In Her Web She Still Delights

by FelicisQuill2

Summary

When the Jahas and Griffins take a summer trip to London for a medical conference, they leave Clarke home alone in L.A. Senior year is approaching, and she needs to get her grades in history up if she will have any chance of getting into one of the Ivies. Being separated from her boyfriend Wells is the absolute worst. Well, no. Maybe her condescending tutor who both scares and excites her wins that award.

The one where Bellamy Blake is Jake Griffin's teaching assistant in world history at UCLA and finds himself maddeningly drawn to his boss' daughter.

Notes

After writing nothing but canon-era pieces, this is my first modern AU - I know, what's going on? World's gone crazy. I might have no idea what I'm doing, yet I'll give it a shot. This idea popped into my head while traveling, so hope you all like it! Title from the amazing Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott."
“There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

And moving through a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot:
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-haired page in crimson clad,
Goes by to towered Camelot;
And sometimes through the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two:
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror’s magic sights,
For often through the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights
And music, went to Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed;
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott."

~Excerpt from Lord Alfred Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," 1842.

“Clarke!” Abby hisses, low and deadly. “The guests are going to be here any minute! Go upstairs and put on your party outfit!”

“Whatever you want, mom,” she mutters, snapping shut The Bell Jar and tossing it onto a rickety, wrought-iron table near her lounge chair.

She sighs as she slides into her flip flops and pulls off her sunglasses, gazing at their old Victorian home and its sparkling gem of a pool. The Griffin estate is an architectural rarity in Santa Monica Canyon. Something she’s sure she’ll hear her parents bring up three or four dozen times during the
annual end-of-year bash her father hosts for his professor friends from UCLA.

In the corner of the patio, Jake is grilling burgers—wearing his “Kiss the Grill Master” apron Abby bought him last Valentine’s Day – and humming along to Van Morrison’s “Brown Eyed Girl” piping out through the outdoor speakers. She can still hear it when she steps into the cool, yet sunny, kitchen. It’s vast and was recently remodeled to include an elaborate painted tile backsplash of colorful geometric designs, as well as granite countertops. Ever since her mother was promoted to Chief of Surgery at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, she’s thrown herself into renovating every square inch of the house for no apparent reason.

Clarke runs the tips of her fingers along the windswept ocean landscapes peppering the hallway – the oil paint she threw on the canvases two years ago rising up to meet her touch – and heads to the turret stairwell. From the top of the stairs, she can see out through a wide window to the main entrance of their wealthy neighborhood, Arkadia Hills. The sun’s rising higher in the sky now, casting golden rays of light on the stacked stone waterfall and vibrant tulips that grace the end of their driveway.

Her lean, tan arms flick across the dresses in her closet, landing on nothing that excites her. At seventeen, Clarke Griffin owns more clothing than many women twice her age. Yet most of the stuffy outfits would be better suited to a corporate boardroom than a high school classroom.

When her phone chirps, she grasps on the bed behind her, haphazardly searching it out without turning, her eyes still trained on the closet. Something sleek and gauzy passes across her skin, and she grins when she looks down. Her brand new cover-up is light and mostly see-through, although its pattern resembles a peacock’s feathers. She throws it on over her turquoise two-piece and reaches for her cell.

Wells Jaha: Miss you, and I haven’t even gotten on the plane yet.

Clarke Griffin: I know. I miss you, too. <3 This sucks. Believe me, I’d rather be hanging out with you in London than stuck here all summer reading about Julius Caesar. xoxo

Wells Jaha: Guess that’s what you get when your dad’s a world-renowned history professor. ;)

Clarke Griffin: Yeah, perfect grades or threats of disinheritance.

Wells Jaha: Come on, it’s not that bad. You’ll work hard this summer and boost up your history grade, then apply for the Ivy Leagues this fall. They’re going to accept you because you’re amazing. Then you’ll become a famous artist whose work’s displayed at the Met, and you’ll forget all about me.

Clarke Griffin: Right, that’s gonna happen. Meanwhile, you actually may fall in love with Kate Middleton and legally drink in pubs after riding The London Eye.

Wells Jaha: Kate Middleton married a prince. I can’t compete. But as for the beer . . . ;)

Clarke Griffin: ☹

Wells Jaha: It’s just for a month, babe. I’ll be back before you know it.

Clarke Griffin: Are we still going to Skype every night?

Wells Jaha: Absolutely! And I’ll buy you the most expensive thing I can afford in Harrod’s.
Clarke Griffin: Diamonds are a girl’s best friend.

Wells Jaha: I’m going to ignore that. Good luck with the party and meeting the new tutor. Love you.

Clarke Griffin: Thanks. Love you, too.

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The Jahas – Thelonious, Rosemary, and Wells – have been a fixture of her life for as long as she can remember. They live just down the street in Arkadia Hills, and Clarke grew up climbing trees with Wells, riding bikes, quizzing each other on the language arts vocabulary their hovering parents were sure to drill them on before tests, and finding their way to each other’s dinner table. At some point, watching the romantic parts of movies together at the mall got awkward. But then when Wells took her hand and kissed her gently on a camping trip when they were fifteen, things somehow shifted and fell back into place. They’ve been together ever since.

Thelonious, Wells’ dad, is the president of Cedars-Sinai. He and Abby plan to attend a medical symposium on new, cutting-edge surgical techniques and technologies through the month of June. Naturally, Jake and Rosemary are invited, too.

A few nights ago, Wells sat with Clarke on a blanket under the stars in his backyard, quietly explaining how his dad held ambitions to run for mayor of Los Angeles and was excited because California’s governor, Dante Wallace, would attend the symposium. He claimed it would be the networking opportunity of a lifetime. Wallace’s son, Cage, and his wife, Lorelai, were doctors at Cedars-Sinai and planned to make a major presentation on innovations in blood transfusions during the well-publicized, international event.

Hearing her parents discuss the trip to England for so long has left Clarke longing to stroll through the crown jewels exhibit at The Tower of London with Wells, see a wax replica of Princess Diana at Madame Tussauds, and feast on fish and chips beside the River Thames before taking in a play on the West End. She wants to buy the latest British fashions and ride in a red double decker bus. She wants to get tipsy on cheap ale at an authentic pub. She wants to catch a glimpse of Prince Harry, the cute ginger.

But, then.

Her midterm grades arrive. As a junior in high school, it's very important that her grades remain high, so she can be a competitive college applicant. But for whatever reason, though she's great at math, science, and English, historical facts slip through her brain like sand through an hourglass.

“I’m sorry, honey,” her father told her the night before at the dinner table. “But we’ve made plans for you to stay here and do some remedial coursework in history. A month in London is too much of a distraction, and this is too important for your future.”

“What!” Clarke spluttered, nearly choking on her split-pea soup. “But London! You promised I could go! Wells and I have it all planned out!”

Abby stretched her hand over to slide inside Jake’s, daintily taking a bite of salad. “I know it’s disappointing, Clarke. But I promise, next summer before college, we’ll do a whole European tour! Won’t that be fun? Besides, you would have been helping me do the paperwork for the symposium during this trip. It would be boring! Next year, we’ll be like free birds and explore whatever we want to!”

“That’s right,” her dad smiled. “And I’ve already got the perfect tutor all lined up for you. He’s my graduate teaching assistant. A great guy named Bellamy Blake.”
“Mhmm, you’ll meet him at the party tomorrow,” her mom added. “And Mrs. Green will be right down the street if you need anything. I popped by communications this afternoon and talked to her about it. Besides,” she threw a long look at her daughter packed to the brim with a guilt trip, "You do want to get into one of the very best universities, don't you, dear?"

Clarke nodded noncommittally and stabbed at the cucumber slice resting in her delicate china bowl, knowing it was pointless to argue.

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Clarke scrolls through Instagram to kill another few minutes before being forced to make idle chit-chat with a bunch of academics she barely knows. Maybe it’s the vibrant colors of the seaside carnival, maybe it’s their cheerful smiles, open and carefree. But something makes her pause on the photo of Raven Reyes, her friend from dance ensemble, and her boyfriend, Finn Collins, posing in front of the ferris wheel at the Santa Monica Pier. An unpleasant feeling lurches in her stomach, but she’s not quite sure why.

After giving herself a final once-over in her floor-length mirror – she can’t wait to see the shocked look on her mother’s face when she takes in the bold cover-up barely reaching her mid-thigh – she heads downstairs and outside. The air is thick and oppressively humid, and several dozen people are already milling around the backyard nibbling on fruit kebobs and sipping wine coolers. She smiles limply at the professors who pat her arm and offers up vague renditions of “I’m so excited for summer break” more times than she can count.

When Marcus Kane, Thelonius’ best friend from college, slips a hamburger fresh off the grill onto her flimsy paper plate, she accepts it gratefully and finds a lounge chair to eat it on. She keeps her back turned when she hears her father joking around with the man she assumes must be her summer tutor. Even at a party, the nerd is talking about history.

“I really believe that if we compare what’s gone on with the economic collapse of 2008 here in the U.S. and the fall of the Roman Empire, there would be some fascinating parallels,” comes his deep voice.

“You could be right!” Jake replies eagerly, oblivious to his daughter sitting nearby. “But you’ll want to make your metaphors a bit more relevant when you’re helping Clarke. The stock market's not something she's learned much about yet.”

Clarke whips around at the sound of her name and inadvertently catches Bellamy’s eye. He’s relatively tall and muscular, with bronze skin and crazy, dark curls. His skin is peppered with freckles, and his mouth tugs itself into a grin as he takes in the sight of her loud cover-up.

“Sure, we’ll work our way up to global economic systems. Maybe start with the basics – what people in the past did for a living, how they formed early civilizations, what they ate, what they wore,” his smirk widens.

“Excellent, Bellamy! I know you’re going to be fantastic,” Jake nods approvingly.

Clarke makes a face at the smug stranger who has the audacity to grin, stands up, and chucks her half-eaten plate into the nearest trash can. I don’t have to listen to his bullshit, she thinks as she heads back upstairs to her room. Once there, she reaches for the old silver crown on her dresser, a silly gift from Raven from when she celebrated her sweet sixteen, and places it on top of her head. If he thinks I look ridiculous now... she chuckles a little at her flamboyant reflection.

“What’s up, Griffin?” comes Raven’s army-like greeting. “How’s the party?”
“As bad as you’d think,” Clarke replies, flopping onto her bed and cradling her glittery cosmos iPhone case closer to her ear.

“Well, suck it up, buttercup,” Raven chirps. “Now you’ll get to live like the rest of us poor slobs who don’t travel to Europe on our summer breaks.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Clarke snorts. “It wouldn’t be so bad if I could hang out like a normal teenager and not spend the whole summer locked away in the library. As if I don’t work hard enough all year! I mean, I’m on the student council, I do dance ensemble with you, I help tutor kids in reading, and I paint murals for the local hospitals and nursing homes. I’m not a slacker! But whatever I do, it’s never enough.”

“Mother Theresa ain’t got nothing on you,” Raven says sympathetically. She still manages the faintest touch of sarcasm.

“And you should have heard my new tutor tonight. He’s my dad’s new TA and is such a suck-up. Who the hell talks about the economic collapse at a pool party?”

“Uhhh . . . an intellectual, I guess?” Raven tries.

“Hey Princess,” comes a deep voice from her doorframe.

Clarke’s blue eyes snap open widely as she takes in the smooth outline of Bellamy, his black T-shirt crumpling against his broad chest. She gulps hard.

“Raven? I’ll call you back,” she almost whispers it before hanging up.

“What are you doing up here?” she demands, shifting to an upright position on her bed.

“I was looking for a bathroom. The one downstairs is occupied.”

“Down the hall. Last door on your right,” she supplies.

“Great,” he answers, but makes no move to go. In fact, he takes a step into the room, instead.

His eyes track over the pale purple décor of her private space, landing on the MacBook on her desk, still open to Instagram.

“You know, it’s bad form to pine away over another girl’s boyfriend, Princess,” he nods toward the picture of Finn and Raven at the pier.

“Wh-What?” Clarke splutters, turning her head to look at the computer. “I’m not pining! They’re my friends,” she snaps. “And I don’t remember inviting you in here or asking your opinion.”

“Then I’ll be going, Princess,” his gaze sweeps over her in a way that sends goose bumps up her arms.

“Why do you keep calling me that?” she demands.

“If the tiara fits,” he shrugs.

She scoffs, ripping the headpiece off angrily and chucking it across the room toward the floppy, white cloth armchair in the corner. With an unreadable expression on his face, Bellamy carefully moves close enough so that she can smell the fragrant cologne he’s wearing. Her breath hitches when he reaches up with his thumb and swipes at the corner of her mouth. She can almost count the freckles dusted across his nose.
“You had a bit of ketchup,” he explains, and when his hand falls, it rubs feather light against the edge of her breast. She's not sure if it's accidental or on purpose.

His dark eyes meet hers and hold the gaze for a moment.

“See you later . . . princess,” he lifts his eyebrows once at her, then turns and leaves.
As Bellamy moves away toward the hall, Clarke watches him go, dazed and frozen.

Her cellphone's buzz brings her back to reality.

**Raven Reyes:** Everything ok?

**Clarke Griffin:** Yeah. Run-in with my new tutor.

**Raven Reyes:** Ooohhh, the plot thickens!

**Raven Reyes:** But wait. Didn't you leave the party?

**Clarke Griffin:** Mhmm. He was in my room.

**Raven Reyes:** WHAT!!?!?!?!? Is he some kind of crazy stalker? DO I NEED TO CALL THE POLICE?

**Clarke Griffin:** No, I'm fine. He was looking for a bathroom upstairs and stopped by to say hi.

Clarke swallows hard. She normally tells Raven everything, but something about her encounter with Bellamy leaves her with the strong feeling to keep it to herself. At least for now. One more glance toward the door, and she makes up her mind.

**Clarke Griffin:** Need to get back. Call u later. xo

**Raven Reyes:** kk :)

She yanks her cover-up off and opens her dresser drawer, landing on a pair of peach-colored jeans with a hole in the knees. Pulling them on, she reaches for a white halter that's soft to the touch and puts it on over her bikini top before heading down the hall. She makes it a few steps before Bellamy emerges from the guest bathroom.

"What are you really doing up here?" she demands.

Her words bring him to a halt.

"I just told you," he says slowly, as if she's hearing impaired. "Bathroom," his head tilts to the side as he examines her face.

Clarke's heart thuds harder in her chest.

"I meant why were you in my room?"

"Wanted to say hello," he shrugs. "I didn't get the opportunity outside. Figured we're going to be seeing a lot of each other this summer."

Clarke brings her hands to her hips and purses her lips. Bellamy's eyes dance with merriment and something that makes her stomach flip.
"So you're my history tutor, huh? I'm supposed to believe you're a history expert at the ripe old age of what? 21?"

"I'm 22, Princess. I'm starting the master's program in ancient civilizations at UCLA in the fall. But since I already had Dr. Griffin for a professor as a history major and we got along, he asked if I wanted to be his TA next year. That ok with you?" he cocks his eyebrow.

"Yeah, sure," Clarke's voice cracks, causing her to walk back in surprise at the sound. Her back hits the wall, and she jolts.

Bellamy smirks.

"So you're . . . what? Hanging out on the edge of 17?"

"I turn 18 in two weeks," Clarke says tartly. "My parents enrolled me in a two-year preschool program, so I'd have the best head start."

"Of course they did," Bellamy chuckles, leaning his arm against the wall.

She turns because the intensity of his gaze is too much and watches the taut ligaments in his forearm shift instead.

"I have a boyfriend!" she flings out then fights the urge to slap her hand over her mouth.

Bellamy nods, leaning back as if giving her room to walk away.

"I'm sure you do, Princess."

"So . . . that means something," Clarke says carefully, tucking her blonde hair behind her ear because she's unsure what to do with her hands.

"Ok," Bellamy shrugs again. "It means I'll see you here Monday at 2 p.m. to get started. Sound good?"

The smell of his cologne is making her dizzy.

"Yeah, that works."

"Great. I look forward to seeing exactly what kind of head start two years in preschool gave you, Clarke."

He can't help but smile at the taken aback expression that spreads across her face.

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A week later, Clarke's already had three study sessions with Bellamy. She hates to admit that he's not quite as big of an arrogant jerk as she first assumed. He has this way of talking with his hands when he gets really excited about a battle that she finds endearing. And he adores his sister, Octavia. She's spending the summer driving up U.S. 1 with her boyfriend, Lincoln, and his family before returning to Mount Weather Charter Academy, where she'll be a senior like Clarke. The Blakes' mom, Aurora, worked hard at a Silicon Valley start-up and left them with a ramshackle ranch home across town and an adequate savings account before she died two years ago in a car crash. She was a single mom, so her death left a large void in her children's lives. Bellamy works nights at a bar called Mecha to help support himself and his sister now. Besides tutoring, Lincoln's family also throws him some home construction jobs when he has the extra time to spare.
Clarke's laughing, loud and bright, at the kitchen table as Bellamy mimics the frantic way he kept rushing back to his computer and refreshing the browser several years ago to check if Octavia earned a spot in Mount Weather's lottery.

"She had to get in. I was determined. The public high school in our district is full of gangs."

Clarke watches him, contemplative for a moment as he meets her eyes. As usual, it gives her a small shiver, which, as usual, she tries to suppress.

"That's horrible, I'm sorry," Clarke says. "It sounds like the opposite of Vera Kane High. Marcus Kane, you met him at the end-of-year party, right?"

Bellamy nods.

"Well, his mom was a little... eccentric. She founded this new-age religion in Santa Monica in the '60s and left a bunch of money to the city in her will when she died a few years ago. She said it had to be used to build a school, and students needed access to natural arboretums."

"Yeah, she definitely sounds like a hippie," Bellamy agrees. "I bet people even do yoga on the lawns."

Clarke blanches.

"It's a P.E. elective," she admits.

Bellamy snorts.

"Anyway, we were in the opposite situation from you and Octavia to be honest," she comments.

"We? I thought you didn't have any siblings."

"Oh," Clarke smiles nervously, "Me and Wells. We grew up together. His family lives down the street."

"Right, your boyfriend," Bellamy's mouth twitches, and he drums his pencil against the side of the table.

Clarke presses on, ignoring him.

"His dad convinced my parents a long time ago that public school was the way to go. He said it 'made a good impression in the local community and helped you understand the common man,' she tries to imitate Thelonious' commanding, self-assured tone.

"What's he trying to do? Run for office?" Bellamy jokes.

"Actually, yeah," Clarke says after a few moments of silence. "He wants to be the mayor of L.A. That's why going to the conference in London was so important to him, beside him being the head of Cedars-Sinai. Governor Wallace will be there, too, so they can talk. His son works for the hospital and is giving a big presentation."

She probably shouldn't be telling him all that. But, for some reason, she trusts him. It's easy to open up around him, maybe because of the way he really seems to look at her and listen when she speaks.

"Hmm, interesting," Bellamy says quietly. "Sounds like a family that's going places."

It would be hard to miss the bitter note in his tone.
"Hey," Clarke lays her fingers over his wrist gently. "You're going places, too."

"Yeah," he agrees gruffly, pulling his hand back as if she shocked him.

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Three days later, Bellamy calls and asks if she can come to his place for their tutoring session. His construction job in Beverly Hills lasted longer than he expected, and it would take too long to try to cross town so close to rush hour. He promises to order Chinese for dinner to compensate for the inconvenience. Clarke agrees happily enough - she's been surviving on Mrs. Green's well-intentioned but slightly dry casseroles all week.

The Blakes' ranch is long and larger than she imagined it would be, half-hidden in the shade of gum and cypress trees. It's front door is painted a happy yellow, but when she presses the doorbell, no one answers. She knocks hard and waits another thirty seconds, but Bellamy never comes. On a whim, she turns the doorknob and feels it give under her grasp.

She steps inside slowly, calling "Bellamy?" several times.

A large glass wall greets her; it's one of four enclosing a sort of rock and cactus garden nestled in the center of the house. Clarke gasps in delight when she sees the two tall, Jacaranda trees bursting with lilac blooms.

Her cell's vibration hums against her side from deep within the blood-orange Dooney & Bourke satchel draped over her shoulder. Thinking it must be Bellamy, she digs it out only to find--

**Wells Jaha:** Hey beautiful. How's your day so far?

The stir of disappointment stabbing her stomach makes her silently chastise herself.

**Clarke Griffin:** I'm good! Just starting a tutoring session. How's London? Anything exciting happen today?

**Wells Jaha:** Things are ok. The Wallaces hooked us up with an insiders' tour of Parliament. Then we went to a pub and got bangers and mash and trifle for dessert, very British. Tomorrow I'm going to check out the London Dungeon. You know, the haunted history thing you found online.

**Clarke Griffin:** Yeah, I remember. That all sounds so amazing, Wells! I'm glad it's a good trip so far.

**Wells Jaha:** It would be way better if you were here with us, babe.

**Clarke Griffin:** That's sweet :)

**Wells Jaha:** Don't study too hard. Skype tomorrow?

**Clarke Griffin:** Definitely.

**Wells Jaha:** Love you.

**Clarke Griffin:** xoxoxo

Clarke drops her phone back into her bag and looks to her left and right. The Blakes' house is cool and shady with lengthy hallways in both directions.
"Bellamy?" she tries again.

She hears a high-pitched wailing noise to her right and begins walking hurriedly down the hallway. It sounds loudest next to the third door on the left, which she pushes open slowly.

"Bellamy? You in here?"

It's a bedroom. By the looks of it, Bellamy's room. She takes a few steps inside. The bedspread is navy blue and somewhat crinkled, and there's a huge bookcase along one wall bursting with titles. He also has a fairly large TV and impressive DVD collection, as well as a basket of laundry perched precariously on a futon.

But what gives her pause is the clear view she has straight through to the bathroom where Bellamy is most definitely taking a shower. She can see the planes of his tan body moving and twisting through the frosted glass.

He reaches out to turn the water handle off, and the whining intensifies before diminishing to nothing. She's about to move, but he's already opening the door, green towel slung low on his hips. Drops of water slide their way down to his toned abs.

"Glad you found the way in. See something you like, Princess?" he asks with a smirk.

"Don't be a Neanderthal," she bites back.

"No, this is very modern. You'll be in college soon surrounded by guys taking showers in your dorm. Gotta be prepared."

He shoots her a half-smile.

"Give me a break," she manages as haughtily as possible.

"Whatever the hell you want. Let me get dressed, and then we'll get started, ok? You can go grab a soda in the kitchen or something. From the front door, it's straight back and to the right."

She nods, mouth rather dry.

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After what seems like centuries spent on The War of the Roses in Medieval England, they finally move on to the reign of King Henry VIII.

"Isn't he famous for sleeping with and marrying a ton of women?" Clarke asks sarcastically.

As soon as the words are out of her mouth, she wishes she hadn't said anything. Bellamy's pupils jump open in arousal. She wonders if hers look the same.

"If you watch the Showtime series," he scoffs. "He actually started the English Reformation, which separated the Church of England from the Pope's authority in Rome."

"Yeah, but only because he couldn't marry Anne Boleyn. Henry was already married and needed a divorce, but the Pope wouldn't let him," Clarke, who in fact had seen the Showtime series, argues back. "So, I'm still right."

But the laughter dies in her throat when she realizes Bellamy's watching her mouth intently, and his hand's only a few inches from where hers rests on her spiral notebook.
"I need to use your restroom," she choke out, scraping her chair back toward the sliding glass door leading to the patio with a screech.

"Down the opposite hallway from my room. Second door on the left," Bellamy says, drifting back in his seat and flipping his pen around in his fingers as he continues to watch her.

Once safely inside the green tiled bathroom, she splashes cool water against her face and towels it off with the pillowy golden hand towel nearby. She grips the side of the counter, staring at her reflection in the mirror. She's dressed simply - a plain black V-neck T-shirt and faded jeans to temper the late afternoon chill that sometimes arises in California, even during the summer. There's nothing about her appearance that should make Bellamy look at her like he does. Like he wants to throw her down on the kitchen table and-

No. Stop it right now.

She leaves the quiet sanctuary with every intention of returning to the kitchen in a business-like manner. But an open door diagonally across the hall catches her eye because she can see its bed's glitter-dusted silver comforter and the window's billowy, white curtains from her perch. Always a sucker for interior design, Clarke edges toward it and toes the door open more widely. The room must belong to Octavia. Posters of punk rock bands she vaguely recognizes decorate the walls, and a big, framed picture of a girl with dark hair like Bellamy's sitting astride a motorcycle with a man who can only be Lincoln rests on the desk. It stands next to another framed photo of a beaming Bellamy, wearing his cap and gown, standing between his mom and sister on his high school graduation day.

Suddenly, it's like something bursts in her body. She can't take it anymore. She can't see his shoulders, his warm brown eyes, his mesmerizing smile and impressive build and not be affected, damn it.

She closes the door but, in her haste, forgets to lock it, and finds herself rubbing up slowly against the bed footboard's polished, circular wooden ball, desperate to feel friction against her core. It comes up right below her waist and rocking into it pushes the seam of her jeans against her clit in a deliciously painful way.

Too wrapped up in playing the sound of his voice in her head, she doesn't hear the door open but certainly catches his "What the hell are you doing in--" before the question fades in his throat.

Horrified, she turns to him, lips parted in an "O," hair falling into her eyes.

"I -- I -- I"

"I could help you with that," he rumbles.

Chapter End Notes

If you've gotten this far, thank you! Should I keep going with this modern tale?
Clarke's face feels like it's on fire as she retreats toward the window. Bellamy takes a few, measured steps into the room.

"Bellamy . . . we can't," she hates how her voice shakes.

Something akin to frustration passes across his face like a small wave lapping into the shore. But it smoothes away in seconds.

"I'm standing over here, Princess." But even as he says it, he moves a little closer. "And I'm not touching you. We're not doing anything."

She didn't even know it was possible, but her clit seems to twitch at the gravel rub of his voice, and she shakes with a small tremor.

He's closer still now and so warm. The heat from his body travels to her easily. She reaches out for his forearm, only to steady her trembling legs.

"You can't kiss me. There's Wells," she watches him from under her dark eyelashes as if afraid he'll pounce.

He licks his lips and swallows hard but nods.

"Ok."

Without thinking much about it, her hand slips down to his fingers, and she squeezes them once before letting them drop.

"Bellamy, please," her voice sounds broken.

His eyes are black as the depths of space when they snap back to hers. He crinkles his brow.

"What do you want?" he rasps.

"I need . . . I need . . ."

Clarke's small hand flutters briefly between her thighs, and his gaze - is it even possible? - darkens further.

"You need to get off, don't you, Princess?"

"Yeah," she breathes, high-pitched and squeaky.

"If you take your jeans off, you'll get more friction," he offers calmly, crossing his arms over his chest.

It's by no means a command, but she follows it nonetheless, kicking off her wedge sandals and slipping out of her pants. Her underwear are plain navy cotton, but she's eternally grateful they won't show her wet spot.
"Should I go?" There's barely contained laughter in his voice.

He watches her push her lips together then motion him toward her. She catches his fingers once more and lets them land on the soft swell of her ass as she resumes her position at the edge of the footboard.

Bellamy's large and warm next to her, a towering presence only inches away. She can hear his deep, even breaths, almost feel the rise and fall of his chest.

She gets closer to the wooden orb again and glances back up into his eyes.

"Go on, I got you," he says in a husky whisper, sliding his hand up along her ass to the small of her back and settling there.

So she begins to rock her hips into it, biting her lip and wrapping her hands along the smooth wooden slide of the frame. She's so keyed up that it doesn't take very long for a familiar heat to unfurl somewhere below her stomach. But she knows this wave is larger and more demanding when the base of her spine begins tingling, too.

Clarke moans a little as she hits a sensitive ridge of her swollen clit. It's like her heartbeat is pulsing there and there alone.

Bellamy's hand travels over to her hip as he moves directly behind her, allowing his other hand to tangle in the elastic band of her panties until he has a good grip.

The touch of his hardening shaft causes her to whimper. But instead of stopping the dangerous game they're playing, she pushes back into him, desperate to feel more.

"Grind into it faster, you're almost there," he whispers against her neck after skimming his fingers across the tenseness in the tops of her thighs.

True to his word, Bellamy doesn't kiss any part of her skin, just traps her body against the bed frame with his own and thrusts repeatedly against her.

The heady scent of him permeates the air around her, wrapping her in a blanket of pine musk. One of his hands paws at her stomach, resting just below the underwire of her bra. Yet he never ventures higher.

She dares to look to her right and catches a glimpse of them in Octavia's dresser mirror. Her blonde hair is wild and wavy, spread out against Bellamy's grey shirt where her head lolls back on his shoulder. She can't see his face. It's tucked away against the left side of her neck. Just his wayward curls and the long, lean lines of his profile are visible. Clarke wants to reach up and knot her fingers in his hair but restrains herself, pushing harder into the footboard instead.

"Bellamy!"

She gasps when the tingling, fizzing rush builds higher and higher. She's clenching and finally there, nearly collapsing forward against the bed in the intensity of her shuttering.

His hands grip the tops of her arms to steady her, drawing her back up against his chest. He's so hard and heavy behind her that it takes all her self-control to not turn around and palm him through his pants on the spot.

Moisture seeps out from her pussy into her panties, and her nipples are painfully tight, straining against her bra.
Clarke breaks out of Bellamy's hold with a gasp, swearing under her breath as she bends down and grabs blindly for her pants and sandals.

She won't look at him as she yanks them on.

"I've got to go," she mumbles to the carpet.

Throwing her notes and laptop into her book bag in the kitchen is all a blur. Clarke almost sprints to the front door hoping Bellamy won't follow her. That he won't try to stop her.

Because she's not sure she'll be able to leave if he asks her to stay.

"Clarke!" she hears him call out just as the front door slams behind her.

Her hands are shaking as she struggles to put the key into the ignition of her white BMW X3.

_What the fuck just happened? One minute I was talking about the Church of England and the next . . ._

She barely misses nailing the mailbox as she races out of the driveway, intent to get back to Santa Monica Canyon as quickly as possible. She needs to put as much distance as she can between herself and the most powerful orgasm she's ever had.

_He didn't even kiss me. He'd barely touched me. How could it be so--_

She can't be alone in her house, not tonight. But she doesn't want to leave her neighborhood, either. So, really, there is only one solution: she's going to Monty's.

Chapter End Notes

Headed into compromising territory now . . . but I'm guessing you may want to hear what happens next anyway. Poor Wells, poor, poor Wells. I really liked him in the show and wished he could have been in more episodes!
Clarke shuffles impatiently on the front steps of the Green's three-story glass and metal home. It's gorgeous, if imposing, and was featured on the front of *Modern Architectural Digest* last year as an example of the future of design. The back of the house's sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean probably had a little something to do with it, too. Monty's dad runs a gardening center a few miles from Venice Beach, so all the landscaping around the home is immaculate. In the distance, Clarke hears the faint sound of wind chimes hung from a maple tree as the wind kicks up.

"Hi, Mrs. Green!" she cries out as soon as the door opens, desperate to be safe and hidden inside the silver vault.

"Well, hello, dear!" Mrs. Green says confusedly, but cheerfully nonetheless, as she holds her front door open farther. "I didn't know you were joining the gang tonight! Come on in - they're all in the rec room watching TV."

"They didn't know I was coming. My tutoring session ended earlier than I expected," she explains.

"Ah, yes, of course," Mrs. Green gives her a look full of knowing sympathy.

But she's far too polite to say anything about Clarke's lackluster history grades. Discretion is embedded in her very DNA by the nature of the job she does. Hannah Green has been friends with Abby Griffin for years. The two bonded after Hannah became the hospital's Senior Communications Specialist. Over the years, she's helped more than one employee escape the prying eyes of reporters intent to know more about top-secret cancer research or a botched surgery attempt.

When Monty joined Clarke's fourth grade class after moving into the neighborhood, they became fast friends through their shared love of science experiments, particularly ones that tracked just how fast plants could really grow. There's still an adorable picture of her kissing his cheek while he wrinkles his nose and holds up the blue ribbon at the seventh grade science fair tacked up on the memory board in her room.

"Well, head right on up, dear. You know where to find them. Shout down if you need anything!"

"Thanks, Mrs. Green!"

Clarke smiles gratefully and makes a beeline for the staircase. When she reaches the cavernous rec room full of fluffy couches and an enormous flat-screen, she's unsurprised to find Monty's best friend, Jasper Jordan, sprawled out on a bean bag on the floor, cramming fistfuls of popcorn into his mouth. She ruffles his shaggy brown hair as she walks by and falls into the empty seat next to Raven and Finn. Across the room on the other couch, Monty is flipping through channels while his girlfriend, Harper, smiles and waves at Clarke.

"I thought you had tutoring!" Jasper manages to get out after a big swallow.

"It ended early, so I figured I'd come hang out with you guys, that ok?" she raises her eyebrows at him playfully.

Raven gives her a questioning look, but she ignores it.
"I guess," Jasper sighs dramatically. "You're not my personal hero Wells, but you'll have to do."

It's one of their old jokes. Clarke's been friends with Jasper for almost as long as she's known Wells. But tonight it stabs into her stomach with blistering edges.

Wells met Jasper before she did. It was the first day of second grade, and after being in each other's kindergarten and first grade classes, it was traumatically the first time she and Wells didn't have the same teacher. She was excited to find him at recess and play on the jungle gym together. But by the time she caught sight of his blue jacket on the playground, he was stopping two older boys, Dax and Murphy, from picking on a stranger kid wearing big goggles on top of his head.

From then on, her mother called them "the three musketeers" until Monty joined the group, at which point they became "the fantastic four." Clarke didn't meet Raven until freshman year in high school. A guidance counselor had urged her parents to "help her explore some new extracurriculars that didn't involve slicing into dead creatures in a lab." So she'd begrudgingly signed up for dance ensemble, which Raven turned out to be an enthusiastic member of, and took her idle notebook doodling skills to Art Club, where she began covering blank, white canvases with fantastically neon acrylic creations.

"Come on, give her a break, Jasper!" Harper shoots out as she cuddles against her boyfriend and pushes her long, dirty-blonde hair over her shoulder. "I'm sure Clarke misses Wells enough without you bugging her about it."

Finn unexpectedly lays a warm hand over the top of Clarke's knee and grins at her, while Jasper mutters something incoherent.

"How's the history champ? Ready to try out for Jeopardy yet?" Finn asks.

She looks up at him in surprise, blue eyes widening, before providing a fleeting smile and delicately moving her leg away.

"Not yet," she replies. "I need to hit the books."

Raven's barely paying them any attention at all. She's too busy yelling various, often conflicting, directions at Monty about what show to put on.

"Ugh, this is such a downgrade from what I'm used to," she complains without much real bite.

"Sorry, we can't all have executive producers for dads and our own elaborate home movie theaters," Monty snaps back.

"Oooh, stop, baby! It's Raven's dad's show," Harper trills out excitedly, squeezing Monty's arm when he lands on a new channel.

Jasper groans.

"I can't do the hyper dramatic, post-apocalyptic thing tonight! Not after running around all week making sure my camp kids didn't blow up the building with their volcano projects! I need something relaxing," he moans from the floor, sinking further into his beanbag chair. "No offense to your dad, Raven!"

Raven purses her lips and flips him off.

"I don't mind Brink of the Universe," Finn says, "I like a healthy dose of deep space now and then."
"Of course you do," Jasper mutters. But Raven pays no attention to him, snuggling against Finn's chest as he wraps an arm around her shoulders.

"Perfect!" Harper claps her hands together. "Maybe this will FINALLY be the night the leads hook up. I literally can't stand the will they/won't they garbage anymore." A flash of guilt crosses her face like a lightening bolt, and she glances at Raven apologetically. "No offense, Raven! Your dad's a genius and all, it's just--"

Raven holds up her hand and nods. "It's cool. On that point, I'm totally with you. You don't have two people be that good-looking and have such great chemistry and keep building up the strength of their partnership without it going somewhere."

A ghost of a smile flickers across her lips briefly, but Harper manages to catch it.

"Wait! Do you know something we don't know?" she demands.

"I know a lot of things you don't know, McIntyre," Raven jokes back. "Mostly about robotics and hip hop moves."

Clarke smirks widely.

"They're so endgame, aren't they, Raven?"

"You know my lips are sealed. I know nothing and couldn't tell you if I did," she hedges.

"Whatever," Monty rolls his eyes. "Let's just watch it for a while."

About twenty minutes into the show, the boys head downstairs to restock on snacks. Raven slides in closer to Clarke and gives her a knowing look.

"So, how's the tutor treating you? Still being a jackass?"

Clarke blanches. She'd told Raven a little about her earliest encounters with Bellamy, it's true, but she'd always left out the crazy urge she had to climb into his lap when they sat at her kitchen table or the way her skin sparked when his arm brushed against hers as he wrote something down. She was dating Wells, and Raven adored Wells. Everyone did. There was no way Clarke could tell her that she admired Bellamy's work ethic and intense desire to provide Octavia with the best life possible without it getting weird. Raven wouldn't understand the way he teased her, the way her stomach flipped when he called her princess, or how she'd just let him grind against her as she had a toe-curling orgasm . . .

"Uh, no, no. He's fine. He's . . . smart. And we're getting along better than I thought we would."

"Really?" Raven's eyes widen skeptically.

"Yeah," Clarke runs her damp palms over her worn jeans as she nods. "It's ok. He's gonna help me with school, and that's what I need."

"Mmm," Raven still doesn't seem entirely convinced, but lets it go. "Anyway, Harper and I wanted to talk to you about your birthday. We know it's coming up at the end of the week, and we're excited to celebrate. But Monty's family's going to their big, family reunion in Boston, and Jasper's summer camp gig includes working that weekend, so we were wondering . . ." she glances at Harper for back-up.

"If you wouldn't totally hate us if we asked to celebrate next weekend instead?" Harper asks sweetly.
"We'll definitely do the escape room you wanted, and we were thinking a drive-in movie with old-school burgers and milkshakes could be fun?"

"Yeah, absolutely," Clarke smiles at her. "I understand. This way will be much better. I want to celebrate with you all!"

"Excellent, thanks for being a team player, Griffin," Raven lightly punches her arm while Harper exhales a sigh of relief.

A few seconds later, Harper's attention is pulled back toward the screen where one of the main characters - but not the leads, of course - is engaged in an illicit hookup during a thunderstorm.

"That is such bullshit," she's saying.

"What?" Clarke asks, happy for the distraction.

"She is not having an orgasm from penetration alone. He never touched her once."

"Gotta love HBO!" Raven laughs, and Clarke tries to join in, but it sounds nervous, even to her own ears.

She doesn't know what possesses her, but before she realizes it, she's saying, "It's possible I guess. Sometimes just having the guy you're attracted to really close to you can push you over the edge."

"Excuse me?" Raven turns her neck so fast, Clarke's surprised she doesn't pull a muscle.

The ruby red blush crawls up her pale neck and into her cheekbones. Raven knows she hasn't had sex with Wells yet, and she's not the sort of person who openly talks about her physical relationship much, even with close friends.

"I mean," Clarke stalls for time by pulling the hair tie off her wrist and twisting her blonde waves into a messy bun. "It's what I've heard. Anyway, I need to go get some water. Do you all want anything?"

She barely lets them shake their heads no before she's bolting for the door, heart hammering as she remembers the feel of Bellamy at her back.

***

Clarke passes Monty and Jasper on the stairs, but finds Finn in the kitchen when she pulls open the stainless steel refrigerator door in search of the Brita container.

She slams the door shut harder than she intended and jolts backward, water sloshing messily, when he appears on the other side of it, dragging a hand through his long locks.

"I would have brought you water," he says.

"Oh, thanks, but I realized I wanted some after you all left," she replies.

She walks toward the cabinet nearest the sink and opens it, pulling down a lime green tumbler.

"So you're getting a little extra history help, huh?" he tries again, his voice somehow sounding even closer this time. The hairs on the back of Clarke's neck prickle, and she takes a deep breath before turning around. Didn't they already have this conversation? When she does, he's close enough that she can see the green and blue rings in his hazel eyes.
"Yeah, we can't all be good at everything. History is my weak point," she answers politely, sliding down the expanse of the slick counter toward the Brita container.

"I'm actually pretty decent at history, so if you ever need any help once the school year starts--"

His gaze tracks up her body as he speaks, and when her phone vibrates loudly in her back pocket, she's quick to grab for it.

She stares down at the name displayed in big, white letters: **Bellamy Blake.**

Taking in the annoyed look on Finn's face, she makes a snap decision, swallows her pride, and unlocks the phone with her finger to accept the call.

"Bellamy?" her voice sounds more high-pitched than usual.

"I didn't think you'd actually answer," he grumbles as opposed to saying hello.

"Hi," she offers, glancing back at Finn, who's now lingering in the doorway, fiddling with his own phone.

"You ok?" he asks. "You just ran out of here."

"Yeah, yeah I'm fine."

There's a long pause, and when she fails to give any more information, he continues.

"Listen, uh, you left your history books here, and I figured . . . well, that you wouldn't want to see me again after what happened. So, um, can I leave them in your mailbox?"

The thought of not seeing him again fills her with an inexplicable sense of loss considering she's only really known him a little under two weeks.

"What do you mean not see you again?"

"It's all right, Clarke. I'll find you another tutor. What I did was wrong, and I--"

"No!" she yells it out so forcefully Finn takes a few steps forward back into the warm yellow glow of the kitchen.

He shoots her a concerned look, but she brushes him away with her hand.

"I don't want that to happen," she hums it into the phone.

And waits.

He clears his throat and sounds strained when he speaks again.

"You don't?"

"No."

She can't remember a time that she felt so weirdly sure about something.

"Can you just bring them over next week?"

Her eyes pass over the ornate, painted clock full of ripe fruits and plump birds that Mrs. Green's family brought from Asia when they immigrated to the United States. It's 7:30 p.m. The afternoon
dissolved without her awareness of its passing.

"Do I have to wait that long to see you again? You didn't even let me order the Chinese food, Princess," the laughter is back in his voice, and it makes the corner of her lip twitch.

"I'm with friends now, I can't," she says carefully, watching Finn roam into the darkening dining room. She knows he's still in easy earshot.

"Can I bring the food to you then?"

She gulps, knowing she's in way too deep.

"Yeah. Ok."

Chapter End Notes

Yay! Some of the delinquents are popping up into the story now. So, as a forewarning, I should say I have a lot of ideas about how Bellamy and Clarke will deal with one another when they see each other again. The story is probably going to unfold in a couple of ways that'll be a little surprising. I'm not sure they're going to handle everything in the "best" way because they're younger and too sexually attracted to each other. Anyway, more on that later. Let me just say that yes, your feelings about Finn in this chapter are justified. Expect a bit of Season One Bellamy's personality to surface from time to time, and I'M SO SORRY about Wells. <3 him always.
A Game of Telephone

Raven Reyes: Clarke, what the hell? What's going on? One second we're planning your bday, and
the next you're running from the house like your pants are on fire!!

Raven Reyes: So you're not gonna answer me now?

Raven Reyes: DO NOT make me come over there, chica!! U know I will. Finn said you got a
phone call and had to leave. Are you ok?

Harper McIntyre: Hey Clarke . . . is everything ok? Raven's kinda freaking out over here. xoxo

Jasper Jordan: U know I was joking about not liking you as much as Wells, right? U my girl,
Clarke. We ok?

Raven Reyes: Stop making everything about yourself, Jasper!

Monty Green: Yo, Raven's serious! She'll come bust down your door if you don't text back.

Monty Green: What did I ever do to deserve all you drama queens in my life?

Harper McIntyre: You love us, baby. Admit it. <3

Finn Collins: No joke, we're so screwed when it comes to the ladies in our lives.

Raven Reyes: Puh-lease. You like it like that.

Finn Collins: Who said I didn't?

Jasper Jordan: Get. A. Room.

Harper McIntyre: Earth to Clarke . . . you there, girl?

Monty Green: For the love of God, woman, TEXT HER BACK!!

Finn Collins: Hey Clarke, seriously, hope everything's ok. If you need anything, just call. Always
here to help. :)

Clarke grins down at her vibrating phone as she clears some of the condensation from her
bathroom mirror with a towel. In the time it's taken her to walk the few blocks home and grab a
quick shower to clear her mind, her friends have gone insane. Well, to be fair, her cryptic, "It's
getting late, and I've got to get home," to Finn probably didn't do much to set him, or anyone else, at
ease when she'd all but bolted through the Green's front door.

She snatches up the glittery device, scrolls through the messages, and pauses with her thumbs
hovering over the keypad.

Clarke Griffin: A girl can't take a shower in peace, can she? I appreciate the concern, everyone, but
I'm fine! Really. It's just been a long day, and I was getting a migraine. Have fun! Talk to you
tomorrow. Love you goofballs!

There. That seems light and airy, yet firm enough, to keep the crazy army at bay for a while. She
starts toweling off her damp hair, wondering what to wear. The outfit needs to be as absolutely devoid of sexuality as possible. She'd said yes to Bellamy's offer on impulse, but now that it's happening, she's just going to lay down the law with him. *He's her tutor, and he works for her dad. She needs to do well in history, and he can help her. That's what their relationship is going to be about from now on. What happened earlier was embarrassing and a mistake, but it was all her fault. She hopes they can move past it.*

Clarke runs her lines over and over in her head as she brushes her teeth and rolls on deodorant, staring into her reflection. Her heart-shaped face seems a little pinker than usual, and her eyes are bright, a good sign of health. She really doesn't appear any different than she did this morning. Same longish, wavy blonde hair, no bumps or bruises. But that thought does little to quell the butterflies dancing in her gut.

**Harper McIntyre**: Ok, thanks girl! Glad you're all right. I'll try to keep all the zoo animals in their cages. ;) Let's start party planning tomorrow, k?

**Clarke Griffin**: Yes!! Sounds perfect. :)

She riffles through her drawers for a pair of unassuming grey UCLA sweatpants and a black lace bra with matching underwear. Her hand is deep in an upper drawer, pilfering through it for her favorite white Wonder Woman T-shirt that says "Anything boys can do, girls can do better" because she's just feeling snarky like that, when her phone begins shaking so much it falls off the edge of her bed.

"Jesus! What now!?” she grunts, bending down and grabbing for it. **Incoming Call: Raven Reyes.**

"Hey Raven, what is it?"

"How's your head?" comes Raven's no-nonsense deadpan.

"It hurts," Clarke returns, the lie slipping from her easier than she'd expected. "I took an Excedrin and just got out of the shower. Can I help you with something?"

"Don't get an attitude with me, Clarke. I'm not the one acting all weird."

"I'm not acting weird! I didn't feel well. Is that not allowed?"

There's a pause, and she can almost see Raven playing with the long, auburn edges of her fierce ponytail.

"Yeah, it's allowed," she concedes. "What's not allowed is keeping secrets from your best friend."

Clarke swallows audibly.

"What secret am I keeping from you exactly?" she starts pacing circles around her room.

"Finn told me what he heard you say on the phone."

Clarke's stomach lurches, her mind reeling back over the conversation from a few minutes ago. Was any of it bad? Was it damning?

"Oh-kay..."

"You were talking to Bellamy," Raven says accusatorially.

"Yeah, I was," Clarke settles on the sweet, innocent approach. She knows Raven's too smart to fall
for it completely, but maybe if she can keep the conversation short . . . "I left my history textbooks over at his place, and he called to tell me."

"Finn said you were talking about not seeing him again and then you got really upset for a minute. Clarke?" her voice is deadly serious now.

"Yeah?" she squeaks, and it's like acrobats are rehearsing in her chest.

"Is he being . . . I don't know . . . like weird or creepy at all? It's just that I remember what you said before, and you don't have to be alone with him, ever, if you don't feel comfortable. You know that, right? You know you can tell me anything?" she says it all in a rush.

A wave of relief crests over Clarke.

"God, no! Raven, you've got it all wrong! Bellamy's not being a creeper, I swear to you. It's all cool. He's a nice guy - he's a nerd, remember?" she tries to laugh it off.

Raven's nonverbal noises do not sound like those of a convinced friend.

"It's just that, well, Finn thought he was--"

"What?" Clarke demands, gripping her iPhone more tightly, so its heat bleeds into her cheek.

"Finn thought Bellamy was threatening you in some way maybe."

"That's ridiculous!" Clarke screeches, temper spiking in a moment. "Do you think my dad would get close with a student who harassed women?"

"No, no, of course not," Raven says hastily, finally sounding a bit ashamed. "But, you know I had to check, right? You're my best friend."

Clarke bites her lip and smiles a little at the confession. Raven's not normally the touchy-feely type.

"It's all right, Ray-Ray," she says melodically. "I appreciate you looking out for me. Listen, maybe you can come over and meet Bellamy at some point and see for yourself, ok? I don't know if he'd be interested in hanging out with a bunch of high school kids, but if it were just you, that'd probably be ok," she shrugs.

"Yes, please! I want to see this guy you're spending all your time with!" Raven suddenly sounds much perkier, as if she's about to call out drill commands at dance practice. "This way I can tell him to back off in person . . . ."

"RAVEN!"

"Kidding, just kidding!"
Sway to the Music

Chapter Notes

So . . . here's some Bellarke? *steps away very carefully*

Jake and Abby Griffin never locked their liquor cabinet. They had no reason to since Clarke was not a wild, rebellious teenager who streaked her hair pink or snuck out at night to go to rock festivals. They never received phone calls from the nurse at Vera Kane High telling them Clarke's skirt was too short, and teachers usually had nothing but praise for Clarke's enthusiasm and intelligence.

So, yeah, liquor's never been an issue. Drugs, STDs, binge drinking, teenage pregnancy . . . these are a few of the topics that never receive air time at the Griffin dining room table. Sure, Clarke's had a glass of wine with dinner now and then on special occasions, but that's been the extent of it.

But now as she holds open the crystalline door to the liquor cabinet in the dining room - it's all reflective and shiny - she wishes she'd been a little less predictable, a little more carefree. The blue, green, and gold glass bottles with their colorful labels and hard-to-pronounce names swirl past her vision in a haze. She just wants something simple to take the edge off her nerves. Drumming her fingers against the nearest shelf, she rolls her neck around on her shoulders, staring up at the brilliant night sky she painted on the room's ceiling last year.

"Screw it," she mutters and grabs a bottle of rum and takes it into the kitchen where she finds a few cans of Pepsi stashed at the bottom of the refrigerator. Her mother does not approve of soda, but her father's sweet tooth often means a small supply gets smuggled into the house anyway.

She finds the TV channel that blasts nothing but bubbly pop music and mixes her drink to the best of her ability using a shot glass and sheer determination. The empty drink's been abandoned on a coffee table by the time she's dancing to the steps she learned for the final basketball game of the season. The song's changed while she wasn't paying attention, and the lyrics "I was so much younger yesterday, oh / I didn't know that I was starving til I tasted you" force her to pause and press her fingertips to the space between her eyebrows.

Breathe, Clarke. It's going to be fine. Just tell him what you practiced.

And then the doorbell rings, and a chill inexplicably runs through her petite frame.

"Coming!" she shouts, scrambling to turn down the music.

"Hey," she says, a bit breathless when she finally pulls back the door.

"Hey, dinner is served," Bellamy says playfully, holding up a large, brown paper bag. "I didn't know exactly what you liked, so I kind of got carried away and ordered a few things. I figured a deal is a deal."

His nonchalant, business-as-usual manner catches her off guard. Still, she smiles despite herself and motions him inside.

"Sounds great, thank you. Let's bring it to the kitchen."
Her body feels lighter and more fluid, and her dancer's feet seemingly glide across the refinished wood floors like an ice skater's as he follows her deeper into the old home. Bellamy sets down the food on the table she's already set, and she tries not to watch his biceps flex while he does it. It's quiet for a minute, and she rubs her bare foot against the side of her calf, suddenly thankful she painted her toenails red a few nights ago.

"Don't need no butterflies when you give me the whole damn zoo. / By the way, right away, you do things to my body."

The music floats in from the living room, and Clarke, desperate for a distraction, lands on the first thing she can find.

"You can take your backpack off."

"Oh, yeah," Bellamy's eyes home in on hers and suddenly she can't look away. "I have your textbooks."

He pulls them out slowly, deliberately, like he's unwrapping Christmas presents, and they land on the seat of a chair with a hard thud.

Clarke nods down at the table, head a little foggy but happier when she sneaks a glance at the firm line of his jaw and his strong grip on the back of a kitchen chair.

"It was nice of you to bring them," she says politely.

"No problem," he returns gruffly.

So, they're not going to talk about it. That much seems clear. And she can deal with it. She can improvise.

"Uh, so what did you order?"

Bellamy rips open the brown paper and begins pulling out numerous cartons and plastic containers. "I got potstickers because Octavia always loves them, and chicken lo mein, beef with broccoli, and spicy shrimp with eggplant."

"Sounds delicious," Clarke murmurs, watching his hands lay out all the food in neat sections.

"Oh shit, I didn't ask if you were, like, a vegetarian or something?" he appears genuinely puzzled for a second.

"No," she giggles loudly, before actually slapping a hand across her mouth. "I'm not."

He raises his eyebrows at her suspiciously, then turns and takes in the sweep of the countertops behind her where the rum bottle still stands.

"Have you been drinking, Princess?" Something like a challenge flashes in his eyes.

"Just one drink," she admits.

He gives her a reproving look.

"If I were in England, it would be ok!" she argues before he can say a word.

"But you're not," Bellamy's voice is firmer than she anticipated.
"No . . . I'm with you," she smiles shyly up at him. "Can I get you something to drink?"

Bellamy scoffs.

"Water's fine."

She raises her eyebrow at him.

"And a beer if you have it."

"Coming right up."

She heads back to the refrigerator, while he starts divvying up the food on the plates she laid out.

Clarke pours herself a second drink, promising herself it'll be the last one, as Jay-Z's "Empire State of Mind" weaves its way to her ears. She sighs in relief, feeling a bit more of the tension escape her shoulders as she takes a sip of the sweet liquid.

She drops two glasses of water onto the table, then comes back with a bottle of Corona and a bottle opener, leaving them on Bellamy's placemat.

"You're not going to open it for me?" he asks, mouth twitching as an errant curl falls into his dark eyes as he leans over scooping lo mein onto her plate.

"I'm not the maid," she replies, all bravado.

He chuckles, shakes his head, and pops the bottle open with a crisp snap, taking a long swig from it while watching her intently. She's holding her own drink to her chest like a talisman. Sliding down into the seat next to his at the round table, Clarke's careful to make sure her feet are tucked away on the side of her chair farthest from him.

But her unaffected, cocky performance goes to Hell five painfully quiet minutes later when she's so nervous reaching for the duck sauce that it flies out of her fingers and onto the floor. She and Bellamy bend down to reach for it at the same time, and when his warm fingers brush against hers, it's like an electric current sizzles up her spine.

"Catherine of Aragon was the best one out of Henry VIII's wives," she says firmly as she sits back up, desperate to direct the attention away from her flaming cheeks.

"Ok," says Bellamy slowly, spearing a bit of broccoli onto his fork and taking a bite. "What makes you say that?"

"Because she stayed loyal to Henry no matter what he threw at her," Clarke explains more confidently. "She stuck to her religion and her belief that she was his true and only wife and that he couldn't divorce her, even though she was living in a foreign country with no real friends."

"Yeah, but what did she get for it?" Bellamy argues. "She was banished after refusing to accept Henry as head of the Church of England. He declared their marriage invalid. The real winner was Anne Boleyn's daughter, Queen Elizabeth I."

"Why?" Clarke demands, cutting into a potsticker.

Bellamy narrows his eyes like he thinks she's trying to play with him. He takes a deep swig of his beer.

"Because she reigned alone for decades during an age of New World exploration and all this artistic
creativity. She defeated the Spanish Armada at a time when women weren't even taken seriously, Princess."

"Mmm, must have been good to be queen," Clarke says noncommittally, but her eyes sparkle when they look at him. Although, of course, she doesn't know it. Maybe she can't even control it at this point.

Bellamy takes her cue and begins drilling her on some of the concepts they covered about The War of the Roses earlier this week. They're topics he promises will come up in her European History class next semester.

"Tell me the battle where Richard III died."

"The Battle of Bosworth Field?"

"Good. And why was that important?"

"Because he was the last English monarch to die on his own soil."

"Perfect. Who were Catherine of Aragon's parents? You should know because she's your role model and everything."

He laughs outright at her expression.

"She's not my role model!"

"It's ok, Clarke. It's an admirable quality to decide to stand by your man, no matter what. Although with that T-shirt, I would have taken you for more of a feminist."

He keeps laughing even after she flips him off.

"King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain," Clarke snaps, answering his question.

"Correct," Bellamy chokes out when he regains his composure.

Despite it all, she likes the way his freckles seem to move when he laughs. It makes him look younger and more mischievous.

"What other very famous person are Isabella and Ferdinand connected to?"

"Christopher Columbus," Clarke says immediately, swaying slightly to "I got this feeling inside my bones" as Justin Timberlake's peppy hit strikes up. "They financed his 1492 mission to the New World."

"You got it! Now tell me what playwright made a name for himself during the Elizabethan Age?"

"And under the lights when everything goes. Nowhere to hide when I'm getting you close."

Clarke stops swaying her shoulders and takes another sip of her drink, looking at Bellamy with confusion.

"What's in a name, Princess? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

"Oh," she breathes. "It's Shakespeare."

But it's the *Romeo & Juliet* reference that makes her tremble.
"Enough history," Clarke says insistently, pushing away her plate and launching to her feet, dancing lightly into the connected living room. She knows the rum is pulsing through her veins because she doesn't even care what she looks like, she just wants to dance along to "Can't Stop the Feeling."

"Are you trying to kill me like that?" Bellamy grumbles from too close behind her a minute later, and she almost stumbles into the nearby recliner.

"Huh?" she eyes him warily.

He points deliberately down to her chest, and when she looks down, she gasps quietly. She hadn't worn the shirt in a while, but it's been so beaten up in the laundry that the material has stretched thin in patches, making it weirdly translucent. She can see her black bra straight through it, but she wonders why the hell she didn't notice it before.

"Yellow diamonds in the light. And we're standing side by side. As your shadow crosses mine. What it takes to come alive."

The hand not holding his Corona takes her hip firmly, but she tries to step out of his grip.

"Bellamy! We can't. Please don't."

She has all her lines memorized from before. It's harder to use them now that he's just two feet away from her though.

"You're my tutor. You work for my dad. I'm sorry about before. I-I don't know what I was thinking, but . . . it was so inappropriate. Do you - do you think we can just move past it?" She hears her voice sound a bit more insistent and frenzied than usual, but maybe that will just help her case.

It doesn't.

Bellamy watches her pointedly, then smirks. His eyes seem to mock her, and she feels the same way she did when he first walked into her room, totally defenseless and totally turned-on.

"Sure, whatever you want, Princess."

He steps cleanly away, sprawling out on a couch facing her instead, his arms spread out along the top of it while his knees are apart.

"I guess you can keep dancing as long as I don't join in. Or . . . you can come sit here by me," he taps the spot beside him.

Clarke's hands smooth the wrinkled fabric along her ribcage, and she bites her lip hard enough to draw a drop of blood.

Bellamy says nothing but takes a final swig of his drink, leaving the bottle on the coffee table. He leans back into the couch in what's clearly his version of "it's your move."

Running a nervous hand through her glossy hair, she sits down on the couch too, but several feet away from him.

"You can do better than that, Princess."

So she shifts a little closer. He takes two fingers and lightly trails them up her arm, grinning when she shudders.

"Come sit on my lap," the darkness in his voice lures her in. "I promise I won't bite. Unless you ask
me to."

Clarke moves beside him and tentatively pushes a hand against his chest, watching his pupils grow into fathomless black pools.

"That's right, baby. Come here."

He resumes stroking her arm then runs his fingers along her side and lower, dipping down her leg before coasting them lightly toward her inner thigh. Clarke squeezes her eyes shut against the sensation, strong even through her sweat pants, remembering their afternoon rendezvous.

"Clarke, come straddle me. I promise I'll make you feel good."

She watches his face, commits his full lips to memory and the untamable spirals of his hair. Her hand trails along the hard muscle of his chest until it comes to rest at his own hip. Breathing heavily, she lifts herself up and crawls into Bellamy's lap. His eyes widen for the briefest of seconds, but that's how she learns he didn't fully expect her to do it. His hands immediately spring to her waist to steady her, and she holds on to his shoulders. He's so close that she just wants to lean into his neck and absorb his scent. So she does.

"You always smell amazing," she breathes into his ear.

And that's Bellamy's breaking point.
"Do you want me, Clarke?"

The raspiness of his voice sends a trigger to her brain that leaves her thin frame shaking.

"Mnhmm," she whimpers into his ear like a wounded puppy before tilting back toward his knees.

His hands slide easily from her waist over the globes of her ass and then back again to her taut thighs. Her breath hitches when he reaches out to tuck a piece of blonde hair behind her ear.

"Good."

It's like an invisible brick wall springs to life between them, neither of them willing to initiate any further contact.

But then Clarke's eyes track the tip of Bellamy's tongue wet his full lower lip, and she begins grinding into his hips in frustration.

"This is a nice view," he makes no point to hide the fact that he's staring at her breasts as they shake and jiggle.

She pants and shoves against his upper arm lightly but doesn't still her hips. When he reaches out to touch her, her eyes widen though, and she leans away from him.

"I don't think so, baby," he sings the words to her, using two fingers to climb up her stomach before cupping a warm hand around the heaviness of her breast.

She arches into him involuntarily, unable to hide how much she was longing for his touch.

"See? You do like it. Your nipple's already getting hard. Can you feel it?" He leans in to whisper it like a delicate taunt against the skin of her shoulder, which is blocked to him by the faded, white cotton. She nearly cries out when he takes to whisking a finger delicately along the edge of her nipple over and over again, never touching it directly.

Clarke closes her eyes, clasping tightly onto his arm that holds her hip firmly in place while the other finds its way into her messy, tangled waves. She presses her core more insistently against Bellamy's pelvis, drawing a sharp intake of breath when his hand abandons her breast only to coast up her ribcage under her Wonder Woman top.

"Wells." Her eyes pop open, glassy blue, when his palm finds her thudding heart.

"You'll be yelling out my name eventually, Princess."

The hiss of his promise is in direct opposition to the gentle way his calloused fingers skim across the tops of her breasts spilling over the cups of her bra.

"No," she shakes her head rapidly because he has to listen. He has to understand.

"I can't. I'm with--"
Bellamy curves a hand around her ass and squeezes it hard, gliding her body up against his and latching his mouth to the pulse point of her neck. He sucks at it aggressively for a minute before laving the reddening flesh with his tongue, smiling against her glistening skin at the sounds of her moans.

"What about Wells?" he draws back and gazes into her hazy eyes.

She can barely form words. He's so close and strong and pulsing with energy that her whole body thrums in response.

"He can't . . . we don't . . . I don't feel," she pants, still rocking against him, only in a much more disjointed fashion now.

"Use your words, Princess."

She turns toward the TV where Madonna is singing about blazing summer suns and tropical breezes. *Beautiful faces no cares in the world. Where a girl loves a boy, and a boy loves a girl.*

She draws some kind of weird strength from the melody, squaring her shoulders and supporting her body by holding her palms against Bellamy's broad shoulders.

"He's not you," she says it quietly, but confidently.

But when she surges forward to finally taste his lips, he pushes her away.

"Get up, Clarke."

She blinks rapidly, totally confused.

"Wh-What?"

He strokes a calloused finger down the side of her pink cheek, tilting her chin up when she tries to hide from his insistent gaze.

"But you promised," she pouts, bottom lip sticking out.

His answering grin is almost carnivorous.

"Don't think I won't deliver, Clarke. But for now," he clutches at her waist and drops her lightly onto the soft cushion beside him. "I'm gonna go. And if you feel the same way in the morning, we can talk about it."

She doesn't move even after the door closes behind him, just sits with her knees curled up to her chest, trying to sort through her thoughts like a seamstress picks through tangled thread.

In the dim background, Madonna croons that "He told you, 'I love you.' He said he loves you," and the gentle, rocking rhythm of the island hymn fades away.

***

It's one in the morning when she realizes she missed her Skype date with Wells two hours ago. She was supposed to catch him early in the morning London time before he started the day of touring his parents set up for him.

The Gmail tab of her Safari window has a (1) beside it. Taking a deep breath, she drops into her desk chair and clicks open the message.
Hey Babe,

Sorry, my international texts aren't working right now. I spent the last half hour on the phone with a Verizon customer service guy in India to try to figure out why, but no luck yet. He did give me two new curry recipes to try though (no, I'm not joking and yes, I know I'm a dork). But hey, what's life without a little cultural exchange? Anyway, that's why I've been radio silent.

But I wanted to make sure everything was ok because you missed our Skype date. I hope you're out doing something fun with our crew of misfits. I can already see the crease between your eyebrows, so this is me telling you don't worry about it (really, I mean it), because we can reschedule. :) You deserve to have a decent summer - so go be crazy!

I went to the Tower of London yesterday but checking out the crown jewels wasn't as awesome without you there to mock them with me. Dad has this whole museum itinerary planned for this weekend, and I'm trying to be optimistic about it because he seems so happy. You know I'd rather be home celebrating your birthday with you though. I was thinking I'd take you to Sushi Roku when I get back and then we can check out the pier rides. I can't believe we've never ridden the roller coaster over the ocean in the dark. Sounds intense though. Would you like that?

Just let me know everything's good at home when you get a chance.

Love you,

Wells

With trembling hands, Clarke closes her laptop and watches the girl staring back at her in her full-length mirror. She looks like an other-worldly stranger, pale, hair mussed, and with a distinct red-purple bruise forming where her neck meets her shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

Teaser: Next chapter features Raven, Finn, Bellamy, Clarke, and a dose of "Twilight" because, honestly, why not? Shooting to have it up July 6.
The sunlight is streaming through Clarke's window Friday morning when she wakes up. Despite the water she guzzled before falling asleep to offset the rum, her mouth is parched like sandpaper, and her head seems packed full of cotton.

"Ugh," she groans, throwing an arm up over her closed eyes. The memories of the previous night fall back to her like fragments of shattered glass. She digs herself deeper into her pillow, bundling a sheet over her head.

This thing with Bellamy has gone too far. Way too fucking far. She never should have drank anything last night. She should have stuck to her plan to talk to him like a calm, rational person and strictly enforced the professional tutor/student line between them. But no, she couldn't manage even that much.

And now, well, now she'd created a huge mess. She didn't deserve Wells. He had been nothing but a loving boyfriend to her. He knows her better than anyone else - her insecurities and doubts that she'll never measure up to her parents' high expectations, her dreams to be a professional artist some day. She'd confided in him when she was worried her mother was acting too friendly with Marcus Kane at last year's holiday party, and he'd genuinely listened. He hadn't just rolled her eyes and told her she was overreacting. She's been there for him when his own mother had a breast cancer scare, cried with him when some of his aunts, uncles, and cousins lost everything in Hurricane Katrina. He's the guy who brings her flowers just because, and she dances and cheers at his basketball games. They have a good thing going, a special thing. She'd be an absolute moron to screw it up.

A few minutes later sleep still eludes her, and her stomach grumbles. A bleary glance at the boxy numbers on her iHome tells her it's 10 a.m., and she really does need to get up. She can't avoid this any longer. It's clear what she has to do.

She reads the email she writes to Wells three times before pressing send.

Hi Wells,

I'm sooooooo sorry about missing our Skype date!!! I. Am. The. Worst. Please forgive me! You were right - you know me so well - I got caught up at Monty's house and lost track of time. We were dreaming up birthday plans for next week because Jasper and Monty aren't free this weekend. But that's no excuse.

Did you get your texts up and running again? I sent you something this morning, but I don't see anything from you yet. Oh, and YOU WOULD ask a customer service rep about a curry recipe. OMG.

I'm glad your dad is having fun, and I think touring the museums sounds great! (But then again, I'm not the Phoenix's star basketball player, so my image isn't as important to maintain). :p Has he talked to Governor Wallace yet? And more importantly, have you been inside Harrod's?

Try to keep your chin up. You are in Europe after all, and I'm still wildly jealous. The pictures you put on Facebook are glorious, keep them coming please!!

Your birthday idea is perfect - that would be so much fun! Wanna talk Sunday around 6 p.m. your
time, 10 a.m. my time?

Love love love,
Clarke

***

"So I need new pajamas, and you want to stop by Victoria's Secret, right?" Raven cocks her eyebrow at Clarke as they set off through the well air-conditioned Santa Monica mall. They just dropped Finn off at the Apple Store, where Raven's convinced he'll be kept amused for at least an hour.

"It's like day care for boyfriends!" she laughs, linking arms with Clarke and strolling past an Auntie Anne's, where the lure of cinnamon sugar is almost overwhelming.

"Yeah, sounds good to me," Clarke returns.

"And is there anything special you might be looking for?" Raven elbows her in the ribs. "Like a welcome home present for Wells or something? Are you guys finally going to--"

"Shut up!" Clarke cries out, blushing furiously. "What I buy is my business."

"Mmm-hmmm," Raven drawls. "I think it's about time you loosened up and had some fun, Griffin."

Clarke just shakes her head as they stroll into Aerie, and Raven immediately begins berating a helpless sales girl over the fact that everything for women is either pink or purple and how that's personally insulting to her, a woman who dreams of working for NASA.

A half hour later, Clarke is running her hand across the silky fabrics laid out on the tiered tables of Victoria's Secret, shooing Raven away whenever she tries to be too "helpful," which generally translates to offering up her favorite sex positions.

Grasping a royal purple bra embroidered with small, golden flowers with a band of lace sewn below the cups, she finds the bikini bottoms that match and tells Raven she's going to the dressing room.

Safe inside her little rectangular haven, she peels off her clothes and tries the set on, pivoting to see herself at every angle. The bra is delicate and feminine but doesn't really give her the support she needs, although she figures that's not exactly the point. She tugs a little at the lace band to pull it down farther along her ribcage, but squeezes her eyes shut when for a moment, all she can see is Bellamy's hand toying with her breast. She can feel his rumpled clothes below her, smell his tangy cologne and the faint hint of his sweat. His expressive eyes are teasing her, tempting her, pushing her over the line . . .

Enough, Clarke.

***

"Damn it!" Raven cries out, shuffling items around in her purse. It's late afternoon, and the sun is making its slow descent toward the horizon line on the far end of the parking lot.

"What?" Finn asks, shielding his eyes from the butterscotch rays and walking over to her.

"I must've left my car keys on the counter at Aerie when I bought the pajamas! I'm an idiot!" she's already stepping backward toward the mall's side entrance.
"Want us to come?" Clarke calls.

"No, it's fine! Be right back!" she waves at them over her shoulder.

Clarke shuffles her feet awkwardly, kicking at some stray gravel. She's desperately glad the paper pink-and-white striped Victoria's Secret bag gives away nothing about the nature of her purchase when she catches Finn eyeing it.

"Nice time of day, isn't it?" he says, leaning against the back of Raven's black mustang.

"Yeah, it is," Clarke breathes, gazing up and seeing a crescent moon rising above them. The first violet, dusky rose, and periwinkle blue clouds of twilight streak the sky above their heads.

"I'm, uh, I'm really happy you came over to Monty's the other day," Finn says after clearing his throat.

"Why?" Clarke watches him closely, her tone maybe a bit more forceful than she'd intended.

"Because I don't get to spend much time with you. You're always so busy during the school year," he takes a small step closer to her, dropping his shopping bag on the back of the car.

"What are you talking about?" Clarke tries to laugh it off. "We see each other all the time."

But Finn's much taller than her, and his lanky frame is suddenly imposing.

"Yeah, but . . . other people are always around," Finn says quietly, biting his lip.

He's even closer now, causing Clarke to back up right into a dingy blue minivan, where she feels the hot metal pressing at her back.

"Finn, please," she holds out her hand to keep him from coming any closer. "You're Raven's boyfriend," she says pointedly.

"I know," his voice breaks at the confession, and he flips his brown hair out of his eyes. "But I can't stop thinking about you."

He reaches out to touch her arm as she draws it back from him, pulling it toward her chest.

"Clarke! What's going on?" an angry voice breaks through the tightness in her chest, and Finn's hand instantly vanishes.

A tall, lumbering man is striding toward them, face still obscured by the interplay of sun and shadow.

"Bellamy!" she breathes out with relief, hurrying toward his side.

She doesn't shake him off when his arm trails around the back of her dress and comes to rest against the curve of her waist.

"Who are you?" Finn demands, trying and failing to keep a touch of anger from infecting his words.

"Bellamy Blake," Bellamy returns coldly. "I'm a friend of the Griffin's. But I think the more important question is why the hell you were cornering Clarke in a deserted parking lot?"

"I wasn't . . . we were talking. We're friends!" Finn sputters.
Bellamy glances down at Clarke for confirmation, just as she looks up at him.

She gives a half nod.

"He dates my best friend Raven."

"Uh huh. And where's she?" Bellamy demands.

"I'm right here," Raven arrives dangling her keys around her finger, mouth in a thin line. "What's going on?"

She takes in the built figure of Bellamy and how he's standing so close to Clarke.

"Who the hell are you?"

"Bellamy Blake," he says for the second time.

A spark of recognition flashes in her hazel eyes, and Clarke watches her nostrils flare as she sweeps her eyes over him again more appraisingly.

"You're Bellamy Blake? Clarke's tutor? The nerd?"

"Yeah, that would be me," he grits his teeth and doesn't blink. Instead, he steps toward Finn and Raven, smoothly pushing Clarke a half foot behind him.

It's silent for a beat, but then Raven quirks her lips and gives a half shrug.

"Nice to meet you. Raven Reyes," she sticks out her hand, and he shakes it. "So, I guess I'm missing what the problem is?"

"The problem is your boyfriend," Bellamy spits out. "You should keep him on a leash."

Clarke's shoulders clench tightly. She desperately tries to catch Raven's eye, to silently apologize, but her friend never looks her way. Instead, she swiftly turns to eye Finn, lips parted slightly and eyes narrowed.

"What happened?"

He stuffs his hands in his jean pockets and hunches his shoulders a bit but meets her glare.

"We were just talking. Captain America over here just overreacted."

"Bullshit," Bellamy snarls, taking another step forward, but Clarke yanks at his arm, dragging him back. "Bellamy! No!" she cries.

Raven seems to consider it for a moment, but when she turns back to Bellamy, her face is hard.

"Listen, I don't know what you saw, but we're all friends here. And I don't really appreciate you sticking your nose into something that's none of your business," she snaps, invading Bellamy's personal space.

"I'm sorry, Raven!" Clarke cries out as she nervously watches the vein in Bellamy's temple throb. "It was all just a misunderstanding."

"Yeah! Absolutely!" Finn jumps forward eagerly, latching onto the end of her sentence. "Clarke and I were talking, and Bellamy doesn't know me and must've thought I was some rando approaching
her in a parking lot."

Bellamy looks murderous, but Clarke digs her nails into the back of his meaty bicep where the other two can't see her do it, and he remains silent.

"Yeah," Bellamy says at last. "It was something like that."

Clarke nods fervently next to his shoulder. Raven finally spares a glance for Clarke, but her face is unreadable.

"Good," she says crisply. "Glad that's settled. It's been a pleasure meeting you, Blake," she finishes with a sarcastic, wide-eyed look.

Finn gives Bellamy an uncomfortable parting nod and walks toward the car door.

"Come on, Clarke," Raven jerks her head toward the car. "We're leaving."

Clarke can feel Bellamy's gaze where the skin of her cheek tingles. Yet she can't help but look up at him, standing right beside her, his chest still heaving slightly.

"You're coming with me," he says it in a tone that brooks no argument.

She nods the smallest fraction.

"What?" Finn bursts out at the same time Raven yells, "Clarke!"

"It's fine, Raven, really. You guys deserve a night to yourselves," Clarke plasters a cheery smile on her face, nodding rapidly. "Bellamy will take me home, and I'll call you tomorrow. Thanks for the shopping advice!" she steps forward and gives Raven a short hug the other girl barely returns, then steps back toward Bellamy.

He presses his hand into the small of her back, leading her away as Raven stares after them, open-mouthed. When they reach his white Ford pickup truck, she's surprised when he opens the door for her and waits for her to climb inside before slamming it shut violently. But the happy bubble in her chest bursts almost instantly when he climbs into the driver's seat, turns to her, and says, "Start talking, Princess," as he revs the engine.

***

Something in his well-chiseled face makes her want to be honest with him. So, leaning her aching neck against the headrest, she closes her eyes (it's too embarrassing to look directly at him), and tells him everything that happened at Monty's yesterday, along with the conversation she just had with Finn. He swears in all the right places as she speaks.

"What a fucking creep!" he mutters when she's done, hand tightening around the steering wheel as he merges onto the highway.

"I know," Clarke sighs, bracing her back against the passenger side window as she pivots toward him. "But he's Raven's boyfriend, and she's crazy about him. He's been a part of our friend group for a while now, and he's close with Wells, too."

"So?" his tone drips with acid.

"I just - I just don't want to get involved in all that right now, ok? He's obnoxious, yes, but he's harmless. Finn would never hurt me," she drops her fingertips lightly along the top of Bellamy's right
hand, which he's still clenching against his thigh.

She watches the muscle in his jaw relax a fraction.

"You sure you've got it under control?" he asks, turning to her.

The flicker of concern she catches there is soon replaced by something more menacing.

She nods.

"I am. So can you bring me home please?"

Her leg stretches forward, and the paper bag on the floor crinkles noisily.

It catches Bellamy's attention, and he looks down.

"Victoria's Secret? Buying some new lingerie, Princess?"

"What I buy is none of your business," Clarke says immediately, pushing the bag to the side of her right leg, out of his line of vision.

"It is if you wear it for me," Bellamy smirks, turning back to the road.

"Jesus! What the fuck is wrong with you?" Clarke snaps, the anger coming quite suddenly out of the blue. Everything she's wanted to say to him, that's been building up all week, releases in the span of an instant. "I have a boyfriend, and he makes me happy! He's good for me. And everything . . . " she takes a deep breath, "everything that happened this week between us was a mistake. I'm sorry if it hurts you to hear it, but it's the truth! I'll take full responsibility for it, but it's got to stop. You're my tutor. You work for my dad. This needs to be a professional relationship."

Bellamy rolls his lower lip completely over his top one, rocking his head up and down as she talks.

"So you got it all figured out then, is that it, Princess?" he taunts her.

"Yes, I do! And stop calling me that!" Clarke nearly shouts.

"I'll call you whatever the hell I want. You're in my car," he replies evenly, but there's steel undergirding his tone now.

The green road sign is getting closer. Thick, fat letters point toward the right for Santa Monica and toward the left for Inglewood.

"Take me home!" Clarke insists again.

Bellamy rolls his fingers once over the top of the steering wheel, before merging into the left lane.

"No," he says angrily.

She's furious, upset, some tangled web of crazy, conflicting emotions she can't name. So she fumes silently, staring out the window at the dusty road zipping by, watching the small mountains rise in the distance.

"Why are you being like this?" she finally asks, twenty minutes later as they enter his neighborhood.

His eyes glint, and his grin is feral when he turns to her.
"Because you want to try on whatever's in that bag, and you want me to see you in it. You were thinking about me when you bought it."

His statement smacks of truth, and he knows it. It makes her stomach flip over.

"You're as bad as Finn," she spits out, clicking her seatbelt open and trying and failing to open her door, which appears to be locked. She struggles against it to no avail.

But then she feels Bellamy's fingers on the light brown, smooth skin of her knee and goes very still. She can't help but watch them as they edge up her thigh toward the hem of her red sundress.

"I'm not," he says softly, dangerously. "I'm right."

"No," but it comes out as a half-moan as he pushes his hand under the fabric.

"Come on, Clarke," he urges. "Be a badass with me."

Chapter End Notes

I'm not completely sure where this story is going to go and end up, so I can make no promises that it'll all be bright and happy / fun and flirty. But I've added the mildly dubious consent tag to account for that because Bellamy & Clarke have got themselves a love/hate/lust relationship going on, and things might happen or be said that could trigger someone. And I'd rather be safe than sorry, so that's why it's there. So I kindly ask that you read at your own risk from this point forward! I'll do my best to put up warning notes at the top of a chapter if I think that anything crosses the line of open and enthusiastic consent. Thank you all for all the incredible feedback so far - love chatting with you guys!! :)


Clarke bites down hard on her lip and watches Bellamy through half-lidded eyes.

"Bellamy, please," she pleads with him as he unsnaps his seat belt and leans closer to her. She clutches her thighs together, trapping his right hand from moving any further.

He runs the fingertips of his left over the wavy, sweetheart neckline of her sundress instead. It's not low-cut exactly, but her ample breasts fill it out nicely, and he takes a moment to watch them rise and fall rapidly as her breathing quickens.

His scent reminds her of some blend of spicy pine when his lips find the fragile spot right under her ear.

"Spread your legs, Princess," he commands her, murmuring the words a half-inch from her ear.

She shifts the smallest bit, and he resumes stroking languidly up her creamy thigh. Hissing when he traces over the growing damp spot of her panties, she inadvertently opens her thighs more to his probing digits. One thick finger ventures beyond the barrier of flimsy fabric protecting her core, and she gasps when he bumps it along her clit before slipping lower to where moisture pools around her entrance.

"You want this Clarke, don't you?" he urges.

She says nothing more than a strangled "mmphf" caught in her throat as her hips jerk upward. She rubs her thumb into the dip of his bicep then winds a hand into his thick mop of curls. He smiles against her jawbone and deftly removes his finger from her folds.

"Show me what's in the bag," he says, withdrawing to the other side of the truck and leaving her staring at him wide-eyed.

"I can't," she chokingly chokes. "It's personal."

Bellamy scoffs.

"More personal than opening your pretty legs for me? I doubt it."

Her pupils dilate rapidly, swallowing up the fierce blue of her irises. He trails his fingertips up and down her bare arm as the fading sunlight dances patterns across it. She smacks her right hand down on top of the one touching her, but he merely interlocks their fingers. The tan and white blended together looks so reassuring somehow.

"Show me," he repeats.

Seeing there's no point in arguing, she leans forward and picks up her shopping bag, placing it on her lap. Pushing the tissue paper away, she pulls out the purple lingerie set, unsure if she should hold it up like a gameshow host model or toss it at his face and hope it's scratchy. Settling on a compromise, she launches the pieces into his lap.

He grins when he sees the bra, all sheer lace and stretch. Her pulse spikes again when he eyes her chest then looks back at the bra.

"You're going to look good in this."
"Well, you're never going to see it on me, so I guess it doesn't matter," Clarke snaps, finally finding her voice.

"I'm not?" Bellamy feigns surprise.

"No, you're not. Because I do not appreciate being treated like a--"

She startles when his mouth collides with hers, one hand firm around the back of her neck. His lips caress hers for a moment in a softer kiss than she expected, until his tongue juts against her still surprised lips and finds an opening, slipping into her warm, dark mouth. When his hand brushes her calf, she shudders, but he seeks out the lever to adjust her seat with a cracking noise, and then she's falling backward in a rush, and he's tumbling down with her, laughing.

Clarke grasps at the sides of his hunter green T-shirt, nails scraping slightly against his skin as he deepens the kiss, tickling the roof of her mouth before sucking her bottom lip between his teeth. Unsure how it happened exactly, her knees are on either side of his thighs, and her dress has rolled up her thighs far enough to make it obscene. But she rubs the pad of her thumb over the map of freckles near the bridge of his nose and kisses him back. Bellamy shifts his right thigh between both of hers, pulling her up off the seat and into his arms, rolling her hip with his hand until she seeks out the friction provided by his black jeans all on her own, thrashing when the tingling sensation at the base of her spine kicks up again. One of his hands glides to the fleshy part of her ass, and he grips it firmly, squeezing it several times.

At last, he pulls away and sees her lips, swollen and red, and the lust swimming in her eyes.

"Ready to go inside now?" he drops her into her seat where she struggles to pull down her dress.

She swallows audibly but gives him one jerky nod, discovering the interior lock at last and shoving her door open.

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Almost as soon as he turns the key in the lock, Bellamy's hands seek out her body again. He presses against the small of her back and guides her to what must be a guest bedroom down the hall from Octavia's.

"You can change in here," he says simply. "I'll make us some dinner."

"I can what? And you're going to make dinner?!!" she must have fallen into a parallel universe.

But then he closes the small gap between them and tilts her chin up toward him, surging forward then pausing when his lips hover an inch from her own.

"Tell me to stop. Tell me to go to Hell. Tell me to take you home," his words tickle the bottom of her nose and ignite a blaze in her bones.

She reaches for his hand instead, and he clutches onto her fingers.

"Put them on," he nods to the bag she's left on the bed. "There are some spare pajamas in the dresser. Something will fit you. You won't need anything else until tomorrow."

"Bellamy . . . this is . . . This is insane," she manages.

"But you're going to do it anyway, right?" he smirks.
"Yeah," she breathes.

"Good girl," he kisses her hairline then leaves the room.

And that was how she found herself staring into the Blakes' hall bathroom mirror wearing a brand new lingerie set covered by a floppy, white, extra large shirt. It almost reaches the middle of her thigh. But not quite. Clarke rubs her palms over her cheeks and smoothes her pinkies against her closed eyelids.

This is happening. This is actually real.

I'm going to have sex with Bellamy Blake.
Clarke's last bits of self-control slip away as she agrees to spend some time at Bellamy's house.

I hope to be able to continue this soon, but things will be a bit busy in the coming weeks. Anyway, feel free to leave thoughts/ideas/reactions etc. below. I promise to get to them as soon as I can. And know that I'll do my best to still update regularly. Thanks, guys! :0)

With every barefooted step Clarke takes nearer the kitchen, her heart bangs more violently against her ribcage. Before she rounds the corner into the mocha-and-cafe colored cooking nook, she digs her fingernails into her palms and takes a few deep breaths.

The mouthwatering aroma of sizzling eggs is almost as much of a shock as Bellamy standing in front of the stove dropping bits of diced vegetables into the pan.

"You were serious. You're actually cooking," Clarke says, unable to keep the surprise from infusing her voice.

"I said I would, didn't I?" he shrugs, attention totally wrapped up in gracefully flipping the omelet over with a neon orange spatula. "I've been cooking for Octavia since she was a kid. Mom worked a lot of late nights at the office."

She doesn't know exactly how to respond to that. But she doesn't have long to ponder the issue anyway.

His face suddenly and mysteriously lights up when he turns and takes in the sight of her. His laughter fills the small space as he shakes his head, lines crinkling around his mouth and eyes.

"What's so funny?" she questions warily, tugging at the edge of the shirt self-consciously.

"You are, Princess. You remind me of one of those ghost Halloween costumes where the kid takes a sheet and cuts out holes for their eyes and arms. Only you would put the lingerie on and then completely cover it up and defeat the purpose."

