”
“I know,” Felicity sobbed softly, “I just needed Oliver to leave, I had to tell him what he needed to hear.”

__________________________

Oliver could see Thea pacing the hallway outside the small emergency room they had wheeled Oliver into and it was an exact mimic of how he felt at that moment before the surgeon burst through the swing door, a nurse close behind.

“What do we have?”
He spoke like words cost more time than he had, and Oliver was appreciative of the speed. “GWS to the upper thigh, no through and through, patient is responsive and no nerve loss recorded, but loss of consciousness on route,” the EMT prattled off just as urgently. The surgeon peeled back the gauze on Oliver’s leg, his jeans now shredded either side almost to the waistband. “Bleeding has slowed, so it didn’t hit an artery, that’s good.” He looked back at the nurse who didn’t look a day older than Thea.
“Kristen, have them book an OR and then pack the wound.”
Oliver grabbed at the white coat of the surgeon with a greying beard and a head shaved in the face of baldness. “Can’t you just stitch it up for now?”
A soft chuckle danced from the older man’s mouth. “Do you have somewhere else to be, Mr,” he looked down at his chart, “Queen?”
“Actually, yeah,” Oliver quipped back as his shoulders rustled against the stiff hospital linen. “Well, it will have to wait.” He turned to the nurse who was readying what she would need, “I’ll be back in twenty minutes.”

__________________________

“Oh my god, I just noticed your dress,” Felicity cried as Caitlin helped her onto the bed in the birthing suit, “You were on a date weren’t you?”
Caitlin’s painted pink lips turned up into a smile as her head dropped towards a one-shoulder shrug. “Iris is parking the car, she’ll be up soon to keep you company.”
“I’m so sorry,” Felicity blubbered, now having almost no control over her rollercoaster of emotions.
“Hey now,” Caitlin perched Felicity’s chin on her finger, “even if I wasn’t the one delivering this
baby, I would be here as arguably your best friend.”
Felicity brushed tears back from her cheeks before more sprung up. “Are you going to get baby
gunk over your nice clothes?”
Caitlin laughed spritely. “I’m going to go borrow some scrubs as soon as Iris gets here. No baby
gunk.”

Felicity dropped her head to the pillow and squeezed her eyes closed as she tried to make sense of
the bedlam that a once normal Wednesday night had unraveled into, but she had nothing.
“I need to check how dilated your cervix is,” she heard Caitlin say as she walked close to her ear.
Felicity hummed with her eyes still closed as she listened to the snapping sound of rubber gloves
being fed onto hands. She plucked one eye open as Caitlin tented Felicity’s legs at the knees,
pushed them together quite uncomfortably and then parted them like the Red Sea while the soles
of her feet stayed touching.
“This is going to be pretty awful,” Caitlin warned with an apologetic smile.
“Everything after making this baby has been,” Felicity quipped back, her tears now replaced with
biting sarcasm and angst.
“The start and the end are always the best.”
Felicity squeezed her eyes closed again as another contraction hit and she felt a different sort of
pressure between her legs momentarily.
“You’re about 6 centimetres dilated,” Caitlin remarked as she peeled off the gloves and tossed
them in the trash.

Felicity’s arm banded across her eyes as a few, nearly silent sobs shook her chest. “Isn’t it too soon,
I’m only 36 weeks.”
Caitlin walked around the side of the bed and clasped Felicity’s hand into hers. “It is early, but
everything is formed in that little baby, they have everything they need.”
Felicity’s lips folded inward as she sniffed back more tears. “Will they be okay?”
“They’ll be fine,” Caitlin replied as she soothed her hand through Felicity’s hair, “I’ll make sure of
it.”

Felicity nodded into the darkness that her arm across her eyes put the room into as her lips quivered
through a smile and her head thumped with one chant, over and over: not without Oliver.

Oliver winced as the seemingly novice hands cleaned and prepared his wound for surgery. It
seemed like hours, even though it had been only minutes and he was anxious to leave before it
became literal hours.

“Sorry,” she said softly as she continued her diligent work, “at least they’ll put you under for the
surgery so you won’t feel anything.”
“How long is all of this going to take?” Oliver gritted as his hand anxiously tapped the side of his
unscathed leg.
“A couple of hours and then you’ll be admitted, but you should be back up and walking in a few
days.”
Oliver shook his head furiously as he looked down at the wound, now circled with dry blood. “I
don’t have that kind of time, you could see the bullet, can’t you just take it out?”
“The surgeon will want to check it didn’t damage anything else, like nick a bone or something.”
He tensed against the bed and rocked his head from side to side. “I need you to stay still Mr
Queen.”

He needed to get out of there.
The contractions were now barely two minutes apart and Felicity was gripping the side of the bed harder than she was Iris’ slender hand that was caught in her other.
“Breathe through it Felicity, it’s going to be okay,” Iris soothed as she wiped a cool, damp cloth across Felicity’s forehead.

Everything ached, from her throat as it tensed when she held her breath, to her lower back that felt like a marching band was parading across it but all she could do was look down at the IV in her hand and quietly mourn how this moment wasn’t anything like she had pictured it.

“Felicity,” Caitlin spoke as she adjusted the foetal monitor across Felicity’s stomach, “the contractions are getting more intense and closer together which means you’ve moved into the transitional stage.”
Felicity had read the books, she knew what that meant, but she asked the question all the same.
“How much longer until I need to push?”
“It seems like this baby is in a rush to come out,” Caitlin offered a bleak smile, knowing her friend as she did and none of this had been in the plan the three of them had set out, “an hour, maybe two if it slows.”
“Is there anything you can do to slow it down?” Felicity asked as she looked past Iris and at the door, hoping it would open and Oliver would appear.

“Do you remember how I told you that the movies always show the women giving birth lying on their back with their feet up?” Felicity nodded. “You said that it always annoys you when you see it because it’s the worst way to give birth,” Felicity managed to get out before she huffed through a contraction that reddened and swelled her cheeks and covered her forehead in a veil of sweat. “And how the best way to get labour progressing was to move around and switch positions.”
“And let gravity do some of the work,” Iris added. She’d heard the speech a million times before. Caitlin looked from one of the women to the other. “Let’s use that and make gravity our bitch.” She gently lowered the bed until it was almost flat and propped Felicity’s legs up with a two-pillow tower.

Felicity looked up at the clock hung above the wall. It had been an hour since they arrived. She needed more time.

Oliver had been moved from the ER to another exam room and Thea was pacing the length of that room when the surgeon returned.
“Sorry, I was delayed,” he offered offhandedly as he walked towards the bed.
“Is my brother going to be okay?” Thea asked with a panicked voice and her arms hugged around her willowy frame.
“He’ll be just fine. I’ll go in, repair any damage the bullet might have done, remove the bullet, sew him up then admit him for observation.”
Oliver tugged at the neck of the hospital gown he was now wearing as though it was becoming increasingly tight in his anxious state. It had already been too long.

“I don’t have time for that,” he gritted, “just pluck it out and sew it up. Do it right here, right now,” he added as he nodded towards the tray of sterile implements, including a scalpel.
“This isn’t a back alley set-up Mr Queen, while your life isn’t in any real danger right now, simply ‘plucking’ the bullet out could do some serious damage,” he stated curtly as he did air quotes around Oliver’s suggestion. “Not to mention doing something like that without putting you under
will be excruciatingly painful.”

Oliver’s lips growled, “do I look like pain bothers me?”
It was clear the Doctor had already made a judgment about his tattoos, wiry beard, moppy hair and leather jacket – and the fact it was a gunshot wound that got him admitted late in the evening didn’t help – so Oliver was going to use that assumption he was shit stain on society to hopefully help expedite matters. “Just give me a shot of whiskey and something to bite down on and we can both get out of here much sooner.”

Thea settled Oliver’s shoulder back into the bed with a stern look on her face. “Maybe you should listen to them.”

“She’ll understand,” Thea wept, unable to hold her tears at bay any longer, “What about Tommy?”
Oliver pulled his sister closer to the bed and laced his fingers with hers. “Tommy was in worse shape Thea, you don’t have to be worried, I’m fine. You don’t get to get rid of me that easily Speedy.”
She let a bleak smile touch her lips as she bobbed her head in a soft nod.

“But I can’t miss this, not a single moment of it. Felicity is the good in my life and this baby is the start of something that will be better than anything I’ve ever done. I was never looking for redemption, but with them I have a shot at it.”

Thea fell into his chest with heavy sobs that shook her small frame as they hugged. With his lips near her ear and hidden behind a curtain of dark hair, Oliver whispered, “I need you to create a diversion.”

She pulled back just a fraction, quizzing him with her tempestuous eyes while he begged her with his.

She blinked, kissed his cheek and pulled away from the embrace. She ambled towards the end of the bed where the doctor and nurse were standing and steadied her resolve. She had always trusted him before.

The last contraction lifted Felicity’s back off the bed as she yelled out in desperation. She was now 10 centimetres, the urge to push could start anytime.

“More ice?” Iris asked softly as she dabbed Felicity’s flushed cheeks.
Felicity shook her head.
“Lip balm?”
She shook her head again.
“Funny story or witty banter?” she sighed quietly, her eyes sombre with emotion.
“I want Oliver,” Felicity breathed, her voice soft and thin, emotions fraying the edge of each word.
“I know sweetheart, I know. He’ll be here soon, I’m sure of it.”

Iris and Caitlin’s eyes met across the bed. Neither of them were willing to bet money on that hope, but they hoped it all the same.

Thea screamed in pain as she doubled over near the wall of the exam room, her nails clawing into the lip of the sink as her other arm wrapped tightly around her stomach.

“Miss, is everything okay?” the Doctor exclaimed as both him and the nurse turned their back on Oliver to see to Thea’s dramatic outburst.

Oliver leaned over to the nearby surgical tray and grabbed a fistful of clean cotton swabs and
jammed them into his mouth before he collected the scalpel, tore off the sheets and the temporary bandage and steeled himself with three sharp inhales of air through his nose to ready himself for the next task.

The pain was beyond excruciating despite the local injection he’d been given earlier. Fresh blood started to pool in the wound as he dug around with reckless but focused speed. And then he felt it, something moved, pressure lifted and the bullet seemed to float up with the rising blood.

“She’s your bullet, now could you please stitch me up or give me a needle and thread and I’ll do it myself,” he puffed, breathless and faint before he turned to Thea, “go find Felicity, tell her I’ll be there real soon.”

*He wasn’t going to miss this.*

Another thirty minutes had lapsed with no urge to bear down and push, but also no sign of Oliver and Felicity was beginning to tire.

Caitlin paced and Iris chatted away, pleasant nonsense, as the minutes ticked on.

“Felicity, we need to get you moving to get this labour progressing,” Caitlin sighed, her fingers tugging at her worried brow as she read the readouts of the foetal heart monitor.

“Is the baby okay?” Felicity asked, beating down every urge her body was giving her to do just that, *move.*

“They’re fine, but if I let you carry on like this when the time comes to push, you will be too exhausted.”

“Some people labour for days,” Felicity pouted her dry lips, despite the rest of her feeling drenched in sweat.

“Sure, some people do. Some people are marathon runners and some people are sprinters and Felicity, your body, it’s a sprinter. Your contractions are hard and fast, they’re not meant to be maintained for much longer than an hour.

Felicity licked her parched lips and looked up at Caitlin with wide, pleading eyes, “Just another thirty minutes.”

“Ten.”

“Twenty.”

“Fifteen and that’s my final offer,” Caitlin bartered.

A knock at the door had all three of them shoot their heads towards it before it slowly creaked open. But it wasn’t Oliver.

“Thea, is Oliver…” Felicity couldn’t finish her words, her body completely shattered and breathless.

“He’s okay,” Thea remarked, there was no way she was going to tell Felicity what’s she’d just witnessed him do, “he said he’ll be ten minutes, they’re just sewing him up now.”

“Oh thank…*fuck.*” The *fuck* was mouthed.

Ten minutes later and Oliver’s leg looked like a High School sewing project, but it would have to do.

“That was really stupid,” Kristen muttered as the doctor had thrown his hands up in the air and left
her to it. “You could have died.”
“But I didn’t” Oliver winced as she carefully bandaged over the wound.
“You could have some injuries in your leg,” she continued to lecture him.
“The scans came back fine,” he nodded towards the back wall, “it didn’t touch the bone.”
“Still, it was incredibly reckless.”
“I have somewhere to be.”
“What could be so important that you would risk your health like that?”
Oliver smiled stupidly, she was.

“There you’ll all done,” Kristen remarked as she looked at her handiwork and flattened the edges of the tape. “I’ll have an orderly come and move you into one of the wards.”
“No, I can’t stay.”
The young nurse’s lips straightened tersely, “You aren’t moving. If you walk you will tear your stitches and then you’ll be back here. You’re lucky the doctor didn’t restrain you.”
“Please, I need to be somewhere.”

His phone lit up beside him, it was Thea; Room 6 on the maternity ward, hurry.
“See,” he sighed, showing the nurse his phone. “The woman I love is having my baby a few floors above me and I can’t miss it.”
“That’s what all this was for?” she unravelled her arms slowly.
“I didn’t think guys like me got happy endings, but I’ve been gifted one. I promised her I’d be there and I intend to never break a promise.”

Kristen blew out a sigh before she walked to the door. “Wait there,” she ordered. She returned a minute later pushing a wheelchair. “I suppose we can take a little detour to the maternity ward.”

Oliver stopped outside Room 6 down a corridor with dusky pink walls he assumed were supposed to be relaxing and peaceful for the expectant mothers. He took a deep breath and went over all the answers he’d formulated for the questions she was bound to ask, but just before he went to knock he heard the distinctive sounds of a baby crying.

He’d missed it.
“I’m sorry Oliver, but I’m sure being here now is just as important,” Kristen remarked kindly.
“Oliver!” Thea called down the hall with a vending machine’s worth of food tucked under her arm, “what are you doing?”
“I missed it.”
Thea looked at him quizzically, “I was just there and she hadn’t started pushing…” she rambled as she walked past the door Oliver was stopped outside of.
“Where are you going?” he quizzed as he watched her walk towards the next door.
“Oh, her room, Room 6.”
“Thea, this is room 6,” he growled, jutting out his finger towards the black number on the door.
Thea looked down at the room she was in front of and cringed at the number 8. “Oops, I meant 8.”
Any other moment and he might have let her have it, but all Oliver felt was relief, that baby crying wasn’t his, he hadn’t missed it.

Expecting Thea back from her run to the vending machine, Felicity didn’t really focus on the door as it opened and the young Queen stepped inside, at least until Thea stepped aside and another familiar face appeared.

She thought maybe it was a dream, a blessing from her mind to keep herself focused on what she was waiting for, or maybe it was her subconscious’ way of telling her that even if Oliver missed the actual birth she was absolutely sure that he wouldn’t miss another moment in their child’s life.
But then he said her name, warm and soft and slightly rasped and she knew she wasn’t imagining that.

“Princess, I’m here,” Oliver repeated as he wheeled himself towards the bed, the walking pace of his accompanying nurse just not fast enough.

“You’re really here? This is really you?” She reached out and touched his face with her trembling hand.”

“I’m really here baby,” he whispered before he smattered her hand with soft kisses. He looked back towards his travelling companion and pleaded, “Please just let me stay here with her.”

Kristen looked at her watch and shrugged in feigned casualness, “I’m going on my break and this is a very busy hospital Mr Queen, it might be a few hours before someone is able to come and get you.”

‘Thank you’ he mouthed before she left the room with a smile.

“You would have the nurses doing whatever you charm them into,” Felicity laughed weakly. “But your leg?”

“Just a scratch,” he lied. He’d come clean to her later, but for now he was where he needed to be.

“When do you move to the bath?” he questioned as his hand moved from her cheek to her shoulder to her stomach before it returned to her cheek.

She bit her lip to stop it quivering as visions of the relaxing water birth they had once planned teased her emotions. It wasn’t as planned but at least they were together. “Plans changed,” she explained with a subtle shrug. “I can’t have a water birth before 37 weeks, but maybe next time,” she added with a shrug.

He chuckled through a smile while he brushed hair back from her face, “Next time?”

“Sure,” she said, almost breathless, “just don’t get shot next time.”

“And all this?” he asked as his eyes looked over the monitor an IV line

“Just precautionary,” Caitlin answered.

He took the cloth from Iris, stood up, wincing through the pain before he balanced on one leg and leaned on the bed. “Are you okay?” he fretted as he saddled the cloth across her brow.

“I am now.”

Roy came in after a knock and handed Oliver a bag, “here are some more clothes,” he turned to Felicity “Jax is with Curtis who wouldn’t unlock the door for me until he saw the dog and he promises not to tell your mother,” he prattled off.

“Thank you Roy,” Felicity smiled.

“Can I go now? I’m squeamish,” the former prospect admitted as he backed towards the door.

Felicity nodded, “You’re excused.”

Oliver looked down at his smock and frowned, “I’ll be right back.”

“Do you need a hand?”

“No baby, I’m fine.” At least that’s what the smile on his face was going to show.

Oliver came out of the bathroom dressed in a flannel shirt and loose fitting jeans that thankfully didn’t strangle the bandages. Thea had left with Roy to wait in the waiting room, leaving him, Felicity, Caitlin and Iris in the room.

The bed back was lifted back up and Iris and Caitlin had helped Felicity to sit on the edge of it, with her toes barely touching the linoleum floor.

“I can leave now if you like,” Iris said softly as Oliver limped to them.

Healthy, and without a bullet wound in his leg, Oliver would have been able to hold her weight without breaking a sweat, but his skin was ashen and sallow no doubt from blood loss and he could barely carry his own weight.

“If you could stay,” Felicity beseeched as she looked at Oliver.
Plans change.
“Whatever you need momma,” her friend simpered.

Oliver stood just ahead of Felicity and, cupping the back of her neck, he pushed their foreheads together. Silently they breathed each other’s air, just living in the moment that it’s them, there, together. She felt the surge of the next contraction and it made Oliver clasp her tighter, his fingers threading through her hair. She let out a silent, relieved sob that shook them both, she could do this now.

“Let’s have this baby now,” he whispered before his lips caught hers in a shaking, emotional kiss. She nodded as she kissed him a second and then a third time. “Okay,” her voice trembled as another contraction beat down, as though her body, now happy that he was there, was ready too.

Felicity slipped slowly off the bed and leaned herself over it as Oliver gently and methodically rubbed her aching back as the minutes passed while she swayed her body at the hips like a rocking boat anchored in the ocean.

Another contraction hit but it felt different than the ones that had come before it. There was something more urgent about it and a deep pressing in her pelvis.

“Felicity do you feel the urge to push?” Caitlin asked, watching Felicity’s face turn a bright shade of red.
She nodded somewhat frantically, it was time.
“Squat on the bed, lets keep making gravity our bitch,” Caitlin exclaimed, “Oliver can you support her on one side, Iris on the other.”

“Wait,” Felicity stammered as she pushed her head against Oliver’s chest, breathing in his scent. He lifted her chin and kissed her cheek. “Baby what’s wrong?”
“Before I do this, I need to know,” she panted, the urge becoming almost out of her control. His brows tugged inward in confusion. “Know what?”
Her fingers laced around the back of his neck as their foreheads sunk together. Her eyes were glassy but staring straight into the pools of his. “A girl or a boy?”
“Princess you’ll find out soon,” he smiled rolling his head against hers as his thumb stroked her pouted lip.
She shook her head excitedly, “No, I don’t want to be the last one in the room to know. I need to know please,” she begged, panting each word and hedging them with sharp inhales.
“Are you sure?” he queried as he studied her face carefully.
Iris blocked her ears and closed her eyes.
“Yes, I’m sure,” she sobbed out a smile as tears ran down her cheeks, “what are we having?”
Oliver pinned back tendrils of her hair, dark with perspiration, before he leaned in and kissed her lips tenderly. “A girl, we’re having a girl.”
Happy tears flowed unabashedly from her eyes as Felicity looked at the swollen belly between them. “She’s a girl,” she whispered as she danced lucid fingers across her stomach.
“Yeah, she is,” Oliver cried as he shadowed Felicity’s hand with his own. “And I’m ready to meet her.”
“Me too.” Felicity looked up, smiling through her tears. “I can’t believe you told me.”
“You asked me to,” he smiled back.

Seconds lapsed into minutes as Felicity descended into the second stage of labour, the actual birth. The hands on the clock moved in fast forward but no one paid them any mind, as though in that room only two concepts of time existed; when to breathe and when to push.
“Push, deep one, nice and strong,” Caitlin encouraged as Felicity teetered on her feet. “Another, shorter one; you can do it.”
When her eyes weren’t closed they were locked on Oliver. He was mouthing her name, softly, sweetly, like an enchanting spell, “I love you Felicity. You’re doing perfect baby.”
“I need you to breathe through the next one Felicity, don’t push, okay?”
She looked at her friend between her legs and nodded. She knew there was a reason, Caitlin had explained it before, but Felicity’s mind was vacant but for *breathe in, breathe out.*

Not pushing seemed even more difficult than pushing and all she could do was watch Oliver’s lips as he breathed with her, guiding her, until the moment had passed.

“Next push, give me all you got, okay Felicity?”
Her head swayed with what was supposed to be a nod as she lifted her head off Oliver’s shoulder, tuck her chin to her chest, rounded her back and gave the next wave everything she had.
“Keep going, keep pushing, don’t let up.”
All she could see were spotted lights dancing behind her tightly closed eyes. All she could feel was a burning pain, like fire engulfing every muscle she had and all she could hear was the sound of her own breathing and the thump of her own heart.
Until another sound entered the room.
The sudden bleat of a baby’s cry.
Their baby.
Their little girl.

The next moments moved like figures in fog until Caitlin placed the tiny baby covered in a towelling blanket onto Felicity’s chest, beneath her gown and then time stopped; captured in deep blue eyes and bowed and rosy lips as tiny fingers reached up her chest, exploring the new but familiar, while Oliver sunk onto the bed beside them. His eyes were wide in awe before a single tear slid down his cheek.
“You did it,” he whispered, his lips grazing Felicity’s clammy cheek.
“We did it,” she whispered back.

“One more little push Felicity and the placenta will be out, are you ready?”
She nodded, a little delirious but gave what was asked and a sudden emptying feeling washed over her.
“Oliver, would you like to cut the cord?”
He did.

Felicity was tired and her eyes were closing as she tried to watch Caitlin perform a few tests while Oliver watched on, somewhat hovering, until she was done. He carried the baby slowly back across the room and held her so that Felicity could see her smacking her tiny lips together.
She had already had a suckle but had tired after a few minutes, which Caitlin said was fine. She would tell them when she was ready to try again.

Just barely 6lbs, the little girl was small, but she was alert and breathing steadily on her own. Her temperature was low, but keeping her bundled up and close would bring that up soon enough.

“Do you guys have a name?” Caitlin asked as she peeled off her gloves.
“No,” Felicity replied. Despite the fact they had both liked the name Evelyn, Felicity had tried saying it a few times as the newborn lay skin to skin, and it didn’t feel right.
“I’m going to file a few papers down the hall, I’ll be back,” Caitlin smiled warmly as she touched Felicity’s shoulder. “Rest, you deserve it.”
Oliver sat close enough for Felicity to glimpse their daughter in her oversized pink jumpsuit that was the smallest Thea could find in the gift shop. Donna would bring some more with her when she came in the morning.

“She’s beautiful,” he cooed, utterly enamoured. Felicity smiled softly as her eyelids draped closed. “You’re beautiful, just like your mom. I knew the minute I saw her that any man she’d be willing to love would be the luckiest man in the world, happiest too.” He smiled down at the eyes that were wide with wonder. “Turns out that’s me. The moment she walked into my workshop with those ruby red lips, that first night we met, I knew I was done for.”

“That’s it,” Felicity breathed, tugging her heavy eyes open again. “Say that part again, about that first night.”

“And your ruby red lips,” Oliver repeated with a smile. “That’s it, Ruby,” Felicity sighed, “her name should be Ruby.” Felicity looked over at the clock, it was almost 1am, “And she was born after midnight, on a brand new day,” she pressed her dry lips together as her throat felt hoarse, “Dawn.”

“Ruby Dawn Smoak?” the name fell like a prayer from Oliver's lips as the tiny baby blinked while her whole hand grasped his one finger. “I think she likes it.”

“No, Queen, not Smoak,” Felicity shook her head against the pillow. “But my name has a lot of bad attached to it.” Felicity reached out her hand and brushed her fingertips down Oliver’s arm. “Let her start a new legacy Oliver.”

“Are you sure?” She nodded with waning but honest smile, “I’m sure. Ruby Dawn Queen.”

Chapter End Notes

So to anyone that follows me on Twitter, y'all should have guessed....

My icon is teen Ruby, I changed my bio to have her name spelled out in capital letters months ago and #rubyrising ... and to those of you that don't, i left breadcrumbs ;) look at the name of the chapter she was conceived in, teehee.

Anyways, I love Ruby ❤❤❤❤ congrats Bish, we're parents
“It’s not just a scratch is it?” Caitlin asked as she finished a few more sheets of paperwork while she waited for Felicity.

Oliver looked down at Ruby sleeping in her little plastic basinet, her tiny bottom lip tugged in her mouth and her tiny fists pushed out through the swaddled blanket and jammed into her full cheeks. “Just a little more,” he answered between two sighs and a thin smile to disguise the throbbing sensation reverberating down his leg.

“Would I win money if I wagered some on you being the guy the nurses are talking about, the one
who dug the bullet out himself?” Caitlin interrogated as she clicked off her pen and braced a hand on her hip. Oliver shifted nervously. “I needed to get here,” he answered with a tugged shrug. Caitlin sunk her other hand into her hip. “You also needed to be alive,” she argued under a soft, hushed voice.

“I’m fine, it’s fine,” he brushed off her concern as his thumb gently smoothed through Ruby’s soft tufts of blonde hair. He sighed, content, but apologetic. “This isn’t the first time I’ve been shot.” “Somehow that doesn’t make me feel any better,” she remarked, lifting a single eyebrow.

He tried to shift his weight from one leg to the other absently but instantly regretted it when the pain cracked up his leg like a thunderbolt. “Are you going to tell her?” he asked her with a worried brow.

“God no,” Caitlin laughed, “that’s for you to do.” She gathered her papers into a folder and tucked it under her arm. “But not now, when you’re home and happy and you’ve just made dinner and put Ruby to sleep and probably, you know,” she raised her eyebrow suggestively, “then you tell her, understood?”

“Understood.” He bobbed his head in agreement.

“But you need to go get it checked out and you need to rest,” Caitlin added with a serious and narrowed glare. “When she comes out of that bathroom you’re going to tell her you need to go. Doctor's orders.”

His jaw tensed. “But I don’t want to leave.”

“Oliver, you can’t stay in this room and both her and Ruby need some rest. I know some people in the hospital, we’ll get the leg checked out just to make sure you didn’t do any lasting damage and then you need some rest too, understood?”

He sighed, wondering if it would be fruitless to try and fight the order. “You’re not really asking me are you?”

She clicked on her heels over to the door. “No not really,” she raised a shoulder into a shrug. “But I’m giving you a chance to do it the easy way.”

He wasn’t going to win. “I accept,” he relented.

Felicity walked slowly out of the bathroom about five minutes later on legs that were frankly exhausted and with eyes that she could barely keep open.

“You okay?” Oliver asked gently as he rushed forward while she shuffled from the bathroom. Peeing had been an interesting experience and one she didn’t want to repeat any time soon. The little tear didn’t require any stitches but it still felt like she was peeing firewater.

Her lips lifted into a soft, but fatigued smile. “I’m okay, is Ruby?” her voice faded away into a yawn.

“She’s sleeping, and so should you,” he smiled kindly as he brushed back tendrils of hair and tucked them behind her ear.

Her eyes lapsed closed as her cheek dipped into his warm palm. “Stay,” she breathed, her voice was spent and whispered.

“You need to rest,” he argued as he pulled back the blankets on her bed and tapped it with his large hand. She looked tired and he could tell she wanted to put up a fight but she didn’t have the strength or fortitude to do anything but sink onto the edge of her bed. “Dig says he’s got people watching over the house with Thea and he’s got someone in the hallway just outside,” Oliver continued.

“I don’t need…” another of her yawns cut her off.

“Don’t argue with me, okay?” Oliver teased while he pulled the blankets over her and carefully tucked her in. She nodded, her eyes heavy and her body sinking into the mattress. “What about you?” she asked
amidst yawns as she patted her lips together and clutched his hand between hers. Oliver winked before he leaned down and kissed her forehead. “I’ll be just fine.”

“He’s doing this to pull you back.” She looked at his hands as a single tear slid down her cheek and bled into the lines of his palm.

“I have you and Ruby now. I won’t let anything jeopardize that,” he swore, his voice cracked and honest.

“Please don’t,” she spoke, her voice fragile and her eyes turning glassy.

“Don’t what?”

She pulled his hand to her lips and brushed his bruised knuckles with feather light kisses. “Don’t let him win. He’s doing this to pull you back.”

“Don’t what?”

He took two short breaths in, listening to the sound of his heart thumping behind his chest. “Would you marry me? I’d get down on my knee but…”

“Oliver wait,” she interrupted with a rutted brow and wide eyes, “Why are you asking me?” Her question was soft and curious and when her hands had stopped trembling she placed one on his knee to assure him her affection hadn’t wavered in those moments.

He looked down at her small hand, slender fingers spread over his knee. “I love you and we just had a baby,” Oliver simpered, brushing the tip of his finger absently over the knuckle of her ring finger.

Felicity turned her hand over and her fingers slid between his before she drew in a long and steady breath through her slightly dry lips and out the same way a few seconds later. “You know I love you right?”

He looked around their surroundings. “No,” he answered with a sigh, “but we can be a family.”

She squeezed his hand. “Oliver, we already are a family. I’m not going anywhere, Ruby and I, we’re yours, completely.”

He turned her hand over and her fingers slid between his before she drew in a long and steady breath through her slightly dry lips and out the same way a few seconds later. “I know,” he responded, with his thumb stroking faint lines across the smooth ridges of her knuckles.

Her face was gentle and a demure smile lifted the tips of her mouth. “Is this how you imagined it? You barely able to stand and me looking like I just got dragged through a bush in a hospital room?”

He looked around their surroundings. “No,” he answered with a sigh, “but we can be a family.”

She squeezed his hand. “Oliver, we already are a family. I’m not going anywhere, Ruby and I, we’re yours, completely.”

“Interesting choice of words,” she chuckled, amused.

He turned his head and caught her palm with a tender kiss. “I do.”

Another squeeze had Oliver sighing warmly, comforted. “I’m saying I don’t want you to ask me because you think it’s the honourable thing to do, or because you’re high on this elation of meeting our daughter, or because you’re trying to think of something other than the pain in your leg. If you tell me that this is how you pictured it,” she smiled as her head bobbed around the room, “that this is how you want it? Then I will say yes.” She exhaled warmed air as her fingers twisted a little in his while her eyes studied how perfectly they fitted together. “But I don’t think it is.”

It wasn’t. So much of who they were had been fate and circumstance. A one night stand. A one-time thing. A crossing of two different worlds in the small bedroom off his garage. That was what they had started off as, so in his mind he’d always imagined that asking her to marry him wouldn’t be one of those fate and circumstance moments – that for once they would plan on something.

Her free hand pinned back a flop of hair that had dropped over his eye. “You forget how much I know you,” she happily chuckled.

Her free hand pinned back a flop of hair that had dropped over his eye. “You forget how much I know you,” she happily chuckled.

He turned his head and caught her palm with a tender kiss. “I do.”

“Interesting choice of words,” she chuckled, amused.
“I’m going to ask you again.” His words were a promise, and not a single note held any uncertainty. “I know, I’ll act surprised.” “I love you,” he effused. She pecked his cheek. “I love you too.”

Saturday rolled around and, now satisfied with Ruby’s feeding and rise in temperature, Caitlin had discharged the pair of them. The mid-morning sun was high and warm and Felicity stood for a moment at the end of their path letting it colour her cheeks a faint pink as she breathed in deeply and let the notes of *home* surround her; fresh cut grass and a neighbour baking bread.

She held Ruby tight against her chest and absently kissed the infant’s silky smooth forehead as she lay wide-eyed but silent in her mother’s arms.

“This is home baby girl,” she whispered, carefully pulling the little bundle closer to her face, acutely and somewhat instinctively aware that their range of vision was very small at that age. “Are you sure you’re up for this?” Oliver asked as he leaned in and kissed Felicity’s cheek with a gentle hand cradling Ruby’s head. Felicity nodded softly as she looked down the path to their front door. The baby shower was to have been today, sans one little new arrival, and while both Thea and Donna had assured Felicity that cancelling it wouldn’t be a problem, they had been jubilant when she told them to go ahead with it and the guest of honour would just be putting in an unexpected appearance.

There was still an unmarked, round the clock, presence outside their house despite the fact they had caught the shooter – although ‘caught’ might not have been the right word; in fact they found him with two close-range shots to the back of his head and the word on the street was that he had acted as a rogue and his own people saw to the misdeed themselves. Both Oliver and John were sure, knowing the inner workings as they did, that no one else would bother them; Malcolm had no leverage and nothing to offer.

Oliver walked a few steps ahead with a crutch that had come with a scolding from one of Caitlin’s surgeon friends. When he reached the front door he opened it and smiled, “Welcome home.”

Felicity stepped into the house first and before she could bite them back happy tears streamed down her face. In the living room amongst an inundation of decorations and presents were the people that truly mattered – the people that Ruby would call her family, threaten to run away to, learn so many things from, look up to and be protected by.

Hers and Oliver’s blood relatives may be small, but their *village* was filled with people that really mattered.

Donna sidled up to Felicity in a pair of teetering pink pumps, blue jeans and a ‘kiss the nana’ tee that Felicity couldn’t help but smile at. “I hope this is okay sweetie. We thought we’d just spend a little time, but if you need to leave and rest,” she smoothed her warm hand down Felicity’s arm. “This is amazing.” Felicity assured the older Smoak with a smile as she looked around the explosion of pink balloons. “I love it, thank you.” “We had originally had it all gender neutral, because Oliver wouldn’t tell us shi...,” Thea clamped her hand over her mouth as Ruby made a gurgling noise in Felicity’s arms. “I mean, he wouldn’t say anything when you were pregnant,” she corrected sheepishly. “But seeing as Ruby will be attending her own baby shower, we figured why not.” “We may have gone a smidge overboard on the balloons,” Iris added as she pushed aside one of the many bunches of helium balloons, this one spelling out RUBY in foil.
Felicity smiled broadly, she knew somewhere under the small army of balloons, was her living room and from where she stood, she was pretty sure she saw Curtis’ legs and Roy’s arms over by the bay window. “Just a smidge,” she said as she winked.

