

The Easiest Decision

Oliver x Felicity

Von Schneeblyme

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"You don't look like Santa Claus."

When his watchful staring is interrupted by her voice – all familiar, kind, and teasing – his eyes immediately find her, and the sight lifts his mood like nothing else would have been able to tonight. As he keeps looking down on her from his place on the ledge, Felicity tilts her head to the side and smirks.

"More like the Grinch – with all the green leather, you understand."

Oliver rolls his eyes, *totally not* fighting a smile, and gracefully jumps down on the balcony.

Pulling her blanket closer around herself, she takes a few steps towards him until there's barely a foot space between them. It's late on Christmas Eve, the evening dark and cold, but the warm, soft light from the loft is enough to let his glance roam over her gentle features. Her eyes shine as bright as always, the cheeks are rosy from the wind, and her deep red lips let little puffs of condensed breath escape into the brisk air.

"What are you doing here, Oliver?" she asks mildly, her words a bit more serious but lacking any hint of disapproval. "Shouldn't you be at Thea's?"

He slightly shakes his head and unconsciously moves closer as his gloved hand finds a place on the railing right next to her so much smaller frame. "She's staying with Quentin tonight. I'm going to meet her for breakfast in the morning."

Nodding her understanding she still looks at him expectantly. Being not as tall as he is allows her to see his eyes despite the hood, and he instantly feels seen through – an ability that's completely reserved for her. It doesn't make him feel uncomfortable though, not anymore, not like it maybe did when their bond was still new and not yet friendly but (in a strange way) thrilling all the same.

Today it only fuels the urge to hold her tight, to bring her warmth and seek hers in return. As if reading his thoughts, Felicity shivers and he almost reaches for her. It pains him not to, and so much so that he momentarily can't speak. But he's at a loss for words anyway. How is he supposed to explain to her what's brought him here? He doesn't know what she finds in his expression but after a while her gaze flickers

down as if it's too much to bear. However, between the two of them she's always been stronger, so when she looks at him again, there's a new sense of determination around her.

Felicity places one hand against his chest in a light touch – the gesture intuitive and innocent but all at once he can breathe a little easier – and she offers, "Would you like to come inside and have a cup of hot cocoa? I was just about to make some." Then, when his glance moves over the quiet streets beneath them, she adds with a small smile, "The city can manage without you for half an hour, you know?" And because it's something he's never regretted, he follows her lead, literally, until they're both inside where it's invitingly cozy, and the stormy coldness safely shut out outside.

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Oliver can feel her watching him, her amusement and fascination nearly palpable. It probably hasn't happened often lately (or at all) that a vigilante in full leathern rig is standing in her kitchen, making hot cocoa like it's nothing out of the ordinary. He didn't think, after leaving his gloves on the counter he just pushed back the hood, and took the milk pot out of her hands. He still knows his way around this kitchen since unlike other places in the loft this one hasn't changed a bit. The thought and the way his hands move by pure force of habit suddenly make him realize what he's doing. Midway through filling cocoa powder into their cups, he freezes as a pang fast and sharp tears apart his insides, and it has him gripping the teaspoon hard in his fist while he waits for it to ebb away.

"You okay?" she wonders from where she's sitting behind the counter. "Sugar's in the cupboard above your head."

Oliver knows, of course, but his lips are firmly pressed together. She has no idea about the burning in his chest; well, at least he hopes she doesn't. Fidgeting, he tries to think of a change of subject as he reaches for both sugar and cinnamon.

"Hey, isn't it first night of Hanukkah? Have you lit your menorah yet?" He congratulates himself on almost sounding casual.

"Oh yeah, as a matter of fact, I have! I put it over there, next to the fire place. See?" While he follows her direction with his eyes and nods, she continues quietly, "Thank you for remembering, Oliver."

He's about to throw her an incredulous look over his shoulder, but then she's smiling disarmingly and it stops him in an instant, beguiling him into responding in equal measure.

"You're welcome."