Clarke rolls her eyes.

"Nobody eats in their bra, Bellamy," she scoffs.

"I wouldn't have minded if you did," he returns.

Yet he continues to smile at her. It's like an injection of serotonin straight into her bloodstream, despite her best efforts to be offended. Her whole body seems to flush under his roving gaze.
All at once, he abandons the eggs and moves swiftly toward her, trapping her between his formidable body and the edge of the counter. Their eyes remain locked as his hands grip the backs of her thighs and haul her against the hard lines of his torso. Though she expects the kiss this time, it's more insistent and possessive than before. He thrusts his tongue into her mouth without preamble and slips a hand beneath the baggy shirt, riding up her stomach and landing securely on her lace-covered breast.

"Just wanted to be sure you weren't holding out on me," he hums the words against her ear before drawing away, leaving her gasping for air.

He resumes flipping the omelet like nothing happened while she stares, trying to remember to blink.

"Is there anything I can do to help?" she manages at last, tapping her foot against the creamy white linoleum to release some nervous energy.

"You can get some silverware out of that drawer next to you," he replies, grabbing four slices of toast as they pop up and placing them on two plates, one already boasting a perfectly rolled omelet, beside him on the counter. "There's fruit on the table and water, milk, and orange juice. Help yourself. I haven't been to the store in a few days, so I don't have a lot of drink options, sorry."

"No, this is great," she says lightly, taking in the assortment of mixed berries he's placed on the table with appreciation. "Thank you."

"What? Does Wells never cook for you?" Bellamy's voice is muffled as he rifles around in the refrigerator, pulling out margarine and jelly. But she still catches the touch of sarcasm in it.

Clarke feels like she took a punch right in her gut.

"He, uh, he just started cooking recently. He likes to play around with recipes," she sits down and scoops berries into her dish, refusing to meet his eyes which she can sense on her.

"But?"

"No, he's never made me anything."

"Sounds like a real Prince Charming," Bellamy turns off the stove and flips the second omelet onto the nearby plate. He manages to expertly carry both dishes, along with the margarine container and jelly jar, to the table without dropping a thing.

She narrows her eyes at him for a moment, but he avoids this entirely by sitting down abruptly and digging into his steaming plate.

"He's never really touched me," the words fall from her lips as she's buttering her toast a minute later.

Bellamy's fork hitting his white-and-blue checkered plate is her first indication that this is newsworthy information.

"I don't think I heard that right," a slow smile curls across his full lips. He reaches under the table and pulls her left leg into his lap, massaging her calf gently.

"You're telling me you never slept with Wells? Not once?"

Clarke slips down in her seat a little as Bellamy gets a better grip on her leg. Tiny, tingling sensations are pulsing all across the vicinity of her pelvis as she forces herself to look into his dark eyes.
"No," she says in a hushed whisper.

She feels his dick twitch against the heel of her foot.

"All right, Princess. We'll go slow then."

Clarke swallows firmly, bobbing her head.

"But we'll still . . . ? You still want to?" she hesitates.

"Yeah, baby. I'm still going to fuck you this weekend," he rubs his thumb over her forearm in a briefly comforting gesture.

Her core muscles contract at the words. She's suddenly thankful to be wearing the shirt as a small gush of fluid seeps out onto her panties. Unable to help it, she pushes her foot against his hardening length, desperate to feel him however she can. He catches it with one hand and squeezes it slowly.

"Easy," he warns. "I promise we'll have plenty of time for that later. Now eat your dinner."

The dishwasher door is barely closed before Clarke finds herself scooped up into Bellamy's arms, laughing and shrieking and half-protesting for him to put her down as he walks them easily into the living room as if she weighed nothing at all.

"Your wish is my command, Princess," he croons in her ear, letting her fall into the center of his incredibly luxurious black sectional sofa.

She laces her fingers into his unruly curls, yanking his face to hers, eager to lick the raspberry flavor from his mouth. Her legs fall open naturally for him as he climbs between them, sucking along the column of her neck and barely breaking the skin with his teeth when she tugs his hair too harshly.

"Take. This. Off," she huffs, pulling at his sun-kissed cotton shirt.

He pulls back from her for a moment to yank it over his head and chuck it onto the floor. She lets her hands glide up toned abs to his chest, pressing her hands into the small hollows there and touching resilient muscle.

"I want to touch you," he rasps, breathing heavier as his hips thrust against her purple panties.

She knows his fingers may leave light purple-blue bruises against her pale skin in the morning when he grips her waist tightly, but she finds she doesn't care. She raises her arms up when he begins to pull at her long T-shirt but still tenses when she hears the fabric hit the floor.

Covering her thinly clad breasts by folding an arm across her chest, she struggles to sit up. She wedges her back against the side of the sofa before drawing her knees to her chest. The action effectively shields her bra from his view.

"What are you doing, Princess?" Bellamy's blown pupils widen farther as her motion knocks him backward several inches.

"It's too sheer," she admits, wildly nervous.

No man has ever seen her exposed breasts before. Wells has felt them a few times though her bra, but that's been the extent of it. That coupled with the fact that she'd never felt Bellamy grow as hard and long before now, before he'd thrust against her lying half-naked below him, her hair billowing out in rippling waves, has her second-guessing herself. This is all quickly becoming very real.
"I think that's the point," Bellamy smirks at her, and she swears his freckles jump.

He leans in on his knees and presses a kiss along her cheek.

"Let me see your gorgeous tits, Clarke."

Latching a hand around each of her ankles, he pulls them up and over his hips. He bends over her petite frame, mildly closing his thumb and index finger around her wrist to pull her arm away.

At last, her rosy nipples and the creamy swell of her large breasts are mostly exposed to him through the delicate, flowery lace. Bellamy drops a hand right up against her right breast, toying with her nipple with the pad of his thumb, watching her areola pucker from the stimulation.

"Bellamy," she bucks her hips against him, arching her back off the couch.

He smiles a little, lavishing the same attention on her other nipple before running a hand down her side and cupping her pussy, leaving a trail of goose bumps in his wake.

"Are you on the pill, Clarke?" he asks darkly as he presses against the button until she squirms.

"No," he can make out the hint of fear in her stunning blue eyes.

It tugs at something within him.

"It's all right, baby," he says soothingly, bending forward and kissing her mouth chastely as his fingers continue to rub her swelling clit unceasingly through her panties.

"You don't want to get pregnant though, right?" he adds it casually like it's an afterthought two minutes later.

"No, I can't!" something snaps in place in Clarke's brain despite her rolling hips as she meets Bellamy's open gaze urgently.

He tenderly pinches the very thin layer of fat below her belly button.

"A friend of mine works at a health clinic nearby. We can go tomorrow, and he'll put you on the pill," he says calmly, beginning to flick her clit from side to side while dipping a hand between her glistening breasts, prodding against them until they jiggle and shake.

In a dim part of her over-stimulated brain, Clarke knows he's driving her crazy on purpose and digs her knees into his hips as she feels a wave of heat build far within.

"Then I can come deep inside you. Would you like that, Princess?" he rasps just as he pushes a thick finger inside her.

The walls of her pussy clench and convulse as his ever-present thumb on her clit stretches her orgasm before making it pulse in a true crescendo.

"Yes," she moans out, scratching her nails along the bits of his bronze biceps and shoulders that she can reach.

"Good. I want that, too," he murmurs against her neck before offering her one more kiss. "But there's no reason we can't have fun while we wait."
This is probably a good place to add the disclaimer/reminder that this story is fiction. I am not a doctor, nor are the characters, most especially Bellarke. So please, please, please do not base any of your own important birth control decisions on what goes on in this story or any other story - fan fiction or regular fiction - that you read!! Always consult with your own doctors for your medical needs and unique situations. Also, if Clarke visits a clinic at some point in this story (which is likely), I'll probably use the most commonly accepted and shared information about the effectiveness of birth control pills / when they start working from accredited medical sources. I realize there are many, many varieties of birth control out there as well as various timetables for when they kick in and some conflicting reports about how effective they are / which is best to use, etc. I apologize in advance if whatever I write isn't exactly like what your OB-GYN has told you / what you've come to know about birth control. Once again, this is fiction, so absolutely don't take it as gospel truth! And now that I have managed to sound like a commercial for prescription drugs, thank you very much for reading!
The First Time

The first thing Clarke notices about Bellamy's bed is that it's surprisingly springy. She bounces a couple inches into the air when he drops her onto it, causing the mattress to creak.

He stands at the edge of the blue blankets, watching her face intently as he casually unbuttons his pants and kicks them off. The air conditioner hums as it clicks on, and goosebumps prickle up along Clarke's arms and legs when he doesn't move any closer. Dryness coats the insides of her mouth as she takes in the sight of his erection straining slightly against the cloth of his navy blue boxers.

He catches where she's looking and grins.

"Still good, Princess?" he raises an eyebrow at her.

Clarke nods, not trusting her ability to form coherent words.

Then Bellamy's climbing onto the bed after her. He pauses about a foot away from her face, bearing his weight on his clenched fists, which sink into the comforter on either side of her thighs. A shiver runs up her spine, and she's not sure if it's from the cold air blowing in the room or the way Bellamy's eyes have darkened considerably.

He rocks forward on his hands, making the muscles of his arm bulge and move, and peppers a kiss onto her lips. When she tries and fails to capture his bottom lip between her teeth because he's already drawing back, he chuckles, stroking her face.

"You're going to be fun, aren't you?"

Clarke bites her lip, shrugging slightly, as his gaze drifts down to her hardening nipples and lower still to the sweet yellow flowers blooming between her legs. He reminds her of a cheetah she saw once in some Discovery Channel documentary, stalking an antelope on the African savanna, all rippling muscle and concentrated attention. His look is ravenous as he creeps closer to her, and she backs her way toward the headboard, into his squashy pillows.

"Nowhere to run now," Bellamy sings the words against her jaw, nose nudging her cheek and then
the side of her neck.

She giggles at the sensation, squirming away a little as the mild stubble of his cheek tickles her.

Bellamy grins at her, and for a moment when their eyes lock, she sees something unexpectedly soft flicker across his face.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing," she sighs, still smiling.

"Nothing, huh?"

Then he's gripping her hips and tugging her down the bed firmly underneath him, leaving her gasping. His lips move to the pulse point of her neck, and she latches her fingers into his hair, holding him there. His hand is a large, warm presence ghosting down the outside of her thigh to her knee, petting it steadily until she opens her legs for him.

Bellamy moves between them and kisses her fully, stroking at her velvety tongue with his own. Clarke moans into his mouth when his fingers find the dampness pooling around her entrance again. He draws slow circles around and around the incredibly sensitive skin below her clit, pushing the fabric inward until it puckers. When the tip of his thumb nail flicks up the side of her clit, she bucks against him, and he presses the heel of his hand against her hip bone, steadying her.

"Easy, easy," he murmurs into her honey vanilla hair.

He unclasps her bra like an expert, slipping it off her shoulders and letting it fall to the floor. Clarke's breathing heavily by the time his hands close upon her breasts at last, kneading and pushing the ample flesh together. His hands are strong and firm; they walk right up to the line of pain but remain on the side of spasming pleasure. She turns her head against his pillow. It smells like him - pine and musk. A flush traces its way up her cheeks like a winding river when his mouth closes around one nipple, tonguing it rapidly to a stiff peak.

"Don't be embarrassed, Princess," he lifts his shaggy head and watches her through the dark hair that falls into his eyes.
Without warning, two of his thick fingers push away her panties and slide straight into her as deep as they’ll go. He swirls them around for effect before pulling them out, and she can hear the faint squish of it. She turns redder still.

"You like it. See?" he brings his fingers closer to her face, so she can behold the sticky wetness coating them. He leaves his fingers hovering against her mouth until she opens it for him, sucking them in and tasting the tangy flavor of herself.

"There you go," he hums to her before resuming his attentions to her breasts and rolling his hips slowly against hers.

She hisses at the friction, her body feeling more and more like a heating coil about to snap. She grips his shoulders before smoothing her hands along the expansive muscles of his back.

"Oh God," she moans when he ruts against her with more force.

Bellamy bites the rounded underside of her breast, and she whimpers. So he thrusts a knee between her thighs, giving her something to bear down on while he repeats the action on the other breast. She tilts her pelvis up, desperate to feel anything hard against the swelling hood of her sex. When his fingers wrap around the elastic, purple waistband of her panties, she lifts her ass up, allowing him to pull them down. And then he's kissing her again more sloppily than before, his erection rubbing against the bottom of her stomach as he grows more careless with holding himself off of her.

"Are you ready for me, Clarke?" his voice is deep like tires sliding over crunching gravel when she kisses the dimple in the middle of his chin before laying her lips on the small, jagged scar by the side of his mouth.

She doesn't know the story behind it yet, but she wants to learn it by heart.

"Yeah," she moans as he starts teasing her clit once more, rolling it from side to side. "I'm ready."

"I don't know," he trails off, reaching for her hand and placing it along his dick, still hidden from her view. "I might be, uh, difficult to take."
She swallows audibly.

When he shucks off his boxers, she can't look away. He's long and relatively thick - not that she has much to compare him to - but she'd given Wells a hand job a couple times in his pool house when no one else was home.

"Will it fit?" she gazes up into his face, her eyes wide and earnest.

"You'll stretch, and then it will," Bellamy replies, caressing her cheek with his thumb. "I'll go slow . . . at least at first."

Clarke sits up fully and scoots closer to him, reaching out a hand toward the base of his shaft before stroking upward. Bellamy hisses as she repeats the motion several times, lets his head fall back and his eyes shut. He shudders when she licks the bit of precum off the tip hesitantly, staring up into his eyes when they open again like she's stepped over an invisible line.

"Fuck, Clarke. I need to be inside you," he growls.

And then she's flat on her back once more, and he's pushing things around in his drawer before dragging out a condom. He rips it open and smooths it over his dick, panting above her when she scrapes her nails across his abdomen.

When he nudges against her hood with the tip of his dick, she rolls against him, and he smirks. He catches her wrists up in one hand and pulls them over her head.

"What are you doing?" she gasps, strugglingly slightly.

"Shhh, it's all right," he reassures her. "It won't be for long."

He brings three fingers to her entrance and works them into her as she clenches her teeth. He was right - she's incredibly tight. But at least this way she won't claw or shove him as he pushes her body past the hurdle it'll have to clear to accommodate him. Once he's got them slipped inside her a little past the second knuckle, he curls his fingers in a come hither motion repeatedly until she's positively squirming beneath him, and he has to hold her down harder.
"You're doing good, Princess," he encourages her, sliding his fingers out. "I have to get you ready for my cock, ok?"

He uses his now free hand to jiggle her breasts, watching them shake as her clit thrums with the full force of her heartbeat. She knows it's pointless to try to break his hold - he's much stronger than her - but she still finds herself twitching intensely when he squeezes her nipples into gumdrops. The action ignites a strong reaction in her pussy, but it clenches around air.

A minute later, Bellamy plays with her opening once more. Finally satisfied by the slippery fluids there, he lines himself up and carefully pushes the bulbous head of his dick past her opening, seemingly fascinated by the way it disappears inside her.

"So damn tight," he mutters lowly, releasing her wrists, which suddenly tingle as the blood rushes back into them.

"Ahhh," the sound tears from Clarke's throat of its own accord.

She steadies her sweaty palms on the side of his upper arms as he thrusts a little farther into her, feeling her hymen. He watches her suck air into her lungs at the invasion. He knows he's thick, figures she can probably feel the veins of him, his girth demanding her pussy stretch and let him in.

"All right, Princess. This is going to sting a bit."
"Ahhh," Clarke forgets how to breathe as Bellamy snaps his hips against hers in one smooth motion, tearing through her flimsy barrier.

Her fingers dig into the hard bone where his arms meet his torso, her electric blue eyes widening at the sensation of being so completely full.

"Shhh," Bellamy whispers, resting on an elbow as he pets her heated collarbone. "You're ok."

Everything in him wants to thrust into her inviting warm tightness, but he knows she needs time to adjust.

He pulls back cleanly, already feeling her walls working to expel him, and is ready to suck her whimper into his mouth when he rocks into her again, a little deeper this time.

"You ok?" he dips his hand down to fondle her breast before sliding it lower to where their bodies are joined.

Clarke spasms when he runs his pointer finger over her engorged clit. He taps on it casually, smiling when her walls give the tiniest fraction around him.

"Yeah," Clarke sighs, tilting her hips upward experimentally.

Bellamy kisses the corner of her mouth while she rubs her hand up and down his taut right side.

"I need you to breathe, Princess," he laces the words into her hairline as he plays with her puffy nipple. "And relax a little. Let me slip between your pretty legs, ok?"

Clarke nods just barely to acknowledge she heard him. For a moment, he rests his forehead against hers. She senses him twitching inside of her when she brushes her lips against his rougher ones.
Suddenly, with no warning, it seems like Bellamy is absolutely everywhere. His musky scent fills her nose as small droplets of his sweat fall onto her pale stomach. His broad shoulders dance and shimmer in front of her eyes, while he drives deep into her at a steady, relentless pace.

"Bell . . . Bell . . . Bell," is all she can manage to chant in time to his thrusts.

It's like she's soaring upward toward the edge of something she can't see or grasp onto. Warmth rushes through her hips and seeps into her spine. Everything feels tighter, especially when she moves against him.

At last, her own hips thrust up to meet his, and she finds a natural rhythm without much difficulty. But what surprises her is how her pussy seems to grip at him, catching him and keeping him locked inside her even when he tries to withdraw.

"You're already clutching at me," he grunts, slipping a large hand behind the small of her back and angling her hips up as he pulls out of her. "Such a good, eager girl."

At this angle, she can see the reddened head of his dick nudge at her folds. He seems to find all the areas that make her shudder in anticipation of what's to come.

"Ooooh," Clarke moans when his erection plows into her once more, rubbing against the spongy tissue buried within her. "There."

"You like that, Princess?" Bellamy huffs, channeling his efforts toward running over the area as many times as possible, relishing the way her hips fall open wider as he slips quick, tight circles around her nub with his fingers.

"Yes. Yes, yes, yes," Clarke pads a thumb against his freckles.

The sight of her trembling breasts and hazy blue eyes is almost too much for him. He leans over her body, slipping his tongue into her panting mouth with the same relentless energy that he's using to drive into her pussy.

"I want you to come on my cock. Can you do that for me?" he asks, gripping her ass as he thrusts against her, faster this time.
Clarke can feel every nerve ending in her body, plus the pulse and twitch of his cock as it tunnels farther into her. Her eyes roll up a little as her back muscles surrender to the endless, building pressure between her thighs. Bellamy plays with her clit mercilessly, flicking it back and forth and lifting the hood to make sure to press against the exposed, delicate nub beneath.

"Bellamy!"

He's kneading her breast, digging each finger into the enlarged mound, when she comes at last. Her wetness propels him onward, and he thrusts harder still as she swipes his sweaty bangs out of his eyes with trembling fingers. His own orgasm comes shortly after. She knows he's swelling within her and juts her chin out when his teeth sink lightly into the flesh of her shoulder. Then he collapses on top of her, panting. Clarke weaves her weary legs between his and slips her arms around his waist. The innocent gesture startles him.

The sun has fully set now, leaving the room in heavy shadow. A wave of air escapes Clarke's clenched teeth when he pulls out of her, rising up so he can dispose of the condom. She's pretty sure she may never move properly again. All her limbs feel incredibly heavy, her clit is still spasming, and her leg muscles twitch involuntarily.

She vaguely recognizes Bellamy pulling down the comforter and fluffing up the pillows when her eyes flutter open.

"You did good, Princess," he offers.

"Better than you expected?" she manages cheekily.

She laughs when he purses his lips at her like he's eaten something sour. Clarke reaches out a lazy hand to him - how did he get his boxers on so fast she wonders - and he squeezes it once before running his scratchy palm across her glistening hip.

"You can sleep here tonight," he tells her simply. "It's late."

She crawls under the fluffy covers, burrowing her nose into the pale blue pillow that carries his scent. It's a struggle to loop her arms into the brown shirt he passes her - one of his own, she realizes - but she manages.
Then he moves toward the door, but she makes a noise somewhere between clucking and a whine.

"No. Stay," she insists, blinking at him as she props herself up on her elbow.

He hesitates in the doorway, one foot already in the hall. The low flicker of light from the heart of the house throws his wild, dark hair into stark relief. But she can't make out his expression.

"Please, Bell?" she pleads, jutting her bottom lip out.

The rough edge of his chuckle sends a tremor down her spine.

"You're a very demanding Princess, aren't you?" he asks as the base of the bed sags down with his weight.

He doesn't climb under the blankets next to her, but rather sits against the headboard with his legs draped out in front of him while Clarke rests her tired head against his hip. Her blonde hair coasts through his fingers like silken ribbons, and he plays with it until her breathing evens out into the peaceful promise of sleep.
In the Trees

Chapter Summary

Some sunshine and butterflies/domestic fluff for a brief interlude. Don't get too used to it though . . .

When Clarke eyes crack open again, gray light is filtering through the gaps in wooden blinds she doesn't recognize. Her body tenses for several moments before she remembers she's at Bellamy's house. In his room. Tucked around his pillow.

Although she's warm and comfortable nestled under his sheets, there's a distinct cool, empty spot where his body should be. She runs her hand across the wide expanse, sensing the blood coursing into her face when she registers the dull ache between her thighs.

She shoots up quickly enough for her head to spin, tugging back the blankets and examining the fitted sheet - pulled tight as a drum across the mattress - carefully.

But there's . . . nothing there.

No dark burgundy stains to make her want to escape out the window and enter the Witness Protection Program.

No evidence anything special happened at all.

When she steps into the hallway, the sounds of closing drawers and clanging metal lure her toward the kitchen. She frowns when she notices the crumpled afghan half-hanging off the couch. A few moments later, her fingers clutch at the wood paneling connecting the kitchen with the living room via a narrow corridor. One quick peek shows her Bellamy's dressed and showered already, too, if his slicked-back hair is any indication. It hasn't started to curl yet. He's leaning over the counter, mixing what appear to be chocolate chips into a bowl full of batter.

"Hi," she says softly," bracing herself against the wall for the physical and moral support.

Bellamy startles, but quickly recovers himself.
"Hey," he gives her a half-smile. "You like pancakes?"

"Isn't it a little late to be asking that?" she jokes, walking into the space and stopping near enough to him that she can see into the bowl of batter.

"Better late than never," comes his winning retort. "These'll be ready in a few minutes. You can use the guest shower if you want," he jerks his head toward the front of the house. "I think Octavia left some toothbrushes and . . . girly bath products in there for when her friends stay over."

"Girly bath products? Like with sparkly unicorns and rainbow teddy bears on them?" she asks with the best wide eyes and earnest high-pitched lisp she can pull off.

He scoffs, swatting at her ass with the yet-unused spatula, while she jumps out of the way, laughing.

***

"Were you serious about what you said yesterday?" Clarke asks him, her fork full of the last bite of fluffy pancake.

"Which part?" he smirks at her. "I think I said a lot of things."

"About going to the clinic?" she asks quietly, eyes glued to her fork. She hates how her voice cracks on the word.

Bellamy cocks his head to the side, eyeing her suspiciously.

She knows her ears are flaming, wonders if he can hear her pounding heartbeat. But she still can't look up.

"I know someone who works there, yeah. Why?"
"It's just," Clarke lets her fork drop to the plate with a satisfying clatter. "I can never go anywhere in the hospital where I'm not Abby Griffin's daughter, you know? And I didn't want half the staff gossiping about what me and-- about the wild sex they think I'm having."

His smile is all teeth now.

"You're planning on having wild sex, Princess?"

Oh God. This is turning out even worse than she'd imagined.

"No! No, that's not - I didn't mean - I would never assume you -"  

"Oh, that's a whole different thing," Bellamy cuts in, leaning back in his chair and stretching his arms behind him, so his hands cradle the back of his head.

She tries not to watch where his T-shirt rides up, exposing a couple inches of perfectly tan skin.

"You thought you'd be having the wild sex with me?"

Clarke quite literally resembles a deer trapped in headlines as she starts shaking her head wordlessly, mouth slightly parted.

"I, uh, I-I, n-no, I . . . "

"Calm down. You'll give yourself a stroke. I'll take you," he says easily, grabbing her plate and placing it on top of his own before heading to the sink.

***

They don't make it very far. Almost as soon as they set foot on Bellamy's driveway, a little girl with flaming red pigtails sprints at him and wraps herself around his leg.
"What's up Clara?" he pats the side of her head and smiles so widely Clarke hears her breath catch.

"Huxley got the kite stuck in the tree," she points upward into a neighboring gum tree, where, it's true, a kite shaped like a dragon is wedged between some low-hanging branches. "Can you get it down, Bell-ah-mee?" she sings sweetly.

He sighs, shrugs, and rolls his eyes exaggeratedly, gazing down at Clara for a few long seconds before conceding, "I guess so" at last, winking at the child.

Clara claps and bounces in her purple sandals like a Mexican jumping bean, looking delighted. "Yay!" she yells.

"Where's your brother?" Bellamy asks, shading his eyes with his hand as he stares into the neighbor's front yard.

But then an older boy of about eight appears from behind the wide tree trunk looking sheepish.

"I'm here. Hi Bell," he says, walking over.

"Playing with the kite after your mom told you not to, huh?" Bellamy ruffles Huxley's thick, auburn locks when he gets close enough.

"Yeah," he kicks up a clump of dirt with his shoe. "I tried to get it down, but I'm too short."

"It's all right. I'll get it down for you," Bellamy says.

But Huxley and Clara are staring at Clarke, as if they've just taken notice of the stranger who's smiling nervously at them.

"Who are you?" Clara asks, while Huxley elbows her in the ribs, hissing "That's rude!"

"Hi, I'm Clarke," Clarke crouches down in front of her, holding out a hand for the little girl to shake.
She does, then immediately turns her heart-shaped face up to Bellamy to announce, "She's pretty."

Bellamy gives Clarke a once over as if pausing to consider it. It makes a rush of heat pulse through her body.

"Yeah, and she's smart," he bends down near Clara's face and whispers conspiratorially, "She even paints," as if he's sharing national intelligence secrets.

Clara beams at Clarke.

"Can you do face paint like at Bailey's party? I had a star and a pony and a flower--"

"She doesn't know who Bailey is, Clara!" Huxley cuts in abruptly. "Sorry," he mutters to Clarke.

"It's ok," she grins at him, before turning her attention back to Clara. "Sure, one day I can do face paints for you."

And that's all it takes for Clara to start careening around the Blakes' front yard, tumbling in half-cartwheels and singing some truly imaginative rendition of "Let It Go" at the top of her lungs that seems to end with, "paint never bothered me anyway."

Bellamy's casual touch on her hip pulls Clarke's attention back to him.

"O and I babysit for them sometimes," he explains. "They're good kids. I'll, uh, go get that kite down, and then we'll head out?" he stands waiting for her reply, dropping his hand.

She bites her lip, watching the way a sunbeam lands on one of the curls across his forehead, burnishing it a chocolate brown.

There only seems to be one response to his offer.
"Ok."
"You were really good with them," Clarke says as he drives them down the curving road toward town.

Bellamy shrugs.

"I've known them for years. And Octavia does a pretty good job of keeping them entertained when she's around. Dressing up in costumes and having sword fights and all that kind of stuff. She even rigged up the old Mario Kart for them to play until they started kicking her ass," he laughs.

Clarke smiles warmly at the spark of fondness in his eyes.

"You probably try to bore them to death reading about the Roman government," she teases, hitting his upper arm gently.

For a second his mouth pulls together in a frown, but then he smirks as he glances over at her.

"The bubonic plague is much more their speed. All the rats and sores and gangrene," he says drily. "Massive death waves sweeping across Europe make for better bedtime stories, Princess."

***

"We can't go anywhere associated with the hospital!" Clarke says urgently for the third time as Bellamy passes a slow-moving SUV in the right lane.

"So you keep telling me," he returns, landing his hand on her knee and inching it up her leg with deliberate slowness. "We have to protect your perfect reputation."

"I'm not perfect," Clarke grumbles.

And instead of swatting his hand away, she allows her legs to drift apart under the red sundress she's put back on as if to prove the point.
Bellamy says nothing, just leaves one hand on the wheel and the other to press easy patterns on the inside of her thigh, creeping steadily higher and hitching up the fabric as he goes. But a panicked protest escapes her when they're a few hundred yards away from pulling alongside an eighteen wheeler.

"Move your hand. He'll see!" she hisses, attempting to pull down her bunched dress.

"It wouldn't be that scandalous," he argues back. "It's not like he's got a front row seat of you in your special bra."

He draws back his hand and trails it over her neckline instead before dipping his fingers lower across the swell of her well-rounded breasts. She gasps at the unexpected touch. It's like her skin burns beneath his hands, a zinging sensation traveling straight to her nipples. She hates how responsive she is to him, every nerve ending electrified.

"Don't worry, Princess," he brings both hands back to the steering wheel and gives her a roguish grin. "I know that one's just for me."

***

The clinic is painted a sunshine yellow, and the waiting room only contains a handful of people when they arrive.

"So which doctor do you know here?" Clarke asks nervously as they sit on a bench near a mounted flatscreen TV playing a rerun of Dr. Phil complete with the dramatic banner headline, "When Husbands Cheat and Lie."

"Dr. Jackson," Bellamy says vaguely, only half-engaged with the conversation.

He's scrolling through the emails on his phone with his thumb. His other hand is back to resting on her thigh, but more appropriately this time. "My friend I work with at the bar, Miller, he knows him."

Clarke's about to ask another question, but the door swings open, and a nurse steps out calling,
"Clarke Griffin?" too loudly. She scrambles up and hurries through the door into the hallway beyond, barely acknowledging the nurse in her haste.

Dr. Jackson is kind and friendly with reassuring brown eyes and an ability to explain complex things in laymen’s terms.

"Ok, Clarke," he says as he finishes her exam. "I'm going to prescribe the combination pill for you, which has the hormones estrogen and progestin in it. Since," he checks the digital record containing her background information he just finished entering on his computer screen, "it's been more than five days since your last period began, you won't be protected from pregnancy until seven days after you first start taking the pill. So if you're sexually active in the next week, you'll need to use backup protection like a condom to be safe, understand?"

Clarke nods, "Yes, that makes sense."

"Good," he smiles. "You'll need to take the pill at the same time every day for maximum effectiveness. And if you experience any of the side effects we talked about like blurred vision, abdominal pain, unexplained skin rash or severe mood swings, call our office immediately."

She nods again. "I will."

"Excellent. Well then," he shakes her hand. "It was a pleasure meeting you, and I hope you have a nice summer. Maya will see to it that your prescription is sent to your pharmacy," he gestures toward the young, dark-haired nurse. "Take care."

Once he's gone, Clarke pulls the cloth gown more snuggly around her body as Maya starts giving her information about how to fill her prescription.

***

Clarke's full of nervous energy as she walks the aisles at CVS, running her fingers over the edges of little girls' hair bows, greeting cards, and bottles of shampoo. A photo of the Golden State Warriors celebrating their NBA win on the cover of a sports magazine brings her mind crashing back to Wells. A wave of guilty unease passes through her.

She pulls out her phone and opens up her messages app. Her thumbs hover over the blinking black
line. But what the hell is she supposed to say?

*Hi Wells, how's British life? I know this isn't the kind of thing you text, but if I don't confess it, I'm going to explode. I had sex with my ridiculously attractive tutor, and I'm sick with guilt because you never did anything to deserve this.*

Or maybe:

*Hi Wells, London sounds amazing! I don't even know how it happened, but I slept with my dad's TA. So don't waste one minute missing me or feeling bad about me not being there. Because I hate myself for what I've done to you and don't deserve you. I don't know how I'll ever be able to look you in the eye again. I'm literally the worst human alive.*

Even a less dramatic version of the truth sounded awful:

*Hi Wells, I know you've been my best friend and person for as long as I can remember. And I adore you so much, you know that. I'm terrified to tell you this, but I met a guy I'm so drawn to that it scares me. I never wanted to hurt you, but I know I already did . . .*

She never wrote any of them. She flipped to her mail app instead and saw Wells had already sent her a note earlier that morning.

*Hey Baby,*

*I can't wait to talk to you tomorrow! I hope you're having an amazing birthday weekend so far!*

*But I think I need to give you a little head's up about what's going on here, so you're not caught off guard tomorrow when your parents call. Ok, so . . . Take a deep breath and try not to be mad. Promise?*

*Your mom and my dad were invited by the symposium leaders to stay here longer and go on a tour of the country's major hospitals. The people running this circus are from St. George's, which is one of the largest teaching hospitals in the U.K. It's supposed to have a big trauma center and specialize in neurology and cutting-edge labor and delivery practices or something like that. I just know dad got really excited when he heard their offer.*
I think they're going to accept. And if they do, we won't be coming back until the second week of August. But dad hasn't talked to Governor Wallace yet - I think Cage is speaking on Monday - so everything's still up in the air. I'm going to see if they'll let me come home sooner, but you know how they are.

I'm so, so sorry about this! You know how much I would rather be there with you. I can't wait until we're in college together on the East Coast and can do what we want when we want. Just think - we will be THREE TIME ZONES AWAY!! I should know more tomorrow when we Skype.

Love you,

Wells

Clarke's hand shakes slightly as she finishes the message. It shouldn't bother her so much, but she can't help it. She feels, well . . . abandoned. As stupid as that might be.

Bellamy's not where she left him in the pharmacy waiting area. Instead, he's slouched over at the edge of the "family planning" aisle nearby examining some black-and-purple packages that claim to "extend pleasure," so you can "last longer" and "stay in the moment."

She flushes despite herself but takes a deep breath and taps him hard on the shoulder with her pointer finger.

"What!" he spins around fast. "Jesus, Clarke! Don't do that!" he rakes a hand through his hair then scrubs the back of his neck, eyeing her more closely.

"What's wrong?"

She doesn't trust herself to speak, so she just thrusts her cell phone, still open to Wells' email, into his hand. When he finishes reading it, he looks back up at her, face impassable.

"That kind of sucks," he admits.

"Yeah," she pulls her hair to one side of her neck and weaves it into a loose braid that starts to
"Hey," he runs a finger against her pouted bottom lip, and a tiny shock sparks in her chest.

Clarke glances up at him from under her lashes.

"When's your official birthday?"

"Tomorrow," Clarke answers.

"And are you doing something tomorrow?"

Clarke looks toward the white-coated pharmacists dutifully shifting pill bottles around on crowded shelves and talking to patients on the phone.

"Not really. Some of my friends are away, so we're getting together next Saturday to celebrate instead."

Bellamy appears to be weighing things over as he gives a slow jolt of his head.

"All right, Princess. I have a shift at Mecha this afternoon, and my coworker Murphy is kind of a dick. But, if you don't mind constant biting sarcasm, you can come."

Clarke launches herself at him, wrapping her arms around his neck before she can think too much about it. It takes him a moment to secure an arm around her waist in response. When she pulls back, her cheeks are pink with embarrassment.

"Calm down," Bellamy says gruffly. "It's an old bar with sticky floors that smells like stale beer. Not exactly Buckingham Palace."

She can't be sure, but she thinks he looks a little smug.
Mecha

Bellamy's right. Mecha is an older bar on the outskirts of downtown L.A. with floors the soles of her sandals cling to like velcro. The faint smell of beer permeates the air, even though it's afternoon, and most customers are tucked away in booths eating sandwiches.

But she likes it. It's got this vibe that reminds her of the old Cheers reruns her dad used to watch when she was little. Stained glass designs made up of brightly colored shapes wedged together hang in some of the windows. Plus, the booths are made from a sort of forest green vinyl, and she actually spies a woman snacking on a burger and milkshake served in a tall, frothy glass as she walks by.

Unfortunately, a bartender with slicked-back brown hair and a shrewd, angular face kills her high as soon as she approaches the bar a step behind Bellamy.

"So the Rebel King's got himself a new conquest, huh?" his wide smirk stretches almost up to his piercing blue eyes as he looks from Bellamy to Clarke. "Found another sorority girl at the latest keg party, Blake?" he taunts.

Clarke's skin prickles unpleasantly as the guy examines her appraisingly.

"Guess the only question is are you the fair maiden in distress type or the town wench who likes to keep her options open?" he pauses from scrubbing down the counter with a rag.

She's too shocked to have any idea what to say, but it doesn't stop her face from burning. Beside her, Bellamy clenches his fist while the vein in his temple pulses.

"Back off, Murphy. Or I'll make you wish you had," he grunts, fingers reaching for a dirty glass at the edge of the shiny, wooden counter.

"Hey, Bellamy! Took you long enough to show up! How's it going, man?"

A tall, muscular guy dressed all in black rushes over from the opposite end of the bar wearing a genuine smile. He gives Murphy a bit of a shove to clear some space for himself.
"Hi, I'm Nathan, but everyone calls me Miller," he extends his hand to Clarke.

She takes it, returning the smile and taking in his strong grip and close-clipped dark beard. "Clarke."

"Nice to meet you, Clarke. Don't pay any attention to Murphy. We don't. All his hangups make him act like an asshole to strangers, but he grows on you after a while."

Bellamy scoffs.

"If a while means never, then that's about right," he retorts, engaging in some sort of weird fist bump routine with Miller that Clarke was sure kids abandoned after junior high.

She catches the flicker of hurt that passes across Murphy's face, though he quickly conceals it with a sneer.

"Yeah, yeah," Murphy mutters, turning away to go wait on a middle-aged man who just sat down at the edge of the bar.

She's not sure what makes her do it, but suddenly, she's chasing him down the bar until he stops to stare at her.

"Let's try this again. I'm Clarke," she says, reaching out her hand to him, which he shakes reluctantly.

Bellamy's leg jerks out like he's about to take a step forward, but he restrains himself. She catches his eye briefly. His face shows about as much emotion as a soldier's.

"Bellamy works with my dad. He and I are . . . friends. He's helping me brush up on history, so I'll be ready for my college applications."
Murphy's eyes narrow like he can't quite believe what he's hearing.

"Let me get this straight. You're entrusting your academic future to Blake?" He leans over the counter toward her like he's about to let her in on the season's juiciest gossip. "Not the best idea, Clarke. I mean, I'm sure his uh, heart's, in the right place and all, but just look at the guy,' he whispers loudly.

She follows his gaze to where Bellamy's got his knuckles wrapped tightly around the back of the bar stool beside him.

"Shaggy hair he refuses to cut, board shorts even when there's no surf for miles, vacant expression. Not to mention all those late-night breakfast foods he cooks. Hate to burst your bubble, but the kid's a stoner. Regular Spicoli right out of Fast Times at Ridgemont High."

When Murphy winks exaggeratedly at her, she can't help it. She grins back at him, feeling like, for a moment at least, they share a secret. It's a little gratifying to see the always smooth Bellamy frazzled.

He throws Murphy the finger, muttering "asshole" under his breath as he leads her toward a sunny booth overlooking the sidewalk. Clarke pulls out her copy of The Bell Jar from her purse and settles in to read as the afternoon rush picks up. From time to time, she pauses to watch Bellamy's hands fly along the colorful liquor bottles, expertly mixing drinks for the customers, many of whom request their "usual."

A half hour later, she's pulled from the novel as Bellamy's form looms over her.

"Planned on getting a lot of reading done at Victoria's Secret?" he says quietly, gesturing at semi-tattered cover.

"You never know when you'll get a few extra minutes to yourself," she teases back. "Women's dressing rooms are really comfortable these days."

"Whatever you say, Princess," he places a water and orange-yellow drink on the table before her, dubbing it a "birthday lemonade."

She takes a small sip and glances up at him, mouthing "Rum?" while twirling the fancy umbrella decoration between her fingers.
"So you can pretend you're in London," he smirks at her.

When he gets a break, Murphy comes over to challenge her to a game of darts. She kicks his ass easily, but he concedes the loss gamely enough, blaming it on a smudge in his contact lens.

The next time Bellamy ventures over to her table, he's carrying a steaming platter of fried cod and french fries, alongside a garden salad.

"Best fish 'n chips this side of the Atlantic," he says, setting it down in front of her.

"You like feeding me, don't you?" she quirks an eyebrow up at him.

He sighs.

"Stoners are notorious eaters, Princess. Weren't you paying attention?"

She likes how his freckles crowd together when he smiles.

A few minutes later, Michael Jackson's "Thriller" erupts from the speakers, and Miller gives a whoop.

"Come on, Clarke!" he jumps out from behind the counter. "I'm gonna teach you how to moonwalk!"

Bellamy backs away, holding up his palms and muttering something about "not wanting to be in the line of fire."

All in all, it's not a bad afternoon.
The sunflowers are glorious. They're a vivacious, creamy orange-yellow with all the petals miraculously still intact when they arrive at Clarke's front door later that afternoon with a note from her parents.

*To our sweet Clarke,*

*Happy 18th birthday! We miss you so much and are sorry we can't be there to celebrate with you. We know you're going to have a great time with your friends though and can't wait to hear about it! We love you dearly and could not ask for a better daughter! Next year we'll travel Europe together. Talk to you tomorrow. And be on the lookout for a basket of British surprises! :)*

*Love always,*

*Mom & Dad*

When the enormous wicker basket arrives around sunset drenched in thick, plastic foil, Clarke can barely lift it out of the delivery man's arms. Her mother apparently has taken retail therapy to a whole new level, seemingly in the camp that the more she bought for her daughter, the less badly she would feel about leaving her at home. Inside Clarke finds no less than: premium chocolates wrapped in a U.K. flag box, a tin of British teas, fruit jams in a red telephone booth container, a Prince Harry mug, top-quality coloring pencils and drawing paper, a cooking apron decorated with a map of London, a delicate bottle of perfume, a large pack of celestial stationary, an expansive beach bag with a drawing of Parliament emblazoned across the front, a gold and emerald hat Abby swears is from the same shop the royals frequent before attending weddings, five Butter London nail polishes, an array of Delilah lip glosses and eye shadows, a book entitled *The Wicked Wit of Queen Elizabeth II*, an Emmy's clutch purse in charcoal grey that's "just the kind Kate Middleton likes," a copy of the latest *British Vogue*, and the seven Harry Potter books' British editions in paperback format.

It's outrageous and so over the top, yet Clarke can't help but love every square inch of it.

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Wells' gift arrives early the next morning. Though more understated than her parents', it's no less heartfelt.

*So of course it makes her stomach churn.*

*Happy Birthday, Clarke!*

*18, legal, and dangerous! Can't wait to take my favorite girl out on the town when we're back in the same zip code. Until then, feel free to get a tattoo, register to vote, and buy lottery tickets. But hold off on booking the sky diving lesson until I get back!*

*I love you and am so thankful you were my girl next door.*

*Love,*

*Wells*

*P.S. Harrod's has the most amazing Egyptian decor . . .*
Inside the carefully wrapped package, she finds a breathtaking gold ring with a jade stone at its center and a tin of chocolate chip cookies emblazoned with the Harrod's logo. Clarke wipes away a stray tear as she looks down at the gift, feeling her throat close.

***

"Sweetheart, we're so sorry about extending the trip. But please try to understand that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me and Thelonious," Abby says as Clarke sighs. "This tour will be so extensive and give us great insight into the British medical system, so we can adopt its best practices at Cedars-Sinai."

"I know, mom. I do understand, really. And I'm happy for you," she replies. "I just miss you guys."

"Aww, baby," Abby coos in a way she hasn't done since Clarke was a small child. "We miss you, too! So much. But we'll be back before you know it!"

"Happy Birthday, honey!" her dad's deep voice rumbles, coming onto the line. "How's my favorite girl?"

"Thanks, daddy. I'm doing well! Your gifts were so over-the-top. You didn't have to do all that!"

Jake laughs.

"But did you like them? Your mother shopped for days, and I picked out a few of them, too, despite my two girls believing I'm totally colorblind."

She can hear his smile through the phone.

"I love them all! You're the best, dad!"

"Good, good," he returns. "And tell me how your tutoring sessions are going with Bellamy. Are you two getting along? Do you think he's up to snuff to TA for my undergrads in the fall?"

"Oh," Clarke hears her voice hitch. "Yeah, yeah. Bellamy's been great. He, uh, he's super smart and really knows how to engage me in the material . . . "

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Wells Jaha: Happy Birthday, baby! I know you're going to hate me for even asking this, but can we please change our Skype date to Tuesday night my time instead of today? Cage's presentation is tomorrow, and he invited my parents and me out for dinner. Dad's freaking out, and he says we have to leave in 30 minutes to be at the restaurant in time for drinks.

Clarke Griffin: Thank you! And THANK YOU for the amazing present you sent!!! It's so sweet. :) I really don't deserve you. Yeah we can reschedule Skype--I understand. Hope the dinner's good! xoxo

Jasper Jordan: Happy Bday, Clarke!! Don't get too lit. Me & Monty R gonna help U with that this weekend. ;)

Clarke Griffin: Thanks! Don't worry, I'll save my cray cray for you, kid. ;) Go easy on those campers! I'm not sure they can handle the full awesomeness that is Jasper Jordan.

Jasper Jordan: Damn straight.
Monty Green: Happy Birthday, CG! You're still my favorite science nerd. See you Saturday!!!

Clarke Griffin: Right back at you! CanNOT wait!! Have fun at the reunion!

Monty Green: Have you met my family?

Harper McIntyre: Happy Birthday, gorgeous!! Wanna grab lunch or something to celebrate today?

Clarke pauses at the edge of her bed, one hand wrapped precariously around her bowl of cereal, while the other grips her iPhone. This latest message, while not unexpected, makes her bite her lip.

Had Raven talked to Harper about what happened in the parking lot of the mall Friday? There was no way she'd kept it between just her and Finn, was there? But how much did she really know?

Clarke honestly has no idea if this is a simple birthday lunch invite or an attempt on Harper's part to go full-on FBI and interrogate her about Bellamy's angry display and her abrupt decision to abandon Raven and Finn. Though a cold dread pools in her stomach, she rolls her head around a few times slowly, trying to stretch out her neck muscles and relax.

I can't deal with this now on top of everything else. I'm not going to tell her about Finn if I haven't even tried to explain it to Raven!

She likes Harper a lot, and she trusts Monty's judgement of people for the most part. But she just hasn't known Harper as long as the others. And things can get twisted quickly in girl world.

Clarke Griffin: Thanks so much, Harper! You're super sweet to ask! I would love to, but I honestly spent the whole day yesterday with my tutor, so I was just planning on bumming around today by the pool. Can I take a rain check for some girl time though? I'm excited to hang out with you next weekend!

Harper McIntyre: Yes, absolutely! It's your day to do what you want. :) See you Saturday! <3

She breathes a sigh of relief and sits down at her desk. Her Facebook notifications are already getting out of control, and it's barely 10 a.m. Nothing like your birthday to bring the "friends" you barely talked to in real life out of the woodwork, she thinks with a smirk. Though there was one wall post she already knew she wouldn't find amongst her notifications because she wasn't even Facebook friends with the guy who could have written it.

Let him touch her in the most intimate of places? Not a problem.

Type his name into the small, white search box and leave a digital trail of wanting to connect with him in a more tangible way? Terrifying.

Happy, happy birthday to my gorgeous bestie!! She's on point both on the dance floor and in the science lab (& that's rare). She paints the prettiest things I've ever seen and always finds time to help others. So lucky to have you in my life!!! Loooooove you, Ray-Ray <3

Raven's wall post is connected to a picture collage of her and Clarke eating ice cream cones at the beach, in matching dance outfits during a basketball game, all dolled up with Harper before last year's Spring Fling, and in a final group shot with the boys in ridiculous poses outside In-N-Out Burger earlier that year.

She smiles down at the digital screen. But something about it still doesn't feel right.

Was it weird that she had been expecting a slew of texts about the standoff with Bellamy in the
parking lot that had never come? Why the hell should she be upset that her best friend wasn't icing her out or demanding an explanation for the rude way she'd treated her and her boyfriend?

Clarke clicks the "love" heart button under the post and slams the silver lid of her computer screen down before she can think about it any further.

Instead, she gets up and starts pulling art supplies out of the desk's lower drawer. Painting Disney characters for the kids in the cancer wing of Cedars-Sinai will be an ideal way to both calm her nerves and do something positive. Not to mention it will stop her from obsessing about her own fucked-up romantic entanglements.

The phone's buzz makes her jump since it's on the same level with her ear as she crouches beside the desk. When she sees the texter's name flash across the screen, her stomach lurches again.

Bellamy Blake: Still planning on spending your birthday by the pool with Sylvia Plath?

Clarke Griffin: Yeah. Got a problem with that?

Bellamy Blake: It's depressing. Besides, someone needs to save you from that ugly peacock wrap thing.

Clarke Griffin: Sweet talk is not your specialty.

Bellamy Blake: I beg to differ.

Bellamy Blake: I'm going to come pick you up at 11:30 a.m. Be ready.

Clarke Griffin: For what? Where are we going?

Bellamy Blake: Most people like surprises on their birthdays, Princess.

Clarke rolls the jade ring around on the fourth finger of her right hand several times before finally pulling it off and securing it in her jewelry box. Then, after a final once-over in her mirror, she digs out her shoes from under the bed and heads off down the hallway.
Take A Little Time to Enjoy the View

When her car door opens and Bellamy reaches for her hand to help her out, she stumbles around, gingerly using her other hand as a shield to make sure she doesn't bump her head.

"Can I take off the blindfold now?" she huffs.

"Yeah, ok," she can hear his smugness despite the black cloth blocking her view of his face. "Knock yourself out."

Eagerly, she tears the fabric away and looks around. But the sharp hills covered in desert brush and tall white walls bordering the plain parking lot give nothing away.

"Where are you taking me?" she demands for what must be the fourteenth time.

Bellamy's eyebrows crinkle up.

"Do you trust me?"

She pauses, maybe for a fraction of a second too long. The cloud's already passing over his face by the time she nods.

"Then let's go. Come on, the tram's this way," he points off to the right where a flight of stone steps leads up to a platform she can't see.

The sign at the top of the stairs declares this to be the tram station for The Getty Center, one of the nation's best art museums. She spins on her heel, face wide open in delight.

"Really? The Getty?!" she squeaks. "Bellamy! I haven't been here since I was a kid. It was our fifth grade field trip. I remember it was gorgeous!"

Bellamy seems to swallow his smile, but his eyes still glimmer and glint.
The tram is packed with weekend tourists and locals alike sporting backpacks and baseball caps. Clarke finds herself shifting closer to Bellamy across the cream-colored, smooth bench. The bare leg below her skirt brushes against the hair along the side of his calf, and she twitches at the sensation. Though their hips remain fairly wedged together, he doesn't try to drape an arm around her shoulder or really touch her in any way all. Instead, he speaks quietly into her ear about the featured exhibits he'd done research on. Despite the steady chug of the tram along the tracks beneath her feet and the occasional slant of a stranger into her personal space as the vehicle twists higher up the mountainside, she does her best to latch onto his words and not just the proximity of his lips to her cheek. She catches that there's a Greek and Roman Sculpture exhibit, as well as ones about eighteenth-century Europe, women in the Medieval world, and something about the birth of pastels.

"Are you going to turn this into a boring history lesson, Blake?" she rolls her eyes and turns to look at him skeptically but immediately wishes she hadn't.

Flecks of gold offset his rich brown eyes like shreds of confetti, and his freckles appear sun-kissed and inviting at this close distance. She hopes the strong sunlight is keeping her own attraction from displaying in her pupils, but the careful glide of his tongue along his bottom lip has her doubting it strongly.

"There's not going to be anything boring about it," he says it with a voice like velvet, so only she can hear it despite being surrounded by people. "It's more of an investment in the future than the past."

The shiver grips her even as the pleasant, crisp female accent over the intercom "welcomes her to the Getty Center" and wishes her a pleasant visit, kindly asking that she "exit the tram to her left, and be sure to remove all personal items" as she goes.

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It's magical, mythical even. And so much prettier than she remembered. The majestic, gleaming white rock walls rise toward an azure sky, while calm, teal pools of water serve as their stately borders. Even the ivory, cream and white stone floors are polished enough to skate across, leading out in every direction of the mountaintop.

Bellamy directs her to an outdoor cafe complete with impressive columns that must be at least twenty-five feet high. The area offers a stunning view of downtown Los Angeles fighting its way through the grey mist still clinging to the hillsides.

But it's the gardens that truly blow her away.
Below the perimeter railing, flowering crape myrtles mixed with flowerbeds full of tea roses, lilies, and elephant's ear dot the sloping lawns, culminating in a labyrinthine pattern of shrubbery in the shape of a circle.

"Bellamy! It's so pretty here!" she cries out, wrapping her fingers around the railing in wonder after lunch and ice cream.

"I'm glad you like it, Princess," he says drily, standing a few feet from her, hands crammed in his pockets.

"It's perfect," she leans up on her tiptoes and kisses his cheek.

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In the picture, a procession of women and children descends down marble stairs. They're wearing flower crowns, while gleeful spectators cheer them on, hanging off roofs and between pillars.

"It's Lawrence Alma-Tadema. *Spring* I think it's called," Clarke says barely louder than a whisper, leaning back against Bellamy's chest as she views the artwork. She tries not to react much when he threads a bronzed forearm across her waist, binding her against him.

"Look at you, knowing some art history," he teases against her braided hair.

"It's about sending kids into the countryside to find flowers for May Day, but it's set in ancient Rome instead of England. All the buildings and the clothes look Roman, see?" she points, wiggling the slightest bit against him.

"Very good, A+. Where did you learn that?" he asks.

Clarke swallows hard when his chin bumps along the top of her head.

"Art history," she manages. "It's the one type of history I can pay attention to."
"Well, it's a good place to start," Bellamy chuckles. "You clearly care about the topic if it comes in a form you like."

You have no idea, the thought slips into her mind, unbidden.

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When the three texts from Wells sail across her home screen in rapid succession, she ignores them. She's examining the squishy cacti sprouting up from a type of garden in the sky at the edge of the museum complex. In the distance, the skyscrapers of downtown reflect the sunlight.

"It's the city everyone's dying to move to, and I can't wait to leave," she admits.

Bellamy stiffens a fraction next to her; it's so slight, it's almost imperceptible.

"Oh yeah? Why's that?"

"I just . . . I don't know. I want to go to the East Coast for college. It would be nice to put some distance between me and my family. Get a chance to do things my own way for once without them critiquing it all."

"Are they really that bad?" he continues to stare off into the horizon line.

"Define bad," she snorts, mirroring his pose and watching a few birds soar below the puffy clouds. "No, I guess they're not. I know they love me and all, but it's hard being the only child. My mom really wants me to go premed even though the thought of cutting into someone makes me want to pass out.

Bellamy pursues his lips.

"Princess can't get blood on her white coat?"

She slaps the side of his arm playfully.
"Be serious! It really does make me feel sick," she protests.

"And what does your dad say?"

Clarke tugs at the loose hair below the elastic of her braid.

"You know how he is," she swivels a bit toward him. "He's so good-natured, and I know he hates fighting with my mom. He'll do it, if he feels strongly enough about something, but he's not comfortable with it."

"Don't you think what you do with the rest of your life is important enough to get a little worked up about?" he narrows his eyes, shifting more of his body toward her as well.

"Yeah, yeah, of course," she hurries on. "But what I really like is art. I mean, I make these stupid little doodles for the sick kids at the hospital in my free time to try to make them smile. But I'm not trying to intern at the labs and help find cures for their horrible diseases."

She looks down guiltily. Her stomach pulls at the rawness of her words. They sound so immature and petulant to her ears.

"That's really cool, Clarke," his voice is lower now, and he brushes against her forearm to gain her full attention.

When her eyes land on his, she's taken aback by how sincere his look.

"If art's your thing, that's awesome. There are a lot of things you can do with it. You can make people happy with it."

Clarke can't take it. It's too much.

"We'll see," she shrugs indecisively, turning back to the plants to conceal the flush blooming in her cheeks.
"What about you? When did Charlemagne and Genghis Khan become it for you," she throws up her hands dramatically.

"That’s easy," Bellamy offers her a relaxed smile that leaves warmth trickling down her sternum. "My mom read a bunch of Greek myths to me as a kid, and it took off from there. I got so obsessed that she let me name my sister after one of the history stories I liked."

The wind ripples across Bellamy's T-shirt as she looks at him, confused.

"Sorry, I don't get it," Clarke admits.

"Oh, uh, well, I really liked Augustus. He was the first official Roman emperor -- Julius Caesar was his maternal great-uncle. Caesar was murdered, but he named Augustus his son and heir in his will. So Augustus is famous for Pax Romana, a period of peace, and for expanding Rome a lot, plus building up the roads system. Anyway, sorry I'm rambling. Octavia was his older sister. She was known for her loyalty and for helping to define what it meant to be a Roman woman."

Clarke smirks at him.

"What?"

"Don't think too much of yourself, do you?" she taunts as she breaks out into a fuller smile. "Deciding you're like a Roman emperor."

"Shut up," he retorts, but he's grinning at the city, too.

"I'd like to meet her at some point, Octavia," Clarke says carefully, gauging his reaction.

He just blinks a few times and gives a very slow nod.

"You make her sound like some kind of whimsical fairy chasing butterflies in the woods. I could use some of that pixie dust in my life."
Bellamy barks out a laugh.

"She's no fairy. She can scare the shit out of you when she's angry. She keeps telling me she doesn't need me trying to protect her all the time."

Clarke tries to laugh it off lightly, but there's something middy possessive in his eyes when he looks back at her, and she feels her stomach clench instead.

"It's ok to want to protect your sister, Bellamy," she says softly. "Although too much can be overkill, you know," she adds as an afterthought.

"I know," Bellamy clenches his fist against the railing, kicking a stray rock, so it lands in the garden bramble below. "It was easier when mom was still here. I knew how to be her older brother. But now," he expels a huge hiss of air. "I don't fucking know what I'm supposed to do when she pushes the limits."

Clarke's nestled against his side before she can think about it too much. His warmth seems to welcome her, and she likes how she fits against the length of his body when he hooks his hand around her hip bone and strokes the skin beneath her tank top with his thumb.

"I didn't like Lincoln at first. He's three years older than her and goes to UCLA, too. But his family's been really great to me, throwing me extra construction jobs to help make ends meet. And he's crazy about O. Everyone who sees them together can tell."

Before she can say anything more, her phone starts buzzing loudly. She makes an apologetic face and reaches into her purse, clamoring for the plastic case, so she can turn it to silent mode. The glare from the sun makes the screen harder to read, but then she sees the four new messages in a row.

"It's just Wells," she admits quietly.

"He could give you a good life," Bellamy's voice jolts her with its dose of tartness. "Being the mayor's son and all. And you said he wants to go to law school, so that's a double win."

Clarke squints at him, furrowing her brow and shoving her phone farther down in her bag.
"He's the best person I know. But our lives . . . it's been like living in a beautiful cage. There's no real freedom. And nobody takes any risks. You do what's expected, and you don't ask a lot of questions. People expected we'd get together eventually, and then . . . we did."

"Is it really that bad, Princess?"

"My parents left me all summer to work on my history grades while they take the grand tour of Europe. They've called me exactly once since they've been gone. And last year, I was convinced my mom was having an affair with this friend of Wells' dad. My dad had found out that some of the money UCLA alums were donating to a new research lab at Cedars-Sinai was actually being used on bonuses for the C-suite. But mom hushed it all up because," she puts on her best prissy Abby voice, "Thelonious has political ambitions, and we can't have any stains on his name."

Bellamy's eyes widen.

"So yeah, I'd say it's a little fucked up. Sometimes I wonder why they even had a kid when their careers are so demanding and important."

"All summer long, Princess?" he says, slightly husky.

She doesn't know why he brushed over all the rest of what she said. Yet as she feels her heartbeat kick up when she tries and fails to meet his eyes, she finds she doesn't really care.

"Yeah, they're not coming back until the second week of August. They got invited to take a tour of all these British hospitals instead."

"Well in that case," Bellamy stretches his arms up over his head, "Speaking of your parents, your dad sent me an email to send him some files from his desktop computer in his office. Wanna go over there with me?"

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Jake Griffin's office connects with a much smaller one that's been converted to Bellamy's personal work area. When he finally locates the right files and clicks send at Jake's desk, he walks into his own cramped office and finds Clarke leaning against the far wall, haphazardly pulling her skirt up her thigh to look for something, totally oblivious to him.
"What?" she fires out when she notices him at last. "It's a mosquito bite, and it itches!"

She scratches her leg gently, sighing in relief. He notes the tops of her breasts falling low in her tank top and finds he's already half hard. He walks over and kisses her surprised mouth, skating his tongue over her own, which quickly springs to life. The feel of her breasts crushed against his chest is almost too much for him.

Then her hands are on his abs, pushing him back.

"We should go," she pants. "Someone could come in," she gestures toward the door.

Her hot pink lip gloss is smeared, and she rubs the back of her hand against her mouth. Bellamy turns and locks the main door to the hallway, sparing a glance for the truly excellent view of the LA skyline offered through Dr. Griffin's window. When he reaches Clarke again, he loops an arm around her waist, drawing her firmly against him, so she can feel him hardening.

"I don't want to go yet," he rasps against her ear.

He notices the tenseness in her shoulders when he applies delicate pressure to the tops of them. Her confused eyes flash up to his for a moment, but he just widens his in reply, running a hand across the thin aqua blue cotton shielding her stomach.

"You can't be serious? Here?" she asks, voice rising as she takes a small step back.

But he leaves his fingers wrapped around her hip, so she doesn't go far. After a moment's pause, he unbuttons and unzips his shorts, so they collapse at his ankles. She tries not to watch the bulge grow in his boxers, but it's impossible.

"Get on your knees for me, Princess," he says coaxingly.

She bites her lip and thrums her fingers across her thigh, biding her time. But then his hand starts rubbing circles against her stomach before slipping beneath the fabric. He meets her gaze once more.
"Come on, baby," he urges.

She complies, falling to her knees. When she raises her hand toward his boxers, Bellamy's hand catches the side of her cheek.

"Mm, mm, mmm," he murmurs behind closed lips. "One last thing."

He pushes his calloused thumbs underneath the edge of her tank, so it catches her strapless bra too, and draws them down until they catch under her full breasts. Clarke moans when he palms the supple flesh of her left breast, flicking the nipple to attention.

"That's better," he says softly, watching her blue eyes grow darker and more hooded.

When his motions cease, she realizes her clit is throbbing, but there's nothing to be done for it.

So she tugs down the elastic band at his hips slowly until his dick rises before her, ready and waiting. Wrapping her lips around the tip, she strokes the underside of his shaft as he lets his chin fall to his chest and tangles his fingers into her hair.
So many people have asked me about a Bellamy POV chapter. Well, ask and it is given onto you. But then again, be careful what you ask for. We're definitely back into that dubious consent territory . . . reader beware. I'm not sure what else to say except you may want to take a deep breath before reading this one.

Traffic is surprisingly light as Bellamy heads out of Beverly Hills and onto I-405 South. The head of his construction crew let him off work earlier than he'd expected. This was mainly because bricklaying at the new house was progressing faster than normal, and Sinclair didn't want to dish out too much money to his men all at once when he could stretch out the check payments over time instead.

Bellamy drums his lean fingers against the steering wheel, cranking up the radio when he hears the opening bars of The Rolling Stones' "Gimme Shelter." Glancing at the clock on the dashboard, he sees it's a little after 1 p.m. So basically, it's too late to head all the way back across town to his house, only to have to return to the Griffin's place at 2:30 p.m.

A flash of Clarke's rare smile and bright blonde hair as she leaned over the railings at The Getty Center on Sunday slips into his mind. She looked so carefree and perfect, like one of those goddamn ads for CoverGirl in the chick magazines Octavia's always leaving around.

He bites the inside of his cheek to keep from smiling. From the moment he saw her in that crazy ass peacock getup, (she stumbled slightly across the uneven brick patio of her backyard while balancing her paper plate of food and nodding politely to the UCLA professors at her dad's party in her wild foam flip-flops), he's felt . . . fuck if he knows . . . just drawn to her. It's not something he can really explain, not like he hasn't tried to figure it out. Sure, she was hot. But it's almost as if they knew each other in another life or some twisted shit like that. And yeah, he's well aware of how he sounds high as a kite when he so much as thinks it. She's his boss' daughter, for Christ's sake. But there's something about her eyes that pull him in every time - he felt like he knew her before he heard her speak. It's like they've fought wars shoulder to shoulder, like he already trusts her, though of course he doesn't tell her any of this. She'd think he was recently released from the nut house.

Whatever, he figures, turning off at Clarke's exit, if I'm going to Hell anyway . . .
"Clarke?" he calls out, rapping on the back door after pulling his Chevy down the long driveway.

No answer.

"Clarke!" he tries the handle, and it gives easily.

He steps inside the spacious kitchen, locking the door behind him, but it's empty. A quick walk around the bottom floor tells him Clarke's nowhere to be found. *Why the fuck did she leave a door unlocked if she's not even downstairs? Let's just make the place easier to rob*, he shakes his head as he climbs the steps.

Her clear voice carries to him before he sees her. Then he hears her laughter like wind chimes.

It's followed by a deep, male voice.

**Coming from her bedroom.**

Pushing his back flat against the hall wall so he can glance into her room where she's left the door cracked open, he tries to calm his breathing. He can already feel the blood rushing harder in his veins and tries not to clasp his fists shut.

But she's . . . alone.

At least, technically.

Clarke's sitting in front of her laptop at her desk, wrapped in a lavender robe edged with lace. On the screen before her, there's a broad-shouldered guy with dark skin grinning at her like a helpless fool.

"I would not have run out of the Dungeon London ride!" Clarke protests, slapping her thigh.

"Believe me, babe, if Jack the Ripper was chasing you into the darkness with a knife, you would've killed me for even taking you in there!"
"Hmph, maybe," Clarke concedes, running her fingers through her wavy hair.

"I miss you. I'm really sorry we won't be back until August," he hears Wells say.

"I know. It sucks," Clarke sighs.

"Seriously," Wells replies. "But the time will fly by, and before you know it, we'll be celebrating your birthday by the pier. I gotta run, baby. But we'll talk in a few days, ok?"

He watches Clarke nod.

"I love you," he says softly.

"I love you, too," she replies before clicking the red end call button.

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"So you really love him?" the words sound like tires screeching as he forces them out.

She whirls around, clutching at her robe as he steps into the room.

"What are you doing here so early?" she demands. "How did you even get in?"

"You left the back door unlocked. Super smart, by the way. I answered your question. Now answer mine," he practically growls, advancing on her.

"Bellamy, I-I . . ."

Her face is all desperation and panic. He stops halfway toward the desk, then holds up his palms
before letting his arms smack lifelessly against his sides.

"Nah, you know what? Forget it," he says, mouth narrowing into a mean line. "Lemme go and leave you to it."

He's walking fast down the winding second floor hallway, the old wood floorboards creaking under the abuse of his boots. Blood's rushing into his ears, and he can't think straight except to repeat stupid, stupid, stupid to himself over and over.

Her hand curling around his bicep is unexpected, but he swings around, swatting her off as if she's an annoying insect.

"Don't touch me, Clarke," he hisses.

She reels backward a step, watching his face warily.

"Bellamy! Please! I'm sorry. What do you you want me to say?" she wraps her arms around her body. "I've - I've known him my whole life. I can't just --"

"Be anything other than a spoiled, rich princess who Skypes her boyfriend half-naked because she wants everything she wants? I get the picture. Thanks," he flings the words at her like daggers.

A couple tears trickle down her reddening cheek, but she bats them away angrily.

"You don't get it!" she yells at him.

Suddenly, he pins her wrists to the wall like a butterfly to a cork board, trapping her there.

"I do get it," he spits out, face a half foot away from hers. "A princess deserves a prince. Not the hired help."

He lets her go roughly and stalks away toward the winding stairs he knows will carry him downstairs and the hell out of this house of illusions. But then she's tugging at his arm again. He cracks his neck
to the side before spinning to face her.

"You shouldn't have touched me," it comes out like more of a warning than anything else.

Clarke stands her ground, fingertips still brushing the clay-stained cotton of his work shirt. Their eyes meet for one electric second before he kisses her angrily, biting at her lips with the sharp edges of his teeth. She shoves against his chest, but he latches onto her hips, dragging her toward his body, so she can feel the metal of his belt buckle bite into her stomach. Insistently, he walks forward, pushing her backward a few steps into the guest bathroom.

All his anger simmering just below his controlled façade is unleashing. He doesn't even care about stopping it. He just wants to make her feel something, feel anything resembling the desperation coursing through him.

He rips at the ties of her robe, pushing it open and exposing the white lace bra and plain white underwear beneath. He tears his own sweat-stained shirt over his head before eliminating his belt and shoes.

She watches him warily, like he's an escaped lion from the zoo.

"Bellamy? What are you doing? Let's talk about it," she says placatingly, holding up her arm in supplication.

"I don't want to talk about it," he snaps, reaching around her to throw open the plastic shower curtain, which screeches roughly as the metal rings slide along the bar. He jerks his head toward the tub, wordlessly directing her inside. She stares at him for a long moment before picking up a foot hesitantly and dropping it on the other side of the tub. He shoves down his faded jeans and boxers, draping them against the sink counter.

"Bell . . . "

"That's right. Get in."

The white porcelain beneath his feet is cold and momentarily soothing as he presses her forward into the wall and crowds against her back, reaching out to turn on the stream of lukewarm water.
"If you want to hang around your house naked, I'll make it worth my while."

He knows the blood's all rushing to his dick but wants to make sure she knows it too, so he thrusts several times into her curvy backside, sucking at the back of her neck.

"Bellamy!" she gasps.

"What?"

"Go fuck yourself," she manages to spit, clawing at his forearms braced against the tiles on either side of her.

"That's not very nice, Princess."

He palms her heavy breasts through the damp fabric that clings to her skin now, pinching her nipples as he hears her sharp intake of breath.

"Fuck you," she hisses again, trying and failing to turn because she's wedged too far up to the edge of the tub.

Leaving one hand pushing into the light green tiles, he snakes the other between her legs, cupping her insistently.

"Get off me, Bellamy!" she pants.

He gives one humorless strangled cry of a laugh before making sure the seam of her panties presses into the underside of her clit. Clarke's thigh muscles clench and shudder against his legs as she bucks against him.

"What were you saying?" he laves his scratchy tongue against the angry, pink-red mark jumping up on the patch of skin below her ear.
"I fucking hate you," she manages, but it comes out more like a moan.

He thrusts his hips into her forcefully. Her fingers fly up to his right hand on the wall, where she interlaces their wet fingers together. It's not what he expected. She actively pushes back against him.

He gasps when she reaches between her legs and settles on the tip of his dick, rolling the head around in her palm as he taps at her clit. She grunts and continues handling him until he grows sticky and bites into her shoulder. He almost tears her underwear at the side when he yanks them off. They soon lay crumpled, forgotten, in the back corner of the tub.

He's kissing down the vertebrae of her spine while pawing at her weighty breasts when he realizes the suppleness he'd brought her body to has grown rigid once more. Clarke clenches her thighs when his dick, hard and heavy, brushes against the blonde curls guarding her entrance.

"Bellamy, please, get a condom," she begs him, voice small.

_Oh, so that's it._

He glides soothing hands up her sides and into the velvet curve of her waist, pebbled with water drops.

She writhes in response to being petted, then rubs up and down his forearm with enough friction to give him a mark like rug burn.

"Please," she groans as he drags his dick between her legs in a slow, sawing motion.

"Does that mean you want me to fuck you, Princess?" he taunts her, taking the full weight of her left breast in his hand and squeezing.

He knows he's too close to her entrance, gliding against her slickness as he sways. Then, quickly, he pulls back and away from her, retreating into the water spray.

Her hips rock back into nothingness, into still air. He's painfully hard now, the tension ricocheting through his stomach like lightening.
"Don't make me say it," she pants helplessly, spinning to see him a foot away.

"I'm not going to make you say a goddamn thing," he barely recognizes his cavalier tone. "You can get yourself off as soon as I leave. But we both know it won't be Wells you're thinking about when you do it."

Water rushes down his skin, matting his curls to the sides of his face. He moves for the shower curtain, but she stops him with a hand on his chest. It feels like a scorching mark.

"Please. Please get a condom and fuck me," she gasps, leaning up to nip his jaw.

"All right, baby," he strokes the flare of her hip and tickles the edge of her entrance with his pointer finger, causing her sharp intake of breath.

It's not hard to reach past the curtain for a towel to dry his hands. And it isn't complicated to grab for the wallet in his pants pocket and unfold it swiftly, pulling out a condom. It might be his imagination, but it seems like the crinkling noise blows out Clarke's pupils wider than normal.

He slides it on, and she watches him do it, licking her lip. Then she steps into him once more, pulling at the tangled, soaked curls at the base of his neck to kiss him properly. When his hand moves down from her ass to the back of her thigh and squeezes, she gives him a quizzical stare.

"Up," he orders. "Wrap it around me," pulling at her slick limb until her knee is hooked securely around his hip.

He picks her up lightly at the waist and smirks when she wraps her other leg around him, breathing heavy. Her nipples pebble through the lace of her bra as he eyes them. He runs a hand over her water-darkened hair for a moment, then cradles the back of her head with his palm, so it won't smack against the tiles.

Her spine flattens against the wall, and he clutches her hip hard enough to leave fingerprints tomorrow. He glances down. The red head of his dick is nuzzled against her plump folds, teasing her gently with little motions.
"Ready?"

Even when he's upset with her, he can't help but ask.

Clarke opens her too-trusting eyes wider at him and nods her head up and down, panting. The pant dies in her throat though, turns to a gasp, when he simultaneously guides her hips down and thrusts straight inside the tunnel warmth of her channel without warning. Her walls give a bit, but the sharpness of the sensation makes her hiss. Nails dig against his arms as he pulls out halfway before thrusting back inside.

He swears he's hitting her cervix a minute later when she reaches between them and begins desperately rubbing between her legs.

"Oh God . . . oh my God," she mumbles somewhat incoherently as he bounces her against him and feels the last of her body's resistance subsiding.

Sparking pleasure takes form at the base of his spine. He can't meet her eyes, he won't. So he leaves his head in the hollow against her neck and shoulder and plunges forward repeatedly until her pussy clings to him as he leaves, and her protective wetness floods her.

When her legs begin to shake in earnest, he nibbles at her collarbone, leaving a biting kiss at the top of her breast before thumbing her clit. The rising pressure in his pelvis finally releases, swallowing him up in a flight of euphoria. He rubs fast circles against her slick hood until she rhythmically contracts around him.

He shuts the water at last, and they both fold themselves into fluffy towels. But he still can't meet her eyes.

Stepping out of the shower onto the bath mat, he reaches for his clothes and wordlessly hands her her robe, taking care to ensure their fingers don't brush up against each other. One touch of her skin, and he might as well be fried in the electric chair.

"Hey, it's ok," Clarke breaks the silence carefully, placing a delicate hand on his shoulder when his fingers fumble over the laces of his boots for the second time.

He shrugs her off, standing up and tugging his belt on.
"It's not," he rasps, glancing fleetingly into her unsure expression. "And it never was. This whole thing was a mistake," he continues before walking out the door.

Yeah, he's definitely a monster.
She curls herself around her pillow in the fetal position, hands clasped together against her cheek as she rocks herself gently like she were a baby. Her nose is still full of the sweet pine, sweaty scent of Bellamy. It's crazy, but she can sense his heat around her trembling frame, the broad and visceral physicality of his rippling muscles even though he's long gone.

But it's his eyes that haunt her most. Midnight black and wide open with the pain she put there when he overheard her talking to Wells. She wouldn't have thought it was possible to see him so raw, so on edge. Now that she has, it seems impossible to go back to the way it was before.

There's a sore stretch between her legs when she tries to roll over and pink-red raised hills on her neck, shoulders, and chest from where he marked her as he drove into her quivering flesh. No matter how deep he went, it wasn't enough. He was never close enough. She wants to lay tangled up in him with no thoughts in her head except how loudly his heart beats and how his hair tickles her collarbone when he burrows his head into her chest. And that's what scares her most of all.

So she lays on her bed, fairly catatonic, as the light in her room turns a dusky blue and then grey with twilight. The shadows lengthen along the wall, and still she doesn't stir.

Tuesday fades into Wednesday. And Wednesday's sunset gives rise to the clear, golden dawn of Thursday. She watches the constellations decorate the sky in her backyard from her favorite lawn chair Thursday night, and when she stirs again with an awful kink in her neck--slightly shocked at the sight of the floating leaves in the pool, Friday has arrived.

The lime green text bubbles flow from her phone each day, but only silence greets them.

Clarke Griffin: Bell, I think we need to talk. Can you call me please?

Clarke Griffin: Please, don't be this way. I really want to see you. We need to sort this out. I never wanted you to leave like that.

Clarke Griffin: Bellamy, I'm sorry about what you overheard Tuesday! I want to fix this. I know you're angry, but you've got to talk to me eventually. At least tell me when you get off work.
Clarke Griffin: Bellamy! I left you three voicemails. I get it, you're angry. This is the silent treatment. But I want to talk things out with you, ok? Can you stop being immature and passive aggressive for two minutes and act your age?

Clarke Griffin: Come on, Bell. I miss you. I never wanted to hurt you. At least text me that you're ok.

Clarke Griffin: Fine, if you want space, you got it. I'll leave you alone. But this is on you, Blake. Not me. I tried. You're the one acting like a stubborn jerk.

***

Sure, his construction work and shifts at Mecha must keep him busy. But not that busy. And what the hell did he mean that it was all a "mistake?" Was she just a conquest to him - some young, stupid girl he thought it would be fun to seduce, and now that he got what he wanted, it's over? Or could the mistake he referred to possibly have been something deeper? Yeah, she's probably a total idiot for thinking the flicker in his eyes when he looked at her was ever anything more than the urge to pin her to the nearest wall.

The doubt and influx of possibilities flood her brain and paralyze her ability to get anything of consequence done. She floats through the grocery store pulling spicy salsa from the shelf when she needs tomato sauce. She almost walks out in front of a fast-moving Prius - thank God the driver laid on the horn - when she heads over to pick up the Green's mail and water their plants Thursday afternoon. When she takes a shower, she can't remember if she's already shampooed her hair.

By Friday, she's this close to driving to Inglewood and camping out on his front steps, so he has to face her. Though she's not exactly sure what the hell she'd say when he shows up. But she drives to Mecha instead, knowing he generally works late afternoons into the evening.

***

She opens the wooden door with the oval glass cutout window deliberately slowly, wincing when the shimmer of bells alerts nearby diners and the hostess to her presence anyway.

"Welcome to Mecha. Can I help you?" the woman asks with a practiced politeness.
Her curly hair is large and wild, with streaks of red and liquid gold woven into its brown base.

"Uhh, no thanks," she squints at the name tag, "Luna, I was just going to head to the bar."

Luna gives her a skeptical once-over, crinkling her nose. She's clearly under the impression that this new customer is not yet twenty-one.

"Best of luck with that," she mutters, though Clarke can still make it out.

It's lucky the bar is darkened today by the lack of natural light filtering in through the stained-glass windows. Clarke hurries into a shadowy corner as she spies Murphy working behind the bar. But within moments, her nails are digging into the upper edge of the nearest booth. She spots Bellamy's well-chisled back easily from across the room. He's leaning over the shoulder of a tall, athletic woman with dark, curling hair and a serene, cherub-like face generally reserved for Classical paintings. Whatever he's whispering in her ear has her grinning, and his fingers are positioned over hers as he imitates the motion of hitting the air hockey puck with a white paddle. A bulldozer might as well be digging out the inside of Clarke's chest when his left hand skims across the woman's hip before he seems to urge her to try the move on her own.

Clarke stumbles back the way she came, shoving the heavy door open with a hard thrust as Luna calls, "Please come again!" sardonically behind her.

She doesn't think Bellamy saw her, but it hardly seems to matter now if he did. Although it's a cloudy day, the sidewalk is much too bright as she hurries toward her BMW parked two blocks away. The speedometer hits eighty on the highway before she even realizes she's driving fast. She swerves cleanly between cars, relentlessly changes lanes on her quest to reach her house as quickly as possible. When she does, the fetal position feels like an old friend.

The texts from Wells have been easier to ignore than she would have thought possible a few weeks ago. The ones from Raven, however, prove more challenging to disregard.

Raven Reyes: Yo, I don't know why you think it's cool to ignore ME when I'm texting you about YOUR birthday. Is everything ok with you? You've been acting super weird lately. You know you can tell me things, right? That's kind of WHAT I'M IN YOUR LIFE FOR in case you forgot. Anyway, no matter how obnoxious you're getting in your old age, I still love you and will be picking you up tomorrow for your birthday shenanigans at 5. BE READY ON TIME PLEASE. Harper's got this all planned out, and we're on a schedule!! I do not need her bitching at me because you're
busy being Sleeping Beauty. :=p xoxo

Chapter End Notes

So you're probably wondering a few things: who's the mystery woman? What is Bellamy's motivation in all this? What is going on with Raven and Finn? Will poor Wells remain in the dark because Clarke really does want it both ways? Oh dear, what did I do...
“Hey, baby cakes! Get in.”

Raven lays down on the horn of the bubble gum pink convertible she’s got parked in the Griffin’s driveway. It looks straight out of Happy Days and emits a high-pitched shrieking sound. Harper is beaming at her from the backseat where the top is rolled down, motioning at her to hurry.

“How did you – I mean, I haven’t seen this car . . . it’s amazing!” Clarke stammers, eyebrows nearly crawling into her hairline as she stares at the beauty.

“It’s something, isn’t it?” Raven replies, lovingly stroking the glossy driver's side door. “Don’t worry, I didn’t steal it,” she smirks. “You know how my dad is about the old classics. He bought this one at an auction a couple weeks ago for a good price, so he said I could borrow it tonight because he loves me so much,” she flutters her eyelashes.

“Or because Raven bugged the shit out of him,” Harper snorts.

“Come on, hop in!” Raven jolts Clarke back to reality.

She jumps into the passenger seat, and Raven races down the driveway, taking off through the quiet, suburban streets and making the heavy breeze whip through their loose hair and tangle it in knots.

Harper leans forward and wheedles the radio tuner, twisting her face into ridiculous expressions of disgust at each melody until she lands on Justin Bieber crooning, “My mama don’t like you, and she likes everyone.”

Raven rolls her eyes then starts singing along with a shrug.

“So where are Monty, Jasper, and Finn?” Clarke tries to make the question sound as unobtrusive as possible while she twists Wells' ring around on her finger.

Raven pinches her lips together briefly and offers Clarke a sidelong glance.

“The boys are going to meet us there.”

"Great," Clarke forces herself to reply nonchalantly. Her heavily-coated eyelashes smack together as she blinks through the sunlight.

***

Clarke slides into the corner of the spacious booth near the window at Stella Barra's and motions Harper to sit by her. Raven chooses the space across from them as they peruse the menu.

But she needn't have worried much about blockading herself. Jasper throws open the main door, bringing a rush of hot air with him. He's wearing a T-shirt that has some sarcastic remark about saving the planet on it and an old pair of goggles she hasn't seen on him in a while. He nearly elbows Raven's eye out when he collapses next to her and thrusts a comically wrapped package at Clarke featuring sea serpents and bits of tape popping out at the corners.
"Happy Birthday, Griffosaur!" he half-shouts, forcing Harper to grab her Pepsi out of his range of arm motion.

"Thanks, Jasper! You didn't have to get me anything," she grins at him.

"Dude," Monty comes up to the table with Finn. "You couldn't even wait for me?"

He redirects his attention to Clarke and gives her a knowing look.

"It's a joint gift from both of us. Happy 18th, kid!"

"Thanks, Monty. You two are so sweet, but you really didn't--"

"Yeah, yeah, open it," Raven barks, patting the cushion next to her for Finn to sit down while Monty presses in next to Harper and nuzzles his nose against her jaw until she giggles.

Clarke briefly catches Finn's eye, and he gives her a small nod and half-smile though his gaze quickly shifts away.

"Happy Birthday, Clarke," he mumbles before sitting down beside Raven, fists still buried in the pockets of his thin, zip-up hoodie.

She nods back and rips into the paper, happy for something to do with her hands, which tremor ever so slightly. The boys bought her two wooden art panels that, when placed together, create a vibrant, blooming vegetable garden.

"You know, since you're all creative," Jasper shrugs.

"I really like it," she smiles widely. "It's perfect. Thank you."

When their waitress, Indra, comes to take the boys' drink orders and ask what they'd like to eat, she mainly addresses Finn since he's sitting right next to her, almost knocking knees.

"Oh," he swivels his neck toward the group. "It's actually, that one's birthday dinner, so I think she should do the honors," he rolls his wrist in Clarke's direction as if practicing a king's wave.

He speaks with a gentle ease and touch of playfulness reenergizing his tone. But she bites her lip and digs her nails into the top of her thigh when she catches sight of the darkness of his eyes, despite the fluorescent lights. As quickly as it takes for him to survey her face, she knows she's blushing.

"Is pizza ok with everyone?" she asks. "The massive one they make, obviously, to feed us all."

Indra smirks, shaking her head a little.

There's a general murmur of assent. Raven meets her eyes for a moment, and Clarke thinks she sees an unspoken question there. But then she's drumming her french-manicured nails against the formica table impatiently and arguing with Jasper about pepperoni versus pineapple. Harper and Jasper want pineapple, while Monty and Raven favor pepperoni. They make Clarke break the tie, and she shrugs and says, "half and half?"

Indra takes down the order carefully just the way Clarke likes - saucy with a little less cheese than normal. When she walks away toward the kitchen, Finn says, "Hey Clarke? What actually is your favorite pizza topping?"

"Umm," she takes a sip of her orange soda. "Pineapple I guess."
"Interesting," he winks at her. "Mine, too."

***

At the end of the meal, Harper and Raven present her with a purple leopard print bag full of confetti glitter and a gift certificate to Artisan Nail Salon for a special girls’ day out. Then they’re barreling off toward 60 Out, the "premier escape room in L.A." to make their reservation.

They're a small enough group to remain one team. Harper booked the "Hangover" room where they've got to find their company's money hidden somewhere in a gigantic bar before their boss, recently released from prison says the instructions card, arrives to fire them all.

At one point, Finn tries to coach Raven on the best ways to hack into a safe, and she screams at him that he's breaking her concentration. And Jasper and Monty do get into an argument about whether or not a clue means they need to check all the whisky bottles or all the gin ones, but they make it out unscathed in 47 minutes.

Finn barely touches the small of her back when they're walking toward the parking lot as if about to say something but then seems to think better of it and just asks, "Had fun?"

"Yeah, it was great. Never did that before!"

"And the fun's not over yet!" Harper slings an arm around Clarke's shoulders, bouncing to her side out of nowhere. "We are headed to a gen-u-ine drive-in to see the best movie ever made!"