John rested his arm on Oliver’s shoulder, “Lyla apologised for not being able to make it, but she wanted to see his transfer to High Security happen herself.” His name didn’t need to be said and for a brief moment there was an air of sombreness amidst the balloon avalanche. But knowing Malcolm’s luck had run out was really the best news they could have asked for.

“She has her godfather here,” Oliver remarked, symbiotically sinking his own hand onto John's shoulder. Brothers.

Curtis appeared, navigating his long limbs through the decorations. “Wait, that’s me,” he pouted before he tapped his finger onto Ruby’s button nose and squeaked in his own delight at the game. “Right Felicity? What’s the truth here?”

Both Oliver and Felicity chuckled at the sight of both men sporting pouts and pleading eyes.

“Ruby is lucky enough to have two godmothers, obviously Caitlin and Iris,” Felicity effused as both women bowed, “So Oliver and I thought how even more blessed would little Ruby Dawn be if she had two godfathers.” Curtis cheered loud enough to startle Ruby and she jumped a little in Felicity’s arms before she yawned at the rousing and blinked around, as if taking in all the sights.

“I count three gay godparents, so obviously she’s going to pride parades with us, and uh, the shooting range with you? Or the gym, because you’re very big, like huge, like chocolate Thor,” Curtis prattled.

John leaned into Oliver, “Too late to turn down the godparent thing?” he whispered in jest.

“Afraid so,” Oliver joking took a sombre tone.

John shuffled closer and touched a careful finger to Ruby’s tiny hand. She caught his finger, her nimble little digits barely able to touch as she clutched it tight to her chest.

“That’s right little girl, I got you,” John cooed as his brown eyes glazed over with unspent tears. “She’s beautiful.”

“That’s all Felicity,” Oliver complimented.

“So what part of her is you?” Thea smirked.

Oliver’s chin rested carefully on the cusp of Felicity’s shoulder while he gazed, utterly in adoration of his tiny baby swaddled in her arms. “I’m scared to find out.”

A few hours later when everyone except Thea and Felicity’s parents had left, Felicity sat in a wicker rocking chair near the bay window, bathing in the warm sun that streamed into the room as Ruby dozed on her lap with a full stomach and a dribble of milk at both corners of her little, puckered mouth.

“All done in the kitchen sweetheart,” Donna spoke softly as she tiptoed closer in case Ruby was sleeping.

“Thanks mom,” Felicity said with a happy sigh while she watched Ruby explore her own hand with her tongue, “But I could have done that.”

“Mmm, nope,” Donna’s lips popped. “You only have to worry about yourself and that little bundle of adorable at the moment,” she squeaked as her fingers squeezed air. She leaned down and kissed the top of her daughter’s head. “I’m proud of you Felicity, I always have been.”

Felicity looked up as a tear sprung into the corner of her eye. “I know, thank you,” she mouthed. “If you need anything else you just call me, although I’m sure Oliver will be waiting on you hand and foot.”
Felicity tipped her eyes out the window ahead of her for a moment before they dropped instinctively to Ruby as the new born shuddered with a tiny cough.

“A year ago, if you would have told me I’d be holding a new born in a house I share with the love of my life, I would have laughed,” she beamed.
Donna combed through strands of Felicity’s hair, once a mother, always a mother. “And what about now?”

“Now I can’t imagine my life being anything but this,” she gushed just as the tear that had settled in the corner of her eye slid a fraction down the side of her nose. She didn’t brush it away, because it wasn’t a sad tear, but rather a sphere of happiness that sunk into the pores on her cheek, and she was happy to let it.

“You deserve all the happiness,” Donna remarked.
Felicity looked up and smiled. “You do too,” she assured her mother.

“I’m working on it.”

Not long after, Noah too walked into the room with Oliver close behind.

“I have something for you,” Noah said as his hand disappeared into his sports coat.
Felicity stood before he could tell her she didn’t need to, and Oliver scooped a wiggly Ruby into his arms and held her carefully against the hard planes of his chest, letting her little head nestle in against his neck and her warm breath melt into his skin.

Noah offered Felicity a plain white envelope with a reserved but assured smile. “This is for you.”
She opened it slowly as her eyes looked at him curiously. “What is it?” she asked as she slipped a folded sheet of paper from the envelope.

“It’s something I should have done a long time ago.”
Felicity looked down as she read the top line of the paper, it was a certified share transfer for all the shares in Smoak Tech to her personal name.

“Does this mean?” she stammered as her breath caught in her throat.

“Your company is yours whenever you’re ready,” Noah confirmed. “There are a few legal ends to tie up when you’re ready, but it’s yours,” his hand grazed her arm as he smiled proudly – something Felicity wasn’t ever sure she’d witnessed, or at least not believed until that moment.

“Go and do great things.”

---

That night, as evening fell and the sun set behind a curtain of orange streaks and shadowed clouds, Oliver and Felicity sat silently on the floor of Ruby’s room as she slept with tiny snuffled noises and the faint notes of a music box playing from one of the shelves.

Felicity was humming along quietly with her eyes gently closed and her back propped up against Oliver’s back while her toes coiled around the soft tufts of wool on the mat beneath them. Oliver was sat behind her, his breathing deep and cathartically-religious, while he gently stroked his fingers down the length of Felicity’s swanned neck, occasionally pecking a light kiss at the nape of it.

She was almost asleep when he roused behind her. “There’s something I want to give you,” he smiled as the light from the hallway and the two lamps in the room illuminated his walk back to the door.

“You’ve already given me so much,” she smiled as she lifted her hand into the air, and carefully Oliver helped her off the floor.

“This is something different,” he hummed as their fingers entwined and he led her quietly from the room, and across the hall to their own room.

Felicity’s eyes adjusted to the brighter lights of their room with a flurry of blinks as she climbed up
onto the bed and let out an appreciative sigh and its comfortable embrace of her tired and aching body.

Oliver placed a white box, a little over an A4 size with a silky black ribbon tied around it onto the bed at Felicity’s feet. “What’s this?” she asked coyly as her fingers traced the striking lines the ribbon made. “Open it,” he teased as he wet his lips and casually folded his arms across his chest, his eyes pinged with excitement.

She pulled the ends of the ribbon and the luxuriant fabric slipped off the edges of the box before she lifted the lid and peeled back the single layer of tissue paper. It was a journal, a little smaller than an average sheet of paper with a warm beige cover and ivory pages.

Felicity opened it to the first page and it read like a title

As I watched you grow...

“It’s a sort of journal of your pregnancy through my eyes,” he explained as his hands nervously dropped to his sides. Felicity turned the pages slowly, taking in each one as her eyes landed on it. There were pictures of her with barely a bump, one she remembered him taking but never thought much of them, with notes written underneath them.

It’s the cutest little bump and at night while you sleep next to me I think about how lucky I am that I’ll get to watch that bump grow.

Another page, when her stomach no longer looked like she’d eaten too many tacos and there was no way of hiding the pregnancy. It was a photo Oliver had taken one morning as the sun shrouded her body in shadows in front of a window.

I’d always known there was a baby inside, but seeing you like this made it so real, that was ours. We made that.

There was still more and Felicity whimpered out a soft sob as she carefully held the gift to her chest. “How long have you been doing this?” Oliver smiled as he perched on the bed beside her. “Remember when I found the camera?” She nodded in response. “Since then.” “This is beautiful,” she cried, her shoulder shaking with each sob. “Baby don’t cry,” he whispered as his thumbed stroked through the river flowing down her cheek. She looked up, her blue eyes pools of tears waiting to be freed. “You always say that you feel lucky to have found me,” she wept, “but you should know that I feel just as lucky to have found you.”

She leaned over and cradled his jaw in her hand as her lips brushed up against his. Wet and warm and trembling she kissed him and he kissed her back.

That night as Felicity slept beside him, her body tucked into his, and Ruby slept in a basinet a few feet from the side of their bed, Oliver felt his sheer happiness enveloping every part of his body as his eyes grew heavy.

But he forced them awake a little longer to relish that feeling of happiness, the one that had eluded him for so long, as he watched over his girls.

Happy.
“I didn't expect you so soon,” Malcolm sneered as his wiry fingers gripped the prison phone, devoid of his many rings as a show of his status.

Oliver noted the frailty with a smile. His face was sunken and his hair thin. Mexico had taken its toll on him and he felt a slight tinge of pleasure knowing it was Felicity shooting him that had driven him underground.

“Let's be honest, you weren't expecting me alive,” Oliver replied, his tone emotionless and bland but his eyes a raft of shadowed malice.
Malcolm laughed. Raspy and sputtered. Once that husky laugh would remind Oliver of a vicious dog baring its teeth but today, here and now, it had no more fright to it than an old man who'd smoked too many cigarettes.
“Funny how things work out.” Malcolm shifted on the metal stool bolted to the floor.
“I'm not here to chat.” Oliver leaned it, his own sneer twisting up his lips, speaking Malcolm’s language. “But you are here to listen. You're going to rot in this jail, live here in oblivion without visitors and no one will give a shit. But you'll be alive and as long as you don't piss anyone off in here you'll live your days out in relative peace until you die in your sleep an old man, and the only person at your funeral will be the priest doing his God-bound duty.”
“Or?” Malcolm snipped, “Thea is still my daughter.”
“Thea is nothing to you.” Oliver scorned, “and if you come near anyone that I care about...”
“You'll what, kill me Oliver? You don’t have it in you. Send the blonde, she can finish what she started,” he gritted his teeth as he touched over the scar on his chest.
“Oh, it won't be me,” Oliver said, a knowing smile turning up the wings of his lips, “I won't be the one holding the gun or the one that plunges the blade into your gut.” He leaned forward, his eyes hard, cold and unwavering. “But mine will be the last face you should think of, because...” he leaned closer still while one hand spread out calmly on the bench in front of him, “…if you come anywhere near anyone I love just remember that I still have a few favours left and from where I'm sitting, you don't.” Oliver hung up the phone with a triumphant exhale. The 16 year old boy living in a world he barely survived was gone. Replaced by a man, a father and, one day, a husband.

He stood up, brushed both his palms symbolically down his blue jeans and walked away.
“Come back here boy,” Malcolm yelled, his voice barely coming through the pane of glass that separated them.
Oliver never turned, but the smile on his face grew with each step he took.
He was done.
A last step from an old life.

Felicity watched Oliver walk out through the prison gates with his shoulders back, his mouth smiling and his eyes dead focused at her, so much so that she found herself blinking away at the heat of them. Little Ruby, three months old today, was cooing happily in her car seat in the back of the car loaded with their suitcases and a forever watchful Jax looking over the little cherub.

“Are you done?” Felicity asked as Oliver stopped just ahead of her.
His hands gripped her waistline and he pulled her just enough to press their bodies together.
“I'm done,” he answered, breathy and molten.
“And are you good?” she brushed his chin-grazing hair back behind his ears as she delved her eyes
into the pools of his.
Oliver looked across at Ruby, now sucking the ear of the little pink bunny he’d got her and smiled
before his eyes travelled back to Felicity, “I’m perfect.”

He kissed her softly, gathering her lips onto his with the lightest of touches, stilling with his lips as
they folded around the soft peak of her top lip.
“Aruba?” he whispered.
She felt her eyes close amidst the warmth of his kiss and the silkiness of his words as she nodded
softly and answered with a smile. “Aruba.”

He opened the car door behind her and Felicity slid into the passenger seat. A moment later he was
in the driver's seat beside her with his hand entwined in hers and, as the car travelled the gravel
road in a cloud of dust, Felicity tipped her head against the headrest and inhaled the many scents
the filled the air.

It didn’t matter what each one was; the aroma of baby powder, Jax’s salon-fresh grooming or
Oliver’s scent of pine and motor oil, altogether they mixed to be one thing, happiness.

He was an enigma. A strange moment of fate a year ago. I never predicted Oliver Queen, I never
could have imagined him either.

But he was exactly what I needed, and everything I could have wanted.

The first step in a new one.

I’ll follow you down to the eye of the storm
Don’t worry I’ll keep you warm
I’ll follow you down while we are passing through space
I don’t care if we fall from grace
I’ll follow you down to where forever lies
Without a doubt I’m on your side
There is no where else I’d rather be
I’m not about to compromise
Give you up to say goodbye
I’ve got you through the deep
I’ll keep you close to me

Dear lovely readers,
In some respects, this is the end of their story – but before you demand that it just can’t be so –
it’s also not. From this point forward each chapter will (for the most part) be like a one shot of a
moment (or a few) that weave through their lives and fixed moments (which are for me to know
and you to find out).

I’m not going to say my goodbyes or my thank yous here and now because, firstly, I’m just not
going to and secondly because this isn’t a true end.

This universe has so much more to give but this felt like such an organic close to the chapter by
chapter story of Uptown Girl meets Ruffian with a Bike.
This was their Ride or Die xox
Mr [T.] Rabbit

Chapter Summary

The curious case of Mr Rabbit and how he got his first name.

Chapter Notes

How this works:
These are like one shots, this particular one follows Mr Rabbit and focuses a lot on a bond between father and daughter. It spans 4 years, but that doesn't mean the next one shot will start where this left off, it won't.

I'm only telling you things I want to and so you might only get scraps of different characters. I also gloss over things that I intend to revisit later. Hopefully this all makes sense.

Dedicated to my own 'Ruby', my little Sprite.

We had a rough week baby girl, but you make the world more colourful. Never dull your smile, it has the power to do the most extraordinary things. I love you eighteen.
The house was finally quiet. The remnants of fireworks popping off around the neighbourhood had finally settled and as 10pm rolled around, 2 week old Ruby was finally asleep. On her tiptoes, Felicity carefully backed away from the Moses basket set up in the dimly lit corner of their room and slowly made her way to the bed.

When she turned, with her frayed and exhausted nerves on edge, her entire face relaxed when she caught sight of Oliver dutifully still awake with his back resting on the headboard as he flipped through a *Hot Rod* magazine.

Given she should still be in the incubation of a womb, Felicity wasn’t ready to let the tiny new born sleep in her own room, but afraid of her exhaustion levels and co-sleeping, the little bassinet set up in the corner next to a wicker rocking chair (padded with an absurd amount of cushions should she need them) and a very dim night light seemed like the perfect balance.

She had offered Oliver the spare bedroom with no strings attached, but he’d chivalrously refused and said his place was with his two girls in case either of them needed him. His leg had healed, leaving only a small scar, barely two inches long, along his thigh.

“She’s asleep,” Felicity mouthed, clapping air between her hands. He looked up from his magazine with a proud smile that hooked one side of his lips higher than the other and like an electric jolt down her spine Felicity found herself licking her lips at him as her core rumbled with desire; suddenly two weeks felt like two years.

Her eyes travelled down the waterfall of muscles that cascaded from underneath the tight, slightly-
rolled, capped sleeve of his navy Henley as she crawled onto the bed like a cat eyeing up its prey. “She’s fed, clean and warm,” she purred before she tapped his tented knees and they fell open like a gate. “You wanna fuck?” she whispered as she slunk in between his legs and kissed just above the waistband of his briefs, her lips puckering at the slight saltiness of his skin.

Oliver chuckled softly as he set the magazine on the nightstand and carefully brushed lose tendrils of hair back behind her ear. “Caitlin said four weeks,” he answered with a tender and knowing smile.

“She’s rounding up,” Felicity pouted as her fingertips traced the outline of his cock behind the spandex-cotton. He gently guided her body up his and placed a delicate kiss on her forehead, whispering the words into her skin, “I don’t want to hurt you Princess.”

She nestled her ear into his chest and listened to the familiar and soothing thump of his heartbeat as his fingers tumbled through her soft hair. “I just don’t want you to,” she paused to nibble her trembling lips, her eyes now filled with emotions she barely held back, “…I don’t want you to get bored with me,” she finished with a cracked whisper.

Her hormones were playing table tennis with her emotions, and while she knew they weren’t always lucid, in this case it had been something that had managed to take root in her brain.

He lifted her chin and kissed her lips tenderly, there was no tongue and no smushing together of faces as they panted warm breaths. The kiss was soft, languid, fond.

“Are you kidding?” he spoke barely above a whisper as their lips parted. His eyes held hers in an affectionate gaze. “I know we started off with a bang, baby but do you know what keeps me here and what I fell in love with?”

“My breasts?” she answered with a smirk.

He tapped his finger lightly on her forehead and smiled, “Your mind, your heart and your spirit.”

She brushed the flurry of tears that escaped her eyes from her cheek with the back of her hand as she pressed her body as close to his as she possibly could.

“How about I rub your feet and shoulders instead,” he hummed before he pecked three soft kisses into her crown.

She considered his proposal with a long, velvety hum before she nodded. “Okay, that sounds per…”

Before she could finish her sentence, Ruby’s bleat-like cry filled the bedroom and Felicity buried her face into Oliver’s arm and groaned.

“You stay, I got this,” he assured after he kissed her a fourth time and slid out from underneath.

He gently plucked Ruby from the bassinette and, ever mindful of her disproportionate head, he gently pressed her into his chest and swayed from left to right in a manner that seemed to be instinctive once you became a parent. While her crying became softer and intermittent, it didn’t stop and looking back at Felicity who was struggling to keep her eyes open, he decided the best thing to do was to settle their new born somewhere else.

Oliver returned with a settled and sleeping Ruby about twenty minutes later, smiling to himself as he looked back towards the bed and found Felicity strewn across the bed, already fast asleep. He took a languid moment to breathe in the scent of his daughter before he placed a feather-light kiss onto her temple and gently lowered her into the Moses basket.

The silence lasted approximately thirty seconds, long enough for Oliver to get halfway to his side of the bed. In the short time it took for him to walk back to Ruby, he’d gotten an idea. One that just might work.
He took her for a drive.

Thirty-nine minutes later Oliver rolled into the driveway of a gas station, his own eyes drooping from the lull of the engine’s thrum. His gaze drifted to the backseat, but despite her sleepy half-closed eyes, Ruby wasn’t asleep. He idled the car in the driveway for as long as he could until the attendant started to glare suspiciously at him. He drove the car slowly into one of the parking spaces and shut off the engine. No sooner had the air fallen into pin-drop state of silence, Ruby broke the same with her soft, but unignorable, cry.

“Alright baby girl,” he yawned as he shook his body awake, “if daddy is going to drive you around all night, I’m going to need some snacks,” he chatted away to himself as he got out of the car and trundled around to the back passenger side.

His little girl gurgled out a coo as he lifted her from her capsule and hugged her against his chest. Carefully he dabbed her bib to her lips to soak up the dribble there before he made sure both sides of her little, fluffy pink hat was sitting down over her ears.

The electric door opened with a clunk and a whirl as Oliver walked inside the gas station/convenience store hybrid and breathed in the distinctive scent of slushies and hand sanitiser. He saw the attendant, an older man probably in his 60s, tense a little behind the bullet proof screen as he eyed up Oliver, at least until Ruby made a happy little gurgle and kicked her feet into the air.

“How’s trouble getting her to sleep?” the older man asked as Oliver made his way to a closer aisle, the one with snacks in brightly coloured packaging. Oliver replied with a bobbed head and a broad smile as he gathered a collection of food to keep him cogent.

“Back in my day we’d give them half a nip of whiskey and straight to sleep, reckon that would probably be frowned upon now days,” the attendant continued with a cheeky half-smile. Oliver laughed, “Probably.” He shifted Ruby from one side of his chest to the other after he placed the array of snacks on the counter and slipped his hand into his pocket for his wallet.

Ruby giggled, or at least that’s what it sounded like, and Oliver’s eyes grew wide at the sound he’d never heard before. A few moments later he found the reason; a fluffy, soft-pink bunny with lop ears and a little black nose was sitting just behind the glass.

He swapped her from one hip to the other, effectively blocking her view of the bunny and immediately the noises stopped. Testing the theory, he turned her back towards it and the gurgling sound of what he was certain was a laugh, started up again.

“Looks like I’ll be buying the bunny too,” Oliver smiled as he opened his wallet. It was a pretty accurate glimpse into his future that he would do almost anything to hear Ruby Dawn laugh. He smiled to himself in a slight sleep deprived momentary delirium as he decided that would have been a time Felicity might have chimed in with a ‘let’s hope she’s not a sadist then.’

It was another five minutes before Ruby was buckled securely into her seat with the soft ‘fur’ of the bunny pressed into her cheek but her eyes started getting heavy within a few seconds and before he’d even left the gas station, Ruby was asleep with her little pink rabbit tucked under her arm.

An hour after he’d left, Oliver returned to the silent house with a conked-out Ruby and her new companion tucked into his arms. He placed her carefully into the bassinet and waited with baited breath for her to wake, but 89 mississippis later, she was still fast asleep.
On careful footsteps Oliver walked to his side of the bed, got in, and fell asleep next to Felicity with his jeans still on.

Ruby was nine months old the first time they lost Mr Rabbit.

It was summer and the evenings were stretched into glorious extra hours of daylight. The fragrant smell of flowers popped in the air and the skies were filled with ducking and weaving birds. He wouldn't always readily admit it but the smell of summer was, next to Felicity and a freshly bathed Ruby, his favourite scent, or rather the culmination of so many aromas that merged to a brilliantly jubilant scent of summer.

It was on one of those evenings, sometime around 5pm that Oliver was strolling the bustling city streets, walking against the stream of 9 to 5ivers that were heading home to grasp some semblance of daylight before they fell into bed to start all over again in a few hours.

Felicity was working, running to a deadline that was fast approaching. She was stressed and when he'd spoken to her on the phone about an hour ago she was riddled with guilt that she wasn't home with her two favourite people.

It was then he offered something which had made her a sobbing mess down the phone line. He would bring Ruby to her, they would have dinner on the couch of her lofted workspace, the one that bared her name proudly. Ruby could nap in the portacot and he'd ply Felicity's brilliance with whatever she needed.

_Utterly brilliant._

He peaked under the brim of Ruby's pink gingham hat and smiled at her puckered lips as she snored against his chest in the front carry pack.

A flustered man in his 50s with a shriek of white hair jostled past Oliver and knocked the bag swung over his brawny shoulder, jolting a perturbed Ruby awake with a wail.

Oliver gritted his teeth to stop from shouting a litany of curse words at the stranger as he settled Ruby with a gentle _sssshh_ and a perfectly practiced sway of his body as he kept making his way towards Felicity’s office. In another life the rude businessman wouldn't have escaped with only a dirty look and a muttered “watch yourself”.

He kept walking to settle Ruby and his slow, constant heartbeat seemed to lull her enough so that her eyes drifted closed, with dark lashes fanned over plump rosy cheeks that Oliver couldn't help but contort himself to kiss.

A few more blocks and with a slight sweat misting his forehead Oliver pulled on the large frosted sliding-door emblazoned with _Smoak Tech._

He was still as infinitely proud of her that day as he had been the day he’d helped her move the last of her belongings from that skyscraper office when she had stepped out from underneath her father's 'umbrella'.

Curtis looked up first as Oliver dropped the baby bag on the florescent pink couch a few feet from the door.
“That’s my cue,” he smiled as he stood up, a little wobbly on his lanky legs when he realised it had been a good two hours since he’d moved from his seat and his muscles were almost atrophied. “It’s not one of those visits,” Felicity mumbled with a pen between her lips and without blinking away from her screen.

Curtis raised a suspicious eyebrow at Oliver who simply smirked in response. “All the same, I can take my work home,” the tall colleague and friend announced as his finger walked his glasses back up the bridge of his nose.

Felicity finally plucked her eyes up from the screen and nodded. “I’ll have my work done for you in the morning.”

He saluted her as he said warmly, “we got this boss.” “Have a good night,” he continued as he grabbed his messenger bag from the back of his chair, took a few steps towards the door and stopped next to Oliver. “Just leave me a note where you... uh...” he spread his hand around the air in front of him making the innuendo clear, “…I’ll avoid those places tomorrow.”

“There is a bed upstairs,” Oliver chuckled, making Curtis’ face turn red. “There was last time too, that didn’t seem to stop you.”

Ruby chuckled from underneath her hat before Oliver plucked it off to reveal a very awake smile. “Ruby knows what I’m talking about,” Curtis cooed as he offered his finger and her tiny digits coiled around it. “I’m going to design you some noise-cancelling headphones in baby size,” he continued with a high-pitched voice and a beaming smile before he left with a wave.

Oliver unstrapped Ruby and bounced her in his arms long enough for her to giggle loudly as her chubby arms reached for his hair, now long enough to wear in a little nub at the back of his neck, before he set her down to crawl around the reception space.

Ruby crawled towards Felicity who stooped down to pick her up, pinching her rosy cheeks before she blew playful raspberries in the soft folds of Ruby’s neck. “She moves fast,” Felicity said as she peppered her cheeks with kisses. “Don’t you dare say just like her mother,” she added with a serious glare sent across the room to Oliver.

He put his hands up as he walked forward. “Wasn’t going to I swear,” he offered with an amused smile.

“I ordered Yum Cha about 10 minutes ago, it should be here in another 10,” she remarked as she carried Ruby to the playpen and set her down in the middle of it.

The little girl pulled herself up on shaky legs while she clutched the framing of the playpen and growled loudly, smiling as her voice echoed through the loft. “That’s all you,” Felicity laughed and Oliver agreed with a nod.

Oliver threaded his arms around Felicity’s waist and kissed her lips with a chaste peck that had her humming blissfully, “I love you,” he crooned as they swayed together.

“What was that for?” she quizzed as her palms rode up the tight mounds of his arms. “I’m happy,” he replied, as though the answer was as simple as breathing.

She brushed tendrils of his hair back with a smile tugging up both tips of her mouth. “I’m happy too.”

Oliver’s expression changed to a considering one before he tapped his finger to his lips and nodded, “Yep, ten minutes is enough time.”

“Enough time for what?” An eyebrow raised up towards her hairline and her nose crinkled. “I think I can get you off with my mouth in ten minutes,” he answered matter-of-factly.

She laughed, but he didn’t; he was serious.

“You looked stressed and I know how to relax you,” he spoke in a warm, velvety whisper that had Felicity nibbling on her lip while he dragged his fingers up her leg and under the hem of her mauve a-line dress. “Go upstairs, take your panties off and get on the bed, I’ll get Mr Rabbit for Ruby and meet you up there.”
“I didn’t see Mr Rabbit when you came in,” she remarked as he patted her rear towards the stairs, “I thought you might have left him at home.”

“Never!” Oliver declared with an exaggerated and playful offended glare.

Felicity shrugged as she let out a soft, melodic laugh. “She wasn’t holding him when you came in.”

“I know,” Oliver nodded as he walked over to where he’d put the baby bag, “she fell asleep on the way here and I didn’t want her to drop him so I put him in the baby bag.” His precursory look didn’t produce any results so Oliver began to rummage a little deeper. When he still couldn’t see the soft toy, he dumped the contents onto the seat of the couch and frantically touched everything that had been inside the bag; nappies, a jacket, two sets of spare clothes, a dummy, a sippy cup, wipes, lotion, a change mat.... No rabbit.

“It’s not there,” he gaped.

It really wasn’t.

Ruby banged a plastic duck onto the edge of the playpen and cheered loudly, oblivious to the worry that was twisting her dad’s face.

“Maybe you just left him at home, she’ll be fine with all the other toys,” Felicity offered before she pressed a soothing kiss into the cusp of his shoulder.

His breathing was deep and rasped. “No, I had him,” he muttered. A moment later something occurred to him; the guy that had run into him.

“Shit,” he breathily cursed. Ruby laughed. “Some guy too busy to look where he was going bumped into me on the way here, it must have fallen out then.” He nodded as he recounted the bag jostling against his shoulder and how his attention had been diverted to lulling Ruby back to sleep.

“I got to go.”

Felicity never had a chance to reply to him as he ran from the office. She turned to Ruby and shrugged with a smile. “I’m not sure who’s more bothered by Mr Rabbit’s disappearance you, or daddy.” Ruby shouted out a laugh before she stuffed the head of the duck into her mouth and happily gummed it.

Twenty minutes later Oliver returned huffing like he had run a marathon, which he virtually had, and proudly carrying the pink rabbit in his hand, clutched so tightly that his knuckles had turned white.

Felicity and Ruby were on the couch playing together when Ruby looked up and squealed loudly a noise which sounded distinctly like “DADA!”

Both Oliver’s and Felicity’s eyes shot to their daughter.

“Was that…” Oliver started.

“...her first word,” Felicity finished. “I think so.”

“It was me?” Oliver breathed, his eyes wide, his lips staying parted.

“Looks like you’re her hero,” Felicity smiled as she watched the emotion wet Oliver’s eyes.

Mr Rabbit was fine after a gentle launder and 30 minutes in the dryer at home.

As Ruby grew, Mr Rabbit never became the forgotten toy in the basket or the one that got lost under the bed. He went shopping, to the playground and every doctor appointment she ever had.

She shared secrets with him and insisted he always had his own pillow on her bed.

He was Mr Rabbit.
Until a few months after her fourth birthday.

It was September and the leaves had begun to change. The PJs got longer and the cuddles got deeper. It was during one of those cuddles on the couch while Oliver watched a repeat of a cheery little show about a bunch of fairies that lived in mushrooms with Ruby tucked under his arm, smelling like candyfloss soap and coconut shampoo.

“Dadda,” the four year old piped up as she tapped his chest to ensure he was paying attention. “Yes Rubik cube?”

A nickname that had stuck to the blue-eyed cherub for the last two years.

“Why is your skin painted?”

He wasn’t sure what she meant until her little finger touched the tattoos on his arm.

“You mean my tattoos?” He smiled as he looked down at the ones he’d carried for years together with the newer ones that he’d added as his life became fuller.

She nodded, her slightly damp hair toppling over her face.

“They remind me of things, here, this one was for you,” he explained as he touched the infinity sign on his wrist that had her name scripted into it.

Ruby pointed to the ones on his neck, “what do these ones mean?”

Oliver’s fingers ghosted over his skin, he didn’t need to see what she was pointing to, he knew what had taken his daughter's attention; the crosses. “They remind me of the people that I’ve lost, the ones that aren’t here anymore.”

She reached up and kissed his cheek. “Like Grandma and Grandpa Queen?”

Oliver nodded. It had been Felicity’s idea to make sure Ruby knew about his parents when she was old enough to wonder who the strangers in the photos were. Oliver was thankful for the open discourse it allowed for.

“One, two, three,” Ruby counted them as she touched each one with her small, delicate fingers.

“Who is the other one?”

Oliver took Ruby into his arms and she sat sideways onto his lap. “His name was Tommy and he was my friend,” Oliver explained.

“What happened to him?” the youngster asked, a small lisp in her voice.

Oliver offered her a soft but sombre smile. “He got hurt.”

“He died?” she whispered.

Oliver nodded. As parents, both Oliver and Felicity had decided to offer truth when asked, the questions weren’t always easily answered, but Ruby had grown to be inquisitive and they wouldn’t discourage that, regardless of the topic, ‘What language do we dream in? What colours do birds like? Do butterflies have ears? Can I teach Jax English?’

“Was he your best friend?” she questioned, her blue eyes filling with care and empathy as she rested her tiny hand over Oliver’s heart.

“Yes, I think so,” Oliver answered quietly.

Ruby leaned in and kissed his cheek a second time before she slid off his lap and walked wordlessly out of the living room.

She returned a minute later with Mr Rabbit in her arms.

“This is my best friend,” she said as she clambered back onto Oliver’s lap. “Dada, would I have liked Tommy?”

He watched her eyes widen with wonderment. “I think so, he was a lot like me.”

“I love you, so I would love him too,” she concluded with a nod, like it was a fact and no more debate was needed. She then looked down at Mr Rabbit, hugged him, kissed the soft fur on the top of his hair and announced, “I think I’m going to call him Tommy now so when you miss your best friend, you can share mine.”

Oliver was speechless, choked up with tears that glassed over his eyes.
“Are you sad Dada?” she pressed Mr Rabbit into Oliver’s chest and his large hand held it there, shaking.
He kissed the tip of her forehead, “No baby girl, not sad, blessed.”

Felicity appeared in the doorway, smiling in silence for a few moments as she watched the man she loved with the daughter they adored. Oliver and Ruby had a beautiful relationship, a secret language, a shared love of things that went *vroom* and the exact same face when watching TV. It never ceased to make her heart full and her smile wide.

“All for bed Ruby,” Felicity finally spoke.
The four year old peeked up from behind Oliver’s bicep. “Story please momma?” she asked, her voice slightly muffled in Oliver’s sweatshirt.
“Of course,” Felicity smiled, mother and daughter had their own sacred moments too.
Ruby kissed Oliver's nose with a giggle. “Night Dada.”
“Night Rubik.”
“Say goodnight to Mr Tommy Rabbit,” she encouraged with a smile.
“Night Tommy Rabbit,” Oliver winked before Ruby bounded off his lap and skipped from the room with Felicity.

But she returned alone a few seconds later and put Mr Rabbit next to Oliver.
“Just for tonight he can stay up and sit with you.”
Oliver stood, his eye latched to the calendar hanging in front of him, as he rocked subconsciously from his heels to the balls of his feet, just studying the slight indentation and the stark contrast between the white background and the vibrant red pen lines that circled it.

18 July.

Felicity had circled the one in the workshop about two weeks ago; and the one at home at about the same time. She had even programmed an alert on his phone which had gone off about an hour after he’d left the house that morning.

“So today is finally the day,” Thea smirked as she walked in and leaned against a nearby wall. Roy, who was following her steps close behind, stood nearby with a takeout lunch bag hanging from his wrist. “Are you going to tell us what it means now boss?” he asked with eagerness. John smirked from behind his newspaper while he sat on the couch with his home-packed lunch beside him.

Oliver rolled his eyes and busied himself with cracking the lid off a water bottle and taking a swig. “Come on, it’s been circled for two weeks, give me a hint at least,” Roy pleaded. Next he was fully prepared to resort to bribing his boss with an extra steak sandwich he’d bought for lunch; it had bothered him that much for weeks. “Are we getting pay rises?” “You wish,” Oliver scoffed.

Thea pushed herself off the wall and patted Roy’s shoulder. “Ruby is four weeks old today,” she
remarked with a sly grin.
“Oh,” Roy bobbed his head like he understood, “So it’s like a party.” He didn’t, not really.
“Sure, a party,” Thea answered before she winked at Oliver while he tried his best to just ignore her.
Roy however was having a different conversation. “Will there be cake?”
Thea chuckled briefly before she manged to fold her lips inward and stifle the laugh. “What do you say Oliver, will there be cake?”
Oliver rolled his eyes; fully aware of the innuendo.

“There will be lots of cake,” Thea continued gingerly, “so much cake. Let him eat cake!”
Roy casually shrugged. “I like cake.”
“Of course you do,” Thea said as she tugged a few strands of his hair playfully.
Oliver groaned while John grunted out a laugh.
But Roy, still confused, continued, “Can I come around for the cake?”
Thea snickered, her eyes tagged on Oliver’s reactions. “I don’t think Oliver likes to share his cake.
He’s very territorial.”
“Over cake?” Roy balked.
“Especially over cake, or at least this cake, right Oliver?”
“Thea stop.” Oliver growled.
Roy blinked from one sibling to the other. “I’m confused.”