Their eyes meet for a moment – it's loaded, with things that should be said as well as things with no need to. And Oliver chides his silly heart for fluttering with hope. He doesn't dare to allow himself this luxury. Just because the woman in question unleashes an unreasonable amount of affection in him and might still carry some feelings beyond friendship for him too, it doesn't mean that anything more will ever happen between them again. Still, lately he can't help but wonder whether he's imagining a new spark between them or if she's feeling it as well. A spark that might be different and stronger than before and therefore, ultimately, impossible to ignore.

"Oliver..."

Felicity stops herself, nibbling at her lip, and slightly shakes her head. After averting her eyes, she nods towards the couch. "Wanna watch some TV while we're having our cocoa?" He'd rather know how she initially planned on finishing her sentence but lets her off the hook anyway.

"Lead on, I'll be right behind you as soon as I'm done." He watches how she nervously pushes her glasses up her nose while hopping from the stool to shuffle towards the couch where she unmutes the TV.

Balancing two cups of hot cocoa he follows not long after, handing one to her; and both of them settle down on soft cushions. Oliver turns to face her and raises his cup.

"Happy Hanukkah, Felicity," he murmurs softly.

"Merry," she glances at the watch. "Yeah, I guess it's safe to say it already: Merry Christmas, Oliver." They clink their cups with a little thud and Oliver leans back to make himself comfortable, his attention temporarily on the television.

"What are we watching?"

"Uhm-ouch, damn, that was hot!" Pressing the tip of her tongue against her finger, Felicity tries to explain, "Haffy Holidayfs with Bing Crosfby an' Frank Sinatra from 1957. Itf's glorioufs!" The hot liquid splashes dangerously against the rim of her cup, forcing Oliver to reach for it quickly. He saves the cocoa from her grip and hands her a bottle of water from the coffee table instead.

"Thanks!" Smiling at him with relief, she cools her burned tongue with a few sips, and then she grins mischievously. "You're my hero."

Feigning condescendence Oliver rolls his eyes and sighs deeply.

"Don't I know it."

Her eyes widen comically and she pinches him into the side. However, it doesn't stop him from going on, "As long there's at least one damsel in distress out there, forgetting how to blow on hot beverages, the Green Arrow still has a mission."

This time she pinches him harder and he finally flinches, almost spilling cocoa on himself in the process.

"Are you calling me a damsel?" she scolds while biting back a laugh.

"I wouldn't dream of it," is his dry reply (although there's a hint of fear hidden somewhere).

"Trust that instinct. Now," after setting the bottle aside, she makes grabby hands towards her cup. "Give it back." However, instead of complying, Oliver pulls back.

"Are you sure, you can handle it this time?" he teases and bathes in the delightful picture she makes – sitting cross-legged beside him, her knee touching his thigh, with the blanket slipped from her shoulder and silly holiday pajamas underneath. She is radiant with joy over some mindless banter that they both seem to seek so dearly.

"Oliver Queen, hand over my cocoa now, or I will... do something... very terrible to you when you at least expect it! Like... like ordering a bunch of huge ridiculous Santa boxers in your name and get them delivered to City Hall! Although... no one would probably believe they're yours, because, *Hello, look at that ass!*, but you get it. You know these hands can do evil things! So be aware! And... and stop staring at me!" Felicity bites her lip fiercely and for a second casts down her eyes until she remembers that she's no one to back down from a challenge. A faint blush spreads to

her cheeks but she stubbornly lifts her chin nevertheless.

"These are..." Oliver does the thing he seems to do often in her presence; he purses his lips. He doesn't know whether to laugh or cry. There's a knot in his chest and it keeps tightening, warmth and longing filling him from every nerve ending to the last fiber of his heart - till it nearly bursts from intensity.

He clears his throat. "These are very valid threats." And offers her the drink back. He doesn't stop staring though. He can't.

Felicity swallows and raises her hand but it doesn't get very far. As if all her concentration is focused on his eyes, her fingers land self-forgotten on his hand, the touch tingling and electrifying. He holds his breath as if a hint of air could burst the fragile bubble around them.