In the background, Clarke can hear Jasper murmuring, "Please don't say Titanic, please don't say Titanic," and the smile splits her whole face.

"Titanic!" Harper shouts while Raven cheers.

"Dear God, no, I can't!" Jasper moans.

"Shhh," Raven soothes him. "It's a classic. It won 10 Oscars. And you like the part where the ship goes down."

"Yeah, I know, but-" Jasper scrapes the side of his sneaker into the dirt. "There's all that gaga romance to get through before they hit the iceberg."

"That part's for us!" Clarke turns over her shoulder and blows him a kiss.

Chapter End Notes

So, while this has nothing whatsoever to do with this story, if you want to squeal/flail with me about SDCC in the comments, feel free!! I'm SO EXCITED about Season 5! And how that sizzle reel was like Bellarke on steroids. And the "101, counting Bellamy." And the reconstruction of the story into a fairy tale. And the possibility of Murven. And I'm intrigued by how Octavia may be darker still and the battle for Eden and the cryo sleep miners and and and....I can go on and on. So, like I said, feel free to flail with me! xoxo
The convertible is huge, and they all wind up piling into it. Monty and Harper sprawl across the back seat with Jasper, while Raven takes up her seat behind the wide wheel with Finn next to her. It leaves Clarke, to her mild distress, with no choice but to sit next to him.

Finn throws a few sidelong looks at her as she plays with the frayed edges of the two tiny holes in her jeans. As modern day Rose closes her eyes to remember the past, and the sea moss-covered, ancient Ship of Dreams rises off the ocean floor to its former, 1912 glory, Clarke digs in her purse for lipgloss, continuously pushing things in the way of finding it, so it takes longer. Of course Monty sneaks in a flask of his moonshine, which they pass around between them. The taste is sharp and bitter in Clarke's mouth, but she drinks it in large gulps, eager for an escape route from her tension.

By the time Rose is asking Jack to draw her wearing nothing but the bluest sapphire around her neck, it's like ants are crawling up her skin. Literally nothing about Leonardo DiCaprio's actual appearance can be likened to Bellamy's, but as he begins to sketch Rose with the sure, swift strokes of his hand, she squirms in her seat uncomfortably. Once more, the feel of Bellamy's hot hand gripping her hip as he drove into her while water droplets clung to his nose and lips seizes her memory. She squishes her thighs together. "You can't do this now. You can't. He doesn't even want you.

Finn's pale hand with its long fingers rests on his knee while Raven nestles into his left shoulder. He never moves it except very occasionally to tap along the creamy leather edge of the seat between them. He's just too close, a mere eight or so inches away. She has to get out of this car.

"I'm going to get some popcorn! Anyone want anything?" Clarke finally cries out, throat closing around the words.

"Twizzlers please," Jasper says, digging into his pocket for money.

"Snowcaps would be great, thanks, Clarke," Harper hands her a few crumpled dollar bills.

"Junior mints, my most considerate and trustworthy friend?" Monty says it with such solemnity that Clarke cracks a smile.

"I'll see what I can do."

She slams the passenger door and heads for the concessions stand. She's shoveling more buttery kernels than strictly necessary into her mouth awaiting the cashier to grab the candy when Finn's voice makes her jaws snap shut.

"Clarke? Are you all right?"

She swallows hard, turning to him. They're standing near a sort of street lamp at the end of the theatre's property, and it makes the lighter streaks in his brown hair stand out as he pushes it from his eyes.

"Yeah, I'm great. What's up?"

"I just wanted to say I'm sorry. You know, for the parking lot thing. I was out of line. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable, and . . ." she feels the tiniest drop of unease slip from the back of her neck straight down her spine. "it was wrong to say it. So . . . I was hoping we could go back to how it was before? Like be friends?"
Clarke hears her heart beating heavily in her ears. It's like her fight-of-flight response has kicked up out of nowhere, and Finn's not even threatening her. He holds his palms up slightly, and he looks sad, more than anything else.

"Finn, you're Raven's boyfriend," Clarke says clearly when she finds her voice.

"Yeah, I know."

"And I'm her best friend."

"Right?"

"So nothing will ever happen between us. I don't want anything to ever happen between us. Do you understand?" she takes a measured step closer to him.

He sucks in a bit of air through his nose quietly but still watches her face.

"I know. I get it."

"I'm with Wells. I care about him. And he's your friend," her words are incredibly measured for the alcohol she consumed.

He taps his foot against the pavement.

"Yeah, Clarke, I know all this."

"But how do I know you're serious? How am I supposed to be around you and Raven now?" she hisses at him.

"This is Hollywood, baby. Act," he tries to joke.

But he seems to know it's the wrong thing to say immediately when her eyes narrow and she draws her shoulders back, preparing for a fight.

"I'm joking! It was a joke!" he says hastily, reaching out for her arm but then letting his hand drop. "I, uh," he fumbles in his jeans' pocket. "I made you a bracelet. Like as a peace offering."

He holds it out tentatively to her, and it catches the light. She takes the fascinating object from him, a tiny, mythical Griffin he seems to have carved out of wood on a thin, grey cord.

"Finn," she breathes his name more kindly. "It's beautiful. But you know I can't take this. You made a bird like this for Raven."

"Which she tangled into her key chain," he says sort of grumpily.

"Which she tangled into her key chain," he says sort of grumpily.

"Finn."

"Sure you can," he replies easier now, smiling at her. "It's a gift. If it makes you feel better, I can make a star for Harper's addiction to Brink of the Universe, and a little test tube for Monty. And maybe a marijuana leaf for Jasper, and a basketball for Wells . . . " he drifts off when she shoves at his shoulder, but she's smiling back.

"All right, all right. Thank you," Clarke says, slipping the bracelet into her purse.

"Hey! That's two times in one week," Raven walks toward them out of the darkness, eyes flashing between Clarke's surprised face and Finn's open one. "But no Bellamy interrupting this time."
"Hey, Ray," Finn clutches her against his side and presses a kiss to the top of her head. "No, just us."

"Have you seen your tutor this week, Clarke?" she asks innocently enough. "You never talk about him, but he is the reason you're missing a summer in London with Wells and stuck with us, right?"

"Not much to say I guess," Clarke laughs nervously, reaching out to take the candy the cashier hands her. "He's a nerd, like I told you. It's all work, work, work."

"But that makes Johnny a very dull boy," Raven flashes Clarke a dazzling smile.

Her stomach turns over anyway.

"Hey!" she changes pace on a dime, flipping out her sleek hair, so the hibiscus scent of her shampoo pummels Clarke's nose as she gazes up at Finn. "You don't hate this movie that much, do you, baby?" she jokes.

"Nah, I just thought Clarke might need help carrying things back. Didn't want the birthday girl working too hard."

Clarke's eyes flash up toward the gigantic screen right as Rose tells Jack to put his hands on her in the cramped car. Her breath catches again. I can't do this.

For a second, there's only Bellamy's belt buckle against her skin, his lips catching her moan when he first entered her. There's just his laugh, his freckles, the intelligence quietly blazing behind his hypnotizing eyes . . .

"Clarke? Clarke?" Raven says sharply. "Seriously, what is wrong with you?"

"I've got to go," Clarke pushes the food into Raven and Finn's unsuspecting arms. "Sorry, I've just . . . I've got to go. Thank you for everything, the gifts, dinner, the movie. Tell the others bye for me, k?"

She's already turning away and walking up the nearest sidewalk between two rows of tall, swaying trees toward the main road, pressing the Uber app on her phone.

"You rode with us!" Raven yells in the distant background. "It's your birthday! Your gifts are in my car! Clarke!"
Y'all--after the Despacito video hit featuring Richard and Bob, I can honestly say I'll support Murphamy if this show never gives us Bellarke. But only if I can't get Murven. And don't you want to dance with both of them? I love their friendship. Season 5 needs a delinquent dance party!!!! We should petition.

See Bob & Richard here:
https://twitter.com/The100writers/status/888617293013434368.

After fuming the whole car ride over to Inglewood - with the added late-night traffic, she just spent nearly $50 on a ride - Clarke finds herself slamming the flat of her fist into the Blakes' yellow front door. It doesn't seem so cheery anymore in the sudden downpour. Seriously when the fuck was the last time it rained in L.A.? They've been going through a drought for what feels like months.

Her hair hangs limply around her face and past her shoulders. A trail of rainwater leaks down the back of her gauzy black, off-the-shoulder top and into the waistband of her jeans. She shivers. Her peep-toe wedges are definitely not made to withstand four-inch puddles.

"Bellamy!" she screams over a clap of thunder. "Open the damn door!"

She saw the rooms at the back of the house lit up as she approached by car, so she knows he's in there. Maybe it's the alcohol that's made her so brazen as she calls his name again and pounds on the door some more. Sure, Monty brought a big flask with him to the theatre, but how much could she have really had? A shot? Two at the most?

The light, golden glow of the doorbell catches her attention, and she's about to lay her weight against it when the door careens open.

Bellamy stands barefoot in front of her wearing black sweatpants and a white T-shirt, staring at her open-mouthed.

"Clarke?" he questions her identity as if they've never met. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Aren't you going to let me in out of the hurricane?" she snaps angrily, shoving the door open wider and stepping into the foyer, where she proceeds to drip all over the floor.

At least the plants will be happy, she thinks ruefully, noticing the Jacaranda trees sagging under the water weight in his odd, rock-and-cactus garden centered in the middle of the house and surrounded by glass walls.

"Clarke, what are you doing here?" his deep voice rumbles more insistently this time, closing the door behind her against the ferocious storm with a heavy click.

"You didn't answer any of my texts all week, you ass! That's what! You told me everything was a mistake! You don't just come to a person's house, yell at them about what they say on a Skype call, and then--" the words evaporate like cotton candy on her tongue as her eyes sweep the living room before her.
She finds the tall, athletic woman from Mecha sitting on Bellamy's couch with her legs tucked up under her, looking at Clarke with a strange expression. On the coffee table in front of her sit two glasses of half-finished wine, and by the looks of it, a Netflix movie with Jennifer Garner in it paused on the TV.

"Hi," the woman stands up, unfurling her long legs and running her palms over her thighs. "You know what, Bell? I'm just gonna head out, ok?" she smiles sweetly at him. "Sounds like you two need some time to talk."

Clarke turns from watching this ethereal creature, half-Amazon goddess, half Rembrandt painting, to gaping open-mouthed at Bellamy. His face is more relaxed when he looks at the stranger, his expression more calm.

"Gina," he sounds a little hopeless. "You don't have to go."

But she's already at the door, where she nods politely to Clarke. She touches his shirtsleeve delicately.

"You know I do," her almond eyes are full of a pleasant, understanding warmth Clarke can't account for.

And then she's gone.

"You've got a hell of a knack for timing, Princess," he scrapes his hand across the stubble along his jaw, giving her a once-over after a long, unpleasant pause.

With no jacket, she knows she most closely resembles a drowned rat. The thought only makes her angrier. There's no way she'll ever look anything like the beautiful Gina. She's too short, too curvy. Her bone structure isn't delicate enough, her hair limper and not as dynamic. When she saw them briefly stand side-by-side, they looked like a matching doll set atop a wedding cake. More similar in stature and skin tone, yet still different enough to be appealing.

She spent four days crying in her bed to find out Bellamy was already screwing a supermodel. Perfect.

"I can see time is one thing you don't waste!" she yells it louder than she'd intended. "God, what did you do? Walk out of my house and head straight to the bar to pick her up?"

The lines spring up around Bellamy's eyes as his nostrils billow outward. He takes two deep breaths that expand his chest toward her before speaking.

"Gina's a friend from college. I didn't pick her up at the bar," he gets it out between gritted teeth. "Who I hang out with is really none of your business."

His tone is an icy caress along her stomach, which twists painfully.

"I saw you together at Mecha this week," Clarke scoffs. "You two looked friendly."

Bellamy blinks rapidly and shakes his head like he's a dog removing fleas.

"You were following me, Clarke?" he's pretty close to yelling, too now.

"I didn't follow you! Don't be so full of yourself. You wouldn't respond to any of my texts, so I thought I could talk to you at work. You were upset when you left my house, and I don't know about you, but I can't go days on end not speaking without exploding, so--"
"Enough," the force of the one word silences her. "I think you should go now, Clarke."

She balks, sure she misheard him.

"So that's it? You're ready to cut me out without even talking about it?"

Her shoes resemble miniature stilts, but they allow her to reach his chin when she wobbles closer. She wills herself to look into his eyes.

They're very black, and there's no friendly spark behind them. He shakes his head a little but stays quiet.

"Just wanted to fuck the stupid high school girl to prove you were a badass? Is that it?" she taunts, jabbing her pointer finger into his chest, but he catches it.

He leans in a little closer until his warm breath tickles her cheek, speaking low.

"I told you I wanted to fuck you, Princess. It didn't seem to bother you at the time."

It shouldn't hurt as much as it does. But God, it feels like a sword eviscerating her intestines. Maybe she could just pass out right now and not have to deal with any of it.

Her head shakes, and her hands tremble. But her fingers remain clasped between his.

"You're - you're not . . . "

Can she even say the words?

"I'm not what?" he taunts her, slipping his hand up the wet skin of her arm. "From a gated community? I'm not like your boyfriend? The one you're cheating on? You wanna tell me how terrible I am, Clarke? Go ahead, tell me."

Thoughts turn to spinning pinwheels in her head, blurring and racing together.

"I didn't mean to," she says quietly to his chest. "I didn't want to."

He makes an aggravated sound at the back of his throat and releases her hand.

"No, you just wanted me to screw you in dark corners all summer, and you could sort it out later, right? Nobody ever needed to know. We could stay on my side of town and hang out with the people I knew, right? Because we can't let your precious tiara slip."

She takes a step away from him, eyes wider, and shakes her head.

"N-n-no," she mumbles. "No! That's not what I wanted."

"Whatever," Bellamy starts walking away from her, reaching out for the wine glasses to bring them to the kitchen. "It's ok, Clarke. This isn't who you are. You made a mistake. Go home and wait for Wells. I'll tell your dad to find you another tutor."

"No!" she says it more forcefully this time, actually stomping her foot.

She hears the clatter of the clinking wine glasses hit the sink. So she Marches in there, hands on her hips.

"Come on, Clarke. I told you it's fine. You don't belong here."
As she draws nearer to him, he clocks every sway of her hips and flutter of her shirt. She gains a little comfort in it, feels the weight of his gaze heat her body. It's easier to see it now, how he caves in. Even when he's angry with her, he's still game to be convinced of whatever she has in mind.

"That's not true."

"Yeah, it is," but his voice is scratchier now as he rests his weight back on the counter.

"I know I'm not Gina, but that doesn't mean I don't belong here."

"I don't want you to be Gina," he glides his palms out to her hips and lets them land possessively on her ass where he tests the weight of the mounds. "I want you to be you."

She swallows hard despite the sensation and says it clearly, but softly.

"Do I have to be me without you?"
Bellamy sighs heavily and looks over her head at the dark kitchen, lit only by the glowing lamps in the living room beyond. As he pulls his hands from her body, she whimpers like a kitten left out in the rain. There's a spasm along his jawline.

"Sometimes people get lonely, you know. But they can't be alone. So they start thinking things are something they're not."

Clarke's leg muscles turn to rubber though she manages to stumble a few steps backward on her stupid heels. She has half a mind to take one off and clobber him over the head with it.

"Excuse me?" she draws the words out like they have the power to maim. "Are you saying I'm lonely and imagined whatever the fuck," her hand whirs between their chests "this is into some fairytale?"

He knots his hand into his hair, and his lean, taut forearm pulls at her attention. A deep green vein coasts up its flawless underside and toward his middle knuckle. He gives her an unexpected smirk.

"Something like that," he says silkily. "I'm not your prince, Princess. You should go home, back to the castle. Wait for Wells. Forget this happened."

He launches off the counter and strides off in the direction of the foyer. Desperately fighting back tears, she gives a cry of frustration and kicks her wedges off - they crash into the lower cabinets with a smack - and tears after him. Her bare feet slapping against the floor catch his attention, and he looks back at her from the hallway leading to his room.

"Bellamy!"

Her throat stings from the high-pitched shriek she's forced it to produce.

Toes curling into the scratchy fibers of his throw rug, she breathes heavily. One shoulder of her top is falling down where the strap of her purse digs into her arm before running the diagonal length of her body, and a thin line of black mascara is smudged along her cheekbone.

"Yes, Clarke?" he says, clipped.

She hesitates for a moment.

"I don't want Wells."

His face remains impenetrable, but his nostrils flare.

"Don't do that."

"Don't do what?" she lurches a few steps forward, close enough to see the red wine stain on his lower lip.

His mouth wrinkles but then resumes a smooth line.

"You know what. Just don't," his tone calcifies, and his eyes narrow.
Her shoulders collapse a little as she stands there. But then she pulls her damp, messy locks into a bun on top of her head with the elastic secured around her wrist. A few shorter strands fall around her forehead anyway. She directs a stare right at him.

"I will if I want to. I don't take my orders from you."

She walks forward and takes hold of his elbows, stroking the insides of them with her thumbs. Bellamy barely moves, just watches her carefully. But she hears his breathing pattern change, and she thinks just maybe his eyes soften a fraction.

"It's been a week," she whispers the words below the hollow of his throat.

"Since what?"

"Since you took me to the clinic."

There might as well be a genuine electrical current pulsing between their bodies separated by inches.

"What do you want, Clarke?" he rasps.

"I thought that was obvious."

She closes the minimal space between them by kissing his chest through his T-shirt, then brings her lips to his throat, and finally launches up so her calves feel the stretch to reach his cheek.

His hands bite into her sides as he propels her backward, but he keeps them clamped around her body when she attempts to wiggle out of his grip.

"I still don't think you get it," he says, low and controlled. His words hold the promise of something that will capture her and refuse to let go.

"What don't I get, Bell?" she slips a hand under his shirtsleeve to rub his bicep.

He ignores her.

"This is really your last chance to leave."

The ocean sway of his words rock into her, but she stays upright. Her eyes glow with the unspoken thing she doesn't even fully understand. "I'm staying here. With you."

She's maneuvered into the corner of the dim hallway between the archway and wall faster than she can keep track of. Bellamy's looming presence surrounds her, his hands gripping at whatever part of her body they snake over. Goosebumps erupt down her thighs when he grasps her ass, digs into her hips, pets her stomach, and cups her breasts. She tries to bend his neck down to kiss him, but he doesn't allow it, biting into her shoulder instead. He yanks the purse and shirt over her head, and they hit the ground with a whoosh of air. Her pants and underwear follow together in a heap.

When he kneels before her, still fully clothed, and bends her right leg slowly up and over his shoulder, she balks.

"Bell, no, it's ok, you don't have to--"

His grin is half snarl, and he skims his teeth against her hipbone before gliding a hand up between her breasts, barely touching them but driving her insane nonetheless.

"I'm going to do what I want, Princess. And you're going to let me."
When his tongue makes its first sweep across her opening, her sweaty palm slaps into the wall, finding nothing to clutch. She almost cries when he wraps his lips around the shivering hood of her clit and sucks it into his mouth.

When the orgasm rips through her body minutes later, her knees tremble as he removes her leg from his shoulder. Standing back up, Bellamy rolls his hips against hers and claims her mouth, so she can taste the sharpness of herself. She sucks gently at his tongue when she hears the approving grumble he offers her, wrapping her arms around his neck at last.

But then he's kicking her legs apart with his knee and pushing two fingers inside her abruptly as she keens, pulling them out wet and sparing a moment to swipe the moisture against her pink-red folds.

"Ready to take me hard and deep, Princess?" he goads her.

"Ohh my God," is her only moan when he locks his fingers around hers and brings them to the pronounced bulge straining against his sweatpants.

***

Naked and more than ready for her, he sits at the edge of his bed while she stands between his knees. Her breasts are near his eye level, and he unsnaps her bra with practiced ease.

"One knee over here, he pats the comforter next to his thigh, using the other hand to toy with her tight nipple, "and the other on the other side."

Clarke crawls into his lap as gracefully as possible, shivering from some combination of want and fear. The tip of his uncovered dick leaves a splash of precum on her belly where it rubs her.

"You're gonna swallow me up inside your little pussy, aren't you, Princess?" he grins, lightly stroking himself until a few more drops bubble up at the head.

She sticks her fluffy lower lip with the sharp edge of her canine and nods.

"All right, then," he pulls her up by the waist, so she's no longer slouching against him and rocks the tip of his dick against her silken clit. It sends firecrackers down her spine and around the whole perimeter of her pelvis. "Go on and take me."

She's jerky and hesitant in her movements, clutching his shoulder and raising up, so he's centered near her opening.

"That's it, guide it in," he murmurs, pushing the blonde flurries of hair behind her ears.

He groans deeply as she sinks onto his shaft inch by inch. It still feels like her body wants to expel the foreign invader, but Bellamy wraps his hands around her waist, and at this angle, there's nothing to do but let gravity takes its toll. Her eyes close when she feels the twinge miles within her that says he's all the way inside.

"You're so thick," she hisses when he leisurely raises her up a few inches only to drop her back down.

"Wait til I really start moving," he returns, kissing the underside of her jaw.

Eventually, he lays on the flat of his back, dipping a finger into the growing arousal seeping from the place their bodies join as Clarke raises and lowers herself onto him with rattling breaths, rubbing her clit against any flat inch of skin she can reach when she sinks down far enough. When he leans up to
suck one of her nipples into his mouth, she has a minor convulsion, clenching tightly around him.

He growls, rolling them over and snapping his hips against her aggressively, kneading first one breast than the other. His fingertips trail across the baby pools of sweat along her stomach, and he licks the stuff off her neck, enjoying her sugar vanilla flavor.

"I'm gonna come, Princess," he manages to choke out, tapping her clit as she clutches at his hair.

"Mmm," Clarke gasps, feeling him tighten, making her even more impossibly full.

Her hips thrust up into his without much conscious effort at this point. He's going so fast, so much faster than before.

"I'm not going to pull out."

"I know," she says it just as the thick jet of liquid floods her. Her spine arches up, exposing the bands of muscle straining in her neck. She squeezes her knees against Bellamy's hips with her last bit of strength before her own orgasm radiates through her core, inviting him even deeper into her body.

***

He crawls under the blankets with her this time, letting her head rest on his chest and spanning an arm across her lower back. She's sticky and exhausted but way too tired to move and twitches when Bellamy ghosts a finger across her nipple.

She drifts off to sleep with him stroking her bare arm, one of her legs tossed across his.

***

Late the next morning, Clarke crouches against his bedside table, already dressed and digging through her purse in search of her ringing phone.

"What is it?" Bellamy asks blearily, rubbing his eyes with the back of his hands.

The white sheet curls around his abdomen, and his hair is extra disheveled from sleep. A flutter takes off in her stomach.

"Nothing, nothing," she soothes. "Just my phone. Go back to sleep."

"I'm awake," he grumbles, unfurling out of bed with a creak of the mattress springs and pulling fresh clothing from his dresser drawers.

"Got it!" she says victoriously, tugging it out a bit too hard and sending a few items careening to the carpet below. She silences her cell and looks thoughtfully down at the number, deciding she has no idea whose it is.

"What's this?" Bellamy pushes his arms through his clean shirt and reaches down to pick something up from the floor.

He dangles it before her eyes. It's a little wooden figure. Hanging from a thin, grey cord.

"Birthday gift," she says it calmly, considering her nervous system just went into hyper overdrive mode.

He watches her carefully and lays the mini griffin in the center of his palm.
"Who's it from?" his eyes harden of their own accord, locking her out of his thoughts.

"Uhhh, it's nothing really. I got it yesterday. Give it to me; I'll put it away," she reaches out a hand for it, the blush stretching to her hairline.

"That's not what I asked you, Clarke," he growls, glancing back down at the griffin before sealing his fingers around it.

"I'll throw it away, Bellamy."

"You got it from Finn, didn't you?" he demands, the clench of his jaw rigid.

"Ha-how did you know?" she breathes. Tears are stinging the backs of her eyes.

"Your pal Raven had a bird one roped to her car keys. She dangled them in my face that day in the parking lot," he snaps. "I can put two and two together. I'm a nerd like that, remember?" his cruel tone stings her.

"Bell, please, I'm sorry," she takes a step toward him. "There was no time to get rid of it. And I had to see you."

He holds up a hand to silence her, scoffing quietly.

"You're something else, Clarke," her name comes out of his mouth like sawdust. "You probably have every guy in town running after you. Lemme guess. Is Finn's dad the president of Google?"

"That's not fair. I can't help it if someone wants to give me a gift!" she throws back.

"You don't have to accept every gift that comes along. You can use your brain. You can read people!" he barks.

"Yeah, a lot of good that's done me with you," she volleys back.

There's a moment's pause and then --

"Take your gift and get the hell out of here!" he yells, throwing the bracelet down on the mess of blankets.

Face dark, Bellamy snaps up the car keys he left on his dresser and storms toward the front door. She hears it slam a minute later. The sound reverses her paralysis, and she bolts toward the door after him.

"Bellamy!" she screams from the driveway as he careens his truck toward the street. "Where are you going?!"

She runs barefoot into the road behind the white Chevy, bits of gravel cutting into her feet.

It happens so fast.

The orange ball of fluff shoots across the pavement toward the untouched woods on the other side.

A girl sprints after it, her red braids streaming in the breeze behind her.

There's the sound of screeching brakes, the pickup spinning toward the left to avoid the child. Clarke's eyes fly open in horror as her entire world slows down.
The truck speeds up over the curb and onto the natural area, heading straight toward a tree. Then there's only the sickening thud and busting glass of the collision. She watches the airbags deploy, can see his torso jolt forward toward the windshield.

"Bellamy!" she howls loudly enough to wake the neighborhood.

She flies toward the front of the smoking vehicle, heart beating out of her chest.
Hannah Green rushes down the never-ending corridor, new kitten heels clicking along the polished floor with each step. She's late for her morning meeting with the executive team about unveiling the hospital's new brand strategy. If Anya had only sent me the final slide deck yesterday morning when I asked for it, she thinks with a sigh, punching the elevator button violently.

Her brief case strap cuts into her shoulder painfully. She leans down to massage her spasming calf muscle only to notice an inch-long tear in her stocking. Perfect. When she rises again, it's the flash of golden blonde hair that makes her pause and draw closer to the room's window, where the hall blinds remain open. The woman's hair is fairly long and wavy, and her frame seems petite. But the way she's slumped against the bed makes it hard to know for sure. She doesn't recognize the young man spread out before the girl, just notices his dark curls and closed eyes.

Clarke? But she was out with Monty last night, and he came home with Jasper . . .

A weird pull of curiosity and concern urges her forward as she takes a few steps toward the room's door. Then the call of "Hannah!" catches her completely by surprise.

Turning, she takes in the man's jovial smile, dark beard, and glowing white coat. "Dr. Nyko!" she exclaims in pleasure. "It's so nice to see you!"

"Hannah, I thought that was you," he smiles in return, drawing her into a brief hug. "It feels like centuries. How are you? Still keeping all the scandals at bay?" he winks.

She grins back.

"I'm doing well, thank you! Speaking of scandals, I'm late to a meeting with the C-suite," she gestures toward the elevator. "Fifth floor conference room?" he asks with a look of sympathy.

"Of course," she returns.

"Well, I'm headed to the OB-GYN wing up there, so mind if I walk with you?"

"Not at all! I'd heard you moved back from the D.C. area, and I was wondering when I'd see you again."

The elevator doors chime open, and the pair step inside. "Yeah, you know, I was really missing the West Coast lifestyle, and when the opportunity opened up to move into pediatric surgery here, I couldn't pass it up."

Hannah nods. Dr. Nyko was the one who delivered Monty years ago when she suffered preeclampsia and required an emergency C-section.

"So tell me where you're living now? And how has the move back been treating you?" she asks as the doors slide open again.

Anya's apologetic face greets her immediately, the young woman's hands piled high with her laptop and assorted folders.
Dr. Nyko smiles politely at Anya.

"Duty calls?" he turns to Hannah.

"It does," she agrees, looking a little put out. "But it was so nice to see you. We'll catch up over coffee or lunch soon, ok?"

"Sounds great," he says before heading off toward the OB-GYN wing. "Just shoot me an email."

Hannah begins listening intently to Anya's hurried last-minute questions as they walk briskly toward the conference room, all thoughts of Clarke swept from her mind.

***

When Miller steps into Bellamy's room, Murphy right on his heels complaining about the parking ticket he'll likely get for parking in a 10-minute drop off zone, he freezes. His best friend looks so . . . helpless. Bellamy's usually tan, self-assured face seems to have lost most of its hue, and there's a pallor to it that makes Miller nervous. His eyes are closed, he's wearing a white hospital gown, and is connected to various beeping machines and monitors. A few puffy, pink-and-blue bruises decorate his face and neck, coloring it like a sunset. From this vantage point, he appears even younger than he is.

But what surprises Miller most is the crumpled form of a girl curled up near his legs. She's half-sitting on a chair pulled up to the edge of Bellamy's bed, and her blonde hair spills out, covering her face where it rests near his knee. He knows who it is though. She's the one who called him frantically a few hours ago when the crash happened.

"Clarke?" he says gently, shaking her shoulder until he sees her eyelids flutter open.

"Miller," she smiles weakly at him, grasping for his hand and sitting up slowly. "Thank you so much for coming!"

"Hey, Clarke," Murphy gives an awkward wave from nearer the door.

Clarke returns the smile and wave. Her eyes are rimmed in red, and there are defined bags under them.

"How is he?" Miller steps around her, gazing down at his friend. "Is he sleeping or in a . . . "

The word dies on his tongue. He can't even think it.

"No, no, he's sleeping!" Clarke says hurriedly, getting up. "The doctors let me stay with him because there was no one else here, but they won't tell me anything specific other than that he's stable since I'm not family. All I know is it's not a coma. It seems like a concussion from what they were saying to each other."

Miller swallows hard but nods, squaring his shoulders against the prickling at the back of his eyes. He pulls Clarke into a one-armed hug, and she sniffs against his shoulder. When he draws back, they lock eyes for a moment. She looks as bad as he feels. Her hair's all matted, there's a rip running diagonally across her shirt, dirt stains her pants, and something that too closely resembles blood is marked all along her hands and forearms.

"So what exactly happened?" Murphy breaks the silence, stepping closer.

Clarke takes a deep breath and relays the story of the accident, voice only shaking slightly.
"I think he fractured a few ribs, but I'm not sure," she finishes, as a beam of sunlight spills in through the outer window onto her face.

Miller takes in how young and small she seems standing before him, twisting her hands together at her waist.

"It's gonna be all right, Clarke," he says reassuringly. "Bellamy's really lucky you were there and reacted so fast."

She bites her lip, appears on the verge of crying, and turns away from him.

"Clarke?"

The croak of Bellamy's voice makes them all jump.

"Bellamy?" Clarke whirls around, eyes round.

Holding one hand over her mouth, she hurries to sit back down next to him, taking one of his hands in both of her own.

"Bellamy, baby, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry," she whispers, bringing his hand to her lips and kissing the top of it. "How are you feeling? Do you remember anything?"

He blinks slowly a few times then winces, pulling his free hand up to his face gingerly.


Clarke whimpers again, bringing his hand up against her cheek for a moment before laying it gently down and rubbing his shoulder with the softness of a breeze.

"I'm so sorry. It's all my fault," she says again, tears spilling down her face.

"It's all right, Princess," he manages, groaning as he shifts in the bed. "You can't get rid of me that easily."

When his eyes find hers, they're warmer than she thinks she deserves. She hiccups, a crease forming between her eyebrows. Bellamy swipes along the delicate skin beneath her eyes with his thumb.

"Miller, hey man," he says when he catches sight of his friend. His voice is incredibly scratchy.

Miller walks over and sits down beside him, grinning and lightly tapping his arm.

"You're gonna be fine, Bellamy. And Clarke here's been with you all day," he gestures at her, but she barely notices. Bellamy completely consumes her attention. "I'm sorry I couldn't be here sooner, but I'm glad you had someone with you."

"Turns out the fair maiden was really your knight in shining armor, Blake," Murphy says from where he's slouched against the wall.

Bellamy presses his lips together for a second but then just says, "Thanks for coming, Murphy."

The shouting in the hall seems muffled at first, but it quickly grows louder. Clarke can hear the stomping of boots and sees a flash of a leather jacket blur by the hall window. Finally, the angry words are clear enough to make out.

"I want to know what the hell happened to my brother! Where is he?!"
I wanted Octavia to be that glowing butterfly so badly. But, you know . . . *shrugs*

Isn't it more fun if she's not a fan of Clarke? And a bit more realistic to her canon character?

The young woman slams her way into the room, causing the door to collide with the wall with a bang. She's slight and petite, but her straight, dark hair falls around her pale face like a formidable specter, and her blue eyes are wild with worry and rage. She reminds Clarke more of Angelina Jolie in Lara Croft: Tomb Raider than any delicate fairy in the woods.

"Bell!" she breathes, frozen for an instant. Then she hurries to his side, barely sparing a glance for anyone around her as Clarke jumps out of her way.

"O!" he manages, trying to sit up.

She halts right next to his chest, hovering uncertainly, clearly wanting to wrap her arms around him.

"You can hug me, just go easy," he gives her a smile that breaks Clarke's heart open in a fresh wave of guilt.

Octavia hugs him around the shoulders and kisses his hairline before fussing with his blankets and pillows for a moment. Bellamy tries unsuccessfully to bat her away.

"What happened?" she demands as she works. "How hurt are you?" It's like she notices Miller for the first time. "What do we know?" Then suddenly, she twists her body in Clarke's direction. "Who the hell are you?"

"Hi, Octavia. Take a breath," Miller smiles at her. "We don't know much of anything new. Clarke was with him when the car crash happened," he gestures to the uncertain blonde at the foot of the bed. "I told you what I knew on the phone, but no doctor's been by yet."

Octavia narrows her eyes at Clarke and crosses her arms over her chest.

"Tell me who you are and what happened to my brother," she snaps.

"Octavia," Bellamy says warningly.

"This oughta be good," Murphy mumbles to himself.

"I'm C-Clarke," she stumbles over her own name, walking forward to stand in front of the formidable girl cloaked in leather and ample eyeliner. "Bellamy works for my dad at UCLA; he's his TA. He's been tutoring me in history this summer--"
Murphy snorts, but no one pays him any attention.

"He was driving down your street, and a cat ran out into the road. And then your neighbor, the little
girl, Clara, I think?" Clarke rubs her hand across her face as the hint of a migraine begins stabbing at
the back of her head. "She ran into the road after the cat, and Bellamy swerved into a tree."

Octavia hisses.

"Jesus Christ, Bell! You could have died!" she rounds on him.

"I'm fine, O. Clarke called the paramedics, and they've got me pretty doped up," he returns, voice a
little harder.

She gives Clarke an appraising stare, pinching her lips together. Clarke watches her cheek twitch as
she simply says, "Hmph," dismissively, tapping her foot.

"Octavia!" comes a deep voice from the doorway.

They all look up to take in the newcomer in surprise.

"Oh good. The Hulk is here," Murphy drolls as Miller throws him a death glare.

The man is tall, bulky, and intimidating. With a shaved head and several tattoos coasting up his
brown skin, Clarke swallows hard when she lays eyes on him.

"Hey, Lincoln," Bellamy calls from his perch, raising a hand but sucking air between his teeth when
the motion causes a shift in his ribs.

"You're in pain!" Octavia insists immediately, reaching over her brother's head to hit the red button
and summon a nurse. "Enough of this bullshit. I want someone to tell me exactly what's wrong with
you."

***

The doctor is a woman with long, dirty-blonde hair pulled gracefully away from her angular face in a
half undo. The badge clipped to the front of her white jacket reads Niylah Woods. Though she's
young, she conducts herself with a certain grace and maturity that makes her seem older.

"I'm Dr. Woods," she smiles at Octavia, reaching out to shake her hand.

"Octavia Blake, I'm his sister," she nods back.

"I'm glad you could be here, Octavia. But I'm going to have to ask everyone else to leave for now
while I go over Bellamy's situation with you, all right?"

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"I'm glad you could be here, Octavia. But I'm going to have to ask everyone else to leave for now
while I go over Bellamy's situation with you, all right?"

"Well, that's my cue. See you back at the bar, Blake. Hope you feel better soon," Murphy stretches
dramatically as he pulls himself up to his full height and taps the edge of Bellamy's footboard before
strolling out the door, humming.

"Later, Murphy," Bellamy shakes his head.

Miller squeezes Bellamy's shoulder. "You let me know if you need anything, all right? I'll come by
the house to check on you soon?"

Bellamy nods, but it's more of an awkward jerk of his chin. "Yeah, thanks, man."
"Rest up and feel better," he says, touching Clarke's arm briefly before heading to the door with Lincoln at his heels.

"I'll be right outside," Lincoln says to Octavia. "Do you all want anything from the cafeteria maybe?"

"No, I'm ok, man. But thanks for bringing my sister."

Lincoln gives him a small smile.

"Of course."

Octavia's hand lands on her hip, and she widens her eyes at Clarke.

"You wanna tell me why you got out of all this unscathed? Or why you were even at our house at ten in the morning?" her voice is somehow both velvety and dangerous all at once.

Clarke reels back, gripping the window sill, while Dr. Woods shuffles her files noisily, not making eye contact with any of them.

"Octavia, leave it," Bellamy says forcefully.

"She can speak for herself," Octavia argues.

"I wasn't in the car with him," Clarke murmurs, staring down at her wedge heels and ruby red toenail polish. "I came over for a morning tutoring session--"

"--Because I had a shift at Mecha and then some construction jobs this week," Bellamy lies smoothly. "We weren't going to be able to meet up for a few days, and her dad isn't paying me for nothing," he glances up at Clarke, winking.

His words pull at her stomach as she grasps their double meaning. She knows she's probably flushing but nods along.

"Anyway, you know I'm a bad housekeeper, O. I was out of milk and coffee, so I was just gonna go to the corner gas station and pick something up, but Clara ran into the road, and . . . you know the rest," he finishes calmly, still watching Clarke.

"All right, I think that's enough excitement for now," Dr. Woods says pointedly to Octavia.

Her quick, delicate fingers make short work of inspecting Bellamy's torso through his gown, and she examines his X-rays and charts carefully.

Clarke nods and scurries toward the door. She closes it behind her and heaves a deep sigh against it.

"She's fierce when she's all worked up," comes Lincoln's deep grumble from a few seats down. "But it's only because she loves him so much."

"Oh!" Clarke lurches over a few inches.

"Sorry, didn't mean to scare you."

His eyes are a kind brown, she realizes.

"Soda?" he holds out a can to her. "You really look like you could use the caffeine."
Half an hour later, Dr. Woods emerges into the hallway. Octavia follows, pulling her leather jacket tight around her. Clarke launches to her feet, her ridiculous black top from last night floating in the breeze she creates.

"Please, is there anything I can do for him? Or something you need?"

Octavia's cool blue eyes seem to crackle as they focus on her, taking in her sexy outfit.

"My brother needs rest and to avoid stimulation right now," she wrinkles her nose. "That, judging from what I just saw in there," she jerks her thumb back at the glass window. "means you. You can go, Clarke. I'll take it from here."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for making it this far with me! I appreciate each and every one of you. :) I'm curious to hear if there is something in particular you'd like to see happen. I have the next few chapters outlined, but I kind of wanted to check in with you all and make sure there's not something I'm overlooking that's important. As the story grows, it gets a little more challenging to keep tabs on all the loose ends! So if you'd care to share, feel free below, and I promise to read and consider everything. Who knows? Maybe your ideas will make a guest appearance in the chapters to come. I've definitely been known to do that. This could be about anything really: characters or character interactions you want to see more of, ships, fights, backstory, fluff, locations, anything goes! THANK YOU!
The Hollywood Hills

Raven Reyes: Has Clarke said something to you about why she left Saturday?

Monty Green: No, haven't heard anything. Have u?

Raven Reyes: Radio silence.

Monty Green: She'll come around when she's ready?

Raven Reyes: Why do I talk to you?

Monty Green: Cause Clarke won't talk to u? :p

Raven Reyes: Screw you, Monty.

Monty Green: You wish.

Raven Reyes: And now we're done.

Monty Green: Touchy.

***

Clarke Griffin: How are you feeling? Do you need anything? Are you getting your rest?

Bellamy Blake: I already have 1 woman driving me up a wall, Princess. I don't need 2.

Clarke Griffin: I'm so sorry, Bell. For everything. I feel horrible.

Bellamy Blake: Don't.

Clarke Griffin: I should have thrown the damn bracelet away.

Clarke Griffin: It doesn't mean anything to me.

Clarke Griffin: I'm really glad you're ok.

Bellamy Blake: Thanks.

Clarke Griffin: Are you sure I can't get you something? Anything, really. You name it.

Bellamy Blake: Be careful with that offer.

Clarke Griffin: I don't take my orders from you.

Bellamy Blake: Making the guy with the busted ribs laugh is not the best medicine, Princess.

Clarke Griffin: When can I see you?

Bellamy Blake: I'll let you know when O calms down. My head's a lot better, and my ribs are healing. She's gonna leave in a few days to drive back up the coast with Lincoln.
Clarke Griffin: You'll call me?

Bellamy Blake: If that's what you want.

Clarke Griffin: <3

***

Harper McIntyre: Come for a ride through the Hollywood Hills with me? Maybe we'll see Katy Perry?

Clarke Griffin: Idk, Harps. I'm trying to finish a new mural for one of the hospital's lounges by Friday.

Harper McIntyre: All u do is paint & study lately, girl. Come on!! Pleeeaaasse? Wind in our hair? Girl talk? On the hunt for Ellen DeGeneres? This is a great opportunity.

Clarke Griffin: Ok, ok. R u gonna pick me up?

Harper McIntyre: Be there in 15. ;)

***

They're been driving for a half hour, climbing higher into the red-brown hills, when the Hollywood sign comes into view under a few rare, puffy clouds. The black asphalt curves right to the edge of the cliffs in some spots, and Clarke tries not to get dizzy looking around the bends and directly outward toward L.A.

"It's crazy how everyone dreams of coming here, and we've lived here forever, isn't it?" Clarke asks, tipping her head back and enjoying the sunshine on her arms and face instead.

"Yeah, I guess so," Harper leans deeper into her seat, reaching up to open the sliding, carpeted screen blocking the sunroof. "Tinsel town and movie stars and all that. It's not all that glamorous to see Renee Zellweger in yoga pants feeding the pigeons at the pier after a bad chemical peel though, let me tell you," she jokes.

Clarke laughs.

"People don't understand that what they see in the movies isn't real life. It's just fun to pretend," she sighs.

"Mnhmm," Harper drums her fingers against the steering wheel. "And speaking of movies, was everything all right Saturday? You kinda left in a hurry."

"Did Monty put you up to this?" Clarke cracks one eye open and looks sideways at her friend.

"Nope, this one's coming straight from me, I swear," she holds up one hand. "Is it Wells? Was Titanic too much? It was too mushy, right? I should've thought of that - I'm sorry. I'm sure you must miss him," she says sympathetically.

The oppressive heaviness fills Clarke's throat and pushes against the walls of her stomach.

"The movie was fine, don't worry about it. And it's not Wells."

"Ok. . . well, did something else happen? Because you've been . . . " she searches around for the
right words, "I don't know . . . kind of jumpy lately. It's like you don't want to hang out with us. Is that it?" her voice soars up on the last question, full of hesitancy.

She reminds Clarke of a person about to skydive, simultaneously willing and unwilling to take the plunge toward the toy towns and patchwork fields below, uncertain of how safe the landing will really be.

"It's not all of you," Clarke mutters, listening to the crunch of gravel under the tires.

"Ok . . . uh, did I offend you or something? Are you mad at me?" Harper tries again in a rush.

Clarke snorts.

"God, no, Harper. If you had, why would I even bother taking this ride with you?"

But then she catches the heavy, confused look on Harper's face and instantly feels badly.

"Sorry," she taps her arm affectionally. "It's not you, I promise. I've just been dealing with a lot of stuff lately. And," she takes a deep breath, weighing the odds, "Finn hasn't exactly been helping the situation."

Harper grasps onto the slipped information like a lifeboat in a churning sea.

"What did Finn do?" she asks carefully.

Clarke turns over her thoughts slowly in her mind. But the anxiety about Bellamy and the guilt over Wells are becoming too much. She's woken up the past two nights in a cold sweat, heart racing, bolting toward the hallway before she realized everything was all right and laid back down again. If she doesn't say something soon, confess something to somebody she knows, she's going to combust.

"He kind of came onto me at Monty's house, downstairs in the kitchen," she admits, staring straight out at the road before them, ignoring the few houses nestled in the valleys as they pass.

"You know Finn, though," Harper starts kindly. "He's a little over friendly, too sure of himself. Are you sure that's what it was?"

"He told me he would help me with my history and looked up and down my body. It creeped me out," Clarke admits. "I would've let it go, but then I went shopping with him and Raven, and he told me he couldn't stop thinking about me in the parking lot and tried to grab my arm."


"Yeah, I know. And then I didn't see him until we went out for my birthday, and he was all right at first. But then when I went to get candy, he followed me and tried to apologize for the whole thing and gave me a bracelet present."

"I mean, I guess that's kind of better?" Harper shrugs, but Clarke can hear the wince in her voice.

"Harper, it was the exact same kind he made for Raven. You know, the little bird she keeps on her keychain."

"He's not even original!" Harper exclaims, gritting her teeth together and pulling her lips back.

"Damn, I'm sorry. I had no idea! What a mess."

You don't know the half of it, Clarke says to herself as a picture of Bellamy's truck smashing into the tree slides into her mind's eye. When his body launched forward toward the windshield as the air bag
deployed, she thought she might actually leave her body.

"It's all right. I didn't tell anyone," Clarke sighs.

Harper seems deep in contemplation as she comes to a red light at last. Clarke rolls forward at the sudden stop after such constant motion.

"And of course Finn's friends with Wells, too, so that complicates things."

"Yup."

The heat that was pleasant a few minutes ago is now making the car oppressively warm.

"So, did you believe him when he apologized?" Harper asks tentatively as she begins driving again.

"Would you?" Clarke looks at her out of the corner of her eye.

Harper barks out a humorless laugh.

"No, I guess not," she answers her own question. "But are you going to say anything to Raven? Or Wells?"

"I want to, but then I don't want to," Clarke rubs her hands across her knees up and down. "It'll be a shit show of drama, and what if she doesn't believe me?"

Harper clucks her tongue in acknowledgement.

"I'm kinda hoping Finn will just back off, but being around him is starting to make my skin crawl."

"Understandable. I'm sorry, Clarke. I really am. I just - I guess I've been checked out. I didn't know."

"It's not your fault. It's not like he was doing the stuff out in the open or anything. But thanks for listening."

"Thanks for trusting me with this. I won't say anything to anyone about it."

"Even Monty?" Clarke raises her eyebrow.

"Even Monty," Harper affirms. "I've got to give it some serious thought . . . But in the mean time, wanna wallow in L.A.'s best bubble tea?"

Clarke grins at her and reaches for the radio dial.

"Let's do it!"

***

Harper rocks on the back legs of her plastic purple chair, slurping at the gummy tapioca balls at the bottom of her bubble tea cup.

"And then my mom is just suddenly going off . . . like giving me the safe sex lecture because Monty dropped me off 10 minutes past curfew! It was insane!" she exclaims.

"That is . . . an intense reaction," Clarke nods empathetically.

"Don't get me wrong, it's not like I don't want to, but it's like we never have an opportunity," Harper
admits. "And it's practically impossible to find an OB-GYN here who doesn't know his mom. I feel like I'll be judged wherever I go for birth control."

"They technically can't say anything," Clarke shakes her head. "Doctor-patient confidentiality and all that."

"Yeah, but," Harper rolls her eyes. "In this town, people talk. I mean, don't you worry with being Abby Griffin's daughter dating Thelonious Jaha's son?"

Clarke flushes.

"Point made. I've thought about the lack of privacy, too."

*And acted on it*, she inwardly cringes.

The thought springs to Clarke's mind then her lips before she spends much time considering the ramifications of sharing it, suddenly just eager to be helpful.

"There's a Planned Parenthood in Inglewood where Dr. Jackson's great!" she says excitedly before clamping her lips together.

"Oh," Harper looks surprised, eyebrows flying up. "I didn't realize you . . . well, thanks! I'll definitely check it out!"

Clarke gives her a tight smile before occupying herself with her own bubble tea.

***

Later that evening, Harper's snuggled up against Monty's chest in his rec room, listening to music.

"I think I found a clinic in Inglewood where I can get a prescription for the pill," she says softly, tracing figure eights along his forearm. "A friend recommended a good doctor there."

Monty's eyebrows shoot up, and a flash of heat coils in his stomach.

"Really? Which is it?" he blurts out.

"It's one of the Planned Parenthood branches, relax. Not affiliated with the hospital," she cranes her neck upward to kiss his jaw.

His grip around her waist tightens a little.

"Yeah, but my mom deals with the PR people at those clinics. I don't think she knows the doctors, but she's always rambling on about sending reporters' questions about teen pregnancy and STD trends and kinky sex party fads to them."

"Kinky sex party fads?" Harper giggles.

"I'm serious!" Monty insists, though he laughs a little.

"Wait . . . who told you about it?" he asks after a minute.

"Does it matter?" Harper hedges.

He nudges her in the ribs until she begins laughing and squirming away from him. But she's no match for his quick fingers.
"Tell me!"

"Fine, fine! I give!" she huffs out one intense minute later, finding it hard to breathe as her stomach muscles continue to burn.

"It was Clarke, but I think it was sort of a secret about her and Wells, you know. She looked so guilty when she was talking about it. So please don't say anything to either of them! You know how strict their parents are . . . " she bites her bottom lip, looking into his eyes.

Monty's nostrils flare out for a moment as he crinkles his brow. But then he smiles at his girlfriend, tugging her into his chest and kissing the top of her head.

"I won't, I understand," he says simply. "We could check it out. I don't know . . . maybe. But we might need to find a place farther away . . . "

Harper lets the steady bass beat take her away to a happy place, used to Monty's serious, worried rants.

Eventually, he quietes down and relaxes into the couch, but he still feels a definite concern he can't shake off. Wells would never risk going to a Planned Parenthood clinic with his dad constantly raving about "what a nightmare Planned Parenthood is in the political world." Legislation that would benefit the hospital often died on the vine because it included funding for Planned Parenthood, and religious activists would come out against it. Plus, with all the media attention Dr. Jaha received for running Cedars-Sinai and now his ambitions to campaign for mayor and cozy up to Governor Wallace, it just didn't make sense for his son to risk strolling into one of their clinics.

Like, at all.

Monty convinces himself Clarke must have gone alone, fearful her own parents would find out about her activities if she ventured too near the hospital and its extensive network.

Yeah, that has to be it.

***

At dinner, he nearly chokes on his garlic sautéed broccoli when his mother turns to him.

"Honey, have you checked in with Clarke to make sure everything's ok? I forgot to tell you, but I could've sworn I saw her visiting a young man in the hospital Sunday. She was laying across his bed, so I couldn't be sure. Maybe it was someone else, you know how people can look alike from the back . . . "
"What did he look like?" Monty asks, reaching for the glass of ice water to wash down his food.

"Hmm?" his mother murmurs, scooping more chicken onto her plate. "Oh, I'm not really sure, honey. I didn't get the best look. He had dark, curly hair though," she glances up to her left, fork poised in the air, lost in thought, "And kind of tan skin. He wasn't that old, maybe a few years older than you." She scrunches up her nose. "Oh, and he also had a lot of freckles on his face. I remember because the bed was near the hall window, and the fluorescents made them stand out. Why? Does it sound like someone you know?"

"No," Monty grips his knife tighter. "Nobody I've met."

His mother begins chatting idly away about how his Aunt Diana seemed a little out-of-sorts at the reunion, but she can't quite place her finger on why. Yet he can only focus on the sour churning in his stomach.

***

He knows he can ask Raven what Clarke's tutor looks like, or even Finn, if necessary. But opening up that can of worms with either of them will only lead to the drama he's trying to avoid. They'll want to know why he's suddenly so curious, and there's no way to answer that question without giving the game away. If he's wrong, there's no harm done, and nobody's the wiser. But if he's right, well, than Clarke has a hell of a lot of explaining to do.

He flips open his laptop in the living room, making sure the screen points only to him and not his mother, who's still bustling around clearing plates in the kitchen. Navigating to www.ucla.edu, he scrolls through the academic departments until he settles on history, then finds Jake Griffin, Ph.D. under the staff roster. When he clicks the name, a blonde-haired, blue-eyed man with an easy expression smiles back at him.

"Courses taught, courses taught, come on . . . " he mumbles under his breath.

It's a long shot, but Dr. Griffin might already have his syllabi up for the fall semester.

"Yes!" he hisses, clicking the first one in the bulleted list, Survey of World History: Neolithic Revolution to the American Revolution.

A strange thrumming skips through his veins as he tracks his eyes over the top of the syllabus. Monday/Wednesday/Friday, 9:00-10:15 a.m., Factory Hall, Room 394. Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3-5 p.m., Room 172. Teaching Assistant: Bellamy Blake, bblake@history.ucla.edu.

Monty quickly opens Facebook and types in the name, clicking on the first profile that comes up. The picture shows a smiling guy standing in front of a body of turquoise water with some neon
paddle boards on the sand next to him. His arm's around the shoulders of a girl with a similar shade of dark hair. His is curly though, while hers is much straighter. She's squinting into the sun, apparently laughing at either something he said or something the photographer said. The guy's tan, but Monty's unsure of his exact ethnicity. He swishes his fingers across the mousepad, trying to zoom in on the image. There they are. Freckles across the bridge of his nose, flowing over to his cheekbones. They have one mutual friend: John Murphy. He snorts. It figures. The greasy-haired playground punk of his childhood who used to taunt him and Jasper. Murphy grew out of some of his idiocy, though, he had to admit. He'd been a big help on the science quiz bowl team when they'd gone to the state finals a couple years ago before he graduated.

But the nostalgia doesn't change a thing. Monty slumps back against his chair, sprawling his legs out onto the rug over the wood floor.

"Bob's your uncle," he says quietly. "Fuck."

***

Wells' face positively beams at Clarke when the video chat window pops up on her screen.

"Hey, beautiful! How was your birthday? Did the crew treat you right?"

Clarke's smile seems to wane the longer she stares at him, blinking.

"Oh!" she finally says. "It was good, sorry. It's just been, gosh, almost two weeks? Has it really been that long since we talked?"

"Talked? No. Successfully Skyped? Yes," Wells corrects her, cocking his eyebrow and studying her more seriously. "I couldn't get a hold of you for the first few days after, and then you know we started traveling around to see the hospitals nearby. I emailed you about that. The internet connection hasn't been the best everywhere we've stayed..." he shrugs. "For the Brits, high tea is a daily priority, but broadband? Not so much."

Clarke laughs as he makes a face.

"Right, I'm sorry! I remember now. We tried last week, and your face looked like a scrambled egg."

"But a cute scrambled egg, right, baby?"

"Very cute."

Clarke shakes her head then props her chin on her knuckles, leaning toward her computer and brushing her hair out of her eyes. "It's just been busy here, sorry. I was asked to start working on a new mural for the hospital, and between that and the history tutoring, and then Harper wanted to go out and spend some girl time in the Hollywood Hills...

"It's all right," Wells says slowly. "But you're ok? You're having some fun?"

"Yeah," Clarke smiles back at him. "I am. By the way, I don't think I said it last time we talked, but your gifts were amazing, Wells! Thank you so much for them."

"It was nothing," he swats his hand nonchalantly. "What did the others get you?"

"Uh, mum and dad sent this obnoxiously large basket full of quintessentially British items," she puts on her best mock accent, "and when I say full, dah-ling, I mean full. British candy and tea, makeup, all the Harry Potter books' U.K. editions, this crazy-gorgeous hat I'll never be able to wear unless I'm
invited to a London wedding, you get the idea, sport," she sighs, while Wells rolls his eyes.

"You can't say they don't try," he offers.

"Yeah, they can buy me off with the best of them," she returns tartly.

"One more school year, then we're gone," he reminds her.

Clarke swallows hard and looks away.

"Anyway," she tries more brightly a moment later, "Raven and Harper got me a salon gift card, and Jasper and Monty picked out this cool art decoration, and Finn—"

She cuts herself off.

What the hell is wrong with you? she chastises herself silently.

"Yeah? What'd Finn get?"

"It's nothing, it's, uh, silly."

"Clarke," his tone sharpens in a way she rarely hears. "What did he get you?"

"He made me a bracelet with a griffin on it like Raven's bird one," she admits quietly.

She watches his eyes dart more fully open and his cheek twitch. But he quickly gets himself back under control.

"I'm going to be honest with you," Wells says after a long pause. "I'm really not ok with that."

"I really wasn't, either," she says quietly.

"Did you say something to Raven?" he presses.

She starts picking the nail polish off the edge of her thumb nail.

"Clarke, look at me," he remains still until she does. "Did you say something to Raven about it?"

"No, I didn't want to upset her," she admits.

"Do I need to say something to her? Or, better yet, to him?" he cracks his knuckles somewhat menacingly.

For a moment, he reminds her so much of Bellamy that she has to dig her nails into her thigh to stop her thoughts from spiraling down that path.

"He hasn't done anything since. If he does, I'll tell you, all right? And maybe we can deal with it when you come home, but for now, I just . . . I'd just rather not, ok?" she bites her lip.

"If he does anything to make you uncomfortable, I want to hear about it. Agreed?" he demands.

"Yes," Clarke pushes the word out more like a hiss, rolling her lips and tasting the strawberry flavor of her gloss.

"I'm serious, Clarke."

"I know you are. And I already promised, ok? Now can we talk about something else?" she whines.
"Like exactly what it felt like to watch the chandelier crash on your head in *The Phantom of the Opera*?" her eyes spark to life. "Come on, I'm a stupid American over here with no culture. Leave nothing out!"
"You're so full of shit right now! You think I was born yesterday?" Octavia shouts from the kitchen as she pours herself a bowl of cereal.

"None of this is any of your business!" Bellamy yells back.

He's lounging on the black sectional sofa, blanket tangled around his legs, flipping aimlessly through TV channels.

"Not my business? Your general well-being is definitely my business, big brother," Octavia retorts, plowing into the room and dropping into an armchair adjacent to him. "Clarke is almost five years younger than you. Her dad is your boss, Bell! You wanna jeopardize your future at UCLA? Because let me tell you, you're doing a damn good job of it! What do you think her parents are going to do when they're back from London - welcome you into the family with open arms?" she finishes derisively, sloshing the milk around in her bowl as she shifts.

"I'm just tutoring her. That's my job," he says through gritted teeth.

"Yeah, right. And my job's to soar through the air on a flying trapeze. I saw the way you were looking at her in the hospital. I'm not blind," her cobalt gaze pierces right through him.

He lands on *UFO Hunters* and tries to focus on the old, bald man on screen explaining how he once got sucked into an alien aircraft from a corn field in Iowa.

"She has a boyfriend, you know," she raises her eyebrows at him.

He shakes his head, splitting his lips open and revealing his teeth.

"What are you, the fucking CIA?"

She waves her hand dismissively.

"Murphy told me. He went to high school with them. Apparently they're like Prom King & Queen material. Everyone wants to be them because they're rich and popular, and their parents run Cedars-Sinai. Wells - that's the boyfriend," she says his name with extra sting, he can tell, "is like this basketball prodigy or whatever. And he's top of their class, Bell. He's been to fucking South America volunteering in clinics and wants to be a lawyer to help prosecute domestic violence offenders."

"Don't forget how his dad is running for mayor and hangs out with Governor Wallace," he mutters.

"You see?" Octavia injects a bit more empathy into her tone. "This girl is not for you. Trust me. She's already got her life mapped out. She's a spoiled, rich princess whose parents left her behind for the summer. She's bored, Bellamy. And I don't want you falling into her tangled web of 'woe is me, nobody understands me like you do,' angsty bullshit."

"She's not like that," his jaw feels tighter, and it's making his head throb uncomfortably.

"You've done this before," Octavia says, ignoring him. "That shit with Echo was so messed up. She was just using you to get Roan jealous, but you wouldn't listen to me. And then Bree," she tacks off the next name on her finger. "Another blonde bimbo. I told you she was a druggie, but you didn't want to hear it."
Bellamy says nothing and won't look at her.

"Now Gina," Octavia gestures at the pretty get well fruit basket tied with a blue ribbon resting on the counter. There's a note card attached to it he glanced at the other day.

_Dear Bell,_

_I'm so sorry to hear about your accident. Please let me know if you need anything. I hope you feel better soon._

_xx Gina_

"Gina is quality. Do you know she's called me three times to check in on you?"

"Mhmm," he murmurs noncommittally, readjusting his blanket and wincing when the shifting causes a prickling sensation near his abdomen. "Only because you called her to tell her what happened."

"She cares about you!" Octavia half-yells, indignant. "She has the right to know. And she told me you guys started hanging out again while I've been gone."

"I broke up with her months ago."

"For absolutely no good reason! She adores you. You're just afraid to commit to something real in your life."

"Ok," he says in an attempt to end the conversation.

"At least she's not responsible for costing you a few thousand dollars in truck repair fees," she snorts.

"I crashed the truck, O. Not Clarke."

"You're a good driver," she argues back a few moments later. "I know you were distracted by something."

But he's already zoned out, eyes glossy as they follow the movement of a spaceship across the night sky.

"Hey!" Octavia snaps her fingers. "Pay attention to me. And drink all that ginger ale with your medicine," she points at the glass on the table in front of him. "It'll help your stomach."

He grunts, flipping her off.

"I feel fine."

"You are not fine! You got a concussion, Bellamy! You fractured three ribs. You've got disgusting bruises all up and down your body! After what happened to mom, you'd think you'd be more careful, but--"

"Octavia," he hisses her name in a dark growl. "That's enough."

A flash of pain passes across her face, but then she flings herself back in her seat heavily, draping her legs over the side.

"You need a reality check, big brother. And I don't mind being the one who's got to give it to you," she says before turning back to her breakfast.
Clarke stands on the Blakes' front doorstep, shifting from foot to foot nervously. Her hands are full of a heavy package, the plastic handle of which is cutting into her wrist. But she stares at the yellow doorbell, afraid to ring it. A memory of Octavia's snide expression springs to her mind.

Taking a deep breath, she squares her shoulders and pushes the bell. It feels like a long time before she hears footsteps, then the door pulling back, but only by several inches.

"Oh," Octavia's captivating face appears in the gap. "It's you," she says flatly. "What do you want?"

Clarke forces a smile.

"Hi, Octavia. I baked some chocolate chip cookies for Bellamy and got him a get well gift," she lifts the plastic-wrapped package up to Octavia's eye level. "And I, uh, well, I have a check for him. I want to pay for the truck damage because it was my fault he crashed," she says it as smoothly as possible.

Octavia's eyes narrow.

"Of course you do. I'm sure mom and dad wouldn't want any stains on your name."

A twitch of pain spasms across Clarke's face.

"Please, Octavia. I'm just trying to make this right. Can I see him? Is he awake?"

Octavia considers her for a long moment.

"It's a free country," she offers a half-shrug, drawing her chin to one shoulder. "Come on in I guess."
"He's in his room. I assume you know already know where that is?" Octavia says silkily with a smirk.

Honestly, the expression is so reminiscent of the one Bellamy has thrown at her countless times that Clarke's mouth falls open a little.

But she just nods.

"Great," she enunciates the "t" with an extra vigor. "I need to run some errands anyway."

She walks toward the side table in the foyer and scoops up a set of keys. "So you can manage to make sure he takes his pills?"

Clarke nods again, more confidently this time.

"Ok, then," she widens her eyes like she's not quite sure of Clarke's IQ, quickly working her long hair into a side braid before heading to the garage. "There's a notepad on the kitchen table that has Bell's medicine schedule written down on it. I'll be back in a couple hours, maybe sooner, depending on how long things take."

Her nearly thigh-high leather boots catch Clarke’s attention as they clack across the floor.

***

"Bellamy?" a sweet voice calls from the other side of his door with a careful tap. It opens a fraction, and he spots the blonde, rippling waves. "Can I come in?"

"Sure, Princess."

He stretches his legs out under the blankets and tosses aside the book he was reading. It was hurting his eyes anyway.

Clarke enters bearing an old breakfast tray he hasn't seen in ages. His mom used to use it when he or Octavia was sick enough to stay home from school. It's oval-shaped and resembles the surface of a pond. There are some small ducks and fish painted onto it to make it look three-dimensional.

"I brought you some lunch," she says, smiling a little at him.

She stands hesitantly in the doorframe, balancing the tray on her thigh to get a better grip. Bellamy shoots her a look in an attempt to bring her closer. He knows his color is better than when she saw him in the hospital, that's for sure. But there are still hollows under his eyes that aren't exactly becoming, more like skeletal. But eating hasn't been the most pleasant experience lately since the air bag deployed right into his gut. He catches her eye meandering down to the large white cloth bandage sneaking into view across his right side and hastily pulls his shirt down toward the edge of his sweatpants.

"Well, come in!" he motions her over. "That thing's heavy. Put it down."

She drops the tray delicately onto his lap and sits at the edge of the bed, barely leaving an indent. When he sees the thin film of fluid glistening in front of her irises, he lets out a heavy sigh.

"Clarke, I'm fine. I already told you not to feel badly. I'll be back to myself in a few more days."
"I know, but I can't help it! It's all my fault. Everything about this is my fault - I'm so sorry."

She gently rubs the outline of his calf through the blanket then jerks her hand back, as if scalded.

His laugh is dark and throaty.

"My legs are fine. You're not hurting them. In fact, if you'd like to work your way up them and--"

"Bellamy!" she snaps, and he chuckles.

A moment later he rubs his hands together.

"So what did you bring me?" he asks, glancing at the contents of the tray for the first time.

There's a garden salad with fresh chicken, tangerine slices, an individual serving of applesauce, a few chocolate chip cookies, water, ginger ale, and of course, his painkillers.

Bellamy picks up a cookie, examining it carefully. It's squishy between his fingers and still a little warm.

"Did you . . . bake these?" he smiles at her incredulously.

"Yeah, so what if I did?" she's trying and failing for indignant.

"Hmm," he juts his lip out and takes a careful bite, chewing slowly. "Surprisingly tasty."

"Ass," she hisses, but then she's laughing, too. "I made a few dozen. They're in the kitchen."

"Thanks, baby," his voice comes out huskier than he intended as he rolls his thumb over her lower lip then down to her chin.

Her eyes meet his for a moment, and he sees faraway worlds racing through them.

"Oh, I almost forgot!" she snaps out of it before him, taking in the book on his bedside table. "I have something else for you!"

"Can I eat this first?" he smirks at her.

"Yeah, yeah of course," she agrees, running her fingers through her loose locks.

When he finishes, she leaves but returns almost immediately holding a wrapped present with a card scotch taped to the top. He goes for the card first and jerks back a little when a check falls out of it.

"Clarke?" she won't quite meet his eyes. "What's this?"

"It's a check," she says slowly, pulling a loose thread on his faded blue bedspread. "For the damages to your truck."

"I have car insurance," he says shortly. "And this is ridiculous - it's five grand. You don't have this kind of money, and I'm sure as hell not taking it from your parents!"

The anger is bubbling up inside of him, scratching at his sternum from the inside out. And the thick, sickening thought that maybe Octavia was right?

"It is my money!" Clarke spits impatiently. "I make money on the murals I paint, and I worked with Jasper for the last two summers at a kid's camp. I save pretty much everything I make." She pushes
the hand with the check he's reached out to her back toward him. "I want you to have it."

He sees the determination in the shallow lines set around her mouth.

"You know I can't take this from you. It's for your college, your future."

Suddenly, and he's not very sure why, the air between them seems to thicken and crackle. She's
watching him with more tenderness in her face than he knows what to do with.

"Bellamy," she always makes his name sound like music somehow. "Fixing your truck is an
investment in my future."

She crawls closer to him, and he's drowning in the sky blue of her eyes for a moment before a bit of
her hair tickles his cheek, and he grins despite himself. Her lips are plush and comforting when they
find his, like falling into a familiar hammock by a lake. Her presence inches from his chest secures
him, holds him steady, and makes his heart speed up way too much.

"Mmm," he hears the tiny vibration at the back of her throat when her tongue coasts along the seam
of his lips. For the first time in days, a good feeling passes through his chest.

"Still can't help yourself, can you Princess?" he teases her, causing her to nip down at his mouth
when his hand skims across the swell of her breast.

Her fingertips barely ghost along his shoulders, hesitant about how to touch him as he eagerly
depens their kiss and cups her cheek.

"Sit down here," he manages to breathe into her neck after leaving a trail of slightly sloppy, sucking
kisses against it. With her help, he pulls her legs sideways across his lap, so she's tucked in close to
him and leaning against his pillows, too. From this angle, she can bend and curve into his body
without him having to twist his torso.

She sweeps into his mouth deliciously - the action causes goosebumps to rise up on his arms. And
despite the dull ache of pain and the painkillers still in his system to temper it, he feels the familiar
twitch of his dick beginning to swell as she arches into his hand, rubbing her chest against him. He
drums his thumb against her nipple in rapid succession, recognizing the start of a hardening peak,
when she pulls away from him, shaking her head. Her hands are soft and small but more sure as they
clade his jaw and stream idly up and down his inner thigh.

"You're such a tease," he taunts into her ear, and she blushes, fluttering her eyelashes at him.

She rears up - is this actually happening? - to straddle the top of his muscular thigh, one knee tightly
bracketed on each side as she flips out her knee-length skirt, so it flutters in a circle like a blossoming
flower. The heat of her core bleeds though his sweatpants as she rolls carefully against him, her
fingers clutching the swirl of sheets closest to her.

"Too much?" she whispers against his lips, kissing them with a touch so fast, he's unsure it really
happened.

"Not enough," he growls back, squeezing her breast more aggressively, so she moans into his mouth.
His hand's just managed to reach under her skirt fabric and skim the cream of her stomach and elastic
band of her panties, when a loud knock and creaking sound from his door casts a thunderbolt down
his spine.

"Platonic. Right. Absolutely," Octavia rolls her eyes, cocking her head toward her right shoulder in a
total I'm over it pose.
"O, get out!" he snarls, latching around Clarke's waist and pulling her down to his left side. He sits up to partially block her from view, ignoring the sharp stab in his middle.

"Actually," Octavia crinkles her nose and squints her eyes, "I think Florence Nightingale had better hit the road for today, as much as I appreciate her baby-sitting you so effectively."

Clarke scrambles out of the bed, blushing a lovely sunset rose, straightening her clothes and slipping back into her sandals.

"You do not have to go," he says gruffly, ignoring his charming sister.

"It's all right," she sings to him. "Octavia's right. You need your rest." She swoops in briefly to land a kiss on his cheek, then hurries past Octavia and out of sight.

Octavia just clicks her tongue and shakes her head.

"And you wonder why I can't take you seriously, Bell," she grins at him, blowing him a kiss. "It's because I know you too well."

He hears her laughing all the way down the hall.

In the quiet of his room, he finally takes note of the wrapped package near the foot of his bed. It's an audio book, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Rise of the FBI*. He frowns, turning it over, then reaches for the get well card again, which he ignored before.

*Dear Bell*

*It's not ancient history, but it sounded fascinating to me. Being a national bestseller can't hurt, either. Thought listening to this wouldn't bother your head as much as reading. And it just might appeal to your dark side . . . ;p*

*I've been so busy trying to keep everyone happy that I forgot about what I needed. Until I met you. I'm so glad you're ok.*

~*Your Princess, xoxoxo*

Palms sweaty, he bites his bottom lip, tilting his neck back and staring straight up at the ceiling. She managed to kick the floor out from under him yet again.
Raven Reyes: Harpsichord! Wassup, girl?

Harper McIntyre: Hey, lady! I'm good. How r u?

Raven Reyes: Dad snagged us tickets to a fancy Hollywood awards dinner this weekend. Movie stars and everything. Wanna be my date?

Harper McIntyre: Sweet! Don't you wanna take the bf tho?

Raven Reyes: Nah. He's going fishing with his uncle's family up the coast. Not his scene anyway.

Harper McIntyre: Oh, ok. Well, if you're sure, then YES YES PLEASE TAKE ME!! THANK YOU I KNEW I LOVED YOU BEST!!!! <3 <3 <3

Raven Reyes: lol. Don't mention it. Tell Ryan Gosling when you see him. I'll text you the details later.

Harper McIntyre: Sounds great! :) I'm SO excited.

Raven Reyes: I couldn't tell ;)

Raven Reyes: Almost forgot! Did you figure out your clinic stuff?

Harper McIntyre: YES. Clarke actually told me the perfect place she used out of the hospital's reach.

Raven Reyes: Huh. Cool - glad it worked out for you! xoxo

Harper McIntyre: Me too! What a relief. Talk soon! xoxo

Raven puts down her phone, staring thoughtfully out the window into her spacious backyard. The sun is slowly sinking toward the ocean, and if she cranes her neck, she can just see the ferris wheel lighting up down by the pier.

"Raven!" her mother shouts with the subtly of a jackhammer from downstairs.

"What ma?" she screams back, walking out of her room and toward the breezeway that provides an open-air area looking down on the den below.

"I need you to give your sister a bath! I'm taking her to the doctor tomorrow early, and I'm late for my book club." Her mother glances down at her watch, groaning. "And then your brother needs help packing for camp, but I have to run over to Polis Towers to check on your abuela. She's been acting out lately apparently." Her mom pulls her dark hair into a bun on top of her head as she
simultaneously slips into her shoes. "Your father just called - he won't be back from his trip until Friday."

"Acting out? Doing what?"

"Honestly? Slapping the asses of the male orderlies as they walk by."

Raven rolls her eyes but smiles a little.

"Sounds like abuela! Always keeping it spicy, even at her age. Ok, ma. I'll do both."

"The bath and the packing?"

Raven nods.

"Thanks, sweetie! You're an angel! Can I pick you up something for dinner?"

"No, I'll make us something here. Maybe omelets."

"Ok, see you later!"

"Bye!"

She checks on her younger siblings, who are happily squealing over a video game in the playroom, and heads toward the kitchen. But even as she cracks an egg into the ceramic bowl and watches the gooey yolk run down its sides, she can't shake the trickle of restlessness coating her stomach. If Clarke was going on the pill, why did she tell Harper and not her? What was the big secret? She would've gladly pointed her toward some clinics where nobody knew Abby. And why all the embarrassment about the lingerie?

Her memory trips back to that night at Monty's when Clarke contributed to a conversation about orgasms. That had been a first, yet Wells had been out of town for weeks now. Maybe they hooked up right before he left? She looks out past their sloping front lawn as a blue-violet dusk settles onto the quiet street. A gray Chevy pick-up is coasting down the road at an easy pace.

Unless . . . ?

His arm around her waist was so possessive in the parking lot. And she'd practically flown to his side, tucked herself against him.

But, no. No. It couldn't be.

There was another explanation. She just had to figure out what the hell it was.

***

Raven Reyes: You know, I still have the artwork Jasper & Monty got u for ur bday. & ur salon card. So...like whenever u come back from the planet you've been living on, u can come pick them up.

Clarke Griffin: Hey Ray-Ray! I'm sorry!! I'll definitely come by soon and grab them. Thank u for keeping them safe! :) xoxo

Raven Reyes: Ok, but are you ever going to tell me what's going on?

Clarke Griffin: What do you mean?
Raven Reyes: Come on, Clarke.

Raven Reyes: You've been literally running away from me the last three times we've hung out.

Clarke Griffin: I have not!

Raven Reyes: Have so. 1) Monty's house when we were all watching TV. 2) Mall trip when you bought your lingerie. 3) Your own birthday at the concessions stand.

Clarke Griffin: I hadn't thought about it like that. I'm sorry. Definitely not running from you.

Raven Reyes: I don't want you to be sorry, Clarke. I want you to tell me what's wrong, so I can know how to help.

Clarke Griffin: Nothing's wrong, Raven. I had a headache at Monty's. I wanted to give you some time alone with Finn after the mall because I'd monopolized you. Idk what happened at my birthday - I was being a moody bitch. Probably my period mixed with being alone all summer and Wells having an amazing time in London without me. Guess Titanic just got to me.

*Raven taps her nails against the side of her phone.*

Raven Reyes: Hey, don't talk about my best friend like that! You're not alone. You have all of us.

Clarke Griffin: I know. Thanks. :) It's just hard sometimes.

Raven Reyes: You sure that's what it is? Really?

Clarke Griffin: Yeah. Let's do the salon day soon.

Raven Reyes: kk! I'll see what's good for Harper.

Clarke Griffin: Thanks for checking on me, Raven. It means a lot.

Raven Reyes: I know. I'm awesome.

Clarke Griffin: And so humble.

Raven Reyes: I just gotta do me, chica! Hey! How's the Victoria's Secret life?

Clarke Griffin: personal!!! boundaries much, reyes?

Raven Reyes: BOR-ing! You're totally using that shit on your Skype calls, don't lie to me.

Clarke Griffin: It's too sheer. He thought it felt good though.

Raven Reyes: *looked, sry. Typing too fast there!

Raven Reyes: lol, proud of you for embracing your inner vixen, Griffin. :p

Clarke Griffin: Goodnight!!

Maybe when Wells came home and school started again, there would be more girl talk. Or maybe Clarke would never open up to her about that kind of thing like she did with Harper apparently. Or maybe, just maybe...
Finn had been right.

No, it was crazy.

Wasn't it?

But then she remembers his possessive arm around Clarke's waist. His flashing dark eyes that looked so scornfully at her and Finn. The way Clarke seemed scared to do anything but go with him. How she talked quickly to stop him from getting angrier. The desperation she'd seen in her friend's face that afternoon, which had made no sense to her at the time. His "you're coming with me." Her glance of panic.


What the fuck was she supposed to do now?
The dreamlike days of summer slide into July without Clarke paying much attention. She locks away Wells' jade ring and Finn's griffin bracelet in the bottom drawer of her tall jewelry box. Octavia rejoins Lincoln's family in Northern California after many promises from Bellamy that he will take it easy and not overexert himself. It will still be a few weeks before he can return to his construction job. Although Clarke monitors her online banking account regularly, she notices he never cashes the check she gave him. And they never discuss it.

Even after Bellamy's truck is repaired, Clarke drives over to Inglewood for her tutoring sessions more frequently than he travels to her house. She pores over pages and websites covering the European colonization of Africa until her neck gets stiff and her vision grows blurry. But his shady, spacious ranch feels comfortable and lived in to her. It's also like a quiet bungalow escape, a place where the possibility of an endless summer seems most real. Watching the days pass by on her desk calendar gives her anxiety as they tick closer to August 12. She hasn't seen Monty or Raven in about a week, even though they live the closest to her. But she figures they're busy with their families, and in Monty's case, building the elaborate new greenhouse his dad pinned all his warm weather hopes on in the backyard.

She gets three postcards in the mail from Wells in his small, cramped black scrawl. They're mostly full of funny anecdotes about his mother trying to drive on the "wrong" side of the road in Surrey or her own mother's absolute refusal to eat anything called "toad in the hole." Her mother checks in on her every few days, mostly via email, asking her how her paintings are going, what colleges she wants to tour in the fall, how Monty's family is doing.

When Raven posts a picture of her and Harper in luxurious, floor-length gowns, sitting at a banquet table with a somewhat fuzzy Matthew McConaughey and Julia Roberts talking behind them, she clicks like and holds it up for Bellamy's inspection. Her legs are pulled across his lap on his back porch swing as the wind rustles the leaves above their heads.

"The only thing that's clear in that picture is that she's an attention whore," he supplies helpfully before returning to the syllabus he's editing for her dad.

She can't help it. She laughs.

***

On Friday afternoon, the phone call is unexpected.

"Hey sweetheart!" her dad's warm, rumbling voice echoes as if through a funnel across the Atlantic. "How are you doing?"

"I'm good, dad! It's great to hear from you! How are you? How's mom?"

"We're both doing well. Touring through the Lake District over the next few days, and it's really beautiful. The sunrises across the water are just incredible! We're going to do a little hiking tomorrow."

"Sounds nice," Clarke smiles at his exuberance. "Mom's pictures are really good on Facebook! She's finally getting the hang of that camera. And how's touring the hospital circuit going?"

"Don't tell your mother, but it's boring as hell," he whispers stealthily as she laughs. "I mean, maybe I'm just an ignorant academic, but they all look the exact same to me, and if one more person asks me
why the U.S. hasn't fully adopted a national healthcare policy, I might scream."

"Haven't they heard about what's going on with Obamacare?" Clarke asks, suddenly intrigued.

Her father groans.

"Let's not even go there. I'll tell you all about it when I'm home. But, anyway, that's not why I called."

"Ok, what's up?"

"I took Wells out to lunch yesterday, and he mentioned you two were thinking about going to college together on the East Coast," he begins.

Clarke groans a little, holding the phone away from her mouth, so he won't hear.

"True story," she says shortly.

"No need for an attitude, Clarke," her father rebuffs her gently. "I was going to say that, if you're with Wells, I actually think it could be a great experience for you. Expand your horizons and all that."

Of course they wouldn't mind as long as she went with stable, loyal, trustworthy Wells. Because there was no telling what kind of psychotic adventures a girl could get lost in if left unsupervised.

Clarke literally holds the phone away from her face for a moment and stares at it to make sure it actually says Dad in bold, white letters.

"Who are you, and what have you done with Jake - Bruins - for - life- Griffin?" she snarks into the iPhone.

He laughs.

"I'm serious, honey. Wells is such a level-headed young man. I know you two would have a high-quality educational experience on the East Coast, as long as the school was reputable."

"So basically, as long as it was Harvard, Princeton, Brown, or Yale?" she chirps.

"Don't rule out Dartmouth and UPenn," he quips back.

"What about mom?" Clarke asks.

There's a pause.

"Ehh, she still dreams about you going to Stanford, but we can work on her," he promises conspiratorially. "With a little effort, I think I can get her to head over to their student store and bring back the onesies she's already bought for her future grandchildren."

"Dad!"

***

There's a light breeze in the air, and Clarke's got the windows of Bellamy's truck rolled down in an attempt for the ocean air to wake her up. It's pre-dawn, and the sky is still a relentless shade of slate grey.
"Too early," she mumbles to him, trying to get comfortable against the door.

"Have your coffee, Princess," he motions toward the thermos in the cup holder.

"Why are we driving six hours to Muir Woods when Los Padres National Forest is right down the road?" she whines.

Bellamy reaches over and messes up her hair, ignoring her protests.

"Because the trees there are majestic," he grins at her.

"Seen one tree, seen them all," she mumbles, allowing her eyes to seal shut once more.

"Not like these," he promises, dropping his hand to her thigh and stroking it.

She wants to push him away, but his touch excites her nerve endings despite her bleary brain, so she traces the gaps between his fingers instead.
Muir Woods is the most awe-inspiring place she's ever seen. She doesn't know where to look first, and Bellamy's face cracks open into a breathtaking grin when he sees her eyes widen in wonder.

He interlaces their fingers together, drawing her deeper and deeper into the peaceful wilderness where echoes of birdsong erupt from secret hollows. They hike along the paved path under a bright green leaf canopy that lets light in in little bursts. The redwood forest is right out of a fairytale picture book with no low-hanging branches to hinder the view. The incredibly thick, auburn bark of the trees beyond the path stretch up so high into the air she cranes her neck to watch how far up they go.

"How tall are--" she starts to ask as they journey along.

"The tallest one is over 250 feet," Bellamy, ever her historian, fails to disappoint.

He laughs lowly at her bemused expression.

"They're just so, so gorgeous," she murmurs, allowing him to lead her along. "But are you sure you're up for this much walking? Do you feel all right?" she turns her attention back to his muscular frame. He's wearing old jeans, a black T-shirt, and - its very existence makes her grin - a royal purple baseball hat with the word Blake on it in stitched lettering.

"I want everyone to know who you're with, Princess," he'd said to her when she'd climbed into his truck early that morning with a questioning stare.

"I'm fine! I've been cleared by the doctor, remember?" he pulls her lightly against him, and she wraps an arm around his waist.

He takes her to see the displayed, golden brown rings of a tree trunk that's well over 800 years old. He leads her to Cathedral Grove, a spot where the tree trunks, knit together by diagonal, slanting stripes, grow near one another, and the sunbeams fall in buttercup waterfalls from above.

"It does feel like a church, like a place you could pray," Clarke whispers, spinning around with her arms thrown out wide. "It's as good a place to get married as any church."

It takes her a minute to realize what she's said, but when she does, her characteristic flush scurries up her cheeks.

Bellamy just barks out a laugh and says, "I'm glad you like it."

An hour later, they're hanging out in a picnic area, munching on chicken salad sandwiches Bellamy packed.

"How did you know about this place?" Clarke asked. "Did you do research on it for school or something when you were a kid?"

"Teddy Roosevelt made the area a national monument in 1908. It was named after the naturalist John Muir, who ran all these environmental campaigns that helped establish the National Park System."

"Of course, everything is a lesson," Clarke sighs, half-exasperated, half-fond.

"That's not why I brought you here," he says, suddenly more serious.
"Ok," she says slowly. "Why did you?"

He leans back against the edge of the wooden table and sighs.

"I have this one memory of my dad taking me here when I was four. It was before he died of prostate cancer. It was just a really good day; I was like, ecstatic, to be doing something with just the two of us. And I remember he was happy here," he says simply, looking back at her face.

"Bell," she breathes, reaching out to stroke the soft skin between his thumb and index finger. "That's really, really nice. Thank you for telling me. I'm glad you brought me here."

She wraps an arm loosely around his waist and leans her head against his chest, looking skyward where the branches of some trees must start at least fifty feet off the ground.

"He died pretty soon after that. And then a year later, mom met someone else. They didn't get married, but she had Octavia a few months before I turned six."

"Was Octavia's dad . . . good to you?" Clarke's breath catches as she waits for an answer she's not sure she can handle.

"Yeah. He was all right I guess. Nice enough to me. But they broke up, you know? It just didn't work out. And he eventually found someone else and married her, had a couple of kids. He's tried to reach out to Octavia in the past, but she doesn't want anything to do with him."

Clarke clucks her tongue sympathetically, rubbing the back of his neck as she rests her chin against the tip of his shoulder.

***

She thinks they're going to make the long trek back to Santa Monica in one straight shot when they leave Muir Woods around 4 p.m. But Bellamy surprises her halfway back, meandering off the highway and down a country road to a sort of camp ground complete with a placid, glistening pond, rope swing included.

"My mom used to come out here with her family in the summers," he offers by way of explanation.

"It's postcard perfect," Clarke smiles. "But I don't have a bathing suit!"