“It has been four weeks since Felicity gave birth to Ruby, medical advice suggests avoiding sex for four weeks after birth, ergo…,” John said pointedly after he folded his newspaper and sat it on his lap.
“That’s what that means?” Roy gaped as his eyes narrowed at the circled date. “So there’s no cake?”
“Oh, Oliver will be eating cake,” Thea sniggered, almost bending herself in half as a result of her amusement.
“What is cake?” Roy wondered aloud as he ran a befuddled hand through his hair.
Thea looked at John and shrugged one shoulder. “Let him figure it out,” she urged.
“Wait, you’re talking about… oh, oh god, I don’t want that cake,” he stumbled over the words as his head shook, “not that there is anything wrong with it,” he quickly added, “I just respect you as both my boss and my girlfriend’s really big brother, and I’m, shit, I’m…”
“Walk away Roy,” Oliver interrupted the stammering fool.
“Well, doing that.” He nodded a single time, turned on his heels and walked to the opposite side of the workshop where he pretended to be consumed by a rotary motor.

Oliver scooted around Thea and scanned the workshop looking for something to do; he found it in a disorganised tool trolley which he quickly set to work to rectify.
“So are you looking forward to tonight?” Thea asked before she blew a small bubble with her chewing gum.
“I’m not talking about this with you?” Oliver mumbled under his breath as he slotted the screwdrivers into their case.
“What? she popped, “you had a baby so clearly I know you guys have sex. Also I shared a house with you when she stayed over, I’m absolutely aware of your sexual proclivity.” She grinned as she spoke, relishing the deep shade of crimson Oliver’s cheeks were turning. “Not to mention, I’ve been having sex for years so it’s not exactly a taboo topic.”
“Years?” he exacerbated as a wrench dropped from his hand and clunked onto the trolley with a clang. “Years?” he mumbled a second time while he glared at Roy across the workshop.
“Oh if you’re looking for my first,” Thea started as she tipped her head over her shoulder, “it wasn’t him.”
“Jesus Thea,” Oliver huffed, a sudden surge of pain throbbing at his temples. “I don’t need to
“We can either talk about your sex life or mine,” she chuckled in amusement.
“How about neither.” He walked away from the trolley and headed towards a hanging shelf where he straightened a tire iron like it was a painting in an art museum.

Thea was relentless though and she followed him with a skipped step. “You should go home early, get a head start on the sextivities; pun intended,” she shortlisted.
“Felicity is at an appointment,” he replied under his breath, not that he owed his sister an explanation, but perhaps she would finally leave him be after she got one.
He was wrong. “Even better,” her lips perked up into a smile. “Take some time to make dinner, set the mood, groom…” she paused to study the frustrated sigh push from his clenched teeth. “What are you rocking down there? A woolly mammoth? Pinocchio hiding in a bush?”

“I’m not talking about this with you,” Oliver said sharply.
“Is it that bad?”
“It’s fine, it’s trimmed.”
He hated himself for answering but at that point he just needed the conversation to cease.
“Have you ever thought about…” she paused to make a ripping sound with her mouth and mimic the same with her hands, “…Waxing?. A manzilian.” Oliver’s eyes widened. “A brozilian.”
He would pay anything to make this stop.
“I was reading in Cosmo that it makes the sex even better,” Thea chatted.
Oliver walked away, throwing his hands in the air. “Nope, not having this conversation with you.”
She was ruthless. “Just think about it, it’s all skin down there, skin on skin, smoooooth,” she rolled the ‘o’ as she spoke.
“Thea, keep going and I’m hitting myself over the head with a tire iron,” Oliver said as he paced the workshop.
“You should do it, spice things up.”
“I’m not doing it.”
“Why, is the big bad biker scared?” she mocked making a droopy face.
“I’m not scared, I’m just not doing it,” he bickered.
“You’ve got how many tattoos and you’re scared of a little warm wax?”
“I’m not.”
That was it that was his answer.
“If it wasn’t for me you guys wouldn’t even be together,” Thea said, changing tact.
Oliver rolled his hand through his hair and sighed, “I don’t know what you mean.”
His younger sister pursed her lips and anchored her hands to her hips. “She’s here for a bible study,” she teased, doing her best gruffy-Oliver impression.
“I don’t sound like that,” he huffed.
“If I hadn’t have pushed you into going and asking her if she wanted a drink, we wouldn’t even be here talking about this,” Thea said as she poked her finger into her brother’s chest.
“I wish we weren’t,” he mumbled.
“Without me you wouldn’t have done what you refuse to admit that you two did on that first night, even though we all know, so don’t be a chicken.” She started making the sound of a clucking chicken, much to Oliver’s dismay.
“That won’t work Thea, I’m not.”

It did work.

And Oliver found himself Donald Duck-ing in front of a male beauty technician who was far too talkative for Oliver’s liking.
Oliver, in truth, wasn’t listening to much of anything the guy who introduced himself as Damien was saying; he was trying to not focus on anything at all in that moment. Not the breeze tickling up his thighs from the air-con across the room, not the fact his palms were like sweaty sponges and definitely not the distinctive scent of something being heated up.

There were noises he wasn’t familiar with an a faint pop song playing in the background but all Oliver could hear was the thud of his heart and the air hitching in his windpipe.

“Nope, sorry, not, can’t,” he stammered as he bounded off the table and dressed quicker than he ever had in his entire life. “I’m sorry, it’s not you, it’s me, I’m not… this is not, sorry.”

When he flung the door of the room open he was met with his sister’s smirking face. “I knew you would chicken out,” she goaded.

“I just want to go home and have sex with my girlfriend,” Oliver replied bluntly, hoping maybe she would decide she didn’t want to discuss his sex life after all.

Oliver was 0-3 in getting things right that day; because Thea seemed beguiled by his sudden bout of honesty.

“But you could have had great sex,” she quipped.

“Oh, were you planning of being intimate tonight?” Damien piped up behind them, his gloved hands looking like a nightmare to Oliver. “Because that was part of my speech just now.” Oliver looked at him confused. “You can’t have sex for about 48 hours. All your pores are opened up down there so no chaffing or friction or bodily fluids allowed aside from you own.”

Oliver glared at Thea, who gulped, “My bad.”

Caitlin disposed of her gloves as Felicity slipped off the examination table and straightened her skirt.

“It looks like it’s healed up beautifully,” Caitlin remarked as she made notes on her computer and Felicity took a seat beside her. “No pain or funky discharge?”

“Nope, all clear,” Felicity answered without hesitation, a bubbling excitement making her talk much louder and faster than she ordinarily would.

“So I guess that concludes our post-natal relationship,” Caitlin smiled while she tapped out the last few words of her notes. “But I expect you back in a month or two to just check up and make sure the implant isn’t giving you any troubles.”

Felicity nodded along with her friend’s advice. “Noted doctor, so am I good?”

Caitlin sat back in her chair and twirled a pen around her fingers. “You mean to have sex?” she smiled, knowing exactly what Felicity meant; but wanting her to say it all the same.

Felicity felt her cheeks warm. “Yeah.”

“Sure,” Caitlin replied as she straightened herself in the chair. “But go slow, lots of foreplay and if it hurts, stop and try again another time. Your vagina went through a pretty traumatic experience so don’t put too much pressure on yourself or,” she paused to lean in closer, making the next words she would say more personal, “and I say this to all my post-natal clients; don’t let him put any pressure on you either. You’ll be ready when you’re ready.”

“Oh Oliver would never,” Felicity retorted almost immediately and wholeheartedly believing it, “he’s been very adamant about waiting until I see you and get the all clear.”

“And how are you?” Caitlin asked thoughtfully.

Felicity’s feelings were mixed, and she had been on a swings and roundabouts mind about it for the last week, if not longer. She wanted to be with Oliver, she had circled the date for Christ’s sake,
but somehow, subconsciously, she had managed to avoid being completely naked around him, and the all clear she got from Caitlin today would see an end to that. Sure they had cuddled and kissed and being intimate on different levels, but necessity; broken sleep patterns and the fact she always smelled like milk (in her opinion anyway), had seen their time alone be minimal and filled, mostly, with sleeping. She knew she didn’t look the same as she had before getting pregnant; her ass was a little rounder and her belly a little shapelier, and maybe she was finding it hard not to be a little self-conscious about that.

“Bodies change,” Caitlin said; as though she read the thoughts straight from Felicity’s mind. “It’s normal to feel self-conscious and unsure. Hormones and sleep deprivation are a bitch and they can create havoc for our bodies, emotionally and physically. The best bit of advice I’ve learned over the years is to have open and honest communication with each other and be kind to yourself; you brought a life into this world, remember?”

When Felicity opened the front door she wasn’t expecting anyone to be home, but her surprise was made even moreso by the fact she was greeted with Thea’s smiling face. “Welcome home,” the young Queen announced as she held out her arms and Felicity, on habit, handed her Ruby who was busy discovering the sensation of chewing on her own hand. “When was she last fed?”

Felicity slipped the baby bag from her shoulders and tucked it to the side of the door. “Uh, about an hour ago. She’s due for another feed in about two hours.” she answered, slightly taken aback by Thea’s sudden interest, just as Oliver appeared from the kitchen behind them. “Good, great, I have some expressed milk from the freezer, a bottle and a shit load of diapers, see you later.” Thea bounced her niece on her hip until Ruby’s face brightened with a smile. “We’ll be right next door, chilling with Aunt Thea,” she sung as she scooted around Felicity. “Oh, okay,” Felicity bemused before she leaned in and kissed Ruby’s chubby, rose-tinted cheek.

A moment later and both Thea and Ruby were gone. “Hi,” Oliver smiled as he pulled Felicity’s into an embrace. “She knows, doesn’t she?” Felicity lamented.

He chuckled as his hands spread across her back. “You circled the date on every calendar we have and she’s smarter than Roy.” “I won’t ask,” she laughed while she breathed in his fresh, ‘rainforest’ scent and noted his slightly damp hair. “Probably best not to.” He gave her a quick wink before continuing, “Are you okay?” “You are cleared for landing,” she answered, a coy smile flirting with her lips. “Because it would be perfectly okay if you don’t want to,” Oliver added, concern threaded through his words. “Thanks for being chivalrous,” she patted his broad chest and hummed her delight at it, “but I’d really like to have sex with you.” She gave him an impish smile and a moment later she was in his arms, with her arms draped over his shoulder, being carried up the stairs. That was all the confirmation he needed.

He gently lowered her feet onto the plush carpet in their bedroom and she wasted no time kicking off her shoes and letting her toes melt into the soft, thick pile.

There was a certain look of rapture in her eyes as a flight of butterflies fluttered around her stomach. “Oliver,” she whispered, a sense of anxiety warming her cheeks and dampening her palms. “I’m a little,” she paused to chew absently on her lip for just a moment, “a little different.” He smoothed his thumb over her cheek, soothing the worry from her face. “I know,” he simpered
warmly, “but how I feel about you isn’t.”
She reached her hands behind her waist, took a slow inhale and tugged the zip of her skirt down as she exhaled.

It floated down her legs and into a puddle of sunny yellow around her feet. Using the hand he offered for balance, Felicity stepped one foot out of the puddle after the other and kicked the skirt along the floor behind her. Her ivory blouse of silk-chiffon grazed the tops of her thighs as she stood and curled her toes nervously into the carpet.

A smile blossomed on Oliver’s face as his fingertips floated along the hem of her shirt, barely grazing her supple skin, until his fingers weaved into hers. Wordlessly he walked her across the room, the silence framed by their shallow breathing, to the armchair beneath the window; a spot drenched in the afternoon sun. He guided her onto the chair and she sat without challenge before he knelt down in front of her with his palms laid flat on her knees.

“What are we doing here?” she asked, her lips caught up with a smile that echoed in the fullness of her cheeks and the brightness of her eyes.

“Worshipping you,” he grinned as he sat a little higher on his knees and slid his hands up her thighs. “Baby I want to make you feel things.”

“What things?” she asked impishly.
He wet his lips slowly as she watched unapologetically. “My tongue, my breath, my words, my fingers. Let me show you how much I adore you.” His fingers reached the scalloped lace of her panties and stilled, waiting for her response to a question that went without saying.

“Okay,” she breathed, barely audible, before she raised her rear off the seat and he slid her panties over her curve. The feeling of the soft, cotton lace was, in itself, tantric as he skimmed them down her legs and off at the ankles.

He gave her another smile and the playful wink she had come to know and adore, before he dropped his lips to her leg and began drawing a path with delicate and lingered kisses.

Felicity’s eyes fluttered as her knuckles lost their colour while she gripped the arm rests of the chair. Each delicate kiss he feathered up her leg had her panting in expectation and she could feel her core twisting over itself as the anticipation built the closer he got. At the bend in her knee he paused to blow the faintest of warm sighs against her skin, lifting a wave of goosebumps in its wake.

“Look at me princess,” he urged, his voice rasped and husky, and without a second thought Felicity pulled her eyes down and locked onto him. “You're fucking perfect,” he said with a puckish smile that tugged one side of his lips high than the other.

His tongue swooped around his lips as a hungry growl reverberated from the bellows of his gut before he carefully guided one of her legs over his shoulder anchored it there with a soft pat. He drank in the sight of her; her juicy, rose-tinted lips were full and glistened with arousal. Each fold was a luscious peach that darkened near the base and he almost couldn't hold himself back from dropping his mouth between her legs and feasting on her delectable heat; but he managed to as he curled his toes almost painfully to still the urge.

He continued the slow ascent of kisses towards her apex, watching the pleasure radiate from the twinkle in her irises and the warm flush across her cheeks. Slowly her fingers unravelled from the arm of the chair and one hand lightly tussled with the lengths of his damp hair, feeling it run between them.

The first kiss he placed on her sex felt like a thunder clap that resonated down her spine and echoed
to both her fingers and toes and Felicity found herself humming in delight while she inadvertently coiled her fingers so tightly in his hair that she could see scalp.

“Sorry,” she flustered as her throat turned a glowing shade of sunset-pink.

“Don’t be,” he growled against her sex, pausing to poke his tongue between her folds, “I’ve always liked it when you get a little feisty.”

She felt the slow graze of his bristled jaw against her thighs and the unhurried swirl of his tongue from end to end, around her clit and back down again. She shuddered with pleasure and her toes buried themselves in the carpet on one foot and twisted in Oliver's tee on the other; leaving indents in his back that he’d surely discover the next morning.

He licked slow and purposeful strokes up her sex, gently coaxing out more of her sweet arousal to slather between her delicate petals. His nose nuzzled against her clit and she moaned unabashedly loud at the sensation of it.

He tickled his fingers up the inside of her leg and held one large palm at her apex, fingers spread around her thigh, while the other gently lifted her ass off the seat and tipped her on an angle that flourished her sex like a blossom.

Using her slick arousal Oliver coated his finger and dipped just the tip of it inside her quivering entrance. She felt her breath stall in her throat and one hand went back to clutching at the armrest, but when a familiar feeling of pleasure washed over her and the looming fear of pain dissipated, she let it slip from the chair and rub across the muscular slopes of his shoulder instead.

He kissed her clit twice before he pulled back to study her face. “Are you okay?” he asked softly. She nodded, her bottom lip snagged between her teeth as an enraptured sigh bled from them.

“I’m going to go a little deeper, stop me if it hurts.” He spoke tenderly and the softness in his eyes assured her that she need only ask and he would do. She hummed her agreement as her fingertips swam through his hair, swaying softly before he dipped his finger up to the first knuckle and watched Felicity tip back her head and moan.

“Still okay?” he asked.

“Yes, yes,” she hummed while she shifted her seat in order to make his finger slip a little further inside.

Oliver continued to the second knuckle and held it there for a time as he continued to read her face for any signs of distress; but found only pleasure. As her body crushed around him he gently stroked his finger down her cushioned wall before sliding it all the way to the third knuckle.

There was a slight twinge of something Felicity wouldn't call pain, but for a brief pause the feeling made her breath skip and her mouth gape, but a moment later and she was feeling the slow, pleasurable strokes of his finger touching her in the most perfect of places; because he knew her body perfectly.

“I’m going to start thrusting if you want m…” Oliver started.

And Felicity interrupted. “I want you too. Mm. I want you to,” her voice was throaty and faint, wrapped in a quivering desire.

A soft chuckle. “Yes princess.”

He started slowly, easing out to his nail bed before delving back in. As her entrance became wet with pleasure he started to move faster, building up a rhythm.

“Another finger,” she whimpered, her body aching for a little more fullness and a little more stretch.

He dipped his head and found her clit with his mouth as he slid another finger inside her. His tongue batted around the little nub while he sucked her deeper. His fingers twisted and scissored...
inside her, opening her throbbing entrance and teasing her cushiony walls. Her breath was ragged and uneven and for every third breath she took she found herself moaning in delight until a growl low in her belly shook through her core and flared out through her extremities.

She came with his name on her lips and his lips on her sex; both getting what they had craved.

With her body still shaking through her climax Felicity tugged his head back, knowing that she was wet enough for more. “Oliver, bed,” she hummed and while he would have happily feasted on her for longer, he swooped her into his arms and they stumbled a two step towards the bed. “Baby if it’s alright with you, he said softly as his fingers touched the buttons on her blouse.

Smiling as she could feel the wetness of her thighs and the quivering of her lingering orgasm, she nodded. She might not be exactly the same woman she was a year ago but it didn't matter.

All that mattered was the lopsided smile he was giving her. Her ruffian.

She undid the first button and then nodded her approval for him to carry on where she'd left off. His fingers moved deftly down the buttons until it fell open like a chiffon curtain. “Your turn,” she insisted impishly.

His clothes came off with much less fanfare and soon he was naked while Felicity’s eyes ravaged his form. It was one she knew well and had not forgotten, but as her eyes drifted down his taut chest, along the deep crevices at his mound and over the hard length of his throbbing cock, it did take her back to that excitement she felt the first night they’d had sex; only now, along with that ravenous sexual attraction, she felt love, contentment and happiness.

She shrugged the shirt from her shoulders and reached her hands behind her back to unclip her bra before she peeled the satin straps down one at a time. When the air whipped over her peaked nipples she shivered down her spine, but his smile instantly warmed her.

They lay down together, their lips gently caressing while their hands explored the other's body. There was nothing rushed and no sense of urgency for either of them as they discovered each other once again. “Mmm, be careful,” she whispered as his mouth trailed down towards her breasts, “you might get a milk geyser if you stimulate that area.”

Oliver chuckled at the brevity of the moment as he lifted himself above her. His fingers skied down the smooth slopes of her body and between her legs where he gently teased her clit enough to keep her on the edge. She could feel his cock against her leg before she tipped her head up and caught his lips; she was ready. “I’m ready.”

“Baby if it hurts...”

“I know. Just kiss me.”

His cock pushed inside her just an inch as he sunk his mouth onto hers when it gaped open. There was more pressure than his fingers, but it’s familiarity made her smile. She tipped her hips to take him deeper and her legs coiled around him as he glided the rest of the way easily, coated with her spend.

His fingertips skimmed along her hairline, tugging her eyes open. “Baby are you okay?” Her body stretched around his swollen shaft and the pinch of pain earlier was now little more that a faint ache. She bucked her hips against him, skimming his head against her sensitive walls. “Mmm,” she hummed, near breathless, “I’m perfect.”
Oliver could feel her body clenching around him, massaging his shaft with a rolling pressure as her warm softness enveloped him. Four weeks began to feel like a lifetime and as the backs of his legs tingled, he worried it would be over in minutes.

She moved below him, twisting and shifting her weight on the mattress to move him in and out as an impish smile puckered her lips and brightened her eyes. Soon Oliver moved in time with her, thrusting in and out, building a rhythm that was all their own.

Time lapsed around them and their eyes, hooded with pleasure, stayed entangled as so much went unsaid but felt in the gentle strokes of her fingers, the feathering of kisses deep against her pulse point and the hot, breathless moans that filled the air.

They came together, perhaps only seconds apart, with their lips enmeshed and their bodies as close as two could ever get.

Exhausted and wearing a fresh glow of happiness, the two lovers lay embracing each other and tangled in the twisted bed linen.

“Are you okay?” Oliver asked as he pinned back her hair, damp with perspiration.

“Perfect,” she whispered as she snuggled her body closer to him and inhaled the heady aroma of sex.

“You know Thea suggested I should get a Brazilian wax,” he scoffed while his index finger drew lazy circles between her shoulder blades. He smiled when he felt her shake with a chuckle. “She thought we needed to spice things up.”

“Oliver?” Felicity started as she sat up on her elbow, her swollen breasts skimming his ribs.

“Mmm?”

“We had sex the first night we met,” she paused to tap her pouted lips together. “Pretty wild sex where you literally flipped me and I watched myself orgasm in that frameless mirror.” She felt a recognisable ache between her legs as she recounted just how carnal that night had been; from the dark seduction in his eyes to the scarlet blush that coloured her chest.

He felt his cock twitch between his thighs. “I remember.” He was in no mind to ever forget.

“We’ve also had sex in the wine cellar at the charity event, hard and fast as we tried to beat your legs cramping and you told me I was being too loud,” she said with a coquettish smile.

“I remember that too.” He leaned in and kissed her neck, tasting the salty remnants misted there.

“Almost in a changing room,” she breathed as her eyes lulled closed and her body swooned against his lips.

“Fuck,” he nipped the word into her pulse point making her moan.

“On your bike while it was idling by a tree at sunset,” she continued, her voice husky and salacious.

“We should definitely do that again,” he sighed as he kissed along her jaw.

“And let’s not forget on the meeting table at a gang’s headquarters.”

“That was unforgettable.”

It was the night that Ruby was conceived after all; not something they could easily forget.

“My point is,” she started as her hands cupped his face and pulled him back from her neck, “I don’t think ‘spice’ is a problem for us. I’m not just saying this to inflate your ego, but I’ve never felt the way I do with you with anyone else. You’re it, you’ve set the bar too high for anyone else.”

He touched her face tenderly and said, “All that, plus I love you.”

“I love you too.”
“But if you wanted me to get a wax, I would,” Oliver cringed as he thought of the rubber gloves snapping on.

“Hmm, no,” Felicity pouted before it softened to a smile. “I love you just the way you are.”
Sometimes the very best friendships are formed despite barriers like age, distance or… species.

And never is that more true than a child and their pet.

The first time Jax met Ruby she was crying. Her tiny hands were fisted by her face and her entire new born body was quaking with the type of wail that completely consumed her.

It wasn’t the first time he’d seen a little bundle of wriggling limbs, and it wasn’t the first time he’d ever heard the bleating cries echo throughout the house. More often than not it was in the thick of
night when the cry rang out, startling him awake with so much alert that twice he’d knocked himself on the table beside his bed.

No, it wasn’t the first time he’d sensed this strange little creature, but it was the first time he was close enough to see the tears falling down her cheeks.

His human was out and the other human they’d adopted together – the one who could scratch his head just right – was sitting on the chair that rocked (and he’d been shooed off at least three times) with her head in her hairless paws gently rocking herself.

At first when he sensed her anxiety, he acted just as he had in the past; with a comforting paw on her lap. Felicity looked down at the gesture, her eyes sore and heavy and her cheeks sodden with the avalanche of tears she couldn’t seem to control. She brushed tears away fruitlessly and more just sprung up to take their place.

“Hey boy,” she sobbed, tiny breaths making her voice stutter, “I’m sorry, I can’t take you on a walk right now.” She managed a weak smile, it was silly how it was for a dog’s benefit, but Jax was part of the family and Felicity felt the need to at least attempt an ‘all is well’ face for him. He yawned, flapping his tongue out onto her knee before pressing his wet nose into her hand.

Jax wasn’t sure why his human wasn’t getting it. He didn’t want a walk. “The noise getting to you boy?” He flapped his head from side to side, his gums flapping in the move. “I wish I knew what was wrong with her,” Felicity continued, a tired and shaky hand passing through her hair. “I just need a minute, this baby thing isn’t easy.” She touched a hand to her tender breast; Maybe Ruby was still hungry.

She took a few deep, relaxing (as best as she could) breaths and tried to dissipate the tension she felt, remembering the sage advice that the milk flows better when mommy is relaxed.

With Ruby still hollering, Felicity turned to grab her glass of water. She downed one mouthful, than another and by the time she was taking in the third, the crying stopped; almost abruptly. Her heart panicked and she spun around, sloshing the water from the glass over her lap, to discover Jax carefully licking the tears off Ruby’s face while the three week old was smiling broadly. Now, Felicity had read the books, she knew that babies didn’t really smile until around 6 weeks old, but, she decided, books be damned because that little girl was brimming with delight and, what’s more, in the throes of what appeared to be a silent laugh.

It took a few moments before Felicity, momentarily frozen in wonderment, reacted. “Oh god, I shouldn’t let you…” She tugged Jax away. “Sorry boy but I don’t think I should be letting you do that.” Ruby started to cry again almost immediately, but Felicity couldn’t very well just let a dog lick her daughter’s face to garner a few moments of peace... could she? While she was still holding Jax by his collar, he howled lightly, with a slight vibrato in his voice, and, although Felicity could barely believe it, Ruby stopped crying and started wriggling happily in her bouncer instead.

When Felicity slacked on his collar, Jax sat down beside the bouncer and leaned his head against the edge of it, close enough for Ruby to blindly grab a fist-full of fur. While his eyes widened, he didn’t growl and he never moved; letting those little fingers coil in tight.

Ruby yawned and Felicity leaned down and gently moved the bouncer in a slow rock, up and down, with the tips of her fingers. Jax watched for a few moments before he mimicked Felicity’s action with his own paw.

Ruby’s eyes became drowsy like heavy weights over her eyes as her lips smacked together. A
second yawn made her entire body shudder before her eyes closed completely. In silence, and as carefully as she could, Felicity took her hand away while Jax kept his there, gently rocking.

“I might very well be hallucinating this,” Felicity whispered to herself.

The front door opened and Oliver hurried in, “I came as…”

Felicity jumped up and ran to meet Oliver in the entry way with a finger pressed to her lips, “Ssshhhhhh.”

“…soon as I could,” he finished, dropping his voice to a rasped whisper.

“She wouldn’t stop crying, I didn’t know what to do,” Felicity sighed, blinking her dry, red eyes.

Oliver wrapped his arms tenderly around her, pressing her head into his warm chest. “She’s stopped now,” he said softly as he feathered a kiss near her temple.

She nodded lightly. “I know.”

Another few soft kisses. “So you got this.”

“No, it wasn’t me,” a tired smile tugged at her lips. “Come and see.”

Felicity led Oliver on tiptoes into the living room where Ruby was asleep in her crocheted bouncer and Jax, sitting beside it, was dutifully rocking the same with his paw.

“Is he?” Oliver gaped.

“He is.”

“And is Ruby?”

“She’s asleep,” Felicity answered with a giddy yawn.

Oliver noted Ruby’s fisted hand in Jax’s fur and instinctively he touched the nape of his own neck, recounting the incredibly tight grip Ruby had had on his hair before.

“Well damn,” Oliver sighed.

“He really is your four-legged doppelganger,” Felicity laughed, a sort of tired delirium making her sway on her feet.

“You, go sleep,” Oliver gently ordered as he pointed Felicity up the stairs. “Jax and I have this.”

She was far too tired to argue.

Jax looked up from his spot on the floor and silently yawled. His human finally got it.

It was a lazy Sunday morning when Oliver was balancing three month old Ruby on his knee in bed, trying every trick he could remember from when Thea was about that age to make the chubby-faced baby laugh. He’d pulled every incarnation of a funny face; most were met with sullen disinterest and one was met with almost tears. He’d tickled every spot, from the backs of her rolly knees to the fold of her neck, each foot twice and under each arm at varying speeds and weight.

She had smiled, wriggled, cooed and pouted her floppy lips, but not a single laugh.

“She might still be too young,” Felicity remarked as she peaked over the edge of the book she rewarded herself with every Sunday morning before the morning rolled over to mid-morning.

Life had settled into a nice routine, and while she wouldn’t call the midnight feedings or the 5am top up ‘easy’, there was something manageable about the routine of it all. Sure, some nights there were intervals in between where Ruby was wide-eyed and demanding, but often all it took was a few moments lying on Oliver's hard, milk-less chest to lull their daughter back to sleep, and of
course they always had their special weapon; Jax.

He’d come to be her pillow on more than one occasion and he was never too far away; even at that moment he was lying at the foot of the bed making use of the space Felicity left on her side. “Or,” Felicity shrugged with a sly grin lifting one side of her mouth, “you’re really not so funny.” Oliver turned to Felicity with an equally as sly of a grin. “I had you giggling last night.” Felicity felt a sudden hot flash across her cheeks and a dazzling pulse between her thighs; the same place Oliver had visited last night. “That... was different. That had nothing to with humour.” “Noted,” Oliver chortled. “But I could make Thea laugh, why is Ruby such a tough crowd?” “She has your serious face,” Felicity teased before she bookmarked her page and set the novel down on her nightstand. She turned back to Oliver and tucked a flop of blondish hair behind his ear. “And your eyes,” she added as she took a moment to study the features of her ruffian; a man who had now found peace.

Oliver moved Ruby onto the bed, propping her up against his legs with one large arm bracing the tiny, precious bundle. She seemed neither happy nor bothered by the move as she cooed away to herself while she tried to fit her whole fist in her mouth. Once she was nestled and safe, Oliver leaned over and cupped Felicity's face with his free hand. She leaned into it, her eyes lapsing contently as a beautiful smile graced her lips.

“I think I’m going to kiss you now,” he whispered softly and her head nodded in his hand. “Mmm, please do,” she hummed before wetting her lips with a salaciously slow lick from her tongue.

He leaned closer, his lips tingling to taste hers, when an effervescent sound filled the room. Both Felicity and Oliver jerked back and looked down to the source of the noise; Ruby was laughing. “She found that funny?” Oliver quipped before Felicity pointed at the reason for her first ever, actual, she-found-that-amusing-laugh.

It was Jax, licking her toes with one paw covering his eyes and his hind legs pointing up towards the ceiling.

“You know it sure looks like he’s pulling a face for her,” Felicity remarked as she watched the fully-grown dog act like a puppy. “You trying to outdo me boy?” Oliver laughed. “Looks like Ruby has her favourite,” Felicity teased.

But she wasn’t really wrong. The two forged a friendship that went far beyond owner and pet.

When Ruby was 8 months old and an overzealous goose at the park got too close, he bared his teeth and took on 4 very angry geese, and one duck who couldn’t resist a snap at his tail.

On her first birthday she shared her cake when no one was looking and cried when it was scooped away from the floor under her chair.

When she was two, Jax dutifully towed her around the snow-covered yard on a sled, and the toddler repaid him with a snow dog statue in his honour.

The pair were inseparable; most nights he slept on the floor at the foot of her bed, on the few occasions where he wasn’t in her room, he kept a vigil outside the door. She shared her snacks and he was more than happy to be poked, prodded, grabbed, ridden and lied on.

On any occasion where there was an excuse to dress up, especially on Halloween, when Ruby was
old enough to pick her own costume she inevitably wanted one that had a costume in kind for Jax. One year they went as Scooby and Shaggy, another year as Belle and Beast and one year Ruby insisted on being the dog while Jax dutifully wore a shirt collar and tie.

There wasn’t much they didn’t do together.

At four years old Ruby Dawn Queen was adamant she wouldn’t have a bath unless Jax had one with her. There was no amount of coaxing either of her parents could do.

*Jax is too big for the bathtub.* She would make room.

*Jax doesn’t like baths.* He would if it was with her.

*Jax is dirtier than she was.* She could get dirtier.

*Jax licks himself to get clean.* Naturally, she started licking herself in solidarity.

On the fourth day of this ‘bath-strike’, and just shy of actually forcing the stubborn four year old into the bath; Oliver had one, final, idea.

The cherub-faced four year old with tumble of blonde hair and ruddy cheeks giggled as she hopped on the spot on a cloudless spring day. It wasn’t hot, but it wasn’t cold either, though a gentle breeze rustled through the trees surrounding their suburban backyard.

“Are you sure this is what you want?” Oliver asked as he helped his excited daughter into the inflated paddling pool.

Her arms banded around Jax as she laughed, nearly giddy with excitement.

“It’s what we want daddy,” she answered gleefully before she smoothed one hand down the front of her *Little Mermaid* swimsuit.

“All right,” Oliver said as he gave an apologetic shrug towards Jax and walked over to the tap the garden hose was plugged into.

The giddy pre-schooler readied herself with her eyes squeezed closed and her little hands fisted at her sides as Oliver turned on the hose. After lining it up with Ruby’s feet, Oliver squeezed the trigger on the nozzle and a gush of cold water pelted the bottom of the inflatable pool and Ruby’s entire bottom half.

She squealed when Oliver turned the hose on Jax too, who buried his head under his paws for the first wave. Soon though, both little girl and dog were twirling and snapping at the water with Ruby laughing gregariously.

Felicity approached cautiously with a palm full of shampoo, a body wash bottle tucked up under one arm and conditioner tucked up under the other. She kept her eye on Oliver who couldn’t help the smirk that turned up the edges of his lips.

“I swear to god,” she mouthed in warning as she looked from Oliver to the spray of water before affixing her eyes back to him.

Oliver exaggeratedly crossed his heart as he kept the water spraying on Ruby and Jax only; he may have been a bit of a daredevil once, but he wasn’t *that* foolish.

“Close your eyes baby,” Felicity encouraged as she splashed through the sodden ground to Ruby. Ruby obeyed just as her mother reached the outer rim of the paddling pool, and with ricochet water spraying the lower parts of her legs, Felicity leaned in and palmed the shampoo into Ruby’s damp locks.
When she was satisfied the shampoo had completed covered Ruby’s head, Felicity stepped back. “Close your eyes tightly Rubiks, daddy is going to rinse the shampoo.” “WAIT!” Ruby called as she grabbed two little fistfuls of lather and dropped them onto Jax’s back. “Okay go.” Oliver lifted the trajectory of the hose onto Ruby’s head. She laughed hysterically as she jumped from one foot to the other, streams of bubbles coursing down her small body.

They repeated nearly identical steps for the conditioner and body wash, until the pool resembled a bubble bath and the lawn around it a sloshy mud-pit.

After turning off the hose Felicity wrapped a towel tightly around the shivering pre-schooler before Oliver plucked her from the pool and slung her over his shoulders, the screams of delight she let out making him smile, ear to ear.

Jax shook himself dry, creating a halo of water drops that splattered against Oliver’s back. “I probably deserved that,” Oliver laughed as he let Ruby down onto the patio where Felicity was waiting with clean, dry clothes. Felicity gave him a look that said what they were both thinking; they had just bathed their four-year old and a dog in a paddling pool in the backyard with a hose. Parenting at it’s finest.