"Sorry, I...uhm, missed the handle." Her voice barely rises above whisper, and when he replies, "No harm done" Oliver hardly recognizes his own. Too soon though she comes to her senses, and the moment is gone. Accepting her cup with silent thanks, she snuggles into her blanket and gazes at the TV screen.

The choir strikes up *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen* and Felicity hums along, but it sounds forced in his ears. Since Oliver isn't quite sure how to end the nervous or maybe awkward atmosphere, they wordlessly follow the show for a little while.

Until Felicity sighs and says obviously without thinking, "There's something *utterly* romantic about this kind of music, you know, in the purest sense of the word- Oh boy!" He feels her stiffen in horror where their shoulders are meeting through all the layers of fabric and immediately recognizes an oncoming babbling of hers. "And with 'romantic' I totally wasn't"

"It's okay." His hand finds the way to her thigh of its own volition, and when Oliver becomes aware of it, a panic similar to hers makes him fear to finally have overstepped a line.

"It's okay," she echoes and gently rests her palm onto the back of his hand. Relief has him sinking deeper into the couch, his finger twitching against her pajamas clad skin. Her grip tightens, but not unpleasantly, and it's soon followed by her head leaning on his shoulder.

The heavy weight on his chest lessens ever so slightly and the flutter of hope is back full force, but he tries to swallow it down and to simply enjoy spending some time with her. Thus, with the fire peacefully crackling and hearts beating with curious excitement, they stay like this until the very last tunes of *White Christmas*.

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It's started drizzling when Felicity accompanies him back outside, the balcony offering no protection against the cutting wind. Oliver reaches for the ends of her blanket and wraps her more carefully in it, pulling her body closer while doing so. She gives in with no resistance, her expression thoughtful and edgy, and her apparent mask of calmness showing some but not the first cracks. There's an air of frustration around her and something else he isn't quite able to name.

"Oliver, you still haven't told me why you're here." He should have known that she wouldn't let it go eventually.

"Does it matter?" he evades, turning his back to her and his gaze over the city. Feeling her presence even closer he suppresses a sigh and grips the railing tightly. "Well, it matters to me." Felicity's voice is quiet but urging.

It's not until he's taken several supposedly calming breaths that he dares to face her again.

"I planned on calling it a night when I left City Hall but I felt restless, I guess, so I thought checking the streets again wouldn't hurt. Coming here wasn't a conscious decision. I... I tried not to, but I kept remembering what happened last Christmas – with the kidnapping, you getting...shot." The last word breaks his voice and he coughs slightly.

"And before I knew where I was going, I was already standing on the roof. I know we're not together anymore, Felicity, and I respect that, I respect you and your decision. I just... I needed to reassure myself that you're okay. I needed to see you even though I shouldn't." He feels out of breath, but there's no going back now.

"I lost myself in the memory of us. Of you standing in front of that Christmas tree, saying *yes*. And I remembered how I was the happiest man on earth in this very moment. And then I realized how much I wish to go back in time to relive these precious minutes and how much I still... That you're still the most important person in my life."

When she doesn't say anything and just keeps gazing at him, his hearts contracts painfully and there's a burning in both his gut and his eyes. Turning his head away, he backtracks abruptly. "I'm sorry, Felicity, I shouldn't have said that. It's not fair to burden you with this. I'm so-"

"Please stop, Oliver! God!" With her hands balled to fists she stomps her foot. "Only you! Only you can apologize for loving someone! Let me tell you what's not fair!

"Loving is not fair. It doesn't make sense! It's not like in all the movies, and books, and songs. Love hurts! The more you love someone the more they're able to hurt you – whether unconsciously or not. And there's *nothing* you can do about it. You can't decide not to love someone – even if you *know* that it's all kind of wrong – forbidden, a mistake or hopeless. It's impossible to just stop. It's not your decision. Why can't you choose whom you want to love? Why can't you choose the one person who's most likely *not* to break your heart? Let me tell you why – because it would be too easy. *Happiness* would be too easy to achieve. No one would appreciate it anymore. So we're all doomed to *suffer*." Her breathing becomes heavy and uneven. "Too long, too long, to love without a choice."