"Yeah, you do," he gestures toward the flatbed of the truck.

She shakes her head disbelievingly.

"You're something else, Blake."

He leans in to kiss her upturned lips.

"I know."

Her buzzing phone in her lap makes them both jump apart.

**Wells Jaha:** I need to talk to you. It's important. I'm gonna call. Pick up.

Clarke glances up at his face. It's impossible to quantify the emotion that settles in his dark eyes.

"I can let it go to voicemail," she says weakly.
"No. You shouldn't do that," he responds roughly, cutting the engine. "I'll go to the locker rooms and change. Take the call."

Then her phone's ringing, a vibrating force in her lap.

He's out of the truck, slamming the door and grabbing his backpack out of the flatbed before she can form words. Her heart is thudding relentlessly against her ribs.

_Calm down, Clarke. You have no idea why he's calling. It's probably about something that happened in England. Someone could be hurt. You need to answer. This has nothing to do with you. Nobody knows. Nobody's seen you with him._

Except Raven.

And Finn.

Murphy.

Miller.

Octavia.

Lincoln.

That Dr. Woods at the hospital.

What were you thinking? You are so fucked.

She slides her thumb across the bar at the bottom of her iPhone with a click, pressing it to her ear, heart in her throat.

"Hey babe," she squeaks. "What's up? Are you ok?"
The fireball of sun overheard is losing its strength as it heads west across the sky, while twilight settles over the tan, desert hills on the eastern horizon. Bellamy listens to groups of cicadas hum out their evening melodies as the shadows lengthen. A few families with RVs are starting bonfires to cook dinner about a quarter of a mile from the shore in the campground's most densely wooded area. He skims his hand across the surface of the placid, silver-blue ripples, waist-deep in the pond. The warm water laps at his skin soothingly, but he feels his anger building with each minute that passes without Clarke's appearance.

At last, he sees her emerge from the ramshackle women's locker room, clad in the white two-piece he swiped from her drawer discretely the other day. Laid out against the rose-tinged cream of her skin, the bathing suit seems to glow in the fading light.

She stands at the edge of the water hesitantly, dipping her toes in.

"Come on!" he calls, motioning her forward with a hand.

"Is it safe?" she calls back.

"Yeah! Of course. People come here all the time."

He doesn't have to raise his voice much for it to carry across the water. Sliding back into the pond's buoyant embrace, he feels the liquid wash over his back and up his shoulder blades. He lets it hold him for a few moments, then flips over and swims out toward the middle of the pond in powerful strokes. When he stands again, shaking water droplets out of his damp locks, the water hits a couple inches below his collarbone.

Clarke's blonde head bobbles like a beacon through the gentle wake she makes with her body as she swims out to him. But when she reaches his section of the pond and tries to feel the mushy bottom with her foot, she sinks under the surface for a moment before kicking back up, spluttering.

"I can't stand here," she manages, as Bellamy grabs for her waist under the water to steady her.

"I got you," he says, taking in the scared expression in her eyes.

She clasps at his biceps for a moment until her breathing returns to normal, and he lets go of her waist.

"Swim," he commands.
They move a little closer to shore where her neck and the tops of her shoulders are visible above the water.

"How was your phone call?" he asks at last, voice terse.

"It was fine," Clarke clips back, pulling her long hair away from her neck. "Listen, there's no need for it to ruin our day, so--"

"Must be a hell of a monthly phone bill," he mutters under his breath.

"They all upgraded to the international plan before they left, so we could talk," she says quietly, treading water.

"You were gone a while," he comments, watching her shift uncomfortably out of the corner of his eye.

Clarke sighs.

"If you want to ask me, just ask me."

"Fine," he retorts. "What did Wells want?"

"He wanted to tell me that his dad got Governor Wallace's endorsement to run for mayor. There's going to be a big announcement and party with a lot of press at the Governor's Mansion a few days after they all get back from London . . . ."

"And?" Bellamy insists, clenching his jaw as he senses her hesitancy to continue.

"And . . . Wells wants me to come with him as his guest. My mother already told a reporter with the Los Angeles Times I would do an interview about how I've known the Jahas my whole life and fully support their political ambitions. Wells wanted to give me a heads up in case the reporter called soon. They already scheduled a family photo shoot and want me to be in it. He's . . . " she fidgets, running the tips of her fingers across the top of the water as if digging small ditches, "been working on my dad, trying to convince him that we should apply to colleges together on the East Coast. I guess he thinks cooperating with them about this will help us leave California," she finishes, voice barely above a whisper.

She won't meet his eyes but has the decency to look ashamed.

"Help us leave California?" Bellamy spits back, the rage barely suppressed. "You're going through with all this, aren't you? You're going to the big party and taking the pictures and heading off to Yale or wherever the fuck you two overachievers get in!"

She shifts away from him in the water as he looms closer, demanding an answer. There's a ruddy color in his cheeks, and she can see a vein pulse on the side of his head.

"Bellamy, please . . . ."

"Please what?" he sneers.

"I don't have a choice!" she cries out, close to tears. "This is what's expected of me! You haven't met my mom or Wells' dad! You don't know what it's like!"

"So that's it, huh?" he raises his eyebrows, face hard.

"No, no that's not it," she tries to reach out for his forearm, but he yanks it away from her.
"What am I supposed to do when you work for my dad?" her voice is near begging.

"So now I'm not good enough for you? Is that it?" he roars, sending a few, nearby birds soaring into the air. "Can't be seen with me in public or God forbid at a fancy, political fundraiser?"

"Jesus, no! That's not what I meant! I'm trying to protect you - don't you get it? I want you to be a TA and write your thesis and get your Ph.D. and be successful! I don't want you caught up in a scandal because of me! My mom works with his dad every day, Bellamy! We've known them for as far back as I can r-ra-remember," she stutters when he closes the gap between them.

He's mere inches away now. She can feel the caged frustration rising off of him in waves as he stares into her face.

"I don't need you to protect me," he says dangerously.

"It's more complicated than you know," she steels her voice, hands on her hips under the water even though he can't see them.

"It's not," he growls, gripping her hips and pulling her against him.

Clarke falters, caught off guard by the movement and sloshing into his chest. She scrambles for purchase at his shoulders when he hitches her knees around his waist. She digs her nails into his flesh as he walks farther and farther out into the lake.

"What the fuck are you doing?" she tries to push away from him, but he holds the small of her back more firmly against him.

"You're mine," he rasps against her ear, feeling her shiver in his arms.

"Bellamy! Let me go!" she scratches into the tops of his arms, but it's like his body's turned to stone, and he feels nothing.

He sucks a bruising kiss into the side of her neck, reaching down between their bodies and sliding two fingers against her slit before grinding them against her clit repeatedly.

She moans softly though she tries to swallow it.

"You're mine," he repeats again.

"Stop," she tries to shove at his chest and arch her hips away from his, "We need to talk about this."

But he just catches her under her ass and holds her firmly in place until his hardening dick is rubbing against her inner thighs.

He coasts his scratchy palm up her stomach and grabs a handful of her breast from underneath. Clarke falls forward, biting down on the tough muscle of his shoulder in retaliation, but he only laughs darkly.

"Up," he pushes against her shoulder until they're face-to-face.

She catches her breath at the glint in his eye. He's breathing rapidly, and they're sharing the same patch of air. Suddenly, he presses two fingers past her entrance. She clenches around him tightly at the unexpected breach, and when she moans, he takes the opportunity to seal his lips over hers, forcing his tongue into her whimpering mouth.

The taste of him sparks a building heat inside her despite her twisted outrage. He swipes his tongue
over hers fully, curling his fingers against the pliant tissue of her walls.

"Enough," she gasps, pulling away to breathe.

But she can't get down. Her legs kick helplessly through the wall of water pressing in on them. He's got her wriggling form flush with his own, one hand at the tip of her spine, and, she hisses as he withdraws from between her legs, the other braced against the side of her knee.

"Shh," he intones, resuming his attack on her neck until she can feel the heat of her blood rushing toward the outline his lips trace on her skin. "Be my good girl."

When he lifts her hips up over his waist, she hates herself for grinding down on his erection.

"There you go, Princess," Bellamy coaxes against her jawbone.

She just makes incoherent sounds he feels vibrate through her chest where it touches his own.

He latches her legs firmly back around his hips and catching her hands, brings them to the edge of his swim suit. "Pull these down a little, would you, Princess?" he says bitingly.

"No."

She cuts her nails into the soft flesh of his sides instead, causing him to grit his teeth.

"That's not very nice," he hisses.

"I'm not trying to be nice," she hurls back, but rocks against him involuntarily when he begins mercilessly flicking at her nipple, tweaking it between his fingers.

"What? Do you save nice for Wells now?" he taunts her, shifting her onto his left hip for a moment to free his dick from the elastic band.

"I'm not saving anything," she snarls, curling her fingers into his hair and tugging meanly.

"I know... you're my dirty Princess, aren't you?" Bellamy murmurs it in a tone that sends a thrill through her despite her anger.

He presses an unexpectedly sweet kiss to her mouth before pushing her swim bottoms out of the way with probing fingers. Even through the water, he feels how slick with arousal she is.

"Take the tip into yourself. I'll do the rest," he demands.

And though she hates herself for it, she yanks off her bottoms and rubs her entrance up against the solid head of his dick.

He pistons his hips forward, urging a couple thick inches inside as she squeezes her eyes shut.

Soon he's driving into her hard and fast, rocking himself against her then drawing back, before plunging in again.

"Ohhh!" she moans when he bottoms out against her cervix. She's wound so tightly, but he holds her hip in a vice grip and manages to twist his finger, so it can sit directly above her clit and torture her until she begins rhythmically clenching.

She collapses on his shoulder bonelessly as her orgasm shudders through her, clapping a hand over her mouth in fear that the picnickers will hear. Then she's too tired to fight him anymore as he thrusts
intensely into her sensitive opening over and over and over again until at last, she feels the ropes of his come inside her. This was never about her pleasure, she realizes.

But when it's over, and his eyes catch hers, a blackness returns there.

"You're still going to do it," he says it like it's a foregone conclusion, dropping her feet to the silty, marshy ground.

***

"Octavia was right about you," he says as they stumble out of the water, shivering somewhat when the air hits their wet skin.

"What do you mean?" Clarke's blue eyes pierce him from a few feet away.

"She said you had your life all planned out already. That you were just bored this summer, acting out."

He has no idea why he says it except that it feels good to inflict pain in this moment.

"That's not fair!" she croaks, wrapping a towel from the bag in the flatbed of the truck around herself. "You know I never wanted to--"

But the boiling tidal wave of desperate anger is sloshing against the sides of his throat now, eager to escape.

"Not everything is about what you want, Clarke!" he half-yells, eyes wide with frenzy. "You have to think about other people, too."

"I am thinking about other people!" she takes a step toward him, tears slipping down her face. "I'm always thinking about other people! I know you don't believe me, but I tried to be the good guy. I just . . . can't. I don't know how."

Unmoved by the tears, Bellamy simply shakes his head, tugging on his T-shirt and grabbing for his backpack with its fresh pants inside.

"And he knew Wells. They were on some science quiz bowl thing together."

"What?" Clarke splutters.

"He said to me the other day that he liked having you around Mecha. That you were really different than he thought you'd be - not like one of the spoiled, rich, privileged kids," he fills in the blanks at Clarke's dumbstruck expression.

"He acted like he didn't know me when he first saw me!" she protests.

"He graduated two years ago and never actually met you in school. He didn't recognize you til you said your name," Bellamy says, waving his hand dismissively. "That's not the point, Clarke! You expect everything to always work out easy for you, and that's just not how life goes! What you do has consequences!"

"What about this is easy?" she demands, smacking her clenched fist into his chest. "Why don't you
tell me? Because the way I see it, no matter what I do, someone I care about is going to get hurt!"

Bellamy catches her fist before she can strike him again and lets it drop heavily.

"It's not going to be me, Princess," but the nickname now sounds like something rotten as it falls out of his mouth. "I think we're done."

She bites her lip, the worried lines appearing between her brows as her mouth twitches.

"Get in the truck. We're going home."

***

It's nearly 11 p.m. when Bellamy pulls into the 76 gas station. He doesn't notice Raven parked a few spots over, and she hides behind the broad pump watching him wide-eyed, shocked by her dumb luck. Her sister is fast asleep in the backseat. She's on her way home from picking the little spitfire up from a friend's sleepover, where spending the night was amazingly awesome until the reality of strange noises and dark, unfamiliar hallways suddenly wasn't.

Someone blonde opens the passenger side door and jumps gracefully to the ground. Clarke. She watches her friend walk behind the truck toward Bellamy, who is pumping gas and steadily ignoring her.

"Don't be like this!" she hears her say. There's the sound of something garbled and then a pleading "Please."

Clarke raises up her hand to - Raven can't be sure. Caress his cheek? Stroke his hair? But he slaps it away angrily and says something with a harsh face she can't make out.
Octavia Blake: Hey loser! U ok? Haven't heard from u in 2 days, which could be a world record.

Octavia Blake: Or a reason to call the po-po.

Bellamy Blake: I'm fine.

Octavia Blake: That's believable. Can we skip all the angsty bullshit where I try to get u 2 talk & u tell me to go to hell & just get to it?

A few minutes pass, but then--

Bellamy Blake: Wells’ dad got Wallace's endorsement for mayor. They're having a big party at the governor's mansion to announce it when they get back in August. Wells wants Clarke to go with him. She's gonna be interviewed about her relationship to the family.

Octavia Blake: Is Clarke gonna go to the party?

Bellamy Blake: She told me she wouldn't, but I know she wants to. So yeah, probably.

The typing bubble comes up on his screen.

Bellamy Blake: Do not say you told me so.

Octavia Blake: I wasn't going to, asshat!!

Bellamy Blake: Right.

Octavia Blake: I was gonna say that sucks & i'm sorry. :( 

Bellamy Blake: Ok.

Octavia Blake: I'm serious, Bell! You deserve the world, and if Clarke can't see that, you don't need her.

Bellamy Blake: What a crock. That's such a line people say, O.

Octavia Blake: I'm not people. I'm your sister, & I know things. So shut up & listen.

Octavia Blake: I know she's ur wet dream & all, but I PROMISE there r other fish in the sea if she doesn't come around.

Octavia Blake: And if not, there's always Gina . . .

Bellamy Blake: Go to sleep, O.

Octavia Blake: Always good talking 2 u. 

***
"I'm telling you, Jasper, the guy on the website looked just like what my mom described!" Monty says in frustration as they clomp through the cool, but gritty, sand.

He's been trying to make his case for the last ten minutes though Jasper's remained resolutely stubborn to all his best logic. The sand is rising and falling in deep ridges near the pier, making it nearly impossible to walk in a straight line or to avoid a burning stretch in his calf muscles.

"Yeah, I heard you, man," Jasper's voice is thoughtful as he stares out at a large boat's rainbow sails. "But it's not enough to go on. I mean, come on, it's Clarke and Wells."

"So what?" Monty raises his eyebrow, turning toward the right as the sound of people screaming on the mustard yellow roller coaster above comes into earshot.

Jasper begins ticking off his reasons on his fingers.

"They've been together for three years. They've known each other their whole lives. They're best friends. They finish each other's sentences. They're the literal definition of girl-next-door, Hallmark sappy kind of love," Jasper returns. "She dances at his basketball games for crying out loud! It's like a fucking episode of One Tree Hill."

"You watched One Tree Hill?" Monty looks at him in disgust.

"It's on Netflix! I like to diversify my entertainment options."

A gust of wind smacks the salt air straight into their faces, stinging their eyes and filling their lungs with its tanginess. Jasper pulls his goggles on over his face.

"You look ridiculous," Monty scoffs.

"Ridiculously sexy," Jasper jokes back through the dark lenses that always remind Monty of overlarge ant eyes.

"All right, let's lay out the facts as we know them," Monty says.

Jasper cocks his head to the side in a "go ahead" gesture.

"My mom sees her practically sprawled across some unknown guy's hospital bed whose description just happens to fit her tutor's description. She leaves my house suddenly after talking to him and ditches Raven and Finn at the mall when he shows up. She left her own birthday party randomly with no good excuse, and Harper says she's gone to a clinic Wells wouldn't be caught dead in because his dad would kick his ass if he knew."

Jasper sighs heavily.

"Yeah, I know. But Wells is our best friend. And I'm not just going to run my mouth to him when I don't know for sure--"

It takes him a second to realize why Monty throws up a hand to halt him. Then he sees the glowing cell phone held up to his face.

"Yeah, down underneath the pier. Where are you? Ok. Sure, we'll come up. By the ferris wheel? All right. See you in five."

"Who was that?" Jasper demands.

"Raven."
"Ugh! I'm right, Monty! I'm telling you!" Raven paces back and forth along the creaking, worn wooden planks of the boardwalk as the ferris wheel glows like a technicolor dream behind them, creating a blazing backdrop for their conversation. Her swishing ponytail almost slices Monty in the cheek as it whizzes by.

Jasper leans against a closed up hot dog stand, rolling his neck back and forth to loosen the tension gathering there as he pushes fuzzy ribbons of blue cotton candy into his mouth.

"You didn't see them in the parking lot at the mall!" Raven hurries on, really working herself up. "It was like he had this kind of power over her - I can't explain it. Like she was under his spell."

Jasper snorts.

"That's so stupid," he mutters.

"It's not!"

All of a sudden, she's up in his face looking ready to pummel him. He holds up his hands, backing away.

"Chill, Reyes. I'm not the abusive boyfriend here."

"He's not her boyfriend!" Raven insists, looking back to Monty for support and getting nothing but an indiscernible expression. "Last night they were at a gas station together, and I saw him almost hit her. Ok!? Something is seriously fucked up here! We have to do something! Say something to her at least!" her voice raises in its desperation.

"You really think he's, like, holding her against her will or something?" Jasper groans. "This isn't some fucked up episode of Dr. Phil. It's Clarke! She's the most balanced person we know!"

"Almost hit her?" Monty's eyes narrow as his tone darkens. "Clarke would never put up with someone like that. And her dad - I mean, he's employing the guy . . ."

"People do stupid shit when they're into someone," Raven argues.

"But does that mean you want to say something to Wells first? Because I'm not sure--" Jasper revs up his original argument again, but Monty speaks over him.

"Are you talking about an intervention?" he asks thoughtfully, rubbing at his chin. "I mean, she has been shady as hell with us lately, giving all these half-assed excuses for ditching us."

"But that's how she gets when she doesn't want to deal!" Raven says excitedly, eyes lighting up as she latches onto Monty's interest. "She lied to Harper last year when she found out her heart condition meant she wouldn't pass the physicals for NASA's space camp and told her we didn't want to go anymore. She never talked about anything Kane-related to her dad. And now--" she kicks against the railing in her frustration. "She's doing it about Bellamy, except I'm telling you he's fucking dangerous!"

"Not to mention if you're right, she's cheating on our best friend," Jasper says quietly into the tense stillness.

Raven can't quite meet his eyes.
"So what do you suggest?" Monty breaks the silence.

***

It's very late afternoon when Clarke finds herself, yet again, standing in front of the Blake's yellow front door in a worn, blood orange tunic stained with paint and battered leggings. She pushes the wisps of flyaway hair come loose from her messy bun away from her eyes and bangs at the door when the doorbell proves useless.

Bellamy takes his sweet time to appear, still in plaid pajama bottoms.

"What?" he grunts at her when he pulls the door open.

She stumbles a step back because she'd been half-leaning against the door, which now gives way beneath her.

"I'm sorry," she exclaims as she rights herself, absorbing the shimmering, light purple circles under his eyes.

"What are you sorry for, Clarke?" he says, voice lifeless.

"I'm sorry I did that to you at the pond!" she grasps the doorframe for support. "I came here to tell you I'm talking to Wells tomorrow morning. I'm telling him everything. I can't take this anymore."

Bellamy briefly closes his eyes and shakes his head a fraction.

"What is it you're going to tell him, Clarke? That you had a stupid summer fling, and it meant nothing and now it's over? That you're so happy to be his arm candy at all future functions?"

He pauses at the hurt expression which springs to her face.

"Don't waste your time. I won't tell him a thing. Just go back and live your life the way it was. And I'll go on and be a big history nerd. No harm done. It's fine."

"It's not fine!" she asserts, lip trembling. "I'm going to tell him it's over."

She hears the exasperated huff of air he expels through his nose.

"But you care about him."

"I care about you more," she crushes herself into his warm, solid chest, squeezing for all she's worth.

Chapter End Notes

It would be nice if that was the end. But it's not. Thanks for sticking with the story this long though!
Arts & Crafts

Chapter Notes

That feeling when you too want to know what happens next in the story. But the only way to get an update is to write it yourself. The struggle is real, guys. #WritersProblems

And as much as I wish I had beautiful answers for your questions, I'm afraid I don't. I just don't know. I go where the story leads me, generally no matter how weird and random the direction...and it often comes as a great surprise, even to me, where it all ends up.

The densely packed art supplies aisle at Target reminds Bellamy of what the inside of a piñata looks like once the final whack makes it explode in vibrancy. Clarke's pretty much a kid in a candy store, grabbing with both hands for paintbrushes, sponges shaped like flowers and rainbows, and jars of multi-colored glitter until her arms are full.

She turns to him with a maniacal grin, trying to drop some of her finds into their cart.

"You're having way too much fun, Princess," he teases, trying to block her with his hip from throwing yet another pack of "Sketch & Sparkle Tattoo Pens" on top of the towering pile of supplies she's already picked out.

"You can never have enough tattoo pens, Blake," she grins cheekily at him, raising up on her tiptoes and smacking a kiss against his cheek.

"I'm going to draw a unicorn on your face," she traces the outline of it on his skin, lost in her own trance.

"As long as it has a long horn," he remarks drily.

"Legendary - golden with diamonds at the tip," she promises solemnly as he snorts.

"Seriously though Clarke, this is just for Clara and a few of her friends. You're never gonna use all this stuff."

She leans against the cart, biting the inside of her cheek.

"Yeah, you're probably right. But the whole family felt so bad after the accident! They came to visit you and brought presents and food," she shrugs, looking at him with doe eyes. "I want to do something nice for them, and hosting an art day is something I can do, mmkay?"

Bellamy gives her a skeptical glance, digging his hands deeper into his jeans pockets.

"Come on, Bell. Please?" she sticks out her bottom lip.

"Do you always get your way?"

He can't believe how much she resembles an eight-year-old right now. An adorable eight-year-old, but still.
"Pretty much," she says matter-of-factly.

He drops his shoulders dramatically.

"Ok," he sighs then dives for one of the thinner cylinders of red paint hanging from a hook and traps her between his body and the flat-paneled wall at the edge of the aisle.

He hears her give a little gasp.

"As long as I get to have some artistic fun with you after," he grins like the cheshire cat, swooping her wrists up over her head in a smooth motion and tracing the outlines of her breasts through the tunic with the paint bottle.

"Bellamy!" she hisses, trying to squirm out of his hold.

But it's too tight. She can't move.

"Yes, baby?"

Her body heat radiates out through the light tunic. He focuses on the birthmark over her lip as he drops the paint tube around her back, rolling it beneath the ample globes of her ass. The action forces her hips to jut out, but he's ready. He presses his own knee between her thighs, fully invading her personal space.

"We're in public!" Clarke manages, fully flustered. "Stop it! Someone could see!"

"That didn't bother you at the pond," he husks against her ear, feeling her inner thighs clench against his knee as he says it.

He lands a hand on the side of her right breast, not cupping it so much as resting on it, and leans back toward her ear.

"Your tits always feel so damn good. Why is that?" he breathes next to her lips before pressing a bruising kiss against them.

She doesn't really kiss him back, more like absorbs the motion of his lips then tries to kick at his shin. A mild but well-placed hit forces a zinging vibration up his leg, causing him to swear loudly but slacken his hold on her wrists.

Finn and Raven choose that exact moment to round the corner.

"Enough!" Clarke pants. "Get off me!"

She frees her hands and drives her fingers deeply into the space below his collarbone, deliberately staying away from his ribs.

Bellamy stumbles back toward the Crayola marker display but misses colliding with it by inches.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" Finn roars, launching himself in front of Clarke to face Bellamy.

Raven pulls a shocked Clarke toward her by the arm, moving her out into the store's back aisle and shielding her with her leaner body. Clarke throws Bellamy a wide-eyed look, but his brain freezes for a minute.

It's enough.
Finn pushes him hard, right in the ribs. Bellamy careens backward, crashing into the aisle behind him and sending stacked boxes of art supplies to the floor.

"I said what the fuck do you think you're doing? Is it UCLA policy to assault the girls you tutor now?" Finn stares him down, enraged.

"Finn, don't hurt him!" Clarke cries out, but Raven throws out her arm to stop her from getting closer. "He was in a car crash! He's not healed!"

Bellamy swipes the back of his hand against his forehead, swallowing his wince. There's no way he's going to let this floppy haired asshole see him in pain.

Instead, he scoffs, brushing his hair out of his eyes and stepping closer, so they're practically toe-to-toe.

"I think that's more your job, isn't it, Finn?" he hisses lowly, puffing out his chest. "You're just a good guy minding your own business, right? Until the moment your girlfriend turns her back and then you're trying to press yourself up against her best friend in a dark parking lot."

Bellamy's eyes narrow, and he hears himself breathing heavier. Blood's pounding in his ears. Finn gets a little paler, but he doesn't step back.

"What are you talking about?" Raven insists from a few feet away. "Finn would never touch Clarke--"

"Except that's exactly what he was doing when I met you that day," Bellamy snaps, shoving around the younger man, who stands as if dazed, to grab Raven's purse out of her cart. "Your boyfriend pushing himself on your best friend."

"Hey! What are you doing?" she steps forward, red faced. Finn tries and fails to snatch the bag back of his grasp, but Bellamy turns away, fingers locking around her keys near the top of the heap of items hidden within.

"Oh, look, that's funny!" he dangles the keys in Finn's face, making sure the carved bird on a thread is right in front. "These seem so familiar." He turns back to Raven. "Because he made one with a griffin on it and gave it to her when you all went out for her birthday. Did you wonder why she left so fast both times? It's because darling Finn over here makes her skin crawl."

A dawn of comprehension darts across Raven's face.

"So what do you have to say for yourself, Prince Charming?"

Mouth slightly open, Raven looks from Finn who's turned the color of lumpy oatmeal to Clarke, who has a few tears staining her face.

"Raven, I didn't . . . I mean - we never . . ."

"It's true. It's true isn't it?" she demands of Clarke, shaking her shoulder. "Answer me!"

Clarke nods slowly, watching her feet.

"Yeah," she gasps at last. "I'm so sorry, I wanted to tell you."

"You don't have anything to be sorry for," Bellamy bites out. "It's this asshole who should be apologizing. Not even original - going after the best friend."
"Yeah, like screwing the boss' daughter is a novel concept," Finn chokes out, regaining his voice.

Seeing white, Bellamy's hand curls into a fist, and he pivots toward Finn, but Raven beats him to it.

SMACK. The blow lands across his cheek, discoloring it instantly.

Finn's wide, puppy dog eyes watch Raven's warily, totally stunned.

"Raven!" he says desperately, cradling his face in one hand. "You're not really gonna believe them over me, are you?"

He tries to scoff in an attempt to regain his usual bravado.

"I mean, who the hell is he anyway?" he gestures to Bellamy. "Some financial aid charity case Dr. Griffin felt sorry for--"

"How dare you!" Clarke gasps just as Raven yells, "Get the hell out of here!"

Finn takes a step backward, sneakers crunching on a pack of colored pencils, a casualty of the fight.

"We're done, Finn. We're so done!" Raven flings out.

"Whatever," Finn mumbles before turning to leave. "Your loss."

Bellamy doesn't even spare Finn a parting glance as he makes his way back to Clarke instead, placing a reassuring hand on her upper arm. She jerks it away immediately.

"Clarke, what is it?" he demands.

Raven's eyes are sweeping across the scattered art and school supplies coating the floor. She's breathing heavy even though she technically hasn't moved far.

Clarke watches her worriedly.

"Just go, Bellamy," she says, voice closing off. "I need some time with her."

"But."

"Please, go!" she insists, and jaw clenched tightly, he turns on his heel.

"I just want to know one thing," Raven says when Bellamy's form slouches around the corner.

"Anything," Clarke says in what she hopes is a mollifying tone.

There's a long pause before Raven's hollow eyes meet hers.

"How many times did you screw my boyfriend?"
Pretty Pretty Princess

Clarke snaps her neck so quickly, she hears the crackle of tendons and ligaments.

"What?!" she exclaims, disbelieving eyes focusing on her friend. "Never! Raven, I swear!"

Raven watches her shrewdly, not saying a word, crossing her arms over the white V-neck tee that emphasizes her impressive biceps and mocha skin.

Clarke gulps.

"He . . . he told me he ugh," she makes a grunting noise at the back of her throat, "this is hard. He told me he liked me once outside the mall that day and did make me the bracelet for my birthday. What Bellamy said was true."

Raven's contorts her face into a look that would give Ursula a run for her money. Clarke watches her nostrils expand and her mouth narrow to nothing, unsure if she should continue. A fresh wave of nerves wracks through her body. But the silence is oppressive.

"Nothing ever happened though. I would never do that to you! I kept trying to tell him to back off, and I thought I had. I should have said something to you as soon as it first happened. I'm so sorry! I just knew how happy you were with him, and I didn't want to ruin that for you."

Raven nods almost imperceptibly, but her face softens a fraction, and Clarke hopes the truth in her speech is ringing through. Raven readjusts the long strap of her purse across her shoulder and takes a step closer to Clarke.

"I know you didn't," she manages.

It's clear the words are a challenge for her.

Clarke's shoulders slump a little in relief, and she reaches out her arms to Raven, smiling slightly, intent on enveloping her in a hug. So her next sentence comes as a blow.

"But you would do that to Wells. You wouldn't do it to me, but you would do it to Wells, right?"

"What do you mean?" Clarke mumbles, feeling the drops of perspiration springing up on her brow. Despite the icy blast of air conditioning circulating through the big box store, a sheen of sweat is pooling at the small of her back.

"I'm sick of playing mind games, Clarke! Just be straight with me," she throws her arms out in a wide gesture. Her voice is too loud. They're going to attract attention any moment. It's amazing they're still alone as it is after that fight. Clarke glances nervously down at the pile of art supplies scattered on the floor she needs to hang back up. "Tell me what's going on with you and Bellamy. He's obviously been coming on to you, right?"

Clarke starts to tremble, stumbling back and turning her attention to scooping up packets of markers in her arms and placing them on their hooks.

Raven is suddenly crouched next to her friend, voice a whispering hiss.

"Clarke - this is really important. Is he hurting you? Or like, threatening you to be with him or something? Because I'm sure he has this fucked up power dynamic thing in his head, but he's not
going to get away with it! I know how much you love Wells, but I know there's something not right going on. Whatever it is, we can handle it. You just have to tell me the truth."

Clarke's totally immobilized. The hand wrapped around a pack of gel pens falls limply to her side. With the speed of a turtle, she wheels back around to face Raven, flopping down onto the tile floor and sprawling her legs out in front of her. Face awash in concern, Raven drops onto the ground too, placing a tentative hand on Clarke's upper arm.

"That's not it," she starts shaking her head. "You don't understand. Bellamy's just a really . . . physical person."

Raven snorts.

"Physical person my ass! He's your tutor, Clarke. Your dad pays him! He's what, 22? 23? He has absolutely no right to be touching you at all, and don't you dare lie to me and say he doesn't because I've seen it! I've seen it at the mall and just now and at the gas station."

"Gas station?" Clarke mouths wordlessly.

"The other night. You came out of his car and tried to say something to him, and he practically slapped you away. What the fuck were you doing driving around with him that late anyway?"

Clarke looks off into the distance with a glazed expression, mute.

"And the clinic," Raven presses on, unrepentant. "Harper said you'd been to a clinic. Come on, Clarke. I know you. You and Wells wanted to wait. So unless you had some goodbye sex before he went to London, which doesn't make a lot of sense because you thought you were going too up until the very end, I just don't understand--"

"You've got it wrong, Raven," she lets the words blow out of her like a breeze. "You've got it all wrong."

"Then tell me, dammit!" Raven's shrill again next to her ear.

Clarke winces then takes a deep breath.

"I don't even know how it started, but it's . . . consensual. I-I'm in so deep now, Raven."

Raven hisses out a long draw of air.

"I'm sorry I lied to you. But how could I say anything to anyone? I can barely live with it myself. Nobody else knows. It's been eating me up for weeks. But . . . I can't stop. I never stop. I've tried. I've told him we can't, and then . . . we do."

"You have got to be fucking kidding me," Raven bangs her head into the white wire rack behind her.

When she opens her eyes again, they find Clarke's face full of accusation.

"But you love Wells," is all she says.

"I know. I did. I do, I guess. I don't know. It's a mess. It's--"

"A fucked-up mess, yeah, I got that part."

"When did it start?"
Clarke looks away again. The shocked disgust is coming through even as Raven is trying to be softer.

"Clarke."

"A week after I met him."

"All summer! And you never said anything! And here I was thinking you were being abused."

It's the first thing that gets a rise out of Clarke.

"God, no! Bellamy would never hurt me. I--"

But Raven shakes her head violently, pressing her lips together.

"I don't want to hear how you feel. This is wrong, Clarke. It's wrong."

Clarke brings her knees to her chest and curls up around them, head pressed sideways toward her friend like a little child. A few tears glisten down her cheeks.

"I know it is," she says brokenly. "What am I supposed to do? Tell me what to do."

"Nobody else knows? Just me? You're sure?"

"Mmhmm," Clarke nods.

"Monty and Jasper suspect though," Raven says it calmly though there are brittle nails wedged beneath the statement.

"What? Why?"

"Monty's mom saw you at the hospital with a guy she didn't recognize. So he looked Bellamy up online, and the puzzle pieces kind of clicked into place. And you just screamed at Finn that he was in an accident and to be careful, so," she shrugs.

All the color drains from Clarke's face.

"He was in an accident. It was my fault," she tells her leggings.

"I'm sure it wasn't," Raven snaps impatiently. "Listen, you told Harper about the clinic, and she told Monty. Monty knew Wells would never be caught dead going into a place like that with his dad running for office. Plus you've been ditching us all all summer. For a smart girl, your whole technique is sloppy as hell," she says dryly.

Clarke cracks the faintest smile.

"You're critiquing the way I cheat?"

Raven gives her a shove.

"I'm critiquing the fucking fact you cheated at all, Griffin! What the hell's wrong with you? Wells is amazing!"

Clarke shifts away.

"I know I'm horrible. Wells doesn't deserve this. I'm going to tell him tomorrow on Skype - come
clean. I have to."

"Well, I can support that decision," Raven contends. "But you know you can still probably salvage your relationship, right? I mean, this doesn't have to be the end. Wells is such a level-headed guy, and he adores you. It's going to sting like a bitch when he hears, don't get me wrong. But . . . there's hope he'll get over it and forgive you."

Clarke pulls her knees more tightly to her, letting the sound of Raven's voice go into high power mode wash over her.

"I don't think it'll be like that," she says, voice tinny.

Raven smooths a hand over her face, clutching the sides of her head briefly as she thinks.

"Don't be so sure," Raven argues. "You're like the golden child who can do no wrong."

Clarke looks exhausted.

"Raven, you know I'm so far from perfect--"

"Whatever, listen. We can tell Monty and Jasper that Bellamy was coming onto you and contacting you all the time and making you uncomfortable because he worked for your dad, but you finally fired his ass. That takes care of all your unexplained disappearances this summer. And that you went to the clinic for Wells, but it was a secret because his family's a little uptight, and you didn't want anyone to know. That explains that. Bellamy really did get into a car crash, so there's not much I can do there, but you going to the hospital with him isn't that weird if you were with him when it happened. Nobody else suspects anything happened between you two, and they don't have to."

Clarke stares at her, awestruck, as she finishes providing this rapid-fire solution and manages to blink a few times.

"You'd really help me cover it up like that?"

"Yeah, I guess," Raven raises and drops one shoulder. "If you wanted me to. What else am I here for?"

Clarke's eyes cloud over again.

"Don't talk like that. You're a great person. A much better one than I am . . . " her voice drifts off as something frantic passes into her vivid irises.

"Finn," she says it like a curse.

"What about him?"

"He knows - he suspects. He'll say something to Monty and Jasper and anyone else who asks him."

"I'll take care of Finn - don't worry about it," Raven cracks her knuckles ominously, a crazed glint in her eye.

"No, no don't do that," Clarke reaches out and pats her leg. "It's my mess, and I have to fix it."

"So you're gonna tell Wells?"

"Yeah."
"And the boys?"

"Yeah."

"And hope for a nuclear apocalypse to come sweep you away right after?"

Clarke does smile genuinely then.

"Maybe it won't be as bad as I think, like you said."

"Jesus, chica, you don't even know when your friends are lying right to your face to make you feel better, do you? No wonder you're so bad at adultery!" Raven gets to her feet, tugging Clarke up with her.

"I'm joking - it's going to be ok. I'm here for you, and you're doing the right thing. I really do think it might be ok with Wells."

The top of Clarke's lip quirks upward, but she doesn't look exactly hopeful. More like . . . disappointed at Raven's pronouncement.

No, that can't be it, Raven reasons.

The look fades rapidly as they finish setting the aisle back to rights.

"I'm sorry, Ray-Ray," Clarke murmurs as they turn the full cart in the direction of the checkout counters. "You just broke up with Finn because of me, and now you're listening to me complain about all this drama I created for myself. What's wrong with me?"

Raven's grin is unexpectedly wide and a little dark.

"It's all right, Griffin. I'm used to you being a selfish princess."

The nickname hits her like a hand grenade.
Come to Jesus

Chapter Summary

I can hear the screaming from here. Bellarke angst, Bellarke drama, another day in our hiatus hell. I'm sorry!!

It seems like Raven's threats worked, because Finn kept his mouth shut. That's the first thing Clarke realizes when the Skype screen pops open with a whooshing noise, and Wells is there, grinning at her easily.

"Hey, baby! What's up? I'll be home next week - can you believe it?"

Clarke barely looks into his kind brown eyes before she starts crying uncontrollably.

"Clarke? What is it? What's wrong?" his voice is insistent, demanding, and still comforting all at once.

"I have to tell you something . . . " she begins, voice full of water.

Wells' face hardens bit by bit as she delves into the tale of her summer with Bellamy. How it started with some playful banter over her ridiculous peacock coverup but escalated into long conversations and meals together and constant texts and harrowing car crashes and birthday surprises and trips to forests and art fortresses and Target. She keeps talking, on and on, because the minute she stops she knows she'll never be able to continue.

"Clarke," his voice drags over her name when she finally pauses for a deep breath and a tissue. "Stop for a second! You're screwing him, aren't you? That's why you're acting like a lunatic?"

"Wells . . . I'm so sorry . . . so, so, so sorry," she manages before the tears engulf her once more.

"That's a yes," he spits out.

She hears the ominous whack of his fist against the side of whatever wooden surface he's got his laptop propped up on.

"All this time?" his voice is of full of fire, but still controlled. She wishes he would yell. "All this time you Skyped me and sent me texts and emails . . . you were with him?"

"I shouldn't ever have let it happen!" Clarke says desperately. "I never wanted to hurt you! I'm such a bitch. You deserve someone so much better than me!"

The silence fills her bedroom, creeps into her bones and curls up in her throat. The seconds tick by in the corner timer on her screen. A minute passes. Then two.

"There's only one problem with that," he says.

"What?" she whispers, pulling her hair from her eyes, so she can see him fully.

His broad shoulders. The strong line of his jaw. The genuine goodness etched into his face even at a
"I've been in love with you practically my whole life, Clarke. I don't know what I deserve, and - at the moment I have no fucking idea why - but you've always been the one I wanted."

Her eyes race over his face frantically, and she lets out a fresh sob. He suddenly seems so much older to her, weary, like he aged two decades in the span of twenty minutes.

"I get that you were attracted to him, Clarke," Wells says slowly. "And I think - maybe - over time, like a fucking lot of time, I could forgive you if that's all it was."

The nails of her fingers are digging into the flesh of her palm so intensely, she's starting to feel mild spasms.

"Is that what it was?" it's like the thud of an executioner's axe.

Her eyes flash to her dresser mirror, where she's wedged a picture of herself and Bellamy standing in front of the wild cacti at The Getty Center. In the photo, he's making a ridiculous, goofy face at the camera, arm wrapped around her shoulders as she looks up at him, beaming like the sun.

"I... it was... I don't know," it's all she can get out when she manages to return her attention to the computer.

Wells' face crumples for only a second before it stiffens again.

"How many times?" he says gruffly.

"What?"

"How many times did you have sex?"

He's looking at her in a way that makes her stomach churn. Like she's an entirely different person than the one he knew yesterday.

_Jesus. Four? Seven? Twelve? What counts? What doesn't? I lost track. How could that be? Am I that much of a slut I don't remember?_

"I don't think talking about that is going to help," she says weakly instead.

His eyes narrow at her. She watches his jaw tick as he temples his fingers.

"Fine. Let's deal with this when I come home, ok?" he says crisply. "I'm not interested in breaking up with you over Skype, all right?"

Clarke swallows several times before nodding.

"Ok," she says, still siphoning off the liquid around her cheekbones.

She hears him sigh heavily.

"Clarke... come on, Clarke. Look at me."

She tracks over his eyebrows, nose, lips before settling on his eyes.

"I don't hate you. I want to kill you, but I don't hate you. We'll figure out what to do, ok?"
"Are you sure?"

He leaps from his chair so fast that she barely sees him leave in a blur. He's gone for several minutes. Several incredibly painful minutes while she tears her tissues to shreds in her hands and listens to the sound of her thumping heart.

"You do want to figure it out, don't you? I mean, that's why you told me?" he questions when at last he slides back into his seat.

Clarke hears her breath rattle.

"Yeah," she says it even while her intestines clench. "I do."

"Good, we'll start there then."

They watch each other for another thirty seconds, totally unsure what to say.

Finally--

"You know you're still stuck going to that damn political party with me, don't you KStew?"

"What?" Clarke snaps to attention.

"You know . . . Kristen Stewart cheated on the ruggedly attractive Robert Pattinson who was so in love with her he made her immortal to be with him forever and--"

"Jesus, why did I let you watch *Twilight* with me?" she momentarily forgets the heaviness of their conversation.

"Because I'm your boyfriend," he says, maybe harsher than he intended. "Which basically means I reserve the right to make you feel like shit about this from time to time."

She can't tell if he's serious or joking - and that's saying something.

"Wells -"

"Forget it, let's talk about something else. Got any other news for me?"

Clarke sits up a bit straighter, folding one arm across the other on her desk.

"Well, Raven broke up with Finn . . ."

***

**Wells Jaha:** Hey, Raven. Sorry to hear about Finn. Clarke told me. That sucks. I always kind of thought he was a douche . . .

**Raven Reyes:** You didn't. But thanks for saying it anyway. :P

**Wells Jaha:** Fine - I didn't see it coming, lol. But it's gonna be ok. You're one of the most badass people I know. And you deserve someone who'll pick you 1st.

**Raven Reyes:** Stop it. You're ridiculous.

**Raven Reyes:** But thank you.
Wells Jaha: Anytime :) Takes one to know one.

Raven Reyes: So cocky.

Raven Reyes: So you know about . . . everything now?

Wells Jaha: If by everything you mean my girlfriend hooking up with her summer tutor, then yeah, I'm aware.

Raven Reyes: I'm sorry. I was sitting right here all summer and had no clue. I hope you guys can work it out.

Wells Jaha: Not your fault. She's sneaky when she wants to be. We're gonna work on it.

Raven Reyes: Good - I'm glad to hear that!! Enjoy your last week in the U.K.! See you soon :)

Wells Jaha: Later, Raven.

***

The conversation with Monty and Jasper in Monty's rec room isn't exactly pleasant. But it is necessary. They yell at her. She absorbs it. They tell her cheating on Wells was a seriously shitty thing to do. She agrees. She apologizes for lying to them about where she was spending so much of her time over the last few weeks. And Jasper confesses, even after Monty throws a pillow at his face, that Wells made them promise to not stay mad at her for long because it was an issue between them and they were going to deal with it. It ends with Jasper giving her a brief hug and Monty nodding her curtly out the door.

***

She doesn't go to Bellamy's house the next day. Or the next.

The text messages start to pile up.

Bellamy Blake: Clarke, what's going on? You missed our last session.

Bellamy Blake: Is your friend Raven ok? I shouldn't have yelled at Finn like that, but he's such a dick.

Bellamy Blake: Did she stop talking to you or something? Is that why you're mad at me?

Bellamy Blake: You can't ignore me forever you know.

Bellamy Blake: Clarke, I know where you live.

Clarke's eyes dart over the iPhone screen before she flings the device onto her white floppy chair and builds a pillow-and-blanket tent over her head, intent to sleep the day away.

***

Wild but lovely black charcoal drawings cover almost every square inch of bleak blue-gray wall around her. She spins around the small space, gazing at them. There's the Eiffel Tower. An old, gnarled oak tree. Some sort of explosion. A lake surrounded by flowers, butterflies and a starry sky. A skyscraper. A warrior wearing a mask. Then there's a pounding at the door - sharp and urgent. But
she can't open the door, as hard as she tugs. It's locked from the outside. She's trapped. She continues
to pull though, even though it's pointless. "Clarke! Clarke!" a deep voice yells from the other side.
She catches her face in her hands, trying to block out the noise.

"Clarke! Open the door!" the triple ring of the doorbell sends her spiraling back into consciousness.

She tears from her bed and down the curving staircase, which makes her dizzy at this speed.

"Coming!" she yells, still half-groggy and not even thinking to look through the window to see
who's outside.

Yanking the door open, she finds him. Messy curls, sun-bronzed skin, a smattering of freckles across
the bridge of his nose just like she remembered. His eyes are molten, viscous, dangerous.

"I told you not to ignore me," he snaps, pushing past her and stepping into the picturesque Victorian.

"Bellamy!" she hums, closing the door and turning toward him.

His hands are on his hips, and his jaw seems so tight.

"Start talking," he demands. "I didn't drive all the way over here to look at you."

A warm flush heats her skin. She's wearing an oversized Universal Studios T-shirt that once
belonged to her dad and striped navy-and-white sleep shorts underneath, but only the edges of them
can be seen. She's a frizzy blonde, barefoot mess.

Not that it should matter anymore. She's ending this.

Right now.
Head to Heart

Chapter Summary

This really wasn't what I expected to write. It wasn't what was in my notes, even. But I'm always at the mercy of Bellarke, and their pull over me is far too strong.

"Bell," she mouths it desperately, looking stricken. "Bell . . . can we sit down?"

"No," he braces his boots apart on Abby's beloved pale lilac patterned Persian rug. "We're not going anywhere until you tell me why you've been avoiding me."

Clarke flinches as tiny clumps of dirt get crushed into the fibrous strands.

"Raven broke up with Finn," she runs the sole of her foot up and down her bare calf.

"Yeah," he snorts. "I know. I was there."

"But after you left she asked me all these questions about you. She thought - "

How can she even say this to him? It's so insane. So far off base.

"What, Clarke?"

"She thought you were . . . I don't know, like, threatening me to be with you or something."

Bellamy's sinister laugh sends a flight of terror up her spine.

"Like I'd make sure you didn't get into AP Euro - or God forbid Yale - if you didn't fuck me? Is she out of her goddamn mind?"

"I know, it's crazy. I'm sorry. But it's what she thought."

"I don't care what she thought. What did you tell her?"

His midnight black eyes are gazing so intently at her it's unnerving.

She blinks back a few tears and pulls helplessly at the edge of her shirt.

"I asked you a question, Clarke. What did you tell her?" his voice rises in anger.

"I told her it wasn't true. I told her it was - consensual."

"Oh," he nods his head sarcastically. "So good of you to acknowledge that. Did you mention the part about how you started all of this?"

"What?" Clarke jerks her neck back. "No I didn't! You did!"

Bellamy slides his bottom lip over his top one, shaking his head.

"Octavia's bedroom. When I walked in that was all you, Princess. *You* grabbed *my* hand. You told
me to stay."
Clarke turns practically maroon at the memory but sputters on anyway.
"You came into my bedroom at the party, uninvited! You practically caressed my face. You touched
my--"
She's stopped abruptly by Bellamy's laughter.
"You really think a lot of yourself, don't you, Princess?"
"You're such an asshole!"
"Maybe," he concedes flippantly. "But you still want me, don't you?"
"I don't have to listen to this," she returns, walking by him in the direction of the kitchen.
"Yes, you do," he grips her elbow firmly, forcing her to a halt.
"Why's that?" she tilts her chin up defiantly.
"Because you owe me the truth."
"I don't owe you anything if you're going to act like a caveman," she fires back.
"That's right, I forgot. I'm a Neanderthal, and you're better than me, is that it?"
"I'm not better than you!" she shakes her arm forcefully out of his hold.
"Did you tell Raven that?" he leans into her, eyes glinting with an emotion that simultaneously scares
and thrills her. "Did you tell Wells what you let me do to you? What you begged me to do to
you?"
She grits her teeth together but says nothing.
"I figured," he scoffs. It's probably meant to sound offhand, but it doesn't quite make it. "You played
it safe, right? Tried to make everyone happy? Told Wells I was a mistake? If you even talked to him
at all . . ."
"I did!" she literally stamps her foot, swiping the back of her hand across her nose as it starts to run a
little. "I told him about us, and he didn't want to break up! He said he'd forgive me!"
She's rolling the ends of her shirt between her fingers, twisting them and stretching the fabric. He
looks at her for the first time with something resembling disgust.
"What a nice guy," he spits meanly. "I mean, if it were my girlfriend fucking someone else all
summer, I think I'd have problem with it. But hey--to each his own! You really got lucky, Princess.
You get exactly what you wanted."
"This isn't what I wanted!" she practically shrieks.
She doesn't try to fight him as he maneuvers her against the hall wall, even when the crown molding
digs into her back.
"No?" he rasps a few inches from her face, wrapping his hand around her chin and pulling it up, so
she meets his gaze. "You didn't want the perfect boyfriend to keep mom and dad happy and the guy
from the wrong side of the tracks to hook up with on the side? And let's not forget the moron who practically drools after you everywhere you go even though he's got a girlfriend. You're telling me you didn't like the attention, Princess?"

"You're being a dick and you know it, Bellamy!" she manages although her head is starting to throb. "I told Finn to back off! And Wells has never been anything but absolutely amazing to me!"

He drops his hands to her hips, sinking his fingers into her compliant muscle.

"Then why the fuck have you been spreading your legs for me, Princess?" he hisses.

She opens her mouth in a strangled cry as he rolls his hips against her sharply, but he talks over it.

"And buying me presents and baking me cookies and crying all over me and telling me all your secrets? Why did you want to do an art project with my next-door neighbors?" He pauses for breath. He's so close she sees the cracked patterns in his lips. "Why do you hang out at Mecha with me? Why do you keep a picture of us in your room? Just tell me, and I'll go!"

"How did--"

"I saw it there, Clarke. Just answer the goddamn question."

She doesn't.

She flings her arms around his neck and cries into his shoulder instead, muttering about how she's sorry, sorry, sorry about everything. Clarke nuzzles against him more firmly - oblivious to the wet stains she's leaving behind - when she feels him wrap a hesitant arm around her waist and stroke a delicate hand through her mangled hair. Even when he steps away from the wall, she won't let go of him. She clings stickily to his upper body, arching up on the tips of toes until he relents and drags her legs up and around his waist, so he can at least sit down on the nearby couch. She crumples in his lap, keeping her face hidden from view.

"Clarke, you're bored with him. You care about him, but you're bored. You know it. Otherwise you would have told me to fuck off a long time ago."

"He's not boring," she argues, but pushes against him more insistently nonetheless. "But he's not you."

She feels Bellamy's chest rise and fall steadily beneath her, feels his smirk against her cheek. He starts lazily coasting his fingertips against the satin of her thigh in reassuring arcs, while his other arm stays wrapped around her waist.

"And that doesn't tell you anything?" he deadpans.

"What's it supposed to tell me?"

"You're going to make me say it, aren't you, Princess?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she trills back.

He huffs and shifts himself dramatically, so she half-flops down onto his lap.

"Would you just try to be with me?"

Clarke pulls back to look at his face. Gently, like a curious child, she traces a finger from one freckle to another. He catches her hand in his own and kisses her fingertips before interlocking their fingers.
"Is that what you want?" she asks.

"Clarke," he practically groans. "Is it what you want?"

"We fight all the time," she returns, unsure.

"So what? At least we're honest with each other. You don't mind telling me when I'm an asshole, and I don't mind telling you when you need to grow up and deal. And it's not like we don't make up."

He brushes his lips across hers delicately, just a shimmer of a kiss. But she reciprocates it more eagerly than he anticipated, bracing a hand against his jaw and slipping her tongue into his mouth.

"That's not an answer," he manages when they break apart.

Clarke's all starry-eyed and flushed lip. But her words gore him nonetheless.

"It's always been so easy with Wells. Everyone thinks we're this perfect couple."

Bellamy transforms to rigid concrete beneath her grasp.

"That's my answer," he manages between clenched teeth, pushing her off him and into the couch, so he can stand.

"Bellamy! Stop it! I didn't say we were one," she tries to straighten her tangled legs from the pillows.

He whirls around as if motorized.

"I didn't ask you what everyone else thought! I asked you what you wanted! Not your parents, or Wells, or Raven, or Finn or the fucking admissions counselors. I didn't say to tell me what you thought I wanted to hear or what would make Octavia happy. What is it that you actually want?"

"It's never that easy," she whispers. "You know what I want."

"WHAT IS SO HARD?" he's thunderous, and she shrinks from him. "Is this punishment for what I said at the store? Are you trying to drive me crazy? What is it?"

"No! No, I'm not upset about that. Finn had to be told to fuck off eventually. And you did it. But that's it, Bell. You're . . . you're . . ."

"I'm what?" he sneers.

"You're so," her face twists as she searches for the right word, the word that'll cause the least damage. "Passionate about everything. It's hard for me to handle it sometimes," she admits with a small voice.

Bellamy holds up his hand to quiet her, tucking his chin toward his right shoulder.

"Ok, fine. I'll go be passionate somewhere else. I got it. Wells doesn't rock the boat. You guys have a long history. And you're gonna be a beautiful first family one day," her face instantly collapses. "Really, I mean it. You'll have my vote," he says sharply then heads for the door.

"Bellamy Blake! Stay here!" she yells, jumping to her feet. "You wanted a straight answer, and I gave you one! You don't get to leave," she marches toward the foyer, overtaking him by the foot of the stairs.
"Why not?" he demands. "No matter what happens today, you're gonna go to the party as soon as he
gets home, and you're gonna make up, and your mom will cry over how sweet you two look
together and start picking out baby names for her future grandkids."

Clarke blanches.

"Am I wrong?"

She bites her lip.

"Answer me, dammit!"

But there's only silence. Because of course, her parents will want her to go to the party and do the
media interviews and go to college with Wells Jaha. It's always been the plan. And the Griffins like
sticking to plans.

"You wanted truth? That's the truth. You're afraid. You can't do anything someone else won't like!
Nothing that lets the crown slip. I don't know how the hell you ever let me touch you to begin with,
but I promise it'll never happen again. I was the idiot. Just blame me if anyone asks."

He stops for a minute, then a sickening smirk slides over his face.

"Nah, better yet, give 'em Raven's version. She's got it all figured out. Tell them I made you do
whatever the hell I wanted."

It's like her hand flies up on its own accord to slap the nasty look off his face, but of course he
catches her wrist. He's always faster than her, always stronger. Still, the move clearly shocks them
both. His eyes widen in surprise, and her whole body tingles as if it's been electrified by an outlet.

"No, I don't think so, Princess. You don't get to hit me," he barks meanly.

"I'm not afraid of you," Clarke gazes at him squarely, holding her ground.

"Even though I'm so volatile?"

"I didn't say I was scared. I said you were a lot to handle. You always let how you feel affect what
you do!"

"Unlike you? You're all under control, right?" his tone abruptly morphs into something silkier, and
he caresses the inside of her wrist with his thumb before letting her hand drop. "Like that time in
Octavia's room? Or my room? Your dad's office? The shower? The pond?"

Clarke flushes furiously.

"You still embarrass way too easily, Princess," his fingers glide over her twitching lip before
brushing, just like that first time, against the side of her breast.

Her decision is made in a moment. She yanks his hand into her own and starts pulling him up the
stairs.
"Don't overdo it. I'm supposed to be the passionate one back here," Bellamy jokes as he stumbles up the creaky steps to keep up with her bare feet pounding against the carpet.

"Shut up," she snaps back over her shoulder, but she throws him a half-smile.

Her room is lit only by a lamp on her bedside table. A painter's palette of gold, fuchsia, cranberry, and periwinkle light the sky visible between the gaps in her blinds as evening rises in the East. She pauses at the foot of her bed, clutching at the white, wrought iron ornate footboard. There's tension in her shoulders. He can see it in the rigid way she holds them. With her hair still mostly up in a truly messy bun, the ridges of her spine peek out from the top of the T-shirt.

The picture of them at The Getty Center is still stuck in her mirror, and the sight of it spreads a warmth through his stomach.

"Bellamy?" she says it quietly toward the window.

She senses him behind her but won't turn.

"Yeah?" comes the deep rumble of his reply.

"I want you to know - whatever happens - I want you to know you made me really happy this summer. It wasn't a mistake. I'm glad I met you. I care about you . . . so much. You're special to me. Ok?"

"Clarke, that sounds a hell of a lot like a breakup speech," his tone hangs precariously on the edge of darkness.

It sends a ripple of goosebumps across her skin in tiny, continuous peaks.

She shakes her head, reaching up to pull the hair tie out and running her fingers through the loose, blonde waves that fall to the middle of her back.

"It's not," she turns back to face him.

He's stern, eyebrows arched up and mouth parted. She wants to dip her finger into the dimple on his chin, make his hair stand up at crazy angles. A faint line of a mustache sits above his lip, mostly shadow, and it makes her ache to think she hasn't seen him in the last few days. That he didn't even bother to shave.

He jerks his head microscopically, which she knows is an invitation to continue. But the room that a second ago felt cozy like a secret grotto now seems cloaked in tension.

"I want you to be the one I'm with, Bellamy. I do! You have to know that by now."

"I don't know that," he says sharply.

"B-B-But . . . you just listed all those things I did for you! If that doesn't say it, what does?" she stammers.

"Not what I meant. I know you're into me, Princess," his grin is all teeth. "But what I don't know is if you'll go back to your normal life next week, wave a wand and make this all go away."
She nods carefully, slipping across the room to him and linking her wrists around the back of his neck. There's still a good bit of space between them though as she leans back.

"I don't want that to happen," she admits quietly.

He shrugs, rolling his lips, catching the sides of her waist lightly with his hands. There's no major pressure in the touch like usual. He holds her like she's fragile china he can't wait to set down.

"This is something you can control if you want to, Clarke," he rasps.

He immediately hangs his head as if he can't believe he said it out loud.

"Hey. Hey!" she wraps her hands around the sides of his face and bends at her knees, so she can find his face. "I meant what I said, Bell. I want it to be you. But when everyone's back, this isn't going to be easy. I still have another year in school before I'm free. You know about our families and what that's like. My mom will do whatever she can to make sure things work out with the Jaha's campaign, even if that means selling the lie of two perfectly joined families."

He scoffs.

"She doesn't think it's a lie, Clarke. Because you won't tell her it is."

She steps away as if he struck her.

"But it's not."

She might as well have dropped an atomic bomb.

"You think you have a good relationship with Wells!?" he roars, throwing out his arms. "You've got a fucked-up moral compass!"

"That's not what I meant!" she yells desperately. "I mean it wasn't a lie when he left! I didn't bargain on you, Bellamy! But I'm trying to deal with it - I am! Maybe not the way you want me to. Maybe not as fast as you want. But I'm trying, all right?"

"Tell me what I'm doing here, Clarke."

It's a level of hopelessness she's never heard from him. Fissures begin to snap in her ribs when she looks into the eyes of a guy who's been shortchanged once more than he can handle.

Clarke tries to smile, but it feels strained and broken and doesn't meet her eyes. Action is more her thing, anyway. Bellamy's the one who always makes her dizzy with his verbal gymnastics.

She presses her leg into her mattress, leaving an indent, and scoots up onto it. Raising herself to her knees, she gives him a long, appraising look. His biceps ripple when he crosses his arms over his chest. Suddenly, she only wants them holding her down on her bed.

"It's not about what you're doing here," she breathes. "It's about what I'm choosing. I'm here with you. For you."

She lifts the shirt over her head, tossing it onto the carpet in a heap. The movement leaves her breasts exposed to him. She wraps her hands around the curve of her footboard, leaning forward and letting them dangle, and watches him swallow noticeably.

"Clarke . . . this isn't a good idea," he manages.
"I just want to be with you. And I can promise you tonight," she holds out her hand to him.

He hesitates for a moment, shifting his weight. His eyes darken with lust enough for her to struggle to meet them. Then he's kicking the door closed with a shudder that sings through the walls. She can see herself now in the full-length mirror hung on the back of the door.

The bed sinks with his weight as he climbs up behind her, dipping his arm into the hollow between her elbow and side and stroking her stomach. He kisses the side of her neck, which she exposes to him fully, lolling her head toward her shoulder with half-closed eyes.

"Keep your eyes open," he whispers commandingly into her ear.

Her eyes jolt wide when he bites down on her shoulder and palms the generous swell of her breast.

"Mmm," she murmurs, pushing her chest into his scratchy skin.

"Do you like my hands on you, Princess?" he sweeps his right hand up her thigh and under the fabric of her striped shorts until he hits the indent of her hip bone, which he outlines with his thumb.

"Always," she manages before biting her lip to stifle the sound about to erupt when Bellamy pinches her nipple roughly between his fingers.

"I want you to watch everything I do to you," he gestures toward the mirror where the ivory cream of her nearly translucent skin slides against the rich bronze of his forearms. "I want you to remember that even when you run, you're still mine, Clarke."
Chapter Summary

It's hard to write darkish Bellamy and sweet Bellamy into the same chapter. But who knows? Maybe I pulled it off.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Together they're . . . beautiful.

It's the word that continues to flit through her brain as she leans her head back on Bellamy's toned chest and watches them in the mirror.

She can't help but slide her fingers through his curls and breathe in the sugary scent of alcohol still sticking to his clothes from his shift at Mecha. She grinds back involuntarily against a still-clothed Bellamy when his index finger slips down past her golden hair, snaking lower toward her opening. He grasps her hips more firmly and thrusts once, twice, three times into her ass, forcing her clit to brush against his finger each time.

"God," she gasps, trying and failing to spin in his grasp. "I wanna kiss you. Let me kiss you."

If it sounds like begging, it's because she is.

Bellamy's eyes are pools of oil, his smile somewhere between a grin and a snarl.

"Say it," he maneuvers two fingers into her pussy, only mildly slick, bumping up against the sensitive tissue of her inner walls.

When he crooks his fingers forward, her head thuds into his collarbone, and he laughs.

"Just say it," he whispers feverishly against the shell of her ear before biting her pulse point.

"I'm yours," she moans.

His lips fly to her carnation-stained cheek as he hugs her tighter against his torso. The sensation of his hardening dick at her back sends a warm gush of fluid around his fingers. It immediately heats her body from the inside out shamefully.

"You really do like me, Princess," he chuckles against her temple, sliding his thick fingers out of her gently enough - though she still suppresses a hiss - and grasps her full breasts, pushing them together while maintaining complete eye contact in the mirror. He can both see and hear her gasp when he thumbs over her puckering nipples.

"I'm going to suck on these later. Would you like that?" he rasps.

Not trusting her ability to be understood verbally, she just nods, gripping her footboard tightly in one hand while sliding the other across the prominent, puffy vein in his forearm as he continues to play with her.
He won't let her help him remove his clothes. Though the mild scent of his sweat mingled with beer hits her nose when he shucks his shirt over his head.

"Did someone spill a drink on you?" she asks quietly, partly to distract from the lewd pose he's told her to stay in for him as he undresses. She's got both hands curled around the wrought iron bar now as she rests on her knees, ass out in the air to him like an offering. And partly just because she's curious.

"No," he drops his pants and boxers on her chair and arranges himself behind her again on the bed. His hands - how are his hands always like fire warmed coals? - tickle the sides of her ribs and dip into the hollow of her belly button before tripping along the tops of her inner thighs and coasting back to squeeze her ass. "Just an occupational hazard to smell like a frat house I guess."

"Why?" he suddenly leans in over her shoulder, so his face is a few inches from her own. It's long enough to take in the scar below his nose and his blown pupils. "Does the smell of beer turn you on?"

"Not really," she smiles, so grateful for the moment of levity.

Her lips capture his soft bottom one for a few seconds before he pulls away.

"But . . . " she begins to speak again before thinking better of it.

"Yes, Princess?"

He's tracing the serpentine line of her spine, digging his fingers into the knotted muscle bordering it in a painfully amazing way. His knee kicks her legs apart, and she stiffens a little, catching the scent of her own tangy arousal.

"Almost everything about you turns me on," she admits, flushing on cue.

His dick is hard and hot against her ass when he swipes a finger back to run over the nerve endings below the hood of her clit repeatedly until she actually reaches back to claw at his thighs. When he dips a finger into her and removes it, it's glistening. He holds it up in front of her transfixed eyes.

"I kind of figured that," he smirks at her in the mirror.

She can't help it. She rolls her eyes.

"I was only bar tending today," he says conversationally.

His hand must be wrapped around the base of his dick now, because he's got it positioned in such a way that the head is tapping a beat against her clit, making her legs tremble.

"But Miller tried to convince me to get drunk with him after work."

"Why?" she gasps out as he rocks his erection along her folds in a sawing motion.

"Because you wouldn't talk to me. And he was getting fed up with my bullshit."

"Really?" She tries, eyes full of questions for him in the mirror. "You were upset--"

She can't even finish the sentence. He reaches around her leg and spreads her apart beneath his fingers enough for his dick to thrust halfway into her tight channel.

"Aaah," the noise breaks from her throat as he rubs against her nerve endings in a way he's never
managed to before.

Clarke squints her eyes closed for a moment, knuckles white on the bar.

"Yeah," he says, pulling out of her completely. "I was."

When he pistons himself into her again, she's expecting it, but still somehow not ready. The stretch of her walls isn't necessarily painful, but she's so, so full. His strokes into her are firm and measured, deliberate, but still quick. The coiling fire in her stomach takes shape almost instantly, and he stokes it higher with his fierce rigor.

"Touch yourself, Clarke," he coaxes her, and she's desperate to comply.

The swollen hood of her clit feels like cloth around marble as she strums her fingers against it in looping, mostly thoughtless, patterns. It's enough to keep up with the steady pounding Bellamy is providing as he clutches at the bits of baby fat hugging her hips. When he wraps a wrist around her hair and arches her up enough to kiss the ridges of her spine, she goes willingly, allowing him to bind her to himself with a strong arm across her belly.

"Bell . . . I can't . . . much longer," she chokes out, already sensing the ripples in her core like tiny warnings of an earthquake.

"I want to feel you come around my cock, baby," he husks to her as the sound of their slapping skin fills the room.

His hand massaging her left breast then gliding his fingers into the hollow between them, is all it takes. She braces her arms against the footboard and lets the wave tumble through her, drawing Bellamy even deeper inside her body.

"You belong to me, Princess," she thinks she hears him say.

She cries out one last time when his come splashes against her cervix, slapping a palm to her mouth to muffle the sound even though no one will hear.

She digs her fingernails into his toned arms as he slips out of her, still pulsing slightly. Bellamy helps support her limp weight, catching her around the waist and drawing her back to snuggle against his side as he flops down onto her pillows.

"What was that?" she asks after her speeding heart rate starts to slow.

Bellamy kisses the top of her golden head before reaching out for the hand she's splayed on his chest.

"I can't lose you, too," he says it so simply, yet her spirit seems to shatter.

Propping herself up on her elbow, she leans in to kiss him fully on the mouth, slow and sweet.

They stare into each other's eyes for a moment? An eternity? It's hard to know for sure.

"How did you get this scar?" she lets her thumb trail over it.

"It's a dumb story," he admits as she burrows back into the hollow above his shoulder. "I was on this rock climbing wall at a playground as a kid, and a clap of thunder hit right over my head. I lost my grip and hit myself on one of the footholds."

"Ouch," Clarke winces.
"I survived," he smiles into her hair, breathing in the honey vanilla he's come to find familiar.

Darkness is settling over the room in earnest as he strokes her sweaty hip, and she tugs a blanket up over their inter-tangled legs.

"Clarke?"

"Yeah?"

"Why did you avoid me after the Target fiasco?"

She presses her cold nose against his freckled shoulder, leaning in to kiss the spot even as he jerks it away from her.

"Are you sure you want to ruin our afterglow haze?"

She wraps an arm up under his, latching on to the front of his shoulder, tickling him with the other until he's forced to flop onto his stomach with her sprawled across his back.

"Clarke!"

Through some truly jujitsu-esque move, he pins her beneath him in about four seconds flat.

Her eyes dance and sparkle, and she cups his cheek.

"Tell me," he urges, sliding back onto his side.

"You're going to get mad," she warns.

"I'll take deep breaths," he drolls.

She makes a face at him but sits up more fully, wrapping her sheet around her chest.

"Ok, you really want to know?"

"That's what I said," he pokes her in the side, so she squirms.

She sighs.

"When I talked to him, Wells didn't want to breakup over Skype."

Bellamy's eyes narrow slightly, but he just nods. He already knows as much.

"And he said he wanted to try to work things out and that he still wants me to come to the big mayor announcement party," she gives it air quotes.

"What did you say?" he arches his eyebrow at her.

"I said I'd go to the party. Don't hate me," she crinkles her face.

A few seconds pass by.

"Ok," he still seems stern but continues to make eye contact.

"Really?"

"Did you tell him you wanted to work on it?" the bite's back in his voice.
Clarke looks away again toward his jovial face in the picture on her dresser.

Her hand slides up and down his forearm gently.

"I didn't know what else to do but agree. I shouldn't have, I know that. But . . ."

"But he's your boyfriend," Bellamy fills in the sentence with a snap.

When she collapses against his chest, she half expects him to shove her away. But he encircles her waist with his strong arms, slipping a hand down every once in a while to squeeze her ass a little meanly. She knows she's sticky leaning against him like this, but he doesn't seem to mind.

"I don't know what to do," she tells his sternum.

"Actions speak louder than words, Princess."

She sits up.

"What does that mean?"

He sighs and stretches.

"I think it means I need to give you some space to figure all this out."

Chapter End Notes

I just wanted to stop and take a minute and thank all of you for your amazing comments and real engagement with this story! I truly cannot believe the outpouring of support I've received, and it's been a huge encouragement to keep writing. It's so fun to have written something that makes people think and consider the characters from new angles and figure out how their canon selves mesh with the modern world. Remember when I was asking if I should keep going after the first few chapters because I'd never done a modern AU? Well, I promise you this story will be completed. I've finally made it toward the latter portion of my outline! Yay! And when it's done, you can follow the delinquents back to the Polis bunker in "A Sky Full of Stars" because I NEED to finish that one, too. It'll bother me if I don't. Ok, over and out! Much love! xoxo
"Like who's that chick that's rockin' kicks? She's gotta be from out of town." Answer: Not the girl you think! Maybe it's just me who's got Miley's "Party in the USA" song stuck in my head now after writing this chapter. You know me, never sure what to say about anything I write in this sordid tale. As always, expect the unexpected!

Also...that political announcement party is bound to get interesting though, huh?

Happy Hunger Games! And may be the odds be ever in Bellarke's favor....although, you kind of do have to feel bad for mistreated Wells, sleuthing Raven, innocent Harper, even, yeah, that girl from this chapter. Eek! Am I decently humanizing Octavia? I'm trying. *Redemption song cues in back of brain*

---

"Bell-Ahhh-Me! Dude, what are you, deaf?" Murphy shoots across the bar at the top of his lungs.

Bellamy startles, glancing up at his annoyed coworker. A group of what must be college football players stomp into the dim bar, obstructing his view of the giggling bachelorette party in the back corner booth. The woman with the glittery sash draped around her and tiara askew on her head has long, wavy blonde hair.

He hasn't heard from Clarke all week since she stood in her driveway and watched him drive away. The memory makes his stomach tighten, so he tries not to focus on it.

"What?" he returns, voice rough.

"Miller said he needed you to restock the napkins and silverware like ten minutes ago," he says, coming closer.

He follows Bellamy's gaze before gesturing down at the rag Bellamy's been running around and around a glass cup.

"You about done with that?"

"Yeah," Bellamy shakes his head and smoothes his hair out of his eyes, dropping the glass to the counter with a clang. "Yeah."

"Good man," Murphy gives him a knowing look and claps him on the back before turning toward the athletes.

***

"This is sooooo nice!" Harper wiggles her toes in the bubbling froth at her feet. "I've never had a professional pedicure before!"
"It is a pretty cool place," Raven glances around in satisfied agreement.

The chairs are a buttery, tan leather and have vibration and massage capabilities. Tall, leafy green plants with striking red-orange blossoms frame the archway leading to the manicure station, and a "Classical Goes Pop" Pandora station offers relaxing melodies from a flat-screen TV drilled into the wall. All around them are paintings of nature - crashing waves on the shore, a striking field and barn at harvest time, the hidden caves of imposing Western canyons, the crisp, dangerous beauty of the Rockies.

Harper leans forward to check on Clarke a few chairs over.

"Everything good with you, pretty girl?"

"Hmmm?" Clarke slaps her phone back on the wooden table next to her for what must be the fifth time in ten minutes.

Still no new text messages.

"You ok, Clarke?"

"What? Oh, yeah. This is really nice! Thank you for thinking of it," she says distractedly, pilfering through her purse for a clear lipgloss and smearing it across her lips.

She's a little more disheveled than usual with thin, lavender lines under her eyes and a downturned mouth.

Harper and Raven exchange a look.

"She's just jittery," Raven flashes her eyebrows dramatically at Harper. "Waiting to hear from Wells and all."

"Ooohhh," Harper giggles. "When does his flight come in? Are you going to pick him up at the airport, Clarke?"

"Is he your boyfriend?" Clarke's nail technician, Mai, asks with a kind smile.

"Yeah. He's been in London for the summer," she answers, purposefully ignoring Harper's question.

She has no idea when she'll see Wells again. They haven't discussed it.

"Oh, I bet he's handsome!"

Clarke looks at her quizzically.

"Because you're so pretty," Mai amends, toweling off her feet and shaking a bottle of emerald green polish hard between her fingers.

"He's very good-looking," Harper calls out in a sing-song voice. "Captain of the basketball team this year, too."

"Smart, attractive, nice, and an athlete. Blondes get all the good ones," Raven slaps her arm playfully.

Clarke smiles weakly before turning up the intensity of her moving chair and closing her eyes to the buzzing hum. She told Raven that she and Wells were going to try to work things out, and she knows Wells told her, too. The knowledge seems to be enough - at least for now - to leave Raven
happy despite her own romantic crash-and-burn. But she still wishes she'd enveloped Bellamy in a hug before he left her house almost a week ago. She's not sure if she'll ever get another chance, and the thought leaves her cold.

For the next few minutes, the girls enjoy being pampered. When all their toes are glossy and colorful, the staff usher them into flimsy, foam flip-flops and toward special UV dryers to harden the paint on their nails. Clarke slouches down next to Raven, but a moment later, as the front door's chiming bell sounds, finds herself practically sliding to the floor out of her chair.

"What is it?" Raven demands.

"It's Gina," she hisses back.

"Who the hell is Gina?" Raven pushes her dark hair in front of her shoulder like a curtain and expertly maneuvers her chair, so Clarke is more blocked from view in the corner behind the Amazon rain forest of plants. Harper glances at them curiously.

"His girlfriend," she moans back. "From college."

Raven's eyes flash darkly, but Gina passes by totally oblivious to them after signing her name at the welcome counter.

"What's going on?" Harper whispers, as the fans whirl at their feet.

"I'll tell you outside," Raven replies, and Clarke can already see her scientific method-based mind, her preoccupation with cause and effect and reasonable hypotheses, springing into play. "But Clarke doesn't want that woman," she jerks toward the archway Gina just walked through, "to see her."

Harper nods but blinks confusedly.

"Ohh-kay."

"Oh, that's a pretty color! Very nice!" Clarke hears Mai say from behind the wall.

"Thank you! I really want it to be special for tonight," Gina's pleasant voice responds.

"Oooh! Big date?" Mai says playfully. "Or big work event maybe?"

But her voice sounds a little less enchanted than it did with the first possibility.

Gina laughs.

"I don't know if it's a date exactly. But I am going out with someone I've known for a long time. Since freshman year in college. He kind of called me up unexpectedly. Maybe I'm just wasting my time though."

"Why do you say that?" Mai asks.

"Oh, you know, we've been friends for years, but it just . . . never seems to work out when we try to be more."

"Do you like him?"

Gina's chuckle is nervous. A moment later she sounds like someone who definitely needed to sort her thoughts out with a sympathetic ear.
"Yeah, I really do. He's one of the best people I know. He works really hard to make sure his sister has everything she could want because their parents died. He's smart - he got into grad school. He makes me laugh. He's thoughtful, too. I don't know if it's because he always took care of his sister. But, he'd do things like bring my mom flowers on her birthday. I guess," her voice trails off, "I guess I just feel comfortable around him. He's one of my best friends."

"He sounds nice," Mai says approvingly. "You need someone good. I can see it in your face. You have a kind spirit - independent, but kind."

"Thank you," Clarke can see her gentle smile without looking.

"And he's attractive?" Mai's voice lilts up teasingly.

"Yes," Gina says unapologetically. "God, it's hard to look at him sometimes! Dark curly hair, tan skin, really nice eyes. He's tall - he has amazing arms."

"Can I get his number?" Mai laughs and Gina joins in.

"So what's the problem? You two have been friends for a long time. He obviously likes you, or he wouldn't be calling."

Raven can practically hear Clarke's mind whirring next to her but tries to stay focused on the conversation. Beside her, Harper is tapping out a text, probably to Monty. Then she puts her phone down and reaches for a copy of *Glamour.*

*It's sweet how oblivious she is. Really. Or maybe she's just a good, trusting soul? Yeah, that's probably it. Well, at least it's helpful right now,* Raven thinks, suppressing an eye roll before her brain jumps to three different explanations, all variations on the truth, to offer Harper when they leave the shop.

"Yeah, maybe. It's just that . . . I think he found himself someone new this summer. He was telling me about her one time when we were hanging out. He was different about it. I can't explain it. He just seemed - this is going to sound stupid - but sort of . . . devoted."

Mai makes a noncommittal grunting noise.

"To someone he just met recently? I wouldn't pay much attention to it," she says warmly. "She's probably just someone he was attracted to. You've been in his life for years, right? And it's you he's asking to spend time with. It's you he trusted to talk about all this stuff with. You never know. Maybe the boy is coming to his senses."

"Hmm," Gina sounds like she's considering it. "Maybe you're right."

"I'm always right about this kind of thing," Mai says.

Raven expels the breath she wasn't aware she was holding, chancing a look at Clarke's stricken face. *Yup, definitely time to go.*

***

"Hey, big brother!" Octavia's voice is way too bright and happy.
"Hey, O. How are you?"
"Coming back into town in two days. Did you miss me?"
"It's been nearly impossible to function."
"That's what I like to hear!" she chirps.
"Are you excited about senior year or something?" he asks hesitantly.
"Not exactly," she returns breezily. "I hear you have a date tonight!"
He drops the pair of jeans he was folding in the laundry room.
"Jesus! How do you know everything all the time?"
"Don't be mad at Gina. I called her, and she told me. I might have mentioned the blonde princess turned out to be a little evil and that I was looking forward to hanging out with someone cool and normal again."
"You didn't!" he groans.
"I totally did."
"I hate you." 
"I love you. I love that you're finally listening to your genius, gorgeous, considerate, has-your-best-interests-at-heart younger sister."
"Yeah, yeah," he grunts.
"This is a good thing, Bell. Don't sound so miserable. Clarke's not for you."
"You didn't hear what she said to me," he can't believe the words actually left his mouth. But no taking them back now.
"What you do speaks so loudly, I can't hear what you say," she parrots back to him. "Someone wise told me that once or twice or a hundred times."
"Good old Ralph," he smiles a little into the phone.
"Good old Ralph," she agrees. Then--
"Hey! I have some news, but I don't want this to freak you out. I know you're in a delicate state."
"What is it?" he asks warily.
His mind jumps to cliff-diving schemes, larger-than-life tattoos, canceling college and joining a grunge band with Lincoln . . .
"Lincoln's dad got invited to Jaha's political party. I didn't realize he was friends with this other guy Jaha knows well - Kane something or other."
"Oh," Bellamy feels like the wind was kicked out of him.
"Is it . . . is it all right if I go? Lincoln's dad really wants him there, and he said he'd only go if I was able to come, too. I know I kind of sound like a hypocrite because I said these things were so dumb,
but it's for Lincoln, and . . ."

"No, no. Of course you should go. Their family's done a lot to help us, O. It's the right thing to do."

"Ok, thanks," she says softly. "But . . . umm, what do you want me to do if I see her?"

A flash of anger roils through him, and he grips the phone a little harder.

Before he can stop himself, he spits out his first, most genuine reply.

"Tell her she's with the wrong date."

"Bellamy!" Octavia huffs. "It's time to let it go. I know it sucks. But it's time. She treated you like shit, I don't care what you tell me."

"Mmm," he mumbles.

"Get it through your head that you don't deserve this!" Octavia raises her voice. "You're amazing, and Gina sees that! She was one of your closest friends in college, remember? And there's a good reason for it. She's real, Bell! She doesn't have any ulterior motives."

"I'm not saying she's not real or that she's not a good person," Bellamy argues snappishly.

"And she's gorgeous, in case you haven't noticed, so I don't see what the problem is. At least loosen up and give it a chance. You might surprise yourself. You might even have fun. Would that be so horrible?"

"Screw you, Octavia."

"I don't think Gina would like that..."

He hangs up on her, shaking his head.

***

Wells Jaha: Flight gets in at LAX at 5 p.m. tomorrow.

Clarke Griffin: Ok, great! Can I come pick you up? Mom and Dad are coming back tonight.

Wells Jaha: Umm, maybe it's better if we meet up like an hour or two before the party Friday? You can come by my house before the photographers get there?

Clarke Griffin: Sure, if that's what you want.

Wells Jaha: I just don't want to make a scene in front of my parents. You know.

Clarke Griffin: I do.

Clarke Griffin: Not that I would make a scene. But I understand the concept of the hypothetical scene someone might make.

Wells Jaha: I'm sorry. That was stupid. You can come to the airport if you want.

Clarke Griffin: Mixed messages, much?

Wells Jaha: If there's a playbook for how to deal with this, I haven't read it.
Clarke Griffin: Me neither.

Clarke Griffin: But I do want to say hi.

Clarke Griffin: I know you might not believe me, but I have missed you.

Wells Jaha: I've missed you, too.

Clarke Griffin: So 5 at the airport tomorrow?

Wells Jaha: See you then. I'll be the one with the Harrod's gift bags.

Clarke Griffin: I'll be the one waiting for you.

She puts down her phone on the kitchen counter with a small clank, trying not to think too much about how Gina's probably got her hand wrapped around Bellamy's right now as he grins easily at her.

Chapter End Notes

So what's going to happen at the party? Will sparks fly? Will Clarke get real with her parents? Will seeing Wells again tug at her heart strings? Is Bellamy really going to try to make a clean break of it? Will Harper remain in the dark about . . . pretty much everything? IDK. These are the questions I must answer though!

You know the drill . . . come flail with me below if you wanna! :)
All right, guys. The story is in my head (and notes) desperately trying to claw its way out. So prepare for a flurry of updates! I'm making the chapters a little shorter, so you'll have more to read, more quickly if that makes sense. So basically, when I finish writing and editing, there you go. New chapter! Hope you like the concluding chapters!

"Honey, we're home!" her father's booming voice carries through the hallway as he steps into the house from the garage.

Clarke launches herself into his arms, and he wraps her in a hug that knocks the breath from her lungs. She breathes in the familiar ocean freshness of his cologne.

"Clarke! It's so good to see you! I missed you so much," Jake says, holding her at arm's length and taking in her face.

"I missed you, too, dad! How was the flight?"

"Surprisingly decent. I managed to make it all the way through Danielle Steele's latest novel," Abby says with a smile as she walks up the stairs.

"Hi, mom!"

Clarke untangles herself from her dad and steps into the wiry arms and flower-sweet scent of her mom.

"How are you, baby?" Abby says as she strokes the back of Clarke's head. "Did you get along ok without us? Did you have some fun? Eat well? Manage to do at least some of your history assignments?"

Clarke pulls her mother's shoulders tighter against her to avoid her parents seeing the rising panic that flashes through her eyes.

"Everything was good here, mom," she says, drawing back. "The Greens were really sweet to me. And I spent a lot of my time with Raven, Monty, Jasper, Harper, you know."

"The adventure squad," her dad grins as he tugs their enormous luggage into the kitchen. "Yes, we're familiar."

"Let me clean the rest of the bags out of the car, and then we can get started on laundry and dinner. How does that sound?" Jake says over her head to Abby.

"Sounds good to me!" Abby returns easily, heading off in the direction of the laundry room to undoubtedly grab a few bins to transport the dirty clothes.

"Honey, Wells probably already told you this. But the Jahas are flying back out of Heathrow tomorrow and should be home around 5," Abby says as her smart heels click back down the hallway.
"Yeah, he told me," Clarke responds carefully. "I'm actually going to go pick them up tomorrow from the airport."

"Oh, that's so nice of you! Perfect!" she says as she crouches down next to the nearest suitcase and unzips it, throwing open the lid.

"I can't wait to tell you all about London and touring the British hospitals over dinner, honey. Everything was so green - like a patchwork quilt - out in the countryside. Incredible!" her eyes are off in a faraway place. "But first--" she gingerly shifts through the matted, crushed ties, dress shirts, and jeans crinkled together at the top of her husband's suitcase. "More practical matters."

"Babe, what did you pack in this one? The rocks from Stonehenge?" her father huffs as he pulls the last bag into the kitchen, pausing to lean against a wall and wipe his sweaty brow.

"Presents for our daughter!" Abby trills pleasantly, jumping up and dragging it over the hardwood floor toward the center of the kitchen.

"Hey! I paid good money to reseal those floors! No scratch marks please!" her father yells, but he's still smiling.

"Mom! You sent me the ultimate care package for my birthday," Clarke protests. "I don't need anymore presents."