Felicity towelled Ruby dry before the little blonde with saucer-sized eyes looked up at Oliver and sneezed. “Daddy,” she said through chattering teeth. “Yeah Rubiks?” “That was maybe too cold, can I have a warm bath inside next time?” He pinched her cheek and winked. “Of course pumpkin.”

Ruby was 7 when things changed.

Over a few months, Jax became increasingly lethargic and began forgoing food for water. He’d lost much of his perk and there wasn’t much that could get him to move anymore. Oliver had even tried coaxing him onto his motorbike, but the lifelong friend barely even lifted his head up from his spot on the front porch.

On a brisk Saturday, mid-afternoon, when dark clouds threatened rain, Ruby was outside with Jax trying everything in her arsenal to make him play.

When Felicity came into the kitchen, combing her hand through a tumble of freshly washed hair, she found Oliver standing on the far side of the room watching the two friends jaunt around outside; well one of them was jaunting anyway.

“All good up there?” Oliver asked without turning away from the window as he heard Felicity's footsteps on the tiles. She slipped her arms around his waist, lifted onto her toes, braced herself against his back and craned her neck to his shoulder before she pecked a chaste kiss near his ear. “All good,” she answered him softly, sealing the words with a second kiss. “And down here?” she asked, threads of sadness weaving through her question as her eyes fell out the same window Oliver was watching out of.

“All good up there?” Oliver asked without turning away from the window as he heard Felicity's footsteps on the tiles. She slipped her arms around his waist, lifted onto her toes, braced herself against his back and craned her neck to his shoulder before she pecked a chaste kiss near his ear. “All good,” she answered him softly, sealing the words with a second kiss. “And down here?” she asked, threads of sadness weaving through her question as her eyes fell out the same window Oliver was watching out of.

“Ruby is throwing the rope toy and running to collect it herself,” Oliver answered somewhat stoically though Felicity felt the sad shudder in his breathing as she pressed her cheek to his back. “He hasn’t moved an inch,” he added, the words shaking in his throat as Felicity held him around
the waist just that little bit tighter. She listened to the echo of his heart and counted each shaky breath he took. “How long?” A deep inhale, held, and then a morose exhale. “About 20 minutes.”

“Did he eat anything?” Her eyes wandered to his full food bowl and she found her answer. “No.” He patted her hands and she unclasped them. He turned from the window and behind furrowed lips and glassy, wet eyes, Oliver made a decision he dreaded but knew would eventually come. “It’s time.”

“Oliver,” Felicity whispered, the word tapering off with sadness. She could see him try to hold his emotions back stoically. “The vet told us if he got like this.” The tremble in his voice gave him away though.

Felicity nodded softly, “I’ll go talk to Thea and see if she can babysit.”

“I need to go tell her,” he lamented as he glanced over his shoulder, watching the oblivious child try everything in her power to ‘cheer up’ her best friend.

“I could take him if you want to stay here with Ruby,” Felicity offered as her thumb stroked a rogue tear from his cheek. His eyes closed, squeezing out another tear that burned a track down his skin. “I need to go with him,” he answered bitterly; life just didn’t seem fair in that moment.

The pair finally had the home, the stability, the family they had both been without for so long. Jax deserved to enjoy it for longer than his lifespan allowed.

Felicity brushed a tender kiss against Oliver’s damp cheek, holding it for a few moments longer as she felt his body sob forward. Oliver Queen was one of the toughest people she’d ever known, he’d looked death in the eye and lived a jaded life for years, but a few times in his life and in her arms, his walls came down. This was one of those moments.

“I’ll go talk to Thea,” she whispered when he finally pulled away.

Oliver swallowed the aching lump in his throat before he looked out the window a second time and nodded. “I’ll go talk to Ruby.”

“Hi Daddy,” Ruby puffed as she ran to the rope toy she’d just thrown, collected it and ran back. “Hi baby girl,” Oliver replied quietly.

She looked at him with her head cocked curiously to one side. “I don’t want him to go,” she whispered, reading her father like a book.

Oliver knelt down to her level and threaded his hand through her long golden hair. “Remember I told you how Jax was so much older than us in human years?” Ruby nodded, slow and deliberate, her eyes trained on her father.

Oliver fought with the words but as tears began to spring from his daughter’s eyes he just couldn’t bring himself to say them.

Felicity soon knelt beside her husband and Ruby fell, weightless, into her arms, her entire body shaking with each sob. “Thea’s going to stay with you,” Felicity said softly as her hand stroked Ruby’s head.

She felt the little girl convulse as she tried to breathe through her tears, before she spoke. “No, I want to stay with Jax.” She lifted her head and her cheeks were red with tracks of tears she didn’t try to brush away. “Please, I want to stay with him.”

Jax didn’t put up a fight when Oliver gently lifted him into the backseat of the car. He sat quietly in the middle with his head on Ruby’s lap and his paw on her knee, where he would have once sat upright in the same spot with his head jolting in and out of the gap between the two front seats.

As they travelled in almost silence, Oliver wringing his hands into the steering wheel and Felicity showing her empathetic solidarity with her hand on his knee, it was Ruby who broke the thick,
“Remember the times we went to Aruba Jax?” she said softly as she ruffled her small hand through his coat. “You didn’t like the sand on your feet so I’d brush them clean,” she natted, a resilient smile caught in her words. “Or when we tried to catch autumn leaves with our mouths, you were much better at that than me,” she continued as he lifted his pale blue eyes towards her. “Remember when I shared my candy with you and you shared your dog food with me?”

Oliver breathed out a laugh that was shortly followed by a thread of tears he quickly brushed away as Felicity squeezed his leg. But the next words from Ruby’s innocent mouth would see Oliver letting the tears soak in, cold and damp; but real. “I’ll give you more than half of my bed if you get better Jax,” she whispered before she leaned over and kissed his furry head. “Just get better.”

Felicity watched through the slatted blinds as Oliver talked in the corridor with the vet. The examination had been thorough and when Oliver was asked to step outside, all of the grown ups knew what the prognosis was.

She watched the 6ft-something man slump forward and catch his head in his hand while Ruby sat on her lap with her arm stretched out, holding Jax’s hand as he lay, near motionless, on the examination table.

When Oliver walked back into the room his eyes were red and his face was sombre as he shook his head. Felicity’s eyes closed and she held Ruby a little tighter.

“There’s nothing they can do,” Oliver said quietly, his voice thin, cracked, broken. “His organs are failing.”

“What does that mean daddy?” Ruby asked, her eyes wide and her lips quivering as she spoke. Oliver brushed his hand down her cheek, sighing at the tears that bled into his palm. “It means it’s time to let him go baby. He’s hurt, he’s tired and he’s done all he can in this world.”

Ruby slapped her father’s hand away as she shook her head furiously. “He’s strong,” she argued with the stubbornness of both her parents.

“I’m sorry Rubiks baby,” Oliver admitted, his shoulders slumping forward as he looked at Jax with the same apology in his eyes. “You did good boy,” he mouthed.

“Fix it daddy,” the seven year old pleaded, “you said anything can be fixed.” Oliver’s brow pinched inwards, heavy with emotion. “I meant cars sweetheart, I can’t fix this.” “You’re not trying hard enough,” Ruby sobbed before she buried her head into Felicity’s chest.

“Jax has lived a wonderful life,” Felicity soothed as she gently rocked Ruby in her arms. “He met your daddy, he almost got arrested,” Felicity looked up at Oliver and smiled gently, as did he. “He’s flown to tropical islands and he’s watched you grow.” She plucked Ruby’s head from her chest and lifted her tear-sodden face at the chin. “But he’s hurting baby, it’s not fair to let him be in pain.”

“Can I say goodbye to him?” the little girl asked, her voice cracking under the emotion. “Of course you can, daddy and I will give you some time.”

Ruby slipped off Felicity’s lap and watched as her and Oliver moved to a corner of the room.

On her tiptoes, Felicity pulled Oliver into an embrace, and, with his forehead buried into her shoulder, he let down his walls again.

Ruby stood on shaky legs beside the metal table where Jax lay limp with heavy eyes. She leaned...
down and pressed her cheek against his, her young tears wetting his fur. Jax stirred lethargically under her until she lifted her head just enough to see him through her watery eyes.

And then he licked her; like he had 7 years ago, like he was wiping the tears from her little, ruddy cheeks.

“Thank you for keeping all the monsters out of my room,” Ruby whispered before she leaned in closer. “And for keeping all my secrets. You’re the bestest friend I ever had and I know you’ll find a way back to us.”

Jax was put to sleep a little while later; loved and at peace.

They buried Jax’s ashes in the front garden under the tree with the rope swing in the spot where it got the late afternoon sun and where he, as he mellowed with contentment, would sit most days, carefully watching over his family.

After a few reflective stories everyone, aside from Felicity, Oliver and Ruby had made their way inside. Ruby was sitting silently on the swing, rocking her feet back and forth but barely moving as she looked down at the disturbed ground and hummed a song she’d decided was Jax’s favourite.

Her tears had somewhat dried up, her face now a tiny reminder of Oliver’s own stoic nature, but it was clear for anyone to see that the wound was still raw for both father and daughter.

“And how are you?” Felicity asked softly as her fingertips stroked up and down Oliver’s spine. He nodded as though that was a full answer, until he saw her eyes telling him it wasn’t.

“I’m fine,” he answered, though his tone contradicted that.

“It’s me Oliver, you don’t need to put on a pretence for me,” she smiled warmly as her thumb brushed across the apple of his cheek. “Never have and never will need to.”

He smiled thankfully as his head bobbed gently in the wind, but for now he had no other words.

“What about her?” he finally spoke, nodding his head towards Ruby as he posed the question.

“You haven’t broken her if that’s what you’re worried about,” Felicity pecked the answer against his cheek. “We just have to give her the freedom to feel how she wants to I suppose.”

It was as if Ruby heard them when she slipped off the seat of the swing and walked, heavy footed, to her parents.

“I don’t want another dog,” she said with two thoughtfully raised brows and her mother's crinkled nose.

“That’s okay baby girl,” Felicity said softly as she crouched. “It’s also okay if you change your mind later too.”

“I won’t.”

“Maybe in a few months at Hanukkah or even in a year or two, it’ll be okay if you do,” Oliver added. He didn’t want her to base a decision on a moment of sadness and shut herself off to new four-legged friends.

“No thank you,” she answered with a decisive nod. “I’ll just wait for Jax to come home.”

Oliver looked at Felicity. “Rubix, Jax isn’t coming home, remember?” He glanced over to the mound of dirty scattered with daisies. Her eyes followed her father’s but her face stayed determined.

“He will.” She tugged on one of her pigtails, coiling the end around her finger before she dropped
her hand to her side. “It might take him a little time, but he will. I want to wait for Jax.”

They may have been the words of a child, but they were said with such conviction that neither of her parents could see themselves going against that plea without a future recantation.

They had mice, half a dozen fish and a cat over the course of a few years, but they never had another dog and Jax’s bed lived empty in Ruby’s room, with one rope toy in the centre.

As a homage to a friend.

[July 2024]

It was a sunny Friday afternoon as Ruby kicked an empty soda can along the sidewalk, her walking partner a few steps behind her with his nose buried in a book. It was a new development that the freshly-minted 11 year old was allowed to walk this short stretch from the bus stop to Queen Motors on Friday afternoons, but after what seemed to her like years of begging for it, she had finally been able to take the jaunt for the last two Fridays, sans any incident; provided they stayed on the approved path knowing that any deviations would be sent to Felicity almost instantaneously and Oliver would be called to ride the block to collect them. Freedom revoked.

Still, she thought to herself as a gentle breeze brushed her warm cheeks, there was something freeing about the whole experience.

A ruckus of noise down an alleyway across the road caught Ruby’s attention and she stopped suddenly near the curb, causing the boy walking along behind her to bump into her backpack and drop the book he’d been studying.

There were three boys a year or two older than Ruby jeering and kicking at a chain fence that bordered an abandoned factory at the end of the alleyway. She studied them carefully from her spot at a distance, unsure what kind of asinine game they were playing. It wasn’t until there was a lull in the noise they were making that another sound caught her attention; a bark.

When one of the boys stumbled back from the fence, Ruby finally saw what was happening; a ragged looking young mutt was growling and snapping at the fence while the boys kicked out at it, teasing the nearly two-foot mongrel.

“HEY!” Ruby yelled across the street, startling all three boys. “Pick on someone of the same intelligence as you, like a brick.”

Her walking companion gulped as he looked down at his laces, checking that they were tied tightly in the very real eventuality they had to run the rest of the journey. They were.

The boys started laughing before ramping up their torment. Ruby, wearing a menacing growl on her full lips, went to step off the curb before the other child, Gabe caught her arm.

“Your watch,” he said as he nodded down to her wrist. As soon as she stepped off the ‘path’ her mother would be alerted to the same and she’d lose her newfound freedoms.

She furrowed her lips as the dog’s barks became more panicked and the boys picked up street debris to throw through the fence.

Ruby unfastened her watch and dropped it into Gabe’s hand. “Hold this for me.”
Before he could answer, Ruby darted across the street and without pausing kicked one of the boys in the shin and pushed the other 7th grader to the ground. As for the third boy, she glared him down with a look copied straight from her father’s face. “Ready to get beaten up by a girl?” she hissed as she lunged forward to make him flinch.

The boy on the ground picked himself up while the other limped backwards holding his shin. It was only the third, unscathed one, who spoke. “Don’t you have some dolls to play with?” he mocked.

“I can play with them after I kick your asses.” He went to shove his body forward but Ruby landed a solid fist into his gut, just like her father had taught her, which sent the bully reeling backwards.

The three scattered without a second thought.

The young dog was still barking, though it had softened somewhat once the boys had left. “It’s okay, those jerks have gone now,” Ruby spoke as she crouched near the fence.

Gabe soon came running over, his blue eyes blinking behind his glasses. “Come on, we should go,” he urged as he reached out for Ruby’s hand. But Ruby was too busy looking at something else; the dog hadn’t run away because he couldn’t – one of his legs had some sort of metal wire twisted around it. “He’s stuck,” she lamented as she looked up the 6ft fence. “I need to let him loose.”

“Uh, Ruby I don’t think…” Gabe started, but before he could finish the spritely 11 year old had already climbed to the top of the fence, “…you should do that,” he finished with a sigh as she jumped down on the other side.

He looked down at the watch still in his hand and shrugged. They had about five minutes.

Ruby approached the dog cautiously and with her already-small frame crouched smaller, she hushed her voice. “Ssssh, it’s okay, I won’t hurt you.” The dog, a black Labrador cross with pale blue eyes, had fur that was matted and skin raw with sores on his legs and he was so skinny that the lines of his ribs could be seen protruding from his belly. He was young and small, but with large paws he was supposed to grow into.

She crouched as low as she could when she was within arm’s reach and took a deep breath as she slowly stretched out her arm. “It’s okay, I won’t hurt you,” she whispered.

The coiled metal wasn’t tight for someone with opposable thumbs and Ruby was able to get the dog’s leg free in a few seconds. As she retracted her hand she smiled at the lopsided whimper of appreciation he gave her. “You’re kinda cute,” she chatted before the dog bounded forward and, quite unexpectedly, licked her face – just like Jax used to do.

Ruby leaned closer and drove her eyes into his, holding his stare for what seemed like hours. “Is that you boy? You finally made it back?” she whispered, each word shaking from her young lips. He flopped his head to the other side before he licked her other cheek. “What took you so long?” she breathed as a smile lifted her whole face. “Welcome home.”
Chapter End Notes

Dedicated to Buffy, I still miss you boy.

RIP JAX *sobs in the corner*

Jax2 doesn't have a name as of yet so I'd love to hear any suggestions, Spot or Rover need not apply...
HAPPY 3 YEAR FICVERSARY TO ME...and I guess to you guys too.

Three times Oliver asked.

“Marry me.” He had meant it despite the way the question had flown without any real forethought or planning and even when Felicity looked up at him, perplexed while her hands dropped away from his, he’d still meant them then too.

It might not have been a proposal like the movies; not even close. And he hadn’t bought a ring yet, but looking at her, her face still glistening with the afterglow of Ruby’s birth, Oliver had meant it.

Funny how the once confirmed bachelor would have married her then and there if she’d said yes.
But she hadn’t, and that had made him love her all the more.

See, the thing about Felicity that Oliver had come to learn was that she never demanded he change, that he be something he wasn’t or that he fit a mould that society might deem appropriate.

She knew he was worth more than the patch he’d once worn and she had given him the clarity to finally believe that too.

“Oliver, we already are a family. I’m not going anywhere, Ruby and I, we’re yours, completely.”

Even now, nearly two years later, her words still struck a chord with him. They were still as clear and as honest as the day she had said them. As were his.

“I’m going to ask you again.”

A promise he had every intention of keeping.

He turned the white gold band with a solitaire set diamond in his thick and rough fingers. Its slender elegance looked swamped by his worn and oil-stained tips; as an emblem of a diamond in the rough, catching the light from above with its intricate faces.

It was a promise he would keep.

A few weeks later and after the raucous that was Ruby Dawn’s second birthday, Oliver quietly climbed the stairs as he stretched out the stiffness in his back, his own fault really as he’d spent the last hour under the hood of his project car in the garage. It might have been more than two years since Felicity had presented him with the Ford Mustang, but he’d only just found himself in enough of a routine in life to steal a few moments away with it in the garage – often with Ruby hovering around his feet, eagerly holding a hammer in the hopes he might use one.

To humour her, a few times he’d borrowed the tool from her tiny, chubby fingers and used it to spiritedly banged it against a tire, which Ruby gleefully cheered on before she’d toddle off to sit with Jax who was usually napping in the corner.

It was a life. The best life Oliver could have ever imagined; and one he certainly never imagined being lucky enough to have.

At the top of the stairs he heard a cacophony of happy sounds that drew him towards the bathroom. He stopped and listened outside the door with a dopey smile across his rugged terrain of a face as he idly combed splintered fingers through his hair. It sat a little past his chiselled jaw when it fell forward over his face, though he mostly wore it combed back. His dirty blonde beard was groomed neatly to look slightly dishevelled as his slate grey jeans bore a trademark skid of grease across the knees.

“Eight, nine, ten,” Felicity finished counting gleefully before a jubilant laugh quickly filled the silence.

It was a sound Oliver could spend his life listening to, the sound of his 2 year old baby girl laughing at the fact she had ten toes splashing around in the bath; the simple pleasures of a toddler.

His smile wilted for only a moment as he considered the dark places and turns his life had once taken him, and yet he had been gifted something he’d never imagined himself worthy of - a family.

“Ebite, niom, tenf,” Ruby chortled before Oliver heard a raucous laughter and the distinctive sound
of water splashing onto the tiled floor.
“Good girl,” Felicity hummed, her tone eliciting another cheery giggle.

His smiled returned, wide and unashamed as he gently pushed open the door and strolled into the bathroom. Oliver found both his girls in the bathtub, with Ruby resting against Felicity's tented legs with her arms splayed in the air and her toes dangerously close to Felicity's nipping mouth.

Both sets of eyes turned towards the door and it was Ruby who happily announced Oliver's presence. “DADA DADA DA DAD!” she screamed happily before her hands slapped the water and her entire body bounced up towards him.

“Someone’s happy to see you,” Felicity chuckled as she carefully held Ruby at the waist but let her tread water towards the edge of the bath.

Oliver leaned over and kissed Ruby's soapy head before he pecked a chaste kiss against Felicity's lips, sighing at the shortness of it while he pulled a stool over and sat on it, with his knees nearing grazing his cheeks.

He took a damp baby wash cloth and cleaned Ruby's nose just to hear her laugh, which she did without much coaxing. The sound of it, happy and utterly carefree bounced off the walls and was like soothing music to Oliver's weary soul. He truly couldn't believe how lucky he was.

“All clean,” Felicity cheered and Ruby intuitively clapped her pudgy hands together while she bobbed her angelically-blonde head.


Oliver reached for the hooded towel Felicity had placed nearby as he stood up.
“Dada up baf, mmmm Jax,” Ruby natted away, her vocabulary coming along in leaps and bounds for the last few months, it was as though she learned at least 5 new words a day – a fact which Oliver had become increasingly mindful when he took her to Queen Motors with him and a certain protégée was struggling to refrain from four-letter words.

“You want to hang out with Jax?” Oliver asked as he opened the towel and lifted a slippery-wet Ruby from the bath.
She giggled to herself as two chubby hands pushed her hair back from her cheeks. “Hide in Feek.” Felicity smiled as she ran the hot tap of the bath, letting it warm up as the silken bubbles rose higher up the sides, and her.

With Ruby practically mummified in the hooded towel in Oliver’s arms, he leaned over and pressed a languid kiss near Felicity’s temple, staying long enough this time to breath in the subtle vanilla notes that was fragrantly wafting up from the churning water.
“Come back?” she asked with wide, pretty eyes.
He nodded and answered with a puckish grin before he left the room, a bundled and giggling Ruby thrown over his broad shoulder.

Oliver returned about 10 minutes later with the book Felicity had been reading and a glass of red wine.
“Best man ever,” she sighed happily as she took the glass of wine from him while he set the book near her towel.
She took a delicately slow sip with her eyes watching Oliver impishly over the edge. “You could join me,” she said quietly after she sat the stemless glass down beside her.
He growled through a smile before he smack his lips hungrily together, but before he could offer any sort of real answer a wild Ruby with tendrils of damp hair in a rainbow coloured onesie appeared in the room. “Boo!” she chortled before she ran out just as quickly, a flash of Jax chasing
along behind her.

“Or probably not,” Felicity laughed as she leaned her head back and sunk deeper into the luxuriant bath water until it touched her chin. “Do you want me to read to you?” Oliver asked as he nestled his back against the edge of the bath and stretched his long legs out ahead of him.

“Mmmmm, chapter 5,” Felicity sighed as her eyes lolled closed, smiling at the happy sounds that were filling the house just outside the door. Oliver picked up the book and cracked open the spine, but before he could start reading where the bookmark was, Felicity sat up and placed her chin on the lip of the bath beside his shoulder.

“Do you ever miss fucking?” she whispered while her eye darted towards the door. Oliver closed his finger in the book and laughed, “We have…Sex.” He whispered the last word as he spoke with a raised eyebrow. Felicity moved a little in the water, creating some choppy waves as her lips balanced so close to Oliver’s neck she could feel the heat radiating off it.

“We make love,” she purred, so close to his ear that Oliver audibly sighed. She plucked a few strand of his hair curiously with her wet fingers. “Which, don’t get me wrong, I adore and love and wouldn’t be without,” she spoke as she idly preened the tips of his hair. “But we used to fuck and have frantic unbridled sex that we didn't need to plan in advance.” She leaned closer and kissed the tip of his bristled jaw. “We didn’t have to worry about being too loud, or where we were.” “I remember,” he grinned wickedly as he turned, “fondly.” He watched her chest rise as she took a deep inhale. “We were loud and crazy and insatiable. We fucked,” she concluded with a shrug. “Remember us in Aruba?” “We barely left the bed.”

“Which, don’t get me wrong, I adore and love and wouldn’t be without,” she spoke as she idly preened the tips of his hair. “We make love,” she purred, so close to his ear that Oliver audibly sighed. She plucked a few strand of his hair curiously with her wet fingers. “Which, don’t get me wrong, I adore and love and wouldn’t be without,” she spoke as she idly preened the tips of his hair. “But we used to fuck and have frantic unbridled sex that we didn't need to plan in advance.” She leaned closer and kissed the tip of his bristled jaw. “We didn’t have to worry about being too loud, or where we were.”

“Remember us in Aruba?” “We barely left the bed.”

His fingertips grazed down her swanned neck and along her shoulder. “Our first night together?” His breath reverberated up his throat like a growl as his fingers slid off the cusp of her shoulder and sunk slowly under the water. Felicity could feel herself getting turned on as his fingers ghosted down her ribs. The warm water brushed between her heightened folds making her silently keen.

“We fucked,” he whispered, raspy and deep. The sound of his voice making her sex quiver. “I want that,” she pleaded, near breathless, as her tongue patted her lower lip and her eyes gently closed; imagining it. “I want to be loud and crazy and…”

“BOOOO!” Ruby bellowed as she careened into the bathroom, skidding on the mat and fell into Oliver’s arm. He pulled his hand from the water and Felicity sunk deeper into the watery embrace.

Okay, come on Rubik, bed time.”

“Storeeee,” the little sprite elatedly demanded. But when Oliver raised a brow she dropped her head to one shoulder, pouted her lips and added “Pwease dada?”

“Say night momma,” Oliver said as he clambered up off the floor. Felicity leaned over the bath so Ruby could give her a smushy kiss goodnight. “Nigh momma.” “Night baby girl, have good dreams,” Felicity said warmly as daddy and daughter left, holding hands.

That night Felicity and Oliver made love. It was beautifully satisfying, passionate and quietly amorous.
It left neither wanting and they fell asleep content and spent; but it wasn’t fucking.

The next day Felicity opened the door at Smoak Tech a little after 1:30pm, surprised to find Oliver on the other side of it. “Momma,” Ruby chortled with a burst of applause before Felicity took the 2 year old into her arms. “I wasn’t expecting you guys,” she said happily as she bounced Ruby on her hip. “Are you here for lunch, because you should have let me know,” Felicity remarked as she nodded towards the table of take out boxes, “Curtis and I have already eaten.” “Not here for lunch,” Oliver spoke, a certain coyness in his tone that Felicity immediately picked up for. Felicity set Ruby down and she ran towards Curtis with a jovial babble.

“Curtis,” Oliver called across the room as he walked in deeper, leaving the door open with Ruby’s stroller just outside. Curtis looked up as Oliver approached. “Looks like you could use some fresh air and an ice cream.” He took $20 from his wallet and handed it to the confused man. “Issseceam,” Ruby imitated as she slapped Curtis’ leg, “Unk Urtis, issseceam.” “I don’t ih,” Curtis looked at Oliver before down to Ruby and back up to Oliver, “Oh god.” His mind suddenly caught up. “You’re going to,” he looked at Felicity and blinked rapidly, “I remember the last time you gave me $20 and told me to go out for an hour at Kuttler.” Oliver smiled broadly while Curtis frantically grabbed his wallet and cellphone. “If she gets upset sing baa, baa black sheep,” Oliver suggested, although it was more direct than your usual suggestion. “Or Twinkle Twinkle,” Curtis chirped. Oliver smile tightened into more of a sullen frown. “No, just the sheep.” “It’s the same tune,” the younger man snorted as he watched Oliver buckle Ruby into her stroller. “Sing the sheep,” he warned before he kissed his daughters chubby cheeks and waves them off.

“Is this about what I said last night?” Felicity enquired and she clipped across the brushed concrete floor to meet Oliver.

He shut the door, locked it and turned around, barely pausing for a moment before he caught her lips in a rough and achingly incomplete kiss. “I’ll take that as a yes,” she panted after he retreated just as suddenly as he had pounced. She rested her forearms on his shoulders and idly twisted the tips of his hair around her fingers. “Oliver I love what we have, what we have is perfect and I wouldn’t trade it for anything,” she assured, fanning her fingers up his neck.

He caught her hands and, after peeling them back from his neck, Oliver lead her over to the large, clear-glass conference table that stood like a beacon in the middle of the office space, surrounded by dusty grey chairs.

He positioned her carefully in front of it, just at the point where the sun streaming in through the higher windows refracted into a rainbow that bled out beautifully down her neck.

Oliver stood back and let his eyes hungrily devour the sight of her with his fingers ghosting the outline of her hip.

She felt the attraction burn her cheeks scarlet as he was unrepentant in his salaciousness, roving his tongue across his bottom lip before nipping the edge and letting go of a dripping, molten-hot
Suddenly his hand grabbed a fistful of her ass as he pulled her hard against his chest. His lips grazed hers and when she opened her mouth in anticipation, Oliver smirked before his lips fell to the edge of her jaw.

Right on the cusp of her smooth, nearly iridescent jaw, Oliver placed an achingly intimate kiss, lingered and warm, as delectably carnal moans filled the palpable air between them.

She felt the tight nip of his teeth on the thin, sensitive skin near her throat and Felicity hissed voraciously, torn shreds of his name heard at the tips where her voice broke away.

“Get naked,” he rasped against her throat while her palms sunk into the table’s smooth bevelled lip. She laughed, effervescent and warm, but when his face moved back from her body she sensed there wasn’t a whip of jest in him.

Studying the shadows in his velvety-blue eyes, Felicity tipped her head to one side and raised a single brow. “We’re not...” Her voice trailed off into thin air as the tips of his fingers skimmed up her neck before they tangled in the hair near the base of her neck.

“We still fuck,” he smirked as his other hand roughly spread her legs and her skirt bunched up near her waist.

A single, nimble and thick digit pressed against her cotton panties, wicking up the first signs of her arousal as the smile grew on his expression. Perched on the very edge of the table with her toes curling in the ends of her shoes as she tried to hold herself steady, Felicity felt each punishingly slow sweep of his finger between her folds.

“The table Oliver?” she jested while his fingers teased her. She looked up at his with playfully coy eyes. “You know what happens with us and tables.”

He snapped his lips onto hers, kissing them furiously-deep before he severed it just as brutally, leaving her panting and craving. He grinned, darkly roguish, a sort of smirk that said he knew exactly what she was referring to.

“Good thing we’re not relying on a condom from the middle-ages this time,” she replied, each syllable and smile brushing against his lips.

“Never going to let me live that down are you?” he huskily whispered while their nose batted against each other.

She softly shook her head as the corner of her lips lifted into a lopsided smile.

Oliver reactively pressed his thumb against her clothed clit, grinning as she threw her head back and bleated. The chaffing of her panties was nearly maddening as friction grew in her core, tiny sparks setting off a chain reaction of soft and unfinished mewls.

His pace quickened as did her breathing, until is was uneven and stretched in her throat. “Look at me,” he ordered with a gentle tug of her hair and Felicity’s eyes shot open, so filled with desire and need that their appeared almost luminescent with flecks of crystal blue surrounding the irises.

Perspiration misted her hairline, glistened across her cheeks and the crevice of her lips as she panted through her building climax. Her shoulders shuddered, quite out of her control, as her hips thrashed in time with Oliver’s fingers; so desperate for more.

And then he stepped back, completely severing all contact between them. Wordlessly, her body slumped and a pained sob broke from her wet lips. She looked at him with desperate eyes as hair fell forward over her face.
“Get naked,” he said a second time and there wasn’t even a hint of a laugh in her response.

She tore away at her own clothes, pulling one off after the other as though they were smothering her, until she stood in nothing but a matching set of black lingerie and her suade, nude heels, one slightly resting on the side, her foot nearly free of it.

Felicity reached down with slender fingers towards the small buckle on her shoe when a guttural growl from Oliver stopped her.

“Leave them on,” he smiled coyly and a shambled sigh shivered from Felicity's lips in response.

She watched him unapologetically smack his lips together as he put his weight from one foot to the other and studied her. Her breasts were fuller than the first time he'd seen her like this, her hair a little shorter and her figure a little shapelier, but she was every bit delectable.

The air between them was ripe with desire when Felicity spindled her fingers towards the brass belt buckle that held his grey wash jeans on his hips.

He caught her deft fingers and guided them towards his mouth where he ghosted a breathy kisses across her knuckles. “Not yet princess.”

The nickname he used in their private moments sent a shudder of arousal down Felicity's spine as her back instinctively arched.

He swooped in with a precision he'd always possessed and lifted her onto the cool glass. A hiss snapped from behind her lips as the frigid temperature shocked her skin into a flurry of goosebumps.

Oliver gently tapped the edges of her knees and reflexively Felicity spread them while her palms found tenement behind her.

Watching her carefully, waiting for the signs of pleasure he'd long ago memorized, Oliver brushed his knuckles over her panties. As expected, her teeth nipped at her full bottom lip while her head lolled towards her right shoulder.

He didn't let up, passing his knuckles back and forth over her wet panties, while his other hand carefully excised the straps of her bra from her svelte shoulders. Once the straps hung loose down her arms, Oliver tapped his index finger across her jutted collarbone, noting the subtle shade of pink it was blushing beneath her alabaster skin.

He would bite here there; enough to pinch the skin scarlet but not enough to leave a mark that would last beyond tonight, and Felicity would sigh, maybe moan, while her eyes fluttered towards the ceiling and her chest would full with a breath she would suck in and hold without even realising it.

He smiled to himself, so sure of his prediction, as his mouth moved towards that delicate spot near the hollow.

Sure enough, when his teeth plucked at her body, she reacted just as he had imagined and he was all the more aroused at seeing it. As his lips ghosted up the damp threads of her neck, Felicity turned and caught his lips with bruising kiss.

She was eager, and with a feisty nip on his top lip, Oliver opened to her tongue. With their lips gnashing together in a kiss, Oliver curtained her panties and plunged three thick fingers into her pulsing and soaked entrance.

She gasped and he swallowed it, coiling his tongue around hers.
The feeling was enthralling, the sudden fullness and the tight stretch of her sex around his brawny digits. Slick trails of arousal coated him as Oliver began working his fingers in and out of her wonderfully tight hole.

He curled the tops of his fingers inside her and stroked down the inside of her cushiony walls before his lips made their way to her ear.

“Purr for me princess,” he whispered as he pulled away. She whimpered as her eyes met with the hungry shadows in his and, while he continued the slow, rhythmic stroke of her crushing walls, she purred with fixated eyes and slightly parted lips.

“God you're perfect,” he hummed as he watched beads of perspiration form down her ruby throat. He pumped harder until her breath was sparse and her eyes were glazed over with pleasure.

Felicity's shoulders arched and her back along with them, nearly lifting her seat off the glass that had now become a foggy mess of smeared palm prints. Her toes wound tightly in her shoes and her thighs were drenched with arousal. She could barely hold herself up a moment longer and her arms began to tremble while her vision began to haze over.

“Look at me when you come,” he urged, his voice stretched and husky at the edges. Her pleasure gave him just as much. She forced her chin down and anchored her eyes to his, noting the coy smile that lifted his lips unevenly.

She watched the veins on his forearm pulse and the muscles constricted and released while he fucked her with his achingly-long fingers.

Prickles exploded across her arms as her core thudded and shook with her climatic release. His smile grew broader after his fingers became utterly saturated in her. Her walls convulsed and swallowed around him as her rowdy cries of pleasure went unchallenged between the four walls that surrounded them.

As she started to come down, tiny jolts still rippling through her body, Oliver slipped his fingers out and studied them closely before he fed them between his lips. Her come was sickly sweet and it ignited his taste buds with an illicit growl as he made sure to lick up every morsel.

While she was still wet from her climax, Oliver tugged down on the centre of her bra and her breasts fell free of the black sheath.