"Felicity!" He finds himself shocked, shocked that this woman, who stood in front of Carrie Cutter, looked her in the eye and defended love so passionately, now seems so...lost and troubled.

As he puts his hands on her upper arms, a small sob escapes her quivering lips and she presses her fingertips against them. His grip is firm yet gentle, grounding her, keeping her from falling apart. He doesn't think, cannot think about the possibility that, given the choice, she maybe wouldn't want to love him, because that would pull the proverbial rug out from under his feet. Instead he focuses on sharing his strength with her for a change, nudging her in the direction of regaining her own. Searching her eyes with his, Oliver waits patiently until she finally looks at him with lots of sorrow

and affection.

"Felicity, I don't care about the pain. I can handle pain. Even if it *was* for me to decide, I would *always* choose you, because despite *everything* – loving you is the clearest, simplest, strongest, and most honest emotion I've ever felt. And I wouldn't trade for anything."

Felicity stares at him motionlessly and Oliver isn't sure what he reads in her expression – understanding, realization, agreeing maybe? But suddenly she's made up her mind, he recognizes that much.

She exhales soundly and reaches for him, and he catches her in waiting arms, right before she pulls him down to let their lips collide.

The second they meet for the first kiss in what feels like ages, something hard and cold around his heart breaks apart at last. It makes him want to cry and laugh at the same time, makes him breathless and hot all over, and he simply cannot stop himself from pulling her close, holding her as tight as possible. At first it's just hungry mouths pressing together. The next thing he knows is how he is plastering kiss after kiss along and against her lips. Short and eager kisses alternating with long, passionate and tender ones. There's no time, no air to breathe in between, but they don't need none anyway. Felicity sinks against him, her gripping of his suit seems both helpless and demanding, and with a sigh she opens up to him. Of their own accord his hands move to her cheeks to cradle her face, and their kissing deepens – letting them both fly high and fall endlessly.

Oliver loses all sense of time and himself in the feeling of her soft, warm mouth on his, the petite woman engulfing him with strength, comfort and love – and all of a sudden he is home.

It's overwhelming and wonderful, too much to bear and not enough. Inhaling, he breaks the kiss, only to bring his lips to her forehead, keeping his eyes shut tight. He feels shaken to the core, and like a child and a man all the same. Felicity mouths his name and while craning her neck ends the connection, she rubs her nose soothingly against his instead.

"Oliver?"

"Hum?"

"I didn't mean what...no, I did mean what I said, but...you'd always be my choice, too." Her voice is thick with emotions, and he nearly loses ground in the very best way. There are still so many things they both need to say and hear, yet, wordlessly they agree that this isn't the right time.

"I should go," he whispers, their breaths mingling. *Before we do something we're both not ready for yet*, is also left unsaid.

Savoring the moment with closed lids, she takes her time to recollect herself. When she nods eventually, her face is still embedded in his large hands, and she smiles slightly as his thumbs tenderly stroke along her features.

"Please be careful. I know the streets draw you out to patrol again, Oliver, but it makes me nervous not to watch over you." Their gazes lock and he relishes the rediscovered spark in her eyes. He would have agreed to anything in this very second, so he promises wholeheartedly, "I will." After a short minute of hesitation he leans

down for another kiss, this one brief yet so full of passion. "I will come back to you," he rasps out.

Her smile grows beautifully while her hands move from his collar up towards his hood. In doing so, her palms swiftly pause against his tickling stubbles, before she pulls the masking cloth back over his head.

"I'll hold you to that," she says. "And when you're done bouncing through the cold for the night, you're welcome to crash on the couch, to warm up and rest. That way I will know you're alright at least."

Tilting his head in acceptance he steps back – a motion that fills him with longing still, but with no more trepidation – and turns to climb onto the railing. With a last look over his shoulder, imprinting her waiting figure on his memory, the Green Arrow tips two fingers against his temple and mutters, "Ho ho ho!" right before he jumps.

A snort paired with a sardonic "Very funny!" is the last thing he hears from her, and it makes him smile as he flies high into the dark but starry sky.

The End