"Hush, a girl could always use more presents," Abby winks at her, grinning. "Just think about everything we'll see and buy when we take our European tour next summer!"

Jake laughs, swiping a hand through his corn-colored hair.

"All right, I'm going to go sort through the mail and make sure I didn't miss anything important while we were away."

"Sure, sure," Abby waves him away breezily. "It's going to take us a little while to sort through this mountain anyway," she sighs as she takes in the twisted mass of medical scrubs decorated with everything from animal prints to daises and actual leprechauns. They begin sorting the varied fabrics into piles, Abby chatting away about how kind it was for Mrs. Green to volunteer to bake her casseroles in their absence. Clarke knows it's only a matter of time before the conversation veers down a path that will flood her with dread.

It takes about six minutes in reality.

"So," Abby turns to her conspiratorially, dropping a blouse into the "launder" bin. "Your father was able to have a few nice lunches with Wells while we were away, and it was a really good opportunity for them to bond, you know, man-to-man," she wiggles her eyebrows a little.

Clarke rolls her eyes.

"Mom, I was kind of under the impression that dad knew Wells pretty well seeing as how, you know," she mirrors her mother's filler phrase dramatically, "he's lived down the street for practically his whole life."

Abby chuckles, the lines around her mouth deepening with the action.

"That's true," she reaches up to pull her light brown hair - full of caramel highlights Clarke frequently envies - into a high ponytail. "But he told dad how excited you two were about going to college
together, and it was an opportunity to talk more on an adult level, about the future."

Clarke nods slowly.

"Yeah, he mentioned that to me."

"Well, I have to tell you honey that your dad was so impressed by his plans. I know you were talking about the East Coast--"

She holds up her palm in a stilling motion before Clarke can open her mouth too far.

"--but it sounds like you were thinking about some good schools. And I'm willing to consider touring some of them with you this fall if they have decent premed programs and, of course, sound political science curriculums for Wells."

"Mom!"

She can sense the age-old "you're going to be premed, and that's final" argument gearing up.

But Abby talks over her outcry.

"You can look at their art programs, too, Clarke. But only as a minor. I love your artwork, it's beautiful, and you're certainly talented. No one is arguing that. But you're going to have a sound major like biology and expand all your skill sets, so you can have the most well-rounded career possible."

"The idea of blood--"

"Clarke, we've had to drag you out of the lab before at the high school. I know you enjoy science. If medicine isn't for you, we can discuss that when the time comes. Maybe you can have a research career, I don't know. You'll figure it out, and we'll help you do it. But you're not running off to an amazing - not to mention expensive - school and winding up teaching ten-year-olds about their primary colors, ok? I'm not against the art; I'm against you restricting yourself to only the art. I want you to keep painting if that's what makes you happy. Does that make sense? I'm not trying to be horrible here, honey. I'm trying to compromise with you."

Clarke feels her mouth fall open. It's all just so logical and fair. So unlike all the other conversations they've had on this topic lately. She finds herself nodding along with her mother's words.

"Good," Abby says crisply. "I'm willing to keep up my end of the bargain as long as you consider some West Coast schools too like Stanford, hmm?" she arches her chocolate eyebrow at Clarke. "The Jahas are very excited for both of your futures, and--"

"Mom? Are you taking mood stabilizers I don't know about?"

Abby tosses a sock at her face.

"Ewww!" Clarke jumps out of the way.

"Relax, drama queen. It's a clean one--I did have to do the laundry over there several times," Abby smirks. "No, I've just had several, good and thoughtful chats about this with your dad and Wells and his parents while we were gone. I know you and I have talked about it," she presses her lips together, "fought about it in the past. But I really just want to do right by you, honey. You're my only kid, and I love you. Contrary to popular belief, I don't really want you living 3,000 miles away."
Clarke launches herself into her mother's lap, feeling the tears stinging the backs of her eyes. Abby's still crouched over an open black whale of a suitcase when the impact hits, and she folds her arms around her daughter's trembling frame hesitantly.

"Clarke? What is it, baby?" she rocks her gently like she did when she was a toddler.

"I think Wells and I are breaking up," she says in a muffled voice into her mother's navy blazer.

The short, but echoing laugh Abby sprouts out seems to bounce off the tiled mosaic surfaces of her expertly redesigned kitchen.

"That's the silliest thing I've heard all week," she continues to rock Clarke. "Wells adores you! And you've been wrapped up in him since you were 15. Why would you even say that?"
All Due Respect

Chapter Summary

Behold . . . The Griffin Family. A study worthy of Norman Rockwell.

Bewildered, Abby sings shushing noises to Clarke.

"Honey, why don't you tell me what's going on?" she asks.

Clarke continues to splutter incoherently into her shoulder, hot tears dribbling onto Abby's neck.

"All right, all right, breathe deep, come on, in," she feels her own chest rise. "And out. Again. In. And out. There you go," she soothes when Clarke begins to respond, and the noises lessen.

"I don't know what happened between you, honey, but I can tell you that if you're worried Wells found someone in London, that's just not the case! The couple who ran the conference had two sons near your age, and he hung out with them and a few of their friends, but it was all guys from everything I saw. You don't have anything to worry about," she runs her fingers through the blonde silk of daughter's hair.

"That's not it," Clarke finally sits back on the floor next to Abby, wiping her eyes. Abby rises to bring her a tissue. "It's me, mom. It's me."

Abby narrows her eyes, a crinkle springing up over her nose.

"What do you mean it's you?"

"I mean I met someone else this summer, mom. I fell for someone else."

Abby blanches a bit and grips the edge of her granite countertop but takes the news in stride, passing along the tissue.

"You did?"

Clarke nods.

"May I ask who it is? Do I know him?"

Clarke takes a deep, shaky breath.

"Yeah, you know him," she expels the secret from her chest like a woman tossing a boulder off a cliff. "It's dad's TA. Bellamy Blake."

"Of course it is," Abby bites her bottom lip and nods. "You know, I had a suspicion and told your father he might not be the best--- You know what? That doesn't matter now."

She drops back down to the floor, sitting cross-legged across from Clarke, taking her hand sympathetically.

"Honey, I won't lie and say I'm not a little bit disappointed. You know what you've done isn't right.
You give someone the courtesy of breaking up with them before you move on with someone new.

*Like you, mom? Is that what you did?* The thought swings into her head. But she never knew for sure. She never had *proof* about Marcus.

"Mom, I know I--"

"Clarke, this isn't ideal, but it's normal enough, especially at your age. You're going to meet many people that intrigue you or whom you're attracted to in your life. But the trick is knowing what to do with that attraction. I'm happy you told me about this though," she reaches out and squeezes Clarke's knee. "Thank you for trusting me."

She glances quickly in the direction of Jake's office, but there's no sign of him yet.

"Now this is what I want to say. Summer indiscretions can be fun, I understand. I was young too once, you know. But you don't have to break up a three-year relationship over a summer fling if you don't want to. You and Wells have something special, honey. You don't really want to throw that away, do you? Did you say anything to Wells about this?"

"I already told him I started seeing someone else," Clarke manages, blotting at her nose.

Abby swallows hard and audibly.

"Ok, and what did he say?"

"He said he wanted to work it out. He didn't want to break up over Skype."

"He always was a sensible one," Abby nods approvingly. "Why don't you look more relieved?" she seems genuinely puzzled.

"Because I like Bellamy!" Clarke almost yells it into the vast kitchen. "And I care about Wells. And I've screwed them both over! I'm an awful person, and I don't know what to do!"

"Up, come on, get up, up now," Abby leans her palms on the wood to help hoist herself to her feet. "Enough."

She pulls Clarke along with her and gives her another brief hug.

"You're going to go get Wells from the airport tomorrow, ok? You'll go to the mayoral announcement party Friday and do the interview with the *Times* like we talked about. You're going to fulfill your obligations because the Jahas are our closest friends, and they've been nothing but lovely to you your whole life."

"But Mom--"

"No, Clarke. No arguments. Your mind might change completely when you see Wells, I don't know. But you owe that boy the respect of looking him in the eye *in person* first before you break his heart any further, do you understand me?"

"Yes ma'am," Clarke says it softly, staring at her slippers.

"Good," Abby returns, a little kinder. "Give it some time at least, honey. Summer's one thing, but you can't go making crazy, snap judgments for every Bellamy that passes into your life. You've got to keep your focus on the things and the people who are truly important."

Clarke feels like she's about to throw up. Bellamy is important. At least to her. But if he could run
right back to Gina that fast, maybe he didn't like her as much as she thought he did. Maybe she really was a summer conquest.

Her father's loud footsteps approach as he enters the room.

"Wait, did I just hear something about you and Bellamy?" he levels a piercing gaze at his daughter. "Did he overstep his bounds in any way, Clarke? Because if he did anything to make you uncomfortable, I'll--"

Clarke's eyes widen in fear as Abby jumps in front of her husband, rubbing her hands across his chest to calm him.

"No, Jake. Nothing like that!" she glances over her shoulder at Clarke. "It's just . . . Clarke might have gotten a little too attached to him this summer, that's all."

Jake steps around his wife, giving Clarke a searching look. She watches his face soften.

"I always thought he was a pretty decent kid. He's been through a lot, from what I've heard. Got a great scholarship to study at UCLA after his mom passed away. Anyway," he brushes away the train of thought. "What's going on, Clarke?"

Clarke feels the blood rush into her face, while Abby places her hands on her narrow hips.

"Jake, I'm handling it!" she insists. "They liked each other when they met, I guess, but it's over now, and--"

"It isn't over!" Clarke yells angrily, staring her mother down, expression akin to a caged tiger at the zoo.

"You care about him, don't you, Clarke?"

Her father's question totally floors her.

Tears slip around the edges of her eyes. It's like she's always crying these days although she can't remember crying more than a handful of times her whole life.

"I really like him, dad. He's . . . amazing."

"Jake!" Abby hisses. "We are not going to encourage this! Did you forget about Wells? Did he magically disappear?"

"No, no," it takes Jake a moment to tear his eyes away from his daughter. "Of course not. Your mother's right, Clarke. You can't do that to Wells. You have to break up with someone before you get involved with someone else."

"I mean, I'm sure Bellamy is a nice kid, but really!" Abby says exasperatedly.

Jake slips off his reading glasses and chews thoughtfully on the tip. He pulls Clarke against his broad chest, kissing the top of her head as she continues to cry quietly.

"Stop it, Clarke. It's all going to be fine. It'll work out the way it's supposed to."

"Winning advice," Abby chirps with only a touch of sarcasm as she returns to the laundry. "She's going to this event with us Friday for Thelonious, and she told the Jahas she's picking them up at LAX tomorrow all of her own accord. Does that sound like a girl intent on breaking up with her boyfriend?" she rolls her eyes. "Go on upstairs and wash your face, Clarke. Then you can help me
make dinner."

Clarke flees the room, too upset to pay either of them much more attention. But she can still hear the tail end of her mother's comment as she climbs the turret stairs.

"... when she sees him again, I bet this will all be forgotten. Mark my words. Teenagers and their hormones . . . "
Gina was real, guys. Regardless of what I think about it personally. Bob said so. And I love Bob.

(I write this as if it will insulate me from the all CAPS lock comments). Yup, I'm naive.

"Abby, Bellamy really is a good kid. If she likes him--"

"Honey, I'm sure he's smart and polite and all the rest of it. And he works for you," she throws him a look. "I'd expect you to like him. But we've known the Jahas for years, and she's just gotten carried away with a little summer attraction. It's no big deal, you'll see."

"Why are you being so opinionated about this?" Jake works the cap off his beer and sits down at the table.

"Why am I opinionated? Why aren't you opinionated? You've known the boy his whole life! You love him! He adores Clarke! They've been perfectly happy together for years. And now, in the span of twenty minutes, that's all gone?" she shakes her head at him and resumes cutting up a tomato for the summer salad.

"Does this have something to do with you working with Thelonious?" Jake asks quietly. "Because I don't really think that's relevant to the kids' lives."

"No, it doesn't," Abby returns primly. "I'm not trying to control her life, Jake! I'm trying to give her guidance."

She sighs, pushing a strand of hair come loose from her ponytail out of her face with the back of her hand.

"Do you remember the alumni donation debacle a couple years ago?"

Jake looks at her blankly.

"You found out that some UCLA alums gave money to Cedars-Sinai for a research lab, but it went to line the pockets of the C-suite instead?"

"Yeah," Jake grips the bottle tighter in his fist and clenches his jaw. "I do now. Another fine example of corruption in our society."

"Exactly," Abby replies. "The last thing we need right now is another near-miss like that. Thelonious wasn't aware of all that when it was happening, but it didn't look good for him as the hospital's leader. Especially when the money was meant for children's cancer research."

"I don't think I follow."

"I'm saying that this event Friday will be buzzing with media. I do not want Wells and Clarke making a scene and costing our best friend his shot to make a real difference in this community
because Clarke thought your TA was hot!"

"Hey!" Jake's voice rises. "This isn't my fault, Abby! I didn't ask for this to happen."

"No, but you didn't listen to me when I mentioned it could," she retorts.

"You're being ridiculous," Jake scoffs. "Wells and Clarke would never make a scene - they're good kids!"

"I'm not saying they're not. I'm just saying let's encourage them to mend things. If they can't, that's another story. And we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. But this boy . . . "

"Bellamy."

"Right, Bellamy works for you. So how do you think that will look? He's already out of college, and she's not even out of high school yet. It's . . . " she fades to silence, searching for the right word.

"Scandalous?" Jake supplies sarcastically, raising an eyebrow. "You sure you're just not projecting?"

"You don't have a Ph.D in psychology, watch it," Abby brandishes the knife in his direction, and he laughs. "I recognize you're four years older than me, Jake. But I was already in college when I met you."

She draws herself up a little straighter, wiping a hand on her apron.

"But now that you mention it, yes, it is a bit . . . taboo."

"Taboo?"

"Yes. No. I don't know!" she huffs, annoyed. "Stop badgering me. Something about it just seems off, ok? I'm her mother, and we're going to trust my mother's intuition for the time being."

"As with everything else," Jake mutters.

"What was that?"

"Nothing, dear."

"Jake, please. I don't want to fight with you. For now, what's the harm in trying to make everything normal and encouraging our daughter to be with a good guy who we know and love and whose family we know and love and who loves our daughter?"

Jake takes a long swig of his beer.

"Nothing too damaging I guess," he admits.

"Thank you," she walks over and presses a kiss against his cheek, and he wraps his arms around her waist.

"You're always whirling around trying to save the day, Dr. Griffin," he nuzzles against her breasts for a moment until she wiggles away, laughing.

"Isn't that why you love me, Dr. Griffin?"

They grin at their stupid joke.
"No, I love you for your ass."

"Mmm, good to know," she snorts, walking back over to her cutting board.

"I'm just saying I do think Bellamy is a good kid who's had a lot of tough breaks," Jake offers to her back.

"I hear you," she returns as she begins chopping. "He seemed nice enough when I met him at the start of summer. And you can tell me his whole life story after I've battled this jet lag and emerged victorious on the other side, ok?"

"Fair enough," he tips the beer bottle to his lips.

"But we won't be able to monitor everything she does for the rest of her life, Abby," he says softly a minute later. "Wells has been the best first boyfriend a father could dream up. But if she has found her way to Bellamy, my guess is her judgment's all right. We're raising a good kid, babe."

She nods, pressing her lips together, willing herself to believe it.

***

When Gina slips her hand into his as they stroll down the Venice Beach boardwalk, Bellamy glances down in surprise.

"Too much?" she teases him, starting to pull away. "I know how you get about being too close."

Her warm, almond eyes sparkle as the wind shuffles her curls.

"No, it's ok. It's good," he squeezes her fingers reassuringly.

"Ooh! Look at that painting!" she points at a sidewalk vendor with a bright blue tarp spread out featuring an assortment of strange dreamscapes.

"Which one?"

"The one with the dinosaur and the volcano. Interesting, huh?"

He cocks his head to the side and gives a noncommittal shrug, laughing a little when she pulls him toward the wizened man with frizzy gray hair wearing tie dye set up in front of the booth.

"Did you paint all of these?" Gina asks him kindly.

"I did. Feel free to look around," he smiles.

"You see that one? With the bowl of fruit tipping over?" she gestures with her sandal.

"Yeah."

"Reminds me of that French painter we studied in the art history class we took freshman year, remember?"

Bellamy chuckles briefly.

"The class where you refused to sit beside me?"

"Only for the first week!" she returns playfully. "You had bad boy written all over you, and I
did not want to go there."

He grins.

"You'd already been there, done that, bought the T-shirt, right?"

"Right," a smile breaks her face into a glowing thing of beauty.

*She could be the painting*, he finds himself thinking.

"How much for the one with the volcano and dinosaur?" he asks the artist.

The man reaches out a hand for the canvas and turns it around, so Bellamy can see the price tag stuck to the back: $35.

"You don't have to buy me anything," Gina immediately insists.

"I know I don't have to. I want to. Kind of like how you didn't have to send me a get well basket."

She rolls her eyes at him but leans up and smacks a kiss against his cheek nonetheless.

"Thank you," she says as they stroll away down the boardwalk toward their destination, Small World Books.

"My pleasure," Bellamy swings his arm languidly across her shoulders, and she leans into the touch.

The sun is hastening toward the edge of the Pacific Ocean and the last of the basketball games are wrapping up as they make their way to the bookstore. Gina was an English major at UCLA. An intellectual. She never teased him about enjoying anything even remotely nerdy because she was the same way.

As they begin to browse around inside, he pauses in front of the *Game of Thrones* series tucked away along a back wall of shelves.

"You know what's crazy about this whole thing?" he gestures toward the massive tomes.

"I don't," she flutters her eyelashes at him. "But I'm sure you'll tell me."

He smirks at her.

"It's just that the author, you know, Martin, well, he hasn't even finished the series. Like, the last book came out in 2011, but he hasn't published *Winds of Winter* yet. So HBO is pretty much canon now, and that's got to upset the purists who always want to read the book first, you know what I mean? People actually post online when they see Martin outside strolling around to harass him to get back to writing, it's nuts!"

Her eyes darken as she smiles at him, shaking her head.

"What?" he asks stupidly.

"Nothing, you're just . . . something else, Blake. But I see your point. It is crazy that the show which isn't targeted at the hard core sci-fi/fantasy audience who genuinely knows and appreciates that kind of stuff has become the runaway canon."

"My point, exactly! Yes. Thank you."
She brushes up against his arm as she walks by him, meandering into a different section of cramped bookshelves, while he luxuriates in checking out the nearby titles.

"Hey, come over here!" she calls out to him a few minutes later.

"What'd you find?"

He looks closer at the book she cradles in her hands. It's an aged copy of *The Iliad*. She holds it open delicately, skimming over the pages. Inside are some of the most gorgeous illustrations he's ever seen.

"Do you like it? This seems much more your speed."

She looks so sweet standing there, watching him a little hesitantly. And fuck, maybe Octavia was right. Maybe he's been missing what was right in front of him all this time. He catches the surprise in her eyes right before they flutter closed and he kisses her there, right in the middle of the well-lit Classics section.

It's the most comforting embrace he's experienced in a while.
Clarke eyes the large arrivals screen hanging over baggage claim carousel B, shifting her weight from one foot to the other. Her throat feels coated with sandpaper. She glances down at her dad's watch stuck to her wrist from the walk through the hazy heat outside. 5:10 p.m. the spindly, silver hands indicate. Any second now. Every time she senses motion on the escalator, her attention flies there. But it's just tanned, voluptuous older ladies wearing coral button-down sweaters and ushering their grandchildren to stop playing and keep up. Or harried looking businessmen in suits talking excitedly into their cellphones while rolling impressively small suitcases behind them.

*How do they fit all the clothes they need in there?* she finds herself wondering.

"Clarke! Hi, honey!" Rosemary Jaha yells from the middle of the escalator, pulling Clarke from her musings about why men always seem to pack less than women.

"Hi!" Clarke calls as brightly as she's able, smiling and walking toward the bottom of the moving staircase.

Although her heart is hammering in her neck and beneath her left breast, Mrs. Jaha pulls her into a comforting hug.

"So good to see you, baby girl! Thank you for offering to pick us up!"

"Of course!" Clarke exclaims, fingers rubbing against the fleshy curves of Mrs. Jaha's back.

For as long as she can remember, Mrs. Jaha has been a kind presence in her life. She's the one who always had lemonade and chocolate chip cookies ready when Wells and Clarke came inside from a day spent climbing trees and catching caterpillars. She prefers bright, bold colors and big, stone jewelry. She laughs loudly, enjoys singing in her church choir, and truly listens when you talk. She yells at the daytime TV talk show hosts she disagrees with and always plans the most decorative and imaginative parties.

"Let me get a good look at you," Rosemary takes in her tidy yellow sundress and tan wedge heels.

"Pretty as a picture! Just like always," she beams approvingly.

Clarke drops her eyes and smiles a little. But she's spared from responding by the arrival of Thelonious.

"There she is! How's my favorite girl?" his gaze goes straight through her like an X-ray before he swoops down to hug her briefly.

"I'm doing well, thank you," she says politely, gazing over his shoulder but not seeing Wells. "How are you all? How was your flight?"

"Oh, it was good. Comfortable. Bigger movie selection in first class," he winks at her. "I even found a few sports channels."

"That's great," she smiles up at his open expression.

"I'm telling you, Clarke, it was so nice to see that American flag at customs. I mean, England was great, and we had a wonderful trip, but there's nothing like being back among your own people, am I right?"
"Absolutely," she agrees.

"Pretty soon we'll be gearing up for football season, and I do not mean soccer, thank God. Just your average tossing of the old pig skin. I think you're old enough to bet on the games this year with your dad! Of course, I'll still take your money from you, but--"

"Thelonious!" Rosemary laughs at him, poking him in the ribs. "Enough of your nonsense."

"Girl's known me her whole life. She knows when I'm kidding!" he argues. "Isn't that right, Clarke?"

"It's true," she says to Rosemary.

"Hmm," Rosemary murmurs, fanning herself with one of those brochures for an airline credit card she must have gotten on the flight.

"Where is my child?" she cranes her neck around her husband's tall, lanky frame. "He was right behind us, and then he was going to the bathroom, and-- Ah! There he is! All right, we'll give you two a minute," she winks at her husband, "And we'll go get the bags."

He seems taller than she remembered, and a little broader across his chest. He's wearing a tan T-shirt and dark wash jeans, carrying a sort of rucksack over his shoulder.

She takes a few nervous steps forward as he paces steadily toward her. It's not long before they're standing just a few feet apart.

"Hopped off the plane at LAX," he starts their preferred airport greeting since 2009.

Her mouth twitches upward even as a swarm of insects ricochet around her stomach.

"With a dream and your cardigan?"

"Damn! Knew I forgot that sweater," he smirks at her and holds out his arms.

She falls into them like a familiar dance. He's warm and solid and smells like spices, like Wells.

"You look really good, baby," he whispers against her ear.

"I'm glad you're home," she returns.

When she pulls away, he gives her a searching look and his full attention, even as the jostling crowd rushing around them.

"We're gonna work on us, right, Clarke? You're still with me on that?"

"Yeah, always," she returns, immediately shoving away the memory of those words falling out of her mouth the last time Bellamy fit himself against her back.

If her face displays anything strange, he doesn't comment on it. Instead, he reaches into the rucksack and pulls out a genuine Harrod's plastic shopping bag filled with small goodies and hands it to her.

"You're something else," she tells him happily, lacing her hand into the crook of his elbow. "Now start talking. I want to hear everything about your trip from the moment you landed to now."

He gives her a strange look as they make their way toward the automatic doors leading to the parking lot where his parents are already standing, waiting for them. Maybe it's because he's never going to
ask her the same question about her summer. Maybe it's because he really wants to. She has no idea and isn't about to ask. She smiles thinly, trying to convey the fact that she's going to try, she really is, without saying a word.

A moment later, he wraps an arm around her waist and squeezes, and she knows, she just knows, that he still loves her. Even though she's done the unthinkable.

So she has to try. She owes it to him to try. Because he's too good, too loyal, too forgiving. She doesn't deserve him. But he's still her best friend, and she'll never abandon him. Not really. Not in essence. She's loyal, too, she realizes as they stroll into the sunshine.

That simple truth is like a series of darts to her chest.

***

"Clarke! The party is tomorrow night. Why haven't you picked up your dress yet? They called two days ago and said the alterations were ready, didn't they?" Abby peers up over her laptop at the breakfast table.

"I'm going there in an hour, mom. Don't worry," Clarke returns, editing over her final history assignment concerning whether or not the United Nations has actually lived up to its original promise.

Of course, she'll be turning this one in to her dad. The alternative is . . . well, the alternative isn't an option.

"Ok, well make sure you get out early enough to beat the traffic," Abby warns, absorbed in her screen again. "Those pictures you texted me of it were lovely though! I think that color green will look great with your skin tone. And don't forget that the Dean of Student Life from Standford is going to be there tomorrow, and I'd really like it if you spent a few minutes talking to her . . . "

"Mmm," Clarke says noncommittally.

***

The jade silk dress with the fluttering sleeves is hung tidily from the hook behind the passenger seat, completely safe as she hits her brakes at the appearance of red lights in front of her. She groans. Traffic on the I-405 is almost always a bitch, no matter what time of day it is. Cranking up the radio, she gazes out the right side of her windshield, squinting against the sun's rays. Of course she forgot her sunglasses in her haste to get to Maribella's and grab the party dress.

It's the abundance of orange construction cones that first catch her attention. And the metal crane - it reaches pretty high into the azure sky. But what really gives her pause is the fact that this - hotel? Yeah, it looks like it's going to be a hotel with its fancy columns and vast, circular driveway and multiple stories - is going up so close to the road.

Who the hell wants to look out the window on vacation and see nothing but asphalt? she wonders.

She's so preoccupied watching the burly men lift the cinder blocks that she almost crashes into the back of the Audi in front of her, slamming on her brakes just in time to flood her whole body with a sickening, swooshing sensation.

She takes a deep breath and watches the nearest worker one last time. He's thin but built, although not quite as built as some of the others. There's a bit of dark curl escaping from underneath his helmet. And when he turns toward the road, and she takes in his profile, she actually moans, there
alone in her car.

It's not a hard choice. It might be a stupid one, but it isn't difficult. Her ticking blinker signals to the drivers behind her that she is escaping this highway hell at the next exit. It doesn't take her long after that to reach the site of the new Sheraton. She parks in a heap of thick, red clay because there are no alternatives. And she slams the door with perhaps more force than strictly necessary.

Shielding her eyes from the sun with a hand across her forehead, she marches over to the men at work, attracting a decent amount of stares and a few whistles, which she ignores.

"Bellamy Blake!" she yells out when she's close enough.

She sees the muscles of his back go rigid before he ever lays eyes on her.

"What do you want, Clarke?" his whole voice is full of barely contained annoyance, but that's beside the point.

"That your girl?" she hears a thin guy with dirty blonde hair and a mustache ask him after looking Clarke up and down. "Cause if she's willing to be seen in public with you, then I definitely have a shot," he jokes.

"Fuck off, Wick," Bellamy snarls, stomping over to her.

"Come on," he lays a large hand at the small of her back and propels her along swiftly.

He doesn't stop until they reach a grove of desert willows that obscures them from the men working several hundred yards away.

Bellamy pulls off his helmet, revealing his sweat-and-dirt streaked face.

"Well? he prompts her. "What the hell are you doing here?"

The sight of him so close turns her into a bundle of mush, and she hates it.

"I saw you working from the highway."

"So what?" he snaps. "Couldn't just drive by like a normal person?"

She pretends like she didn't hear him.

"Should you be working this soon after your accident? Those cinder blocks are heavy, Bellamy," she takes a step closer to him, his musk drawing her in. "I don't want you to get hurt again."

"You know what? That's real nice of you," he bites back. "But I'm pretty sure you don't get a say in what I do, Clarke. So thanks for your concern, and have a great life," he starts walking away, avoiding the desperate look on her face.

"Bellamy!" she cries out.

"What? What do you want from me?" he yells angrily. "Why can't you leave me alone?"

She takes a few steps back toward the wooded area, mouth quivering.

"I want you to be ok. You have to be ok," she says feverishly, as though not really aware of it. "You have to take care of yourself."
"Why don't you let me worry about that, yeah?" he barks, coming back to tower in front of her, so he's only a few inches from her face.

His eyes are dark and mean.

"You can't stop me from worrying about you," she snipes at him. "I won't quit doing that!"

"Why do you even give a fuck?" he's impossibly closer now.

She watches the tracks of sweat roll down the dip above his lip, how his muscles flow when he moves his arms.

"Because I care about you! I miss you!" she says in a high-pitched whine.

He scoffs.

"You don't get to do that. You don't get to decide when to care and when not to care, Clarke. That's not how it works."

"I always care about you!" she meets his mean expression with one of her own, leaning in as if ready to do battle.

"You want to know why I'm out here?" Bellamy taunts her. "I'm taking extra shifts because school starts in a couple weeks, and I don't know if I'm still going to have a TA job after . . . this," he gestures between them. "And I wouldn't blame your dad. I screwed everything up. And I'm paying for it. Ok? So now you know. And you can go home to your pretty castle in Arkadia Hills and wait for the prince to take you to the ball. Don't forget your glass slipper," he hisses, breath landing hot on her upturned face.

"My dad won't . . . he wouldn't," she stammers. "I'm sorry, Bellamy. I didn't think it all through, not enough."

"Yeah?" he raises both eyebrows at her. "Well neither did I. But I should have. Forget about it. It's not your fault. I should have known better."

She doesn't fully register that his hand's been pressed against the small of her back for the last minute rubbing careful circles into it with his fingertips despite his rage. Maybe he didn't notice himself until he pulls it away.

"Bellamy! Wait!" she clasps the front of his shirt, not really sure what she's going to do.

He hangs there, inches above her, watching her, waiting for her to decide as if held by an otherworldly force.

Her arm is snaking around his neck, and she's stepping into the space between his still arms when Sinclair's shout comes.

"Blake! Blake! Where did he go? He needs to get over here, now!"

His fingertips ghost against the curve of her waist one last time before he says, "Bye, Princess," softer than before, and leaves her standing under the shade of trees.

It's not until she's climbed into her BMW that she sees the familiar shape of Gina walking down the hill toward the construction site, picnic basket hanging off her arm.
Chapter Summary

I had too much fun with this one. Not sure if it will show though. It is, I can assure you all though, a scene we will NEVER see the likes of in the show. But I long for it, nonetheless.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

"Mom! Where's dad?" Clarke bellows, rampaging into Abby's oval-shaped study in their home's turret.

Abby spins her rolling chair around abruptly, hand clasped to the sapphire necklace hanging from her neck.

'Do not do that to me, Clarke! Goodness, you scared the hell out of me! Are you all right? What is it?"

She steadies her breath as Clarke props herself up against an inlaid bookcase. The books and medical journals on it are offset by quirky, small artistic sculptures of the human body - and various parts of it- her mother's picked up at street fairs and in artisan shops over the years.

"I need to talk to dad!" she reiterates. "Where is he?"

Abby's eyes sweep over her for a moment longer as if checking for bruise marks.

"He's downtown at his departmental conference. You know . . . the one they have every year before school starts," she says slowly, a hint of a smile playing at her lips. "He'll be back tomorrow. You can talk to him then."

She moves to turn back to her desk, but Clarke's already at her side.

"Mom! I need to talk to him - it's important."

Abby narrows her eyes.

"Why?" she presses. "What's going on?"

"He can't fire him. He's not going to, is he?" she says insistently, smacking her fists on the desk with enough force to rattle Abby's pen cup. "Because he really needs the money. You know, he takes care of his sister, and he's doing this dangerous construction job after he already got in the car crash and busted up his ribs and--"

"Woah, woah," Abby lays her hands on top of Clarke's. "Slow down, honey. First, who are you even talking about?"

"Bellamy," she says quickly. "I'm talking about Bellamy. Did dad say something to you? Is he going to fire him because of . . . because of what happened this summer?"
Abby blinks blankly at her, shaking her head mildly.

"Your father hasn't said a word about it. I wouldn't know. I mean, you can call him if you want. But it'll probably go straight to voicemail. You know how he gets when he's with all the other academics. But--"

"But what?" Clarke urges at full force.

"I'm just going to remind you that it's your dad's call what grad students he works with, not yours," she purses her lips.

"Fine, whatever, thanks for all your help."

"Watch your tone, young lady!" Abby calls to her retreating back. "Hold on! What were you saying about a car accident?!"

Clarke's halfway down the hall to her room when she adds, "It's not like I expected you to understand anyway," slamming the door behind her.

***

"Come on, come on, dad. Pick up, pick up, pick up!" she mumbles into the phone, wearing down the rug beneath her feet as she paces back and forth.

But Abby was right. It goes directly to voicemail.

Clarke Griffin: Dad, I need to talk to you as soon as you're free. Can you give me a call please?

Her phone buzzes a moment later.

"Clarke? What is it? Are you all right?" comes Jake's rough whisper.

She can hear a lot of jumbled conversation in the background and the sound of clanking plates.

"Yeah," she sighs with relief that she reached him, flopping into the white chair by her bed.

And then her brain catches up with her actions.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you at the conference!" she says more normally. "Is this a bad time? I figured you would call me later if you were busy."

"I'm walking out into the hall right now. The Academic Dean is about to speak. Is it important, Clarke? Because if you need more than five minutes, I'd really rather chat with you tomorrow, so I can give you my full attention. Ok?"

Rolling her neck from side to side, she nods.

"Clarke?"

"Yeah, yeah that's fine," she says.

"Great! You can come by my office. And then, if you wouldn't mind, I have a few errands I need you to run for me before Thelonious' event since your mom's headed back to the hospital."

"Sure, dad. Have a good time. See you tomorrow."
"Bye, sweetheart. Enjoy your girls' night!"

***

The steps up to her dad's office are steep and numerous. But at least she found a parking spot this time in the lot that wasn't half a mile away. She's wearing black yoga pants and a purple lycra tank top, intent on a hard run through nearby Getty View Park to clear her head before the party tonight. The undulating hills out there might give her enough of a workout to actually cease her mind's frantic thoughts for a few straight minutes.

She raps smartly on the frosted glass of her dad's door with her knuckles and waits.

"Come in!" he calls out.

"Hey, dad!" she steps into the sunny space with the wide windows, green leather seats, and embarrassing assortment of snapshots of her in a dragon costume, a frilly tutu, without front teeth in an apple orchard, and swimming in the Jaha's pool that line the bookcases.

There are piles of papers crowding the desk space and laid in many places along the carpet. Jake looks frazzled as he scans over them all, pausing to type something quickly on his desktop. When he sees her, he freezes. But she's already leaning against his side and kissing his cheek in greeting before she notices how still he's become.

"How was the conference?" she says hesitantly.

"Good, Clarke. It was good," he glances toward the adjoining room, where the door is shut. "You know, honey, this really isn't the best time. I'm a little overloaded with paperwork since I was gone so long," he throws out his arms, and she nods appreciatively.

"Would you mind running to that formal wear shop - it's called The City of Light I think - down on Washington Avenue and picking up my tux for tonight please?" he starts scratching down instructions on a yellow legal pad next to him. "And then your mother dropped off her dress at the dry cleaners, and it's ready, so if you could grab that, too, you would literally be a lifesaver!" he grins at her.

"Yeah, sure, of course," she returns his smile.

"Thanks, honey! And I promise, this weekend we can go to the country club and play golf or see a movie, or maybe check out some art galleries downtown, whatever you want, and really catch up. I just didn't expect to be so swamped before the year even began . . ."

"It's ok, dad, don't worry about it," she reaches for his notes.

"Great! You're my favorite daughter, you know."

"I'm your only daughter," she snorts. "Stiff competition."

But a pit of unease travels down her esophagus and into her gut.

*He wouldn't be so swamped if he had help.*

The door across the office swings open.

"Dr. Griffin, I ran through the roster again for Intro to World History, but I still don't think we can break the ceiling for--" Bellamy's eyes pop when they look up from the papers he holds in his hand.
and see her.


For once, Bellamy appears legitimately speechless. Jake noisily clears his throat though.

"Hi," Clarke manages over the noise, pulling her thin hoodie more tightly around her torso.

"Hi, Clarke," the two words crunch out like rocks under tires.

"All right, well, thanks for stopping by, honey," Jake says, standing up to his impressive height. "If you could grab those clothes this morning, it would be really helpful."

But Clarke doesn't move. She's still staring blatantly at Bellamy like she's been touched by Medusa.

"I'm sorry about yesterday," she says softly. "I shouldn't have walked on site like that."

Bellamy's lip dances upward infinitesimally, and he leans into the doorframe, propping himself up with his curled fist.

"Don't worry about it," he says back smoothly, politely.

Jake looks between them, slightly rattled. It's like he's not even in the room. He might be sporting a few gray hairs laced into his thick mane, but he's not that old. He knows what the energy shifting and cracking between them means. And frankly, it's making him uncomfortable.

"I hope you're healed from the accident," the words are just tumbling out of her mouth like a high-pitched hosepipe she can't turn off. "Do you feel ok?"

"Feeling pretty good today. No major complaints."

She's not imagining the half-smirk now. She's sure it's there.

"What accident?" Jake starts to ask, head veering over in Bellamy's direction. "This summer? I didn't know you--"

"I finished that last paper on the UN. The websites you mentioned were really helpful," she says softly right over her father's bumbling.

"Glad to hear it," his tone tilts upward a tick.

"Clarke's got to be going now," Jake says pointedly, finally pulling himself together. "Say goodbye, Clarke."

"Goodbye, Clarke," Bellamy, the cheeky bastard, singsongs to his daughter before returning his attention to the papers in his hands.

She's shaking when her back hits the wall alongside the stairwell, not quite trusting her legs to make it down the three flights just yet.

_Shit_, Jake thinks, still standing awkwardly behind his desk. _Abby has no idea what we're in for._
I know how difficult it is waiting for new chapters to be posted of a story that's a WIP. So I wanted to recommend two gems to you all that I read today and absolutely adored. The first is "Freckles, aka Drunk Etsying" by notnicorette. The second is "Save Water, Shower Together," by Kacka. All the cute, fluffy, domestic, modern Bellarke you want and written beautifully! So what are you waiting for? Get reading! And I'll get back to writing now. :)

The Governor’s Mansion

"I thought we were going to the actual Governor's Mansion."

Clarke stares up at the sprawling white stucco estate with its shining fountains and hedges cut into assorted animal shapes. She spots one that looks like a dolphin in mid-flight. Already a bevy of reporters with large cameras and tripods stands waiting at the edge of the front garden.

"Clarke, that's in Sacramento. Please tell me the public school system has taught you geography," Abby sighs, touching up her eyeliner from the front seat with a compact mirror. "How on Earth could we have made it there in time?"

"That's why I'm confused."

Jake chuckles and swivels around to look at his daughter.

"Clarke, Sacramento is almost six hours away. I meant that we were going to Governor Wallace's actual mansion, which, as you can see," he gestures at the palace rising up before them through the windshield, "is outside L.A."

The entrance steps look like they were carved out of marble, and she walks carefully, taking care to lift up the long hem of her dress above her spiked heels in an attempt not to slip. The flashing lights of the reporters don't help much, but she clings to the steady arm of her father as their car is whisked away by a valet behind them. Her mother, she leans forward to see, is smiling broadly and taking it all in stride. When they reach the top of the steps, Jake pulls a bit at his collar before reaching out to shake the hand of none other than Governor Wallace.

"Governor, it's a pleasure," Jake rumbles warmly. "Thank you so much for inviting my family to your home."

"The pleasure is all mine," Dante smiles kindly, shaking Abby's hand after Jake's. "And this must be Clarke. You look lovely, dear. Wells and Thelonious could not stop singing your praises when we were together in London at the symposium."

He grips her hand firmly, almost swallowing it up. He seems genuine enough, but there's something that flickers in his eyes she's unsure about.

"Do come right in, please!" he insists, ushering them toward the gilded front doors, already thrown open. "There are cocktails and food tables to your right, and I'm sure you'll find some people you know," Dante finishes, winking at Clarke.

A line of guests is already growing behind them, and the lace-and-beaded neckline of her dress may be giving her early signs of heat rash. When she steps inside the cavernous foyer, illuminated by a crystal chandelier hanging high above her head, the blast of air conditioning is more than welcome.

"Clarke!" Wells calls out almost immediately, hurrying over to her.

"Hi Dr. Griffin," he says to Jake, Abby having already made a beeline for Hannah Green, who she spied snacking on a meatball across the room.

"Wells! Great to see you, son. Big night for your dad, huh?" Jake claps him on the shoulder and looks around at the ice sculptures and string band set up in the far corner of the great room appreciatively.
"Yes, sir," Wells nods. "Getting here early was definitely a good call."

"How many people are they expecting?" Jake asks.

"Somewhere between six and eight hundred," Wells widens his eyes dramatically. "You know, casual gathering of close, personal friends."

Jake flashes his teeth as he laughs.

"You know your dad - go big or go home."

"Exactly."

"Clarke," Wells' hand slips down her forearm to interlace their fingers. "We're wrapping up the family interviews upstairs. The lady from the *Times* is here to ask you a few questions, and you're gonna take a couple photos with us, ok?"

"Sure, sounds good," Clarke agrees, turning to her dad. "Will you be all right--"

"I'll be fine, go on, honey. Can't keep the press waiting!" he drops a kiss on top of her impeccably styled waves - care of Abby's favorite hair salon - and heads off toward the bar.

"Alejandro!" she thinks she hears him yell out over the upbeat melody coming from the violin corner.

"Is Raven's dad here?" she asks Wells quietly as they climb the steps, covered in a sort of red carpet reminiscent of the Oscars decor.

"Yup, major executive producers definitely got invites," he says, tucking his arm around her waist to support her on the climb. "And the corporate banking executives, the Silicon Valley hotshots, everyone important at the hospital and university, not to mention the senators and congressmen . . . you get the idea."

Clarke nods, absorbing the information.

"So basically my parents will be in Heaven."

"And we'll be in Hell, you got it," he smirks at her.

Her hand's on the library door handle when he throws his own on top of it. She wonders if he can feel the racing pulse at her wrist.

She spins around.

"What is it?" she says softly.

He pushes gently at her hips, knocking her into the wall and boxing her in with arms on either side of her shoulders. His eyes are dark in the dim hallway, and the vague hint of cinnamon fills her nose.

"Hi," he murmurs, eyes flicking from her own surprised ones to her lips.

"Hey there," she replies, slipping one hesitant hand around his side under his unbuttoned jacket and using the other to swipe her thumb across his cheekbone. He's lean muscle under her touch, though his skin is ivory-soft and blemish-free.

"I really missed you," he admits, leaving a hand low on her hip when he shifts forward and captures
her lower lip between his own.

The action sends a few shockwaves down her spine, and she kisses him back, tasting his lips with different levels of pressure. Her hand slides from his face to hide under his jacket and cling to his waist, pulling him toward her a few inches. He's solid and sturdy around her, the athlete who rarely misses a basket. And when he drives his hips against hers deliberately, rhythmically, she can't help it. She opens her mouth to his waiting tongue and lets it sweep across her own, winding her arms around his neck and massaging the base of his skull the way she knows he likes, the way that makes him groan into her mouth. His fingers cupping the side of her breast are unexpected and bring her back to reality mid-kiss.

"Wells," she mumbles, knowing her lipstick is smeared, and her hair expanded outward from where he ran his hands through it, "The interview."

"Right," he says languidly, not moving his hand at all but pressing it, if anything, more firmly against her yielding flesh, "the interview."

Her blood feels hot and thick in her veins when his lips meet hers again hungrily. She seeks friction despite herself but settles for moving his mouth to her neck and sucking in a few lung fulls of air. Her blue eyes jolt open when his commanding hand grips at her ass and drags her more closely against him, forcing her legs to straddle his thigh through the yards of fancy fabric.

"Wells," she gasps. "We really do have to go inside."

"I know," he admits, pushing his knee against her core, once, sharply, making her hiss. "I just never got to say a proper hello."

A tremor zings from her core directly up into her stomach.

Fuck, she thinks as she rubs her lips with her fingertips, working insistently to remove the last vestiges of smeared makeup before gliding her palms lightly across her waves in an attempt to bring back their natural gloss. Wells nonchalantly straightens his jacket and reaches for her hand once more.

Who the hell am I?

The photographer's impressively bright lights nearly blind her as they walk into the library. She notices Anya immediately, one of Mrs. Green's teammates from communications at Cedars-Sinai, no doubt there to help direct the flow of the interview and stop them from saying anything damaging. Dr. and Mrs. Jaha are sitting comfortably on a crushed velvet couch looking completely at ease.

"Ah, there are our lovebirds now," Anya smiles nervously at the woman who must be the reporter. She's young, with dark hair and an assertive handshake.

"I'm Ontari," she says, all business. "I'm going to ask you a few questions, Clarke, then we'll take some candid shots of you and the Jaha family. Ready to get started?"

"Yes," Clarke squeaks as Wells grips her hand more tightly. She feels herself leaning into the firmness of him beside her.

The questions pass by in a blur, rapid-fire, though she does get to go more in-depth about how Dr. Jaha once took her and Wells to the Smithsonian's National Air & Space Museum. She remembers he spent all day answering their questions about how rocket ships stayed in orbit and all the new technologies the space race brought about. She ties it into a larger point about his progressive mindset concerning the importance of STEM education initiatives and hopes it doesn't sound too stupid.
"Not stupid at all," Wells whispers in her ear between photographs when she shares her worry. "You're humanizing him, making him sound like a tree-huggin', crunchy granola-lovin', free healthcare for all kind of guy. Californians will eat that up."

"I agree, Clarke," Thelonious turns from his couch seat to grin at her. "You made me sound like I wear Birkenstocks and drive through town in a car fueled by sunflower oil with a Feel the Bern bumper sticker."

"You don't?" Wells' eyes widen in mock horror. "I feel so betrayed!"

"Hey, you are running as a Democrat!" Clarke defends herself over their laughter.

"You just really sold it, baby," Rosemary pats her arm affectionately, wiping away a stray tear.

Ontari is quick to capture the moment of Wells pressing a kiss to Clarke's cheek, while her hand rests easily on Thelonious' shoulder and Rosemary beams.
The Whole Truth

I'm working on getting you more of the story soon, guys! I wish I could just tell you what happens, but that would take all the fun out of reading it as it unfolds. Anyway, I highly recommend checking out "Backstreet Boys Need Not Apply" by Kacka while you wait if you haven't read it. So. Adorable.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Why am I here? What am I doing?

They're the thoughts that play themselves on repeat as Clarke walks through the crowded great room, doing her best to avoid bumping into shoulders as she goes. Every few seconds she glances down to see Wells' strong, dark hand cupped around her own. She wipes the sweaty palm of her free hand down the length of her dress as discretely as possible.

"Hey, relax! We can breathe easy now," Wells leans in to murmur near her ear. "That was the hard part. This next segment only features fake, frozen smiles, good eye contact, and talking about your Harvard hopes with the political elite. Who knows? Someone in this room's gotta be an alum of Brown or Dartmouth or any school on the other side of the country who can put in a good word for us!"

She laughs nervously despite herself. But her stomach falls a few notches when he tightens his hold around her waist, stroking her side slowly. She grabs for a champagne flute sailing by on the tray of a passing waiter and downs the drink in one gulp.

"Thirsty?" Wells cocks an eyebrow at her.

"You know I hate small talk," she grimaces slightly at the sharp taste. "Mom wants me to meet with some dean from Stanford who's here, and she's probably just waiting to pounce as soon as she sees me."

"Got it. I'll keep a lookout," Wells returns, leading her deeper into the room toward a double-door balcony overlooking the sweeping back lawn. "Wanna go find somewhere we can hide out for a while?"

His tone quirks upward suggestively, and suddenly the room is too hot. Too crowded. Her head is pounding, and the women nearby are laughing too loud. She can't remember the last time she ate. What did she have for lunch? Did she eat anything at all after that trail mix she devoured after her jog?

She squints her eyes shut for a moment to eliminate the constant twinkle of chandeliers.

"Uh, actually, I'm gonna go see if I can find a bathroom. Wipe off some of the extra makeup from the photo shoot," she offers apologetically.

"Sure, come find me when you're done," he pulls her against his solid chest at rapid speed, kissing her soundly.
She hears an older man say "nothing like young love" to a woman who must be his wife as she hurries by.

Gripping the edge of the sink counter, she stares at herself in the mirror. Her eyes are smoky and dark, her lipstick too pink. The dress fabric is irritating the delicate skin around her neck, but at least the elaborate bodice does a decent job covering the bite mark Bellamy managed to make above the swell of her left breast. The foundation she applied to the spot kept rubbing off due to the awkward angle. She takes a few, deep breaths, trying to still her heart rate.

"It's ok, Clarke," she mumbles to herself. "He's your boyfriend. You're allowed to kiss him. You're supposed to kiss him for God's sake."

But her hands are still shaking when she pulls her cellphone out of the adorable clutch Harper helped her pick out. The jade ring Wells sent her from London catches on the clasp and falls to the floor with a tinkling clatter.

"Shit," she bends down and scoops it up.

Twirling it around her hand though, she can't bring herself to put it back on her finger. She slides it into the clutch.

Clarke Griffin: Are you around?

Clarke Griffin: Bellamy?

Clarke Griffin: Please? Can you answer me?

Bellamy Blake: Shouldn't you be at a party?

She exhales and sinks into the ridiculously large chaise lounge along the wall.

Clarke Griffin: I am.

Bellamy Blake: So you're texting me because . . . ?

Because I miss you? Nope. Not saying that. Because Wells is watching me like he wants to throw me down on the first bed he finds? Definitely not. Because . . . because . . .

Clarke Griffin: I'm glad everything worked out with my dad.

Bellamy Blake: . . .

Her nerves are so shot she's chewing at her fingernails, a disgusting habit she thought she'd given up a decade ago.

Bellamy Blake: What exactly did you tell him about this summer? I think that info would be helpful for me going forward if you don't mind.

Clarke Griffin: What did he say?

Bellamy Blake: Quit screwing around, Clarke. Did you tell him or not?

Clarke Griffin: Yeah I did.

Bellamy Blake: . . .
The sight of the typing symbol cause bile to rise in her throat. Suddenly, her thumbs can't move fast enough.

**Clarke Griffin:** I'm sorry!!!! I didn't mean to. He overheard a conversation.

**Bellamy Blake:** Well, as long as it was an accident. That's great, thanks.

**Clarke Griffin:** Please don't be mad! I know he's not going to fire you! He really likes you!! And it's not like he knows the whole truth.

Bellamy pauses and stares down at his phone. *As if I know the whole truth.*

**Bellamy Blake:** Whatever, it's fine. I'll deal with it.

**Clarke Griffin:** . . .

**Bellamy Blake:** I have to go. I have a date.

He shoves his phone into his pants pocket, praying it doesn't vibrate again.

"Hi Clarke," the rumbling voice catches her off guard as she veers haphazardly around a corner.

She looks up into his open face, eyes widening. His classy tux emphasizes his broad shoulders, and he's chatting with a woman near a group of potted plants.

"Oh, uh, hi, Lincoln. What are you doing here?" she stammers.

"My dad's a friend of Marcus Kane's actually, so we got an invite."

"Oh . . . right, that's nice."

"How are you doing, Clarke? How's Bellamy? Has he healed up from that accident?"

She nearly jumps out of her skin. She didn't realize the woman standing beside Lincoln in the slinky silver dress was none other than Dr. Woods from the hospital.

"It's one of my biggest complaints doing emergency medicine that I rarely ever get to see how the patients do long term," she admits more to Lincoln than anything else.

"He's doing great, thanks!" comes the over bright voice of Octavia, right behind her.

Clarke pushes down a moan.

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear it!" Niylah smiles broadly, flipping her dirty-blonde, curled locks over her shoulder and taking a sip of her drink while Octavia passes Lincoln a beer and drinks from some sort of punch cup. "Is he with you, dear?" she asks Clarke. "You two make such a cute couple."

Of course Wells stops at her side at that moment. Because God hates her like that. She can feel him stiffening beside her without looking.

"H-He's not my . . . boyfriend, actually," Clarke strains to make the words coherent, to sound polite and offhand. "He was tutoring me this summer, but this," she slaps a hand against the buttons of Wells' tux, "is my boyfriend, Wells."

"Yeah, he was tutoring you, all right," Octavia hisses lowly while Lincoln elbows her unobtrusively in the ribs.
"Be nice," Clarke could swear she hears him whisper.

Fortunately, Niylah seems too preoccupied with saying hello to Wells and apologizing for her mistake to pay any attention. Clarke's face is a flaming flamingo pink, she knows it, and her fingers are trembling again around her clutch. It's like she consumed rotten fish that's rolling around in her insides.

"Uh, Wells," she says softly, careful to avoid his eye, "This is Octavia Blake, Bellamy's sister, and her boyfriend, Lincoln. I met them when he, uh, got into a car accident this summer. Dr. Woods was his doctor at the hospital."

Lincoln affably shakes Wells hand, and even Octavia offers him a glance that could be placed in the pity family when she says hello.

Clarke wants the floor to collapse under her spiked heels and send her down into the Earth's molten core. She wants an invisibility cloak, so she can slip out of this event unseen into the fresh night air. But she stands there, stupidly, crippled, not knowing what else to say, not knowing how to get Wells away from these people who saw her with . . . him.

But then fate intervenes, and she doesn't have to say anything at all.

"Octavia!" the man cries out from a few feet away, moving swiftly forward.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone can guess who the character is approaching Octavia and why he's at the party, I'll let you name the Bellarke baby in A Sky Full of Stars. Sound good? Good luck! :)

Chapter Summary

Breathe deep. In and Out. In and Out. Ready? You sure? Ok...

Looks like I still reserve naming rights to my Bellarke babies as nobody made the correct guess. Sorry!

"Octavia! Honey!"

A man dressed in khaki pants and a white button-down dress shirt approaches, some sort of walkie-talkie device secured on his brown leather belt. Clarke's eyes flick over his sandy hair, sky blue eyes, and the angular jut of his jaw. She comes up blank.

Octavia freezes beside her, then turns her body half into Lincoln's stocky frame as if to shield herself. Her eyes flare dangerously though. Lincoln throws out an arm in front of the man to stop him from coming any closer.

Niylah, Clarke, and Wells all take an unconscious step back as the mood instantly shifts.

"I think it would be best if you stayed over there," Lincoln says shortly, pointing at a spot about ten feet away.

Niylah's eyes flick between Octavia's thunderous expression and the man's stricken one.

"Is everything ok?" she looks to Lincoln.

Wells takes a small step in front of Clarke, pushing her halfway behind him.

"Everything's fine," the man insists loudly, half-bemused. He draws a little nearer Octavia, holding his palms up. "I didn't know you'd be here, but I couldn't not come over to you once I saw you, could I?"

"Who are you?"

It's Wells who asks the direct question, startling Clarke back to her senses.

He turns to take in Clarke and Wells' wary expressions and manages to smile at them. It doesn't cause the skin around his eyes to crinkle, but it's an attempt.

"Carl Emerson. I run Governor Wallace's Security Detail. I'm Octavia's dad," he reaches out to shake a bemused Wells' hand.

"But . . . but . . . " Wells stares at Clarke. "I thought Octavia was Bellamy's sister."

"We have different dads!" Octavia flings out nastily, lip snarled. "My brother had a wonderful father who died too young, and I got stuck with him!"

She tries to step forward, but Lincoln pulls her back.
"I told you I never wanted to see you again!" she yells, lunging forward with more force this time, catching Lincoln off guard and managing to shove Emerson.

Clarke jolts back in alarm as Octavia’s bony hands thwack into his chest before Lincoln pulls her away by the waist, inadvertently ripping her dress in the process.

"Octavia, baby," Emerson pleads. "I just wanted to see you. I haven't seen you in five years! I'm your father. Don't you think--"

"I think you should stay the fuck away from me!" she screeches.

Clarke's feet are glued to the ground, immobilized. But she manages to move her neck from side to side far enough to take in the dozens of heads now turned in their direction. The violin music seems much softer now and stumbles along, like a car engine on its last leg.

"Maybe you should go," Niylah says pointedly to Emerson while Lincoln swallows hard and clenches his jaw, still straining to restrain a fierce Octavia.

"Yes," Wells jumps in. "She doesn't want to talk to you! And Governor Wallace won't appreciate a scene," he adds as an afterthought.

"You heard them! Go!" Octavia yells, a line of mascara sliding down her cheek. "Stay away from me!"

But it's Octavia who turns and runs from the room, losing her footing once and wobbling as one of her ankles gives way. Clarke stares at Niylah's shocked face then down to the place where Wells is firmly gripping her upper arm.

"It would be better for everyone if you left now," Lincoln reiterates loudly, a mask of anger finally overtaking his features.

"What the hell is going on?" Thelonious appears out of nowhere beside his son. "Why were you harassing that young woman?" he demands of Emerson.

"I wasn't harassing her! That's my daughter!" Emerson replies, voice rising. "I haven't seen her in five years!"

"I think I can understand why," Thelonious hisses quietly, flicking his hand into the air as two more men in uniforms like Emerson's approach, walking on either side of Dante, whose face is lined with suspicion.

When he reaches their small group, he throws his hands out and offers a wide smile toward those standing nearest them.

"Everything's all right, folks! Just a little disagreement. We're clearing it up," he says cheerfully.

Lincoln twitches next to her.

"Emerson, really," Dante says sharply as the band begins to strike up a faster beat. "What is the meaning of this?"

The guests slowly begin slipping back into buzzing conversations as they see that the main show is over and that they won't be able to hear what follows.

"Sir, I'm so sorry," Emerson blanches. "It's just--" he reaches out a hand awkwardly into the space
where Octavia disappeared. "It was my daughter, and I hadn't seen her--"

"I don't care if it was your great-grandmother resurrected from the grave!" Dante's voice heats with emotion. "That was completely inappropriate. You're here to protect the guests! Not harass them!"

"Yes, sir," Emerson bows his head.

"I need to go after her," Clarke leans up to whisper hastily in Wells' ear. "She shouldn't be alone."

He nods, and Clarke takes off in the direction she watched Octavia run.

It takes her a few minutes to find the petite brunette, who's pacing back and forth across the polished wooden floor of Governor Wallace's music room, neon gold heels kicked aside in a heap. The room's sunken into the ground, and there are several, navy blue carpeted steps to reach the grand piano, where Clarke waits, clicking her nails across the black top.

"Ummm, Octavia? Are you all right?" she tries.

The younger Blake pauses before whirling around to face her.

She scoffs.

"I'm sure this is exactly what you wanted, catching me in an embarrassing situation, isn't it?" she calls out meanly, her words bouncing off the walls. "Leave me alone, Clarke!"

Clarke presses her lips together but holds her ground.

"I'm sorry for what . . . your dad . . . did out there. It wasn't nice of him to make a scene," she continues. "But Governor Wallace is getting rid of him as we speak. So you can go back out there, you know, when you're ready."

"Thanks for the news update," Octavia narrows her eyes.

Clarke pops her hand onto her hip and glares up at the frescoed ceiling.

"Octavia, I am trying to be nice to you, ok? What he did was shitty, and . . . "

Octavia watches her intensely. It's making her nervous.

"Umm, well, I know that he, you know, your dad, has a new family now, and I'm sure that's got to be really challenging, and--"

Octavia's laugh is high-pitched and cruel.

"What are you some kind of Blake family expert now?" she takes a few steps closer to the stairs. "I'm not angry because he left me, Clarke. I'm glad he's gone!"

Clarke blinks, feeling the mascara on her top and lower lashes smack together. She nods delicately.

"Oh-kay. But then I don't really understand why--" she jerks her thumb back toward the door.

"God! Not everyone's as egotistical as you are," Octavia snaps. "I'm pissed because he has the nerve to try to talk to me here! After what he did to Bellamy. But you wouldn't care much about that, either, would you, Clarke?"

She ventures close enough for Clarke to see the whites of her eyes.
They would almost be the same height if Clarke weren't still wearing her heels.

"What do you mean? What did he do?" the words sprout from the back of her throat while her heart sinks.

It's like suddenly she knows before she hears a word.

Octavia appraises her for a moment, apparently thinking it over.

"Let's just say he wasn't a big fan of the stepdad role, ok?" she raises her perfectly filled-in eyebrows.

Clarke passes over the remaining step and hits the ground in front of Octavia with a click.

"Tell me," she demands, blinking away the moisture she senses gathering at her lash line.

"For starters, he hit him when he asked too many questions while he was trying to watch the game," Octavia's nostrils flare but she sustains eye contact, issuing the words like the crack of a whip. "He didn't give him dessert if my mom wasn't home. And he locked him in a closet once even though Bell is claustrophobic and wouldn't let him out for an hour. That should give you a general idea. You know that scar he has, over his lip?"

Clarke's face is already twisted into an ugly expression of grief, and when she nods, the tears come spilling down.

"It's because my dear old dad pushed him to go rock climbing at one of those play parks but didn't make sure the rope was secure, and Bellamy fell. That was the day my mom finally kicked his ass out of the house - she finally believed us," she mutters darkly more to herself than Clarke.

Clarke's hand's over her mouth now, and she's shaking her head violently. She can't listen to anymore. It's horrific. So she sinks into the plush carpeted steps instead and hugs her knees to her chest. Octavia crouches down, so they're face-to-face again.

"I love my brother, Clarke. More than anything. And I will be damned if I let him suffer again. We haven't seen Carl in five years, and I'm going to make sure it stays that way! Do you understand, Princess?"

"Octavia, Octavia," she gasps through her sobs. "I'm so sorry! I didn't know. He didn't tell me. He said your dad was ok, that it just didn't work out with your mom. I didn't know--" she trails off weakly.

"He doesn't like to be vulnerable, Clarke!" she spits. "But he really liked you, and you went and fucked it all up, didn't you? You don't care about him. So why are we even having this conversation?"

She stares her down, genuinely wanting a reply it seems.

"Please," she stretches her hand out to grasp onto Octavia's forearm, and the brunette doesn't pull away. "I know you don't like me. I know you won't believe me. But, it's like I was just stuck going through the motions before I met your brother. He's made everything better. When he had that accident . . . I-I-I was out of my mind. I'd never felt like that. He's - he's so important to me."

"Well, you have a funny way of showing it," she says bitterly, standing up again and leaving Clarke to her puddle of tears. "If he was so important to you, you wouldn't be here with your boyfriend, would you?"
Clarke tries to open her mouth but only starts crying again.

"It doesn't matter now. He's with someone else, and she's really good for him," she says confidently. "So just leave us alone, all right? I don't want to see him in anymore pain over you."

There are spots of dancing white in front of Clarke's eyes. Her stomach roils one final time, and she can't hold it in anymore. She crawls on hands and knees toward one of Governor Wallace's many potted plants and vomits straight inside just in time, the sickening sweet flavor of champagne flooding her mouth.

Octavia gives a big sigh as Clarke continues coughing and gagging before crouching down beside her to hold her hair back.

"All right . . . all right," she pats Clarke's shoulder, suddenly much gentler. "Breathe. You're ok. Everything's ok. Breathe. That was a lot to throw at you. I'm sorry. Bellamy always says I'm too dramatic for my own good. Let me go find you some tissues. Are you all right?"

Clarke jerks her chin up and down, wiping at her mouth with the back of her hand.

"Oh, shit," Octavia curses as she steps toward the door.

Clarke follows her gaze, and it lands on Wells.

"I'll give you two a minute," she pushes easily past him, hurrying away down the hall.

"How much did you hear?" Clarke keeps clutching the clay with her fingertips.

Wells thrusts his hands into his pockets. It's hard to read his expression in the half-darkness of the room.

"Pretty much the whole thing," he admits quietly. "Heavy stuff."

Clarke sits back, wiping away the water running down her face, and hiccups.

"Wells, I don't think I can . . . I wanted to try with you. God, I really wanted to, but I can't. I care about you so, so much. You've always been wonderful to me, better than I deserve--"

"But you love him," he finishes the sentence.

"I - I"

"You do," he nods his head solemnly.

"I'm sorry," she breathes it out to him across the space between them.

"I'm sorry too," he says, voice harder this time as he turns and leaves Clarke on the floor and Octavia in the doorframe, holding tissues.
One Thing Leads to Another

It's not like he went looking for it. The picture was just . . . there. Waiting for him. Right in the "local" section of his Google News feed. He wouldn't have even paid it any attention - stuck as it was between threats of nuclear war from North Korea and Al Gore's new documentary on climate change. But he sees her hair, and that makes the difference. He clicks on the article from the LA Times, "Jaha Launches Bid for Mayor with Progressive Agenda," to zoom in on the image.

Yeah, that's the Princess. Living her royal life.

Head tipped gently to the side as she laughs, face glowing, while Wells kisses her cheek. Her fingers curl around the mayor-to-be's shoulder. Even the wife is beaming in the candid photo.

Well, if that's her choice, so be it. His hand grips the edge of his desk until the sharp corner bites into his palm.

A clean break, that's what I need. That's what Octavia said, and she's right. I won't tell her that, but she's right.

He pulls out his cell phone and immediately changes "Clarke Griffin" to "XX Do Not Call (the Princess)," so she slides away to the very bottom of his contacts list. Then he navigates his way to Facebook on his laptop and types her name into the search bar.

There she is. Grinning vivaciously up at him from a field of wildflowers that blow around her head. It's actually a picture he took of her one sunny afternoon in a park near his house. The memory gnaws at his stomach unpleasantly.

He rolls over her name, then the friends tab, which pops up in the box. The last option says it simply: Unfriend. Yes, that's what he wants. A clean fucking break.

He clicks it sharply only to be met by another window asking if he's sure he wants to remove this friend. Yes. He wants their memories erased from his digital domain. Her spare clothes gone from his drawers. The feel of her body burned out of his brain.

But this is the best he can do for now.

So he clicks his mousepad and slumps back in his seat. The heaviness in his bones, despite his best intentions, doesn't fade.

***

Gina Martin: Hi! I know we hung out yesterday - and feel free to tell me I'm being annoying - but would you maybe be interested in catching a matinee later? I found one I think we'd both like.

Bellamy Blake: Hey :) You're never annoying. Depends what it is, but you could probably twist my arm.

Gina Martin: You must be lonely. Or desperate. O gone?

Bellamy Blake: Spent the night at Lincoln's. Probably most of today, too. But you underestimate your persuasive prowess.

Gina Martin: Gotcha.
Gina Martin: Good to know!

Gina Martin: And nice alliteration.

Bellamy Blake: Don't let it go to your head.

Gina Martin: As long as you don't let the attention go to yours.

Bellamy Blake: Never.

Bellamy Blake: So what's the movie?

Gina Martin: It's called Paris Can Wait. Looks like a good indie comedy.

Bellamy Blake: Who's in it?

Gina Martin: Alec Baldwin & Diane Lane.

Bellamy Blake: WHY DID YOU BURY THE LEAD?

Gina Martin: You are such an SNL slut.

Bellamy Blake: Nobody does a better Trump impression.

Gina Martin: True. It's playing at Aero at 2:30.

Bellamy Blake: Perfect. I'll be at your place at 2.

Gina Martin: Yay! See you then. :)

***

The movie is entertaining. Comedic with sweeping panoramas of the French countryside and shots of decadent meals that make you want to walk through the screen and eat them yourself. Alec Baldwin nails the role of the distracted, asshole husband.

But, the thing is.

There's photography. Which is like art.

And adultery. Which is like cheating.

And France. Which is like England.

So when Gina reaches for his hand as they walk back into the late-afternoon warmth, he squeezes it more firmly than he might have some other day. And when she knocks the top of her pistachio ice cream cone against his nose and giggles, he returns the favor before pinning her against the booth and licking his way into her mouth. And when he could turn off the highway toward the shady street where she lives, he doesn't.
She falls easily onto his bed and pulls him on top of her. Although it's been a long time, she remembers how to grip him so he groans and matches the quickness of his thrusts with her own rocking hips. She drinks him in, skating patterns across his chest and rubbing his shoulders, poking fun at him in a way that only she can. The branches of the trees outside his window cast shadows over his sheets and their interwoven limbs as the wind whistles through them.

Her knees bite into his waist when he comes inside her. And she grasps at his back, saying all the right things, pushing his sweaty bangs out of his dark eyes.

But even after she falls asleep half curled around his torso, he just strokes her arm aimlessly, staring wide-eyed up at his ceiling fan.

***
"Bellamy Blake! Where the hell are you?" comes the shrill voice of Octavia, knocking him out of his reverie.

"Mmm," Gina groans, rolling away to hide her face the pillow.

"I'll deal with her," he says in what he hopes is a soothing way, touching her shoulder briefly before crawling out of bed and searching for his boxers and jeans. "You stay here and sleep."

"Mmhmm," she hums contentedly, hugging his pillow closer.

In his haste, he forgets to completely shut the door.

"O? I'm here. How was the party?" he asks casually when he finds her in the kitchen rummaging in the refrigerator for a carton of milk.

"Horrible. Catastrophic. World-ending," she cries out, slamming the door with a thud and pouring herself a glass of the creamy beverage.

His brow wrinkles in concern.

"Why? Was it . . . " he can't even say her name. "Her?"

Octavia finally levels a stare at him, smirking at his shirtless state.

"Jesus, Bell. Is Gina here?"

"Would you answer my question?"
"I'll take that as a yes," she sits down at the table.

"I don't have to let you hang out at Lincoln's family's place, you know," he says harshly.

"Let me?" she scoffs. "I turn 18 in a month. Then I'm an adult."

"Tred lightly, baby sister," he scrunches up his nose at her. "You're one more sarcastic comment away from me throwing your clothes in the street."

"You love me too much," she bats her eyelashes at him.

"Start talking, O. I left Gina sleeping," he sits across from her, crossing his arms in his no-nonsense way.

She smiles a little, but then the light fades from her eyes, though he can't think why. It's not like she's been hounding him to get together with Gina all summer or anything.

"Carl was there - he runs the security detail for Governor Wallace apparently . . . " she starts carefully.

His whole countenance darkens immediately.

"Shit. Did he say something to you? Do something?" his voice rises of its own accord, as he makes to stand up.

"Sit, sit, everything's fine," she waves him down. "He tried to come over and talk to me, but I got angry and told him to fuck off. And Lincoln told him. And Dr. Woods, you know, the one from your accident? Well, she was there, and she told him. And then Wells told him--"

"Wait? What?" Bellamy half yells.

"I should have had you take a shot first," Octavia shakes her head regretfully.

But she plows on at the violent look on her brother's face.

"Yeah, I met Wells. Lincoln started talking to Clarke while I was getting drinks," she shrugs. "And there you go. He seemed nice enough."

Bellamy shakes his head, feeling dizzy.
"Get back to Emerson," he orders.

"Oh, right. Well, Wells' dad called over Governor Wallace and some other security guards and escorted him out of the place. I didn't have to talk to him much except to make it clear I never wanted to see him again."

He's up on his feet again, stalking around the kitchen.

"I can't believe that motherfucker was there . . . " he's mumbling. "Are you sure he didn't hurt you?" he whips his attention back to her, striding over to examine her under the table's light.

"I'm fine, Bell," she catches his hand, smiling more sweetly at him than usual. "That wasn't the major drama of the night."

"How the hell could that not have been the major drama of the night?"

"Uhh," she grits her teeth together. "Clarke sort of followed me when I left the scene - to see why I was so upset I guess. And, you know, because I was so upset, I mean, I was in shock. I kinda--" she crinkles her face apologetically, "I kinda told her why we hate Carl so much. And then she kind of fell apart, crying all over the place, and-"

"You WHAT?" he roars, face a mixture of red and purple.

And she swears she's never seen him quite so frightening in her whole life.
Gloves Off

He's shaking. He's actually shaking. His fingers are caving in toward his palms but frozen halfway down, and all the veins are bulging along his exposed neck.

"Woah, hold on, calm down," Octavia jumps up, banging her glass of milk on the table with a clang that sloshes the liquid onto the table. "You need to stay calm," she whispers urgently. "Gina's here, remember?"

His nostrils flare, and he breathes laboredly through his nose, slotting his hands behind his head with an "Ah!" A moment later, he storms off onto the back patio, making the blinds shake on their strings. She watches him through the window, pacing. He snatches up one of the glass sun catchers she meant to prop up in the garden soil but hasn't gotten around to fiddling with yet and breaks it with one sharp throw against the stone walkway. It smashes into dozens of shards by the looks of it.

And then he's back - marching into the kitchen.

"Shhhhh," she urges as placatingly as she can manage.

"I swear to God, Octavia, I am going to kill you the second I get her out of this house," he fumes. "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

"I know! I'm sorry! I wasn't thinking. I was just so upset."

"What exactly did you tell her?" he demands, chest still heaving as he grips the chair before him.

"Just the bullet points," she says vaguely, pushing her dark hair away from his face and not meeting his gaze.

"What. bullet. points?" he grits out.

When she explains, her own eyes welling up with tears at the painful memories from their childhood, she watches the color drain from his face. And then he does something she didn't expect. He collapses into the chair and buries his face in his hands.

"You're never going out in public again without me," his snipe is muffled, but it makes her smile a little. "I hate you so much."

She takes a tentative step forward, resting a hand on his heated shoulder. She can see the sweat forming at the back of his neck.

"I love you so much," she breathes out, leaning in to kiss the top of his shaggy head gingerly. "And Clarke--"

"Don't say her name to me," he spits out, jerking upward.

But Octavia slips into the seat next to him, gently knocking her knees against his.

"Listen," she says, voice hushed. "Clarke was really upset when I told her. She was crying. She said you made her life better and that she was terrified when you got in that car crash, and how important you are to her--"

"Stop," his fist comes down on the table, heavy. "I can't listen to this anymore. And you've made it
very clear you're not a fan."

"I'm not," Octavia says hesitantly, "a fan of her exactly." Her fingertips ghost against his forearm. "But I am a fan of you, so I can get behind her thinking you're special."

Bellamy snorts, bringing his bleary eyes up to hers. 

"Yeah, she's with Wells because I'm so special."

"I think they had a fight. I don't know for sure; I wasn't in the room with them the whole time."

"Doesn't matter," he waves his hand vaguely. "Their relationship can withstand the apocalypse from what I can tell."

Octavia's face twists painfully.

"What?"

"She did run after him after I gave her some tissues," she admits. "But it could have just been to get away from me."

"Yeah," he drolls. "I'm sure that was it."

"Bell, I think she--"

Gina's soft rap against the edge of the wall draws their attention away from the conversation. She's already dressed in a pretty cream skirt and off-the-shoulder, flowery top. She's like the summer to the Blakes' winter malaise.

"Hi," she says softly. "Uhh, hey, Octavia. Sorry to interrupt. I hope the party was fun," she gives a small smile. "But Bell, I'll just be going. Wanted to say bye," she kind of mumbles the last part.

"No," Bellamy scrapes his seat against the floor, getting up to walk over to her. He catches her chin in his hand, and she blushes. "You're not interrupting anything. Stay. Please," his eyes plead with hers. "I'll make you something to eat. What do you want?"

Gina throws a look at Octavia over her shoulder, but she just smiles and waves in a friendly way.

"Hi, Gina," she echoes. "Bell's right. Stay! We haven't caught up in ages! I wanna tell you all about my fabulous road trip up U.S. 1 with Lincoln."

Her winning cheerful demeanor seems to relax the tension around Gina's mouth, and she smiles back, allowing Bellamy to wrap her up in a secure hug.

***

Her phone buzzes. Clarke groans, totally tangled in her bedsheets as sunlight spills into her room.

**Jasper Jordan:** Get over to Monty's. Now please. This is not a drill. U copy? Over.

She stares at her iHome. 11:15 a.m. Shit. Her parents were having brunch with the Greens today, and they'd probably already left. She can't even remember what time they were supposed to meet.

She squeezes her eyes shut. It's hard to remember anything past what happened last night. She rolls the fabric of her down comforter between her fingers trying to soothe herself, but all she can see is Octavia's pained face, her ruined black makeup as she talked about Emerson. Her face is soon
shoved away by Wells rising up in her mind's eye, the way his finally registered betrayal in a way that made her feel like someone had kicked her in the stomach repeatedly, sliced a knife along her arms, watched her bleed.

Though she'd tried to chase him down the long corridors and into the great room full of swaying bodies and oppressive perfume and high-pitched laughter from one cocktail too many, he always seemed to be on the other side of the expansive space. He joked with his father and Governor Wallace, throwing his head back in laughter. He chatted with Mrs. Green while dipping strawberries in a chocolate fountain. He met her eyes once, accidentally, and she saw the controlled rage in his normally kind eyes and stumbled off in the opposite direction.

**Clarke Griffin:** Why?

**Jasper Jordan:** Cuz Wells is here screaming at us. & he should be screaming at u. I did not break up w/ him.

**Clarke Griffin:** Why the hell is he there?

**Jasper Jordan:** Thinks me & Monty knew about ur fuck buddy.

**Clarke Griffin:** JASPER!!!!!

**Jasper Jordan:** Sry. That 2 harsh 4 u? Idc. Get ur ass over here, now. This isn't Monty's fault.

**Clarke Griffin:** Be there in 15.

It's a frenzied race to wash her face, brush her teeth, throw on deodorant and comb her hair enough, so it doesn't resemble a rat's nest. She throws on a tunic and an old, beaten-up pair of Tom's. With no makeup and the limp, shapeless outfit, she looks about 15. Wide-eyed and young. Except for the dark circles under her eyes, and the summer of secrets buried within her.

Clean-faced, but not quite so innocent.

She jogs to Monty's glass palace, the smack of her soles against the pavement satisfying and jolting. Letting herself in the back door like she used to do in middle school, she takes a deep breath and looks up at the stairs leading to the rec room. Apparently, she was just running on adrenaline. On the thought that she had to make this better with Wells somehow, had to stop him from attacking Monty and Jasper for something so clearly her fault and not theirs.

Because now that she's here, she has absolutely no idea what to do next.
"If you're supposed to be my best friends, why the hell did you think it was ok to hide something like this from me?" comes the sound of Wells' thunderous rampage as she approaches the rec room on tiptoe.

Monty's pulling on his sleek black hair before throwing his arms up in the air about ten feet away from Wells.

"Like I already told you, man! I would have said something if I knew for sure there was something to say! My mom saw her with him in a hospital room, but that didn't mean anything by itself. And yeah, she was ditching us more than usual this summer, but still--"

"You did know about the clinic," Jasper throws out.

He's standing between them like this is some sort of ping-pong match.

"Are you trying to be helpful?" Monty snaps aggressively as Wells makes a sound near a snarl.

Jasper frowns, then jerks his head in what appears to be agreement.

"Dude, you've got to calm down. This can't be good for your blood pressure," Jasper tries again.

"Clarke could have been going on the pill for . . . you know . . . acne or something. Regulating her--" 

"We are not going to argue about Clarke's . . . cycles!" Monty yells, more desperate than she's ever heard him.

He's absolutely aghast, fire racing up his face.

"No, we're definitely not!" she launches herself into the room, staring between their shocked faces.

Wells stands stock still, fists clenched at his side, breathing heavily.

"Wells, please," she tries, grimacing a little. "I know you're angry, and you have every right to be--"

"Oh, do I? Is it ok that my girlfriend of three years wasn't just screwing her tutor but falling in love with him, too? Is that a good reason to be upset?" he takes a step closer to her.

"Guys--" Monty tries to butt in.

"Leave it," Clarke brushes her hand up in his direction to silence him.

"You do," Clarke says seriously, bugging her eyes out at him an curling her lips into a small circle. 

"But not at Monty and Jasper. They didn't hurt you. I did. They didn't know. Nobody knew. It's me. I'm the one you're mad at."

She walks all the way up to him until they're about two feet apart. His eyes flash over her face in a distracted fashion, and she sees the vein jump in his neck.

"Come with me! Please. We'll talk. You can yell all you want. I won't run away," she says more calmly than she feels.

She doesn't realize she's holding her breath until his head moves a fraction of a degree downward.
"Thank you, God!" Jasper cries out to the ceiling.

Wells acts like he's going to move toward him, but Clarke puts a hand on his arm, which he slaps away harshly.

"Wells, come on, man!" Monty calls out, crossing his arms. "Don't leave like this."

Clarke flinches back but lets Wells lead the way out of the room, mouthing an "I'm sorry" to Monty and Jasper as she follows him.

***

They walk down the stairs and out of the house silently. She's only half-conscious of the route her feet set beside him - they're headed toward the old hill they used to play on as kids. There's an abandoned swing set on top of it left behind from a house that was demolished back in the 1980s. The sun is up almost in the center of the sky now, beating down on their backs. Waves of thick anger waft up from Wells' body as their shoes thud against the pavement.

"Wells . . . Wells . . . are you ever going to look at me again?"

He's staring straight ahead, dead focused on absolutely nothing.

"You knew. I mean, I told you I'd met someone this summer," she tries again.

Instantly, she knows that was a wrong move.

He rounds on her, face contorted in fury.

"So that makes it ok!? Because you told me WEEKS AFTER YOU'D ALREADY GOTTEN TOGETHER?"

She accepts his wrath like a sponge although every instinct she has is telling her to bolt.

"No, no, of course it doesn't. What I did was wrong! I should have told you right from the beginning. That's on me."

"You should have told me from the beginning? Clarke, you never should have let it happen!" he pushes out his words in time to the relentless pace he sets.

The houses pass by in a mild blur as she struggles to keep up.

"You never acted like such a --"

"Excuse me?" she snaps back as he cuts off. "I'm acting like a what, exactly?"

His eyes darken as they focus on her, and he looks mildly repentant, but only mildly.

"You always had all these physical boundaries, Clarke. What am I supposed to think when it turns out this guy can just come along, and you jump him? You tell me."

She's silent, struck dumb. They've reached the hill, where patches of parched grass fight for air through all the red-tan silty dirt, and start to climb.

"I . . . I "

"Save it," he shoots back, vigorously bending his knees to get up the hill as quickly as possible.
"You're obviously into him. But," and at last he turns to look at her squarely, and she can see all the hurt laced into his face, "How can you love him if you always say you love me?"

"Wells, I do!" she says desperately, grinding her fingers into the tightness of her thighs. "I do love you! We've been through so much together, you're my best friend!"

"Right," he scoffs. "That's the polite way of telling me to go fuck myself."

"No, it's not!" she nearly shouts into the cloudless vastness around them. Up here you can see the ocean easily, the way the sun casts a white, shimmering triangle of light upon the waves. "I was always attracted to you! We fit together, you and me. You get me, we come from the same place. You're so damn nice to everyone you meet, and it's genuine. You're smart. You're the star of the goddamn basketball team! You always try to do the right thing. You let me bitch to you about nothing important, and you always let me pick the movie! You're a great friend," she smiles ruefully, pushing a strand of hair between her ear, "Minus that time you went psycho on Monty and Jasper."

But he doesn't smile back. He just digs his hands into his pockets farther and keeps watching her. The crease deepens between her eyebrows.

"Then what the hell is it?" he bites at her. "What's so special about this guy?"

"Wells, let's not do this--"

"No, you're doing it. You owe me."

Her mother's words flash into her mind, and she realizes they're true. She does.

"Believe me, I'm the idiot," she sinks into the rickety swing, hearing its satisfying creak as the rusty hinges try to hold her weight.

Wells is leaning against the abandoned turquoise slide, streaks of silver down its center where too many kids wore away at its color.

"You're wonderful, and it's ripping me up to think about losing you. Why do you think I didn't say anything sooner? I couldn't even think about a version of my life you weren't it," she kicks at the dirt at her feet. "This summer was like a bubble away from everything real."

"But?"

It takes her a long time to reply as her eyes take in the perfect suburbia that is Arkadia Hills. At this height, everything seems small and manageable, from the well-manicured lawns to the quaint brick mailboxes.

"Bellamy's . . . a force to be reckoned with," she says at last. "I know that sounds stupid, but it's true. He pulled me in before I even realized it. It's like . . . he knew that we were supposed to be together, even when I was fighting him. He works so hard to give Octavia a good life; you can just tell how much he cares. There are these two kids who live next door to him that he's babysat for years, and they adore him. He's a nerd, but in a fun way. His dad died of cancer when he was little, and his mom's gone now, too, and," she clears her throat. "You know what Octavia said last night, but he never complained. He just kept looking for fun ways to surprise me or challenge me."

"What the hell was I doing? Locking you in a tower?"

"No! God! This isn't a good idea, Wells. Whatever I say, it's never going to be enough. Let's just stop," she's finally feeling frustrated by the whole thing.
"I don't want to be a dick, Clarke. I don't. And I'm sorry that I don't have a sad story, too. But I don't think that's enough of a reason to throw everything away."

"It's not because of his story!" she jumps up and invades his personal space, jabbing him in the chest with a pointy finger. "It's because I trust him, all right? I know that no matter what kind of stupid shit either of us pull, he's going to be the one waiting for me at the end of it all. I know he's my person."

It's too much, and she knows it immediately. It's hurtful. It's sharp. It stings with reality and truth. But how are you supposed to explain something you can't fully comprehend yourself? She and Bellamy have been orbiting each other for months, pulled by a force as strong and unseeable as the wind.

"I wish you the best of luck with all that. Sounds intense," Wells forces the words out before turning and leaving her atop the hill, all alone.

***

It's her father's arms she crashes into first when he walks through the door, humming a rock tune off-key.

His arms instantly wrap around her back, and his voice is infused with concern.

"What is it, Clarkey Bear?"

The nickname comes covered in cobwebs it's so old.

"We broke up. Me and Wells," she mumbles into his shirt, staining it with her tears.

Jake exchanges an intuitive look with Abby over her head.

"It's all right, honey. It's all right," he rocks her rhythmically. "We kinda figured things were going downhill after last night."

Jaha and Wallace managed to quell the outbreak between Octavia and Emerson. Yet word of it - and news of who Octavia was - quickly reached her parents' ears. Abby's ever-sharp eye spotted the tension between her daughter and Wells for the rest of the night.

Abby nods at his side, reaching forward to stroke Clarke's hair.

"I think some ice cream is in order," Jake says, "Mint chocolate chip, right?" he releases her and moves toward their impeccable sub-zero freezer.

"And a little time with our favorite Miami ladies," Abby gives her a sympathetic smile.

"You're not mad?" Clarke stares at her.

She makes a face.

"I love Wells. I'm not going to lie, honey. And I love the Jahas. I was rooting for you two. But I want you to be happy. I love you most."

Clarke falls into her arms.

Ten minutes later she finds herself wedged between her parents on their sofa, spooning ice cream into her mouth and laughing despite herself when Dorothy exclaims, "Oh, c'mon, Blanche! Age is just a state of mind," and Blanche replies, "Tell that to my thighs."
Brick Pathways

Abby spreads the frigid, anti-wrinkle cream onto her face before sliding in bed next to Jake.