She whimpered as the cold air from the ceiling fan above whipped against them before Oliver's mouth was on one. His tongue teased and rolled her pebbled nipple until his name dropped like honey from her lips.

Her nipples were tight and a dusky rose colour as he lay her back onto the glass, tiny sparks of chill erupting up her spine.

She writhed for a moment as he stole seconds to release his throbbing cock from his pants, which he left hung around his knees. Gripping her under her knees he pulled her towards him. Her legs dangled from the knees over the edge of the table while Oliver yanked down her soaking panties and dropped them proudly on the table beside her.

“You're a fucking masterpiece,” he gravelled as his fingers trickled over her body, relishing the way her body writhed and contorted with the feathery sensation.

Moving his hands back to her, Oliver lifted her dangling legs and bent them forward toward her chest. She gasped as the stretch pulled across her sensitive clit, still raw from her last orgasm.
“We still fuck Felicity,” he chuckled, gruffly and alluring as he bent over and kissed the edge of her clit. He flicked his tongue across the top of it while he inhaled her heady scent. “Do you want me to fuck you now princess?”

She nodded, haphazardly and without a moment to consider the question. He hummed against her folds making them ache with need before he rimmed her entrance with his tongue.

She desperately wanted to buck, to grind against his face, but he held her legs bent marvellously tight and Felicity could do little more than hum his name. “OhhOli-vur.”

He rammed his tongue inside her and her shoulders jarred off the table as she cried out his name even louder, “OLLLLLLIVER!”

“Louder princess, let’s disturb the neighbourhood,” he gleefully evoked as his cock bobbed in the air and before his tongue dove into her again.

The room became an echo chamber of her pleasured cries as she came a second time with ease.

But her body still ached for more.

As he lapped up her juices from the bristles around his mouth, he lined himself up with her and, without a moment’s despite, he thrust his erect cock into her quivering body.

It was immediately warm and wet, and he sighed quite deliriously at the way he nested so perfectly inside her. He was already halfway there with a few deep thrusts and after watching her come apart in front of him, and the pull at the back of his thighs told him so.

Felicity desperately clawed at his arms while he pinned her legs down and thrust into her hard and fast. It was fast and wordless, carnal and insatiable; and it was messy as their bodies slapped together. It was fucking.

Her whole body swelled with him and he took every inch she gave him, ploughing his way into her like a galloping stallion, until they had a moment where neither could finish with the distance between them and, instinctively, Oliver released her legs and Felicity sat up, found the tips of his hair with her shaking fingers while their lips crashed together in a passionate entanglement.

Because they had something more now. Something that neither of them would ever trade.

They had love.

Seconds later they climaxed together, their bodies pressed one against the other, dank and shaking, while their lips danced with each other’s names.

Still inside her, stealing the few languid moments left, Oliver bushed back Felicity’s hair and studied her blushing and misted face.

“Marry me,” he spoke, his breath still panted.

Her eyes widened and her swollen lips fell open.

He thought about the ring in his wallet and whether or not his hands should leave the warmth of her face to find it, but she answered before he’d decided.

“You can’t ask me now,” she blinked down at her naked and wrecked body, the feeling of his seed pooling in her folds. “We just had sex.”

He nodded with a silent chuckle. His cock was still throbbing inside of her, he hadn’t forgotten.

“You shouldn’t ask that sort of thing in heightened moments Oliver,” she wrapped her arms tightly around his neck and buried her head in the crevice of his throat.

“There are rules to this?” he asked, amused as her breath misted down his chest.
“Endorphins and adrenaline, they make you say things,” she answered as she slowly lifted her head, “things you might not mean.”
“I mean it.”
She kissed his lips devoutly, but before she could say anything more, the intercom from the front door rung out.

“Ruby is upset and if you guys are done and fully clothed, can we come in?” Curtis pleaded, the sound of a crying toddler also echoing through the office.
Oliver helped Felicity off the table before she scurried around to find her clothes and disappeared into the bathroom.

With a tissue Oliver wiped himself clean before he jostled his pants back on and walked over to the door.

Ruby went to him immediately, her red eye puffy and drenched and her milky complexion was botchy and red.
“She fell over at the park and nothing I did worked,” Curtis sighed forlornly.
“Did you sign Baa Baa Black Sheep?” Oliver quizzed.
Curtis looked down at the floor while he scuffed his shoes too and fro. “It’s the same tune,” he remarked quietly.
“It’s not the same Curtis,” Oliver fired back.

It took the first 6 words of the nursery rhyme for Ruby to stop crying, much to Curtis’ bemusement.

“You sung the wrong song didn’t you?” Felicity remarked as she wandered, clean and dressed, up to the others.
“It’s the same basic song,” he huffed as he watched Ruby’s mood completely change.

Within seconds she was laughing happily in her father’s arms.
“You’d think that,” Felicity grinned before she sidled away.

When the song was finished Ruby looked at Curtis and shook her head knowingly.

*It wasn’t the same.*

That night, a little after 7, with the curtains drawn and the lights dimmed, Felicity sat on the couch watching Ruby smack her lips together in a yawn while she bounced Mr Rabbit on Jax’s head in the corner of the room.

The lingered smell of Oliver's chilli still flavoured the air while the soft sounds of Ruby's favourite CD played in the background.

It was everything typical that Felicity loved.

Oliver strolled into the lounge with a dish cloth hung over his shoulder and a smile on his lips. She beckoned him with a tap on the seat of the couch beside her and he wordlessly obliged.

He sat down beside her and lifted her feet onto his lap before he gently began massaging them under the sea foam-blue blanket strewn across her legs. Felicity took her half empty wine glass from the table and took a slow drink as she let the perfect moment wash over her.

It was in that moment that it finally dawned on her.
She had spent too long worrying that her life would follow the path of her parents.
There had always been a looming dark cloud about marriage, watching her parents fumble through it as the worst example. So many insecurities she didn’t often think about but they coloured her view of it all the same.

But that wasn't her legacy. He'd already proven that. *What was she waiting for?*

She set her glass aside and blinked, speechless, at Oliver. A curious smile hooked up the edges of his lips as he watched over Ruby.

“Ask me again,” she breathed. He turned to look at her; her eyes were glassy but she was smiling. “If you want to, ask me again,” she added, softly whispered.

His body perked up. “Now?”

One shoulder shrugged. “Or not, it’s okay,” she chortled. “I didn’t mean just now, just that next time you ask, whenever it is, I’ll say yes. Wherever or whenever.”

The *moment* no longer mattered.

Oliver lifted his body from the seat of the couch just enough to slip his wallet out from his pocket. She watched him studiously while he opened the leather wallet, dug his large fingers in the small coin pocket and pulled out a diamond ring that caught the light above it like a hazy halo.

Felicity gulped air as her mouth gaped. She hadn't expected he actually had a ring.

“I love you,” he said warmly as he gently took her legs and slipped out from underneath them. “You’ve loved me with my scars and with my mistakes,” he continued as he dropped to one knee beside the couch. “With you I’ve wanted to be a better man.”

“You’ve been carrying that around?” Felicity asked, the words shaking in her throat.

“I told you I meant it Felicity,” he answered, grinning.

She shook her hand through her tumbled hair as she nodded buoyantly, “Yes.”

Oliver laughed puckishly. “I didn’t ask the question yet.”

He took her hand and she smiled at the slight shake in his clammy palm before he smooth his rough thumb over her knuckles.

“Felicity, Princess, Will you marry me?”

She cupped his face and brushed her quivering lips just barely against his.

“No maybe about it.”

There was a flurry of kisses between them until Jax's excitable bark and a gentle tug on Felicity's locks pulled them apart.

“Momma kying?” Ruby asked, her brows wiggling about her sapphire eyes.

“Happy tears baby,” Felicity replied while she skinned the back of her hand over her damp cheek.

“And dada kying?” Ruby added as she patted her palm against his face.

Oliver smiled, but before he could answer his phone lit up on the coffee table with John's name across it.

“You should get that,” Felicity nudged his arm as Ruby climbed onto her lap. He kissed the ring on her finger before he stood up and collected his phone.

“Want your old job back?” Oliver laughed as he walked towards the doorway.

“I wish that was why I was calling,” John replied. He sounded defeated and worn out.
Oliver's stomach churned as he stopped and pressed his palm into the doorway. He turned his head back to glance at Felicity laughing on the couch with Ruby while Jax licked their toes; and he knew.

“It's him isn't it? It's Malcolm?”

To be continued ...
His face looked as white as a ghost. Even in the soft, ambient light of their living room the contrast to the man that had left it to take a call and the man that returned was unmistakable. He sat heavy onto the couch and bundled Ruby into his arms.

She drew her finger over the ink on his arms, as she often did, tracing the tattoos she could see as she chatted away to herself. His hand swamped her small head as he gently coaxed her head close enough against his chest that he could inhale the fragrance of her baby shampoo lingering from her bath.

With his other palm he felt her heartbeat, mimicking it in every breath he took. “Oliver?” She whispered his name and he looked up at her. Fear plagued her eyes and worry wrinkled her brow.

The toddler in his arms yawned and her whole body shook with it as she pressed her head against his chest. Safe. Protected. He would keep it that way; whatever the price. “Time for bed rubik,” he whispered into the blonde curls under his chin. She groaned to show her disapproval for the idea but a second yawn made it impossible for the young one to fight.

“Night momma,” Ruby yawned with her eyes drooping. “Night baby.” Felicity stood when Oliver did and kissed her daughter’s ruddy cheeks. “Sleep well.”

Oliver walked towards the door and Jax’s head flew up. The dog waited with anchored focus, just
waiting, until Ruby's little arm shot over the top of Oliver's shoulder. “Comun Jax,” she announced, and Jax leapt up from his perfectly cosy spot and dutifully followed Oliver and Ruby up the stairs.

It was 10 minutes later when Oliver walked back into the living room. Felicity tugged the thumbnail she had been chewing on from her mouth and tracked him with her eyes as he paced the room, stopped, and then made a beeline for her.

His kiss caught her by surprise and it was so bruising and deep that her body fell against the arm of the chair making her moan onto his furious lips.

His body soon shadowed hers before one hand crept up the inside of her shirt, heavily palming her supple skin. He nipped at her bottom lip and she opened her mouth for him. His tongue invaded her mouth, pushing deep inside her, fighting against hers while his other hand spread her legs.

Her fingers tangled in his hair as his body, still fully clothed, thrust against hers, also still fully clothed. The jarring of each thrust had Felicity's head banging against the arm of the chair until it became too much. She pulled her lips free and it was only when he lifted his head back from her that she saw the desperation in his eyes.

Both her hands brushed against his cheeks as he fell backwards and Felicity sat up. “Baby, talk to me,” she pleaded. He looked at her, crippled with guilt. He had brought her into his world and now they had Ruby.

“Malcolm.” He spoke the name with vengeance and a darkly bitter tone as his eyes clouded over with rage. Oliver felt Felicity's hands trembled against his face while he watched her swallowed fearfully. “He's out.”

Her hands fell away and while he desperately wanted to collect them and hold them tight against his body, he didn't. He didn't deserve to. He had brought her into this.

“Dig says it was a technicality, but they're working on it and he'll be going back on trial, but in the meantime...” Oliver started, trying his best to recount John’s words. Felicity shook her head as she retreated. “No, that can't happen.”

“They have him in a form of house arrest, but they couldn’t keep him incarcerated.” Oliver's hand tore through his hair as he gritted his teeth. “Seems he might still have a few people in his pocket.”

He watched, helpless, as Felicity pulled her shoulders back and stiffened her spine, making every attempt to appear stoic. But her eyes gave her away; she was afraid. “How long? How long will he be out?”

“Dig thinks a few weeks, max.”

“And you, what do you think?”

The question felt like it pierced his chest as the air startled from his lungs. Oliver’s head hung and swayed with each breath he lumbered through. “I don’t know baby.”

“Oliver you have to trust me, he won’t set foot outside the house. We have people there.”

John’s words echoed in Oliver's head as his hands clenched and his breathing tightened across his chest.

“I trusted you before too and here we are.”

“Don't do anything stupid.”

“Don't let your guys stand in my way.”

He'd hung the phone up and stood against the wall, blindly listening to Ruby and Felicity chatting
on the other side of it.

He knew what he had to do but he didn't want to.

Felicity could see the shadowy despair in his eyes; the resolution. She knew what thoughts echoed through his subconscious, no matter how hard Oliver tried to hide it. *Maybe this time she shouldn't stop him.*

Her eyes tracked to a photo of their small family on the wall. Tiny Ruby in her father's arms. She fitted so perfectly along his forearm.

She kissed Oliver softly with trembling lips, holding back words. His lips became desperate, while his fingers knotted in her hair, emotions like sparks between them.

They both knew.

They made love that night on the couch, their bodies soaked in each other's kisses while unspoken words hung heavy in the air.

They both knew.

When Felicity woke the next morning in their bed she found his side of it empty. Her heart felt heavy with regret and she sobbed against his pillow quietly. She should have stopped him. She knew what burden Oliver had as he lay holding her last night. He had tried to disguise it behind whispered sentiments and shallow breathing. But she knew.

Oliver was planning on killing Malcolm and leaving; and she hadn’t stopped him.

Felicity inhaled the lingering scent on Oliver’s pillow for a few moments before she realised how eerily silent the house felt.

She pushed back the covers and threw open the closet doors; Oliver’s leathers were gone. With her heart in her throat, Felicity ran into Ruby’s room.

It was empty.

Her mind a rush of scenarios and her stomach bubbling up her throat, Felicity ran down the stairs. She halted at the archway into the living room and the tears sprung from her eyes a moment later.

Oliver looked up from the chair, dressed in his leathers with his cheeks red and wet. He was holding Ruby close to his chest; the toddler was asleep with pouted lips and blonde hair tumbling in curls over her face.

“Oliver?” she sighed as she floated into the room. “She woke up,” he whispered, the hot tears scolding tracks down his face. “I was going to leave,” he admitted, the words burning his throat. “I was going to kill Malcolm and disappear for a while.”

Felicity walked up beside him, lowering her head to his as her eyes squeezed tightly. *She knew.* “It would have been better for you both if I left afterwards. It would have kept you safe.”

She breathed him in as her hand caressed his quivering jaw. “But I couldn’t.”

“*I know,*” she breathed against his forehead. “*I knew.*”
When their eyes met, Oliver’s were in turmoil and Felicity’s were glassy with tears.

“You couldn’t leave because you’re not that person,” she spoke as her hands cupped his face. One hand trickled from his face to the hand he had around Ruby. “You promised me these hands, do you remember?” she asked softly. Oliver nodded. He promised her his hands, clean, and hers forever. “Well they belong here, with us.”

A peaceful silence lapsed between them before Felicity spoke again, “Marry me,” she said with a warm smile.

“I already asked you that,” Oliver grinned through the drying tears.

“I don’t want to wait. Marry me in August, right outside with the only people that matter. We won’t stop our lives for him. We won’t,” she said, her voice tapering off to a whisper.

“If that’s what you want,” Oliver remarked.

“I want to be your wife,” she answered, smiling.

---

**AUGUST 2015**

Felicity trickled her fingers down the front of the white bodice as it hung on the back of her bedroom door. She hadn't considered wearing a dress quite that intricate, in fact when Donna had insisted they go bridal store hopping, Felicity had been set on finding a simple dress, but this dress had been the first and only one she saw.

From the front it was effortlessly simple. A high cut boat neckline, slim tailoring, and delicate darts nipped in her waist. It was pure white, in a fabric that melted to her body. But the back was something else altogether; it scooped down below her lower spine where a soft mesh covered and a decal of lace that resembled the intricate beauty of a single snowflake. And, finally, a waterfall of decorative buttons followed her spine, and stopped just on the cusp of her rear.

It was far from simple and yet it was perfectly graceful and effortless.

“Momma,” Ruby hummed from beside Felicity's leg.

Felicity looked down at her daughter and smiled; she was dressed in a white tulle dress which she had insisted on, asking to look like a fairy.

“I like my dress,” Ruby happily added as she twirled in a tight circle, her blonde hair a halo of curls that spun with her.

The only wedding party they had was Ruby, and Jax at the little girl's insistence. But whether he would, or not, was yet to be seen. The few bodies mulling around had already seen the unsociable canine disappear into Ruby's room seeking the quiet and making frustrated growls under his breath. While Ruby had mellowed him some, he was still a bit of a grouch when it came to anyone else.

In the event that he didn’t bow to Ruby, Thea would walk with her and her basket of petals, down the aisle; and John would marry Oliver and Felicity under the pretty white archway near a backdrop of luscious evergreens in their own backyard.

Felicity had already stolen a look out Ruby's window a little while ago, and smiled with wonder at Oliver dutifully setting up the few rows of white chairs and lining the aisle with a simple bunch of baby breath tied to each aisle-chair. She had studied him as he surveyed his work to make it perfect before he ducked away to Thea and Roy's cottage to get changed.

“Can I wear my boots?” Ruby chatted after she stopped spinning and stumbled towards the bed.
Felicity laughed, knowing the little girl was referring to a pair of black Doc Martens that Thea has bought her a few weeks ago; and she had practically lived in ever since.

“No baby, nana got you those pretty sparkly ones to wear,” Felicity atoned as she crouched to her daughter’s level.

Ruby pouted as she touched the delicate silver and diamond hair broach that was pinning back one side of Felicity’s barrel-waved hair; still warm from the hairdresser who finished moments ago, when there was a knock on the bedroom door.

“Just the mother of the bride,” Donna giddily said through the crack in the door. Felicity stood and briefly checked the robe around her was still fastened. “Come in mom.”

Donna walked in to the sight of a bare-faced Felicity nervously wringing her hands over each other. “The makeup lady should be here in a few minutes,” she nattered as she clasped her chest in front of Felicity's dress. “It's even prettier than I remember,” she sighed giving the dress another once-over.

“Have you seen Thea?” Felicity asked as she started to sway on the balls of her feet. Her nerves were making her nauseous.

“I’m sure she's with Oliver getting ready,” Donna assured, glancing just the once over her slender shoulder.

“Could you...,” Felicity stopped as something other than words came up her throat.

Donna turned back toward Felicity to see her cupping her hand to her mouth and a pale wash over her cheeks.

“I think I'm...” Felicity ran into the bathroom and promptly threw up.

Twice.

****

Oliver huffed through his third attempt at tying a Windsor knot in his powder blue tie before he growled menacingly at the smiling face of his YouTube tutor. He jostled his shoulders and rolled his neck; he wouldn’t be bested by a fucking tie.

His sweaty palms didn’t help and he rubbed them swiftly down the pants of his light grey suit. Felicity had surprised him with his first trip to a tailors. It seemed unnecessary at the time, but he would be lying if he didn’t say the plush Italian fabric didn’t feel like silk against his skin.

They had both filled the few weeks since learning about Malcolm’s temporarily release, immersing themselves in wedding preparations; which had been a welcome distraction. John had promised them that he wouldn’t bother them, and – quite surprisingly – they hadn’t heard from Malcolm. Although cynical Oliver didn’t imagine things were that simple, Felicity had found some comfort and safety in that fact, and keeping her and Ruby safe and happy was all that mattered to him.

And tying this damn Windsor knot.

He eyed his reflection in Thea’s mirror and gritted out a silent warning to the silk tie.

*Where was Thea anyway?* She was likely primping herself in the bathroom of her and Roy’s cottage, but he hadn’t heard any smart ass quip from her since this morning when she told him he ought to have gotten a hair cut.

Oliver combed a spread of thick fingers through his hair and smiled; Felicity had expressed
requested he not and it was now sitting somewhere close to what it had been the first night they were together; in her words “the length a girl can hold on to”.

The fourth attempt was no more successful and he growled like a wounded bear. “Thea?!” he called out into the quiet air. He waited expectantly for her to round the doorway with a smirk on her face.

But she didn’t.

He walked to the door and looked down the small hall that joined the bedroom, the second bedroom, and the bathroom to the open plan living.

“Thea?” he asked wearily into the empty hall before he strode down towards the second bedroom.

He knocked and the door opened, there was nothing but Roy’s weights and an armchair – No Thea.

He carried on down the hall towards the bathroom at the end. “Thea?” he asked as he knocked on the bathroom door. It was unlocked and, once again, the room was empty.

He wandered down into the living room and found Roy pacing the kitchenette. “Where’s Thea?” Oliver asked gruffly. He knew Roy knew.

“She said she’d be back,” Roy remarked, hopping on the soles of his feet, panic in his eyes. “She told me to come back and she’d call.”

He looked down at his phone and pressed his chin into his chest. “She said…,” his voice tapered off before Oliver barrelled towards him.

Throwing the protégée back into the fridge his eyes were wild. “Where is Thea?” he asked a second time, and this time he expected an answer.

“Malcolm, she went to see Malcolm,” Roy answered before Oliver dropped the hold he had on his shirt.

*****

Donna held Felicity’s hair back with one hand as her other hand soothed small circles against her daughter’s arched back. She’d thrown up four times in the last ten minutes before she sat on the cool tiled floor and scooted back to rest her body against the side of the bath.

Donna wet a washcloth, wrung it out, and handed it to Felicity who took it with a gracious smile. “You don’t think you might be…?” Donna’s words tapered off as Felicity broke out into a laugh. Of course her mother would leap to that conclusion.

She pressed the washcloth to her face and sighed at its pleasant coolness against her heated cheeks. “Trust you to say that. That’s your go-to response,” Felicity quipped from behind the cloth.

Pulling the cloth away as she stood up, Felicity continued, “Remember the last stomach flu I had?” She smirked while she walked to the basin and washed her face with a splash of clean water. “You said the same thing then,” she added with a single arched brow.

“I might have been off then,” Donna pleaded her case as she raised her palms.

“Mmm,” Felicity laughed, “this is just nerves seeing as it’s the first and only time I’m getting married.”

“Momma are you okay?” Ruby asked, a concerned frown taking over her entire cherub face.
Donna picked Ruby up and smothered her cheek with kisses as the two year old squirmed. “You can't blame a nana for wanting more of these little things.”

“Maybe one day,” Felicity primped her hair carefully in the mirror, checking for any... clumps, “but I have the business and Oliver has his shop.” She paused, “Oliver and I haven't really talked about it and,” she tapped her arm above her implant, “we're good.”

“You can still get pregnant with one of those you know,” Donna said matter-of-factly. “I could always duck to the store for a test to be sure.” A mischievous eyebrow shot up towards her hairline. Felicity laughed as she smiled reassuringly at Ruby.

“Nice try mom,” she leaned in and kissed her mother's cheek. “Now where is this makeup magician?”

*****

It was half an hour later and Felicity was sitting as still as she possibly could while the makeup artist whisked away two weeks of sleepless nights and a day or two of nervous vomiting from Felicity's face.

Her wedding dress still hung on the back of the door and every so often Felicity would steal a look at it, cracking an excited smile. The nervous butterflies in her stomach hadn't subsided but she tried her best to put them aside. She was marrying Oliver today. She had nothing to worry about.

Donna had taken Ruby for a walk and was due back any minute, so when there was a knock on the door Felicity assumed it was them.

“Come in,” she said through slightly parted lips.

Instead it was Iris and Caitlyn, both dressed in pretty dresses that encapsulated them; Caitlin in an a-line dress with a pleated skirt in a delicate fabric and a hue of slightly sheened powdery pink, while Iris wore a deep plum dress that hung a little tighter to her flawless curves and paired the same with a dramatic lip.

They both wore unmissable smiles.

“Have you seen Thea?” Felicity asked, her voice still muted as her cheeks were getting rouged. “No,” they both answered, checking with each other for clarification. “Still nauseous?” Iris enquired as she casually walked around the room.

“A little,” Felicity answered honestly as her eyes tracked Iris. “Light headed? Tender breasts?” Caitlin added to the conversation, keeping awkward eye contact with Felicity.

Then it became apparent to Felicity what they were really asking.

“Did my mother send you in here?” she gaped, garnering an exacerbated sigh from the make up artist. “Could you be?” Iris swooped in with a ginger smile. “No. Caitlin put the IUD in herself.” Felicity turned to the other interrogator, “remember?” Caitlin nodded before her head dropped to one shoulder. “There is still a chance. It's slim but...”

Felicity cut her short with a laugh. “This is ridiculous,” she regaled, chuffing out an exacerbated laugh; first her mother and now her best friends.

A second knock came and this time it was Donna and Ruby. Ruby made a beeline to Felicity while gingerly sucking on a lollipop.
“Where did you get that from?” Felicity asked as the angelic toddler primped her own dress. “Shops,” Ruby answered with the lollipop between her teeth.

Felicity was all ready to growl at her mother for giving a two year old sugar half an hour before they needed her to walk a straight line and stand still, but after a glance around the room she couldn't find her.

Then there was another knock. Felicity shrugged and Iris answered it.

There were a few hushed words that, despite straining to try and hear, Felicity couldn’t; and she couldn't see from her peripheral vision who it was, as the make up artist keep her head anchored straight; but the hushed voices soon grew quiet moments before Iris walked into her line of sight with Roy close behind.

“Felicity you need to hear this,” Iris said solemnly.

*****

“Thea put it down,” Oliver spoke calmly as he stood, barely a foot, back from his sister. Her svelte body was poised and anchored to the ground, her dark hair pulled tightly back from her face and a look of resolution sat firmly in her eyes; while she pointed a 9mm Glock at Malcolm Merlyn.

After Roy had pulled alongside Oliver’s motorcycle which Thea had taken – she’d hear about that another time – he’d told him to go home and get John when he saw the bullet holes in the front door.

What he’d walked into hadn’t surprised him at all. John’s two placements were on the floor in one corner of the room, one nursing a superficial graze to the left side of his face and, undoubtedly, both nursing extremely bruised egos that they had been caught off guard by a 110 pound teenager. She’d taken their guns and tucked them into the back of her black jeans and their radios were sitting on a table behind her. Oliver would have been immensely proud of his sister if he wasn't insanely angry at her instead.

“I didn't ask you to come here Oliver,” she gritted, all while she kept her finger on the trigger and her eyes on Malcolm. “I don't want you involved.”

Oliver didn’t look at the man with his hands, open-palmed, raised to his chest, rather, he kept his eyes on Thea. “I'm your big brother. I'm always involved.”

“Go get married,” she turned her head just enough to catch Oliver’s eyes and give him a smile. “You shouldn't be here. It's better if you're not.”

“He's not worth it Thea,” Oliver sighed. In her pained smile, he saw himself. “We can walk out of here. None of what you've done here can’t be undone,” he continued, glancing to the officers, one of whom nodded – likely hoping to just be out of this room.

For the first time, after he spoke, Oliver glimpsed at Malcolm. The son of a bitch was smirking.

Thea saw it too. “I'll never be rid of him,” she spat, her words like venom towards the man who she was there to kill. “He's in my veins Oliver.” She swallowed down her shaking words and dropped her elbow just a fraction while she lined up her shot; right between his eyes. “What he did to mom. I just,” the gun started shaking in her hands. “He deserves to die and it should be me that pulls the trigger.”
Finally Malcolm spoke, his words hissed like the snake that he was. “Spoken like a true Merlyn.”

“Oliver leave,” Thea urged, steadying her hands. “Get out of here.”

****

“He went where?” Felicity fretted as she stumbled back onto the bed with her hands clasped on her lap, trembling.

“Thea wasn’t back, I took him,” Roy stuttered through the words a second time, but Felicity hushed him with a shake of her head. “I told John, he said…”

“He needs to leave,” Felicity said abruptly, focusing her confusion and frustration at the messenger.

“You should go hon,” Donna said as she shuffled Roy out of the room.

“I have to, I have to…” Felicity panicked as she stood up and walked towards the door. Her eyes were blown wide and her breath was uneven and panted.

“You need to sit down and breathe,” Donna urged as she pushed the door closed and stood against it.

“What if he…” she couldn’t finish the sentence as her eyes trickled down to Ruby, caught up in the panic.

What if Oliver didn’t come back?

****

“Do it. Pull the trigger,” Malcolm sneered, his eyes as black as his soul while his thin lips lifted up in a menacing smirk.

“Thea, listen to me,” Oliver shouted, loud enough to drown out Malcom’s taunts. “They loved you.”

Tears sprung from the corners of Thea’s eyes as her once resolute lips started to tremble. “How could they?” she whispered. “After what I was. After what he did?” The gun in her hands felt like led pulling down her wrists but she fought back the fatigue to keep it square on target.

“You were their daughter Thea,” Oliver pleaded, his own voice shaking with emotion; if he could only make her see what he knew. “Do you remember just after they died I put you on the bike?”

She nodded stiffly, “I remember. You told me we were visiting the beach.”

“Dad, our Dad, he told me to do that Thea. He told me to look after you. His daughter my sister. They loved you.”

Her shoulders dipped only a fraction before she caught them and raised them back up.

“Do these guys go,” Oliver persuaded as he nodded towards the two officers.

Thea glanced their way and nodded.

They could go.

Oliver moved them quickly out of the house while Thea bounced the gun between them and Malcolm.

“I just squeeze the trigger and he goes away,” Thea breathed, stilling her nerves once there was only the three of them left.

“It’s never that simple Thea,” Oliver sighed, pulling from his own mistakes and the guilt he’d spent years buried beneath. “Trust me.”

“Just go Oliver,” she pleaded, fractions of his scared baby sister peeking through her tough posturing. “I can do this. For you and for Felicity, once and for all.”
“Is she still a good-looking whore?” Malcolm chuckled before he rolled his tongue over his chaffed lips. “And your daughter Oliver,” his eyes narrowed, “I know all about little Ruby, pretty little girl, so young.”

With unprecedented reflexes Oliver took both of the officer’s guns from Thea’s waistband and, moving like a freight train, he barrelled down on Malcolm, pushing the butt of one pistol into the older man’s temple while he forced the other into his mouth, wiping the smirk from his face.

“Say her name again,” Oliver warned as he cocked the first gun and then the other.

“Oliver put the guns down,” John shouted as he burst through the front door, kicking it closed just as quickly.

“Are you going to shoot me John?” Oliver grunted. In that moment, he wouldn’t have cared. He would have taken Malcolm from this world along with him and that would keep his girls safe. That’s all that mattered.

“Step away Oliver,” John warned a second time.
Four guns raised. Four triggers ready to be pulled.
“This son of a bitch,” Oliver seethed.
“You have a wedding to go to. A bride waiting for you. Step away.”

He couldn’t.
He couldn’t let Malcolm live.

*But he’d made a promise to Felicity.*
His finger shook around the trigger. “This will never end until he’s dead.”
“I know,” John said stoically.
Oliver glanced back at his friend and saw a look that mirrored his own, before he stepped back and raised both guns.

“He’s right,” Malcolm laughed, rubbing his jaw. “This doesn't stop until one of us is dead and I've taken everything...”

Three shots rung out, deafening and echoed in the small living room and the smell of gun powder invaded Oliver’s senses.

Malcolm dropped lifeless to the floor and Oliver looked back at John; who simply nodded.

“He had the gun,” the older man sad coolly as Thea dropped her weapon and fell against the wall.
“That's what my report will say.”

*****

Felicity had locked herself in the bathroom before she slid down onto the floor with her back against the door. The cold whip of the tiles sent a shiver up her spine, but she couldn’t move, her entire body was paralysed with fear.

She searched every inclination and sixth sense she had, trying to gauge if somewhere she could feel whether Oliver was okay, but all she could feel was a churning in the pit of her stomach and utter uncertainty.

She had kept the tears at bay, trying to will herself to remember that when (not if) Oliver came walking through that door, he’d scold her with a smile for getting herself so worked up.
Desperate to keep her eyes moving, Felicity glanced around the private bathroom. Oliver’s towel from the night before hung on its hook, hers was on the floor beneath it. She chuckled in a moment of brevity.

His toothbrush sat beside hers.

The shower caddy was on its side, tipped over just as they had left it the night before after she’d ‘surprised’ him in the shower. Her eyes continued to move around the room until they stopped not far from her head, where a brown bag sat on the edge of the bath, rolled over at the top. A note stuck to the front of it:

Just in case.

Love, Mom.

Without shifting from her spot, Felicity reached over and snatched the bag before tearing the top open. She wasn’t surprised by the little box she saw at the bottom.

“Oh for goodness sake.”

*****

Felicity walked robotically out of the bathroom and sat back down in the chair. A single look to the makeup artist and the woman with a bee hive of dyed black hair and perfectly lined cats eyes, skipped back into action, makeup brush in hand.

“Oliver's here,” Donna panted after having run up the stairs to deliver the news.
Felicity nodded but the truth was she had heard the familiar rumble of his bike a few moments before she’d stepped out of the bathroom and she had taken it upon herself to decide that he was fine. Her Oliver was fine.

“And Thea?” she asked quietly.
“She's getting dressed.”
“Good,” she mouthed.
“All done,” the makeup artist announced after the last swipe of mascara.

Felicity stood up and patted her slightly clammy hands against her thighs. “Mom can you help me into my dress please? The rest of you should find your seats.”

*****

Twenty minutes later and the string quartet started up as Ruby trotted down the aisle in her black boots sprinkling daisies as she went, at least until she saw Oliver smiling at her at the end of the path.

“DADDY!” she squealed happily as she dropped the wicker basket and ran towards him. Perhaps, even though Felicity remained tight lipped about her fears, their young daughter had sensed the same; or she had simply not seen her father for at least 3 hours, which, at her age was tantamount to a lifetime.

Oliver caught her in his arms and lifted her easily into the air as her arms wrapped tightly around his neck.

“It's been for hours,” she whispered in his ear as he felt her little heart pound against his chest.
And then he saw her.
Oliver put Ruby down and the small girl stepped aside to hold Thea's hand as Oliver turned to face Felicity.

He'd never seen her dress, she had kept it squirrelled away in an opaque dress bag, and while he'd thought about sneaking a peak, he hadn't. But he knew in that moment, that seeing it on a hanger wouldn't have given him the radiant vision his eyes were currently basking in.

It fitted her perfectly, sweeping down her body like his hands had done a million time before, and then spilling into a decadent puddle around her feet. Her lips were painted red and her hair bounced in gentle curls off her shoulders. He watched her in reverential awe as she carefully straightened the small train of her dress and took three, slow and steadying breaths.

Without thinking he walked towards her, captivated and drawn to her like he had never been to another before, nor knew he never would again.

He stopped at the end of the aisle, a foot from her, with his arms hovering achingly close to her arms, but resisting the urge to touch her.

“I’m supposed to come to you,” she said weakly. He could tell she had been crying, despite the pristine makeup, and when her eyes blinked away from him, they looked down at his calloused hands.

“They’re clean Princess,” he whispered, knowing the questions that lay just behind her azure eyes. He opened his palms, more symbolically than anything. “They’re clean baby, I swear to you.”

Holding her flowers dropped to her side in one hand, Felicity traced her fingers down the deep crevices that crisscrossed Oliver's palm before she looked up and caught the tenderness in his eyes.