"So much for avoiding that scene you were afraid of last night, huh?"

She sighs, reaching for her reading glasses as she flips open her novel.

"Yeah, but you were right. It wasn't Clarke and Wells," she returns.

"Small wonders," he says drily.

She's silent for a while as he flips through the TV channels, finally settling on a rerun of an old golf tournament. But out of the corner of his eye, he notices that she's stopped turning pages.

He places a hand on her thigh above the blankets, weaving their fingers together.

"What's going on in that brain, Abby?"

She sucks in a noisy breath then talks in a rush.

"Jake. I know why that girl - why Bellamy's sister - didn't want to see her dad."

He shifts upward off his pillow to see her better.

"Really? How? Why?"

"Wells overheard her telling Clarke. Apparently it shook him up enough to say something to Rosemary. She called me earlier today, thought we should know because you're connected to the family."

He stares at his wife, knowing what remains unsaid between them.

*Clarke's connected to the family.*

"What did he do?" he says gruffly, swallowing.

"The man, his stepdad . . . he abused Bellamy as a child. The details aren't pretty. The sister hadn't seen him in years. They don't ever want to see him again. Well, you can imagine."

"Jesus Christ," Jake flops back onto his pillows, massaging the bridge of his nose as several strong emotions war for dominance within him.

***

On Monday, Bellamy asks Gina if she'd like to stroll around UCLA's main campus with him. The weather's decent - not too hot with the hint of a breeze. It's still relatively quiet since school hasn't begun yet. With fewer people around, the brick-and-sandstone buildings resemble Medieval fortresses from another world, at least in his imagination. He tries to convinces her that this is their last chance to be on campus before they officially don't belong anymore.

"You still belong!" she laughs over the phone. "You'll be a grad student. I'm the one who gets to be *that alum.*"
"But you're a very cute alumna," he argues back, and she relents.

They're ambling through one of the more prominent quads, his arm hanging over her shoulders as she chats about finishing studying for her teaching licensure exam, when he spots her.

Or maybe she spots him.

It's hard to know for certain.

Clarke's about fifty feet away, carrying a stack of books toward the history building. But when she realizes it's them, she becomes rooted to the spot. He doesn't realize he's stopped moving too until Ginapulls right out of his grip, looking up at him, confused.

"Bellamy?"

He wants to focus on her, to answer her, but Clarke's braced the large books against her stomach and sends him a tiny wave. So, logically, he grabs for Gina's hand, jerking her in the direction they came.

"Bellamy! What is it?" she tosses a parting glance over her shoulder, narrowly missing an upturned brick in the pathway as she follows him.

Two squirrels tumble away from the tree he leans Gina back against. It's near the covered courtyard and currently devoid of any passersby. Her lips are tentative and stilted when he brushes his mouth against hers, but they warm to him after a few seconds. She pulls him into her by the waist, propping up the back of her sandal against the rough tree bark.

"What was that?" she looks at him starry-eyed when he finally breaks away.

"Couldn't resist," he grins roguishly. "Let's take the longer path around to the stadium. It's more scenic."

But when he steps back out into the quad, he has an out-of-body experience. Clarke's still standing there. He blinks, desperate for her to be a mirage. She's not. Definitely not. Because Gina can see her, too. Gina's head whips back and forth between them for several, never-ending seconds, taking in the open-mouthed, I-just-saw-a-ghost expressions on their faces. Then she watches the girl's blonde, curvy form spin around and take off for the history building at full speed. Bellamy wonders if his legs might give out.

Unfortunately, Gina didn't graduate magna cum laude for nothing. She rounds on him, eyes narrowed in suspicion.

"That's Clarke - that's the girl that came over to your house that night," she accuses. "The one you wouldn't shut up about. The one you were obsessed with."

There's no point in denying it. He's screwed either way. So he nods in agreement, pressing his lips together.

"That's her," he agrees with the obvious.

"And you saw her before you pulled me behind a tree, didn't you?" her tone very quickly mirrors that of a lawyer conducting a cross-examination.

"No, I didn't, I really thought the other way would be--"
"Save the lying for someone who doesn't know you!" she throws it at him, but it's not as nasty as he anticipates. "I'm such an idiot," she mutters to herself.

"What do you mean?"

"Bell. Bellamy look at me!" she commands, tapping her foot until he meets her eyes. "You obviously still care about her! You look like someone just ran you over with a range rover."

"I don't," he argues. "I'm sorry if I made you feel like I did."

"What kind of new-age bullshit is that?" she crinkles her brow. "I'm sorry if I made you feel like I did. You didn't make me feel like you did. You do! Just own it," she shoves at his chest, surprising both of them.

"No. I like you," he says, voice dropping an octave. Her shove didn't move him an inch. "You're good for me."

"I am?" she's more shrill now. "Really? Ok. Look me in the eye and me you have no feelings for Clarke."

He shuffles his feet, pulling himself up to his full height and staring her down.

"I don't have feelings for her," he says simply.

"No. Say 'I don't have feelings for Clarke.'"

She watches his jaw tick, the light breeze ripple the silken lock curling against his forehead.

"I don't have feelings for Clarke," he tells her ear.

"Bullshit," a tear trickles down her cheekbone.

"Gina! You're making something out of nothing," he tries to reach for her.

She backs away from his arm.

"I'm not!" she says fiercely, palms smacking against her thighs. "You've never looked at me like that!"

"Gina..." his voice breaks over the two, simple syllables of her name.

She shakes her head violently.

"I deserve someone who does, Bell. And so do you. I thought it could be me, but I'm not the girl you get to pass your time with until the person you really want comes along!"

His shoulders plummet, and he caves forward like he's been gut punched.

"What do you want me to say?" he demands, desperation creeping into his words. "I care about you!"

"Maybe," she blinks back fresh tears. "But you care about her more."

She moves swiftly down the path, getting lost amidst a large tour group a few moments later before passing under the covered courtyard's awning and out of sight.
Chapter Summary

TOTAL. WISH. FULFILLMENT. And I'm not apologizing.

(And I don't mean the Bellarke, haha)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When he gets home, he finds Octavia making tacos with Lincoln in the kitchen.

"Where's Gina?" she says immediately, cup of sour cream in hand. She stretches up on her tiptoes as if Bellamy somehow has her concealed behind his back. "I thought she was coming to lunch."

Lincoln glances from Bellamy's pained face to the table where he's arranging a fourth place setting.

"We broke up," Bellamy says heavily, placing his car keys on the hook next to the garage door.

Octavia drops the cup straight into the sink, ignoring it completely.

"Again!?" she demands, hands on her hips. "What the hell for?"

"Octavia," Lincoln says warningly. "Sorry to hear that, man," he claps Bellamy on the shoulder as he returns to sautéing the ground meat on the stove.

"No, really, I want to know!"

Octavia makes her way across the dull tile floor to stand right in front of him. He sees the challenge in her eyes and suddenly hates any part of him that ever encouraged it growing up.

"You've been all about her the last couple weeks, and now, what? You're throwing her out like yesterday's trash? What is wrong with you?"

His lip curls into a snarl despite the nauseated sensation circling in his intestines.

"Nothing is wrong with me, O! People break up. It happens. Sorry to shatter your fairytale. I know how much you hate it when you can't control things."

"Why don't you want to be happy? Why do you refuse to be happy?"

Tension electrifies the air between them. Lincoln shuts off the stove and moves to stand nearby. Bellamy scoffs, crossing his forearms over his chest.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Octavia! And you know what--" he snatches his keys back off the ring, "I don't owe you any kind of explanation! I'm going for a drive."

He slams the door on his way out, and then there's only the sound of the rattling garage door to fill the silence.
"Well that went well," Lincoln says sarcastically as Octavia gives a cry of frustration and goes to clean up the splattered sour cream on the sides of the sink.

"He's just so frustrating!" she exclaims. "Gina is amazing and is crazy about him, and everyone says the best relationships are built on friendship."

Lincoln places a calming hand at the small of her back, bending down low to kiss her neck softly. "Too much fire, my butterfly. No matter how many times I warn you," he laces the words into her hair.

She shrugs away from his touch, heading to the stove instead to continue cooking the meat.

"Well how else is he gonna learn then?" she snaps. "You tell me!"

"You're forgetting it's not your place to teach him," he says warningly. "Some things you've got to learn on your own."

"Start studying international diplomacy, and suddenly you know everything," she grunts, scooping out the meat into a few crisp taco shells before reaching for lettuce. "My brother is a stubborn ass, no matter what you say. And it's not an attractive trait."

Lincoln turns away, rolling his eyes a little because yeah, and it runs in the family, baby.

***

By Thursday, Clarke figures she's tried out every sleep position currently known to humankind in an attempt to bleach the daylight hours from her life. She wishes she were a kid with a bad head cold who could take some gooey Dimetapp and let the world go blurry around the edges. She manages to look respectable enough in the mornings before her parents head to work. She makes vague comments about whatever's headlining the morning news and drops blueberries into her cereal like always. But then it's back to bed until at least 5 p.m. when she has to reenact the "good daughter" routine.

She actually abandoned her cocoon at one point in a moment of weakness to search Facebook for Gina. But since she didn't have a last name, the search ended fairly quickly with her slamming the lid down in frustration. The thought occurs to her as she wakes from a haunting dream about a Hunger Games-style battle (fast dissolving into a million pieces) to check out Instagram. It's possible Octavia and her gladiator shoe collection might have a presence there. She's trying to hold onto the dream, but all she can see is Octavia with her hair in a high ponytail, paint on her face, wearing mud-covered boots.

And . . . there she is: Octavia Blake. Her profile is blessedly public, which, to be honest, is not much of a surprise. I'm back, bitches. Bet you missed me. Butterflies, bikes, & badass. The only way out is fighting through. Home is where Lincoln and Bell are. Blake is matrilineal, therefore . . . #ImStillWithHer.

Clarke scrolls through the vibrant images, eye landing on an insane shot of dark, rocky cliffs overlooking the Pacific and a thin figure in a forest green bathing suit about to . . . dive off the edge?!! She clicks it. The caption just says Live like you're dying. The third comment down is from gina_is_real_martin Fly into the sky, girl! Pic is AMAZING!!! xo

Her eyes light up even as her stomach sinks. With a shaking finger, she clicks Gina's profile link and holds her breath.

Public.
The first photo is of Gina's brown eyes peeking out over a battered copy of *The Iliad* with shelves of books lined up behind her. *Bellamy always knows the way to my heart* it says with 100 likes.

Now that she's seen it, she wishes she'd never looked. Proof.

***

**Wells Jaha:** So this getting dumped thing kind of sucks.

**Raven Reyes:** Read, liked, & retweeted.

**Wells Jaha:** Haha, at least you got to do the dumping.

**Raven Reyes:** Yeah, I got a slightly better deal. Maybe.

**Wells Jaha:** I was kind of thinking of a Friday night spent blowing things up in Call of Duty. Wanna join?

**Raven Reyes:** You say this to me like I have anger problems.

**Wells Jaha:** You don't?

**Raven Reyes:** Ass.

**Wells Jaha:** Is that a yes?

**Raven Reyes:** It's a yes.

**Wells Jaha:** See you at 8?

**Raven Reyes:** :)

***

Bellamy is halfway toward the office door when Dr. Griffin's voice stops him.

"Uh, Bellamy?"

"Yes, sir?"

"I wanted to thank you for all the extra hours you put in this week. Having two lecture courses this semester on top of my senior seminar and advising the dissertation students is going to be a lot. So I really do appreciate all your help."

"You're welcome," Bellamy tries to smile, but it feels like his face is cracking.

Jake nods.

"Everything good with you?"

"Yeah. Everything's fine. Two weekends left before the all-nighters start again," he tries to joke.

Jake gives a thin smile, rocking back in his leather chair and crossing his ankle over his knee.

"Umm, this is a little . . . awkward for me, but Clarke mentioned that you took her to a sort of lake campground this summer, that you grew up doing that kind of thing?"
This is it. The other shoe is about to drop. Fuck. It had been such a good day until she got that call. Until he got angry. Until he practically commanded her to have sex with him in a public place. His face burns, and he stares out the window at the city.

*I never should have touched her. I never should have touched her. I never should have touched her.*

"Bellamy?"

"Yes, sir. I did. I'm really sorry. I shouldn't have traveled anywhere with her, and if you want to--"

Jake waves his hand to stop him.

"No, no. That's not it. I was going to say . . . I go down to fish once in a while at Franklin Canyon Park. I haven't in a while, obviously," he shuffles the papers around his desk, "Been busy. But, next time I go, if you wanted to come?"

Bellamy stares at him. He's serious.

*Clarke didn't say anything? About . . . anything?*

"Uh, yeah, maybe," he runs a hand through his tangles. "That's nice of you to ask."

Jake looks more relieved now and smiles normally.

"All right then. Get out of here. Have a good weekend, son."

Chapter End Notes

Because I know waiting for chapters of a story is frustrating, I offer up another fic gem to you. If you haven't read "Don't Let the Days Go By" by HawthorneWhisperer, you're missing out! Off you go!
"I don't wanna go out, Raven. I feel like shit." Clarke whines.

"Oh. My. God. I can't anymore! I love you, but I can't! You broke up with him, Clarke. It's been almost two weeks. How do you think he feels? I'm trying to be Switzerland here, but you're making it a bitch."

Clarke sighs heavily, staring at herself in Raven's bedroom mirror. She's wearing a strapless, black dress that hits at mid-thigh. It's form-fitting and a little tighter than she'd like, but it does fully secure her chest, and that was what was most important she'd decided.

"I wasn't really talking about Wells."

Raven takes a steadying breath, applying her mascara in the adjoining bathroom.

"Clarke, he's in grad school. You're in high school. He went to college with this chick. You heard her at the nail salon - it's like true love or whatever," she says bitingly. "I know it sucks, and I'm sorry. But . . . it's not really an unexpected ending, you know?"

She catches Clarke's eye through the mirror as she coats her lips with gloss.

"She's way prettier than me," Clarke stares at her hips and thighs. "All tall and willowy with that gorgeous hair."

"Uuuugggh," Raven groans obnoxiously loud. "I saw her in person, remember? She's all right. But you're very pretty. And I'm telling you, if Bellamy couldn't see that for himself, you don't need him."

Clarke's still poking at parts of her body when Raven glances up at her again a minute later.

"Listen, chica. It wasn't you! It was a stereotype. Older, bad boy hits on boss' younger daughter, sees how far he can make her go. If you would've been upfront with me about all this when you met him, I could've saved you the heartbreak. You know I've got your back. And I know you think this is your fault somehow. But it's not. Bellamy - I'm not saying he's a total bastard or anything. He may have some redeeming qualities - but he was never going to pick you in the end. A high school girl could never be endgame for someone like him."

Clarke winces at the sound of his name, but the stinging reprimand gives her more incentive to slide on the wedges she brought that make her legs look the best.

"Besides, could you get your head out of your ass and be there for me for once? Maybe? Potentially? Possibly? Do I ask much of you?" Raven bats her newly blackened eyelashes sweetly and walks back into her bedroom.

Clarke laughs.
"No, you're a mean pain in the ass. But you don't."

"Thanks so much," Raven smirks then goes back to weaving a braid against the side of her head in the floor-length mirror.

"So who is this guy again?"

"I told you - I met him online. His name's John."

"And that doesn't seem," Clarke wants to be tactful, really. "Kinda sketchy to you?"

Raven rolls her eyes and cranks "Same Old Love" up higher, pointing toward her laptop and letting Selena Gomez talk for her for a minute as she rummages through her bedside table.

She throws two mini bottles of flavored Vodka at Clarke, who manages to catch them clumsily despite her surprise. One is vanilla, the other peach.

"Seriously?" Clarke quirks up an eyebrow as Raven twists off the cap of her own and tosses it into one of the glasses of Coke on her desk.

"Liquid courage never hurt anyone," Raven says dismissively. "Besides, we're Ubering to the bar where he works. My parents took the sibs to whatever Pixar movie just came out, and all they know is I'm staying with you tonight. We're golden."

"Unless the guy turns out to be a serial killer," Clarke mutters, finishing twisting her last blonde strand around the curling iron.

"He's not!" she protests. "He's another wounded soul, crushed in love by a heartless girl like you," Raven flips her off. "Now come get your Coke already!"

Clarke lets it slide and does as she asks. Raven's vulnerable.

"So what else do you know about him?" Clarke makes herself comfortable on Raven's bed and sips gingerly from the sugary drink. She can barely taste the vodka.

"He'll be a junior at UCLA studying poli sci. Only child. Likes racing cars, dislikes organized religion. King of the one-line comebacks."

"Perfect for you then," Clarke chuckles.

But there's a kind of whimsical, almost sad, look on her face as she watches Raven finish her hair and adjust her red halter top for the fourth time.

"What? Does this look bad? Is the other shirt better?"

"No, that's not it."

Clarke takes a deep gulp of the drink. It's making her feel lighter and kind of tingly. Raven didn't want to waste time and poured both bottles in at once.

"Oh-kay. What is it then? Come on, Griffin. I said I'd meet him there at 9."

She feels awkward now and kind of stupid. After everything that happened with Finn, bringing this up could be like inviting World War III.

"I kind of thought . . . maybe you were interested in Wells?"
She turns her face away, bracing for impact.

Raven whips around, leveling a shrewd stare at her, struggling to keep the liquid in her mouth. She swallows hard.

"Really?" she makes the funniest face.

It's certainly not revulsion or even confusion. It's more like thoughtful curiosity.

"Well, yeah. You guys had been spending a lot of time together since he came back, right? And you get along well. I didn't know . . . I thought . . . maybe you were into him and just never said anything to me because, how could you?"

This is ridiculous. She should not have started this conversation. She scratches at her neck and drinks more.

Raven plops herself down on the bed beside Clarke.

"Honey, baby, sweetheart," she sings out kindly, cocking an eyebrow. "Wells is the best, a class act. But," she shrugs. "We're probably too much like bros for that anyway. He's like a brother to me. It's never crossed my mind to be honest with you."

"Would you tell me if it did?" Clarke asks quietly.

Raven thinks about it for a second.

"Yeah, I would. If you were open to talking about it. I guess you're open to talking about it?" her voice tilts up.

Clarke shrugs, takes another drink.

"I could be. Give it some time."

Raven grins.

"I don't think you have much to worry about. I can't see myself fucking up our circle like that."

"Mmm," Clarke shakes out her shoulders and lets the lyrics to "Blank Space" pulse through her.

"So what drew you to John, anyway?"

Clarke suddenly realizes she's never even seen a picture of the guy. This is all pretty new. Raven's been talking to him for a few weeks, but she only mentioned him for the first time on Wednesday when he mentioned the idea of meeting in person.

Raven's eyes light up happily.

"His profile blurb had this line in it that said 'Hurt, Pain, Envy. Those are the ABCs of me.'"

Clarke's mouth drops open.

"Seriously?"

"I was wounded at the time! Target just went down," Raven comes to her own defense. "It read like poetry. It spoke to my soul!"
She brings her folded hands together over her heart in a swoon.

Clarke pretends to pull her solo cup away from her.

"Maybe you've had enough . . . "
"So tonight you're meeting your dream girl, huh?" Bellamy asks Murphy as they rip open cardboard boxes of the latest beer shipment in one of the bar's back rooms.

"Yeah, yeah. Don't get your panties in a twist, Blake. We'll see how it goes," Murphy slices into his container aggressively.


"Like I'd tell you," Murphy mutters to the floor.


"Go to Hell, Blake."

"Doesn't really matter," Bellamy continues like he didn't hear him. "She'll probably take one look at you and run screaming into the street."

"Fuck you," Murphy shoots back.

Bellamy thinks he sees a flush sliding up his neck though.

"Awww, is Murphee get-in nervuss? You know this could be twue luv, and I'll be wight thair to witness it," he snarks in a decent impression of Tweetie Bird.

"Last time I ever tell Miller anything. Does he even know you came in tonight, jackass?"

"Relax," Bellamy responds, "I'm off the clock. I'm helping you out of the goodness of my heart."

"Why would you be here if you got a night off?"

"I didn't," Bellamy starts placing the bottles in neat columns and rows along the metal shelving against the wall. "I was supposed to babysit for my neighbor's kids, but then she got sick and cancelled. So here I am," he throws his arms out.

"Who would trust you around kids?" Murphy says quietly.

"Excuse me?"

"Couldn't find a date?" Murphy snorts, louder.

Bellamy walks over and smacks the back of his head.

"Easy, man!" he cries, smoothing his hands over his slicked-back hair which shines the color of milk chocolate under the fluorescent lights.

"I came for the free alcohol Miller throws my way. And," a smirk passes over Bellamy's face as he stands over Murphy, who's still seated on the ground, "More than likely, to take your girl home."

Murphy's on his feet in an instant, but Bellamy's too fast for him. He's already out the door, slamming it behind him and laughing as he goes.
The third mini bottle was a mistake, but Mrs. Reyes kept a full liquor supply on hand. And Raven was convincing.

"One night, come on!" she persuades as they clink their solo cups together, giggle and sing along to "Tik Tok." "We deserve a drink after all the shit we've gone through this summer! We're almost seniors!"

"And they're not going to serve us at the bar. We're underage," Clarke says sagely as she slips a little off the side of the bed.

"Mmm," Raven nods in agreement, waving her arm over her head as her hips rock in time to the beat. "Well, maybe John could hook us up."

The Uber comes fast - the driver is a black woman with gorgeous cheekbones and a tattoo snaking up her arm Clarke can't quite make out. She swears she's seen her once before, but she can't remember where. The thoughts she tries to hang onto for too long are like wisps of smoke curling out of a bonfire. Her legs feel a bit like they're floating though they're firmly touching the mat below her. Outside, the stars are twinkling, and the moon is almost a full silver orb.

_The universe is so vast_, she thinks. _So vast._

She peers over at the app on Raven's phone. Indra. Indra. Indra. The name sounds like a chant, a hymn, a country, falling rain.

"You ladies ok?" Indra turns around and raises an eyebrow at them as Clarke tries and fails to secure her belt buckle. Finally, she hears the sharp click and leans her head back against the fluffy cushion.

"We're good!" Raven says in her hyper positive dance voice. "How are you?"

"Can't complain," Indra smirks through the rearview mirror. "So you're going to 48 Dropship Street?"

"That's the one!" Raven says.

"Weird name," Indra offers. "Lot of hipsters in that part of town though, doesn't really surprise me."

"Hey! Don't you waitress? At that pizza place, Stella Barra's?" Raven asks loudly out of nowhere.

_That's it. From her birthday dinner._

"Guilty as charged," Indra says. "Did I serve you recently? Sorry, I get so many customers."

"Well, it was weeks ago now. But you were great! Got the order perfect, and we were probably an annoying bunch," Raven replies.

Raven and Indra continue a polite conversation, but Clarke lets her mind wander as they make their way toward downtown. She sees the sparkling outdoor lights of the cafes flick past, watches the dresses slide by in shop window displays. There's a guy chasing after his dog who must have broken free of his leash. A restaurant worker carrying heaving bags of trash out a side door. The curves of the road lull her, and the journey is fairly smooth without many red lights. Indra has a classic rock station on, and she hums idly along, only knowing half the words.

Then the buildings begin looking more familiar. A spark of fear settles low in her belly, cutting
against her insides as they move into the bohemian sector. Yeah, she's seen that pharmacy display for flu shots for sure. And the red-and-white striped awning of the ice cream parlor with the smiling cone statue outside the door.

Shit.

"Ray-Ray?"

"Raven!" she taps her arm more firmly when Raven continues to talk.

"Yeah, what?"

"Who was the girl that broke John's heart?"

"Huh?"

"Tell me, please! Who was the girl he broke up with?"

"Uh . . . she had a weird name. It was like Ebony or Avery or . . . no, no, it was Emori! Strange, right?"

Oh my God. This cannot be happening.

But twenty seconds later, it's happening. Indra is pulling up right in front of Mecha, which already seems to be pretty full judging by what she can see from the windows.

"Have a nice evening, ladies!" Indra says before taking off.

Raven waves brightly then turns to Clarke, still smiling. "She was really nice! I liked her. I'm giving her five stars."

Clarke tugs at her dress but it won't go much further down her leg. The wind is making her chillier than she was when she picked out the outfit this afternoon.

"Raven! I can't go in there."

Raven stops halfway to the front door and looks over her shoulder.

"Of course you can! Let's go. You're my backup, remember? In case he's a creeper."

She reaches for Clarke's arm and links her own through it, pushing her steadily toward the entrance.

Please God don't let him be working tonight. He'll think it's on purpose. He'll think I wanted to see him.

She wants to protest but can't find the words fast enough. The bar is more crowded than she's ever seen it before. Then again, she's never been here on a Saturday night, when apparently the place turns into a semi-nightclub.

"They don't card at the door? Interesting," Raven slips her fake ID back inside her purse.

"Where the hell did you get that?" Clarke asks, bewildered.

"Shhh, I had one made for you, too, relax. One of Monty's friends is great with forgery."

"Perfect," Clarke mutters.
But there's no time to say anything else because the hostess with the hair like Medusa's snakes, Luna, is welcoming them to Mecha, smirking as she spies Clarke.

"Listen, I'm gonna run to the restroom! Freshen up my makeup, ok?" Raven says in a rush, suddenly nervous. "Can you get us seats at the bar?"

The bar. The bar means him.

Her stomach flips, and her brain snaps back in place for a moment.

"No, Raven -- this is Mecha -- I can't . . . "

But she's already asking Luna where the restroom is, and Luna is pointing her blithely off toward the left down a long corridor.

"Thanks!" Raven shouts over her shoulder to Clarke, already venturing too far into the crowd to hear Clarke's feeble protests.

"Back again, Blondie?" Luna sings, leaning over the podium and looking at her like Clarke's pain is her personal pleasure. "You really can't take no for an answer, can you?"

Clarke musters up a dirty look and shoves away toward the right, into a wood-paneled hallway right off the main bar. She leans against it watching several dozen people mill around what's clearly turning into a dance floor. A few couples are already taking advantage of the shiny pop remixes and grinding against each other.

From this angle, she can't see Murphy at all, but she knows he must be behind the bar somewhere, slick hair and stubble growing across his angular jaw. She reaches down to pull her cellphone out of her bag, trying to think of what to text Raven then doubting she'd even hear her phone over all this noise.

"Clarke?" a deep voice comes from right behind her as someone touches her elbow.
"Yo," Bellamy knocks into Murphy's arm, holding out a shot glass full of amber liquid.

They're in the back alley behind Mecha where Murphy is breaking up the cardboard beer boxes for recycling.

"What?" Murphy twists at the waist, narrowing his eyes.

"I was being a dick before. Good luck with the girl, whoever she is. Hope you have more luck than me, anyway," he clinks their glasses together and tips the contents down his throat.

"Did you poison this or something?" Murphy asks skepticaly.

Bellamy barks out a laugh.

"No," he pours himself one more from the glass Jameson bottle in his fist. "See, I'm drinking the same shit."

Murphy jerks up his chin in a masculine salute.

"All right, thanks, man," and the whisky slides down his throat.

Bellamy pours himself one final shot, throwing it back and then grimacing.

"I'd offer you another, but you've got to work tonight," he winks and leaves Murphy standing amidst the overflowing trash cans and chain link fence separating their property from the next.

"Where's Miller?" he shouts at Bellamy's retreating back.

"Dunno. Haven't seen him yet. He'll be here though. Don't worry your pretty face about it," and he disappears back into the bar.

Murphy smashes into the last cardboard box with his feet to relieve some tension.

*That dude is gonna have a rough morning,* he thinks to himself, glancing down at his watch. It's only 8:00 p.m.

***

Women's bathrooms always have lines, and this one is no exception. So by the time Raven finally makes it up to the mirror, she decides to monopolize it. She spends a couple minute before the glass until finally deciding this is as glossy as her hair is going to get and the shirt isn't *that* low-cut. At last, she maneuvers around three sorority sisters wearing matching ribbons tied into their hair and making some dumb hand sign as they try to take a drunk selfie.

*Ridiculous,* she thinks to herself.

She's still contemplating why anyone would join up with one of those estrogen cults when her way is suddenly blocked by a man coming out of the bathroom whom she super gracefully runs smack into.
"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she manages to keep her words fairly crisp.

He's broad-shouldered with dark hair and a white shirt that kind of glows in the speckled grayness of the hallway. When he turns though, she catches her breath.

"Bellamy?" she blinks.

"Raaay-ven," he smirks. "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this on a Saturday night?"

She has the urge to move around him and skip this whole routine, but he's bigger than her, and quite frankly, he's blocking her only exit. Plus, it's pretty obvious they've both been drinking. She can feel the body heat coming off him, and it's making her nerve endings jump. Her brain links from one memory of him to another - the mall, the gas station, Target - none of them have been particularly pleasant.

"What are you doing here?" she snaps back.

"I work here," he says slowly, widening his eyes for effect like he's talking to a child.

"Great, get out of my way, Bellamy," she makes to move around him, but he flings his arm out, so it touches the other wall, blocking her path.

A shimmering rope of fear courses up her spine, but she tries to keep her face blank. She doesn't give a fuck what Gina said at the salon - he freaks her out.

He sucks air into his teeth, drawing his cheek muscles up.

"Rude. I was just trying to say hi."

"Well, you did," she pushes her hair over her shoulder and throws her hand against her hip. *One of those sorority bitches better stumble out here soon. "Hi, back. Now can I go?"

She stares pointedly at his arm, which he releases from the wall. Relief courses through her bloodstream. He looks at her a little more carefully, stepping back to give her space.

"Oh," he says slowly. "Right. You think I'm dangerous, isn't that it?"

He laughs kind of to himself.

"Who told you that?" she questions despite her better instincts, which, for the moment, are seeped in Smirnoff.

"Clarke."

There's something about the way he says her name, like it's breaking him open.

*Clarke.*

Her eyes widen as she recalls the friend she left out there. Alone. In this bar. Where Bellamy is. The steady thump of the bass of some Kanye song floats down the narrow passage to them.

*Goddammit.*

"I gotta go, Bellamy. Good to see you," she tries for politeness and brushes by him. But he catches her arm.
She instantly tenses, trying to jerk away from his secure grip.

"Let me go!" she yells, whipping her arm to release it.

He drops it immediately.

"Sorry, I just wanted to apologize. Don't freak out," he attempts a half-smile. "I swear I'm not dangerous. My sister frequently kicks my ass actually."

"Isn't that sweet?" she throws a nervous glance over his shoulder toward the front entryway.

He's still somewhat in front of her, a direct obstacle in her path. But there's a part of her that wants to fight, or at least argue with him, the guy who broke up her best friends then broke Clarke's heart on top of it. The one who told her Finn was a fucking asshole. She knows it's not his fault, but yet it is. It motherfucking is. Or at least, he's the common denominator.

"Apologize for what?"

"Target," he rakes a hand through his curls and looks a bit sheepish. "I was an ass," he says it loudly, leaning toward her ear over the music. "I shouldn't have gotten involved in you and Finn."

When he pulls back, he keeps eye contact with her but flattens himself further against the wall, as if to let her pass. His face is contrite enough, but his darkening eyes still sparkle with a touch of something like mischievous satisfaction.

Raven's mouth puckers as she considers him.

"It's ok," she says finally, drawing herself up to her full height. "Water under the bridge. Don't want to be with a cheater anyway."

Bellamy nods at her, slipping his hands into his jean pockets.

"For what it's worth, you're too good for him. From everything I heard."

The smile he sends her is warmer, more genuine.

"Thanks," she gives a thin-lipped smile, throwing her own arm against the wall for better balance.

"So you don't hate me?" Bellamy asks.

"Not much," the liquor makes her honest.

"I'll take that," he laughs. "You'll be all right, Raven. From everything she said about you, sounds like you can hold your own."

"Who? Clarke?"

She knows her mistake immediately. His face darkens right as her eyes pop open. She needs to get the hell out of this bar with Clarke before her best friend is reduced to an oozing mess.

"Yeah," his jaw tightens. "Nevermind, have a good night."

She gives him the barest hint of a smile and finally maneuvers around him, smelling the pine musk that seems to cling to his skin.

*Now where the fuck was Clarke?*
"Clarke? What are you doing here?" her eyes flash up to Miller's friendly brown ones.

He's wearing a beanie and a puzzled expression.

"Miller! Hi," she sighs in relief. "I'm here with my friend Raven. She, uh, apparently has got a thing for Murphy, and I was supposed to be moral support. But - I didn't know anything except the guy's name was John, or I wouldn't have come, I swear. I didn't know which bar, and then she ran off to the bathroom and--"

"Breathe, girl. It's cool," Miller's melodic laugh sets her at ease. "I'm just starting my shift. Can I get you something to drink? Water? Soda?"

Her smile grows into a full one. She wonders how glassy her eyes are.

"Water would be great."

He motions her to follow him, and they cut across the dance floor, where she finds one empty seat at the end of the bar. The thought of I need to get out of here is replaced by Miller is a sweetheart when he ceremoniously places an icy glass of water with a pineapple wedge and umbrella at the top in front of her a minute later.

His attention is distracted by customers right after she thanks him, but she slurps gratefully on the water and keeps her eyes peeled for any sign of Raven, Murphy, or Bellamy. But there isn't any. Miller makes it back to check on her.

"Doing all right, Clarke?" he calls over the music.

"Yeah, sorry for just showing up here like this."

"It's cool," he nods at her slowly. "I heard, uh, things got a little intense at your boyfriend's dad's political party."

Clarke scrunches her nose.

"Octavia?"

"The one and only," he glances into her eyes for a moment, and she thinks she sees the slightest sign of betrayal there. But the next moment, it's gone.

"I really should get out of here. I don't wanna . . . cause a scene," she swings her legs around and tries to unsuccessf ully find the floor.

Her body feels loose and seems to thrum, and that can't be good.

"Clarke," Miller places a warm hand over her wrist. "It's ok. He's not working tonight. He had to babysit the neighbor's kids."

"Ohh," it comes out in a whoosh.

Her stomach sinks like a stone with a disappointment she would not have thought possible a minute before.

*What is wrong with me?*
"You can stick around," Miller says lightly. "Your friend shouldn't be left all alone to deal with the crazy that is Murphy," he winks at her.

***

"Clarke!" Raven wraps her arms around the back of Clarke's exposed shoulders. "Thank God! I'm so sorry. I didn't know Mecha was where he worked. I didn't know. Come on, we can go. I'll text John. I'll tell him another night, that I couldn't make it. Come on!" she tugs at Clarke's upper arm.

How does Raven even know? Clarke's foggy brain wonders. I didn't tell her, unless Miller told her? Does she know Miller?

"It's ok, Raven!" she tries to say it forcefully, twisting in her seat to grab Raven's forearms. "He's not working tonight."

She shoves the water toward her friend.

"Here - drink this. I'll get Miller to bring us more."

Raven opens her mouth to retort, but then--

"Raven?" Murphy steps up to them from behind the bar, smiling in a wide, warm way Clarke's pretty sure she's never seen before.

"John?"

"That's me, but everyone calls me Murphy," he stretches out his hand, and she shakes it. "I'm glad you could come! Sorry it's so busy tonight. Were you waiting long?"

Clarke takes one look at Raven and knows leaving is officially a lost cause. The tops of her cheeks are pink and shiny, and her smile displays all her pearly, white teeth.

"Not long at all," she says as Clarke steals back the water and slurps noisily from the straw.

It catches both of their attention.

"Oh!" Raven says, "This is my friend-

"Clarke," Murphy finishes the sentence for her.

"Yeah," Raven's head swerves between them both.

"You know each other?"

Telepathic communication has never been Clarke's strongest suit, so she just widens her eyes at Murphy, giving him her best sad kitten face and hopes he doesn't fuck everything up by mentioning exactly how he knows her.

Murphy catches the expression and gives her the tiniest movement of his head in recognition.

"Yeah, kind of," he says smoothly, turning back to Raven. "I went to Vera Kane High, too, but we never officially met there."

Nice, Murphy. Very smooth. Finally, someone who can play the game right.

"So I know who she is," Murphy is saying to Raven now. He reaches out a hand to Clarke, too.
"Nice to see you again."

"Likewise," Clarke smiles at him, nodding encouragingly.

"That's awesome!" Raven gushes. "What a small world!"

"I was really into the science thing in high school, so I didn't spend as much time with the popular kids like Clarke," he grins at her. "I did quiz bowls and that kind of thing."

Raven is seriously eating this stuff up. She's leaning into the counter now, chin propped up against her hand. Clarke rolls her eyes behind her friend's back, the alcohol pulsing through her making her inhibitions slip.

"One of our friends Monty does quiz bowls, too!" Raven says. "Or at least he did."

"Monty Green?" Murphy asks.

"Yeah, that's him!" Raven lightly taps her fingers against the back of Murphy's hand.

"I was on his team my senior year. He was crazy smart for a sophomore," Murphy's blue eyes - she never noticed how blue they were - sparkle at Raven.

Clarke lets her head hit back against the wall and tugs the top of her dress up more securely.

Yeah, this could take a while.

***

Although he hasn't had a chance to talk to Miller yet, Bellamy's seen the back of his head a few times walking through the crowd or pouring drinks. He can't believe how crowded the place is tonight - must be an end of summer thing. He finishes lining up all the beer bottles Murphy - the lazy bastard - left all over the floor, checking out his work with a final, satisfied nod. To be honest, it was the most mindless contribution he could make in his current state. Pushing the stockroom door open, he meanders down the long hallway and back into the bar, which he scans for Miller (still no sign) and spots Murphy instead.

I'll be damned, he thinks.

There's the goofball, flirting charmingly away with none other than Raven. The girl's practically climbed halfway across the bar, laughing at whatever idiotic thing is coming out of Murphy's mouth. Meanwhile, he sees at least seven empty glasses of ice cubes and another half dozen people flashing money and credit cards in his direction, trying to get served. He sighs and gets to work.

Ten minutes later, a harried Murphy finds him at his end of the bar.

"Sorry, man. I know you're not even supposed to be working! Go hang out or whatever. I got this."

"Good of you," Bellamy grunts but doesn't argue.

Instead, he cracks open a Corona, steps out from behind the bar, and scans the crowd of dancing bodies. There's a large black-and-white disco ball hanging from the ceiling, and the way it fractures the light makes it kind of hard to see. The DJ their boss hired is incredibly invested in top 40s billboard stuff. As if on cue, "Shape of You" kicks up.

Tipping his beer bottle to his lips, at first he thinks he's imagining things. Her long, wavy blonde hair is flowing down her back, and she's off near the middle of the dance floor, swaying to the song,
apparently quite alone. Wearing a black dress that emphasizes her curves, she's pretty hard to miss. She's radiant. He squeezes his eyes shut and looks again. But yeah, she's still there, most of her body turned away from him. Though he can make out part of her profile, the straight nose, slightly curved up at the end, a birthmark over her lip. She looks free and light like she doesn't have a care in the world.

There's no sign of Wells, and that's the last coherent thought he has. Leaving his beer bottle on a nearby windowsill, he glides through the crowd easily to reach her. She's still turned away from him, still oblivious, but her honey vanilla shampoo engulf hims, and he breathes it in happily.

Without thinking, he reaches for her hips, latching on there and drawing her back against his chest. He expects her to break from his grip, to turn and demand to know who the hell would grab her without her consent. But she doesn't. When she turns her neck, he realizes her eyes are closed, and there's a peaceful look on her face. He interlaces their fingers, knowing his are rough and coarse again from the construction work, but she only grinds her ass against him, wrapping his forearm against her waist.

With his palm splayed against the softness of her stomach and the ability to peer over her satiny shoulder at the small gap between her breasts, he feels his dick twitch in his pants.

He can't take it anymore. He has to say something. Even if it ruins everything.

Bending his head down, so his lips are right next to her head, he pulls her more firmly against his frame while whispering, "Hey, Princess," into her ear.

Clarke instantly stills in his arms, eyes flying open.

Chapter End Notes

I reiterate from chapter 22: If Murphamy can have Despacito, Bellarke can have Shape of You. I need the delinquents to dance in season 5. This is not optional, JR. I'm very serious about it. I don't care what kind of dance or how awkward or sweet or sexy it is...beggars can't be choosers!

Thanks for sticking with me this long! I'm so appreciative!!

(Aren't you happy I got them in the same room again. For a while I wasn't sure when it was going to happen)!!

Oh, and I know I haven't talked about this yet, but I am SO thrilled that Clarke Griffin loves Bellamy Blake and that he's a piece of her soul on the line. (That's how I chose to read the script).
Chapter Notes

You know, a chapter of nothing but smutty dance floor fun because you all had to wait such a long time. And for all the people who've been begging for more Darkish!Bellamy, well, here you go . . .

When her eyes open, a girl with long brown hair is dancing intensely about a foot and half away. Swishing her cup over her head, she laughs loudly as a stocky black guy in a backwards baseball hat tries to latch onto her collarbone, his fingers kneading into her ass.

There are bodies everywhere, pressing in on her from all sides like a human sea. It's a minefield of pointy elbows and gyrating backsides. The smell of spicy aftershave and a perfume resembling lilies wafts through the thick air. It's hot and sticky. Her wedges part from the dark brown wooden floor only with extra effort as traces of liquid there latch on and won't easily let go. Sweat is pooling between her breasts and running down to the dip at the bottom of her back.

But none of that really matters. Because Bellamy is the one behind her.

Her first instinct is to break away, and she tries to. But his arm flattened across her stomach acts like a harness keeping her firmly pressed against the hard planes of his chest.

"It's all right," he rumbles into her ear. "I've got you."

The words alone send a spasm of heat between her legs. She feels her inner walls throb and clutch at nothing. Goosebumps burst forth up and down her arms as if in synchronized harmony when the warm softness of his lips fastens to the tendon atop her shoulder. His scratchy tongue follows a moment later.

Girl, you know I want your love
Your love was handmade for somebody like me.
Come on now, follow my lead
I may be crazy don't mind me.
"Bellamy," she says uncertainly, fingers tracing down the length of his forearm until they find his fingers on the slight swell of her belly.

"You taste good, Princess."

He lets her wiggle her own fingers between his, but still he doesn't move his arm. Instead, his left hand slips down from her hip lower to her thigh, then lower still to the end of the cloth offsetting the creamy ivory of her leg. He rests it there, just his thumb under the hem of her dress, but she takes a shaky breath nonetheless. Her heart rate kicks up when she looks down and sees his tan hand. It's as if he's marking her, his skin a branding iron on her own. She clutches more determinedly at his fingers, willing Ed Sheeran to calm her.

*How is this happening?*

She tries once more to pry his arm from her waist, so she can turn and look into his eyes. She has to see his face, has to know what he's thinking. *Why is he here? How did he find her?* His muscular body has absolutely no reason to be crushed against her like this, knocking the breath from her lungs, causing darts of fire to zing through her chest and burrow into her pelvis. A second ago, she was dancing alone and free, just rocking to the music. But now--

She hears him chuckle, the rumble penetrating right out of his chest and into her back.

Raising his hand from her thigh lightly, he curls his fingertips momentarily against her inner thigh before brushing her long, wavy hair away from her face and tucking it behind her ear.

"Please don't fight me," he whispers hoarsely.

It's not what she expected, but her mind is such a jumble of conflicting ideas that it's difficult to keep any one in play for long. She registers the slight plea beneath the roughness, the hint of desperation.

So she nods and allows her hips to sway.

Bellamy immediately curves his torso delicately against the arch of her spine, covering her, fitting his jaw into the crook of her shoulder and sucking a bruising kiss to her neck. His black hair tickles her cheek, scratching at it. If anything, it turns her on, even though she knows it shouldn't. When she bends her neck to the side to give him more room, she hears him growl lowly and grinds her ass
directly into his groin in response.

"You always were my dirty princess," he hums against her jaw, peppering another kiss there.

"Aaahh," she moans in a careful whimper.

Her nipples are tightening painfully, even though his free hand now rests simply along her ribcage, not touching her breast in the slightest way. She's glad her dress is dark, glad the neckline is higher than the other dress she considered.

His arm tightens a fraction more at her waist though it doesn't seem possible.

Relenting completely at last to his touch, she drops her heavy head back against his shoulder and winds her left hand over his knuckles, rubbing back and forth, feeling at the callouses of his fingertips when he lifts his hand up a little for her.

Through all the people in this mess of a crowd, she can't see Raven or Murphy. Miller's beanie remains conspicuously absent.

"Your tits are unbelievable, baby," he rasps into her hair, attempting to grope one.

*I'm in love with the shape of you*
*We push and pull like a magnet do*
*Although my heart is falling, too*
*I'm in love with your body.*

She pushes him away, dimly aware that they're very much in public. He makes a guttural groan of disapproval but slips his wandering hand down and around her hip, between the closeness of their bodies, clutching at the pliable flesh of her ass instead. The action arches her spine involuntarily, and she thrusts out her chest, sensing the growing hardness of his dick wedged at her lower back.

"There's my good girl."

His laughter is light, but something ominous still lurks underneath. He uses his middle and index
fingers to climb back up her stomach like a walking stick figure then ghosts the tips of them from one nipple to another in a straight, smooth line right across the front of her dress.

Her half-lidded eyes coated in silver eyeshadow dust and too much violet eyeliner burst fully open once more.

_Jesus, what is he doing to her?_

She wiggles in protest, digging her fingernails into the giving flesh between his own fingers. He relents at that, dropping his hand from her breast after tweaking the nipple gently and returning to her hip.

"Bellamy! What are you doing? We're in public!" she protests in a huff.

"Shhh, it's ok," he says. I'm really glad you're here. With me. In public."

_Oh God. This is all too much._

Her heartbeat pumps her vodka-laced blood swiftly through her veins. She wants to break away. She really does. But he's hot and solid behind her, a protective wall. And the smell of his pine musk is driving her insane. Her walls tighten and ripple again as he strokes up and down the curve of her waist gently.

_But wait._

_If he's here . . ._

_Gina must be here, too._
"Bell, Bell, Bell," Clarke chants, scratching her nails up the forearm still locked around her waist. "Let me go. Please. Wanna see you."

He drives his uninhibited hand over the top of her thigh and toward the gap between her parted legs, remaining above the silky black fabric of her mini dress. Though she thought the moth's wing brush across her breasts was obscene a moment before, she keens fiercely forward into his hand when it plummets suddenly, thumb pressing sharply down against the hood of her swelling clit through her panties. All thoughts of anything but him are promptly swept from her mind.

"God," she pants out, gripping harshly at his thigh as he does it again. Then once more.

It's a mark of how crowded the dance floor is that nobody else even seems to notice, lost as they are in their own alcohol-induced realities. At least no one nearby spares them a glance.

"Gonna run, Princess?" Bellamy taunts, thrusting his hips forward just as she is forced back against him as her nerve endings jolt. "Because I'm chasing you this time."

His erection pressing into the top of her ass sends a fresh bolt of electricity into her clit. Even her breasts feel more heavy and full than usual.

"No, no, I won't. I promise. I'll stay with you. Just let me go," her voice is so high-pitched and breathy she barely recognizes it.

It takes him a moment. The disco ball shatters the light into thousands of white and silver rectangles scattered across the floor. When his arm relinquishes its grip on her waist, she sucks in a full breath and spins in his arms.

In the bar's murky haze, his white shirt shines vibrantly, casting his skin in a darker hue by comparison. His freckles stand out over the bridge of his nose, but his hair's too controlled for her liking with just a hint of curl around the tips.

"Bellamy," she says his name like it's the key to a long-hidden secret, drinking him in.
He smirks at her, catching her at the elbows before she can step away and slipping his hands down the cool sinew of her arms until their fingers are woven together. The motion makes her stumble forward a step closer to him, and she looks straight up into his impossibly dark eyes.

Clarke blinks a few times slowly before leaving her lids thrown wide open. No matter how long she stares, he's still there. Still real. Still causing her feet to feel like they floated up from the ground and are flying through galaxies and time itself. Like nothing ever really existed until . . . right . . . now.

The room careens away from her, and she swears if he wasn't holding her steady with the weight of his presence, she'd sail straight upward toward the ceiling full of wires.

_Bellamy._

In the vague background of her mind, Rihanna sings about being someone's only girl in the world. What she really registers though is the strange euphoria flooding her limbs when his thumb rubs circles into the side of hers.

"Who else would touch you like that?" he taunts her, leaning close, so she can hear him over the noise.

He drops one of her hands and tilts her chin up when she tries to look toward the door in her embarrassment. Without thinking, she buries her fingers into the soft cotton wrinkled at his side, desperate to keep him close.

"You're blushing, baby," he tries again, one side of his mouth curving up in a smile. "But you always like it, that's the damn thing."

She opens her mouth to argue? Agree? Kiss him? She has no fucking idea beyond the desire to be closer still. But before she can say much of anything at all, his fingers dig into the hot flesh at the back of her thighs and drag her forward onto his bent knee, so she can grind herself down on his leg.

"Bellamy!" she yells into void, lacing her arms around his neck hastily for support.

"I still wanted you to have friction," he grins, kissing her dewy cheek and angling his knee up an inch, so her nails dive into his skin.
She swears starbursts erupt at the perimeters of her vision. His hands return to steady her at the waist.

"What are you doing here?" she pants, allowing her hips to circle over his sharp knee of their own accord.

His grin breaks out wide and lazy.

"I work here, Princess."

"B-But-But Miller said you had to babysit."

He shrugs a little.

"The mom got sick. It got canceled."

The sharp edge of her canine pierces the flesh of her bottom lip as she tries to avoid staring at the fullness of his.

"I didn't come here for you," she shakes her head as she talks.

Although she's not sure exactly why, it seems desperately important that he know she isn't stalking him, or something like that, who really knows anymore?

"Princess," he holds the warmth of his palm along the center of her stomach before pushing it upward until it lands in the hollow between her breasts. She wishes he would touch them already, though a second ago she was shoving him away. Vodka is confusing. "You always come for me."

The muscles supporting her backbone tremble, as the hand at her waist tips her forward, so the underside of her clit rubs deliciously against his thigh. Clarke takes over from there, rolling her hips into his thigh with abandon because coming wrapped around Bellamy Blake is the best idea she's had in a while.
It's the tall woman pushing her way through the crowd near them with brown, curling hair framing her face that makes Clarke remember her.

The shove aimed right at the center of his torso a few inches above his belly button catches him off guard. He staggers back a couple steps, allowing her her freedom at last. Although he knocks his shoulder into a guy dancing behind him, he brushes it off and returns until his face is eight inches from hers.

"Where's Gina?" she throws the words at him like a bomb about to detonate. "I know you're with her! I saw you together! So you don't have the right to touch me like this!"

The hollows around Bellamy's jaw become more pronounced like they always do when he's upset.

"I'll touch you however the hell I want," his voice drops low as he looms over her.

She'd back up, but that would be like giving in. And she's not giving into him when he's acting like a patriarchal asshole. Still, there's wetness slipping out of her; she can feel it. And it's such a problem.

"Bell, you ran away from me at the quad!" she pokes her finger into his breastbone painfully.

He looks guilty for a second, but then the expression is wiped clean.

"You have a lot of room to talk!" he shoots back, eyes narrowing rapidly. "Where's the First Son? Super happy to have you out dancing and picking up random guys, I'm sure."

Her face contorts into something meaner by the second. Her nostrils flare and suddenly, she can't see his smug face for another second. She whirls on her wedge heel and takes two steps into the human sea before his hand closes around her elbow.

"Definitely not," he brings her back to his chest with a tiny thud of impact. "No running this time. You're coming with me."
Her palm collides with his chest when he pulls her to him, and she looks up at his profile, some combination of hurt and startled, unable to believe half the things coming out of his mouth.

"I'm not," she protests, attempting to shake him off.

He runs his free hand over his closed eyes and then down his jaw. His grip is still firm on her.

"I'm sorry!" he half-shouts to her over the rumble echoing around them. "Come on, I'm sorry."

The kiss he presses to the top of her head is fast and unexpected, but it softens her. He watches her lips purse in a line, semi-smirks when the faint, though familiar, markings creep up into the porcelain skin at her brow. That's his Princess. Totally pissed with him half the time. She wraps both arms around his comfortably solid waist and squeezes. His heart beats into her ear, her own lullaby in a storm of remixed cacophony.

Butterflies, dragonflies, maybe bats take flight in his chest.

"Let's find somewhere quieter, ok?" he says while his fingers tangle in her hair, allowing the corn silk to slip over his skin, tickling him. "Please?" his hand settles on her hip, and she shivers.

His eyes plead with her when she removes her chin from his chest and stares into them. Her drinking mind whispers that no face means more to her than this one. But that doesn't even make sense.

She nods.

The pads of her thumb roll against the raised hills of dry, marmalade-colored skin dotting his fingertips from carrying cinder blocks, wielding a hammer, transporting wood planks. Clarke follows behind him dutifully, allowing him to cut a path through the crowd, to be the one who taps on shoulders and swerves around the over-enthusiastic break dancers. There's one moment when he looks back over his shoulder at her when his eyes soften and he smiles, and her stomach tightens into a mean rubber ball at the cruelty of the universe.
When she sees Murphy, he's dancing with Raven at the edge of the dance floor, near the part of the bar where she left them. It's quieter here, farther away from the DJ. Murphy's hand grazes against Raven's waist from time to time, but they're not touching, not really. Raven grins for a moment though, interlacing her fingers and rippling them over her head like an expert belly dancer while she juts her hip out. Murphy laughs at something she said and taking her hand, spins her.

And that's when her eyes fall on Clarke. To be more specific, they immediately flick from Clarke to the beautiful man at her side.

Raven ceases motion immediately, and although it takes Murphy a second to catch on, when he does, his mouth falls open. But then he actually grins, rolling his eyes and shaking his head.

She's on top of them in a minute. Her eyes are glazed from the alcohol, but her every syllable is crystal clear.

"Where have you been?" she demands of Clarke. "You went to the bathroom and never came back! Didn't you get my texts? And what--" her eyes cut to Bellamy, jutting her chin out, "are you doing with my friend?"

"I don't think that's any of your business," Bellamy says with faux politeness as Murphy joins the party.

"Save it, Blake," she snaps. "It'll be my business when I've got to pick up the pieces of whatever," she gestures between them, "damage you wind up doing."

"I'm not doing any damage--" Bellamy begins angrily, but Raven talks over him, grasping Clarke's hand.

"Clarke, you can't! Not again. You did this when you were with Wells. Now you're gonna do it while he's dating Gina?" she shakes her head sadly. "You know better than this!"

Confusion passes like a storm cloud over Murphy's face.

"He's not with Gina. They broke up. He's been an even bigger asshole than usual for the last two
weeks," his blue eyes glint merrily.

Bellamy appears ready to commit murder, life behind bars be damned.

Clarke immediately turns to him, but he's still staring at Murphy, determinedly not watching her. She gets to take in his jaw pulsing instead.

"Bell," she tries to take two steps toward him but winds up swaying a little instead on her too-high heels. He catches her around the waist just in time. "Is that true?"

Raven's liquid honey eyes narrow, and she opens her mouth to protest again, but Murphy clasps a hand down around her shoulder.

"It won't be helpful," he warns her.

A twitch seems to run through Raven's body, but remarkably, she stays silent. She taps her foot impatiently, trying and failing to make eye contact with Clarke.

"Murphy," Bellamy's voice is full of barely contained indignation when he takes a step forward.

"Sorry, man! Just slipped out," he shrugs, mouth turning down. "Didn't realize it was a government secret."

Clarke observes the three of them as if peering in through a rounded glass. Raven huffing and rolling her neck. Murphy tracking each of Bellamy's movements. Bellamy's temple vein throbbing as his hands clench.

In a flash, Clarke pins her stomach against Bellamy's hip, hand splaying out over his heart to both steady herself and slow his steps.

When he looks down at the distraction, she just shakes her head back and forth one time, sharply.

"Murphy's all right," she says it like she's the teacher and he needs to learn his lesson. "Let it go."
His teeth snap together, but he jerks his head to the side in a *let's go* motion, taking her hand again.

"Don't follow me, ok?" she says to Raven, widening her eyes and raising her brows.

Raven violently snaps her loose hair behind her shoulder and sighs but doesn't argue. Clarke winks at Murphy and lets Bellamy lead her into the dim back hallway beyond the rows of shamrock, cobalt, and ruby liquor bottles glinting on high shelves over the bar, perfectly aligned.

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The pop music pulses through her chest and shakes her bones as she walks the corridor, no idea where they're going. She's only stayed in the sunlit booths of Mecha before, snacking on french fries and quesadillas Miller made her. Surprise passes across her features as she sees how twisted and tight this labyrinth of "management only" hallways actually appears to be. Bellamy's walking fast, and the posters on the wall flash by in a blur for her. He squeezes her hand once, as if to make sure she's still actually there.

At the end of the hallway, he turns left and continues moving. The third door down on the right is open, allowing a chink of lemony light to spill out into the hallway. He pulls her inside and snaps the door shut behind him with his boot, locking it.

She swallows audibly. She hasn't been alone with him since that late afternoon in her bedroom. The things she moaned that day still can make her squint her eyes shut and curl into the fetal position.

Clarke steps away, walking into the big rectangle of a storeroom. The ceiling is higher than she expected, and a few fluorescent beams glow hazily overhead, casting the corners of the room in shadow. Around her, towers of cardboard boxes stand, and the gray metal shelving is full of all kinds of drinks. It smells like air conditioning newly turned on, mostly fresh with just a pinch of moisture.

His heavy footsteps thud behind her, closer and closer, but still she doesn't move. When his arms circle her waist, hands opening on her hipbones, she breaks his hold before his lips can start touching her again. It's so quiet in here after the raucous party, her ears buzz.

"You and Gina broke up?" she asks, more accusatorially than she initially intended, turning to face him. "What Murphy said was true, wasn't it? That's why you're here alone?"
He lifts his left shoulder then lets it fall.

"I wasn't gonna miss my last weekend to hang out before school," he bites out. "Sue me."

Clarke blinks rapidly, mouth falling open. Her arms cross over her chest. It does little more than hitch her breasts up closer to the top of her dress, but probably only he realizes that.

"You broke up TWO WEEKS AGO, and you didn't think to call? Send a text? Throw up a smoke signal?!" the yelling is truly out of nowhere.

"Why would I?"

"Why would you?" she stamps her foot, feeling warmer by the second.

"Why would you grab me on a dance floor and grind on me? Does that sound normal to you?"

"You didn't even care who grabbed you, Clarke," he says darkly. "I could've been any guy. It didn't matter."

She stutters and stumbles as incoherent stammers erupt from her throat. Until finally --

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

His golden skin can't hide the ruddy color rising up on his cheeks. He throws out his arms widely.

"What do you think it means?" he yells. He takes a few, measured steps toward her, hair beginning to curl out as as the sweat and humidity from the dance floor have their way with it. She doesn't know if she's more insulted or infuriated. But before she can think of a cutting retort, he's talking again. "Look, you were there, right in front of me. I came up to you. I did something about it, didn't I?"

"So you thought you'd roll the dice and bet on the universe? Maybe I'll see her again, maybe I won't?"
He's close enough to view the heather flecks in her eyes.

"It worked, didn't it?" he husks out.

"You're ridiculous!" Clarke snaps. "And you don't believe in fated, cosmic shit anyway."

He rolls his eyes.

"If you're so upset, did you forget how to pick up the phone? It works both ways, you know."

"WHY WOULD I CALL A GUY WITH A GIRLFRIEND?" her scream tears from her throat, shocking them both.

It feels raw and stings now, and her head is starting to throb from the alcohol. She should have drank more water when Miller offered it. Her dress falls a little with her erratic movements, bringing the tops of her full breasts into view.

"Why would I sleep with a girl with a boyfriend?" he asks, deadly serious, the emotion in his eyes immobilizing her.

"That's not the point!"

"I think it's exactly the point."

She holds out her arm, warding him off from moving nearer to where she stands trembling.

"I warned you to get off me out there. I kept trying to tell you, to push you away. I was dancing by myself, minding my own business before you came up like a Neanderthal and--"

He rolls his eyes.
"Then why are you here with me right now?"

He pinches his T-shirt between three fingers and yanks it away from his chest in rapid motions, trying to fan himself. It makes her focus on the strip of his collarbone she can make out, the dark line of hair leading down in a trail into his boxers.

"Because we need to talk!"

"Is that why you came to Mecha? To talk to me?" he scoffs.

"Well, I didn't come to fuck you!" she shoots back meanly. "That's usually your idea."

It seems like the sting embeds into his skin, but she can't be sure.

"I came because Raven wanted backup. She was meeting Murphy for the first time after talking online. I didn't' know who he was or where he worked! It's not my fault, ok?"

He intuits she's telling the truth as soon as he says it, has a mostly sharp memory of teasing Murphy, the chain-link fence, whisky shots, slicing into cardboard crates. He recalls giving him shit about the mystery girl who turned out to be . . . right, Raven. She doesn't need to know that though.

He raises an eyebrow. "Ok."

"It's true! I didn't come here for you!"

"Got it, I heard you," he takes a step closer to her, and she automatically takes one back to keep the same amount of space between them, roughly three feet.

"I'm not lying," she spits. "You deleted me on Facebook. Why would I come here?"

"Did that hurt your feelings, Princess?"
"Fuck you," she hisses.

"No, no, I mean, you're right," he's mock thoughtful, gazing around the shelves in wonder. "This is definitely low-end after the Governor's Ball."

Chapter End Notes

Oh my goodness! Thank you all so much for the abundance of feedback after the last few chapters! Love hearing from you!! I hope to get one more chapter up tonight, so keep an eye out!
Her eyes narrow while her hands move to her hips.

"I knew you hated me. I knew all that 'I'll give you space to figure things out' was just bullshit."

He laughs meanly.

"You didn't need any time! You ran right back to him."

"Like you didn't run back to Gina!" she yells. "Probably slept with her already, too, right?" she jumps forward and shoves into his bicep with her small fingers. "Right?" she taunts.

His face is caught somewhere between laughter and rage.

"Does that piss you off, Princess? Because it shouldn't. You don't exactly have the moral high ground," he folds his arms over his chest.

"Bastard!" she flings the insult at him before stomping off toward the door.

She needs fresh air, needs to *breathe*, needs Murphy to pour her a shot of whatever's strongest until this all disintegrates into a bad dream.

He reaches the wood door first, slamming his shoulder into it in front of her, blocking her escape.

"Get the fuck out of my way, Bellamy! We're done. I'm over it."

"You can't end something that never started," he argues.

"Oh, right. Educate me about relationships, please. Because you're so successful at them," she snipes.
He bites his front teeth into his lower lip, holding back some kind of nasty smirk.

"Is that the best you can do? Still can't be honest about us?" he challenges harshly. "You can only insult me?"

"I learned from the best."

"Jesus, Clarke!" his fist collides with the door behind him, and she jumps. "Why can't you just say how you feel?"

She watches him for a lengthened moment, heart thumping madly against her ribs.

"Why can't you?" she whispers brokenly, infuriated that the tears choose now to start welling up.

He gaps at her.

"I did! Goddammit I told you to be with me!"

The tears do slip down her face now because he's giving her the look she can't handle, the one so full of raw pain that it actually hurts her, too.

His Adam's Apple bobbles as he breathes in hard, his exhale fanning across her face. He smells sweet and musky this close, and it's doing nothing for her resolve.

"It doesn't matter how I feel, Clarke. That picture of you with Wells and his family said it all. All of fucking California has to have seen it by now! Life's been treating you just fine, as always."

Her head migrates so far toward her right as she beholds him - still stoic, still holding it in - her ear almost hits her shoulder.

"Bellamy, Bellamy," her hands wrap around his wrists." Her eyes are drowning in black when he
brings himself to look at them. That night was horrible! You don't think I had fun? When your sister told me about--"

"Don't bring Octavia into this!" he snarls, roughly breaking free from her grasp.

She stumbles back, floored.

"If you didn't want your perfect bubble popped, you shouldn't have followed her! We don't all live privileged lives like you, Princess!"

Clarke's lost between wanting to smack him across his smug face and cradle him in her arms and never let go. She wants to rub away every dark stain that's ever touched him. Her breaths are shaky, and her heels are starting to stab at the soft undersides of her feet.

It's the tear that drops down his face that does it.

"Bellamy," her voice mellows out to its usual pleasant hum. "I'm so sorry that happened to you. I'm so sorry! I can't imagine," her fingers knit together in a pleading entreaty.

He doesn't say anything, won't look at her.

"But," she sighs heavily. It needs to be said. Even if it destroys her spirit to say it. "I saw you with Gina. You looked happy with her. And I-I overheard her talking about you a few weeks ago. We were both at the same nail salon."

His look is utterly confused, but she charges on.

"She's crazy about you! You should've heard all the amazing things she said about you. Don't throw that away over me, all right? We're like . . . like . . . " her brain casts around for the best metaphor, "Fire and ice."

"Fire and ice," he repeats, nodding a little. There's something that's sparking back to life in his brown eyes.
"Yes, we've got to let this go," she sniffles, sounding more practical, more pragmatic. More like the happy girl in biology lab before she ever laid eyes on him. "It's never going to work anyway. We're in different places in life," she echoes Raven's words. They sound so smart, and yet they wound so much. "Gina is good for you."

His eyes latch onto her face like he wants to drink in every word. This wasn't what she was going to say initially when he mentioned Wells, but as she watches his face warm at the thought of Gina, it seems more and more like the right call. The tall, willowy girl with the kind smile and dozens of photos worth of college memories, she's worthy of him. She'll be the one he can open up to about his pain. Raven's right. She was never going to be his choice.

"You've got good jobs and grad school in front of you at a great university in a program you love," she forces herself to go on. "Gina wants you in her life; I know she does! You've got a sister who'd walk through Hell and back for you, and friends like Miller who can't defend you fast enough."

She takes a deep, shaky breath. He's still staring at her, bemused? Transfixed? It's hard to say, and she's avoiding his freckles and the ripple in his abdomen when he stretches.

"You have everything you need to be so, so happy, Bell. I was a fun summer distraction," it's harder to keep the resentment out of her voice, but she tries to swallow it. After all, she's just as much to blame for what happened between them, if not more so. She steels herself, ready to make her voice hard. "You wanted to fuck me, and you did."

He bounces his back off the wall about to interrupt, but she halts him with an upraised hand.

"It's ok, I didn't stop you," she says. "I'm not blaming you."

I wanted you to. I was desperate for you to. But those confessions won't help, not now.

"I don't know why you ended things with Gina, but you'll work it out, and then you'll have a really good thing back in your life. Trust me. That sounds better than all this, doesn't it? Then risking your career? Then your sister hating me or Raven wanting to take a swing at you?"

She tries to smile a little at him, even though it's watery.
When he clears his throat, she's not expecting the rough gravel of his tone to send a shiver up her spine.

"It does. I won't lie to you, Princess," he says.

Her stomach plummets in a free fall. She wanted him to agree, desperately wanted him to agree, but not that fast. The rejection bites into her flesh, crippling her like corrosive acid. She was really his stress relief, a sexual distraction. It shouldn't wound like this; she already knew it.

Clarke tangles her hands in her hair and in three steps, collapses wearily against the shelves stocked with baskets of freshly laundered napkins and endless rows of salt and pepper shakers.

When he starts to pace, she barely registers it. But then his motions grow more frenzied. He stalks back and forth like a jungle cat.

"That's all a great analysis, Clarke," he says finally. "But you're missing one crucial insight."

She blinks.

"What?"

"Gina broke up with me."
"What?" "Why would she break up with you?"

Clarke stands still and shocked, sure she must have heard him wrong. It never crossed her mind that anyone would willingly leave him, especially after everything she heard Gina say. It's unfathomable. She seemed to feel so strongly. Be so sure of exactly who Bellamy was. Raven thought so, too. It's not like she'd imagined the whole damn thing. She'd seen them walking together so serenely across the quad, watched him press her into a tree and kiss her sweetly.

"Not for the reasons you are right now," he pushes off against the door and thrusts his hands into his pockets.

"Huh?" her bleary brain feels like someone left it in the boiling pan too long.

"You think I'm damaged goods," he says gruffly.

Well, that sure as hell wasn't what she was expecting.

"I do not! I think you're amazing!"

The words catapult out of her with such spontaneous strength he just has to believe them.

His mouth tightens as she blushes. But that's the only sign that he heard her words, let alone acknowledged their meaning.

"What happened with Gina?" she demands more insistently, kicking off her aching heels because she needs to focus on him and what he's saying.

She finds a strip of nearby, blank wall to rest against and gives him her undivided attention.
He fidgets a bit, kicking a loose beer bottle cap from foot to foot, so it scratches and grates on the floor, making her wince.

"Bell?"

"She said he didn't always like coming in second place with me."

Something reminiscent of hope flutters in her chest. But she pushes it down. He could mean Octavia. It's highly likely he does. God help the woman who tried to come between her and her brother.

"Second to who?" she whispers it.

His head snaps up, and he rolls his eyes, shaking his head.

"Who do you think?"

He fixes her with such a piercing, naked gaze, her body wants to fling itself the few feet across the room and bury her face in his chest. She tingles with the sensation of the desire as though a magnetic cord connected them.

But Clarke says nothing, just silently hopes and keeps watch.

He sighs, shoulders slumping with the weight of the omission.

"To you, babe. Always to you. Only to you."

Her nod is so brief she wonders if he saw it.

"But it doesn't matter anyway," at last his deep voice sounds a little broken as it rushes on. "You picked someone else. You've got your life, so go on and live it. I won't stop you anymore."
He ambles farther into the room, away from the door, leaving her exit unbarred.

She wraps her hand around the gray shelf next to her, mentally spinning like a top.

"I broke up with Wells."

It hangs there, between them.

"Why? He's like the world's most perfect boyfriend," Bellamy’s scoff isn't the reaction she expected.

It twists nastily in her stomach.

"I don't need perfect," she takes a step forward, and he pivots to face her fully.

His chuckle chills her.

"Right."

She closes the gap between them, reaching out for his hands.

"It's true! I need you though."

"You need me?" he raises an incredibly skeptical eyebrow.

"Yeah, I do," she rolls her lips inward, willing the waterworks to remain at bay for just one damn conversation with him.

Something breaks open in her chest. It feels freeing. She remembers what her mother used to say to her when she'd read her a fairytale before bed if the story was about a moral lesson. She'd prop herself up on Clarke's frilly, pink pillows and tickle her before cupping her cheek like it was delicate china.
The real world doesn't just have good guys and bad guys, honey. Everyone has a little bit of both in them. But always try to tell the truth when you can, Clarke. Remember the truth won't suffocate you. Your father knows that, but I'm still learning. I want you to learn faster, with less heartache.

. . .

. . .

. . .

. . .

"You left me."

Bellamy's declaration is a genuine axe in her side. Her knees weaken, despite being barefoot now.

She shakes her head.

"I shouldn't have!"

"Why not?" his condescension will never cease infuriating her. "You had so many good reasons."

"Because every day I wake up, and the first thing I remember is how I can't talk to you, can't be with you," she manages, cheeks wet. "It makes me sick! I miss you."

"You miss me?"

"Are you just going to keep repeating everything I say?"

She's exasperated, but she knows he is too, far more so than her.
"Maybe, until you get real."

"Get real?" She flings her arms out. "This is as real as it gets, Bell."

And it kind of is. They're alone, enclosed in a space the size of a postage stamp. The walls press in on them, capture their secrets. There's nowhere to run. Nothing to do but face it, and still she can't.

She's not exactly sure why she can't. She told Wells, told him all the time. But now she knows she didn't mean it in the right way, not in the way you're supposed to when it's like this. Not in the profound, wherever-you-go-is-my-home kind of way. What she felt for Wells was unsullied and loyal affection, sure, but it didn't make the hairs on her arms stand on end, didn't make her throat close with the mere thought of being away from him for another week, day, hour. Bellamy already lives inside her, and he'll be nearly impossible to evict.

"It's not," he argues.

Because he's him. And she's her. Arguing is what they do.

His eyes, this whole time hovering near her face without quite reaching it, suddenly lock on hers. Adrenalin floods her system. He rakes a hand through his hair, messing it up completely. He looks wild and dangerous and a bit untethered.

But, fuck it. She wants him anyway. Every version of him is one she can spend time with, come to understand, learn to respect.

"Come here," the words fall out of her mouth more like begging than anything.

He approaches slowly, and when he's close enough, she tries to lace her arms around his neck, but he shakes his head, trapping them against the wall at her sides. The smell of the woods on his skin puts her at ease, and his chest grazes against hers before he's backing up a few inches.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry for running away," she says sincerely.

He nods.

"So tell me," he kindly demands it.
Clarke could drown in his eyes if there was time enough. She gazes into them, nodding that it's true. Yet she knows when she says it, she will cross a line she can't uncross. That he'll become the center she builds her life both with and around. Then again, he already is. He already affects so many decisions he's not even aware of, but he deserves more than that. She hopes she's strong enough to give it to him.

She takes one last, steadying breath.

"I love you, Bellamy. I'm so in love with you. I tried to, but I can't ignore it anymore."

The burgeoning smile playing at his lips is dampened by apprehension lines sketched around his eyes and mouth.

He clears his throat. The moment seems suspended in time. Everything is so very still. Through the walls, they hear the distant rumble of the party, the shouts, laughter, lyrics about celebrating life. She's surprised when his left hand releases her wrist, and he runs his fingertips along her side instead, an unconscious attempt to steady her labored breaths she didn't realize were still bubbling from inside her.

"Do you want a way out of this, Clarke?"

She shakes her head, wide-eyed, eyes softening completely.

Her little hand curls up against the back of his neck, winding its way into his curls and scrubbing his scalp gently.

"No, baby. I want to keep falling."
I don't even know!! But this chapter kind of wrecked me. So be forewarned. I can't believe I'm here 100k+ words later. This fic is now approximately the length of Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban. I'm not sure what to make of that.

He lays the flat of his palm right next to her left breast, his thumb and index finger curling around it in a crescent shape. Below the veins and cushion of his skin, her heart thuds solidly, but faster than usual.

Her mouth is parted, and she's staring at him in a way that exposes herself like sex never managed to. Her blue eyes remind him of the power of full moons - you just can't look away once you catch a glimpse of one in the sky. But he can't ignore the rapid way her chest is rising and falling.

Her hand stills in his hair.

"What are you doing?" she asks.

"I'm not sure," he concedes.

Clarke's porcelain hand, trembling and cool against his overheated neck, sweeps across his cheek. Carefully, she swipes her thumb over the scar above his lip. His breath catches. When her eyes meet his again, he pays attention to the dark fan of her lashes and the glitter outlining the lids that sparkle like stars. Then she lays her fingers on top of his hand splayed over her chest and steps into him, straining up on her tiptoes as she draws nearer. The press of her hand is secure, and it causes his elbow to bend back, but she clearly wants to keep them connected. He releases her other wrist just as her lips make contact with the scar.

"I'm sure," she whispers it against his ear.

The memories crash back around him like rain pouring down from the atmosphere. Emerson sneering at him, telling he'd never amount to anything worthwhile. The cold darkness of the closet he
could not break free from, no matter how tightly he twisted the handle, pounding against the door with little fists until he collapsed in exhaustion. The time his mother spent all afternoon baking a birthday cake that Emerson threw at his feet, splattering blue icing against the walls in one of his drunken tirades. The smack across his face when he brought home a C in math. Being left behind at an isolated gas station somewhere in Arizona because Emerson was "distracted" and "forgot he was there."

Bellamy has a strange thought that this must be what getting shot with a stun gun feels like. His muscles are paralyzed, his left arm falling limply from her ribs down to hang at his side. Clarke steps back, the lines sprouting up between her brow as she worries her lip.

"This isn't what you want?" the last word catches, soars upward two octaves. "I'm not what you want?"

He licks his lips. His brain is thunking along five paces behind hers. It's like he's floating at the bottom of a pool, and she's talking to him from above water. Pain races across her cheekbones as her body bristles.

"Oh, ok," she scratches at her neck, glances down and hikes up the top of the dress intent on slipping low over her breasts. "I-I'm sorry. That's not what you meant. Uh, I'm sorry. I'll go."

Swiping her hair across her glistening brow, she stumbles toward the spot her heels rest stacked on top of each other in the corner nearest the door.

*Go.* The word slams into him, and he squeezes his eyes shut tightly before ripping them back open. *Not again.*

"No!" he surges toward her, dark hair falling into his eyes.

She tries to sidestep him, but his arms cage her in.

*I can't let her leave.*

All he knows for sure is that she was warm and real under his fingertips a moment ago, told him *she loved him,* and now she's ready to leave him forever.
"It's fine, Bellamy. I misunderstood," she says crisply, despite the closeness of their bodies. She swipes away one lone tear from under her lid line. He sees the way her mouth's quaking though as soon as she stops talking. "It's ok. It was a fun summer," she smiles in what he supposes she means for sarcasm. "I can always say that I learned more than I bargained for."

Yet her final gasping glance into his eyes splinters his swollen heart. And then, he can't help it, despite the tidal wave of pain that just engulfed him, he laughs. Goddammit, she always makes him laugh.

"What the fuck could be funny right now?" she demands, pushing her hair to one side of her shoulder.

"I'm the one who got more than he bargained for," he smiles with the tips of his lips.

Still, she struggles against the hard press of his chest, slapping her hand against his forearm.

"Let me, go!" he sees the sheen of sweat against her neck and below her collar bone, her breasts heaving up before his eyes as she squirms. "I'm not just the girl you get to fuck whenever you want! Just let me go!"

She attempts to level a kick at his shin, but somehow, he sees it in time. His long fingers feel hot against the slick coolness of the bit of thigh he grasps just above her knee.

She sucks air in between her teeth, and it makes a whizzing noise.

"Relax, Princess!" he soothes his thumb over her skin. "You're definitely a lot more than that."

He's holding her leg suspended in air, her thin, shapely calf swaying near his hip. As he slides his hand higher, her eyes expand in reluctance.

"You're ok. It's ok," he shuffles a baby step into her, letting his hand off the wall and wrapping his sweaty palm around the thin band of her waist. His dick is starting to swell and strain again against his pants, but he tries to hold his hips off of her.
"It's not ok. This isn't ok. Get off me!" she shakes her head, shoves at his chest. "You can't use me anymore."

The words slice into his chest.

"I was never using you," he hisses, some strange cocktail of anger and desire boiling up through his body. "I love you, too!"

In one swift move, he sweeps up her other leg and pulls both around his waist, stepping her back into the wall. Her hands lock around his neck for balance. Bending his knees, he hoists her up to get a more secure hold, his biceps straining a little to do it. He feels her eyes on his muscles and smirks. Bellamy bands one hand firmly under her ass, leaving his palm upturned, so he can feel it and flattens the other along the wall for her head to rest on like a pillow. She whimpers, but her thighs tighten on either side of him. At this angle, he can feel his dick rubbing below her bunched up dress against her pussy.

Apparently, so can she.

She arches her neck back and wiggles her hips, but then relaxes, and digs the french manicured nails on her right hand into the meaty part of his shoulder.

"You don't," she gasps. "And I can't do this anymore!"

"I do," he insists vehemently, rolling himself into her. "I've loved you since you baked me those damn cookies."

The flush at her throat is too inviting; he can't help himself anymore. He latches his lips to the place where her shoulder meets her neck and sucks at it harshly. He smiles when her moan reverberates through her.

"Then why... then why... then why did you just do that?" she gasps.

Unwillingly, he releases her throat and kisses her temple instead. He steps back from the wall and strokes his fingertips up and down her spine. Looking into her insistent blue eyes is difficult, but at
least she's not fighting him anymore. Her wrists are linked around his neck, and she's tickling the curls there. Her face is full of curiosity when he dares take it in, not the venom he feared.

"I don't like facing my demons, Clarke. When you touched that scar," he shrugs. "I don't know. They all came back. You caught me off guard."

She looks perplexed.

"The memories came back you mean?" she murmurs.

He licks his lips.

"Yeah."

"But I've touched it before," she says thoughtfully. "Kissed it before."

The tightening of his jaw sends shot of pain into his head. He says a silent prayer to ward off a migraine.

"But you didn't know before. You didn't know the truth."

She nods, teeth drawing in her bottom lip.

"I'm sorry, Bell."

"Nothing to be sorry for, not your fault," comes the sound of his gruff voice, shot through with shouting over the music, shouting in general. "It's my fault. I was wound too tight I guess."

She gives him a small half-smile and kisses him right in the center of his cheek.

"If you ever want to talk about it . . . " her hands are massaging his shoulders pleasantly now. "I have
a feeling I'll be hanging around for a while."

_Damn, where did she come from?_

"I think so, too," he raises his eyebrows at her playfully. "And believe me, I know you love to talk."

She chuckles.

"So, you did want me to say it?" she says hesitantly after a few moment's pause.

He laughs, reaching up to thread their fingers together.

"It's definitely what you want to hear from the girl you're in love with."

Her lips are soft and inviting when he finally captures them with his own. She kisses him gently and chastely but makes sure it lasts and lingers by catching his bottom lip between hers before pulling away.

"Sorry, I'm sure you don't want to get into all that," she says as he drops her gently to the floor. Clarke takes a step back. "It's . . . ah, it's getting late. I should probably go check on Raven and Murphy. We can talk tomorrow? You should relax after working all day," she says shyly.

The tightening in his groin is pure torture.

"I thought I got you for that," he tips his head to the side, a smile forming.
All that cute sweetness was only going to last for so long, right? But hey, at least they’re calling a thing a thing. As usual, I have no idea, and I’m sorry.

A tiny flash of annoyance flicks through her, but it’s quelled by the arousal she finds darkening his eyes.

"You might," Clarke replies, rubbing the sole of her foot into her calf to ease a twitching muscle.

"Oh, I might?" Bellamy teases her.

"Yeah, you might."

She spins around and strolls to the corner for her heels, slipping them back on. When she makes her way over to him, his eyebrows are raised, and he’s bouncing his leg slightly. But he stills it instantly at the look on her face.

"Why do you say that kind of stuff?"

"What kind of stuff?"

Clarke senses the heat emanating from his chest and runs a finger across his lips, thrilled with the new idea that she can touch him whenever she wants now.

"Like what you just said. That I could help you relax."

"Oh," he catches her finger between his lips, sucking it into his mouth and nibbling at it a bit with his teeth until she laughs and pulls it back.
"Because it's true."

"But it sounds so . . ." she crinkles her nose.

"What?" Bellamy's eyes sparkle at her.

He loops an arm back around her waist, swaying her weight from one foot to the other.

"Caveman-esque."

His laugh fills the space.

"That's your favorite description for me, isn't it?"

But she doesn't get a chance to answer because he leans in, and his mouth is warm and insistent. She leaves tiny kisses along his lips until he groans, and his fingers bite into her side. The taste of his tongue gliding over hers after so long without it sends sparks of light through her. She chases after his tongue when he pulls it away, playing with her, until she's the one grasping at his T-shirt and flicking her hands under it to paw at his stomach.

"Bell," she breathes it out when he affixes his mouth to her jaw instead.

His smile presses into her skin.

"I do it because it turns you on."

The insinuation is antithetical to everything she's ever been taught about relationships. Then his hand's grasping under her dress, flicking against the molten heat of her inner thighs, skimming the edge of her black panties before she captures it hard in her own and pulls it away.

"It bothers you that I'm right," he hums against her ear, voice full of laughter. "I was just going to
show you how right I was."

"I know what you were going to do," she says swiftly, depositing his hand back on her waist and catching his chin in her grip, so his cheeks are smushed together.

She bites the inside of her cheek as she surveys him, but his face is still one of total amusement. So she releases his face just as he asks, "Are you saying I'm wrong?"

Clarke purses her lips at him.

"I never said you were wrong."

His grin is enormous, showing what seems like most of his teeth. Rather than watch him gloat, she takes his hand instead, tugging him across the storeroom to a set of sturdy looking boxes about three and a half feet off the ground.

"Up please," she taps the top of one and looks at him expectantly, trailing her fingers through her loose hair.

She loves watching him admire it.

"Sure," he says with just a touch of sarcasm, gripping her around the waist and hoisting her up.

"But it's fine if you use me for my muscles, of course," he says offhandedly.

"Thank you," she says primly, swinging her legs. "And yes, exactly."

A hint of something primal flicks through his brown eyes, and her stomach coils in response. He settles a hand on each bare knee, pushing them apart and stepping between them.

"Why'd you put the heels back on?" he asks her before wrapping his lips around her top one.
His hands rest right under her breasts, thumbs slanted diagonally across their ripe fullness, flicking back and forth over the easy peaks of her nipples, which harden rapidly.

She kisses him back feverishly, absorbing his invasion, fire licking at her insides from the stimulation.

When she draws away and opens her eyes, she sees his are completely black like an evening without electricity, and he's watching her expectantly.

"I think they make my legs look good," she says charmingly, batting her eyelashes.

The shoes truly are a masterpiece. Matte black, four inches off the ground with two, thin straps that cross around her ankles, two more that make pretty diamonds of the top skin of her feet, and a gold lining peeping out at the open-toed bottom.

But nonchalance is a little difficult to pull off when his hands continue to lightly grope her chest. The action's making her thoughts jumble as shocks travel straight to her clit. He runs one hand down the outside of her thigh and calf, humming his approval.

"And . . ."

"Yeah?" he kisses the area below her ear, then in front of it, before settling on the tip of her nose and central swell of her lips.

"I figured you'd prefer them on. Give you something pretty to look at," she smirks at him and rubs the heel of one shoe against the bottom curve of his ass.

He widens his eyes briefly, catching her meaning.

"You're too fucking much, Clarke."

"I know. That's why you love me."
It tumbles out of her mouth the way she's always said things like it, but it falls heavily in the space between them. She realizes the difference immediately, and it appears, so does he.

They're still for a second.

"It's one of the reasons," he admits after a moment, going back to kneading the soft flesh of her breasts.

She grasps onto his shoulders, scooting farther toward the edge of the cardboard, wrapping her legs more fully around him and grinding against his hardness.

"You wanna do this here?" You're sure?" he asks.

"Can anyone come in?"

"No, I locked us in."

"Then yes."

"I could take you back home with me," he offers.

"Later, we'll do it there, too."

He laughs outright, the familiar expression rumbling out of him.

"Whatever the hell you want, Princess."

He claims her mouth with his own and unzips the back of her dress, so it pools around her waist. It has a built-in bra. Therefore, her rosy breasts are exposed to his hungry gaze immediately. He grins wolfishly at her then moves to suckle one, laving over and over the ridges of her areola and nipple until she's squirming, digging the heels into his lower back and latching into his curls to draw him closer still.
"Oh my God," she exhales over the top of his head, feeling him twitch against her thigh.

He breaks away for a moment

"Such pretty tits. They're a full handful, baby," he praises her. "Do you know what I wanna do to them?"

Words are too much effort. She shakes her head.

He wisps over her cheek, smoothes back her hair, and reaches down to tweak her left nipple with a touch of roughness.

"I wanna slide my dick between them soon, ok?" he says, all velvet and silk.

Her eyes are hazy on his, trying to focus on his freckle patterns. But she gasps out something that sounds like assent.

And then one of his hands is glued to the jiggling flesh of the breast in his hot mouth, while the other clamps down on the bare skin of her upper thigh. Her dress is rolled almost all the way to her waist now, but the thought of that only makes her pussy clench.

When Bellamy switches to the other breast, she keens, jerking her searching fingers out and landing on the bulge in his pants, trying to stroke him through the fabric.

"Easy, baby," he croons against her shimmering pale skin, flicking out a pointy tongue at random intervals to shock her aroused nipple.

He reaches down lazily and tears her hand away, locking it down at her side.

Her grip in his hair tightens, but a moment later, he's unclenched that one too and pinned it near her knee.
Reaching around her back, Bellamy guides her ass right to the teetering edge of the box, her back at a forty-five degree angle to stay upright, causing a crunch in her abs. Rolling his scratchy hands up her thighs, he thrusts slowly against her soaked underwear. Her breaths come out in ragged gasps.

"Bellamy . . . Bellamy . . ."

Pulling his hips back, he smiles at the glossy look in her eyes and, slipping a hand between her legs, expertly catches the hood of her clit between his thumb and pointer finger through the cloth.

"Ahh!" she gasps as he rolls it around in his fingers, electrical fire flooding her.

"There you go. That's what you need," he encourages before flicking his tongue back into her mouth, pressing the cotton against her opening as he does it.

She kisses him eagerly, sucking on his tongue. The edge of his thumb juts against the underside of her clit repeatedly, and the stimulation puts her nerve endings on overdrive. Her legs instinctively try to close against so much pleasure, but he keeps them open as she claws at his back.

When his eyes meet hers again, they're filled with barely contained intensity.

"Now be a good girl, and ask me for it nicely."
This is ridiculous, but I don't care. Because Abby just wants Clarke to know she'll be happy again one day and LOOKS AT BELLAMY when she says it in the stage directions of 4x12. There is a God, and endgame is coming, my friends. :)

"Bell," she buzzes the name into the gap between his shoulder and neck, lips brushing over the slickness of his skin.

"Mhmhm?" he hums, catching her earlobe between his teeth.

Her body's already shuddering by the time he latches around the elastic band hitched at her hip and yanks it violently. The ripping sound catapults her back to reality.

Clarke clenches her jaw. She's barely hanging on to the edge of the crate tower as it is, knees braced on the sides of his hips. And now he's pressing a hand under her ass, arching her hips, and sliding her torn underwear down her shaking legs like she weighs nothing while she struggles to remain upright.

"Bell!"

"Have something you wanna tell me, Princess?" he rasps.

"You tore t-t-them!" she moans accusatorially, trying to fix him with a fierce glare, but it's no use.

"Only way to get them off," he grunts," tossing them to the floor in a black puddle. "You don't need 'em anyway."

She frowns like a disgruntled child who didn't get dessert and huffs, flopping herself across the top of the box on her back and letting her legs dangle over the side.
"I liked those."

But the sound of his belt buckle clinking open sharpens her senses. Bellamy appears swimming in her line of vision, all freckles and angled cheekbones and dimpled chin.

"I like you," he wiggles his eyebrows.

Her pout slips reluctantly into a smile.

"You'll buy me new ones?"

"I'll buy you new ones," he says dutifully.

"You do have a thing for lingerie."

He scoffs.

Clarke's legs wrap around the top of his ass in a highly unladylike way as he rolls his eyes and bends forward to suckle at one breast, then the other, pushing them together tightly and pinching her nipples. The wetness seeping out of her smears across the narrow strip of skin visible beneath his T-shirt, but she's too far gone to care.

"Jesus," she grits out, rising off the cardboard against her will and thereby better thrusting her chest into his waiting mouth.

"So gorgeous," he murmurs, lapping his tongue over the generous swells until her fingers wrapped around the back of his neck urge him back to her mouth.

Clarke lets his hand slide between her shoulder blades and lift her back up. He nuzzles her face with the bit of stubble cropping up along his jawline until she giggles. But when her lips make contact with his once more in the shaking and shuddering, she kisses him hungrily, darker and dirtier than she usually does. Bellamy responds in kind, grunting in what must be satisfaction when her small hands wrap around his waistband, tugging his jeans and boxers down in one quick motion.
She looks straight up into his eyes as she grasps him firmly, stroking down his length. He catches the glint in her eye, the amusement when she digs a finger into the underside of his cock and his hips jerk forward. Clarke braces a hand on the tight muscles of his abs and increases her pace, raising her eyebrows suggestively.

"You gonna come on my pretty tits, Blake?" she challenges. "I know you want to."

The growl is caught in his throat, and his pupils obliterate the brown warmth of his irises.

"No," he snaps, shoving her hand away.

He takes a mean hold on the bottom of her thighs and rocks himself right against her exposed heat, teasing her. Clarke looks down when he pulls away, sees the head of his cock glistening with her fluids. Her stomach is tightening; she's afraid she'll let go before he even really gets started.

"Say it," he demands, voice darkening.

She watches his resolve slipping, sees the intense way he's trying to keep his face calm and controlled. With her crinkled dress still stuck around her waist, scratching at her skin, she feels simultaneously restless over and paralyzed by the sensations coursing through her. His cock flicks up against her entrance again and she whines.

"Bellamy, I want you. Please," she cries, letting her nails sink into his back.

"Not quite right," he mutters brokenly, grasping at her breast and slipping his tongue back inside her mouth when she gasps.

Her fingers melt into his tangled curls, smooth up the side of his jaw, stroke the warmth of his bicep until he relents and removes his lips.

"You're the only one I want," she confesses quietly.
He leans his forehead against hers, and takes her hand.

"Slow this time, ok?" she whispers.

He nods, kissing her cheek.

BANG.

BANG.

BANG.

"Clarke!" Raven's yell is audible through the sturdy door. "We've got to go! You told your parents midnight!"

Her eyes widen in painful surprise at the jolt. Bellamy's nestled right against her folds, his index finger already on the hood of her clit. The smell of his cologne mingled with her perfume and arousal is making her dizzy. In slow motion, she lifts her watch up and checks the time. 11:20 p.m. They have ten minutes, maybe, before she absolutely has to be walking out the door if she ever wants to leave the house again.

"What do I do?" she whispers.

Bellamy sucks in a breath. She wants to reach up and trace the vein in his neck but thinks better of it.

"Give us a minute, Raven!" he yells back over her head, losing his fingers in her hair.

She'd laugh if there was any room between their bodies.

"Hurry the fuck up!" Raven shouts back, exasperated.
Clarke thinks she hears Murphy's voice but can't make out what he's saying.

"They'll hear us," she says suddenly, catching the gleam in his eye.

"Then be quiet," he returns, placing a finger against her lips.

She shivers, and he grabs her thighs once more and thrusts into her.

"Shhh," he urges when she begins to call out.

She lets the sound die in her throat.

"Some say the word will end in fire," he murmurs, sliding out of her warm heat, which tries to cling to him.

"Hmm?" she purrs, hands clutching the corners of the box for dear life.

"Some say in ice," Bellamy continues, ignoring her as his cock pulses back into her channel.

She bites down on her lip, straining to be silent.

"From what I've tasted of desire, I hold with those who favor fire."

His bulbous head is tearing along her inner wall, rutting against the spongy patch of nerves buried there. She jerks against him.

"But if I had to perish twice," he pulls out of her completely, holding her stare before pressing just an inch of himself back between her legs, then two.

She's never been able to watch them join together quite like this before.
"I think I know enough of hate, To say that for destruction ice is also great," he pistons forward as her mouth drops open and her walls relax as she accepts him fully.

"And would suffice."

His finger rubs urgently on her clit and she starts to shake, pelvis tightening impossibly further. When her walls first flutter, she bites into his arms. He holds her there, suspended, as she lets go.

His calloused palm covers her mouth with moderate pressure, and he makes sure she can breathe through her orgasm. She can't help but leave tiny kisses against his skin, and he offers her a melting half-smile at the gesture. When her last tremor subsides, he pulls out of her with a soft groan and pistons his hips, so his cock slips easily into her lubricated pussy as he maintains the right angle. With a better purchase on the cardboard, she lifts one of his hands in her own and kneads it against her right breast until his eyes meet hers, half-dazed with want, and she feels him release inside her.

"What was that?" she asks softly a couple minutes later, cradling his head under her chin and kissing the top of it.


She slips off the box with a small whooshing sound, hitting the hard floor with a thud that vibrates up her ankles and into her calves. Catching his hand, she pulls him down to lean against the boxes with her, readjusting her dress as she goes.

"I had to memorize it in high school. Didn't know I remembered," he continues, pulling her into his sweaty chest and lacing an arm around her waist to zip her up. He's already dressed, of course, since he never undressed to begin with.

"You said we were--"

"Fire and Ice. No, I get it," she smiles up at him.

Bellamy sighs.
"I just wanna sleep. Come home with me."

"I want to," she turns into him, letting one leg drape over his. "But you know I can't. We told my --"

"CLARKE! NOW!" Raven screams from the other side of the door. "Murphy's got the other key, and I am not afraid to use it!"

"Ok, ok! One second!" she tugs herself to her feet, crinkling her nose as a bit of Bellamy's come trickles out of her, shooting him a murderous look when she is forced to climb back into ruined underwear. But something is better than nothing.

Bellamy stifles a chuckle and stands, walking over to the shelves of supplies and bringing her back a napkin to clean herself. He reaches out to smooth her hair made larger and frizzier by the circumstances just as the doorknob rattles.
Raven's expression is caught between exasperation and annoyance when the door finally opens from the other side.

"Good to see respecting other people's privacy is still a high priority for you," Bellamy grunts to Murphy, who has a key in hand and is standing two feet from the doorknob.

Murphy throws a winning grin in Raven's direction. She shuffles her feet but meets Bellamy's fierce glare.

"Hey, the lady asked, and I answered."

"One hour later, and you're already whipped," Bellamy shoves at his shoulder.

"I don't know about that--" Murphy starts to protest, but Clarke's blonde hair appears in the chink of light, and Bellamy's face softens.

"A guy who actually does what the girl he's into asks him to do. Must be a novel concept for you," she teases him, mouth quirking up as she slips into her shoe.

He holds out his arm openly, and she tucks herself into the space against the side of his chest, looking from Raven to Murphy.

"So this is a thing now?" Raven demands, apparently past the point of caring about tact. Her voice is loud and a little hoarse, even though they're all concealed away from the roaring party.

Clarke glances up at Bellamy, whose eyes find hers easily. He quirks an eyebrow at her. She squeezes him around the waist in response before turning back to Raven with a smile.

"Yeah, I think we're going to give being out in the open a try."

Raven's mouth wiggles, but she says nothing, looking at her glowing iPhone instead.

"Whatever, we'll deal with it all later. It's 11:30. We've got to roll."

With a final skeptical look at Bellamy, she walks hurriedly to Murphy, bounces up on her toes, and leaves a kiss on the side of his cheek.

"Thanks for everything," she lilts from under her eyelashes.

Murphy pauses in surprise but regains his composure quickly and gives her an easy wink.

"Anytime, gorgeous."

"Say goodbye to Blake," Raven says more sharply, eyeing Clarke, before fiddling with her phone again, no doubt requesting an Uber.

Bellamy's arm tightens around her waist, and he nudges against her cheek with his nose, making her giggle.

"Sure you can't come home with me?"

Murphy clears his throat loudly and, heading over toward Raven, steers her farther down the hall in
the direction of the bar with one hand on the small of her back.

Clarke catches Raven watching them over her shoulder before redirecting her attention to Bellamy.

"Yeah, I'm sure. I'm not home alone anymore," she says quietly, hiding her face in his chest. "I would if I could."

His groan of a reply ripples into her skin as she presses closer against him. Suddenly, she feels his hands on her back, but he only pulls up her zipper more fully.

"Evidence," he chuckles against her hair.

"I gotta go, Bell," she tips her head back to take in his freckles one last time.

He nods, swiping his thumb across her cheekbone in a fleeting caress before she half-jogs down the hall toward Raven, who's motioning her to hurry up with her hand.

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A slow, but triumphant smile colors Murphy's face as he ambles back to Bellamy, jutting his chin out and sinking his hands into his pockets.

"So, uh, if I read that right, I kind of helped you get your girl back."

"How do you figure?" Bellamy lets out a deep sigh and knots his fingers through his hair.

He already feels his arm tingling like it's missing something, and Clarke disappeared around the corner less than a minute ago.

Murphy's face clouds with suspicion.

"Are you blind, man? I held Raven off, and let me tell you, it was not easy. That girl is determined when she's angry."

"What does she have to be angry about?" Bellamy snaps, giving Murphy his full attention and taking a step closer. "I talked to her earlier. She seemed all right."

"You were probably drunk," Murphy snorts but tenses under Bellamy's glare.

"I don't know," Murphy hedges, glancing at a skinny black-haired guy awkwardly trying to dance his way into a group of girls who continue to turn their backs to him.

"Murphy!" Bellamy interrupts, voice harsher. "You're telling me you spent the whole night trying to get with her, and you have no idea what she was thinking?"

Murphy scratches the back of his neck but doesn't make eye contact.

"Yo! Blake! Murphy! Where the fuck are you guys!" they hear the shout of Miller in the distance. "We're slammed out here! I need you!"

"She just . . . you know . . . thought you were maybe rebounding from Gina. Trying to make yourself feel better because you knew Clarke would, you know . . . "

"No, I don't know," Bellamy spits, narrowing his eyes and moving his fists to his waist.

"Put out," Murphy swallows and hisses out air.
It happens so fast.

Bellamy's hand is clenched around Murphy's neck, and he has him pinned against the wall, balancing on the tips of his shoes.

"Bell," Murphy croaks, face rapidly transitioning from pinkish cream to an ugly maroon.

"Don't you ever say that about her again! Do you understand me?" Bellamy threatens, bringing his face within inches of Murphy's.

"Sorry," Murphy tries, but Bellamy still holds him in place, weakening his grip only by millimeters.

"Holy shit!" Miller yells, running down the hall toward them. "Let him go, Bellamy! Now!"

Bellamy's fingers snap open simultaneously, and Murphy gasps for breath, rubbing at his throat. Miller jumps inbetween them, crouched forward, holding out his arms in a warning pose.

"I can't leave you two assholes alone for five minutes, can I?" he yells, head swiveling between them.

"It wasn't even me!" Murphy throws out, looking mutinous, when he can finally talk again. "I like Clarke. You asked what Raven was thinking, and I told you, you dick!"

"What's he talking about?" Miller demands of Bellamy.

Bellamy jolts his shoulder forward but doesn't speak. His eyes are indiscernible.

"Just don't talk any shit about Clarke," Murphy mutters to Miller, slamming into Bellamy's shoulder as he stalks off toward the bar.

"Clarke found you?" Miller starts, turning back to Bellamy. "I knew she was here and gave her some water, but she didn't want to bother you, and--"

"I found her," Bellamy corrects him. "Long story. I'll tell you later. C'mon," he claps Miller on the back. "Let's get back to work."

Miller supplies the hint of a smile as Bellamy stands up straighter and unclenches his jaw.

"You two, uh, talk things out?" He throws his friend a sly look, taking in Bellamy's rumpled shirt and hair wilder than usual.

Bellamy can't swallow the smirk fast enough.

"Something like that."

"Where'd she go?" Miller glances around.

"Left with her friend Raven. They had to get home."

"Did you say goodbye before Murphy got here?" Miller snorts. "Or let me guess, better yet, Murphy interrupted, right?"

He doesn't pause to look at Bellamy but rambles on.

"Well, it's all right. I'm sure Clarke knows you're in deep at this point. Your damn face is like a puppy's whenever she's around..."
Bellamy stops mid walk, staring at his friend a little bemused. He remembers Raven's cutting parting look, what Murphy said, Clarke's apprehension as she followed her friend.

He realizes he doesn't feel nearly so confident and takes off toward the front door.

"Ten guesses what that's about," Luna rolls her eyes, bored, as he skids along the floor past her hostess stand.
The car ride back to Santa Monica Canyon is uncomfortably silent. Raven's propped up into the corner between her seat and the door as far away from Clarke as she can get, one leg crossed over the other as she jiggles her foot consistently. The night is dark, with thin yet puffy clouds constantly crowding out the moon.

After several attempts at small talk, their driver lapses into silence and turns up the radio instead. He's got a kind of Fabio look to him - longish dirty blonde hair, a broad back, and amused blue eyes that dart between the girls in the rear view mirror from time to time. Clarke has no idea what his name is since she didn't order the ride.

"Raven, you don't have a reason to be upset," Clarke tries halfway home, looking at her friend out of the corner of her eye.

Raven turns her face to the window, watching the headlights of cars on the opposite side of the highway flick past.

"He just broke up with her, and he jumps right back to you," she hisses back over a minute later out of nowhere. "What does that tell you?" she slaps against Clarke's knee, who jolts.

"It tells you he's a player, and he just wants to get laid!" she answers her own question.

"Well that's one interpretation," the driver mutters thoughtfully.

Clarke turns to her, indignant.

"You don't know what you're talking about!" she hurtles the words across the tan leather. "Why do you even care so much? If I'm happy, why can't you be happy for me?"

"Yeah, it's totally about me not wanting you to be happy," Raven shakes her head. "You're just gonna let him use you all over again."

"Bellamy never used me!" Clarke all but yells it. "Just because your relationship ended badly, it doesn't mean all guys suck!"

"That's valid," the driver remarks, tilting his head.

Clarke pulls up at her dress again, reshuffling her hips as more thick moisture seeps out of her unexpectedly. Her cheeks are mottled a shade of fruit punch.

"Gina broke up with him because he couldn't get over me!"

"Right," Raven scoffs. "Of course that's what he'd tell you. Are you really that naive? I'm not doing this again with you, Clarke. When it all goes to Hell, I don't wanna hear it, that's all I'm saying. You deserve . . ." she glances around at the dark nothing of the inside of the car, " . . . someone who doesn't just want to use you in a back room," she whispers it so quietly, breath still laced with alcohol as she leans all the way across the backseat.

Clarke flinches away from her, pressing herself into the cool glass of the window.

Raven sits back up and shrugs.

"Listen--" she hits the back of the driver's seat a few times. "I need you to drop me off home before
you go to Arkadia Hills, all right?"

"Your wish is my command," Fabio smiles a little flirtatiously back at her through the mirror. "What's the address?"

Before the brunette slams the door shut, she bends back into the car.

"You didn't even ask me how meeting John went. But I guess you don't really care, do you? You're different around him, Clarke. You just are."

Clarke watches her red top fade into the night, gaping.

***

Bellamy's leaning into the archway between their living room and kitchen and hasn't answered any of the three questions Octavia lobbed at him when he walked in the door from his shift at Mecha nearly ten minutes ago. For her part, she's rolled up in a blanket watching a marathon of *The Little Couple*, a packet of Oreos ripped open down its center in front of her like a patient on the operating table with his organs exposed.

"I can't believe what they have to go through," she mutters to herself about the show, shaking her head a little before returning her attention to Bellamy. "Adopting those sweet little kids and then the cancer."

"Huh?" Bellamy asks, barely looking up as his thumbs continue to peck away at his phone.

"I said *who* is so important that you can't even pay attention to your beloved baby sister?" Octavia demands, muting the TV during a commercial about the HPV shot. The lime green digital clock on the cable box snakes into the shape of the time: 12:30 a.m.

"Nobody," he responds evasively before going to riffle through the pantry for a bottle of water.

"Oooh," she perks up, pushing herself up against the arm of the couch. "Is it Gina? Are you two talking again?"

"No, it's not. We're not," he grumbles, head hidden. "Mind your own business, O."

She huffs and falls back into the couch.

"Loser."

When he reappears, he has a funny look on his face.

***

Clarke tries to exit the car as gracefully as possible, but it's a small feat. She's too absorbed in making sure her bodice stays up and her skirt stays down.

"Good luck with the guy," the driver says over his shoulder. "Sounds a bit . . . complicated."

Clarke pauses, caught between the door and the seat with her arm reached around grasping the outer handle.

"Uh, yeah, thanks. Thanks for the ride."

She's about to slam the door shut when the guy asks her to wait.
"Yeah?"

"The guy you were arguing about, Bellamy was it?"

Her neck tightens uncomfortably as her heart flips.

"Mhmm," she sighs curtly.

"Does he have dark, curly hair, kind of tan, wearing a white shirt tonight?" the driver asks, spinning around to take her in fully.

Her body is rapidly turning to Jello.

"How do you know that?" she asks shrewdly, ducking her head back into the car but remembering to keep a hand on the cloth between her breasts.

Fabio smirks. Seriously, was modeling his second job or something?

"He came out of the bar when you all got into the car. Chased me for half a block or so. My guess is he's into you," his eyes dance with laughter.

"Why didn't you say something?" she demands, sensing the uptick in her heart beats.

He looks at her like she's off the deep end.

"Because I didn't know you two were together, now did I? He could have been some stranger, or your friend's boyfriend for all I knew. A concerned friend . . . "

"Oh," Clarke says slowly, eyes narrowing as he toys with her. "Ok. You have a good night."

"'Night, blondie. Don't worry - if he's worth a damn, you'll hear from him."

And with one more amused grin, he speeds away.

***

The usually creaky house is uncharacteristically quiet and still when she walks through the front door into the expansive foyer.

"Mom?" she calls. "Dad?"

No one shouts back.

But when she flicks on the light in the kitchen, she notices a note on the table.

Hi Clarke,

Your dad surprised me with an overnight at The Ritz before the school year starts. We thought you and Raven would enjoy having the house to yourselves. NO PARTIES! See you tomorrow afternoon. Have fun!

Love you,

Mom

She's in the middle of shampooing her hair, suds sliding down nearly into her eyes as she mulls over the driver's words, when she makes her decision. The thought of potentially encountering Octavia
nauseates her (thank God they don't go to the same school), but she's not sure when the next opportunity will present itself.

***

Clarke Griffin: Hi.
Bellamy Blake: Hey Princess.
Clarke Griffin: Did you follow us out onto the street?
Bellamy Blake: What are you talking about?
Clarke Griffin: Nice try. The driver said something when he dropped me off.
Bellamy Blake: Oh. Yeah, I guess I did.
Clarke Griffin: Wanna share why with the class? ;p
Bellamy Blake: It wasn't important.
Clarke Griffin: Nooooo. I hate when you do that! Tell me. I wanna know!!!!
Clarke Griffin: And I will keep texting you until you do.
Clarke Griffin: Bell! <3
Bellamy Blake: It's not a big deal. I just wanted you to know that I meant what I said, ok?
Clarke Griffin: I know you did. I trust you.

He sighs, a small portion of tension dissolving around his shoulder blades.

Bellamy Blake: Ok, I just didn't want Raven to poison your mind against me or whatever.

He can see her sarcastic expression as if in the same room as her.

Clarke Griffin: I think you've been spending too much time studying Ancient Roman backstabbing.
Bellamy Blake: Maybe.

Clarke pouts at the phone in her hand. She doesn't have the heart to tell him he is way closer to the truth than she's willing to let on.

Clarke Griffin: Baby, I wouldn't let that happen.
Bellamy Blake: Ok.

Clarke Griffin: You still don't believe me, do you?
Bellamy Blake: Sure I do.
Clarke Griffin: Bellamy.
Bellamy Blake: Clarke.

Clarke Griffin: Why don't you make anything easy?

Bellamy Blake: I thought you liked that about me.

She bites her lip, hesitating over the keypad.

Clarke Griffin: I came home to an empty house. Parents are staying at a hotel tonight. Can I prove it to you?

Bellamy Blake: Well at least someone gets to have a good night.

Clarke Griffin: BELLAMY!

Bellamy Blake: Are you inviting me over?

She takes the time to towel dry her golden hair into waves, staring at her mirror reflection before replying.

Clarke Griffin: I don't know when they'll come home. And I don't think it's a good idea if you're here when they get back.

Bellamy Blake: Fine.

Clarke Griffin: Don't be mad! :(

Bellamy Blake: Nothing to be mad about. What you said makes total sense.

Part of her wants to fling her phone into the glass because, honestly, he's more frustrating than calculus. And he's not letting her finish before jumping to conclusions, as usual.

Clarke Griffin: Can I come over to your place instead? Then I can leave early enough in the morning? I'll just say I was at Raven's if I have to.

Octavia's got her legs draped over the side of the couch, and she's licking the cream off a twisted open Oreo delicately, like a cat lapping up milk.

Bellamy Blake: I don't think Raven would appreciate that.

Clarke Griffin: What does that mean?

Bellamy Blake: I think you're smart enough to figure that one out for yourself.

An hour ago he was all over her, and now he's acting like she wants to force feed him brussels sprouts. She pulls on her UCLA sweatpants and an old Dance Ensemble T-shirt that cinches in at her waist.

Clarke Griffin: Can I come over or not? Would you prefer to sleep alone?

The text somehow manages to arouse and piss him off all at once. Raven's expression was completely closed when she caught sight of him standing in the doorway before sliding into the Uber, telling the driver they had to get going. Clarke never looked up, didn't notice him as he almost kept pace with the car for a little while. He wonders how much she and Raven drank tonight, how
freely she gave her confession.

**Bellamy Blake:** You shouldn't drive all the way over here this late. And not after you were drinking.

**Clarke Griffin:** It's been hours. I'm fine. My guess is you drove home.

**Bellamy Blake:** That's different.

**Clarke Griffin:** Because you're a guy?

**Bellamy Blake:** Because I'm over 21 and know my limits.

**Clarke Griffin:** Oh, right. I forgot how mature and responsible you are.

**Bellamy Blake:** Clarke, please just stay home, all right? I'll talk to you tomorrow, and you're much safer there.

**Clarke Griffin:** I'll see you in a half hour.

When he tries to call her, she doesn't answer. So he leaves three voicemails then proceeds to pace the kitchen. Even if he drove out to her place, he'd be too late to catch her. And saying anything to Octavia means a bigger fucking drama about Clarke and her motives and cars wrapped around telephone poles and lust and how he's not been thinking straight about anything lately and going to wind up flipping burgers for a living if he's not careful. So he marches off to take a steaming shower instead, trying to clear his mind of all the worst case scenarios. His hands still shake noticeably when he brushes his teeth.

It's a fact. The women in his life are going to drive him insane.
The moment Octavia shuffles off to her room with a bleary "good night" and he hears the door shut behind her, Bellamy slips out the patio door and walks to the front of their ranch house to wait on the steps. A light rain is falling, dappling his worn, light blue T-shirt with speckles of water within a minute as he sits. Clarke isn't responding to any of his texts, and he shifts his phone from hand to hand. His palms are sweaty.

His chest lightens when the flicker of high beams turns down his street. The car stops at the edge of his long driveway. Clarke springs out of the backseat, slamming the door behind her, a spacious paisley cloth bag slung over her shoulder that clashes horribly with the darkness surrounding it.

"Bellamy!" she says in surprise when she lays eyes on him about halfway down the driveway.

"You didn't answer any of my messages," he says grumpily, leveling a stare at her. "I was worried you were in a ditch somewhere. And you keep wasting money," he gestures vaguely toward the spot where the car was parked seconds ago, "On rides over here."

Despite his little sermon, Clarke is still smiling up at him, hair pulled out of her face with a simple braid down her back. She drops the bag with a thud on the ground and hooks her arms around his neck, burying her cold nose into his collar. As soon as her body touches his, he softens despite himself, mouth twitching. He pulls a sturdy arm around her waist and allows every bit of his palm to touch her shirt.

"Riding over here to see you is never a waste of money," she says when she pulls away. "Sorry I didn't text back. I figured you'd be mad I was coming anyway."

He raises one eyebrow.

"Like you ever do what I ask you to do. Come on, let's get inside before we're drenched. And Clarke?"

"Yeah?"
"Don't do that to me again."

He picks up her bag and takes her much smaller hand, directing them toward the front door. On the threshold, she pauses.

"Octavia home tonight?"

He nods.

"Yeah, she's back for good now. School starts in a week for her."

"For me, too," Clarke says quietly, tiny crinkles breaking out around her eyes.

"She's sleeping, Princess. We're ok as long as we avoid any wild sex."

She cracks a smile at that and follows him inside.

The steady thrum of rain drops against the roof and porch outside relax Bellamy as he settles into his bed shirtless in his favorite plaid pajama pants. Clarke padded off into his bathroom a few minutes ago with the bottle of water he practically forced into her hand.

"You need to hydrate," he'd insisted.

"I didn't drink that much," she argued. "I think Raven was worse off, to tell you the truth."

He shoved away the tightening sour pit in his stomach at Raven's name and shook the water bottle at her until she accepted it.

"I could have come over to your house and just left really early," he says through the gap in the door as he listens to the sounds of her brushing her teeth.
"No," she pokes just her eyes and the left side of her face around the door. There's some white toothpaste smudged at the corner of her lip. "I'm not risking you losing your fellowship for me! The last time you were with me and left in a rush, you almost got killed!"

"Clarke, that's crazy--"

"I said no," she stamps her foot, face going stern. "You worked way too hard to get where you are! And you have Sunday construction crew work in the afternoon, don't you?"

She raises her eyebrow knowingly.

"Well, I mean--"

"Don't you?" she asks more firmly.

"Yeah, I do."

"Exactly," she resumes scrubbing the brush against her teeth and talks through it. "So you need a good night's rest."

She's running a comb through her hair when she reappears and begins walking the length of the room. He puts down *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, which will be assigned reading for his graduate seminar "Winning the War: Effective Military Techniques in the Ancient World," and smirks when she resumes talking again. Clarke seems so comfortably at home telling him off wearing nothing but a hot pink nightgown dusted with white hearts that he's almost able to brush aside what Murphy told him earlier.

"... Besides, with any luck, Monty's mom would have caught you climbing out of my bedroom window or something and called the police on the spot."

"Huh? Who's Monty?"

Clarke stops mid-step and turns to him.
"One of my best friends. I've known him for years. He lives across the street, and his mom's the head of communications for the hospital. She was keeping an eye on me this summer."

"A very diligent eye," he returns, widening his eyes in mock solemnity. "I remember the cops stopping by at least four times to arrest me when I came over to tutor."

She swats at his arm while he laughs, catching her off guard and tugging her half on top of him. His hands slide up under the hem of her nightgown along her silky thighs as she straddles his waist and regains her breath, dropping the comb to the floor.

"It's not funny," she pouts, although her fingers are already dipping into the outlines of his abdomen, ghosting around the rim of his nipples in a way that makes his fingers curl hard into the soft flesh at her hip. "Monty's mom saw us together at the hospital and said things about it. I told you there were eyes on me all over this city, but you didn't believe it."

She rocks in what she must think is a casual way against him, but it makes his jaw clench.

"Do you care if the eyes see you with me?"

She stops her motion, licks her lips, and meets his brown gaze full-on.

"No, everyone can look all they want. We're very attractive."

The bubble of laughter catches somewhere in his esophagus as she pushes her hair behind her ear and wraps her lips around his top one. She tastes like mint, and the quick flick of her tongue against his makes his body course with anticipation within seconds.

"I thought you said I needed rest," Bellamy catches a strand of her hair between his fingers while Clarke mouths along his breastbone.

She smiles sweetly at him with glassy, expansive pupils. The rough jut of her chin against his ribs makes him want to readjust himself. But her ass is pressed tight into his pelvis, leaving no room. If she keeps it up, he's not going to be able to speak coherent English for very much longer.
"Clarke, baby, hold on."

He rolls them onto their sides and traps her hip down with his hand, so she can't move away when she bounces into the springy mattress.

"What is it?"

She shifts back a few inches but locks her fingers together with his over her pointy hip bone, propping herself up on an elbow while toying with the a wayward black curl, making it bounce as she pulls on it.

"Having fun?" he deadpans.

"You provide endless amusement just like Shirley Temple. And your hair's like hers, too."

The assault on her stomach comes fast and rough, leaving her squirming away from his claw-like hands as he tackles her and pins her beneath him until she forfeits, begging for air.

When her eyes find his again, she sees the hesitation floating right on the surface of them.

"What is it, Bellamy?"

"I know people are going to say things about us. But," he rolls off her onto his side, sliding his hands up and down the generous inward curve of her waist and outward curve of her hip. "I really don't give a damn what they say. I don't know if you feel that way, but--"

"I do," Clarke returns quickly, sternly.

He nods.

"All right. And you know you can tell me anything, right? Whatever you want?"
She sticks out her lower lip a bit, wiggling closer to him and allowing the spicy citrus of his shampoo to fill her nose.

"I know," she mumbles into his shirt.

"Good."

He collapses onto his back with a sigh, catching her inner thigh a few inches below her ass to pull one of her legs half over his own.

"Oof," Clarke grunts, chin knocking into the area above his heart.

His dark eyes still harbor a question. She feels the relentless curiosity laser into her face, heating it.

"Raven's not thrilled," she says finally. "She said you were rushing into this after Gina."

"Mmm," he stares up at the ceiling. "Murphy mentioned that to me."

Her heart sings into his tan skin a little out of tune.

"Are you?" the words come out in such a hush he thinks he may have imagined them. He's thoughtful for a minute.

"No, I want you. Gina's a good friend," he clears his throat. "I guess she was a good friend. I'm not sure she's going to talk to me again."

"Because you broke her heart," Clarke provides, stroking his bicep and laying her head flat at the crease between his arm and torso. "She really liked you."

"I didn't mean to," Bellamy replies, letting his fingers fall down her spine before climbing back up it again.
"I didn't mean for Finn to give me that bracelet," Clarke admits.

He's not sure if she's admonishing herself for accepting it or him for overreacting to it. Maybe both.

"I know. The guy was a piece of work," Bellamy offers.

"I think it's why Raven's still so pissed about us. She's close to Wells, but that's not the part she's really angry about. At least, that's how I think."

"Knowing someone you love wants to leave you is kind of a gut punch, Princess."

Clarke flattens her hand up his side as if trying to rub away a sensation, a memory, a whole experience.

"I never wanted to leave you. But I owed Wells . . . something. At least, that's what it felt like."

Bellamy sighs, carding a hand through his hair and shifting on the pillow below him.

"Well Raven probably doesn't think you left him for the greatest reason," he purses his lips at the truth.

Clarke thrusts her left leg fully over him, so both her knees sink into his comforter.

"You're the very best reason," she says determinedly, crinkle back between her brows.

"Oh yeah?"

Her answering kiss is hard and sloppy. Her teeth clink momentarily into his as he jolts his hips upward, his erection rubbing up into her warmth through his pajamas. Then he wraps both hands over the globes of her upturned ass, kneading them.
"Definitely," she sighs, forcing herself up with a cat-like smirk.

She wraps a hand around Bellamy's forearm and catches hold of his hand, pulling it from her ass and sliding it along her thigh instead. All the while she inches up her nightgown until he can see the flash of purple underneath, the curling arc of yellow flowers.

"Still wanna sleep?" she asks, stretching forward to give him a view of her breasts.

"How did I get so lucky?" Bellamy grunts, shifting a hand to grope the rough lace of the cups though the outer layer of fabric.

"I think you got that backwards."
Like Lovers Do

Honestly, he just looks so happy looming over her, coasting his roughened palms over the lacy fabric of her purple bra that she threads her fingers into a cradle behind her head, effectively pushing her breasts up toward him. It's hard not to jerk when his thumbs begin a relentless assault on her nipples, flicking over them repeatedly until they're painfully tight. But she manages.

"I told you that one would look good on you," he mumbles as his index and middle fingers slide under the stretchy elastic band that hugs the top of her ribs.

She twitches as the fingers prod into the delicate skin at the bottom of her breasts, goosebumps breaking out down her arms. He repeats the motion every few centimeters until she's practically shaking with want at the teasing. When his warm, wet mouth latches onto her right nipple through the barrier, she abandons any pretense of being disaffected. Her hands fly into his hair, holding him close. With a mind of their own, her hips rock upward, and he presses the top of his thigh firmly against her electrified core so she has no choice but to grind on it.

"There's my good girl. Go on, ride me," he licks the words into her flush chest, reaching down to grab her ass and pump it, as if it were a heart he wanted to bring back to life.

"Harder," he demands, helping her find a rhythm for her buzzing clit to use as it crashes against his leg.

"B-B-Bell," she tries.

Fizzing firecrackers are set to explode in the depth of her stomach. Everything feels impossibly tighter when he unhooks her bra and works her breasts together.

"Yeah, Princess? You thought you could keep these pretty tits from me?" he sends her a cracked smile before clamping his teeth over one nipple and tugging gently.

Her fingers slice into his bare back, slipping across firm muscle with nothing to grab. Rolling down his pajama pants sounds like a Herculean effort at this point. But Bellamy's mouth clamping down on her other breast while his tongue lavs over the peak there that's so stiff it twinges sends her hand slithering between their bodies, desperate to rub herself.
"I've got it, Princess," he kisses down her sternum, over the soft white hill of her belly and yanks her underwear off her helpless legs. Her bent knees fall open for him even as she tightens her hold on the bedsheets in anticipation of the onslaught of sensation.

"Bell . . . please," she sighs brokenly, not even sure what she's asking him for.

The warm moisture of his breath tickles her, and she feels more exposed than ever as he contemplates the pink folds of her pussy, cocking his head to the side.

"Yeah? What?" he asks after a lengthy pause.

"Your fingers," she croaks, bucking at nothing.

"All right, all right, go easy," his palm applies weight to her hipbone, holding her down.

He gives a quick pinch to her nipple while circling a finger around her wet heat.

"Inside," Clarke huffs, shifting down with a struggle in an attempt to impale herself on his digit.

He chuckles, bending his head lower and sucking her clit into his mouth, abusing its underside with his tongue until her thighs clamp fiercely into his shoulders.

"Did I make you so dirty, baby?" he croons to her, pawing at her breast again, holding its weight in his palm while he adds a second finger to join the first right at the edge of her opening.

She knows she's trickling fluids even though she can't see it for herself. She can't see much through her half-open eyes past the heaving mountains of her chest and the mop-mess of Bellamy's hair.

"Mmmmm," she keens incoherently.

The two fingers together push their way into her, scrubbing at her inner wall like he's trying to
remove a grease stain from the stove, and she's babbling nonsense.

"There, that feels good, huh?" his kiss lands in the center dip of her chest, a few inches above her belly button.

The third finger is a stretch, but she takes it, her channel becoming more slick to accommodate the rapid thrusts of his fingers in and out of her. While he works, he alternates between tapping on her nipples then her clit in sharp little motions that leave her breathless.

When her orgasm hits, it's like scaling an icy summit and leaping straight into the sky. The rolling free fall of her contracting pussy wrings ever last ounce of energy from her shaking form. Bellamy flops down beside her, kissing the side of her head. Soon, the steel of his cock nudging into her hip rouses her again. She's not sure if he's done it on purpose or not, but it's not really important.

"Clarke, what are you--"

The answer becomes obvious when she gets his plaid pants and boxers down to his knees, and he kicks them the rest of the way off.

"You can't sleep like this," she purrs, mouthing a kiss into his jaw before gripping him firmly.

Her strokes are languid and slow from base to tip. Clarke props herself up on one elbow to watch his reddening head and the bit of precum that leaks out of it. Occasionally, she rolls her thumb across the slit, sinking her fingertips into the underside of his cock until his panting incoherency turns into "Fuck . . .Clarke . . . yes, there," and she knows she's on the right track. But the feel of her tongue circling the tip is evidently too much for him. He tries to push her shoulder away, but she just shakes her head.

"It's ok. I want to," she skims her fingers over his thigh light like silk and scoots onto her knees between his legs before wrapping her lips around him.

"Jesus," Bellamy groans, snaking her fingers into her loose hair.

The gesture sends a spark straight down to her clit, which she would've thought impossible a few minutes ago. He tastes like salt and musk on her tongue, but she relaxes her throat and lets him slide farther back until he hits the wavy flesh at the end of her mouth. When her hand locks around him
and starts to turn, his hips buck forward, fucking into her mouth. For a moment she panics, feels her airway cutting off, but then he's caressing her shoulder.

"You're ok," he manages to pull himself back a bit before gently thrusting along her tongue.

Several minutes later, she sees his jaw tighten, feels him tense as she increases the pressure of her lips. But with a growl, Bellamy manages to pull back, splashing his hot come against her stomach in unfurling ribbons.

"Sorry," he mutters, a wall of red climbing his cheeks while he stares at her stomach, transfixed.

"It's ok," Clarke sighs, thumb rubbing circles into his twitching thigh muscle. "But I wanted to--"

"I know," he cuts her off, reaching for tissues on his bedside table to wipe her off.

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He tucks her into the curve of his broad chest a few minutes later after she insists on another trip to the bathroom ("Listertine's powerful stuff, Blake," ) arm snaked around her now-clean belly.

"I'm gonna leave early, Bell, to get out of our way. I set my phone alarm. I'll miss Octavia completely," Clarke whispers into the darkness when his lips kiss her shoulder.

She likes the forest glade smell of his pillow and snuggles deeper into it.

"Not ready to brave the family drama," he laughs, a dark rumble in her ear.

"You know how she feels about me," she arches her ass into his groin just to be mean before pulling away.

"She'll come around eventually."
Clarke snorts.

"Really," he insists. "I have the harder mountain to climb."

"How do you figure?"

"Your parents? Your friends? They'll all hate me because of Wells."

It's more of a growl than he intended.

"Not totally true," she confesses quietly, stroking his sinewy forearm.

She's eternally grateful he can't see her flaming cheeks.

"My dad likes you."

"Mmhmm," Bellamy's chest shakes next to her spine. "As his TA. Not the guy who wants to be with his daughter."

Her mouth feels dry, her tongue too heavy.

"That's not true."

"Meaning?"

"He told me he wants to take you out fishing," she scrambles over in his arms, searching for his eyes in the hazy grayness. They always manage to ground her.

Bellamy's brow crinkles.
"Uh-huh, yeah, he said that a few weeks ago, but," he half shrugs.

"You thought it was a throwaway comment?"

His bemused expression is mostly identifiable in the half light, and she leans in to kiss him carefully.

"It wasn't. He wants to get to know you better because I told him how much I liked you."

***

Clarke does her best to disentangle herself from the drowsy, warm wall that is Bellamy the next morning. He makes a valiant, if lazy, grab for her waist, but she dives around it.

"Too early," he groans, flipping over onto his stomach. "Come back to bed."

"I've got to go home. You know that," she drops a hasty kiss to his temple before scooping up clothes from her paisley bag and hurrying into the bathroom.

She's tiptoeing her way across the living room toward the front door when a floorboard creaks obnoxiously below her foot.

"Well, there's something I thought I'd never see," Octavia's voice rings out behind her. "Clarke Griffin slinking out of my house for the . . . what? Drive of shame?"

Clarke swallows hard but manages to spin around with a smile.

"Hi, Octavia."

The brunette is holding a steaming bowl of oatmeal against her chest. She's wearing tennis shoes and faded jean capris with a green "Earth Day 2016" shirt.

"You're up early."
"Yeah, the flower beds need some serious work before it gets too hot, and Bell's sure as Hell not gonna do it," she nods, eyes sweeping over Clarke in a way that makes her feel guilty of stealing or something. "But I live here, so it's all good. What's your excuse?"

"Uh, I, umm, well," Clarke sets down her bag and draws herself up to her full height. "Actually, last night I ran into your brother, and--"

"He was working at Mecha last night," Octavia interrupts, voice a little higher. "You didn't run into him. You know he works there! And he came home alone. I was still awake."

"Well my friend picked the bar. I didn't know where we were going. But anyway," Clarke swipes a piece of hair behind her ear, "Bellamy was working, and we spent some time together, and we decided we'd try to work things out."

She doesn't have all the bravado she'd like infusing her voice. It sounds a bit more like a church organ with something stuck in the pipes.

"Did you break up with Wells?" Octavia snaps, eyes narrowing.

"Octavia," Bellamy steps out of the foyer unexpectedly, rubbing a hand across his bleary face. "Quit harassing Clarke. She's my guest."

Clarke gives him a thin smile as he splays a hand over the small of her back.

"Yeah, your 5-to-7," Octavia mutters.

"What?" Bellamy says sharply.

"It means after hours, big brother. Behind closed doors where no one else can see. God, watch a French film!"

Bellamy takes a step toward her but anticipating it, Clarke flings out her arm to block him.
"I did break up with Wells, Octavia. I'm . . . " she glances up at Bellamy who's still shooting daggers at his sister. "serious about your brother."

The lines around his mouth soften some.

"Listen, Octavia," she turns up her palms. "I know we got off to a really bad start. And I'm sorry about that. But . . . I care a lot about Bellamy, and you're so important to him. So I know it won't be easy or anything, but maybe, maybe you could give me another chance?"

She tries to keep her voice from squeaking, she really does. But the truth is Octavia resembles a Venus Fly Trap poised to strike. The brunette crosses her arms over her chest and smirks.

"Uh huh," she says. "And what about your family? They gonna welcome Bellamy in with open arms?"

When Bellamy reaches for her hand, she realizes it's slick with sweat.

"My dad really respects Bellamy," she manages. "I know it may not seem like a big deal to you, but they're going fishing soon. He hardly ever invites anyone to go with him."

Bellamy's grip tightens. Their faces turn inward toward each other's momentarily, but she takes in his calm resolve, understands his message. They're in this together now. He's not going anywhere.

Octavia seems vaguely aware that something strange passes between them if the expression she wears is any indication. She clucks her tongue, watches her brother gaze at this girl with eyes she's never seen him use.

"All right, whatever," she says at last, and Clarke's eyes brighten. "Clean slate."

The blonde practically jumps across the room, enveloping Octavia in a warm, but meant-to-be-brief, hug. Octavia surprises her by gripping her arm right above her elbow when Clarke tries to pull away.
"I watched you break after what I told you at the party," she hisses, whispering it too low into Clarke's ear for Bellamy to discern. "So don't screw this up again."
Drama, Drama, Drama

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She feels his eyes on her back even while pushing through the crowd of chattering teenagers pressing in on her from every side in the tight hallway lined with blue lockers. Clarke turns the combination lock on hers hastily, snapping it open and dumping her English lit books inside. She trades them for her AP US Government textbook and glitter encrusted notebook.

A lot of their lessons come through a digital portal now after the one-to-one laptop initiative passed in her district when she was in middle school. But there are still some classes that require multiple books and ample note taking by hand while the teacher drones on for 45 minutes straight because "you retain more information when you write it out." Many of the APs are like that since they're supposed to be training her for "an authentic college experience in a large lecture hall environment."

She sighs and unzips her backpack, throwing the new materials in alongside her laptop. Clarke glances at her watch. She's got exactly seven minutes to book it down the endless hallway and a flight of stairs, across a breezeway and through another long corridor to hear about how Congress continues to fail at its job.

It's the end of the first week of senior year, and already the memories of her carefree summer are fading faster than her tan lines. Her parents and her teachers think every spare moment is now fair game to bring up how this semester is incredibly important, and colleges will want to make sure they're maintaining their GPAs, so this isn't the time to party and blow off their work. How it's the last chance to retake the SATs, and their extracurricular leadership roles will be very relevant while writing their application essays. How if they need to see a guidance counselor to discuss their options for next year to sign up now because time is running out, but, of course, a four-year college isn't necessarily for everyone and . . .

It's enough to make her want to throw up. At home, her mom's been putting together an itinerary of the East Coast schools they'll visit during Fall Break, all Ivies. And she's got every weekend in October dedicated to touring California's most revered institutions of higher learning for aspiring doctors.

She lets out a huge breath, wanting to rest her head against the cool metal door for a moment but refraining. Before Clarke can stop the involuntary reaction, her gaze skims over the photo collage near her forehead. There's a picture of Raven, Harper and her at the beach jumping in the frothy surf in neon bikinis last summer. It's taped alongside one with Wells' arm wrapped around her at the bottom of her staircase as her dad laughingly kisses her cheek before junior prom. The only one she can bear to look at for more than a microsecond shows her and Monty with icing smeared all over their faces after a food fight erupted at their mutual 10th birthday bash. She'd meant to clean things
out but hasn't had time yet.

She clenches her hand tightly before slamming the door shut. Ducking behind a group of tall cheerleaders, she tries to slip toward the stairwell, but.

"Clarke! Wait up!"

Finn cards his fingers through his floppy hair and reaches her side, panting a little.

"What do you want?" she raises an eyebrow.

"Didn't you hear me calling your name?"

"I've got class. I don't have time for this," she insists.

She tries to keep going, but he jumps in front of her.

"Clarke! Can you give me a minute, please? I just wanted to talk."

His eyes resemble a dopey Basset Hound's.

"About what?" she spits. "Trying to cheat on Raven with me?"

A small smile plays on his lips, but something dark passes over his face.

"Do you really think you can talk to me about cheating, Clarke?"

"Go to Hell, Finn!" she shoves by him once more, dodging a group of freshman boys hauling oversized band equipment.
But in moments, he's back at her side walking fast alongside her.

"Come on, can't you take a joke anymore? Or does Bellamy have you on that short a leash?"

Clarke halts in her tracks, backpack thudding into her spine near the entrance to the whitewashed stairwell. She wishes she could breathe fire.

"What. do. you. want. from. me?" she grits out.

Finn hitches his own backpack up on his shoulders, slips his phone back into his pocket. His shoulders slump a little. He's decked out in what looks like a brand new hunter green button-down rolled up at his elbows, designer jeans, and those medium-brown loafers boys seem so fond of.

"I just wanted to say that yeah, what I did was shitty. But I really did like you. And I thought maybe--"

He's giving her the puppy dog face again.

"What?" she demands, tapping her foot impatiently.

"That you liked me, too?"

"I was dating Wells! Raven is my friend!" she says it loudly enough for a flock of passing cheerleaders to stop and stare. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"You were always nicer to me than everyone else," Finn admits quietly. "You laughed at my jokes. We hung out that day we all went hiking, and I showed you the place with all those butterflies?"

His voice slides away into embarrassed silence. Yeah, she does remember the day they all went hiking together. She and Finn let Raven and Wells walk ahead because they were more athletic and the trail was hilly. Harper, Monty, and Jasper lagged farther behind, maybe smoking, she couldn't remember. Finn had seen a few fluttering, yellow wings float by and grabbed her hand, urging her to follow him. He grinned broadly at her expression of delight when they came upon the grove. It was swarming with the ethereal insects, butter yellow against the expansive green leaves surrounding
them. For a second their eyes had met, and she thought he might kiss her. But then Wells shouted out asking where they were, and the moment broke open. Later, as she sat in the car with her thigh firmly pressed against Wells’, she tried to shove down the thought that maybe she'd wanted him to.

It was a long time ago. But it was always weird between them after that.

"Finn, it's in the past, all right? Let it go."

She wraps her hand around the stair railing.

"You didn't say I was wrong," Finn speaks more dangerously now as the crowd thins around them.

She smooths her hair behind her ear, bites her lip.

"I would've broken up with her for you. You're something else, Clarke. But I thought you wouldn't do that to Wells, wouldn't leave him."

"So you still wanted to hedge your bets?" Clarke snaps, finding her voice. "Flirt with me on the side just in case and keep Raven as your girlfriend?"

"I was wrong," he talks over her, ignoring what she said. "Turns out you just wouldn't leave Wells for me."

She blinks, silent, brain gone numb.

"Only bad college boys for you, right, Clarke? You just wanted to be pushed up against a wall, is that it?" he starts walking toward her, but she holds her ground. "If I knew that was all it took--"

"You know what you are, Finn?"

"What?" he takes a step closer still, and she's suddenly very aware of their height difference. He's lean, but he's still imposing when he's angry like this. "What am I?"
"You're a coward," she says nastily. "And you want to make people uncomfortable to get them to do what you want. You're manipulative and mean when you don't get your way. Now get the hell out of mine!"

She pushes past him for the stairwell, taking the stairs so rapidly her ankle twists right before the landing, and she clings to the railing for balance. She's ten steps below him now. She doesn't look back.

***

By lunch, her brain feels like it's thumping against her skull and she's more than relieved to find Harper waving her over to a table she's snagged in the garden courtyard.

"I can't believe Pike already assigned a 15-page research paper. It's only the first week!" Jasper groans as Clarke flops into the seat beside him and rests her head on his shoulder.

"What's up, Griffin? You all right?" he pats her shoulder, frowning at Monty and Harper.

"Just a migrane. Finn screamed at me before class."

She begins peeling open her tangerine, the citrus smell cloaking her, and doesn't notice the look her three friends exchange.

"Uh, what about?" Harper asks mildly.

"How I'm a horrible person who doesn't deserve to breathe," she sighs, resting her head on the table.

"He never acted like he loved Wells that much," Jasper says offhandedly.

Harper rolls her eyes.
"Always missing the point, aren't you, Jasps?" she reaches over the table to tousle his lengthening hair, and he jerks away from her.

"What's the point?" Jasper challenges.

Harper's eyes grow into round circles, and she gives him a fierce look, but he just throws up his hands, shrugging.

"Sorry, I don't speak nonverbal girl drama."

"Clarke, it's not that bad. Quit beating yourself up. We're still talking to you, aren't we?" Monty butts in as he swallows a bite of a turkey sandwich.

"Because Wells didn't want you choosing sides," she mumbles.

"Clarke!" Harper slides a hand over hers. "There are no sides. We're friends with both of you. And one day, I know it's hard to believe this right now, but one day, you and Wells will be ok again, too. You guys have a long history. It's going to get better."

"Raven won't even answer my texts."

Harper swallows hard.

"It will get better," she reassures.

"Mmm," Clarke mumbles and returns to peeling her fruit.

Harper starts a conversation about potentially joining the fencing team since she and Raven will be busy with Dance Ensemble during basketball practice in a few weeks. Clarke's stomach sinks at the thought of being trapped in the same gym for hours on end with the two people who hate her the most.

***
"Hi," Clarke says shyly as they walk in the direction of the parking lot.

It's too hard to look at him directly, so she's glad of the distraction.

"Hey," he responds politely. "How's your first week been?"

"Oh, you know, just being reminded this is the make-or-break semester of my entire academic career about eight times a day," she smiles limply.

"Yeah, it sucks. Too much pressure," Wells agrees, shoving his hands in his pockets.

"How, uh, how are you?" Clarke chances a glance at him beneath her lashes.

"I'm good. Starting to practice ball again with the guys. I think AP Bio is going to be a bitch, but my government class seems interesting."

"That's good."

Her voice sounds so small.

"So umm," Wells throws his long arms out in front of his body like he doesn't know what to do with them. "My mom's birthday is next weekend and instead of doing a big party, she wanted to host a volunteer party with the American Red Cross to help the people displaced by that forest fire up in the mountains. Like organize donations, work the food line, entertain the kids when the parents search for new housing, that kind of thing."

"Oh!" Clarke says, surprised.
She pushes open the wide, glass doors into the gigantic paved parking lot. A gust of wind blows into her face, lifting her hair off her neck. It's cloudy today, and the sky is dishwater grey and close.

"That's such a nice idea!"

"Yeah," Wells kicks absently at some loose rocks.

"She'd love for you and your family to come, if you want," he locks eyes with her for the first time since they started talking.

Clarke wets her lower lip.

"Are you sure you'd want me there?"

He smiles the tiniest amount.

"We've got to start somewhere, Clarke. Monty's gonna be there. Jasper can't make it. But I asked Raven, too," he swipes at the back of his neck, glancing away toward the endless line of cars. "Our parents are best friends . . . We were best friends . . . before, and," he pauses. "Isn't it better than fighting?"

She nods quickly. There's no opposing thought in her mind.

"Yeah. Of course, I'll come. I'd love to," she smiles at him.

"Great, I'll text you the details," he says and leaves her standing there as he heads off to his car.

***

Abby's insistent about it. Clarke's just trying to understand the old time language of *Jane Eyre* curled up in her favorite chair in the library loft, but that makes no difference.
"You're spending a lot of time with him,"

Abby peers at Clarke over the reading glasses she's wearing to sew a button back on one of Jake's work shirts.

"Mom, I've been to his house once since school started."

"Well, you spent a lot of time with him this summer."

"So?"

"So, I think it's about time I met him and got to know him a little better, don't you?"

"You did meet him at the beginning of the summer," Clarke smirks.

"Don't be cheeky with me, young lady," Abby retorts. "If he wants to date you, I want to get to know him better. Find a time that works for his schedule and invite him over."

***

Her mind can't keep the details of the Apartheid government straight. She wants to blame it on her general dismal relationship with all things historical. But Bellamy's fingertips ghosting along the bare skin around her ankles as she drapes her legs over his lap probably has something to do with it, too.

He's grading first-year essays for one of her dad's introductory classes on the couch, red pen caught between his teeth as he shakes his head.

"Do they really think I can't tell the difference when the margins are more than one inch around?" he mumbles, uncapping the pen, and scribbling something on the paper.

"Sneaky freshmen bastards," she clucks her tongue in sympathy and he chuckles, resuming stroking the bottom of her calf.
Clarke sighs contentedly. She wants to live in this moment for as long as possible. The warm glow of the nearby lamp lighting up Bellamy’s curls and making his skin shine bronze. His quizzical face and slightly pouty mouth as he reads the words in front of him. And the way he looks up at her from time to time and grins brilliantly for absolutely no reason at all.

She puts down her book and taps at his arm.

"Take a break for a little bit. I gotta talk to you."

"Needing to talk is never a good thing, Princess," he grumbles but puts down his paper obligingly enough.

Clarke scoots into the side of his chest, leaning her back against it, as he stretches an arm over the top of the couch. But she pulls his forearm down so it locks her against him instead, reaching forward to kiss his bicep.

"What's going on?" Bellamy plays with her hair, massaging her scalp gently. "You're a little tense tonight. Relax," he squeezes her waist playfully, and she squirms before melting into him more fully and closing her eyes.

"I don't want to freak you out, but--"

"Nothing good starts that way."

She elbows him in the side backwards.

"But?"

"My mom really wants you to come over for dinner sometime."

She squints an eye open with a crunching sound and pivots to see his face. He's got his lips scrunched together and angled toward the side and his eyebrows raised.
"What do you think?"

"Ok," he shrugs.

"Ok?" she stammers it. "Really? That simple?"

"Yeah. Dinner is dinner. I met your mom already. It can't be that bad, right?"

Clarke's eyes soften, and she rises on her knees to kiss him. He wraps his arms around her waist and holds her against his body for several long seconds.

"I don't know," she curls back into his chest. "But however bad it is, I'll make it up to you."

He laughs.

"I might have to hold you to that."

They're silent for a while, returning to their work. But then Bellamy gets a text and stirs back to life.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you! Clara and Huxley's mom asked me and O to babysit next Saturday. I thought maybe you'd want to come over and do the art project stuff with them?"

Clarke tenses, drawing her knees to her chest. Bellamy's eyes flash to hers, darkening.

"What?"

"I'd love to," she begins. "But I can't. I have a volunteer thing that day."

"Oh, ok," he narrows his eyes for a moment but then returns to his work. "Some other time."
"Yeah, definitely. I really want to hang out with them! They're adorable."

Bellamy taps his red pen against the manilla pages on his lap listlessly.

"What's the volunteer thing for?"

"The American Red Cross. It's to help the people who were displaced by that bad wildfire in the hills last week."

"That's nice," Bellamy resumes squeezing her ankle but then glides his palm higher up her cream-colored, tight-fit jeans, caressing her knee, her thigh, then finally her hip. "Anyone else going to be there with you?"

There's the smallest bit of an edge to his voice, and she wonders for the thousandth time how he always seems to know things before she says them. Why he can read her so well.

"Please don't be upset, Bell. Just hear me out," she sits up straighter, pushing away from him on the couch and claiming a corner for herself. Being skin to skin is clouding her mind.

"I'm listening," he says shortly.

"It's for Wells' mom's birthday," she says in a rush. "Instead of a party, she wanted to give back to the community. And she invited my family and some of our friends to come. I didn't expect Wells to ask me, but he did."

Bellamy nods slowly.

"I thought it was a nice gesture."

She bites her lip hard and scoots closer to him, dropping a hand to his muscular thigh.
"The nicest," he says sarcastically.

"Bell, babe, we talked about this. He's still going to be in my life in some way. We're not exactly friends, but I don't want to be enemies, and I don't think he wants that either. You know you're the one I'm with. You're the one I want."

She circles her arms around his waist and kisses his stubbly jawbone, running her pale hand up his chest.

"I know," he rumbles.

"Ok, so then let's hang out afterward?" she says hopefully.

Bellamy swallows.

"We could," he says carefully, voice low. "Or you could ask me to go with you."

Chapter End Notes

If you're pining for more Bellarke, I recommend "Your Mess Is Mine" by monroeslittle. I read it, and I loved it so, so much I can't even tell you. It became one of my favorites immediately. So what are you waiting for? Go check it out!!
A bead of sweat slides down Raven's back, trickling at the base of her spine as she dribbles the ball, feinting right then rushing left to dodge Murphy. She shoots, body in perfect alignment down to her tipped wrist, and grins when the orange orb knocks into the net.

Murphy groans.

"I thought you danced at the basketball games, not played in them!" he says.

"Ha! You just didn't know how awesome I was. I have many talents."

She scoops up the ball and fans herself with her shirt before tossing it back to him.

"We can play HORSE instead," she teases. "You might have a shot at beating me then."

Murphy bounces the ball against the ground and smirks, flicking his hair out of his eyes with a toss of his head.

"I think I got this."

He maneuvers his way toward where she stands guard beneath the basket, arms flung out at her sides. Her head bobbles to follow his movements. When he gets close, he dribbles the ball expertly between his legs, keeping it out of reach, and flashes his eyebrows at her.

"You ready, Raven?"

"I was born ready."

"We'll see," he laughs.

She's so distracted by watching the spider's web of curving black lines that when Murphy caresses his fingertips up her waist, she jolts.

"Foul!" she cries.

His eyes race up to hers, electric blue on warm brown.

He leaves his hand in place, and she stills, dropping her arms.

"Is it really?"

She cocks her head to the side, ponytail swishing.

"No, I guess not," she smiles.
The smile lingers when he tugs her toward him and kisses her, the basketball rolling off toward the chain link fence bordering the Venice Beach walkway.

"So we're on for the Coldplay concert Saturday?" Murphy asks a few minutes later as they walk back to his car.

Raven reaches up and laces her slim fingers through his, which rest on her shoulder.

"Yes!" she smiles up at him. "I've got the charity thing for Wells' mom in the afternoon, but then I'll come to your place?"

"Works for me," Murphy responds, pushing the door unlock button as they approach his car.

"Anyone I know gonna be there?"

Raven sighs as she pulls away from him and walks in the direction of the passenger door.

"Just me and Monty..."

There's a long pause when she sits down and turns toward the window.

"And Clarke."

Murphy throws her a look from behind the wheel. He notices the way her shoulders inch closer to her ears.

"Sounds like you two are back to braiding each other's hair."

Raven snorts.

"I'll be nice when I see her at dance practice. But we don't have any classes together this semester, so it's easier to just avoid it."

Murphy gives a curt nod but says nothing.

She bites her lip and glances at his angular profile while he pulls onto the quiet neighborhood streets behind the ocean.

"Are you sure you can't come?"

"Nah, I can't." Murphy returns. "Someone's got to cater to the weekend drunks while you and Blake go make a difference."

Anger flares to life in Raven's dark eyes.

"Wait! What? Bellamy's going to be there? With the Jahas? Is she crazy?"

"From what he told me yesterday," Murphy shrugs.

Raven flops fully against the seat, closing her eyes.

"Perfect, now I'll have to be the damn referee between Clarke and all her bad decisions. On what planet does going to your ex-boyfriend's mom's birthday with the guy you cheated on her son with sound like a great idea?"

Murphy tenses his jaw and drums his hands against the steering wheel.
"Dunno. You rich and famous types do a lot of kinky shit."

She shoves his arm.

"I'm serious! I mean, it wasn't enough that my boyfriend of two years turned out to be an asshole trying to hook up with her behind my back. And did she care about me then?"

Murphy gapes at her as her voices rises, angry blotches springing to her cheeks.

"No! No, she didn't! We talked about her and her feelings for Bellamy instead. Then I got to deal with the fallout of Wells after she dumped him. That's right! My boyfriend is a douche who wants her, and her boyfriend adores her, but she wants to throw him out. And I love Wells like a brother, I do, but he puts up this whole facade of 'everything's great' around her and loses his shit with me and Jasper and Monty. Is that fair?"

Murphy hisses air out through his teeth.

"No, it's not," he acknowledges. "But it's normal."

She sighs heavily and, taking in his tight expression, strokes his forearm.

"Sorry. I just . . . haven't really been able to talk about it."

Murphy smiles at her, taking the exit for Santa Monica Canyon.

"I'm don't think I've ever been someone's confidante before. I might suck at it."

She scrunches her fingers in his hair and drops a kiss to his cheek.

"You're great at it."

They're quiet for a while with Raven watching the tree tops flash by when the broken white lines of the road begin making her dizzy.

"I know this isn't like, a consolation prize or anything, but it seems like Clarke has been good for Bellamy. He's different now," Murphy ventures when they're ten minutes from her house.

"What do you mean?"

"Just that he was a major asshole before to work with, domineering, aggressive, you know. But he's . . . I guess, uh, less of an asshole now?"

"Wow," Raven says drily. "That's a ringing endorsement."

Murphy laughs and turns the radio on low.

"Look, we've all got our sob stories, right? I mean, my mom got really depressed when my dad left. But half of marriages end in divorce."

Raven's face softens, and she resumes stroking his arm gently as he steers leisurely through the town streets where the speed limit drops to 35.

"Mhmm," she murmurs her agreement.

"Well, Bellamy's dad died when he was little from cancer. His mom hooked up with a real creep from what I know, and when she died in a car crash--" Raven sucks in her breath. "He had to take
on all these odd jobs to keep him and Octavia afloat."

"I've heard bits and pieces of this," Raven says slowly.

"Yeah," Murphy shrugs. "I guess people cope differently. But what I remember of the last few years was what Miller called Rebel King Bellamy."

"Cute," Raven purses her lips. "Meaning?"

"Lot of girls, random hookups, speeding tickets, drunk, stupid fights," Murphy says in what sounds like a controlled casual tone. "This one chick he was with was crazy - bleach blonde and super skinny. Involved in some kind of orgy cult and all these drugs based in teas or some shit like that."

"Wait, wait, wait. You're telling me Bellamy participated in orgies?" Raven stammers, immediately alarmed.

"No, no, at least," Murphy coughs, "I don't think so. It was all her, but I can't remember her name. This other one," he relaxes into his seat as the memories roll back to him. "Came to Mecha all the damn time. She was tall, dark hair, athletic--"

"Gina?"

"No. Echo. That's it! She seemed gaga for him, but she showed me this collection of knives and like, Medieval swords, once at her apartment, and I was out."

"Sounds normal," Raven can't keep the skepticism from coloring her voice.

"Definitely not. But Bellamy swore she was just really into the martial arts. Turns out she was actually into her ex-boyfriend Roan. When he found out about Bellamy, he wanted her back, and their sex tape hit the inter webs a couple weeks later. Pretty sure Roan thanked Bellamy personally in it."

Raven drops her mouth open fully.

"You're making this shit up now!" she accuses.

He chuckles, swiping a hand over his chin.

"Wish I was for the poor bastard's sake," he looks thoughtful for a minute. "Roma was all right, but I think she was just easy sex to get over Echo. And Mel, well, she really liked him. Like, really. Got kind of stalkerish after they met at a club when he helped her get away from her angry boyfriend if I remember the story right."

Raven's eyes are darting back and forth.

"And that's not counting all the one night stands I've seen pass by the bar stools. So--" he turns to his right. "Way I see it, Clarke's great. Normal. Stable. Doing things with her life. Seems to be able to put up with his bullshit. You know, whatever."

Raven's mind's still reeling with it all.

"Sex tape?" she mouths to the glass beside her lips.

She remembers what Harper told her about Clarke's clinic visits.

"Dios Mio, they better be using condoms. So many fucking condoms."
School Spirit

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The squeak of tennis shoes on the polyurethaned floor is constant as the basketball team runs drills. Clarke tries not to watch Wells much, but he always could make a killer three-point shot, and a summer in Europe hasn't hindered his abilities. The Phoenix fire-red uniform seems to burn against his dark skin every time he passes near her, and it catches her eye. He smiles at her once, giving her a nod of his chin, and she returns the gesture with tight lips.

Soon she has to count out her own steps to "Magic, madness, heaven, sin. Saw you there, and I thought, 'Oh my God, look at that face. You look like my next mistake,'" remembering when to sway her hips, when to spin, and when it's left over right rather than right over left. As one of the more petite girls on the team, she knows she'll get tossed in the air one time near the end of the routine and tries to mentally prepare for it.

The moment rushes toward her as the basketball coach blows his whistle for a time out on the other side of the gym. Two juniors with firm thighs suddenly are hoisting her up, soles of her shoes in their hands. They bend to gain momentum and off she goes. She soars upward, smiling brightly like she's supposed to, and waits, hoping as the dread floods her stomach that she's caught properly. Her spine collides with strong, expertly positioned forearms snaking across her uniform in an interlocking pattern like a backgammon board.

"Nice fall, Griffin. Good form," the familiar voice says from somewhere above her head.

Her eyes fly open and meet Raven's honey brown ones peering over her.

"Thanks," she gives her the whisper of a smile.

When Clarke's wrapping up her dance outfit in a damp towel after her shower, she realizes there's only one other person left shuffling around by the sinks. She closes her locker and walks into the well-lit area smelling faintly of chlorine and shampoo. Raven gives her a nod and a casual "see you tomorrow" as she dabs mascara back on, but Clarke's fingers close around her cool elbow.

"Yeah?" Raven stills her motion and raises her eyebrow, turning.

"Raven," Clarke sighs. "I don't like this."

"You don't like what?"

Clarke frowns.

"You know what. Us not talking. I miss you."

Raven runs a hand down her sleek ponytail.

"It's not the best situation, I agree," she says grudgingly after a few tense seconds pass.

Clarke lets her hand drop. Now that the opportunity is here, she just hopes she doesn't screw it up.

"I'm really sorry for what I pulled at Mecha. I shouldn't have wandered away from you and not come back. That was a shitty thing to do," she admits, rubbing her own upper arm nervously. "But I really
did want your date with John to go well! I wanted to give you some space."


"How, umm, how are things going with him?" Clarke bites her lip.

"They're good," Raven says matter-of-factly. "I like him. He says what he means. He's smart. He's nice to me."

"And it looked like you two had some chemistry on the dance floor," Clarke smirks at her, briefly forgetting the awkwardness between them as Raven blinks and blushes.

"Mmm," Raven mumbles, turning back to the mirror.

"Raven," Clarke says more sharply to the brunette's reflection face. "I just don't understand. Why do you hate Bellamy so much? You don't even know him!"

"I don't hate him," Raven says instantly.

It's so fast Clarke thinks she must have planned what to say if she were ever asked.

"Well you don't like him. And it's making you act like I'm infected with something you can't catch, so--"

Raven whirls back around.

"It's always about you, Clarke! Isn't it!" she yells.

Clarke takes a couple steps back in surprise.

"What do you mean? No, it's not!"

"Did you ever think it bothered me that Finn was willing to throw me aside to get with you?" Raven blazes on, eyes a little wild.

"Oh, oh, Raven!" Clarke's face deflates faster than a tire slicing into glass on the road. "I'm sorry! You know I'm sorry for that. But I didn't want his attention. I kept telling him to back off. I wanted you guys to work out. You have to know that!"

Raven sneers.

"You never did anything?" she demands. "It was always platonic? Nothing ever happened between you two?"

"Never," Clarke swears solemnly.

"And you never wanted it to?" she crosses her arms over her chest and leans back against the sink.

Clarke hesitates, starts to shake her head, but Raven's too quick.

Her eyes are thrown open in anger.

"I knew it!"

"You don't!" Clarke's voice raises to match hers. "You don't! I never betrayed you with Finn. I just wasn't always sure that Wells and I were right together. And one time on that hike we all took up in
Topanga, there was a moment I thought he was going to kiss me."

Raven looks murderous.

"But he didn't! And I realize now that I didn't want him to. I didn't want Finn, Raven. I just wanted to feel a real spark with someone, you know?" she's wringing her hands, her tone pleading. "I care about Wells so much, but it was never, I don't know. I just didn't feel giddy and excited and super connected to him. We were--" she says quickly at Raven's mouth opening to argue. "We were best friends. I'm not saying we weren't connected, but just not . . ." she leans back into the boring cinderblock wall. "I wasn't counting down the minutes until I saw him again. He knows me, but it's just different with Bellamy. Easier. Lighter. I don't have to think about it so much."

"What the hell does any of that have to do with Finn?" Raven snaps.

Clarke sighs.

"Finn was funny and charming, I guess. When you all first started dating, we got along well. I thought he was a nice guy. I--"

"Liked the attention?" Raven asks, voice quieting.

Clarke flushes, the embarrassment coursing through her blood. She wrinkles her nose.

"I'm really sorry."

"I'm sorry he wasn't a nicer guy," Raven retorts drily, coming over to slide down to the floor against the wall where Clarke now sits.

"I guess I kind of know what you mean," Raven admits. "I liked the attention from Wells too every once in a while. It was different, kind of fun."

Clarke's head snaps in surprise.

"You told me you never liked him!"

Raven laughs kind of bitterly.

"I never did. He's just always been the best one of us, right? Like too good for this world. I like when he pushes me to be better, too."

"Yeah," Clarke agrees quietly, picking at her lavender nail polish. "I don't know how he can even look at me let alone be so nice after what I did to him. I still feel awful."

"Don't worry - he had some choice words about the situation when he talked to me and the two goobers."

Raven knocks into her shoulder with a smirk.

"Guess he doesn't think you're so perfect anymore."

Clarke huffs out a breath.

"I was never perfect."

Raven kicks out her legs and runs sweaty palms over her thighs.
"Yeah, um, about that."

Clarke turns to her with wide blue eyes.

"What?"

"From what John mentioned, I don't think Bellamy's got a really perfect past either."

Clarke doesn't expect the wave of defensiveness to curl in her stomach so hotly, but it does.

"What are you talking about?" she says sharply.

"Look," Raven begins. "I know Wells might have been a little too vanilla for you or whatever, but Bellamy's kind of... wild from the sounds of it."

"I already told you, Raven, he has never threatened me in any way!" Clarke jumps up and begins stalking the space in front of the sinks. "And he did break up with Gina! Murphy was right! And Octavia told me the same thing, too. So what is it?"

Raven bites her lip and looks a little lost.

"I get that he treats you all right, really, I do. I'm sorry I thought otherwise for a while," she holds up a placating hand. "And I'm glad the Gina thing is sorted out. But, Clarke, you're, uh, on the pill, right?"

Clarke blinks repeatedly.

"Yeah. What does it matter to you?"

She swallows hard and makes a face.

"I know this is gonna sound weird, but, are you using condoms, too? I just think it would be smart to make sure you're protecting yourself--"

"Are you serious right now?" Clarke spits out heatedly, feet wide apart with her hands on her hips. "How the hell is any of that your business?"

"Please, Clarke, I'm just trying to be a friend here, all right?" Raven stands up and shoves her hands into her jacket pockets. "John mentioned Bellamy's hooked up with a lot of girls, that's all. I want you to be safe. Do you know he's clean?" she asks, surprisingly unembarrassed.

The tension in the room is exacerbated by how the warm air from all the showers stretches around them thickly.

"Yes," Clarke grits out through clenched teeth.

"Oh," Raven says placatingly, trying to smile. "I just wanted to make sure he was straight with you and got himself tested or whatever because it's not something you want to fuck around with."

"I trust him," Clarke says with a ringing finality.

"Ok, good," Raven eyes her warily, reaching down for her abandoned dance bag. "That's good."

Chapter End Notes
Bellarke FanFiction Suggestion: Three Months by VirginiaSoil. I couldn't stop reading it. It might have also made me cry (which is pretty challenging to do).
No Good Deed Goes Unpunished

Chapter Notes

Yup, I once again feel the need to say I'm throwing common medical practice out the window. I am not a doctor. Don't take the medical parts seriously. Sorry!

On Tuesday, Clarke returns to the sunshine yellow clinic where Bellamy initially took her, lightning bolts crashing through her stomach. She knows what he told her about his own health, but she's a doctor's daughter. There's no way she could be stupid and take risks with her own well-being and live with herself.

Maya is on duty again and after taking her blood pressure, the kind-faced nurse offers her a consent form to sign for the tests.

"There's another page under it," she notes, motioning toward the back of the clipboard on Clarke's lap. "Since you're 18, you're not a minor anymore. But if there's anyone you would give us permission to release the results of your medical screenings to, you can mark down the name there. We usually recommend that patients do, in the event we can't reach them directly for whatever reason."

Clarke raises an eyebrow at her and bangs her legs nervously against the metal examination table. Maya smiles.

"It cuts down on the amount of time you spend worrying while you're waiting to hear back," she explains.

Clarke's mind flashes to Bellamy first as she taps the tip of the pen into the paper, but he doesn't even know she's doing this. She shudders inwardly at the thought of the hurt in his eyes if he knew she wasn't taking him at his word. But she had to be sure, right? She had to know and be safe. She studied science, for crying out loud. She doesn't operate in guesswork. It's a true mark of how wrapped up she's been in him that she never seriously considered catching anything until staring the hard truth of Raven Reyes down yesterday.

Writing her mother's name on the form seems even worse than Bellamy's, somehow. What if something is wrong with her? How would Abby react? It's not hard to imagine her disappointment, her anger, her infuriating stubbornness and litany of "You knew better than this, Clarke! How could you let this happen?" Her mother would barrage her with insulting commentary and follow her from room to room from now until graduation.

There's nothing for it. She pens down Jake Griffin and his cell number, writing "father" on the relationship to patient line.

"Thanks, Clarke," Maya says with a smile as she takes back the clipboard. "Now I'll go grab Dr. Jackson, and we can get started."

***

On Saturday afternoon, Clarke sits in Bellamy's Chevy as he cuts the engine and drums his fingers
"On his steering wheel."

"Ready to go inside?" he gestures toward the large, rectangular civic center that's been repurposed into an emergency shelter for victims of the devastating wildfire.

There's a definite note of hesitation in his voice.

Clarke scoots closer to him, tucking her chin against his shoulder and breathing in his cologne.

"You said you wanted to do this. To meet them," she whispers quietly, reaching out for his hand and bringing it back to her lap. "It'll be ok. They're nice people."

"I know," he sighs, leaning back into the seat and tipping his head into the path of sunlight. He lets her curl his fingers into hers.

She stares at his freckles shimmering a little and sees a rainbow of light reflection zip across his eyelashes.

"Wells said it would be ok," she says barely above a whisper, stroking his hand with her thumb. "It's not like I'm bringing you inside for shock value."

He tilts his head away from her and smirks.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you, Princess? Causing a big scene?"

"Not my style," she kisses his shoulder through his ironed button-down. "These people are important to me, and you're important to me, and it would be great if this went well," she bites down on the flesh above his ball-and-socket joint for a moment before drawing back. "So be good, ok?"

"I save my bad behavior for when I'm with you, Princess," he pinches her waist, causing her to yelp in a half-moan, half-laugh.

But before she can maneuver away, he wraps a hand around her ponytail and crushes his lips against hers.

"Bellamy!" she huffs, pushing at his chest a minute later.

Her back is pressed mostly against the cozy cushion, and he's a warm weight above her, kissing her neck and rubbing the thin skin of her stomach.

"Someone could look right in! You wanted to go to this thing, so let's go help people!"

She straightens her shirt then reaches up to fluff her fingers through his disheveled hair. It's almost impossible to not play with it when he's so close to her.

"There, you look presentable now," she grins.

"Mmm," he murmurs mild agreement, checking himself out in the rearview mirror.

"Enough preening, let's go!" Clarke exclaims, hand on the door handle.

"Wait," he drops a large hand to her knee.

She notices something dark flash in his eyes as they survey her. A dose of liquid apprehension swishes down her throat and through her chest.
"What?"

"Were you going to tell me about what you were doing today if I hadn't asked? Or just wait for it to happen and hope I didn't find out about it?" he asks her, suddenly serious.

Clarke shakes her head, laying her hand across his rougher one.

"I was going to tell you last Friday when we were studying at your place. You just beat me to it," she admits, looking away in embarrassment. "But I was gonna tell you before I left that night. I didn't want you to think I was keeping it from you. There's nothing to hide."

She keeps her eyes on the dimple in his chin as he remains motionless until she lets them flick up into his face. His expression seems calm.

"All right, Princess," he says at last. "Let's roll."

***

Abby is the first to greet them near the double doors leading into the vast multipurpose room. Its ceiling is over 20 feet high, and it seems to stretch on for miles. There are dozens of cots set up in long rows, a sorting station full of clothing, another section on the far wall that appears to be set up to accommodate meals. There are already at least a hundred volunteers milling around working on different tasks.

"Hi, sweetie," Abby descends on them with the swish of a long skirt and the click of her sandals. "Nice to see you again, Bellamy."

She feels Bellamy tension for the merest moment, but then he's smiling warmly and extending his hand toward her mom.

"Hi, Dr. Griffin," Bellamy's deep, professional voice rumbles. She's heard him use it with her father. "It's nice to see you again, too. Thanks for allowing me to be part of the response team here today."

Abby cocks her head and knits her eyebrows together but she continues to smile.

"Oh, don't thank me," she returns. "Rosemary is a people person. She's normally of a 'the more, the merrier,' mindset. I'm sure she's happy you could make it."

Bellamy's cheeks tighten a little. If you didn't know him, you wouldn't detect a difference. But Clarke does.

"Mom?" she interjects hastily. "Is there a sign-up section, or someone to check in with to get an assignment?"

"Oh, yes," Abby pivots her attention back to her daughter and gestures toward a basic, foldout table not too far away. "Let me take you over to Marcus, and he'll give you your jobs for the afternoon. And Bellamy--" she adds as they start to walk.

"Yes, ma'am?"

"You are still coming over for dinner tonight after this is all done, right?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'm looking forward to it."

"Perfect," Abby smiles once more. It doesn't quite reach her eyes, but Clarke can see her mother is trying. "I'm making spinach stuffed shells, does that sound good to you?"
"Sounds great, Dr. Griffin."

"Excellent," she says, poised and straight-backed.

They arrive in front of Marcus Kane a moment later. Already a line of eight or so people stand in front of him, waiting to receive jobs.

"Hi, Marcus. I have two new recruits for you," she smiles fondly at the man with the lavish beard sitting behind a table housing a laptop, stacks of paperwork, and name tags with Sharpies in every conceivable color.

"Thanks, Abby," he grins warmly at her. "Hi, Clarke. Sorry I didn't get a chance to talk to you at Thelonious' announcement party. Things just got crazy. You know how it is rubbing elbows with the political elite," he winks at her. "Did you have a good time?"

She grips Bellamy's hand more tightly but smiles and nods.

"It was a beautiful event. I was happy to support Dr. Jaha."

"Abby, I was wondering if I could grab a few minutes of your time to help with the check-in process? I'm already getting backed up," he juts his chin toward the growing crowd.

"I can give you a hand, GQ Jesus," Jake pops up at his wife's side out of nowhere, wrapping an arm around her waist. "How's it going, Bellamy?" he extends his hand to his TA to shake.

***

Clarke and Bellamy are sorting through an enormous pile of donated canned good items when Wells approaches about an hour later.

"Hey, Clarke. Thanks for coming. Mom hasn't had a chance to come over yet, but she did see you."

She gazes up from her perch elbows deep in a cardboard box and smiles at him.

"Hi, Wells. No problem. This, uh--" she pushes the long bangs out of her face with the back of her wrist. "Is Bellamy."

There's a stiff, awkward silence for a moment. She watches Wells' eyes narrow slightly as he squares his chest. Bellamy stands and pulls himself to his full height. A random muscle in Clarke's face twitches.

"Wells Jaha," Wells says at last, extending his hand a bit like it's a ticking grenade.

"Bellamy Blake," Bellamy says gruffly, reaching out to shake it.

They both seem to grip too hard and too long. But then it's over.

"Good of you to want to volunteer," Wells says in a flat tone.

The flash of red and black darts into Clarke's vision a moment later, dispelling the awkward moment.

"Yo, Wells!" Monty practically crashes into his friend's shoulder, clapping him on the back. "Your mom was asking if you and Clarke can move over to help entertain the kids for a bit?"

"What?" Wells stares at him stupidly.
"Because you two have been camp counselors before," Monty says like it's obvious. "And Jasper 'I make the world's greatest volcano experiments' Jordan isn't here."

Wells smirks but looks at Clarke hesitantly. He's not surprised to find her eyes on Bellamy, but it still stings.

"Raven and I can take over here with Bellamy," Monty adds before reaching out a hand to Bellamy. "Hey man, I'm Monty Green. Been friends with Clarke since elementary school. And, uh, I heard you already met Raven."

Raven barks out a laugh.

"Yeah, we've met."

Bellamy's jaw ticks noticeably.

"Hey, Blake. You look better sober," she raises her eyebrows at him.

"I could say the same for you," he quips back, not missing a beat. "Murphy sends his love."

Clarke can't help it. She laughs out loud at the surprised look on her friend's face.

"You good here?" she arches on her tiptoes to whisper in his ear.

"I'm a big boy, Princess."

"Ok, see you in a little bit."

Bellamy tries not to pay attention to how Wells takes Clarke's arm briefly to steer her toward the children's area as they walk away.

***

Two hours later, they've made a big dent in the canned good operation, and Bellamy's decided that Monty's not an asshole. He knows a lot about computer hacking actually, and they get into a detailed conversation about conspiracy theories surrounding the Russian influence in the presidential election that quickly morphs into their takes on popular conspiracy theories in general. Raven just shakes her head.

"Do you know what made all that computer technology you're both so hard up for possible?" she demands, gazing from one to the other.

They glance at each other than shake their heads.

"Space travel. Taking rockets to the moon. Exploring the final frontier," she says, a kind of dreamy look softening her features.

He'd almost say she looked pretty, but then again, he'd never go that far.

"We should be focused on advancing science, not wasting time coming up with bullshit theories about who killed Kennedy!"

"She's still bitter she didn't get into space camp a few years ago because my girlfriend has a heart condition and couldn't go with her and Clarke," Monty explains at Bellamy's confused face.

He grins.
"Do you really think we even landed on the moon?" he asks her cockily, eyes dancing.

She lets out a roar of fake outrage, and grabbing the nearest bag of black beans in sight, lobs it at his head. It splits open at impact, spilling the black ovals in every direction.