“And what about?” she stopped short of saying his name, the mere thought of it making her chest tighten.

Oliver closed his hands around hers and gently squeezed. “You don’t ever have to worry about him again.”

She didn’t asked why, at that moment it didn’t matter, but she took his words and felt a weight lifted from her shoulders.

“Do you still want to do this?” he asked as softly as his deep voice would allow. A gentle smile lifted up her scarlet lips. “I’m supposed to come to you,” she remarked. He dropped her hand before his palms sunk into her waist and his fingers curled around to her back. “It’ll take too long,” he answered with a grin before he lifted her into the air.

Both of them laughing, Oliver carried Felicity slightly bent over his shoulder, the rest of the way down the aisle while Ruby cheered them on gleefully.

In front of everyone that mattered, on the bright but crisp afternoon, they got married.

The Ruffian and his Princess.
them, with full stomachs and even fuller hearts, Oliver and Felicity swayed to the dulcet sounds of
whatever love songs played behind them.

It didn’t matter.
Nothing mattered but the touch of his hand at her waist and the way she gently coiled her finger in
his hair while her arms draped over his shoulder.

Ruby was nearby, asleep on two chairs with Oliver’s jacket over her like a blanket and Jax sitting,
watchfully, nearby. Thea and Roy too were not far, swaying to their own melody across the dance
floor. They could hear the happy chatter of friends and family and they could feel the warmth
radiating from the small group left behind.

But for the first time that day, that evening, it was really just them, in their own little world.

When Oliver thought no one was looking, or perhaps he didn't care if they were, he gently brushed
the edge of her dress off her shoulder and feathered the lightest of kisses there, making Felicity
sigh into the still air. With a smile on his lips he pulled back and, just as gently, lifted the dress
back onto her shoulder, smoothing it down with a delicate touch.

Felicity slid one hand from over his shoulder and smoothed a path over the convex of his chest,
stilling at his heart. “Oliver?” she whispered, barely above the words of the song.
“Mmm?” he hummed as his fingers toyed with a few of her pearl buttons.
She smiled fondly at him, taking a snapshot of his face; so happy, so content, so very different
from the last time.

His eyebrows tweaked, waiting for whatever it is that she held on the very tip of her tongue.

She pressed her hand firm against his chest, feeling the thud of his heartbeat. The last time a pane
of two inch thick glass stood between them.

Not this time. She could feel his heart. Smell his scent. Melt into his arms.

“Felicity?” he breathed, coaxing an even bigger smile from her lips.
She leaned up onto her tiptoes, making sure her hand stayed over her heart. With her lips poised so
close to his ear that he could feel the mist of her breath, she finally let go of the words. “I’m
pregnant.”

When she lowered back down, Oliver was silent but brimming with delight.

Then he looked at her and winked. “Was it the table?”
AN: Hello, this is a HARD chapter. And when I say hard, I mean it. I’m not kidding around. I seldom ever have a chapter that terrifies me, there have been a few, and this is now one of them. Before you go on I want to stress that this is not, in any way, intended to be a chapter about misery. It’s really not, and I hope that you can look past that for what I’m actually trying to show you. This is a chapter about so much more than that.

It’s also a chapter with two parts. Initially I wanted to have it be one, concise, chapter. But, the more I wrote, the more I felt it earned more than that.

Lastly, if you know me as a writer, then you know that nothing I say is throw away. If I’ve taken the time to tell you something that might seem superfluous to what you need to know for the story to flow (i.e. a name) then I have done so with a reason. Trust that.

Title from *Fix You* - Coldplay.
Felicity's stomach was a somersault of nerves, shooting around like tiny pen springs snapped from their plastic sheaths.

Week 20.
She touched her stomach, her pregnancy was much more visible this time around than with Ruby and once they had hit the 12 week mark, there was little chance in hiding it from friends and family.

Of course, her mother had excitedly clapped, before slyly taking Felicity to the side and whispering that she'd known; a fact, unfortunately, Felicity couldn't argue with.

Curtis had been happy, but Felicity couldn't help but notice the tensing in his jaw. After some gentle prodding he'd admitted that the last time she was a little "scary". To which she had laughed as she recounted flashes of the car she had keyed for parking too close. Maybe Curtis was onto something. She'd promised to be more in check this time and, so far, she had been.

Thea cried. A deep sob that shook her entire waifish frame before she hugged Oliver so tightly her knuckles had turned white. They had a family. They were growing a family. It was no longer them and baby number 2 cemented that.

Iris and Caitlin had already made themselves official god parents.

John Diggle had nodded; just the once, before he slapped Oliver's shoulder and smiled. It might have seemed like nothing, but more was said in that exchange than most could decipher. Oliver knew though.

They had told Ruby together, using words that the two year old could understand. There was a baby in mummy's tummy and in a few months they would all get to meet him or her. Her little face has screwed up rather pensively and she didn’t say anything for what felt like the longest time until she jostled her shoulders, tipped her head to one side and asked, rather astutely, how the baby was going to come out of there? Oliver had grimaced and Felicity had laughed before she’d crouched down to Ruby’s level, cupped the little girl’s chin, and told her she didn’t have to worry about that right now. She’d skipped off quite happily and they had found her a little later putting her soft toys in two piles.

“What are you doing Rubiks?” Oliver asked as he stood in her doorway.
With a somewhat exacerbate sigh, the toddler had looked up from her task with big, wet eyes. “I'm sharing out my toys.” A tear slid down her cheek and she brushed it roughly away with the back of her hand as her little fingers gripped Mr Rabbit.
“You don’t need to do that sweetheart,” Felicity cooed while she and Oliver walked into Ruby’s bedroom.
“What will baby play with?” Ruby sobbed, unable to contain her emotions a moment longer.
“We’ll get them their own toys Ruby, you won’t need to share yours unless you want to,” Oliver explained as he bundled Ruby tight against his chest.
The little girl look relieved and her frown morphed into a smile. “They can have Pete,” she said with a quivering, but happy, voice as she pointed over to a penguin that was nearly half her size. “He’s good at keeping bad dreams away.”
Felicity leaned over and kissed Ruby’s temple. “You’ll make a very good big sister,” she said softly and Ruby’s face lit up.
“I be the best!” she exclaimed.
Oliver hadn't stopped smiling from the moment the words had left Felicity's lips. While baby number two wasn't exactly planned - and required a hasty removal of Felicity's implant - there was something different in this conception over Ruby's.

Felicity could see the turmoil in his eyes with Ruby. He never thought himself worthy of a child. He was never really sure he deserved to be in her life; they had made her in a moment of impassioned anger, after he'd hurt her to the core. He was still broken, sharp around the edges, still wading in a life of greys and shadows - despite his best efforts.

But now he was a father, a husband, and they had created a life where there was no uncertainty. His life had light. His sharp edges, while not gone, had smoothed. He'd shown himself a man. A father. There was no turmoil this time.

For her part, Felicity had a sort of Zen about this pregnancy. The morning sickness was faint and she had already countered the usual suspects from the last time. Her cravings had been mostly for fruits and she had taken it easily in her stride. She already had the clothes and was less than surprised when one day things didn't fit quite as well any more. There was nothing to hide this time and, even though it was a ridiculous notion, having a wedding band on her finger seemed to, at least to Felicity, dampen down a few of the looks she had gotten the first time around.

Perhaps, like Oliver, there was also a calm in knowing that she wasn't going to be doing this on her own. There was certainty.

Never underestimate the importance of certainty.

Or the damage of uncertainty.

Oliver took Felicity's hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. She hadn't even realised it had been trembling on her lap before then. She didn't even realise it had been trembling on her lap before then. She didn't know why she was nervous, this wasn't the first scan and at the last one to measure the baby and estimate a due date everything was fine – 7 March 2016, it would still be winter so they could keep the house toasty with a roaring fire and no one would think anything of them for hibernating through the first month as their own little family.

They had already settled on not knowing the gender this time around either, and this little bundle seemed far more content than Ruby had flailing around in there. In fact, Felicity had felt the baby move just last night, rolling over as she lay in bed. She had nothing to be worried about, she reminded herself as she enjoyed the feel of Oliver's lazy thumb strokes across her knuckles.

“How are my favourite patients?” Caitlin asked as she swung the door opened and strolled in.

“I bet you say that to everyone?” Felicity quipped.

“Yes,” Caitlin shrugged, “but I only mean it with you.”

She settled onto her chair as Felicity swung her legs off the edge of the examination table.

“Shall we have a look at this baby with impeccable genetics?” Caitlin chatted as she fed her slender hands into latex gloves. “Are we finding out the baby's gender today or are we repeating last time where only one of you knows to torment the other?”

Oliver laughed as he gave Felicity's hand an extra squeeze. “We don't want to know.”

Caitlin raised a single brow. “We sure?”

Felicity patted Oliver's hand as it held hers. “We're sure.”

“Okay.” Caitlin switched on her monitor. “You know the drill, lie back, shirt up. This might be cold.”

Felicity lay back, listening to the crunch of the starched pillow case beneath her head as she lifted
up her baby-pink knit. Fingertips grazed over the rise in her belly and she let out a soft sigh when she felt a gentle prod against her bladder; they were awake.

The chill of the gel didn't bother her and while the fuzzy image started up on the overhead TV screen, Felicity stole one more look at Oliver. His eyes were damp, and his smile was soft; excited but at peace. Such a beautiful combination.

When Felicity's eyes moved back to the screen she saw the tiny figure; big head, fists up by their cheeks, curled legs. Perfect.

As the wand moved over her stomach and Caitlin gave it a little more pressure, their head turned and Felicity was looking, face to face, at their baby. Nothing could explain that euphoria and Felicity rested in it for as long as she could, glued to the screen.

She didn't even notice Caitlin had paused until the baby turned away and put their head back into their tiny splayed hands. Felicity expected another prod or a chatty remark, and when she got neither she looked away from the monitor to her friend.

There was an unmissable crinkle across the bridge of Caitlin's nose. And her smile flickered. “Everything okay?” Felicity asked, and her comment brought Oliver's attention to them too. Caitlin looked up briefly from the smaller screen in front of her. “Yes, fine, just taking a few measurements and stills.” She offered Felicity a smile, but it was hollow.

The processor shot out a few stills and Caitlin collected them. “I'm just going to run these under the nose of a colleague. I'll be back.” Felicity sat up and eyed Caitlin who could barely keep the contact. “Why?” “I just want him to check some of my measurements, that's all.” She laid a considerate hand on Felicity's shoulder. “No peeking my notes for the gender while I'm out of the room,” she added with a soft chuckle before she left.

“That was weird,” Felicity remarked as she instinctively stroked fingertips down the centre of her stomach. “I'm sure it’s nothing to worry about,” Oliver replied, though his smile, like Caitlin’s, was hollow. Felicity could tell he didn’t believe the words he was saying either.

It was as though hours passed while they sat in ruminating silence before the door opened and Caitlin, wearing a practiced but fragile smile, walked into the room; followed by an older man in a white lab coat with a shock of white hair and a matching beard – like a trimmer version of Santa, and with a MD.

“This is Dr Carter, he’s a wonderful paediatrician here who’d just like to take a look at your baby if that’s okay?” Caitlin spoke softly. Felicity’s hands didn’t move from her stomach. “What’s going on, what’s wrong?” She saw the colour drain from Caitlin’s cheeks before she blew out a soft, but trembled breath. “It’s probably nothing, but I’m having trouble with a few measurements and it’s routine to ask for a second opinion in this sort of situation. Sometimes the way the baby is lying or where your placenta is located can make imaging hard, so this is just a precaution.”

Felicity felt the gentle squeeze of Oliver’s hand near her elbow and when she glanced his way, he nodded softly, as if to say she needed to let them look. She unravelled her hands and held onto his as she lay back for a second time; only this time she didn’t hear the crinkle of the pillowcase above the thump of her anxious heart.

Numbness set over her and she didn’t feel the gel, nor did she look at the monitor; in fact she only
moved when she heard the clunk of the machine shutting off and Caitlin handed her a paper towel.

When she sat up she saw Dr Carter and Caitlin talking just out of earshot. There was a nod from him and a soft sigh from her as her eyes blinked; holding them closed for a few seconds. Felicity struggled to read their mouths and she thought she caught a few words from him, “Would you like me…”

Caitlin then shook her head. “They’re friends.”
He nodded as though he understood. “Have them… next door … need me.”

He left quietly and Caitlin’s smile, even the fake one, had disappeared.
“What’s going on?” Oliver asked, a roughness in his voice that he didn’t mean, but couldn’t control.

“There’s an abnormality on your baby’s scan,” Caitlin started.
“Abnormality?” Felicity interrupted, clutching at her clothed stomach, “Meaning what?”

“The baby’s heart hasn’t formed correctly, they have Total Anomalous Pulmonary Venous Return, or TAPVR,” Caitlin tried to explain, her hands wringing over each other while she talked. Oliver’s knuckles were bone white as he gripped the arms of his chair and Felicity couldn’t catch her breath to speak.

“What does that even mean?” he asked as he stood up and put himself next to Felicity before he wrapped an arm around her trembling shoulder.
“It’s when the four pulmonary veins on the heart drain to the right atrium instead of the left, it’s very rare, but…”

Felicity looked up, her words cutting off Caitlin. “He or she?” she asked, her voice thin, cracking at the edges.
“I don’t understand,” Caitlin replied softly.
“I need to know who we’re talking about, we’re talking about our baby, I need to know exactly. Is it a girl or a boy, he or she?” Her voice shook and cracked as tears broke from her eyes and scolded tracks into her cheeks. “I need them to be real, not to be talking about them in generals, I need…” she sobbed forward and Oliver caught her in his arms.

“Please tell us, Felicity’s right. Is this our son or our daughter?”
Caitlin nodded, she understood. “Your son. You’re having a little boy.”

There was only a moment’s respite for them to take in that news before everything else came careening back. An abnormality.

“What does all this mean for him?” Felicity asked as her hand instinctively went to her belly, and Oliver set his on top.

“From here I’ll be transferring your prenatal care to Dr Carter,” Caitlin began, but she paused when Felicity shook her head.

“No, I want you, you gave us Ruby and she’s perfect and happy and he will be too,” she whispered, her voice so broken that shards of it were merely breaths.

Caitlin’s eyes welled as she took Felicity’s free hand and squeezed it. “I’m not the right person for this Fleck. Dr Carter is a paediatric surgeon and one of the top in his field. I will be your person, your friend, anything you need me to be on the way, but you need to trust me; the best chance that little boy has is with him.”

Felicity nodded, barely, she thought about brushing away her tears, but she let them fall instead.

“What will happen with him?”
“A lot will depend on the tests he’ll need after he’s born, but he will need surgery to correct this, either within a couple of days, or a month tops.”

“Was it something I did?” Felicity asked, her voice trembling as her body shook outside of her
control.
“No,” Caitlin replied immediately. “We don’t know why this happens, but you need to listen to me, this is not on you. This is not something you did, or didn’t do. This isn’t you.” She stared her friend in the eyes, begging for her to hear the words and believe them; and she only looked away when Felicity nodded.
“Is he safe while he’s inside?”
Caitlin nodded, “He’s just fine in there. Dr Carter will want to give you an echocardiogram to confirm, but it’s both of our opinions that that’s the abnormality showing on the scan.”
“What happens after he’s born?”
“Dr Carter will talk you through all that, and he can see you right now, or you can take a few days to let the shock settle. It’s a good thing we know this now, you have to trust that.”

Felicity closed her eyes, squeezing out the bitter tears that felt like acid against her cheek.

You’re having a boy.

The conversation with Dr Carter was an out of body experience for Felicity. It was as though she was sitting there listening to all the stats and the data and the information he had, but hearing – really hearing – none of it.

The prognosis was good; surgery has a high success rate; he may need to be on a ventilator before and after surgery; neonatal; cardiac; all words she heard, but her heart was too broken to retain it.

She moved through the hallway and down the lift wordlessly. Her eyes stayed heavily lidded and red.

Oliver tried to talk on the drive home; he spoke about how well Dr Carter seemed to know the situation, how their baby, their son, would go on to live a healthy life. But, Felicity remained silent as she watched the trees pass out the window.

Tree, building, flagpole, people – none of it seemed real. Was the car moving? Or was the world speeding past them?

She was numb.
Her body dried of all the tears, but still drenched in despair.

When she stepped out of the car at home, the air had lost its fragrance and the trees that rustled above her seemed drained of colour. As though life, its simplicity and it’s wonder, had been stolen away.

Oliver opened the front door for her and she headed for the stairs.

There was a rumble in the living room before Ruby came rushing out with a sunny smile taking over her face. “Where’s my baby?” she asked with a huff as she looked at Felicity’s pregnant stomach.

“Not yet sweetheart,” Oliver replied, trying his best to keep a smile affixed to his face for Ruby’s benefit.

Thea appeared a few moments later with five different colour ribbons in her hair. “How did the scan go?” she asked.
Felicity’s heart sank as a strangled sob sat in her throat. “I’m quite tired, I think I’ll go lie down,” she spoke quietly before she walked up the stairs.

“Momma okay?” Ruby asked, her eyes glassing over as she sensed a thickness in the air. “Momma just needs a rest,” Oliver pinched his baby girl’s cheek and she laughed. “Go play with Jax while I walk Aunt Thea home.”

Ruby nodded excitedly before she skidded off into the living room to find Jax.

Outside, as the temperate breeze slapped Oliver’s cheek, he told his sister what they knew; and her tears gave him permission to cry too.

Days went by in a haze of barely surviving. Felicity barely spoke, pulling into herself as she moved about the house. They hadn’t told Ruby, neither of them knowing how to even begin. Oliver buried the fear and the anguish that crushed his chest, only allowing himself moments to feel them when the house was still and quiet and the hot shower hid his pain.

At night he held her.
She held him back just as tightly.

As days stretched to weeks and then onto months, Felicity threw herself into her work. The echocardiogram confirmed the diagnoses, but there were still things they wouldn’t know until he was born – the extent, whether there were any blockages in the pulmonary veins, and if there were any other defects.

She took in every medical article she could find, threw herself into research and stayed up, or woke up, at all hours of the night trying to find some stability, some certainty, in it all. She studied every aspect of the tools the surgeons’ would use to the neonatal care that he would likely require.

It was a chilly December morning when Oliver found her in her study. There were dark rims under her eyes and her skin was clammy and pale. She sat at her desk with one leg up on her chair and chewing on a nail that she’d bitten down to the fingertip, while she stared, expressionless, at the computer screen. It was 8am and he knew she’d been there most of the night.

“Baby you need to rest,” he pleaded with her as he walked into the room.
“I don’t need to rest I need to make this better,” she answered. Her voice was frail and hoarse, as though her body was parched.
“You can’t,” he whispered before he turned the chair to face him.

Felicity twisted her head, afraid of leaving the text on the screen and missing something. “I have to try.”

Oliver knelt down in front of her and kissed her swollen stomach. “He needs you to rest baby,” he begged her with every ounce of strength he possessed. “He doesn’t need a genius MIT graduate who will one day change the world, he needs a mother who is healthy and strong for him.”

She sobbed forward, her whole body wracked with guilt. “I can’t fix him, I’m trying but I can’t.” He held her head between his palms as tears bled into the creases. “We can hope and believe in him though. Fight for him. Make him feel loved. Give him the best chance by making sure he knows we're right there with him.”

She nodded in his hands, before he leaned up and kissed her sodden cheek. “Rest baby.”

Felicity managed a few hours sleep and afterwards she found Oliver and Ruby baking cookies in
the kitchen while Jax sat eagerly beside them waiting for his crumbs. She took a seat at the breakfast table, watching them wordlessly go about their duties. The room was filled with the glorious scent of baking chocolate chip cookies and the delicate laugh of a 2 year old, both of which made the room feel so warm, despite the dappling of snow outside.

Oliver doused his hands in water and dried them on the dish towel he had pulled through the loop on his jeans before he walked over. In all the years they’d been together, some habits never died.

He took the seat opposite her and smiled gently as he took her hand and held it on her lap. They didn’t say anything, they didn’t really need to. Whatever happened, they were in this together.

“We should tell her, in case something happens, she should know,” Felicity said quietly, her eyes moving wayward towards Ruby, who was letting Jax lick batter off her fingers.

Oliver agreed with a nod and when he called Ruby over she climbed up onto his lap with a chuckle. Jax made himself comfortable with his head resting on Felicity's lap and his ear pressed towards her stomach, much like he had when she was pregnant with Ruby.

“We found out you’re going to have a little brother,” Felicity explained while her hand ran over the crest of her stomach.

Ruby reacted with a clap and a cheer that shook her entire tiny frame; but both Felicity and Oliver shared a knowing look that they were certain she would have reacted like that whatever gender the baby was.

Then the little girl noted her mother’s glassy eyes, far more astute than given credit for. “Are you sad because you wanted another girl momma?” she asked, reaching her small hand across the divide between them.

Felicity took Ruby’s hand and encased it in her own. “No, sweetheart,” she paused to take a shaky breath. “But when your baby brother comes out he might not be very well. He has a break in his heart, but the doctors are going to try really hard to fix it.”

Ruby’s eyes grew wide and her brow creased across her forehead. “With glue?”

“With all the big fancy glue and machines they have honey,” Oliver chimed in before he kissed her temple.

“Will he be okay?” Ruby asked, a quiver in her lip.

Felicity brushed her fingertips down Ruby’s cheek. “We sure hope so.”

“Does he have ears?”

“Yes,” Felicity answered.

“Can he hear me?”

“Sure,” Oliver cooed. “do you want to say something?”

Ruby hopped off Oliver’s lap and leaned in close to Felicity's stomach.

“Baby,” she paused and tapped her lip pensively. “What’s his name?” she whispered to Oliver.

“He doesn't have a name yet,” Oliver answered, also whispered.

Ruby shook her head as if that answer just didn’t suit her. “I think he needs a name.”

“What would you name him?” Felicity asked.

Ruby’s lips folded and twisted as she thought about her answer. “Gearbox!” she finally announced. Felicity laughed, for the first time in a while. “Maybe not.”

“Engine, brake, ca-ah-barta,” Ruby continued, a chuffed little smile plumping her cheeks.

“Carburettor?” Oliver posed and Ruby nodded fervently. “Ruby, sweetheart, those are just parts of a car, we can’t call your baby brother Engine.”

She pouted

“How about Gabriel?” Felicity suggested but she shook her head at hearing it out loud.

“Gabe?” Oliver offered.

She let the sound of it roll silently around her mind before she spoke it aloud, “Gabe.” A small nod.
“I like that.”
“Axel,” Ruby chortled, “Wheel, Jax.” She wasn't done offering suggestions and Jax looked up, bewildered, at hearing his name.
“Those are parts of a car too, and the name of our dog,” Oliver explained with a smile and a laugh just beneath the surface.
“Wait, Axel,” Felicity hummed softly, saying the name a second time, barely audible. “I like that, a little tough and maybe he could do with a little tough. Gabe Axel Queen,” she said resolutely and she felt a roll across her stomach. “I think that’s that then,” she gushed.

Oliver put his hand over Felicity's, his fingers spilling over and touching her stomach before Ruby spread her hand as much as she could over the back of his. “Gabe,” he said softly.

Ruby leaned closer to Felicity’s stomach with her chin resting on Jax’s head. “Gabe, they will fix you. Don’t be scared,” she whispered.

Felicity felt him move a second time; he was listening.

Lights will guide you home
And ignite your bones
And I will try to fix you

Chapter End Notes

Note Chapter 41.
Sunday, 14 February 2016

It was Valentine’s Day, but the air inside the house that evening was thick and sombre as Felicity’s due date approached. There was still 22 days until the 7 March date, but there was some ambiguity as to whether or not they would make it that far. The stress had taken its toll on Felicity and the surgeon was weary of putting both her and Gabe through the possible trauma and pressure of a ‘normal’ full-term birth.

The idea of a c-section hung like a weighted noose, though the final decision would rest on the scan she would have the following day.

Felicity’s mind was as turbulent and stormy as the weather outside; the air was chilly with a bite to the temperature and torrential rain pelted against the window panes. The night was thick and cavernously dark, as most of the stars were hidden behind a sheet of swollen, grey clouds. Not even the moon could pierce through it.

The fire was stoked and cracking into the dimly lit living room while Felicity lay on the couch, her head propped up on the arm with three cushions and her feet draped over Oliver’s lap.

Ruby was asleep upstairs and Jax had, somewhat miserably, torn himself away from the hearth of the toasty fire to follow her up.
There was no noise; no TV show playing in the background and no soft ambience of music to lull the tumultuous thoughts from Felicity’s brain as she touched her tightening stomach. But, she did catch Oliver smiling gently at her and she returned his smile in kind, which sparked up a conversation.

“Do you think he’ll be blonde like Ruby, or dark-haired?” Felicity asked, the somewhat inane question helped her think beyond the moment when Gabe would be in the world, fighting for his life, outside of the walls where she felt she could protect him. Oliver pressed his shoulders into the back of the couch as he danced delicately-feathered fingers across Felicity’s toes. He took a long moment to consider her question before he replied, “I think he’s going to be a spitting image of you; and just as stubborn,” he laughed.

Felicity’s smile grew before she jutted her toes into Oliver’s stomach making him wince playfully. “You’re the stubborn one,” she retorted as she sat up enough to pinch his bicep.

“No,” he argued, adding a subtle wink. “I’m sure we decided that you were the stubborn one.” The back of her hand impishly slapped his shoulder before a pinch at her side made her gasp.

Oliver’s face turned immediately from jovial to worried. “Are you okay, did something happen?” Felicity took a few moments to catch her breath before she settled back down on the couch. “Just moved too fast,” she breathed, as she shuffled slightly on her back, trying to ease the sudden bout of discomfort.

He took her feet and gently ran his hands over the crest; not quite a massage, but soothing all the same, while his eyes stayed locked to hers, watching as she took a few slow and considered breaths.

“I think,” Felicity started as she dropped her feet to the floor, “I might have a warm shower.” She winced again as a dull ache resonated down her spine and flared out across the small of her back.

“Do you need me to help?” It was a question, but before Felicity had a chance to reply, Oliver was on his feet, gently holding her at the crook of her elbow.

She made it a few steps with Oliver walking alongside her, until the doorway into the foyer when another sudden slap of pain made her hand grip at the painted-white surround while her body instinctively keeled over.

It was a pain she knew well, and with watering eyes and a heavy heart she looked up at Oliver and wordlessly told him it was time. She was having contractions.

“I’ll call Caitlin and Thea,” he said, his voice a soft, nearly melodic tremor as he forced a smile onto his face and brushed back her hair. “We got this baby, I promise.” She nodded, an uneven and somewhat havoc nod, as the pain addled her ability to speak.

Oliver leaned closer and kissed the small spring of perspiration that misted her temple. “He’s strong, he’ll fight,” he whispered and Felicity closed her eyes, praying that Oliver was right.

Oliver trekked down the stairs with Felicity’s hospital bag slung over his shoulder and a practiced smile on his lips. Thea had come over and would spend the night at the house to keep Ruby as settled as possible.
Thoughts were thrashing about Felicity’s head with every decision she tried to make; faced with the reality that things might not go as they hoped, both Oliver and Felicity were unsure whether Ruby ought to know they were leaving – perhaps to be given a chance to say farewell to a brother she already, so proudly, loved. *Just in case.*

But, the difficult decision was made for them when she appeared at the top of the staircase, fisting her tiny hand into her eyes while Mr Rabbit hung from the other.

“Is it time?” she asked with a yawn either side of the question. “Time for Gabe?” Oliver lifted her over the gate at the top of the stairs and carried her down to the bottom where Felicity was perched on the edge of a stool.

“I think so,” Felicity answered her daughter softly, as she brushed back her messy hair. Ruby squirmed free of Oliver’s embrace and threw her tiny arms around Felicity’s middle. “I need to tell him, are his ears on?” Felicity chuckled, a much needed moment of brevity, before she nodded. “He’s awake, you tell him whatever you need to.” Ruby cupped her hands around her mouth and pushed them into the side of Felicity’s stomach, just a fraction below her ribs.

Her little eyes were closed and all anyone could hear were soft whispers, muffled by two small hands.

When she pulled away, Ruby was smiling with one hand laying gently on the cusp of Felicity’s belly. “What did you tell him?” Oliver asked as he crouched down to Ruby’s level. She smiled brightly as she shook her head, her blond locks a halo around her. “Secr-wet,” she grinned.

The labour progressed rapidly and by the time Felicity was admitted to the ward, she was almost fully dilated. The room felt quieter than the first time Felicity had found herself like this. She hadn’t noticed whether there was an incubator nearby for Ruby in case she needed it, but the fact there was one there now felt like a beacon to Felicity; regardless of how this happened, Gabe would need one and the best she could hope for was a few precious moments with him on her chest before he would need to be placed on a ventilator and taken to the NICU.

Oliver was stood, like a sentry beside the bed, gently stroking back Felicity’s hair while she squeezed his other hand through every contraction.

“Not planning on getting shot this time?” Felicity joked when the quiet of the room just became too much. It was only them there, Caitlin had ducked out and the surgeon was just across the hall seeing to another patient and would return soon. Oliver smiled, and the creases around his eyes looked wet with tears he was trying his hardest to contain. *He needed to be strong for her; for them both.*

“Wasn’t planning on leaving this spot,” he answered, a soft rasp in his voice as it frayed and broke at the edges.

She tried to stay positive, she really did, but there was a heaviness in Felicity’s heart that, as Oliver’s thumb stroked across her knuckles, she let go with a silent sob. Oliver stooped and peppered her damp forehead with more kisses than either of them could count, and as his eyes closed tightly, his tears melded into hers.
“What if this is all we have, just a few moments? I needed more time, we needed more time,” Felicity cried, letting herself feel the ache of a cracked heart.
“I don’t know what will happen baby,” Oliver whispered as he too allowed himself to feel the emotion. “But I do know that when Gabe comes into this world, he will know he is loved,” his voice shook and splintered as he bit back more tears. “He will know that you cared for him, that we’re so happy and blessed to meet him.”
Oliver pulled back with tears sodden across his cheeks.
“Will he know all that?” Felicity asked, shaky and thin as she brushed her fingers over her stomach. Oliver smiled through the tears as his thumb brushed a few back from Felicity’s cheek. “Oh, he’ll know.”

Gabe Axel Queen was born at 11:23pm, Sunday 14 February 2016. He weighed a little under 6lbs and had a mop of dark, fine hair.

As the air hit his lungs, he mewled rather than cried and when the tiny bundle was put into Felicity’s arms he looked up at both his parents with a serene expression, and perhaps even the slightest hint of a smile at the very edge of his rosy lips.

But his breathing was laboured and rapid, and his little chest struggled with each breath he took. His skin was cool but clammy as Felicity gently stroked a finger across his forehead. She held him tight against her chest, letting her body feel him and letting him know that the familiar heartbeat he’d learned over the last 8.5 months was still there; still close.

His eyes closed gently, little lashes splaying over alabaster cheeks that had a translucent glow to them.
“We need to get him set up now,” Caitlin advised gently as she brushed back Felicity’s damp hair. “Breathing will be much easier when he’s on the ventilator.”
She had held him for barely 10 minutes and while her instincts begged for her to hold him longer, she couldn’t bear to see him struggle through breathing a moment more.

Felicity lifted him into Oliver’s waiting arms and as he carefully enveloped the little boy no larger than his forearm, he placed a tender kiss on the crown of his head. You are loved.

It was Oliver who carried their son to the incubator and stepped back while Dr Carter did what needed to be done.
“We’re going to take him down to the NICU and get him settled in. Once he’s strong enough we’ll run the tests we need in order to know the extent of what we’re dealing with and we can discuss the next steps from there, but,” Dr Carter said warmly as he held Felicity’s hand, “he’s a good weight, and a good colour, and I strongly believe this little boy will be just fine.”

Felicity smiled, it might have been something he said to everyone who faced something similar, but she wouldn’t think about that – she would just believe it. Because that’s what she needed to believe.

“Will you go with him?” Felicity asked, the words coming out thin and pleading as she looked up at Oliver.
He looked torn, knowing Felicity still had to pass the placenta and unwilling to leave her alone, but wanting to stay with their son who, only a few minutes after he entered the big wide world, was about to be left ‘alone’ in it.

“Please, go with him,” Felicity begged as she squeezed Oliver’s hand. “I don’t want him to be
alone. If something happens,” she paused, afraid of her own words. “I don’t want him to be alone.” Oliver was still carrying a weighty and troubled brow as he looked between his wife and his son. “Felicity’s labour was text book perfect,” Caitlin remarked, threads of worry melting off Oliver’s shoulder. “I’ll stay with her, but there is nothing to worry about here. Stay with your son.”

Felicity gave him a small nod and a shaky, but honest, smile. “I’ll be fine, please stay with Gabe.”

To Oliver, Gabe looked tiny; almost like one of Ruby’s dolls behind a house of plastic, and if it wasn’t for the tiny movements he made every so often, Oliver wouldn’t have believed that he was real.

While he wasn’t all that smaller than Ruby, his limbs appeared much thinner than Oliver remembered hers.

A fine, downy layer of hair, lanugo, covered his small body, and he wore only a knitted bonnet on his head and a diaper. He was asleep on his back with his head turned towards Oliver, but his tiny features were overwhelmed by the breathing tubes taped to his skin.

The room itself was softly lit and the temperature was warm enough that Oliver had shed his jacket. The constant sound of the monitor provided a sort of ambience that it didn’t take long for Oliver to become accustomed to; memorising the sound of it, knowing that those sounds kept his baby boy alive and stable.

His rosy skin had dulled somewhat, and they had both been warned that as the days progressed there might be a blue tinge to his lips and nailbeds. The degree of this, cyanosis, would give them some indication of the extent of any obstruction to the anomalous pulmonary veins.

There was an IV line on his tiny hand where medication was given to help his heart and lungs function more efficiently; because the sooner he was considered ‘stable’ the sooner they could plan the next steps.

The nurse doing her rounds, an older woman with warm-auburn hair, a kindly smile, and pink laces on her shoes, checked the wires and monitor around Gabe before she turned to Oliver. “I’ve checked on your wife, she’s doing wonderfully. She’s just having a little rest and something to eat.” She spoke softly, no doubt a practiced soothing tone for both the parents and the babies on her ward.

“Thank you,” Oliver said, his shoulders lifting with a relieved sigh.

She pointed to the small latched windows, two on either side. “I can open these little ports if you’d like.”

Oliver looked up as tears formed in the corners of his eyes. The thought of putting his gigantic hand anywhere near his tiny new born terrified him, but at the same time he desperately wanted Gabe to know he was there; he would always be right there.

He was loved.

She unlatched the portal at the head of the incubator and went about checking on the two other babies nearby. Oliver’s hand crept forward, inching closer, but hesitantly, until Gabe’s fingers twitched as though reaching for Oliver. He gave him a finger and with his entire hand Gabe latched on.

“You got this little man,” Oliver whispered. “We got this.”
A chest x-ray, echocardiogram, and electrocardiogram confirmed what they already knew, and while Felicity had studied fastidiously to understand what the surgeon would come and say, she felt lost in a sea of words she couldn’t bring herself to understand when Dr Carter explained.

What she did hear was that there were no obstructions and while Gabe was doing quite well, there was little to no benefit in waiting; and their little baby boy with his quiet snore and his curled up toes wouldn’t survive without the surgery.

So, 10 days after meeting the world with tiny, squinted eyes and pensive, furrowed lips, he was booked in for surgery.

The operation to reconnect the four pulmonary veins to the left atrium felt like it took a lifetime. A lifetime spent sitting in near silence but for the distant sounds of feet scuffing on linoleum and the sound of her own heartbeat. A lifetime spent wringing his clammy hands against each other and clenching his back teeth.

A lifetime spent not knowing.

A lifetime that screeched to a halt when Dr Carter walked through the doors.

Oliver’s hand instinctively reached for Felicity’s and she gripped it just as tightly as they stood up together; waiting and ready.

“The operation went better than we had hoped,” he started and Oliver let go of a shaky and desperate sigh as Felicity rested her eyes closed and let the tears, finally, fall. “You have an amazing little boy.”

Felicity’s tear-soaked eyes blinked up as she leaned against her husband for support. “When can we see him?”

“He’s on his way to NICU where he will need to be closely monitored for a few days during recovery. We will keep him on the ventilator to allow him some time to rest. I’ll come with you to explain some of the other equipment as it can be hard for parents to see.”

Hard had been an understatement and when Felicity saw her tiny baby boy for the first time after surgery, she had felt her knees give way and a strangled sob shudder from her body before Oliver caught her around the waist and held her weight until she could hold her own.

Even in the private room’s dim, soft focus lighting, the tubes and wires could be seen basically covering every part of his small body.

The small, plastic tubes of two IV catheters provided fluids and medicine while an arterial line in his wrist continuously measured his blood pressure. Another small, flexible tube, a nasogastric tube, kept his tiny stomach drained of acid and gas bubbles that may have built up during surgery, while another line drained his bladder and accurately measured how much his body was making; a fact, Dr Carter took time the to explain, that would help determine how well his heart was functioning.

A third tube in his tiny torso kept his chest free of blood that might otherwise accumulate after the incision was closed.

As Oliver and Felicity walked a few steps closer, the soft white light of the heart monitor cast a
sort of halo over his little bed. He was asleep and still, but for the tiny wiggle of his toes.

“I wonder if he’s dreaming,” Felicity said softly as she rested her head against Oliver’s arm. He leaned in and kissed the top of her head. “I think so,” he whispered.

Twelve days later and Gabe was discharged from the NICU to recuperate in another hospital unit; and, at fourteen days new, Ruby could finally meet him.

His skin had pinked and he was now breathing on his own. All that remained of his spider web of tubes was a single IV line, together with the new addition of a feeding tube. He was awake more often and had begun making the softest of noises as he greeted the world with wide, blue eyes and a curious pout.

Felicity stayed with him, feeding him for a few minutes every hour, while she expressed at other times. He was tired and weak at times, but he was getting stronger by the day.

It was mid-morning when Felicity, with Gabe asleep in her arms, looked up as the door to the room opened and a timid, but happy face peered over the top of the bed. While Gabe had been in the NICU, Ruby had been nursing a small cold and given her age, and the likelihood that she would sneeze everywhere, she hadn’t yet been allowed to see her baby brother until then.

She stood a few feet away from the end of the bed with her bottom lip snagged between her teeth, even when Oliver offered his hand to walk her closer.

With matching smiles, both Oliver and Felicity decided to allow Ruby to come closer in her own time. Oliver sat on the edge of the bed and gently cupped Gabe’s head in the palm of his hand before he kissed both Felicity and his son in succession.

“Good day today?” he asked softly, the same way he had every other morning he’d arrived. Felicity nodded as she looked down at Gabe furrowing his lips in his sleep. “Good day today.” Oliver kissed his wife a second time on the cheek while Ruby took a few stunted steps closer.

“He sleeping?” the little girl asked while she tugged on one of her lopsided braids; an attempt by Oliver to try and give her the hairstyle she had asked for, but not having the slender fingers or dexterity to perfect it.

“He’s having a little rest, but you can come and say hello,” Felicity answered warmly and Ruby slid closer, until she was just barely touching the side of the bed.

“Hi,” she peeped and then covered her mouth with her hand to laugh quietly behind it. Gabe’s opened his eyes and squinted up at Felicity, before he moved them judiciously from one parent to the other.

“He awake?” Ruby chortled as she put her palms on the edge of the bed and lifted her body onto her tippy toes.

“Do you want to get up?” Oliver asked as he opened his arms. Ruby clambered half way and Oliver lifted her the rest, sitting her on his outstretched legs so that Gabe’s toes, peeking out of the swaddle, brushed against Ruby’s bent knees.

She giggled before, with one very tentative finger, she touched his toe. Gabe yawned in response, his lips smacking against the tube in his mouth that he had become accustomed to.
“What’s that?” Ruby asked with a fraught and creased brow as she waggled a finger towards the tube.

“That helps Gabe when he’s hungry but too tired to eat,” Oliver explained.

She leaned a little closer, and her eyes scurried across him. “What’s that?” she asked when she pointed to his IV line.

“It gives him medicine if he needs it.”

She pointed at the plastic bracelet on his tiny wrist, her finger inching ever closer to him. “What’s that?”

“That has his name and his birthday on it, so the nurses know,” Felicity answered.

Ruby leaned even closer as she scrutinised the little bundle. “He’s little,” she quipped as she cocked her head to one side.

“He’ll grow, you wait and see,” Oliver grinned as he pecked Ruby’s ruddy cheek.

She laughed, buoyant and effervescent, as she scrunched up her shoulders. At the same moment, Gabe reached up and caught Ruby’s finger.

The little girl’s mouth opened, her jaw dropping like a caricature.

“I think he’s happy to finally meet you,” Felicity said smoothly as she let the image embed in her memory.

“Hi Gabe,” Ruby chuckled as she gently shook his hand. “I’m Ruby.” She squinted up at Felicity, “Does he talk?”

“No yet,” Felicity smiled. “He has to learn.”

“It’s okay, I help you,” she nodded as she looked back down at the newborn. “Can he have toys?”

Ruby asked a second question with a serious frown.

“He can have some, did you bring him something?” Felicity quizzed.

Ruby nodded so frantically that the elastic on one of her braids fell out. She looked at Oliver and pointed her free hand towards the unicorn backpack still hung over his massive shoulder.

He wiggled it off his shoulder and set it down beside Ruby.

“I need my hand please,” Ruby laughed as she jigged it free from Gabe’s grasp. She rifled through the small backpack and pulled out a little, powder-blue rabbit.

“Who’s this?” Felicity asked as Ruby smiled brightly.

“Mr Rabbit’s baby brother,” she announced proudly. She put it gently on Gabe and it was nearly the size of his torso. “For Gabe.”

“Daddy cleaned him in the wishing machine,” she added astutely.

“The washing machine,” Oliver corrected before Ruby shot him a sideways glance.

“Yup.”

His little hands fistled the soft, plush toy as Ruby watched on, pleased with her choice from the toy shop where Oliver had taken her the day before.

Thea knocked on the door and Oliver gestured her in. Both Donna and Thea had been able to visit Gabe in the NICU and Felicity was thankful for the ongoing babysitting they had both done while Oliver spent time at the hospital too.

“How about you and me get a milkshake from downstairs?” Thea asked Ruby who clapped gleefully at the prospect.

“Gabe have a milkshake?” Ruby asked Felicity.

“He has to have special milk, but you go and have fun with Aunt Thea.”

The blonde cherub clambered off the bed and blew a kiss back at her parents and an extra one towards her brother. “Bye Gearbox,” she laughed before she skipped out of the room.

“You look tired,” Oliver lamented as Felicity struggled to keep her eyes open.
“It’s not me we need to worry about,” Felicity argued before she looked down at Gabe rousing in her arms. “He could get an infection, or an obstruction or….”

“Baby,” Oliver interrupted with a soothing voice like honey before he lightly kissed her cheek. “He needs his mother to take care of herself too.”

Felicity knew he was right; but she could wait, Gabe could still face complications. “Maybe you should go home for a few hours, you’ve expressed some milk and I can stay with him,” Oliver added.

Felicity’s eyes shot upward as she shook her head, surprised at his suggestion. “No, I can’t, Oliver, I can’t leave him.”

He saw something more in her eyes and his heart plummeted. She was still holding onto something, something she needed to let go of. “You know you didn’t do this right? Nothing you did made this happen,” he assured her, his voice like a soft whisper that brushed against her cheek.

Tears sprung from her eyes that she didn’t try to bat away. “I try to remember that,” she started, shaky and quiet. “But Oliver, there are times where I can’t help but think….” she stopped herself short of saying the words, but they were there, on the tip of her tongue; she had done something or not done something, or should have done something different…

Her finger feathered down the centre of Gabe’s chest where a scar was beginning to heal; how could she not think that?

“Baby, he’s good, he’s strong,” Oliver chanted near her ear as his firmly protective arms enveloped them both. “And you gave him the best start in life, never forget that.”

She blinked and let the tears draw tracks down her cheeks. “But you need to look after you too. He needs his momma well and healthy.” He brushed her hair back from her face and kissed a spill of salt-tinged tears. “Let me look after him for an hour while you sleep. I’ll take him for a walk around the hospital.”

Her lips were shaky and her brow furrowed, but the idea of an uninterrupted hour of sleep was too perfect to turn down.

“You’re a good man Oliver Queen,” she smiled as she gently placed Gabe into his waiting, sinewy and custodial arms.

“Only with the love of a good woman,” he replied impishly.

Gabe was 2 months old the day they left the hospital. The sun was warm and the air was fragrant with the scents of spring. His small frame seemed to swim in even the smallest clothes, but he was strong and his recovery had been near-perfect.

His appetite had flourished and he’d become more curious about the world, though he always greeted it with musing and a slightly scrunched up face. He didn’t ‘talk’ much, although Ruby was adamant that he wanted her to speak for him, and his cries were soft and kitten-like, but he was going to be just fine.

When they arrived home, it was Jax that met them at the front door first. Once a dog that lived on probation with an attitude for hating anyone that wasn’t Oliver, he was now a sook that greeted Ruby with a happy bark and an excitedly-frantic wagging tail.

He kept his distance from the baby capsule, poking his nose around the edges for a sniff, but backing off when a nervous Felicity brushed him away.

“Jax this is Gearbox, our baby brother,” Ruby announced, her face beaming with pride as she
hugged Jax and buried her face into his coat. “They call him Gabe,” she added with a smile that peaked through Jax’s fur.

“His name is Gabe,” Oliver remarked, trying his hardest to hide his smile.
But Ruby just shrugged and turned her attention back to her four-legged friend. “He lives here now.”

Felicity looked around the entrance of their home. It had felt like so long since she’d allowed herself a moment to enjoy it. The few times she had gone home in the last 2 months, she had spent that time feeling guilty for not being at the hospital; but she was home now – they all were.

She touched the bottom balustrade of the staircase and smiled. “Ruby, do you remember telling Gabe a secret here just before he was born?”
The little girl nodded enthusiastically.
“Is it still a secret?” Felicity asked.

Ruby pressed a finger to her lip and furrowed her brow in an eerily similar manner to the way Oliver did, before she answered. “Nope,” with a pop of her lips. “Save him a cookie!” she announced loudly before she ran up the stairs, Jax following along behind her.

Both Oliver and Felicity look at each other and shrugged.

Ruby returned a few moments later with a stale and dusty chocolate chip cookie that had a patch of green growing on it.
“Oh god, what is, what is that?” Felicity cringed as Oliver plucked it dubiously from Ruby’s hands.
“How long have you had this?” Oliver asked as he held it at arm’s length.
Ruby shrugged. “It’s his,” she added as she pointed to a dozing Gabe.
“Mmm, I don’t think he can have this,” Oliver smiled weakly as the family walked towards the kitchen.
“Maybe we can make some new ones another time,” Felicity added while Oliver threw the festering cookie in the trash.
Ruby sighed as her eyes rolled up towards the ceiling. “Mmmkay,” she breathed, completely oblivious to the issue with the cookie which she had dutifully saved and kept in a shoe box under her bed.

Dr Carter had been honest and optimistic with the possible challenges that might lay ahead for Gabe. His scar would fade as he grew, but it would be his for life. He would be followed periodically by a paediatric cardiologist who would make assessments to check for any heart-related problems and there was a chance that, as he grew, the area where the arteries were reconnected to the left atrium might become narrowed, preventing blood from moving from the lungs to the left atrium. It was unlikely, but possible.

Aside from that, Gabe would grow and develop just like any other child.

And he did.

He smiled at 4 months.
Laughed at his sister’s expressive storytelling with toys, at 5 months.
Cut his first tooth a few days after.
He said his first word, “Boo-Bee” at 6 months; which took them a week to realise was meant to mean ‘Ruby’ and not what it had sounded like at the time.
He started crawling at 9 months, and took his first steps at 12 months and 2 days.
His scar flattened and blended into his chest and his eyes lightened to a colour almost identical to his sister. His smile grew wider and his hair grew darker, finally settling into a shade of chestnut.

He preferred to spend time in Felicity’s office over Oliver’s garage and his favourite toy was an old wireless mouse that no longer worked.

His stamina wasn’t as robust as his older sister’s and when he stopped to need a breath, Ruby would always instinctively stop with him.

He was 4 when he got chicken pox, the same weekend that Jax was euthanized; but with white cream blotted over the spots on his face and his most sombre of smiles, he stood beside his sister, Bee, quietly holding her hand as they buried Jax’s ashes in the front garden under the tree with the rope swing in the spot where it got the late afternoon sun and where Jax, as he mellowed with contentment, would sit most days, carefully watching over his family.

And he was 8 in July 2024 on that sunny Friday afternoon when his impulsive older sister took the GPS tracker off her wrist and darted across the road to start a fight with three boys who were picking on a stray dog.

He watched with a squint, expecting the worst, as she hopped the fence and approached the strange dog. “I don’t think you….should do that.”

But she did; and after she let him loose, the suddenly-spritely dog followed her through a hole in the fence.

“Do you think Mom and Dad will let us keep him?” Ruby asked as she tussled the top of the dog’s head and he happily lapped air.

Gabe pursed his lips to one side and opened his mouth to speak, but the familiar rumble of a Milwaukee-Eight 1923cc engine cranked it shut again.

Ruby heard it too and she blew out a heavy-hearted sigh. “Guess we’re about to find out,” she remarked as the three of them walked towards the street.

The Harley pulled alongside the kerb and the rider tugged off his helmet and ruffled his hair with a comb of fingers as he stood up.

“Hi dad,” Ruby grimaced as she tried to hide the dog behind her willowy frame.

“You went off the track Rubik,” Oliver stoically sighed before he looked at Gabe and sighed again, “And you took your brother with you.”

“I had to,” Ruby argued while her younger brother stood alongside her, nodding for moral support.

“Does that have anything to do with the dog behind your back?”

An awkward laugh trickled from her mouth as she stepped to one side and the dark lab looked curiously up at Oliver.

“Who’s this then?” Oliver asked as he crouched down in front of the dog.

The dog hunched a little, his mouth pulling taut as he waited on edge.

“He was stuck and some boys were teasing him and Ruby ran across the road even though I said she probably shouldn’t and reminded her about the wrist watches, but she did, so then I followed her, and she,” Gabe paused to take a breath, and Oliver smiled at his son that was unmistakably Felicity’s child. “And she fought the boys and…” Oliver hushed Gabe with a raised finger.

“She what now?” he questioned as he turned his attention to Ruby.

“It wasn’t really a fight, fight,” Ruby explained with a one shoulder shrug. “Can we keep him?”

Oliver’s lips furrowed for a few moments before he held out his hand, open and palm down,
towards the Labrador with the pale blue eyes.

It was a stand-off of sorts where neither party moved back or advanced, until the canine tentatively butted his nose against Oliver’s hand. Oliver smiled as he stood up, “You know we’ll have to ask your mother,” he reminded them both and two little heads bobbed at the same time. “She won’t be happy about you breaking the rules, and neither am I,” he added with a stern smile. “She would have done the same thing,” Ruby replied with certainty. Oliver chuckled, before tensing his lips to hide the smile. That was probably true. “All the same,” he remarked before he walked back to his bike and retrieved a helmet from the hard tail box.

“You alright son?” he asked as he held the helmet out to Gabe. It didn’t go unnoticed by Oliver that he was looking a little pale and his breathing was unsteady. Gabe nodded. “Fine,” he peeped before he took the helmet and pushed it onto his head. Oliver kept a close eye on him with the visor lifted, turning away only when Gabe gave him a thumbs up. “You walk the dog back to the shop,” he instructed Ruby. “Gabe and I will ride alongside you.” Ruby idly kicked out her foot and dropped her head towards one shoulder. “I could walk alone,” she suggested quietly. Oliver laughed. “Not happening.”

Gabe and Oliver, true to his word, rode along the kerb, travelling at a walking pace beside Ruby for the few blocks until they reached Queen Motors. Felicity was already there, and rushed to them the instant Oliver rode into the workshop.

“Oh thank god,” she sighed while she clutched her heart. She helped Gabe off the bike and started religiously checking him until he swatted her away. “I’m fine mom,” he groaned, but with a sunny smile.

Felicity then turned to Ruby who was standing nearby, sheepishly scuffing her shoes on the oil-stained concrete. “What happened, your watch went completely offline, and whose dog is this?” Felicity questioned, wide-eyed and confused.

“They’re fine,” Oliver soothed his wife as he wrapped his arms around her waist and kissed her lips, making Roy, who was standing nearby, gag, and their two children, in turn, laugh. “Let’s talk,” Oliver suggested as he walked her away and out of earshot. “Seriously, whose dog is that?” Felicity quipped as she allowed herself to be led by the hand at the small of her back.

“Ruby wants to keep him, she found him,” Oliver answered once they’d stopped near his office. Felicity’s expression reeled in surprise. “She wants another dog?” “That’s what she said,” he nodded. “But after, Jax,” Felicity started, her voice trailing off when she said the faithful-friend’s name. Oliver smiled wistfully. “I know, she said she would wait until he came back,” he breathed, remembering the words his little girl had spoken what seemed like a lifetime ago, with speckles of tears in her eyes and ruddy-red cheeks. They both looked over to Gabe and Ruby, petting the new dog.

~*~*~

“Do you really think he’s Jax?” Gabe asked curiously as he pushed his glasses a little higher up the bridge of his nose. Ruby shrugged and then nodded, “he could be, who says he’s not?” “Not me,” Gabe smiled as he looked up at his big sister. She might have been reckless and occasionally hot headed, but he could always rely on her; so today she would be able to rely on
“Do you think they’ll let us keep him?” Ruby pondered aloud. Gabe looked over at his parents talking. “I’m not sure” he whispered with a laugh.

“Sorry if we get in trouble for leaving the path,” Ruby apologised quietly. Gabe shrugged his narrow shoulders. “You had to. What will you call him?” Ruby’s eyes lit up as her brain jumped into action. “Something cool like Razorwhip or Harley”

Gabe looked down at the comic tucked into the back cover of the coding book he had in his hands, borrowed from his mother’s library. He plucked it out from between the pages and showed his sister. “This guy is cool, maybe we could name the dog after him.”

“Spiderman?” Ruby scrunch up her face. “No.”

Gabe stood up and flashed his sister a flailing smile. There was a wrenching pull in his chest and he was finding it hard to catch his breath all of a sudden.

“Everything alright Gearbox?” Ruby asked as her slender fingers brushed down his trembling arm. His eyes were wide but he nodded to allay her fears all the same. “Probably just a stitch,” he remarked.

~*~*~

“We don’t really know the dog, he could be sick,” Felicity sighed as her and Oliver continued talking.

He nodded, understanding her concerns; he had them himself. “I can take him to the vet after work and keep him here for a few hours to see how he acts.”

“Mom, Dad!” Ruby called from across the garage. They both spun around to see Gabe doubled over and Ruby frantically shadowing him. They ran towards him and the sound of his laboured wheezing became nearly deafening.

“Gabe?” Felicity panic as she dropped to her knees in front of him, holding his face between her palms. His breathing was rapid and unsteady “Call an ambulance,” she shouted and Roy moved quickly towards the garage phone.

“They’ll take more than 20 minutes to get here, I can get him to the hospital in less than 10,” Oliver said as he scooped Gabe into his arms and put him on his bike. “Call the hospital, then meet us there.”

Felicity nodded as Oliver took off.

It took Oliver 7 and a half minutes to get to the hospital and Gabe was breathing normally 10 minutes later with the help of an oxygen mask and an antiarrhythmic drug.

Three tests and 60 minutes later, Dr Carter was stood in the corner of the room with Oliver and Felicity explaining the situation. “We’re still waiting on one of the test results and I would like to keep Gabe in overnight for observation,” Dr Carter explained as he stood with Oliver and Felicity in a corner of the room.

Felicity asked the question that weighed the heaviest on her heart, “Could the repair have ruptured?”

“No, nothing like that,” he assured her with a kind smile. “There are no signs that anything like that has happened. It might be that one of the veins has narrowed at the repair site, or a small obstruction is present.”

“Can I talk to him?” Ruby interrupted quietly. Her demeanour was quiet and withdrawn and her slender body was curled into itself as she sat on a chair with her toes barely scraping the floor.

Dr Carter walked over to the bed where Gabe was quietly sitting, surrounded by the humming of
the oxygen. “I’m going to take the mask off now Gabe, if you have any trouble breathing let me know, okay?” He carefully enunciated each word and waited until Gabe offered him two thumbs up before he removed the plastic mask.

Gabe took one deep and considered breath, letting the air fill his lungs, one time and then another, until breathing became like second nature once again. Another thumbs up to everyone in the room set them at ease.

“So what happens now?” Oliver asked as the three adults once again congregated to the side.
“We believe that Gabe may have an abnormal cardiac rhythm which has led to his shortness of breath. For the most part it appears benign and shouldn’t require any treatment. On this occasion, it seems he had an episode of rapid heartbeat,” Dr Carter judiciously clarified.
“What’s the treatment?” Felicity enquired.
“At this stage I think we should try medication before we look at anything surgical, he responded well to the antiarrhythmic drugs, so there is definitely some medications we can prescribe to counter this, in the hopes that this was a once off.”

“Sorry about, everything, making you freak out and stuff,” Ruby said softly as she stood at the head of Gabe’s bed, with her fingers skirting over the woven blanket.
“It’s not your fault Bee,” Gabe offered with a resilient shrug. She thanked him with a genuine, but shaky smile.
“So I was thinking maybe Spiderman isn’t such a bad name after all,” she quipped. “We can name him after one of your silly comics if you want Gearbox,” she finished with a wink.
“How about Parker, like Peter Parker?” Gabe offered, his azure eyes dappled with excitement. Ruby nodded, it wasn’t half bad. “Parker, I like that.”

She looked over to where the adults were huddled in conversation. “Now we just have to convince them to let us keep him.”
“I think we got this Bee,” Gabe laughed as he offered his sister his fist. She bumped it with a knowing smile.

They weren’t wrong.
After he came back with a clean bill of health, they adopted Parker.

AN: While this was the ”moment” I alluded to way back when I started these one shots, it has become apparent that I will never finish this story and it will live on and on amen. There are still more stories to be eventually told. So watch me create polls on Twitter for which stories to tell first 😊

I will however be taking a short break from this story to concentrate on my WIPs and a few other things I have going on.

||teen aesthetics||

Gabe "Gearbox"
Ruby "Bee"
As a thank you to making this fic ranked #1 in Olicity xox
Oliver Jonas Queen got his first tattoo at 16 out the back of the Lost Souls bar with a bottle of cheap whisky in his hand and a butcher with a penchant for causing pain driving the needle.

It was barely better than the fifth one he'd gotten during his first stint in prison by a 6ft tall, 200 pound brickhouse named Marvin, but the faded blue skull on the inside of his wrist was a constant reminder of the youth and life he'd pledged to Malcolm Merlyn in the hopes of keeping his baby sister safe.

He neither wore it with regret nor with pride, but every so often when Felicity pressed her thumb over it to enjoy the constant lull of his pulse while they lay in bed, he hated it.

He hated the past it represented, and how it very nearly cost him his future.

Ruby never liked it and more often than not he wore a wide watch over it to keep it out of her sight. But every so often while they were cooking together or when he was giving her a bath, the little girl's face would scrunch up when she saw it and her tiny hand would hold his wrist to cover it over.

Or, a few times as they idly watched television, Ruby would draw her own little picture over it. A little girl with a triangle dress, two arms stretched outwards, two legs above two turned in feet, and
two strands of hair on either side of her head. She had no nose but two dots for eyes and a smile that took up half her head.

The skull was scary and "not her daddy" and the day they celebrated Ruby’s second birthday in June 2015, Oliver knew he needed to do something about it.

Wipe the slate clean for all of them.

Felicity had suggested he could cover it over and while that made the most sense, he would still be left with a brand that he'd never really wanted.

All the rest of his tattoos had meant something at one point, the three crosses on his neck reminded him of the people he'd lost. The Lost Souls emblem above his heart was gotten with a best friend and a six pack of beer and served as a challenge to rise above where he had been.

The eagle on his back was his journey and it was nothing without the sun, Felicity, alongside it. Even the jagged prison tattoo at the base of his neck that simply said 'Fight' was a challenge to never let go of what was worth fighting for.

But this one, the size of a half dollar, meant nothing that wasn't forced or taken.

He tried to remember that as the first laser burned the top layer of his skin, stripping away what Oliver once was.

He tried to remember that every session thereafter as the stench of his burning skin filled his nostrils and the constant ticking buzz of the laser tormented every hour he gave to it.

But seven months later, as Christmas approached and Felicity was 6 and a half months pregnant with Gabe, all that remained was a dappled blue spot that looked like a tiny smear of faded blue ink.

"That's a near perfectly clean wrist Mr Queen," the technician smiled as her almond-imbued eyes studied the before image on her screen.

“Actually, I'm going to get another tattoo over it,” Oliver casually remarked.

She looked up bemused over the rim of her plastic glasses. “Why remove it then?”

Oliver looked down at the nearly-empty skin, red raw and painful, but almost free. “A clean slate,” he answered simply.

Six weeks later, near the end of January, and Oliver was sitting in the tattooist's chair with an unbending smile on his face. It hurt, which he'd never admit to Felicity as she watched on flinching while she rubbed tentative circles over her pregnant stomach, but the pain took second place next to the peace he felt.

The night before he had peeled off the bandage he'd been wearing to protect the new skin as it grew after the last bout of removal treatment and Ruby's eyes had flared open when she saw the tattoo was gone.

With both her little hands she gripped his wrist and turned his hand hurriedly as she searched every angle for the missing mark.

“It's gone?” she had asked with quizzical eyes.

“It's all gone Rubik,” Oliver had replied. “You going draw on it for me one more time though?”

He’d added before he’d leaned in close and kissed her forehead.
Ruby had squealed in delight before she’d ran from the room returning a few minutes later with a black marker. Like she had done many times before, Ruby Dawn drew the same little stick figure representation of herself on her father's broad and sinewy wrist over his twisting veins, carefully and conscientiously, until she was happy with the result; nose-less face and all.

“That looks painful,” Felicity winced as she turned away.
“Princess you had a baby,” he answered with a wink. “And you’re about to have another one.” Felicity smiled proudly with a decisive nod added for good measure. “This has nothing on that.” “Would you like me to get a tattoo?” Felicity asked with an impish laugh.
“If it were up to me I would tattoo my name on your...,” he stopped short of saying it and finished with a wink instead.
“I'm serious Oliver,” she pouted as her fingers pranced up his free arm. “And who says I’m not?”
“So you want to make sure everyone knows I’m yours? That's very patriarchal,” she teased. He smiled, broadly, and despite the sharp pain in his wrist. “I'd get your name tattooed across mine at the same time.”

She felt her cheeks flush as he smiled roguishly at her, and Felicity stifled a giggle before it breached her lips. It was nothing short of amazing how hot Oliver could get her with only a puckish smile.

But that wasn’t to say Felicity couldn't elicit the same sort of response out of him. She leaned forward under the guise of tucking a few strands of his loose hair behind his ear until her lips brushed across his ear lobe. “Maybe one day I'll get one for your eyes only,” she whispered, silvery and a little husky.

She watched his free hand grip the arm of the chair, puckering the stiff black leather. “Here I was thinking I couldn't fall in love with you even more,” he breathed, deep and guttural.

“We're done,” the artist said as he set the needle gun aside and wiped the last few sprigs of blood away from Oliver's wrist. “Do you like it?” Felicity asked when Oliver's silence hung heavy in the air. He let out a puff of air before a smile lit up his entire face. “It's perfect.”

And it really was.

****

Three days later, with the swelling dissipated and his colouring back to normal, Oliver sat on the couch with Ruby cuddled against him as she attentively watched a cartoon bear look for clues in their forest home.

Felicity was finishing up a phone call to her mother in the kitchen and when she was done and appeared in the living room doorway Oliver tapped Ruby's shoulder and paused the TV show.

With intrigued eyes and a pensive smile, Ruby Dawn looked up at her father before a little yawn took over her whole body.

“Bed time?” Ruby sighed dramatically as she squinted her eyes towards the clock on the wall across the room, despite the 2.5 year old not being able to actually read the analogue face. “Bath time,” Oliver answered as he plucked her cheek and a smile grew across her lips.

He rolled up the sleeves of his long Henley up to his elbows and slapped his hands together excitedly, stopping only when Ruby shrieked happily.
She clutched his arm just above his wrist with both her tiny hands as she continued to laugh with giddy abandonment.

“Daddy look,” she enthused as she looked down at his wrist with wide eyes full of wonderment. “Huh, would you look at that,” Oliver remarked as Felicity smiled at him from the doorway, a hand resting on the home of their second baby.

On Oliver's wrist was the same little girl Ruby always drew and beneath it was his daughter's name in the band of an infinity symbol.

Ruby tried in vain to rub the ink mark off, thinking it was the one she had drawn a few days ago, but when it didn’t so much as smudge, she looked up at him and gaped. “That's me?” she asked with a shaking finger dancing across the little stick figure with her triangle dress.

“It sure is,” Oliver whispered as he leaned in close. “You made the bad go away. You and mommy and Gabe.”

“What about this?” Ruby pondered as she ghosted the lines of the infinity symbol. “That's your name and this,” Oliver commented as he swept his finger around the figure 8, “it means forever. You’ll forever be my little girl, no matter what.”

The little girl, overwhelmed, threw her arms around Oliver's neck and sobbed into the neck of his shirt.

“I love you dada,” she whispered into the weave. Oliver’s hand ran protectively down her head before he pressed a kiss to her crown. “I love you too baby girl, forever, no matter what.”

In the months that followed with Gabe’s birth, surgery, and recovery Oliver found himself often sitting alone and silent in the private room on the neonatal ward. Despite the heavy weight on his soul and the lateness of the evenings, these were his times to watch dutifully over their young and fragile son.

Making sure he was never alone.

One such night, a few days after his surgery, Oliver leaned forward in the dim threads of light that emanated from a low lamp in the far corner of the room, and he watched the lines of Gabe’s monitor with an aching hitch in his throat as he prayed that the next beat would carry on just as the last one had.

There were moments in those still evenings where it paused, and his tiny heart struggled against the odds he was dealt. In those painful moments, Oliver stopped breathing too, as fear ripped through his body and he put everything he had into making that line move again, begging whoever might be listening that those precious moments they had already had with him wouldn’t be all that they would have.

Panic held him down for those fractures of a second as he carefully reached in and stroked Gabe’s arm, whispering with the softest encouragement that their little son was strong, he had this; that he was a fighter, just like his mother, and he was with him, he wasn’t alone.

Then, each time the monitor would spark back to life, Oliver would take a first breath, shaky and
unsure, while his eyes fell back onto the monitor.

Just watching and memorising each peak and every dip in that thin green line.

And, after the monitors were unplugged, most of the tubes removed, and Gabe was moved to the ward to be with Felicity, Oliver found his way to that same leather chair where on his wrist, above where the blood flowed through his veins, *his lifeline*, he tattooed Gabe’s heartbeat with his name below it.

Both his children, his life, his clean slate.

---

**May 2017**

The house was finally quiet.

With both children tucked up and carefully checked on at least three times and with Jax settled at the foot of Ruby’s bed, Oliver tiptoed towards the master bedroom with a contented smile lifting up the tips of his mouth.

He expected to find Felicity asleep as he followed the gentle orange glow emanating out from the slightly ajar door, but as he silently crept into the bedroom he was surprised to find her sitting, fully dressed and cross-legged, on the bed.

He glanced at the clock and while it was only a little after 10 it felt like much more like the wee smalls of dawn.

Felicity looked up from her book and smiled as she closed her bookmark in the page. “All settled?” she asked while she set the book on her nightstand. “Ruby’s nightmare about space sheep has been settled, Jax has been taken for a bathroom break, and reluctantly Gabe has had his medication.”

After a slight cold, the 14 month old was precautionary on a course of antibiotics and steroids to ensure the infection didn’t spread into his lungs and put any extra strain on the repair to his heart. They had been warned that even the common cold could see Gabe do poorly and as spring ended, they hoped too that the weather would warm up and he could continue flourishing.

Oliver bent over her and caught Felicity lips with a soft kiss. “They’re both perfect,” he added.

“So oo,” she started, “it’s your birthday tomorrow.” Oliver shed his tee to get ready for bed, answering her with only a smile. “The kids are excited to give you their presents,” Felicity continued, watching as he stripped down to his charcoal boxer-briefs. “It’s been a pretty crazy year,” she sighed as Oliver stood, nearly naked at the foot of the bed carefully folding his jeans in half to drape over the armchair nearby. “I’ll take a bit of crazy for the life we have,” he remarked as he ambled back towards the bed.

“I have a present for you tonight,” Felicity enthused as she sat onto her knees, her small shorts riding up her smooth legs. Oliver patted his tongue across his bottom lip as his shoulders instinctively flexed. “Mmm what?” he asked with a slight smirk playing on his lips and dancing into his hungry eyes. She rolled her lips together, fighting back a smirk of her own. “Close your eyes,” she instructed and he did so without questioning her demand.
Felicity slid off the bed and padded up to Oliver. With a hand on each of his shoulders she turned him and guided him to sit on the edge of their bed.

His cocky, uneven smile grew across his lips. “I like this present already,” he growled as his hands kneaded into the bed.

Felicity slipped off her shorts leaving on a tiny pair of cotton panties which she folded down on one side. Checking herself in the mirror near the corner of the bed she finished by lifting her tank top higher on one end and then stood, slightly angled, in front of Oliver.

“Okay open them,” she peeped and Oliver plucked one eye open before the other, instantly seeing what she had put directly in his eye line.

“Holy shit is that a…?” he gaped without finishing his question as his finger ghosted across the tiny crown tattoo on the back of Felicity's hip bone.

“A tattoo,” she finished his words with a silvery tone. “For your eyes only.”

It was small, a little smaller than a half dollar, with intricate fine lines creating an ornate crown just to the back of her hip and slightly above the slope of her ass. There were four arches that curved up from the band, meeting at a small, round monde in the centre.

Oliver barely blinked as his index finger ghosted the edges. “When did you?” he wondered, severing another sentence short.

“A few days ago,” Felicity admitted before she chewed nervously on her bottom lip. “It was so hard to keep it from you.”

His eyebrow hitched. “So you’re not?”

Another stunted question she understood “On my period? No... not for another week,” she admitted.

A deviant smile flickered across Oliver's lips making Felicity chuff out a breathy laugh. Keeping Oliver's hands off her was practically impossible; a fact that she would never complain about; he was handsy.

The only exception was that once a month visit where he became exceptionally understanding and showed his affection in a million other ways. Telling him it was early bought her a little time and no pressure.

He leaned closer to her hip and his warm breath misted her supple skin. “Does it still hurt?” Oliver asked with his eyes wandering up the magnificent curves of her body.

“Not much.”

It was more sensitive than painful and even the softness of his breath was felt with a shudder of prickles across her skin.

He licked his lips absently while his eyes stayed trained on her. “Can I kiss it?”

She nodded with a frisky smile as her fingers combed through his long tresses. “Do you want to?” Felicity asked, despite seeing the answer in his impish eyes.

He growled low in his chest. “Fuck yes.”

“And you like it?” As she spoke Felicity’s tongue fretted with her lower lip before she nibbled on the corner of it. “It's not tacky? I just thought Princess and Queen and...,” she looked down and caught the rapture in his eyes as he stared at the ink now permanently marking her skin. “Tell me you like it?” she asked, almost pleaded, as just her index finger coaxed his chin and his gaze upward.

“Next to that perfect freckle you have on your amazing ass, it's my new favourite thing,” he answered her with his lips turned up into a dizzy smile and his eyes pinning and ravenous.
He leaned closer and gently kissed the edge with a kiss no deeper or rougher than the glide of a feather tip. Felicity sighed, blissfully and ardently, at the erotic sensation as her arms fell limp to her sides and he held her gently at the ribs, holding her tight against the foot of the bed.

His thumbs snuck under her ruched up tank and grazed the crescents of her breasts while his lips pressed a second kiss against her alabaster skin.

The soft swell of his tongue painted the edges of her tattoo making Felicity weak with desire as the pressure made her wobble in his arms.

Parts of his bristled jaw tickled over her supple skin, making Felicity bleed out an amused and unbridled sigh. Languid strokes and tiny flicks traced each delicate line until his lips folded around her hip and gently sucked. Her nails embedded in his scalp while tendrils of his hair knotted around her fingers. The sensation raptured her completely, making her sway, malleable, in his hands.

When he looked up the smooth curves of her figure he saw the pleasure and longing woven in her expression.

“Lie down princess,” he encouraged with rasped words and an avaricious smile. She turned and flopped, practically weightless, onto the billowing linen and Oliver made short work of the little bed shorts she was wearing, tossing them somewhere behind him.

Rolling her hips a little on the side, Oliver started kissing a slow amble from the little tattoo, across her hip, and down her pelvis, until he paused at her mound. She could feel his tepid breath beating between her swollen folds as he paused above her. Lifting onto her elbows, Felicity nodded her consent down at him before he placed a long and decadent kiss on her nether lips.

His tongue poked between her folds with deft flicks that caught the tip of her throbbing clit every second or third pass, making Felicity tremble each time.

“Mmmm,” she sighed, lifting her heavy head from the bed, “it’s your birthday, I’m supposed to be giving you the present,” she smirked before Oliver plunged his tongue between her wet folds making her clamp a hand across her mouth to stop from screaming in delight as it caught her clit.

“I’m having my cake princess,” he answered with a smoky tone and salacious smile before he licked her wetness from his lips. “And it’s fucking delicious.”

He spread her legs wider and opened up her pinkish lips with two burly fingers before he stroked two others from his free hand across her soaked taint. Oliver blew gently on her tempered sex, “I just made my wish.”

He swilled his tongue in her arousal as he slid and twisted it around her sex, much like the rambunctious lapping of an excited puppy.

Felicity’s fists knotted in the twisted bed sheets and her toes coiled tightly as they hung off the edge of the bed.

She gasped, barely lucid, when Oliver plunged his tongue into her thrumming entrance and sucked ravenously at the skirt of it. The noises emanating from between her legs was prurient and carnal and Felicity bucked and rolled into each impetus with fractured slices of his name erupting from behind her hand.

Her eyes glazed over with delirium and he swapped with tongue for his deft fingers which curled and twisted and thrust as deeply as they could inside her, curling against her walls and heightening her bliss, while his mouth pinched around her clit and teased it towards ecstasy. With tickled
strokes and light nips, Oliver drew Felicity so close to the edge that the bubbling in her core became molten and her toes ached.

She came suddenly with a rippled spasm before Oliver pulled his fingers out and plunged his tongue in, drinking her up as her fingers tussled with the sheets and her body was doused in a fine film of sweat.

Still riding the high of her climax, Felicity twisted her hands into Oliver’s hair and pulled him up into a bruising kiss. His lips were salty and wet, and her tongue slid happy between them, lapping up her remnants with an amorous moan.

She severed the kiss just as impetuously as she had started it. “Like the hotel room,” she stammered as tiny waves of her orgasm shook her body. “I want it like that,” she hummed before she leaned back, opened the nightstand draw, found the bottle of lube, and tossed the same towards Oliver’s hand; for clarification.

He kissed down her lithe stomach, relishing the way it rolled and twitched as each kiss drew closer to her sex. He reached her swollen clit and kissed it roughly making Felicity sob out in pleasure, before he flipped her with ease onto her stomach.

The soft linen felt like fire as it brushed against her tremoring sex, and for a moment as Oliver leaned over her and finely kissed her tattoo once again, Felicity felt like she might just roll into a second, fleeting climax.

With a nip on her lip, she managed to halt it as Oliver lifted her hips and she tucked her knees up under her body and anchored her palms into the mattress.

She hummed as he kissed slow trails down her spine, and smiled when she heard the distinctive pop of the lube cap. A chill shuddered up her spine and down her bent legs when Oliver painted a thin coat of lubricant around her puckered hole.

While his tongue created a wake of goose bumps around the site of her tattoo, Oliver gently dipped a wet finger into Felicity’s tight hole, prepping the entrance with the satiny liquid and she soon bore the slight pull as he slid in a second digit.

Felicity felt the weight lift off the bed as Oliver, still coaxing her canal with his two fingers, stood from the bed. With curious eyes she watched him retract his fingers and release his rigid cock from behind his underwear. He took the bottle of lube from the bed, but before he could slick his cock with the same, Felicity stilled his hands and licked his lips.

“All ready,” she offered as her slippery hands ran off the edge.

Oliver kneeled on the edge of the bed, bending it under his brawny weight, before Felicity crawled back towards him, placing her own knees at the cusp of the mattress beside his. “Tell me if it’s too much,” he whispered while his fingers tickled down her spine and her back reactivity arched.
She caught the sight of his reflection in the mirror on the top of Oliver’s set of drawers on the opposite side of the room and a smile threaded across her rosy lips, darkened by tiny flecks of scarlet where her teeth had sat.

Felicity nodded at Oliver’s reflection before he lined himself up with her rosebud. After smoothing his thumbs up the rounds of her supple ass and glossing over the tattoo that sat a few inches from a dimple in her back, Oliver held her at the waist and eased himself into her.

Felicity’s head bowed towards the mattress as the pinch ricocheted up her spine and broke free from her lips in the form of a breathy sigh. Oliver stilled, letting his wife’s body stretch with him, moving only when she tip her hips and took him a fraction deeper herself. She felt the ridge of his head pass through her tight skirt and the smooth stiffness of his shaft as he slid even deeper until he was completed seated in her.

She lifted her body once again onto the heels of her hand and rolled her hips to feel his cock brushing against her internal walls. With hooded eyes and ruddy cheeks, Felicity rocked her ass against Oliver’s chiselled chest making him groan wetly as her body swelled with him.

“Fuck princess,” he moaned between gritted teeth as his thumbs dug into her sides. Each time she moved, his cock was strangled inside her clenching passage, rousing him until he sat on the edge of a burning ache to release.

Stretched and slick, Felicity caught his attention in the mirror once again as she pushed off from the bed and balanced on her knees. The sudden change of angle had them both moaning while Felicity banded an arm around the back of Oliver’s neck.

His hand shifted too, coiling one around her willowy waist as the other dipped down between her legs and expertly found her budded clit. As he teased the same with tiny circles, Oliver pulled his cock back a few inches before he slid back in, watching as Felicity gasped in pleasure.

The rhythm was slow and even at first, but as her eyes stayed hotly fixated on Oliver’s reflection, wordlessly coaxing him on with every flittered and keening moan, it gradually quickened, until his cock was thrusting into her back hole with the vigour of a stallion and the pace of a stampede.

He kissed her neck feverishly, tasting the tiny flecks of salt in the perspiration that misted her skin, while Felicity lifted the tank top she was still wearing above her breasts and fondled them wildly and with unbridled joy as she found pleasure at the tips of Oliver’s fingers.

Every thrust was like a shockwave and her body was soon overcome with raw and titillating pleasure, hurtling her towards the cusp of her second climax just as Oliver sunk his fingers inside her wet entrance and pressed them into the wall between, where he could feel the rigidity of his cock between the thin curtain of cushiony skin.

“Come undone, I fucking love seeing it,” he begged, his voice hoarse in her ear, while his breathing was ragged and uneven. With her eyes wide and her body fully open to him, Felicity climaxed again, soaking his thick fingers as they thrust in and out of her.

Oliver bucked against her, taking her deep and hard for a few rucks before he too climaxed and spilled his seed inside her throbbing walls. He held her limp body up against his sweaty chest, savouring the sweltering heat between them, before he kissed the damp threads of her scarlet neck.

“I’ll never tire of seeing that princess,” he whispered against her fiery skin.
Felicity rested her hand atop the one of his that held her waist, and entwined her fingers into his. “Me either, and…,” she puffed, breathless, while her head sunk into his chest, “…happy birthday Oliver. What did you wish for?”

Oliver kissed her softly again. “I’m living it princess.”
Hey peoples, I'm back! As promised, this story never really leaves me and you've been exceptionally patient, so I hope you like it...

Ps: I honestly love these two, ooof.

Her skin was misted with sweat and felt like velvet beneath her fingertips as they grazed down her naked body, lazily swerving over the curves of her breasts and toward her narrow waist, before falling off at her shapely hips.

A breathy purr was the only sound she could muster as the final ripples of a quaking orgasm deliciously tickled every nerve in her body.

As the last fetters held her, Felicity reached down and, arching her back just enough for the angle to be perfect, she moved between her legs and grazed her knuckles against her sensitive nether lips.

“You're my never ending thought.”

[August 2018]
The feeling was akin to a jolt of electricity that pulsed from her core down to the very edges of her toes, making them curl tightly in the soft charcoal coloured sheets, before a strangled moan bled from her pink lips.

What had once been a perfectly selected and applied lipstick in a blushing-pink hue was now smeared and faded, and imperfectly spotted with red marks where her teeth had absently nipped at the edges.

With her eyes wide and a breath stalled in her throat, Felicity found her pebbled clit and rolled the pad of her thumb delicately over the tip, prolonging the last remnants of her climax with perfect precision, knowing exactly what tempo and pressure her body needed to balance on that tip.

As one eyebrow raised up her damp forehead, she let her free hand drift to one of her breasts. She cupped and kneaded and pinched it; seeking out an encore of the same pleasure that had ripped through her body only minutes ago, even while the smell of it still lingered in the air.

With her focus at the end of the bed, Felicity moved both hands faster in unison, rocking the mattress beneath her while she took her body to the edge of pleasure, although making sure to leave it plateaued there.

Finally he spoke.
Gravelled and husky.
Soaked in desperation and coated with adoration.

“That's it princess, a little faster,” Oliver encouraged.

He licked his lips as he drunk in the sight of his wife, completely naked with her legs spread on their tangled sheets, her ponytail skewed and her body wet with pleasure.

She hadn't even made it out of the bedroom that morning in the grey dress that hugged her curves like liquid. Because, from the vantage point of their bed as he watched her slink around the room, he just couldn’t help himself. And when Felicity paused to try on a pair of nude pumps, Oliver had began kissing her neck in slow ribbons. That was all it took, and within minutes the door was locked and their clothes were thrown around the room; all before 7am.

On the cusp of her second orgasm, and with her body grasping around emptiness, Felicity slowed her hands and blinked up at Oliver. His cock was hard and still covered with a sheer, shimmering veil of their mutual spend and, as he kneeled on the foot of the bed, she could see every one of his muscles firing as they glistened in the fresh morning light.

“Do you want me to stop?” she panted, her fingers wet with arousal and her breasts aching.

Oliver shook his head unevenly as he grazed his knuckles up the insides of her legs, spreading them wider still. The stretch granted him the perfect view of her blush, satiny folds, and her slender fingers working quickly between them.

“I want to see it. Will you finish for me?” he hummed and Felicity reacted to his words almost immediately.

Because, Oliver Queen liked to watch her masturbate.

It was a kink they had discussed a month or so back, and Felicity had soon thereafter discovered that she enjoyed both the attention and excitement indulging in it every so often had brought them. That Friday morning was no exception.

With a blush dripping down her chest and his eyes feasting on the sight of her, Felicity came for
the second time before breakfast. It was tremored and short, but exquisitely satisfying all the same, and when her hands flopped lazily to the sides of her flushed body, Oliver leaned in to clean her up with light licks of his tongue, making a few carnal noises as he did.

While endorphins ran through her body like unhindered wildfires, Felicity sighed blissfully before she sought Oliver out with a limp hand. Knowing what she wanted without the need for words, Oliver finished licking spend from her sex before he laid down beside her and instinctively Felicity curled in against him while she rode the last waves of her climax with a dreamy smile.

Oliver brushed back strands of damp hair from Felicity's temple as he drew soft strokes down her spine with the other hand.

“It's your turn,” Oliver hummed before he tenderly kissed the top of her head.
“Baby, not a third time,” she pleaded, nearly breathless while his hand moved down her body, stopping to trace the outline of her tattoo.

“While I think you should call Curtis and tell him you aren't going in to work today,” Oliver started and even without seeing his face, Felicity could tell he was smirking, “so we can fuck the entire day while the kids are out of the house.” He paused to growl a breath near her ear. “I meant a fantasy.”

She looked up at Oliver with a twinkle in her sapphire eyes. “Basically just you,” she laughed softly before she kissed the hard pecs of his chest, tasting the saltiness of his sweat that lingered there. She sat up a little and he took the chance to kiss the underside of her breast as it perched right there. A pleasured sigh trickled from her lips and so Oliver did it a second time, pleased when it garnered the same response.

“Plus we’ve already done mine,” she remarked as a playful smile rose from her lips to her cheeks. “The porn one?” he asked as his fingers intrepidly teased her nipple.
Felicity’s cheeks instantly flushed red as she hushed him with her finger. “Yes, that one,” she whispered as she began to pull away.

“You call in sick, I’ll take Ruby to school and Gabe to your mom’s. I’ll come back and we’ll do that again,” he remarked as his hands followed her to the edge of the bed.
Still smiling, Felicity leaned over and kissed Oliver’s forehead. “I have that presentation today that I can’t miss,” she sighed as she glanced over at the clock beside the bed. “The one that was kind of the reason why I got up at 6am,” she added with a soft laugh.

Oliver watched as she walked around the room collecting her strewn clothes, but before she could reach the panties he’d thrown over the bedside lamp, Oliver plucked them off and winked. “I’m keeping these.”

She took his head with both her hands and kissed him ferocious and deep before she tugged the black lace panties from his hand. “Late night shower sex tonight?” she asked as she left his lips kissing the air.

He didn’t need to verbalize his answer, his smile said all she needed to know.

It was after that promised encounter in the shower later that same night, as Felicity was towel-drying her hair, that the conversation returned to the idea of fantasies. She’d given it far too much thought during the day and while they had done a lot sexually, there were always things left still to try.
“So this morning,” she started with a soft hum in her voice, and before she'd said anything else, Oliver's attention was hers with a raised eyebrow and a permanent smirk.
“You thought of one?” he asked after he wet his bottom lip with a slow wipe of his tongue. “No,” she chuckled and his curious eyebrow sunk. “But, it did remind me of one I had in college.” That was all Oliver's brow needed to shoot up towards his hairline again. “I wish I'd met you in college,” he grinned before Felicity walked around to her side of the bed and shot him a playful pout.
“I don’t think I was your type,” she jested as she impishly slapped her knuckles against his brawny arm. “Are you kidding?” Oliver replied, a hungry purr in his tone. “I've seen the pictures.” He leaned over and kissed the threads of her neck while Felicity moisturised her hands as part of her nightly ritual. “We would have had a lot of fun princess,” he sighed before he sucked gently on her ear lobe. “A lot.”

“You, being my first,” she purred as she set the bottle down on her nightstand and turned to face him. Her dainty fingers swerved slowly down the slopes of his defined chest, relishing the tiny mist of water still left there after their languid shower. “I wouldn’t have needed to try anything else on the menu, that’s for sure.”

Oliver cupped her face and tipped her chin just enough to kiss her deeply, but soon pulled away leaving it achingly incomplete.

“Anyway,” she breathed as her lids slowly opened again. “I had this professor in college who was a good 20 years older than me. He wore these twill blazers and brown slacks, sometimes this really old fashioned ribbed cardigan. He had these round glasses,” she continued as she made her hands into circles in front of her eyes, “and slightly greasy hair he always wore slicked back.” He watched as Felicity took a shaky inhale and blew it out with a soft quiver.
“You were attracted to him?” Oliver asked while his fingers swept down her arm, leaving a wake of prickles behind.
“Yes and no,” she remarked, pausing to nibble on the edge of her bottom lip. “I don’t think if I’d seen him on the street in different clothes I would have been, but there was something about him in that outfit,” another sigh, “and the glasses and that air of authority.” Reactively, as she thought about it, Felicity patted her lips together.
“It turned you on.” It wasn't so much a question, because Oliver knew her well enough to detect the subtle notes of Felicity's arousal; from the way her teeth played with her lips, to the slight blush that started near her clavicle; both things she presented with as she spoke.
“A little,” she answered with a shrug. But Oliver smirked and she readily gave up the truth. “Okay a lot. I had some very naughty dreams about that professor.”

The blush started spreading down beneath the lacy trim of her burgundy camisole. “Like?” he asked without masking the hedonistic growl in his voice.
She touched his arm and laughed softly. “You don’t want to hear about them.” The look Oliver gave her was almost an offended one. “Yeah I do, Princess. I want all those little fantasies in your head.”

Oliver didn’t get jealous in the sense of the word. While the idea of Felicity with other men (or thinking about them) made his chest tighten, he trusted her implicitly and would never think to judge her on her past when she had never seen to do that to him. Jealously was fickle and blazing, but the true test of a man wasn’t to demand or force that he be her all, but rather find what pleases her, turns her on, or makes that secret smile in the corner of her lips appear... and then be the manifestation of it.

She folded her lips together to tame her smile. “One time I dreamed I was failing his class,” she
started as she felt the heat rising from her core. “He called me into his office and told me I was failing and that I would need to do some extra credit.”

“And? Did you?” Oliver said as he smirked.

“I remember being naked on his desk, but then I woke up,” Felicity finished with a flourished laugh. “Most of them ended like that, before the good stuff,” she huffed. All these years later she was still annoyed by that.

“So you’d want to do it on his desk?”

“Mmmm, or the chair.”

She fanned her chest instinctively before there was a soft knock on their door. “I’ve got this one,” Felicity noted before she nodded down to Oliver's erection, sheathed behind his boxer briefs. “You should cover that.”

He pulled the blankets up to his waist and chuckled as Felicity slid off the bed to answer the door.

She found both Ruby and Gabe on the other side of it; 5 year old Ruby with two crooked pigtails and halfway through a yawn while she was holding Gabe’s hand. The toddler was wearing his pyjama top backwards and he had no pants on, while his face looked red and puffy from tears.

“We can’t find his pants,” Ruby said with a nonchalant shrug.

Felicity looked at the two blurry eyed children in front of her and laughed. “Why did you take off your pyjamas Gabe?” she asked, although she could have guessed what his answer was about to be.

He shrugged before he fist his free hand into his eyes. “Wanted robots.”

“He had dinosaurs on,” Ruby finished.

“Alright,” Felicity smiled, “Let’s go find you some pants.”

“Robots?” Gabe insisted softly.

“Of course,” she quipped.

[September 2018]

It was a particularly wet Friday night, forcing Felicity to make a dash from the driveway to the front door with an old newspaper over her head like a film from the 80s. Once inside, she discarded the tattered and sodden paper on the porch and hung her wet coat up beside the door. It took a few moments to realise no stampede of little feet had come to greet her as was their custom, but she soon remembered her mom had organised to have them for the night and part of the weekend.

Still, she didn’t hear Oliver either and she knew he was home; his bike was parked up in the garage and she’d spoken to him just before she’d left work.

As she squeezed some of the moisture from her ponytail and toed off her shoes, she caught sight of a note taped to the end balustrade; I need to see you upstairs in my office Ms Smoak.

Felicity left her bag on the bottom step and crept up the stairs with a smile that teetered on a laugh. She stopped on the landing at the top and glanced around, wondering where exactly he might mean, when she saw the only light on upstairs was coming from her office.

The door was slightly ajar and she knocked on it softly.

“Come in,” came a husky, almost hurried response.

She opened the door and stepped in, only to be stopped in her tracks by the sight in front of her.
Oliver was perched on the edge of her desk looking at the door, with his legs stretched out in front of him, crossed at the ankles, and his bulky arms folded across his broad chest, which made his entire upper half look gloriously massive.

But, Felicity was used to a sight like that, and while her husband's stature and oozing sexual prowess instinctively and immediately turned her on, it wasn’t that which halted her steps, but rather what he was wearing.

Brown corduroy pants that looked like they came from a thrift store, clung tightly to his muscular legs. A white shirt with thin blue vertical stripes and a dark brown tie which had a bulky top knot sat below a mocha-coloured cardigan with thick ribbing and a rolled collar that dipped down into a v-neck. His beard was neatly trimmed and his longish hair was slicked back with a wet-look gel, and, to top the entire ‘look’ off, he was wearing glasses with tortoiseshell rims.

Before Felicity could comment, Oliver dropped both his arms and clasped onto the edge of the desk before he gave her a slow, disappointed shake of his head. “You're failing my class Miss Smoak,” he remarked with a deep, gruff voice.

She smiled coyly before she kicked the door closed with her bare foot. “I’m sorry Oliver,” she started, but she stopped when he raised his finger.

“Professor Queen to you Miss Smoak.”

She stepped deeper into the room. “Sorry, Professor Queen,” she hummed. “I think I’ve been a little preoccupied.”

“Have a seat Miss Smoak,” he instructed and wordlessly Felicity sat on the chair opposite him; rearranging her office to look more like a faculty type office had been a nice touch.

She watched in silent attraction as Oliver shed the bulky cardigan, laid it over the edge of the desk, and proceeded to slowly roll up the sleeves of his shirt until they met his elbows.

“Care to tell me why?” he asked as he clasped his hands in front of his crotch, making her eyes graze over the area. The pull on his trousers was exceptionally enticing and Felicity found herself crossing her legs tightly to gently squeeze her sex.

“I get a little distracted in class,” she replied in a hushed tone before she blinked her dark lashes slowly. “Maybe I could do some extra credit?”

She glanced up as the last words left off her pouted lips in almost a breathy whisper, and caught the smile Oliver was trying his best to tame.

“What did you have in mind?” he asked before he took a sip from the glass of water he had put nearby, in a futile effort to disguise his out of character smirk.

Felicity stood up and closed the distance between them before she spoke in a smoky whisper. “How about I get completely naked, then you bend me over that desk and take me as softly, or as roughly, as you like.” She bit her bottom lip after she finished speaking and Oliver set down his glass of water and pushed up off the desk, putting himself so close to her that his breath grazed across the pink blushes of her cheeks.

Even though she knew with some certainty what his answer would be, there was an erotic sexual tension in his silence.

He raised his hand as if he intended to gently brush his knuckles down her cheek, but he just as quickly retracted them before he wet his lips and smiled. “Do the first part,” he sighed before he curved his lips around a breathy moan.

Felicity stepped half a step back and slid her fingers nimbly up to the top button of her silk chiffon blouse. Granted, if it was actually college she would have been wearing a heavy metal tee shirt and
ripped jeans, but the wardrobe inaccuracies weren't enough to take her out of the fantasy.

Deftly, she moved down the buttons on her blouse while she watched Oliver try to contain his hands as he wrung them together tightly in front of his abdomen.

She untucked the tails of the blouse carefully before she shuffled it off her shoulders and left it on the floor where it landed. Her nipples were already hard, and no doubt she knew he could see them budded beneath the peach satin fabric of her bra. She hooked her thumb under one strap and guided it off her shoulder, leaving it to drape down her arm while she shifted to the back of her skirt. Felicity tugged the zipper down on her black pencil skirt and coquettishly wiggled it down her legs until she let it drop into a pool around her feet.

“Those are very small panties you have on Miss Smoak,” Oliver remarked, Cheshire smile bouncing into his eyes. Felicity glanced down at the item in question, a tiny triangle of blush-peach fabric with a delicate border of sheer lace. There was very little to them indeed. “They’re also very soft,” she sighed as she feathered her fingertip over her thrumming sex while Oliver salaciously licked his lips. “Did you want to feel them?” she asked with one hitched eyebrow.

He gestured her closer with just one finger, and Felicity happily obeyed. When she was inches away from him, Oliver drew a soft line up the inside of her leg while keeping his eyes locked to hers. But, before he reached her sweltering apex, his finger dropped away, making Felicity sob out a breath she had been unintentionally holding.

“I bet they are,” Oliver whispered without stepping back. He looked down at her bra and rolled his lip through his teeth. Reactively Felicity reached behind and unclasped the hooks before letting it drop between them.

His hand hovered over her breasts and just the gentle breeze of air he created in doing so, made Felicity moan ever so quietly. “You’re fucking perfect,” Oliver gasped, and while Felicity knew it was a break in character, she loved hearing it so purely from his lips.

As if to pull himself back, Oliver spent a few seconds fumbling with his glasses before he cleared his throat and hummed, “About that extra credit Miss Smoak.”

He stepped to the side before he patted the edge of the modern white desk. “Get on.” Felicity felt his eyes hot on her as she walked the few steps to the desk. She turned on the balls of her feet and lifted her ass up onto the edge.

Once she was settled back a bit, Oliver took her hand as he walked around to the back of the desk, spinning her slowly as he moved. Once there, he let her hand float out of his before he reclined in the padded leather chair. She scooted to the edge of the desk and hung her legs over it before Oliver rolled the chair closer.

His large hands covered her knees and in one movement, he spread her legs wide before he leaned in and pressed a deep and decadent kiss into her mound.

“They are soft,” he whispered against her sex, his warm breath seeping through the thin fabric and between her pulsing folds.

“I told you,” she whimpered while her fingers embedded in the painted wood. “Did you wear these for me?” he growled, still buried between her legs. A breathy moan. “Yes.”
“You’re already wet?”
Another moan when his tongue pressed through the fabric.
He knew she was, he just wanted her to say it.
“For you, yes,” she sighed while she tangled two fingers through his slick hair.

He peppered kisses against her sex; some hard, some softer, some quick, and some deliriously slow, until Felicity was panting. And, then he pulled back, leaving her aching to be sated.

“I’m going to fuck you through those little, soft panties with my mouth, then I’m going to flip you and take you from behind, exceptionally slow at first until you beg me to go faster. How does that sound?” Oliver asked coyly as he loosened his tie and popped open his top button.

Felicity pressed her elbows into her knees as she leaned forward. “Please do,” she replied, assuredly.

Oliver sunk his hands into the inside of her thighs, close enough to her sex that his thumb nails brushed her outer lips. With just the right amount of pressure, he opened her legs as wide as he knew she could take and then dropped his mouth to her sex. He wasted no time in peaking his tongue into the filmy fabric and weaving the tip through her tempered folds like a snake through grass. Felicity hissed delightedly, as her knuckles went white on the edge of the desk and her head tipped backwards. He found her clit and used his nose to nudge the hood of it before he sucked deeper, pulling the pearl tight. A litany of mumbled swear words bubbled from Felicity’s mouth as he gave her absolutely no stagnation; when he wasn’t sucking, he was stroking the flat of his tongue between her throbbing lips, all while applying just enough pressure to the insides of her thighs to make her feel achingly good.

There were no pauses and no languid moments, as Oliver devoured her sex tenaciously like a meal, while he made sure she heard about it.

Felicity rocked her head from side to side as her hot, dripping moans filled the small room. Perfect delirium had taken over and her eyes began to well up with happy tears as reactively she fought to close her legs around his head, and twist into a ball of shuddering pleasure. The indents in her thighs would no doubt leave tiny bruises in the morning, and the thought of them as a reminder heightened her pleasure until her core felt like molten lava on the frail edge of explosion.

As if he knew (which of course he did) that she was painfully close to climax, Oliver rolled his hands over her thighs and gripped her waist, allowing her legs to snap closed around his head while he continued to feast on her. She hooked her ankles instinctively at his lower spine and arched her body so her rear was barely touching the surface, in order to rock her body against his face, riding it for those last few seconds of peak until she came with tiny explosions that made her whole body tremor.

Oliver sucked through the soaking fabric to get a taste of her, and while he would ordinarily lick every last morsel of her spend from her silken thighs and her dripping folds, what he had in mind next, wouldn’t allow for that.

While her orgasm was still rolling through her body, Oliver unravelled her legs from around his head and tore the panties off her body, before twisting them around his wrist like a keepsake. Her brow was sodden and her lips bore tracks of red where her teeth had scoured them; her eyes were wild and her chest glistened with a veil of sweat over a watercolour of flushed, pink skin.

Her lips parted like she wanted to speak to him, but all that came out was a mewled hum and his slow, smoky name, “Oliver.”
He winked, and Felicity corrected herself after she’d caught her breath, “Professor Queen.”
With that, she slid off the desk and into Oliver’s waiting arms, before he spun her around and bent her over the desk; just like she’d offered and he’d promised.

The coolness of the smooth desk made Felicity sigh as she pressed her balmy cheek into it. She could feel her whole body shivering, although she wasn’t cold, as the last throes of her climax ran down her fingers and toes like tiny prickles. She was nearly on her tip toes, with her stomach and breasts flat on the cool surface, and through her own ragged breathing she could hear the sound of a zipper and the shuffle that followed before she glanced down and saw a fraction of his pants around his ankles, sitting over brown loafers. She inhaled and bit her lip in expectation before a slow trawl of fingers grazed up the inside of her leg.

She hummed and her eyes lidded over as she felt his hard length brush between her wet folds, teasing her with each pass. When he said he would be slow, he hadn’t exaggerated and Felicity could already hear the breathy pleas she was instinctively making for more.

She recognised his fingers sink into her first and she clenched tightly around the two digits, sucking him in, all the way to the knuckle, while she raised her body up onto her elbows. He worked his fingers in and out of her tight entrance, keeping the same deliberate and slow pace, despite Felicity grounding into him to get more depth and friction. His other hand walked slowly down her spine, causing an eruption of prickles over her skin, before he leaned in and delicately kissed the slope of her neck.

“Do you want to come like this?” he asked near her ear as he twisted his fingers inside her and hooked them down her cushioned walls. She lifted a little higher off the desk, holding her body up on straight arms. “Do you want me to fuck you with my fingers Miss Smoak?” As the question left his lips, Oliver plunged a third finger inside her, making Felicity cry out in pleasure as she threw her head back against his upper chest and exposed the ribbons of scarlet down her throat.


“More what?” He kissed the warm spot behind her ear as he spoke while she rode her ass into his pelvis.

“More you,” she hummed, slamming her body against his as she sought out what she was looking for.

“I might need you to be specific,” he said, and Felicity could hear the grin in his voice.

She turned around swiftly, and unexpectedly, and pushed Oliver down onto the office chair, smiling as it resultantly rolled a few feet away. Before he could say anything, Felicity was straddling his lap on the chair, with his hard length in her hands, pumping it up and down impetuously. She lifted her body up and guided his cock inside her with a wicked smile turning up her rouged lips.

“Does this answer your question?” she answered with doe eyes but a devilish smile, as she began to ride him.

“This wasn’t part of the lesson plan Miss Smoak,” Oliver returned with a grin as he held onto her waist and kissed across her collarbone.

“I guess I have trouble following instructions. Maybe you could tutor me?” she whispered as she shifted her hips so the head of his cock pressed into her pillowed walls with the next thrust.

One of his hands left her waist and caught her at the back of the neck, pulling her down onto his lips with a deep and passionate kiss. Their tongues dipped and twisted through their mouths as Felicity bounced above him, taking every inch that his long, sinewy cock offered. They barely parted their lips for a sharp inhale of warm, shared air, while they kissed with wanton abandonment, until Oliver spilled himself inside her in ribbons of silky warmth that coated her
They broke from the kiss and Oliver’s lips moved to Felicity’s breast as she lifted an inch up his shaft and held herself there, tiny thrusts rolling over her entrance. With his free hand, Oliver found her clit and gently rolled the sensitive nub between the pads of his fingers and that friction was all Felicity needed and, seconds after him she came too.

Spent and exhausted, Felicity’s body went limp atop Oliver’s and he held her tight against his chest as he tenderly kissed her damp temple.

“Was that good Princess?” he asked, near breathless himself. Felicity lifted off him just enough to kiss his clammy cheek. “You’ll always be my favourite fantasy Oliver,” she whispered as her palms cupped his jaw.

They stayed like that for a minute or so more, wet with pleasure and content in each other’s arms, until Felicity kissed a feathered path up his scruffy jawline towards his ear.

“Your turn next,” she whispered.

He simply smiled.

End Notes

The writer and reader pairing is symbiotic, so let me know what you think (whatever form that takes).

I write the Queen’s English (with a few exceptions).

Twitter/Tumblr @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!