"Excellent work, Raven," Monty sighs in exasperation. "Always gotta rise to the bait, don't you. Sorry, Bellamy," he says as he bends down and begins sweeping the beans nearest him into a pile.

But Bellamy can't stop laughing.

He catches Clarke's eye a few times through the afternoon, but they don't get a chance to communicate. Finally, around 5 p.m., he notices Wells helping Clarke up from the floor where they were playing Duck-Duck-Goose, and his attention snaps to the young man's hand curved around Clarke's waist.

He doesn't bother to say goodbye to Monty and Raven but heads straight for Clarke, the blood pounding in his ears.

"Ready to go?" a deep voice rumbles from a few inches behind Clarke making her jump.

"Bell! Hi," she steps into his side away from Wells and trails her hand around his waist, locking her fingers through one of his belt loops.

She smiles up into his tan, unreadable face.

"We lost track of time playing with the kids. How did the sorting go?"

"It was good. I like Monty," he returns.

Her grin expands. "I thought you might."

But then her eyes flick back to Wells, and it's hard to miss the pained expression he throws her, like she's doing something unthinkably wrong.

"Thanks for inviting me," she says to him quietly, letting her hand drop from Bellamy and taking a small step forward. "It was fun. And I'm glad we were able to help some people who needed it."

Wells pushes his lips together and gives a tight nod.

"Thanks for coming," he says in a strained voice. "Bellamy," he nods once, then walks off toward where his father is dishing out an early dinner at the cafeteria line without a backward glance for either of them.

***

"You were always so keen on her going to UCLA! What happened?" Abby laughs at her husband as she spoons more fruit salad into her bowl. "I'm telling you, Bellamy, this man bought her a onesie from the gift shop while she was still in utero."

The meal is going well, surprisingly well, Clarke thinks. Bellamy wanted to stop and pick up flowers for her mom at the grocery store before they returned to Arkadia Hills. Abby graciously accepted the sunflowers, found them a pretty vase, and set them up on the dining room table. The stuffed shells are steaming in a mosaic platter in the middle of the table and smell like a delicious blend of tomato, basil, and ricotta. Bellamy's sitting next to her, her right hand laced into his left one on his thigh under the table. He's laughed at Jake's imitations of famous football players and listened politely and
with interest while Abby explained what her duties as chief of surgery for Cedars-Sinai entail.

"It's a fine school," Jake admits. "With a variety of wonderful science courses and some good art ones too," he winks at his daughter. "But if she wants to spread her wings and check out New York or Boston for college, I'm just saying I'm not fundamentally opposed."

"Gee, thanks, dad," Clarke says sarcastically while still managing to grin.

"Make of that what you will," he throws her a goofy face, bugging out his eyes and opening his mouth before spooning a few shells onto his plate.

"You're thinking about the East Coast for school still?" Bellamy asks her.

"Oh, uh," Clarke flushes, fork clanking too loudly against her plate. "Well, it's still on the table." She glances at her mother, who nods. "Mom's taking some time off, so we can visit a few schools in October. But I'm applying to schools in California, too!" she finishes in a rush.

"Ok," Bellamy says lightly enough.

When she squeezes his fingers under the table, he doesn't squeeze them back, opting instead to use both hands to cut into his dinner.

The question comes a few minutes later.

"How have you enjoyed your time at UCLA?" Abby asks Bellamy.

"It's been great," he returns, face opening up a little. "The history department's been really good for me. I like the classes, and when I hit a tough family situation, they worked with me to make sure I could graduate on time and be able to afford everything. Honestly, I wouldn't be working toward my master's without Dr. Griffin taking me on as his TA," he says, gratitude infusing his voice.

Clarke's stomach warms, and she feels a pang of guilt.

"That's wonderful, Bellamy. I'm always happy to hear about young people intent on making a good life for themselves," Abby smiles encouragingly. "Jake tells me you have a younger sister that you take care of?"

"Yes, ma'am," Bellamy answers. "Octavia. She's a senior this year, like Clarke. I've been looking out for her since our mom died a few years ago."

Abby nods, biting her lip.

"I know, uh, that going to school is easier for you with your scholarship and the TA job . . ."

Bellamy nods as Clarke's eyes snap up to her mother's controlled face. Her neck is getting stiff with stress. She wants to reach out and rub Bellamy's knee, but she's not sure the gesture would be welcome or go unnoticed.

"That's right," Bellamy replies.

"Abby," Jake interrupts, lilting the last syllable upward in gentle warning.

"No," she smiles more genuinely now. "Please don't misunderstand, Bellamy. I think what you're doing is very admirable. I just wondered how you're managing to pay for everything for you and your sister outside school expenses."
"Mom!" Clarke interjects, outrage cropping up on her face in raised red splotches. "That's none of your business!"

"Abby, Clarke's right, honey. Let the kid eat his dinner," Jake eyes her in disbelief.

"I'm sorry," Clarke whispers to Bellamy's profile.

He's chewing thoughtfully, still watching her mother.

"No, it's ok. I don't mind," he brushes aside their concern. "I manage a bar called Mecha in downtown LA with my friend Nathan, and I also work some construction jobs. My mom worked for a start-up in Silicon Valley before she died. She didn't leave us a lot, but I invested some of it in the stock market, and," he shrugs. "We've been doing all right. I can support us."

Clarke turns to him in surprise. She didn't know the last part.

"Hmmm," Abby says in satisfaction, her bottom lip slipping up to cover the top one. "Very industrious of you."

Jake's sigh of relief is audible.

"I'll go bring the key lime pie out from the kitchen, shall I?" he asks, rising up from his chair.

The phone rings while he's gone, and but Clarke doesn't pay it much mind, listening instead to Bellamy talk about a time when Octavia went to a friend's sleepover in middle school and managed to come home with half her hair dyed pink. His fingers are safely caught up in hers again, and she can't wipe the dumb smile from her lips.

"Clarke," her father's voice, not normally sharp, echoes around the dining room from where he stands in the doorway, breaking her reverie.

She jumps.

"Yeah, dad? What is it? Do you need help?" she looks up at him, confused.

"That was the Planned Parenthood Clinic down in Inglewood," Jake says tightly.

White dots burst into Clarke's line of vision as her stomach rolls. Bellamy turns still as stone beside her.

"They just wanted to let you know your test results all came back negative, and they've renewed your contraceptive prescription."

Her heart's beating so fast, she's certain it's going to rip from her chest.

"Clarke!" Jake's voice booms, and Abby stares at him in alarm. "What the hell is going on?"
"Jake!" Abby vaults from her seat, almost knocking it over in her haste to reach her husband. "Calm down!"

Clarke sits frozen, watching the artfully lacquered chair wobble.

"I will not calm down! I want to know why the hell my daughter thought she had an STD!" he practically roars, slamming his fist into the top of the table.

Bellamy flinches beside her. She can hear his breathing coming faster.

"Dad, stop it!" she shouts, standing up, too, the anger and mortification battling inside her in a churning storm.

"Jake, calm down right now," Abby repeats through gritted teeth, laying her hand on her husband's chest. "Come into the kitchen with me, and let's talk for a moment--"

"No!" Jake yells, pushing his wife's hand away. "I told you she should have been with us this summer! And now you can see I was right. She wasn't ready to be responsible on her own like that!"

Clarke's face blazes as she stares down at the congealing tomato sauce on her plate where it leaches into the pasta noodles.

Abby's eyes widen and she stares up at the ceiling as if praying for strength.

"Jake--"

"What did you do to my daughter?" Jake rounds on Bellamy, biceps flexing where he pushes against the table.

"I-I-I," Bellamy stutters, trying and failing to come up with any sort of explanation. "I didn't know she was getting tested," he manages weakly, eyes still frenzied when they find hers. "I care about Clarke so much. I wouldn't do anything to hurt her, sir."

"If that were true, I wouldn't have just gotten that phone call," Jake argues. "I trusted you to watch out for her over the summer, and this is how you repay me? By making my kid think she's got a disease?"

Abby looks suddenly weary, lines dug into the skin around her eyes and mouth. It's the expression she wears when she comes home from a particularly grueling day of surgery, and the patient didn't make it. She's half reaching for Jake, one hand wrapped around the top of his shoulder. He's stretches up, hands on his hips and a vein pulsing near his temple. Clarke sees his eyes go a bit red and immediately worries about his blood pressure. But then her gaze drops to Bellamy.

It's as if he's been shot. Clarke's heart explodes as she catches the glimmer of liquid building in his brown eyes.

"He didn't know I was going!" Clarke insists angrily, throwing up her hands. "He didn't give me a reason to think I should. I just wanted to do the responsible thing, ok? So blame me! Yell at me!"

It's the most awkward moment of her life, and it simply stretches on and on, like the orchestra music
for an actor that can't stop making his acceptance speech when he's won an Academy Award. Clarke steps in front of Bellamy, shielding him from her father, nauseated but ready to take whatever venom he's about to spew.

"Clarke, I-

She feels Bellamy rise to his feet behind her but turns and shushes him, "No, I've got this," she widens her eyes at him. "This isn't your fault."

She takes a step closer to her parents.

"I'm 18, and I'm not doing anything wrong. And Bellamy didn't do anything wrong either! I care about him, and you have no right to treat him this way!"

Bellamy has the stunned look of a man trapped in a whiteout blizzard with no sense of direction whatsoever. He grips the back of his neck before letting his hand fall with a smack against his thigh.

"Clarke, he's right," Bellamy sighs heavily at her back. He's close enough that she feels the vibrations of his chest as it moves and the wave of air that ruffles her hair. "I broke your dad's trust. You deserve someone better than me, someone good."

"What?" she whirls around, tears leaking down her face. She buries her face in his chest while he stands motionless, hugging him tightly around the middle. "That's insane! Don't listen to him. I only wanna be with you," she mumbles.

Bellamy weakly tries to push her away, but Clarke's hold is unbreakable.

"He's not right, Bellamy," Abby says strongly out of nowhere, voice regaining some of its normal composure. "This is wildly inappropriate on many levels, and we can get to that later. But for now," she pivots toward her still-shaking husband to look at him fully. "Jake, I need you to breathe, ok? Yes, Clarke didn't tell us what was going on, but . . . but," she sighs. "She was trying to be safe and responsible. And that's what we raised her to do. And she's fine. She's healthy. So can we start with that, please?"

Jake clenches his eyes shut but gives a tiny jerk of his head.

Abby throws her daughter a look that clearly says she may be vouching for her in this moment, but the conversation is far from over.

"I-I'm going to go." Bellamy says weakly, voice breaking slightly. "Dr. Griffin," Jake twitches at his name but doesn't make any noise. "I'm so sorry for everything. You have every right to be angry with me. I-I'll ask Dr. Polaris to give me an assignment change first thing Monday."

Jake simply blinks at him while Abby mumbles out, "I'm not sure if that'll be necessary . . . " but her voice is eclipsed by Clarke's.

"Bellamy, no!" Clarke argues, angrily brushing a tear from her face. "You don't have to go!"

He gives her a fleeting squeeze of her hand and says, "I'm glad you're ok," softly before walking toward the front door.

"I'll never forgive you for this!" she shrieks at her father before dashing off after him.

"Bellamy!" she yells, feet pulsing hotly in her shoes as she slams against the concrete drive to reach him in time.
"Clarke, go inside," he manages to keep his voice firm, but his Adam's Apple bobbles noticeably.

"No, she knocks her hip into his half-open door, closing it. "I'm coming with you."

He frowns.

"That's not a good idea. It's just gonna make your dad angrier."

"I don't care if he burns the house down!" she erupts passionately. "I'm not losing you again!"

Then there's a crush of yellow hair flying in his line of vision as she buries her face in the hollow created by his shoulder and neck.

It takes a long time, but his arms finally join together behind her back, pulling her flush against them.

Clarke sighs, kissing his pulse point with a brush of her dry lips.

"Take me home."

***

The ride back to Inglewood is mostly silent. When they arrive at the ramshackle ranch, Clarke finds a note from Octavia saying she's hanging out at Lincoln's family's house overnight and will be back sometime Sunday.

"I'm sorry you didn't get to finish your dinner," Clarke says sheepishly when Bellamy slouches into the kitchen, changed into his sweatpants and a T-shirt. "Can I make you something?"

Bellamy scoffs mildly.

"Since when do you cook for me, Princess?"

"Hey! I can make a few things," Clarke smiles through her indignation. "Pancakes and sandwiches, pasta, burgers, tossed salads . . ."

"I'm not so sure the sandwiches and salads count as cooking," Bellamy quirks his lip up at her.

"I'll make you anything you want," Clarke replies from around the refrigerator door.

"I'll just have a beer, thanks."

She sighs, but hands him a glass bottle of Corona.

They're sitting on the back porch swing which Bellamy is rocking lazily with his feet when the silence starts to suffocate her.

"We have to talk about it. I know you told me you'd been checked, but then, you said you'd been with Gina, and I," she puckers her mouth. "I just wanted to be safe. But I trust you, Bellamy. I do."

She slides her hand inside his, and he doesn't resist her. But he doesn't squeeze back.

"I'm not mad at you for going. It was smart," he says roughly. "I just don't get why all of a sudden you decided to do it."

Clarke bites her lip, cheeks heating up under his gaze.

"Clarke, what?"
"Bell, I know you're way more experienced than me, and I don't mind, but well. Murphy mentioned to Raven what some of your past, uh, *girlfriends* were like, like they're lifestyles, and I just . . . wanted to be sure."

He takes a swig of his beer, staring off into the woods behind the house.

"I told you my past wasn't that great," he breaks the silence after a while. "None of them were really girlfriends though, except Gina."

His jaw clenches.

"Bell, talk to me. What is it?"

He runs a hand through his hair in frustration. "I'm just pissed at myself that you were afraid of what I could do to you!" he says violently.

Clarke sits up in alarm, wrapping a hand around his knee.

"I know you wouldn't do *anything* to me on purpose, Bellamy. Hey, look at me," she jerks his chin with her fingers until she can stare into his eyes. "I know you."

His smirk is hollow.

"I was terrified when my mom died, Clarke. She wasn't always the best parent, but she was all we had, and I loved her. I didn't know how to take care of Octavia, not really."

"You're doing a good job," Clarke says comfortingly, laying her head against his chest, so she can let his heartbeat comfort her. His skin smells like honey and baby powder.

"Mmm," Bellamy grunts. "Better than before, maybe. I was just so mad at everyone and everything, you know? I got drunk with Miller a lot, got into some stupid fights with guys in the bars around UCLA. Smashed my hand through a glass window once, and that woke me up a little when the doctor told me I almost sliced into a major tendon."

Clarke makes a pained face he can't see.

"Raven said there was a girl, Bree, who was in a drug cult?" she asks, voice hesitant.

Bellamy's hands on the arch of her hip, and he presses down on it at the question.

"Bree was a lost soul," he says. "I didn't do drugs with her, but yeah, I guess you could call it a cult."

"And the girl with the knives and swords?"

Bellamy's laugh comes out like a bark.

"Echo had a lot of anger and self-loathing issues. That's probably what brought us together to be honest."

"What kind of name is Echo?" Clarke nuzzles farther into his side, pleased he's talking now even as what he says stabs at her.

"We don't really have room to talk about strange names, babe," he brushes his fingers through her hair.
She chuckles.

"Can I stay here with you?" she asks later as the boiling tangerine sun sinks behind the trees.

He just tipped the last of his beer bottle to her lips, and there was something erotically comforting about the gesture.

"I still think you should go home, Clarke."

She crosses her legs on the swing and turns to him, taking a deep breath and weighing the options.

He looks at her expectantly.

"I'm home when I'm with you," she whispers into the twilight.

"Clarke, don't do that."

"Don't do what?" she demands, narrowing her eyes in concern.

"Just don't . . . say things like that when you don't know what the future will look like," he sighs.

She jumps up to stand right in front of his long legs drifting back and forth as the swing creaks.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You're applying to East Coast schools, Princess. You said so yourself today."

Her stomach tightens until it's more difficult to breathe normally.

"It's- It's just an option!" she insists. "I'm applying here, too! And that doesn't change how I feel about you. Even if I went to a school outside the state, it doesn't mean I'm leaving you!" she cries, relieved to be coming to the heart of it.

"Ok," he wets his lips with his tongue and watches a bird fly by.

"You're not exactly begging me to stay."

When his eyes meet hers, their empty blackness causes her to draw in a sharp breath.

"I could've gotten you sick, Clarke. I could've gotten you pregnant. I pushed you too much. And I get too angry," she's shaking her head wordlessly, but he keeps talking. "Your dad's right. You deserve someone better than me. My mother if she knew what I've done, who I am. She raised me to be better, to be good..."

"Bellamy, that's not true!" Clarke drops to her knees on the worn wooden boards before him, catching his face in her hands.

"It is. All I do is hurt people," he sniffs quietly. "I'm a monster. I nearly choked Murphy after you left Mecha that night because he said Raven didn't like me. I betrayed your dad. I let you betray Wells. I've screamed and ranted at Octavia. I used girls until I got tired of them. I came onto you when I shouldn't have. I could have killed Clara that day with my car . . . "

"Hey," Clarke says sharply because it's becoming unbearable. "You may be a total ass half the time, I'm not going to sit here and deny it. But you never forced me into anything, all right? I wanted you, too. You're a wonderful brother. And you didn't hurt Clara. That was an accident. And Murphy," she rolls her eyes. "You probably need to work on your relationship with Murphy. He looks up to
you, you know."

"I'm a monster, Clarke. The Princess runs from the monster or kills it in the end."

"You read too many myths," she curls up into his lap before he can react. "Listen to me, Blake. You want forgiveness? Fine. I'll give it to you. You're forgiven. But you can't run from me. Not now. We're in too deep."
Clarke finds herself grateful she stored some clothes and toiletries in the Blakes' guest bedroom over the summer when Bellamy finally relents and agrees she can stay the night. She picks out a plain pair of dark green Aerie sleep shorts and a grey V-neck shirt soft to the touch before padding back into the kitchen.

"You've got to go back tomorrow, all right?" he grumbles when he sees her passing. "I don't want your dad adding abduction to my list of crimes."

Bellamy's sprawled out on the comfortable black sofa flipping mindlessly through his Netflix queue. Clarke just tisks her tongue, drumming her fingernails against the kitchen counter and staring at the tea kettle, which remains annoyingly quiet on the stove. It's white but covered with blooming fall flowers that are sort of 1960s psychedelic. Honestly, it reminds her of something Carol Brady might have used, and the thought makes her smile.

"I'm not agreeing to that," she scoffs. "Monday is Labor Day, and school's closed. Remember?"

Bellamy glances up at her, lips pursed.

"Well, I guess I've got one more day til the execution," he says darkly.

"Bell, he'll cool down! I promise," she insists. "Honestly," she sighs heavily, "They need to start realizing I'm not this perfect porcelain doll still reading *Little House on the Prairie* and screeching about One Direction."

"Clarke, you *do* still love One Direction."

She flips him off, but he smirks at her, unfazed.

She's about to head into the living room to wait when the tea kettle finally emits a low whistle that builds to a piercing shriek.

"There, milk and honey like you wanted," she places the steaming mug of Earl Grey into his outstretched hand and sets hers down on the coffee table for it to cool.

"Thanks, Princess."

"Don't mention it."

"What did you decide on?" she asks a minute later after arranging the afghan around her legs and finding the most comfortable position in the nook between Bellamy's arm and the side of his chest.

"Comfortable?" he teases.

"You could do with a little more fat on you. It would give my head something squishy to lean on," Clarke says seriously.

He snorts.

"I'll keep that in mind. How about *Deep Blue Sea*?"
"What's it about?"

"You've never seen it?" he asks incredulously, peering into her upside-down blue eyes.

"Nope."

"Excellent, it's a classic!" he says, sounding excited for the first time all day.

"I repeat: What's it about?"

"Over-intelligent sharks attacking scientists and Cuba Gooding Jr. That's all you need to know."

"Ok, baby," she says placatingly, nuzzling farther across his torso.

He slips an arm around her waist before hitting play.

The first time her phone lights up she ignores it. It's the same the second and third time it happens. But by the fourth flash of white light and accompanying insistent humming, she feels Bellamy stiffen completely under her and stretches out for the celestial cover twitching at the edge of the table. Her eyes flick across her mother's words. She can almost hear the shrill quality of the thoughts.

Mom: I already left you two messages. You can't just leave the house like that, Clarke! Are you coming home tonight? Are you staying with Bellamy? At least tell me that, so I can sleep without worrying you'll end up in a ditch somewhere driving back.

Mom: Clarke Alexandria, answer me please.

Mom: Dad's calmed down now. He said he apologizes for yelling. Are you with Bellamy at his house?

Mom: Clarke! Do not make me drive out there and embarrass you. Answer me right now, or I will make sure the only place you see is the inside of your room for the next month.

Clarke: I'm fine, mom. I'm at Bellamy's. I'm staying over tonight. Thanks for your concern.

Mom: I don't need your attitude, young lady. I'm not the one who was shouting today if you remember correctly. You need to apologize to your father.

Clarke: I need to apologize!? Did you hear what he said to Bellamy?

Mom: I did. It was inappropriate. But you can't go springing things like that on him. He'll have a heart attack. He just loves you, baby. He wants the best for you.

Clarke: I'm 18. I can figure out what's best for myself, thanks.

Mom: You're a senior in high school who's tied to my credit card. A little respect please, Clarke. I think I'm being more than understanding of the situation considering the circumstances.

Clarke: Sorry.

Mom: How heartfelt. Listen, I know you're still upset, but we can sort this out tomorrow, ok? You NEED to come home tomorrow, or I will come and get you. Understood?

Clarke: I'll come home Monday. And only if dad promises he's not jeopardizing Bellamy's scholarship in any way. He has to work for the department - it's important.
There's a long pause where Clarke stays crouched in the opposite corner of the couch, the dull light from her phone illuminating her face in the darkness. She knows Bellamy is watching her out of the corner of his eye but refuses to look up at him.

**Mom:** Ok. Let me talk to him.

"What's the verdict?" Bellamy asks too lightly as she cuddles against him once more. On screen a shark rams repeatedly into a glass barrier separating it from its human prey.

"I'm staying until Monday. And you're keeping a job with the history department."

She wraps her arms around his waist and sticks her cold toes under the back seat cushion for warmth.

"You don't have to do that for me, Clarke."

With a huff of frustration, she snatches the remote out of his hand and hits pause.

"I know I don't **have** to! But it's the right thing to do," she argues, staring straight into his face. "You didn't do anything wrong. Plus you were respectful to everyone all day. My friends liked you. My parents liked you. You even handled Wells like a gentleman."

He scoffs and looks away disbelievingly.

"I'm serious!" she grabs his chin in her hand and turns it back to her, climbing into his lap, which is fortunately devoid of tea. "You'd do the same for me if the situation were reversed, right?"

"If the situation were reversed, none of this ever would have happened," he retorts drily after a long pause.

"Oh, I don't know," Clarke's voice turns playful as she flashes her teeth at him and walks her fingers up his chest. An idea is forming in her mind, something to make him feel better. "You are very good-looking, Bellamy Blake."

"What are you doing, Clarke?"

A second later, she's on her feet beside him then tripping away down the hall toward his room, laughing softly.

"Follow me and find out!" her girlish squeal bounces off the walls.

When he enters his room, there's no one there.

"Clarke?"

"In the bathroom, one second. Do you have-- Oh, yeah, you do!"

And then she appears in the doorway, framed in a sort of dandelion halo with her hair in a messy bun, holding up a container of Vasoline. Clarke balances one bare foot against the side of her knee and cocks her head at him, wriggling her eyebrows.

"Come 'ere," she curls her pointer finger at him, squinting her eyes like a drunken sailor.

He moves slowly with heavy footfalls, face full of confusion. The warmth of his body in the closed space is all the more apparent when he's suddenly looming over her, hand stroking her waist questioningly.
"What's going on, babe?"

"Sit," she points her chin toward the closed toilet, nodding encouragingly when his look morphs from confusion to a strange, boyish hopefulness.

"There you go," Clarke smiles up at him, swallowing her nerves as she kneels down between his legs on the fluffy throw rug in front of his shower. She drops the container next to her, and Bellamy eyes it again.

The chill of the low-running air conditioner sends a slight tremor through her, and her nipples are popping out through the thin fabric of her top. Bellamy will surely notice in a moment if he hasn't already. Still, she runs her hands up and down his sweat pants, draping one delicately down his length, before reaching up and tucking one of his curls back behind his ear. He's breathing heavier when he catches her palm.

"You're really gonna let me . . . " his voice is gruff and husky, pupils already blown wide despite the low light in the small room.

Clarke doesn't say anything, just takes one of his large hands in her own and brings it up to her breast, more pliable beneath her shirt without her bra.

"Mnhmm," the back of her throat purrs when he begins the gentle squeezing motion first with one, then the other.

Bellamy leans forward on the balls of his feet, half-scooping Clarke up at the waist and bringing her to his level until their faces are only a few inches apart.

"You did good today, Bell," she whispers suddenly, latching her pale arms around his neck. "I was proud of you."

The corners of his mouth tip upward, and she surges forward to kiss his full lips, soft and pillowy.

"Can I?" he gestures toward the hem of her shirt when she draws back.

"Yeah," she sucks the word into her lungs more than dispels it.

His hands glide up her sides as he removes her top, tickling her. Clarke shivers and settles back into the rug. Reaching for the blue-lidded container, she pops open the top and extends it out to him.

---

Yeah, I have no idea what came over me. I'm telling you all this now, so that when you write to me in the comments, I can just shrug and say, "please see the notes section where I told you how the craziness just snuck up on me." Anyway, thanks for sticking with this story this long! As always, you guys are the best!

I FINALLY updated my bunker tale, and I'm hoping to give Bellamy and Clarke some softness in baby land over there. We'll see how it goes. I can't decide if it's harder writing canon verse or modern AU.

Lastly, if my opinion is worth anything to you, I recommend checking out "Same Time Next Week" by Oseastarved. I think you might love it as much as I do. And, there's the
totally self-serving side of me that wants to read the end to that story, and I know you all might comment that you'd like to see the same thing. Power in numbers, right? ;)

Happy Labor Day weekend! Look out for new Season 5 info coming out of DragonCon this weekend. xoxo
The gooey, manilla-colored substance glistens in the light as Bellamy takes the container in his hands and dips two fingers into it. The edges of his lips quirk upward as his fingertips hover a few inches from her skin. He raises his eyebrow at her one last time.

"Go on," Clarke chides him playfully. "What are you waiting for?"

"All right, Princess," he exhales, breath blowing warmly over her face.

Her shoulder jumps a fraction when the thick jelly hits the top of her left breast, gliding across it in a zig-zagging pattern. Bellamy's fingers run dry above her areola, and when they reappear from the container, the jelly clings to them.

"You've got to get them nice and slick, baby," Clarke leans up to murmur right against his mouth, tickling him.

She scratches the back of his neck easily and winks at him.

"You're so beautiful," he huffs out along her jaw, fingers slipping over her nipple and grazing a nail across it.

"You're not so bad yourself, Blake," she returns, kissing the central swell of his lips.

Bellamy groans as she shifts upward. His palm falls open to cup her generous breast, her movements letting it graze against his hand. She settles on his knee, arching so her nipple rests right between the gap between his index and middle finger.

"Do you need some help?" she sings into his ear.

"Uh, ummm, hmm."

Noises jumble at the back of his throat.

"You're cute," she whispers, nipping at his earlobe. "But I don't get it. They're just breasts."

"Well yours are spectacular," he says in a low rush.

Her throaty laughter sends the hairs on the back of his neck springing to attention. She rocks her hips very slowly into his thigh to get a little friction against her core.

"Ok, I'll help you."

He rests still and wide-eyed while Clarke applies the slick substance to the trail between her breasts until it glimmers. Her hand slides over his resting upturned on his knee, bringing them back to the Vasoline together. She clenches his hand down on the jelly, crackling her knuckles against his before directing his hand to sweep gracefully over her right breast, too.

"There you go, that's it," she coos, dancing her free hand along the length of his hardening dick through the sweatpants.
The sensations are too much - one of his hands locked against her swaying breast, grasping it slightly, while she makes him increasingly hard under her careful ministrations.

He tilts his neck back, allowing it to bear the full weight of his heavy head.

"This is so hot, Clarke," he grunts, locking onto her sparking blue eyes.

She grins.

"I was hoping you'd think so," she whispers huskily.

His hands trail down her arms, wiping the excess Vasoline off in glowing swirls. Clarke stands, wrapping her fingers into the waistband of his pants.

"Up," she murmurs, tugging.

It takes a moment for Bellamy to clamber to his feet. Clarke backs up a step to give him space, biting her lip a little bashfully as she takes in the gleam in his eye. He's arched over her body in a moment, kissing her hard and rubbing his scratchy palms into the dip of her waist. She opens her mouth under his and sucks languidly on his tongue, which tastes like honey from the tea. Afraid all the jelly smeared across her chest will rub off onto his old shirt, she pushes his shoulders back gently and yanks at its base until he pulls it off his head. His pants and boxers fall down next in a smooth push of her hands. The sight of him thick and ready sends a sparking sensation to her clit. She presses her thighs tightly together.

"Ok, sit back down," she says motioning with her arm, a little breathless.

She kneels before him, scooting close enough so the bristling hair of his calves chafes her thighs. Bellamy's panting noticeably when the heat of his dick lands on her stomach, kept nestled just below her breasts by Clarke's careful hand.

"Relax, baby. I'm going to take care of you," she smiles sweetly.

He grits his teeth, nods once sharply, and locks his hands around the side of the toilet, trying not to arch his hips against her hand. Clarke stares down through the hollow between her breasts at the reddish head of his dick just below. She feels a string of his precum rubbing against the top of her stomach. Reaching for the container of Vasoline once more, she takes a bit more in her hand and strokes the length of his shaft a few times until Bellamy actually moans. He blinks rapidly, jaw clenched.

Clarke presses her fleshy breasts tight together and bends her knees fluidly, so his dick slips through the tunnel she's created.

"Ahh," Bellamy breathes, giving her a broken smile.

"That feel good?" Clarke wonders aloud as she stretches back up and watches his dick disappear again while she pulls away from it.

"So damn good," he hisses.

Clarke traces a wandering finger over the bow of Bellamy's lips before gripping her breasts once more and repeating the motion, bending her knees then rising again. She's boxed in by his tan knees on either side of her ribs, and she can feel the heat rising off him as he thrusts easily along her slickness.
Clarke feels the wetness slipping out of her. It's like her heartbeat has migrated between her legs. Bellamy's eyes are heavily lidded, and a flush is rising in his cheeks. She sees the tenseness in his thighs, but when she flicks a thumb across her own nipple, he jerks up too far, breaking his rhythm and smearing a drop of precum at the base of her chin.

"Sorry," he grunts, pulling his hips back.

"It's ok," Clarke says easily, swiping at her face. "You wanna hold them?"

His eyes snap up to hers.

"Yeah? Can I?"

He sits up, running a hand through the golden strands woven along her scalp and buries them under her hair tie, cradling the base of her skull for a moment.

She nods.

She's slippery and warm, a dusky pink tinging her skin, and she gasps when his bronze hands wrap around her chest.

"Fuck, Clarke," he says brokenly.

"I'm just giving you what you asked for," she teases him in a voice quite unlike her normal one.

She rises and falls against him in time to his thrusts, her fingers bracing into the hard flesh of his thigh, gasping when he rolls her nipple with his thumb until it aches. When the head of his dick slips up toward her collarbone, she runs the broad base of her tongue across it in a long swipe in retaliation.

He hisses, but she just wiggles her eyebrows and traces a hand down her belly and into the soft cotton of her sleep shorts.

"Are you touching yourself, Princess? You getting off on this?" Bellamy demands gruffly.

"Mmhmm," Clarke murmurs, sucking in a breath when she realizes how sensitive her clit already is.

"So . . . dirty. . . " he grits out.

Clarke purses her lips and rolls her chin toward her shoulder, rubbing herself eagerly, chasing a sensation frothing through her blood. She braces her other hand feather-light on top of the groove where his hip meets his torso, enjoying the glide of his muscle and bone under her fingers.

"Clarke," he says a minute later. "I can't last much longer."

"Bell, it's ok. Let go when you're ready," she pinches at the hood of her clit with desperate fingers.

"No," Bellamy gasps. "Shower."

He slips between her heaving breasts one final time before dropping his hand and wrapping it around her forearm instead.

They manage to remove her shorts in one rapid joint motion. Then he practically pulls her in with him, turning on the warm spray and slamming the frosted glass door behind them. There's a long, tile bench along the side wall, and she drops onto it, leaning her dampening hair back into the wall and turning expectantly to look at him standing in front of her.
"Come on, baby. Finish," she spreads her legs invitingly before him and rubs two fingers along the underside of her clit in quick circles.

She uses the other to cup beneath her breast and push it out in his direction. "Finish," Clarke demands quietly once more, arching an eyebrow at him.

There's no blood left in his brain for clear thought. He shakes his head one time, digging his canines into his lower lip and lunges toward her, causing her to shriek out, half in laughter, half in shock.

"Bellamy, what are you--"

Her words are cut off by his large, coarse hands gripping her under her arms and pulling her lengthwise beneath him on the bench. The heavy slide of his dick across her stomach, then pubic bone, makes her gasp as he rearranges himself over her body spattered with goosebumps and Vaseline. She opens her legs to him, pulling him toward the hollow of her shoulder by the curls resting at his neck. He settles there willingly, sucking at her pulse point. The tip of his dick nudges against her clit in a jerky movement before he settles down to her entrance, thrusting inside.

"Yes," she hisses, "Yes, yes, just like that."

It was exactly the extra burst of stimulation she needed, and she's cascading over a precipice with him moments later.

After, he lets her soap up a washcloth and clean the planes of his chest, knot her fingers in his black hair. And he returns the favor, pulling the hair tie loose from her golden mane and massaging her scalp with shampoo while she kisses his collarbone.

"That would have been a good sex tape," she jokes when he finally turns the water off and hands her a towel. "Only thing is, I didn't thank you in the middle of it."

"Ugh," he groans. "Too soon, Princess. Roan was an asshole."

The smile that spreads across her face is like daybreak.

"So it was true," she laughs, stepping out onto the fluffy rug.

Chapter End Notes

Hey People!

I have new recommendations for you!

- Just Know (I Will Be Around) by TroubledPancakes: AU version of the S1 dropship crash.

- Hospital Wing by SpicyPepper_SweetSugar: Bellarke meets on the Ark before falling to Earth.

- Traditions Old and New by HawthorneWhisperer: Adorable Christmas modern AU where Bellarke is locked in a cabin during a snowstorm.
The dart makes a whizzing sound as it soars through the air, and then there's just the pop of latex and a splash of neon green paint exploding on the white canvas.

"Awesome, Huxley!" Clarke turns a beaming smile on the boy who's grinning straight ahead of him. He gives her a high five.

With Bellamy's help, she taped together a few of the larger canvases they bought at Target and pinned balloons filled with paint to them. For each accurately aimed dart, Huxley and Clara are delighted by a river of color that ends up running down the canvas before soaking into a bed sheet in the Blakes' backyard.

"Ooooh, green!" Clara is bouncing on the balls of her feet, sparkling star clips woven into her fiery locks today. "I wanna try! Can I try?" she turns a pouting face to Clarke.

Clarke raises an eyebrow at Bellamy who's standing off to the side watching them. Her teeth are locked together as she makes a worried face. From her old summer gigs as a camp counselor, she knows kids and sharp objects aren't the best combination. She'd really set it up as an activity for Huxley, planning on painting animals on Clara's cheek alongside blooming flowers sprouting from lush vines up her forearms.

"I don't know, honey. The darts are kind of sharp, and don't you want me to paint your face instead?"

Clarke watches the little girl's lip tremor, and a crinkle crease her brow. She immediately drops to the girl's level.

"Then I've got a special canvas all for you! And you can paint on it and put on stickers and glitter, whatever you want! I even have special sponges shaped like ponies," Clarke opens her eyes up enticingly.

Clara is still thrusting out her lower lip, resembling a puckered tomato with her bright hair.

"It's because I'm too little, right? I'm always too little," she huffs, kicking at the ground. "Huxley gets to have all the fun because he's a boy!"

"Hey, hey, that's not true," Clarke insists, running her fingertips along Clara's arm in a soothing gesture. "Girls can do lots of fun stuff that boys can't do!"

"Like what?" Clara demands in a cute bossy voice.

"Well, for starters--"

"Like this," Bellamy says suddenly, swooping in from out of nowhere and catching a squealing Clara up in his arms.

He holds her so she's flying, like Wonder Woman he tells her, arms outstretched as they careen around the yard while Clarke laughs. Bellamy fishes a dart out of his pocket and when they get close enough, he allows Clara to pop the balloon in the upper right corner, which, to her glee, is full of a
rich lavender hue.

Before long, the canvas is streaked in every shade imaginable, reds and yellows swirling together to make orange when Huxley makes a well-aimed shot at the last balloon. Bellamy claps him on the back, and they start throwing a frisbee around in the California sunshine. Clarke, as promised, diligently paints a tropical rainforest of flowers up Clara's forearms on the patio.

"You've gotta stay really still," she says from her perch on the green wrought iron seat. "I don't want to smear it."

"But it tickles," Clara giggles as the bristles glide along her skin.

"I know, but it'll dry really fast. I got the paint that's made for this," Clarke smiles.

It's quiet for several minutes. Clarke's so intent on her work that she misses Clara studying her face from under her orange-brown fan of lashes.

"Are you Bellamy's girlfriend?" Clara bursts out at last.

Clarke blinks up at her, startled.

"Rude, Clara," Huxley comes up behind them, ruffling his sister's hair.

"Yeah, she's my girlfriend," Bellamy's deep voice twists something in her stomach.

She glances up at him shyly, and the warmth in his eyes makes her melt a little.

"But you're still my favorite girl, Clara," Bellamy says loudly, winking at the first-grader, leaning over to inspect Clarke's handiwork.

Clara seems to consider this for a moment before nodding slowly. "Ok."

"It's very pretty, Princess," he says softly of her work.

"I thought I was your favorite girl!" Octavia appears from around the driveway, two Super Soakers in hand.

Then absolute chaos erupts as she begins chasing Bellamy and a shrieking Huxley around the yard, spraying them with what appears to be cold water if their yelps are any indication.

"Where did you come from?" Bellamy cries out as he tackles her to the scratchy grass after several intense minutes of running and feinting and pries one water gun from her hands.

"I got back twenty minutes ago. You losers just didn't notice. I saw you through the window," she says simply. "Hi, Clarke," she lifts her chin in greeting.

Clarke raises her eyebrows but smiles back, waving from the patio. "Hi, Octavia."

She blows on Clara's arms, making her giggle some more.

"All done. Do you like it?"

"It's super beautiful!" Clara says exuberantly enough that Clarke can see her missing upper tooth.

But then she frowns.
"What is it?" Clarke says, concerned.

"I wanna shoot Huxley with water," she sighs. "But I don't wanna mess up the paint."

"Oh," Clarke smiles in understanding. "It needs five more minutes to dry, but then you're good. It's water resistant paint."

"What's that mean?"

"It means it'll stay on for at least a day or two even if some water splashes it."

"Yay!" Clara claps her small hands together happily and knocks her legs back into the chair.

The two chat for a couple minutes, Clarke asking Clara about school and her friends and favorite super heroes. Then they start cleaning up the table, Clara dutifully following Clarke inside like a duckling to put the paints away.

"I'm glad you're Bellamy's girlfriend," she says out of nowhere as Clarke reaches up on her tip toes to store the supplies in the hall closet.

"Really?" Clarke asks. "Why's that?"

"Because you're nice and you smell good. And Bellamy smiles more around you," Clara says simply as if this is obvious. "He used to not smile so much."

Clarke ushers her outside and back into the full-fledged water fight, hastily batting one lone tear away from her black eyeliner before she can see.

She's bundling up the bed sheet beneath the large canvas, intent on bringing it to the laundry room when a sharp shot of water hits her square between the shoulder blades, making her drop the cloth.

"Oh no you don't, Clarke! Everyone plays. Blake rules," Octavia's challenging tone hits her with force as she turns.

The brunette tosses her the spare Super Soaker, and her eyes twinkle mischievously.

"Let's get Bell!" she mouths.

***

Two hours later, Octavia has made everyone English Muffin pizzas, which they eat outside, and sent Clara and Huxley home still damp and plastered in grass stains, but nonetheless happy and full. Clara gave free and easy hugs to each Blake while Huxley initiated parting fist bumps. But Clarke was surprised when Clara squeezed her waist while Huxley shouted "Bye! Let's do it again next weekend!" to her before the door slammed shut behind him.

"Thanks for being nice," Bellamy gives his sister a pointed look as they begin to clean up the kitchen. Clarke's tackling the mess outside.

Octavia shoves playfully past him, waving her hand dismissively to begin loading the dishwasher.

"You two are hopeless causes--all heart eyes," she huffs, trying to pry off a bit of burned bread from one of the plates with extra effort. "It's like trying to stop a freight train at this point."

He scoffs, but she catches the hint of a smile when she looks up at him.
"Whatever, O."

She elbows him in the ribs, and he jerks away.

"I'm happy you're happy. But if you get unhappy," she drops the plate and cracks her knuckles. "Heads will roll."

"So dramatic, baby sister," he wrinkles his nose at her, but she just sticks out her tongue.

When Clarke reappears inside, Octavia conveniently disappears down the hall to the shower, white shirt streaked in green and sticking heavily to her back. Clarke bundles up the paint-splattered bedsheets for real this time and hauls them off to the laundry.

"Definitely not sure this is going to come out," she mutters to herself after shoving the cloth through the circular hollow and adjusting the settings. The hiss of water signals the filling of the machine.

"It's not a big deal. They're old, and the kids had fun," Bellamy's voice catches her by surprise.

He's leaning with one arm thrown against the woodwork, watching her appraisingly. Her face flushes when he walks into the cramped space and shuts the door behind him.

"Bell . . . " she says warningly.

"Clarke . . . " he calls back teasingly.

He's pressed against her back a moment later, and her skin absolutely erupts in a rush of warmth at the contact of his wet mouth on her neck. Her stomach lurches into the steel structure before her as Bellamy's hands gently squeeze at her hips.

"You were really sweet with them today," he breathes against her ear, nipping at her earlobe while she groans.

"Bell, we can't," she insists, looking down and rubbing her nail mindlessly at a triangle of royal blue paint embedded in the fine, dark hair of his forearm.

"Why not?" his tone is enough to lull her into a trance.

"Octavia," she manages as the machine beneath her fingertips starts to rumble loudly, making her muscles vibrate.

"Always such a good Princess. Always following the rules," he bites lightly at the flesh of her shoulder, and she shudders.

"Clearly not with you," she grits out, arching her ass into his crotch and rubbing it back and forth.

It's not like she doesn't know how to play dirty.

Clarke swats her wisps of blonde-white hair away from her forehead.

"Knew you had it in you, Griffin," his voice is full of laughter as his fingers work on the button of her jeans.

"Really? Here in the laundry room?" she pants as he wastes no time but immediately slips a hand inside and starts to trace her slickening folds.

Her nostrils flare when he pinches the hood of her clit, and she jerks forward. Bellamy takes the
opportunity to lace their fingers together and leave them on top of the vibrating white cube.

"Do you want me to stop?" he asks, the sugar dripping from his words. "Cause if you want me to stop, I'll stop."

Clarke rolls her eyes and feels her thighs tighten as he presses one long, thick finger past her opening. His thumb gently pets her clitoris, and her head falls back on his shoulder.

"You know I don't want you to stop," she half-hisses, half moans. "That's the damn problem."

Bellamy chuckles, and never leaving her back, pushes her jeans and panties cleanly down her legs as the movements of the washing machine increase in their ferocity.

"Let me get you off, baby," he murmurs in her ear, wrapping a hand across her waist and pulling her into his chest. "I can make it quick."

Clarke hesitates for a moment, then bites her lip and nods, spreading her legs and sparing just one glance at the closed door. True to his word, Bellamy slips his fingers in and out of her slick heat rapidly until she feels her legs start to shake and her lower stomach erupt in fireworks. He keeps one hand on her hip as he works, pressing them both into the spluttering machine, whose noise is thankfully enough to stifle her moans when her walls pulse and shudder at last around his invading fingers.

"God," she moans as he withdraws, leaving her twitching.

"Bellamy's fine, Princess."

She swats at his chest, but he just kisses her shoulder, then her jaw as her chest continues to heave over the intensity of it all. When she chances a glance into his face after spinning around, she notices his lips quirk ing up. In this new position, she can see the darkness of his eyes and the focused nature of his stare.

"What?" she whispers, lips parted slightly.

"You're my girlfriend, Princess."

"I know that," she gets out before he captures her lips with his own.

Her body grows supple once more and molds into his as it always does. His heated presence surrounds her, crushing her into the moaning machine as she opens her mouth below his and shivers at the brush of him against her bare thigh. She fumbles briefly with the zipper at his waist but manages to free his cock without much difficulty. She holds it, heavy and solid in her hand and arches up to kiss the corner of his mouth.

His jaw clenches as she strokes him serenely, only looking at him under partially closed eyes and thick lashes, hoping it drives him a little bit crazy.

It seems to work.

With a growl, he hoists her up at the waist until she's dangling on the edge of the moving cube below her. He teases her for a minute, sliding the bulbous head of his cock around her entrance, already glistening with shiny fluid as her bones reverberate with the noise underneath her ass.

His warm hand lands on the side of her full breast, and she pushes into his touch, smiling and closing her eyes. The touch is sure and welcome, sending fizzing sparks through her chest, but it doesn't last
"Slide onto me, baby," Bellamy whispers huskily against her mouth, voice catching on the last word.

He grips her waist and she lowers herself onto him, relishing the dull ache and simple stretch after last night. With her legs clinging around his middle, he leans her back against the shuddering steel frame and fucks her languidly, like they have all night and not a care in the world. His hands palm her ass, and his gaze lingers on her quivering breasts hidden beneath her paint-smattered top. She kisses him again, tasting the sweetness of tomato sauce through her gasp as he thrusts an inch deeper, then sighs in satisfaction at their full union, letting her head fall back for a moment.

"I'm glad it was you," she whispers along his freckled cheek a little while later, fingers embedding themselves in the tops of his shoulder blades. "I'm so damn glad it was you."

The sound of Octavia turning on the TV sends them scurrying around the overheated room for the rest of their clothes. Clarke smirks when she sees the lone window is mostly fogged. But the buzzing ringtone of Bellamy's phone stops them cold. He grabs it abruptly out of his pocket, not wanting to alert Octavia to their location.

He holds the phone far away from his body, going still.

"Answer it!" Clarke hisses. "Or mute it!"

He must mute it, but he remains immobile.

Clarke throws her second leg into her abandoned jeans and looks over his shoulder.

**Incoming Call: Jake Griffin**

Chapter End Notes

Reading Recommendations:

~ Crown (Wear My Love Like A) by: MercuryM - Grounder Bellamy/arranged marriage AU. Read it then beg the author to finish the story like I did. ;)

~ Hands All Over by: Arysa13 - You'll never think about massages or candles quite the same way again.

~ How Do You Say I Love You in German? by: Junia - Basically it's similar to this story in general idea but the reverse. Clarke's the smart tutor, and Bellamy desperately needs help in German. It's sweeter than this story too, for all of you who enjoy the fluff of their relationship. Plus, amazing teamwork by Octavia and Raven, guest appearances by Finn and Lexa, and OF COURSE WELLS. So all you Wells fans, get going!

~ ikitai yo, kimi no machi by: Chash - It's a modern college AU with RA Bellamy and freshman Clarke complete with many of your favorite delinquents. Slow burn "Can I love him if he's my friend's brother and my RA, but I'm so drawn to him" angst we all hate to love.

~ It Was Always You: Willaphyx ~ It's a modern AU that starts with pretty much the
best premise ever and keeps you hooked until the end. You'll like it. I promise.

~ long day by: crooked queen - Lyrical, angsty modern AU that is like a little love poem to NYC apartment living. It was like this poetic work of art for Bellarke. It was unlike most other fan fics I'd read in that regard, which was awesome.

~ Your Heart Is Your Own (So Build Me A Home) by: proscuitto - For those that love the "we live together, but we're not dating even though we pretty much are thing."
Bellamy throws her a frustrated look over his shoulder before pressing the green button and opening the door to the hallway. He strides out of the muggy laundry room, and his voice instantly morphs into something smooth and professional when he says, "Hi, Dr. Griffin. How are you, sir?"

Clarke wants to follow him, watch the facial expressions play across his face, demand to grab the phone from his grasp. Instead, she swallows the nausea churning in the back of her throat and buttons her jeans.

"What's with the frown?" Octavia's voice holds the mildest strain of accusation.

Yet she barely glances up at Clarke as she falls into a recliner, continuing to paint her toenails a deep purple.

"Nothing, Bellamy's just on the phone with my dad," Clarke says quietly, half-watching the home renovation show Octavia turned on.

Octavia's eyes spark with interest, and she turns fully to Clarke, wielding her nail polish brush like a baton.

"Isn't that a good thing? Family bonding and all that?"

Clarke emits a sigh and curls her knees toward her chest.

"Yeah, sure."

Octavia's eyes narrow, and she cocks her eyebrow.

"That sounded convincing."

"I wasn't trying to be convincing," Clarke mutters.

Octavia's sitting up fully on the couch now, purple toes digging into the carpet as she stares openly at the blonde.

"What's going on, Clarke?"

"It's...nothing," Clarke shrugs, finding it difficult to meet the blue eyes seeking her own. "We're working it out."

"Listen, we talked about this," Octavia's voice calcifies on the spot. "You can't jeopardize my brother's academic future because he's worked too hard, and--"

"She's not," Bellamy's rumbling voice cuts cleanly across his sister.

Clarke springs to her feet, hands on her hips in front of him.

"What did he say?" she demands.

"He said you go home tonight, and I keep my position. He apologized for yelling. And..."
"And what?" Clarke asks suspiciously.

Bellamy rolls his head around his neck until she hears something crackle.

"And you can't spend the night here anymore."

The words land on her with a thud.

"What?"

"What the hell went down at dinner?" Octavia snaps from behind them at the same time Clarke speaks. But the dull rush of blood in her ears is all she can focus on.

"That's not happening," she argues, staring into Bellamy's dark eyes defiantly.

"Yeah it is," he scrubs a tan hand hard across his face. "I don't want to get between you and your dad. He's always been good to me."

"Until he attacked you Saturday when it wasn't even your fault!" Clarke argues.

"Clark . . . you need to go home. Come on, I'll drive you."

He reaches for her hand, but she jerks it back from him, tears springing to her eyes. She shakes her head blindly.

"No, I'm not going. I'll call him myself."

"You won't!" Bellamy's tone is somehow both desperate and forceful. "This is on me, Clarke. Your dad's right. Let me take you home. It doesn't change anything."

He takes a step closer to her, landing a heavy hand on her upper arm. He feels her muscle twitch beneath his skin. Octavia doesn't blink, but her mouth parts open as her brother and Clarke seem to have an entire nonverbal conversation in front of her. It ends with Clarke leaning against his chest and him wrapping an arm around her waist, tucking her against his body securely.

"It's going to be fine," he promises, kissing the top of her yellow hair while she hides her face in the jut of his collarbone.

***

For September, it's warm. The sun beats down on the continually spinning white windmill marking the fifteenth hole of Castle Park Mini Golf. Clarke bites her lip and brushes her hair out of her eyes, choking down on her putter and shuffling her feet as she examines the dark tunnel through the blades.

"You can do it, Griffin!" Raven calls from the bricked-in edge of the hole where she stands beside Murphy, squinting into the brightness.

The sharp, satisfying click of her putter smacking against the ball comes next, followed by it whizzing down the emerald felt toward the menacing blades. Miraculously, the sky blue ball disappears into the black hole. Murphy jogs into the cave-like belly of the windmill without a backward glance for any of them, Clarke hot on his heels.

"She actually friggin' did it!" he exclaims. His voice echoes off the plastered walls. "Hole in one!"

Clarke comes skipping out back down the length of the green, launching herself into Bellamy's
surprised arms and kissing his jawline.

"What was that you were saying about being the best at mini golf?" she teases.

"Beginner's luck," he purses his lips at her and wiggles his eyebrows while Raven smirks. Unfazed, Clarke just ruffles his hair lovingly.

"You got a problem with a girl being better than you, Blake?" Raven smart mouths from the sidelines.

"Nah, he's had his ass handed to him at darts by more than one girl in the time I've worked with him," Murphy quips casually, strolling out from behind the windmill before Bellamy can respond. "He's even getting better with holding back the tears."

Bellamy grunts, punches Murphy in the shoulder for good measure, and strolls off toward the sixteenth hole with Clarke poking him in the side and Raven loudly reciting their scores (he's in last place) as she follows.

A half hour later, Clarke is ramming their bumper boat against Murphy and Raven's, cackling with delight. But the next thing she knows, she's ducking away from the cold spray of water Murphy sends soaring through the air from his built-in spray gun.

"He who laughs last laughs loudest, Clarke!" he shouts.

Bellamy's shirt is soaking wet, but he's grinning, one hand braced on Clarke's thigh as they float toward the other side of the pool.

"Arcade next?" Bellamy throws over his shoulder at Raven, steering their circular little boat toward the unloading area. "I'll annihilate you at air hockey."

"Is that a promise?" Murphy yells back.

"Absolutely!"

"You're on!" comes Raven's sure voice.

It happens quickly. One second, Clarke is reaching out for Bellamy's hand, one foot on the damp edge of the bumper boat. The next she's slipping, calf caught between the side of the tiny boat and the wooden walkway, twisting her ankle.

Her sharp cry of surprise is enough to attract the attention of a family eating ice cream at a nearby picnic table. Panic flashes in Bellamy's eyes, but he captures her under her arms, tugging her gently upward as she clings to his biceps.

"Are you ok?" he gazes into her face.

When her foot hits the ground, she winces.

"Ankle," she mutters.

"What happened? What's wrong?" Raven materializes out of nowhere, appearing at Bellamy's shoulder.

"She twisted her ankle I think," Bellamy drops to a knee, and Clarke clutches at his shoulder while he delicately presses into the flesh above her ankle sock. "Can you roll it around at all? he glances back up at her.
Clarke sees the concern in his eyes brewing just above his splash of freckles. She grits her teeth and moves her ankle sloppily around in a sort of circle.

"I have weak ankles, but it's not broken or anything," she wobbles a few steps forward while Raven braces a hand on her shoulder. "Just maybe sprained?" she says hesitantly.

"We all know you're just looking for a way to end the day early and spare Bellamy's ego any further damage," Murphy smiles at her, and she manages a small one back.

But the truth of the first part of his words hits them all when a flash of discomfort crosses Clarke's features.

"All right, it's been fun, but we're gonna have to go. Bye, guys!" Bellamy jumps into action mode, sweeping a protesting Clarke up into his arms bridal style.

She waves goodbye to Murphy and Raven over his shoulder, Raven shaking her head enough for her ponytail to swing but waving back. In fact, Clarke continues to protest the whole way to the drug store that she's fine, keeping it up even after Bellamy talks to the pharmacist, buys a tight-fitting, stretchy cloth brace for her ankle to keep it from making any further drastic movements, and slips it over her foot back in his kitchen after making her sit with an ice pack on her ankle for twenty minutes.

"You're ridiculously overprotective," Clarke murmurs with her eyes closed later that Saturday afternoon.

Her injured foot rests in Bellamy's lap, and they're sitting in a sort of gazebo in the park at the end of his road. The trees around them sway lightly in the breeze, and the air smells like lilacs and ocean salt. Shadows play across her face, and Bellamy can't help smiling at her because she looks almost too young and innocent in that moment.

"Does it turn you on?" he smirks at her, showing his top teeth.

Her eyes pop open, and she pauses, as if considering it.

"Maybe . . . " she lazily dances her fingers up and down his smooth arm.

Bellamy puts down the textbook he was reading on the bench beside them.

"Clarke, you know that's a bad idea."

"Why?" she pouts like a child, sticking her bottom lip out.

"Because we have to be responsible about this. I promised your dad before he left for the conference. You know that." He's all logic and reason and surety.

Clarke rubs the heel of her uninjured foot over the crotch of his jeans several times until he catches its arch with a firm hand and pulls it more safely into his lap.

"Stop it, Princess."

"I talked to him too, you know," she argues sassily, sitting up. Her fingers wander more brazenly across his torso and down to his stomach. "Got your fishing plans back on the agenda, thank you very much."

"And I appreciate that."
"Mmm," she sighs noncommittally.

"I miss you," she tries again after a minute, sliding her thighs into a triangular arch, so they bridge across his, and whispering the words into his throat, nudging at his jaw with her nose.

His hand finds the warm skin above her pants all of its own accord. "I'm right here, baby," he hums into her ear, and the sound gives her goosebumps.

"You know what I mean," she flicks her light eyes up to his dark ones.

He wets his lips, and she watches his tongue avidly.

"You said you were all right with slowing things down a little bit," he begins rubbing her thigh instead. It sparks something in her chest.

"Nobody can stop us from having sex, Bell. And nobody tried to," Clarke rolls her eyes at him. "You're the one who suddenly decided you were a chivalric knight from the Middle Ages."

Bellamy makes a face at her before tucking her head under his chin.

"I just want to do this right," he confesses after a long period of quiet.

Clarke stills but then nuzzles closer into his chest and traces a fingertip over the wavy lines of his mouth.

"You are doing it right," she insists. "Everything will go fine tomorrow if you just relax."

She senses his shoulders slumping a little.

"I love you, Princess."

"Well you got a funny way of showing it," she teases him before sealing her lips over his. He makes a short, choked noise in the back of his throat at the sudden impact but kisses her back after a moment, allowing her to deepen it. But when she slides her hand under the edge of his T-shirt, he catches it, drawing it out with a sure grip on her wrist. She huffs hotly and bites down on the raised tendon between his shoulder and neck.

He barely reacts.

So Clarke spins her legs outward and then rises up on her knees, leaning into the shell of his ear.

"I want you," she breathes huskily before nibbling at the soft flesh of his earlobe. "I want you inside me again."

Bellamy groans loudly and reaches around her body to squeeze her ass once meanly.

"Time to take you home, Princess."

Chapter End Notes

Bellarke Story Suggestions

1. "How You Stay Alive" LaughingSenselessly - It's a beautiful Bellarke reincarnation

2. "Just As You Are Mine" Proscuito - Arranged marriage / Grounder Bellamy (but the delinquents are accounted for, and really, it makes you feel like Sky Crew and the grounders are all one big group).

3. "Faithfully" WinterWaters - Ark AU where canon collides near the end.
Jake clears his throat loudly, and the sound skims cleanly across the placid water like a skimming stone. A stringy cloud passes over the sun.

"So when did it start?" he asks Bellamy.

They're standing on opposite ends of Jake's old pontoon boat, each with a fishing line in the water. Nothing has bit yet, and the back of Bellamy's neck is starting to itch. He forgot sunscreen even though Octavia yelled at him the night before to bring some. Jake's voice knocks him out of his reverie.

"Uh, sorry . . . what'd you say, Dr. Griffin?"

Jake squints his eyes, turning to appraise the tall, muscular young man before him.

"You can call me Jake outside school," he says carefully after a pause. "As long as you shoot straight with me. Understood?"

"Yes, sir."

Jake cocks an eyebrow, something akin to a chuckle escaping him as he shakes his head.

"I asked you when your relationship with my daughter stopped being about tutoring."

"Oh . . . uh . . . "

Bellamy rubs the back of his neck, his other hand firmly around the fishing pole. He slides it into the holder propped along the side of the boat.

"It was pretty fast," he admits, cheeks reddening. "Maybe a week, week and a half after you all left for England."
Jake lets out a low whistle. Bellamy feels every muscle in his back and shoulders tensing up. Jake props up his own fishing pole then reaches into the cooler, tossing Bellamy a fresh bottle of water.

"And you knew about Wells I imagine?"

Bellamy lets out a deep sigh, struggling to keep looking into the rugged planes of Jake's face.

"Yeah . . . yeah, I did."

"You didn't care?"

"I cared," Bellamy says quietly. "But Clarke, I don't know how to explain it, sir. I couldn't stay away from her. She keeps me . . . centered I guess?"

Jake gives him a momentary funny look.

"I knew it was different with you, but I guess I never expected Clarke to be so wrapped up in anyone, not this young at least."

Bellamy swallows audibly, doing his best not to cross his arms over his chest. He settles for snapping open his water cap instead and allowing some of the cold liquid to slide down his throat.

"I really care about her, sir. I . . . I love her."

Jake rubs a hand over his face and stares off into the burnt orange-red hills in the distance, covered as they are in scattered clumps of vegetation.

"I know you do," Jake says finally. "I don't think you would have stuck around through everything that's happened if you didn't. Clarke was with you after your car accident, right?"

Bellamy smiles slightly and nods, suddenly noticing a dull ache near the edge of his ribs. A fish leaps
into the air and splashes back into the grey-blue water about twenty feet away from them.

"That's my girl. Calm under pressure like her mother," he mumbles more to himself than anything.

"Clarke's special," Bellamy agrees. "I saw that almost as soon as I met her."

Jake's expression is kinder when he meets Bellamy's eyes. "I didn't exactly make it easy for you that night at the house." he scoffs lowly. "Believe me, I don't want to give you a lecture. But she's my only daughter. And we raised her to use her head. Her mother's a doctor for God's sake, it's not like we're . . . unaware of what goes on. I just . . . need you to be safe with her, all right?"

Heat pulses through Bellamy under the weight of the gaze. For the first time in a while, he realizes how large and imposing Jake Griffin can appear when he wants to.

"I would never hurt her," he returns solemnly.

Jake twists his lips and looking down at the floor, nods once before moving over to clap Bellamy on the shoulder.

"Good man."

***

Clarke tries to conceal the eye roll that's threatening to sneak up as her mother begins to go over the itinerary for their Ivy League Fall Break tour for what must be the fourth time this week.

"Mom, I just don't know if it's necessary," she tries, slicing into the red peppers with an impressively large, glinting knife.

"What do you mean you don't think it's necessary?" Abby says with an edge of sharpness from the stove where she's heating up the chicken for a stir fry. "How are you going to choose to go to a school for four years when you haven't even seen it?"
Clarke huffs out a breath through her nose.

"I think I wanna stay here. In California," she admits, waiting for the torrent of questions.

Abby swirls on the balls of her feat, one hand on her hip as the one grasping the wooden spoon swipes away a strand of honey brown hair stuck to her forehead from the steam.

"Clarke," she says warningly. "You were so excited to see the schools on the East Coast! I don't want you to throw away your dreams over a boy."

And there it is.

"He's not just a boy, mom!" Clarke snaps, throwing down the knife with a thud and facing her mother.

"I know . . . I know," Abby says more kindly, holding up her palms. "I like Bellamy; you know I like him. I would not have invited him over for another meal if I didn't."

"So why are you being--"

"I'm saying you need to explore all your options, so you can make an informed decision," Abby speaks more loudly over her daughter. "There's no guarantee you and Bellamy will last forever. I'm sorry," she waves a hand over Clarke's look of murderous protest. "But there isn't. It's just the reality of young love. If you prove me wrong, more power to you. I'm always on your side, baby, but you've got to be practical about this. I think your father and I have been more than understanding. So cut us some slack please and drop the attitude."

Clarke purses her lips but doesn't respond. The pure rage boils and brews in the farthest reach of her stomach quite unexpectedly. She strokes her arm mindlessly.

"I believe in me and Bellamy," she manages through gritted teeth. "And I want to go to a school with an art program out here. Grandma Griffin's inheritance is enough to pay for--"

"This isn't about the money, Clarke!" Abby raises her voice fully, exasperated. "Of course you'll be
able to afford to attend whatever school you get into! You're incredibly fortunate that that's your reality!"

Abby steps closer to Clarke, who goes rigid, draws nearer and nearer until she's clasping her daughter's chin and staring straight into her electric blue eyes.

"You deserve to know what all your options are, Clarke, before you make a decision. I won't let you sell yourself short. You're too smart and talented for that. You've worked too hard."

Clarke wrenches herself free and storms upstairs to her room, slamming the door and flinging herself on her bed face first. She tugs her phone from its tight resting space in her jeans pocket.

Clarke Griffin: Tell me something good.

Bellamy Blake: I got a 93 on my paper about the reasons the Renaissance started.

Clarke Griffin: You are such a nerd.

Bellamy Blake: What's your problem?

Clarke Griffin: I'm sexually frustrated.

Bellamy Blake: Clarke.

Clarke Griffin: Sorry. Congratulations! :) :) ;)

Bellamy Blake: :P Right. Thanks.

Clarke Griffin: You asked.
Bellamy Blake: What is it, Princess?

Clarke Griffin: Mom's going on about the Ivy League tour again.

There's such a long pause Clarke thinks he's not even going to bother to answer her.

Bellamy Blake: It's not a bad idea to know what your options are. You're smart, Clarke. You've done a lot of community service. You're an amazing artist. Your parents run half of L.A. You've got choices.

Clarke Griffin: You know what I choose.

Bellamy doesn't respond to her next three messages. Their schedules over the last two weeks have been brutally busy, and she hasn't seen him since she twisted her ankle. Between classes, TA responsibilities, a construction job Lincoln scored for them, and the litany of dance practices, student council meetings, and tutoring kids filling all the spare time she's not spending on homework, it just hasn't been possible. Plus, every teacher is also starting to not-so-sweetly remind her and her classmates to "get a jump start on applications if they want to apply early admission" at the end of each class. Bellamy picks up on her second attempt to call him.

"Having a good night, Princess?"

She chuckles despite herself.

"Calculus sucks."

"Yeah, I wasn't a big fan, either."

"Bellamy, I want to come over."

"You know you can't, babe," he says, voice softening.
"Don't you miss me?"

"Every damn day I don't see you."

"Mmm," she breathes into the phone.

"I just want to fast forward to college. Then I'll be in a dorm and can do what I want, go where I want when I want, see who I want . . . "

"Oh, so that's how it's gonna be?" she hears the teasing lilt in his tone.

"Yeah, that's exactly how it's going to be."

"And what do you want, Princess?"

The gravel sliced into his words sends a shiver down her spine.

"I want you on top of me, Bell. I want you squeezing my thigh and kissing me until I can't breathe. I want you to pin my wrists over my head on your bed. I want you--"

"Jesus, Clarke. Warn a guy," he laughs, interrupting her, but there's something aching in it.

"When am I going to see you again?" she demands raggedly, fingers clenching into her comforter. "Are you coming to the barbecue at the Jaha's with me next weekend?"

"Clarke, I don't think that's the best idea."

She rolls her eyes and stares across the room at her dresser mirror, where a photo of him carrying her piggyback style in Muir Woods rests. It's beside another one of them standing with Murphy and Raven in front of a mini golf waterfall and a third of him smushed between a grinning Clara and Huxley covered in paint. They all join the first from The Getty Center.
"You did really good at the charity day for the wildfires! Wells was polite, you were polite. I know it's still a little awkward, but it'll keep being that way until you hang out with my friends more."

She realizes she's whining a little, but she's too far past the point to care.

He doesn't say anything.

"Please Bell? I need you."

She hears him shuffling something around, probably essays he's grading. But then he finally relents.

"All right, Princess. I'll see you Saturday."

"Yay! I love you."

"Yeah, yeah," he says gruffly.
Clarke presses the bowl of potato salad securely into her stomach with one hand, holding tightly to Bellamy's with the other.


There's just the sliver of a smile gracing his lips as he walks through the open gate into the Jaha's yard. It's marked by a white trellis interspersed with fragrant red roses.

Clarke takes in the sight of her mom and dad greeting Dr. Jaha warmly ahead of them and just clutches at him harder. He sees the steely glint in her blue eyes and notices how she squares her shoulders though before she begins marching forward purposefully in her too-high heels.

"Ah, Clarke and . . . Mr. Blake I presume?" Dr. Jaha watches the couple approach with an appraising look on his face.

Bellamy reaches out to shake the hand offered to him. "Bellamy, sir. It's nice to officially meet you."

Dr. Jaha's gaze on Bellamy's face lingers for a moment before he flicks his penetrating eyes to Clarke and their joined hands. She holds her breath, feeling her palms grow sweaty.

"Yes, likewise," he says calmly. "Didn't get a chance with everything going on at the wildfire event. Jake speaks very highly of you. Nice to see you as always, Clarke," he nods politely in her direction. "You can put the dish you brought on the table over there," he points. "Thanks for coming out to support the campaign."

"Thank you for inviting us," Clarke replies, trying to infuse her voice with as much sincerity as possible but unable to stop herself from biting her lip.

No matter what happened between her and Wells, Thelonious and Rosemary have been like a second set of parents to her during her whole life. She never meant to hurt them in any way, but she knows they're disappointed in her choice. The realization that no matter what decision she makes, she can't keep everyone happy is finally hitting home.

"Go on, enjoy yourselves!" he nods them off with a more genuine smile. "Wells, Monty, and Harper are probably hanging out by the ice cream sundae bar if I know them."

Clarke grins when he winks at her and nods in appreciation. That was less painful than it had to be. She's not sure exactly what Wells told his parents about their breakup, but she has a suspicion he was too much of a gentlemen to confess how royally she screwed everything up between them. He always was too good for her.

Abby calls her over with an insistent yet still chipper, "Come meet the dean of UC Santa Barbara, honey!" just as she deposits the potato salad next to a impressive red, white, and blue Jello dessert crafted in the shape of the American flag.

She turns apologizing eyes upward to Bellamy's face, and he's already smirking, his freckles darkening in the sunlight.

"Go on and show him how awesome you are," he huffs into the top of her blonde head for a brief second, forearm curving around the waist of her blood orange dress to pull her into his chest. He lets go too soon.
Clarke pouts and crinkles her nose. "Duty calls. You ok by yourself for a bit?"

"Hey, guys," Monty walks up to them, holding out a beer, which Bellamy gratefully accepts. When he's close enough, he lowers his voice. "Wanna climb the hill to the trails with me and Harper? I have something to, uh, set a relaxing vibe."

Clarke snorts and shoves his shoulder. "You're a dork, Monty. Mom wants me to meet the dean of UC Santa Barbara, so I gotta be firing on all cylinders. Don't fuck up my boyfriend," she says sassily over her shoulder, smoothing her hands down her maxi dress and already walking away.

Bellamy clinks his beer against Monty's orange soda as Monty mumbles a cheers along the line of "Women? What can you do?"

They fall into an easy conversation about the Lakers' chances this season and then a science project Monty's working on for school centered on ways of sustaining vegetable growth on Mars. Time slips away from them, but a polite tapping at Monty's shoulder causes Bellamy to turn and see a new face, female, with dirty blonde hair tied back in a long, wrap-around braid.


"Hmmm," Harper tilts her head to the side while resting her folded hands and chin on Monty's sharp shoulder. "The famous Bellamy Blake. I've heard a lot about you."

Bellamy grips his beer in one hand and reaches out the other to her to shake. "None of it great, I'm sure."

That brings a small smile to Harper's mouth.

"I wouldn't go quite that far," she admits, narrowing her eyes a little. "Depends on who was talking."

He already has a better first impression of her than he did of Raven.

"It's just," she shrugs casually, flouncy black top rippling in the breeze. "Wells is a tough act to follow. We've known him for years. We like him."

Bellamy swallows hard and tangles his free hand in his hair.

"Yeah, I get that. The whole situation was . . . less than ideal. But I hope, eventually, you know, that I can get to know you all better . . . Clarke's friends I mean."

Monty makes a humming noise of affirmation and shuffles his feet in the spiky grass, but Harper holds his gaze.

"It's ok," she says after an awkward pause. "Shit happens, right? I'm open to getting to know you. God knows I've been left out of the loop long enough as it is. Can't promise I'll love you, but I'll give you a fair shot."

"Sounds reasonable," Bellamy lets out a deep breath kept caged in his lungs while she spoke.

"I'm a reasonable kind of girl," she straightens up beside Monty and joins their conversation easily.

He's deep into his second beer, keeping his eye on Clarke from time to time. She winks dramatically at him in a Marilyn Monroe kind of way once over her mom's shoulder and pretends to smoke a joint
when Kane's not paying attention, making him chuckle. But then he loses sight of her as her father pulls her into a conversation with a group of middle-aged men whose height blocks her.

Finally, he spots her vivid dress again amid all the banners proclaiming "JAHA FOR MAYOR" in bold lettering, overflowing food tables, and clusters of balloons shaped like giant stars. She's smiling up at Wells near an impeccably frosted golden cake resembling the Liberty Bell. They appear to be in an animated conversation when Clarke reaches up to brush something off the shoulder of Wells' dark blue button-down. Bellamy feels his jaw clench despite himself. He's taken a few paces toward them when Lincoln walks into his line of sight.

"Hey, man," he steps back in surprise as his friend's bulk blocks out the arc of the sunlight. "I didn't know you were going to be here!"

Lincoln claps him on the back by way of greeting.

"Didn't expect to be but then my dad couldn't come, and Octavia was caught up with a school project, so..." he drifts off.

He can tell Bellamy's attention is absorbed by something going on behind him and follows his eyes.

"First love dies hard sometimes," he says sympathetically.

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?" Bellamy snaps before he can think better of it. The third beer finds its way into his hand as he roots around in the ice-filled cooler.

"Sorry," Lincoln holds up a palm and immediately shifts gears. "Didn't mean to offend you, man. You're trying to bring your two worlds together, and that's got to count for something, right?"

"Hmm," Bellamy grunts.

"If it's any consolation, she couldn't have been more torn up when you were in the hospital. She really cares about you."

"Who really cares about you?" a familiar, melodic voice sounds at his shoulder.

His body feels like it's shutting down organ system by organ system as he pivots to find Echo's brown eyes staring amusedly into his own. She's wearing a tight, black cocktail dress whose hem lands a few inches above her knee. Her hair is straight and glossy, cascading down her back, and her lipstick is a dark fuchsia.

"Echo?" he chokes out.

He hasn't seen her in almost a year, but somehow, the video she made with Roan remains burned on his retinas.

"Hey, stranger," she swoops up and crushes a kiss to his cheek. He feels the sticky residue of her lip color against his skin. "You're looking as handsome as ever."

"What the hell are you doing here?" Bellamy manages when he finds his voice again. Lincoln remains stoically silent at his side.

"I could ask you the same thing," she laughs like wind chimes. "I'm in my second year of law school now, and I interned with Marcus Kane's firm downtown over the summer. Apparently, he's good friends with Thelonious, and he invited me. I'm hoping to land a job there when I finally pass the bar."
Bellamy nods along stupidly, trying to grasp the meaning of her words. He doesn't fully hear Lincoln getting called away by Kane before he can even introduce the two to each other.

"So how about you?" Echo bats her eyelashes at him suggestively. "What are you doing here?"

"Clarke?" Wells says it more sharply this time, snapping his fingers near her face for emphasis. "Are you even listening?"

He was telling her about his plan to spend a week of Christmas break volunteering at a health clinic in a low-income part of town. But the sight of the leggy brunette closing in on Bellamy near the drinks table has her permanently distracted. Up until this point, she'd actually done well. She'd nodded along as Rosemary told her about the suspense thriller her book club was working its way through. Remembering Wells' deadly allergy to honeybees, she'd even swatted an insistently loud buzzing one away from his throat until it found new prey.

"Sorry, Wells. It's just . . . I've left Bellamy alone for a while now, do you mind if I . . . " her weight's already leaning on her left foot, stepping away from him.

"Sure, yeah, whatever. I'll catch up with you later," Wells replies, face remarkably blank.

A pang of guilt stabs into her stomach, and she watches the slope of his shoulders long enough to see him find Jasper in the crowd. The two head for the thicket of trees at the edge of the yard, the one that leads to the trails along the cliff face. She sighs, saying a silent prayer the basketball coach doesn't do a random drug test next week.

"What are you doing here?" she arrives in time to hear the toned, model-like creature ask Bellamy after saying something about what a bitch constitutional law is.

Clarke fits herself snugly into his side like a puzzle piece, wrapping her arm around Bellamy's waist and giving the girl her best, fake-bright smile perfected from attending years worth of academic and medical fundraisers.

"He's here because he's my boyfriend, and my family are good friends with the Jahas," Clarke says sweetly, blinking deliberately. "I'm Clarke Griffin."

Bellamy's eyes heat a path up her neck to her cheek as he stares at her. She notices they're a little glassy, a little awestruck, before readjusting her attention, asking, "And you are?"

"Echo Winters," comes the swift response and curt nod. "Bellamy and I dated in college."

"Right, right," Clarke says slowly, a diabolical grin spreading across her face as her nostrils flare. "I've heard a little bit about you. You have quite the active online presence, don't you? Too bad you don't put it to better use though, especially with a promising legal career ahead of you."

If looks could kill, Clarke Griffin would be dead. As it stands though, Echo can only splutter, blood pooling in her cheeks, and Clarke takes her opportunity.

"Bell, can you come inside with me for a sec?" she motions at the regal Jaha estate with her hand. "I need some help bringing out a few things Rosemary asked for."

She doesn't really give him time to answer properly, just interlocks her fingers with his own and tugs until his warm heat is pressed near her back, and they're weaving through the crowd in the direction of the back patio door.

"You were fucking brilliant, Princess," Bellamy noses against her neck, shutting the door behind
them with a snap.

"I have my moments," Clarke grins, locking her eyes on his dark ones for a second before his lips are suddenly coaxing the air from her lungs, and he's backing her up into the elegant wallpaper featuring fleurs-de-lis.

She tastes the alcohol on his tongue but rolls her own against his anyway. She's lost momentarily in the crush of the hard lines of his body and the dig of his fingers in the cushion right below her ass as he uses his other hand to cup her jaw and smooth back her hair.

"Anyone can come in here," Clarke warns when they finally pause, both panting heavily.

Bellamy glances up to his left over Clarke's head, noticing the curve of a stairwell.

"Come on, then," he tries to tug at her hand, but she remains rooted to the spot, shaking her head 'no' emphatically, lips pressed tightly together.

Bellamy smirks, dropping her hand and leaning his weight into the island countertop instead, which unfairly flexes the muscles in his arms.

"What's a matter, Princess?" he taunts. "I thought you needed an opportunity to do whatever the hell you wanted."
Clarke looks out through the vast, glass patio doors at all the obliviously happy partygoers dressed in conservative khakis and sensible floral sundresses before turning back to Bellamy. It's true they're quite alone in the airy kitchen, at least for now. If they're looking for a window of opportunity to sneak away, this is it.

Bellamy drums his fingertips idly along the countertop, but his eyes are active, alert, and maybe a little hungry when they return to her face. She steps between his legs and hooks her arms around his waist, pressing her cheek into his sternum.

"What if my mom comes looking for us?" she asks his buttons.

The vibration of laughter gets caught in his chest.

"Make us hard to find," he whispers back.

One glance up into his charmingly boyish expression, and she knows she's already lost.

"You better make this worth my while, Blake," Clarke breathes in his cologne before tugging his hand in the direction of the stairs.

They climb to the third floor, and Clarke turns left at the top of the stairs. She makes her way expertly down several hallways featuring expensive vases, bold abstract art, and an impressive assortment of houseplants, trying to ignore it when Bellamy brushes into her shoulder from time to time. It's lucky the breezeway connecting the main home to the pool house is on the western side of the estate, far away from the sweeping back lawn. She stops at an open guest room.

"The Jahas didn't strike me as a big boating family," Bellamy raises an eyebrow and stuffs his hands into his pockets, gazing around with a disbelieving expression. "I feel like I'm on the set of Gilligan's Island."

The bedside table lamps of the cozy bedroom are shaped like anchors, while the bedspread is adorned with seahorses and shells. A tranquil blue paint graces the walls, with the accent wall covered in an under-the-sea mural Ariel would be proud of. A white, circular life preserver sits next to a model sailboat on a wooden shelf near Bellamy's ear, and even the windows resemble portholes. Clarke snaps the door shut and locks it carefully, rolling her eyes at him.

"You wanted a private place, I found a private place."

"Aye, aye, captain!" Bellamy puts on a pirate accent and salutes her.

"That's for the army," she argues lightly.

"Navy salutes too, babe," he tickles her waist as he passes by her, headed straight for the painting.

"This looks like the castle from . . . " Bellamy starts, fingertips grazing the raised facade.

"The Little Mermaid, yeah, you're right," Clarke crosses her arms over her chest and leans back into the door.

"You painted it, didn't you?"
"So what if I did? Are you going to make fun of me? I was only 15 when I did it, and Mrs. Jaha said I could do anything nautical I wanted."

Her voice is as petulant as a child's, but she can't see the grin he offers the artwork. Bellamy's rich laughter fills the room and crinkles the skin around his eyes. He's practically shaking with it.

"What?" Clarke cries out, truly confused.

"I picked out the right nickname for you, that's all."

Then she's laughing, too, because honestly she chose a scene right out of the Disney Princess collection of all things. The glint is back in his dark eyes when he takes measured steps toward her. Her heartbeat quickens the moment her hands land on the warmth of his sides, dragging him closer to kiss his full lips with a renewed fervor.

"We don't have a lot of time," Clarke manages as Bellamy's mouth finds her neck, and he tugs down her strapless maxi dress several inches to toy with the tops of her breasts. His hands are rougher than normal from the recent construction projects, and she finds his touch twisting something low in her hips.

"Let's make it count then," he murmurs against her skin.

Bellamy is sucking and biting a path up her inner thigh, dress pooled around her waist with her fingers tangled in his thick curls when it hits her where she is. Flat on her back in the Jaha's pool house while an elegant party unfolds outside. Bellamy glides her panties down her legs in a fluid motion.

"This is wrong . . . so wrooooong," she moans, thrashing slightly when his head settles where his hands just were, and he licks straight into her.

"Want to stop, Princess?" he draws back several long minutes later, mouth glistening a bit with her arousal. A stab of heat crashes through her frame. He's still got his pointer finger on her swollen clit, flicking at it playfully.

"Fuck, no."

She grabs at his bicep and arches her back, yanking him down on top of her, so she's crushed in the best possible way. He's still laughing when her tongue meets his, making everything messier. She feels like she's burning, blood rushing too hot and tension mounting as she climbs higher with each brush of his fingers.

"You're kind of the best, Princess," he mumbles into her cheek after she drags his hand up to her breast and bucks into the one teasing her core.

"Bellamy ..." she hisses. "Been waiting too long to be teased."

His eyes are warm and welcoming, like coming home after a long and exhausting day, when they meet hers.

"I love you," she kisses his forehead and plays with his curls before squeezing his neck. "But I wanna come around your cock, not your fingers."

"Jesus, Clarke," he huffs but lets her divest him of his boxers and guide him to her entrance.

He fills her in one simple thrust, causing them both to groan. Bellamy draws out of her deliberately
slow each time before stroking back in with more force until her nails carve half-moons into the tan flesh of his shoulder, and she cries out his name. The pad of his finger teasing her hood and the nerve endings embedded below it sparks a rolling sensation at the base of her spine that grasps and grows until her knees clutch at his waist before her legs give out entirely.

His own orgasm seems to stretch and linger, flooding her channel and causing her to tuck her head into the hollow between his shoulder and neck. She mouths at the sweaty skin of his collarbone.

After, his palm massages her hip and thigh through the shuddering of her muscles. Clarke offers a small, satisfied smile when Bellamy kisses her cheek and maneuvers their bodies, so she's draped half on top of him where he rests on his back.

"Worth the wait?" he asks drily.

She hears the tiniest waver of hesitation there though.

"Always," she says confidently, turning to look at him. "You're always worth it, Bellamy. We're always worth it."

He holds her a little tighter, and they bask in the late afternoon light filtering in through the windows for as long as they're able.
Looking For Yourself Out There

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It's been an eventful six months to say the least. When Clarke's art teacher helps her display her series of portraits at a local gallery downtown, nobody anticipates the amount of attention they will receive. There's a charcoal of a young man with slightly greasy brown hair expertly mixing drinks behind a gleaming glass bar while machines whir in the background. Another of a fierce-eyed brunette pointing a gun at the viewer in a field of translucent butterflies, dark face paint streaking her cheekbones. Still another of a boy with overlarge goggles playing Skee-Ball on a pier while a ferris wheel rages into a blood orange inferno behind him. They're realistic, yet otherworldly, as if they harken from some futuristic time.

The media buzz catches the attention of universities, and before she knows it, her inbox is full of inquiries from professors. They hail from California Institute of the Arts, University of Southern California, Otis College of Art & Design, University of California at Irvine, and University of California at Santa Barbara. They come complete with chipper tones and provide information about scholarship programs and freshman course listings for aspiring studio art majors.

It takes a lot of convincing on her part - and some help from her father if truth be told - but Abby relinquishes her ideas for a grand tour of the Ivy League schools along the Eastern seaboard at last. The Griffins come to a mutual agreement. As long as Clarke applies to schools that offer strong science programs alongside impressive art programs, Abby will refrain from sighing too loudly over her evening meal as she stares across the table at her daughter.

Jake frames one of Clarke's sketches of himself and his wife walking toward a Stonehenge caught in a swirling, black-and-white vortex, hanging it in his office. Bellamy grins at it whenever he passes by on the way to his desk to grade tests.

Suddenly, it's the end of March. Spring break is upon them, and Clarke has long since hit the submit button on her final college application.

The fireworks explode in the wide sky, a dizzying array of indigos and potion-bottle greens. Lincoln did have an impressive pyrotechnic collection, Clarke had to admit it. The air smells crisp and fresh with a touch of salt mixed in as Monty builds a blazing bonfire on the shore. Raven and Jasper unpack the supplies for s'mores from the back of Wells' new Range Rover while Octavia and Harper take off racing across the coarse sand before collapsing in a fit of laughter, clutching their sides.

It's strange how their motley crew of friends has come together over the last few months and formed a larger unit of blissful misfits. Even Murphy smiles from time to time now, mostly when Raven tucks herself into his side and whispers things no one else can hear to him.

"Yo! The hot dogs are almost done, so unless you want yours burnt to a crisp, get over here!" Miller yells a few minutes later, expertly turning three pokers at once over the flames.

She finds him staring out into the gently crashing waves, jaw prominent as she takes in his side profile.

"Take a walk with me?" Clarke slides her smaller hand inside his, raising an eyebrow.

"Sure, Princess," he returns.
They set off down the beach away from the dull roar of the others, warm water washing their feet clean with every few steps. Clarke doesn't speak again until they're settled on a blanket under the darkening night sky. She presses her head back into Bellamy's chest from her comfortable spot nestled between his knees.

"I have some news," she says quietly.

"Mmm?" Bellamy replies, but he hears his heartbeat quicken.

"I picked a school."

Clarke's eyes trace the flight path of a lone seagull as it soars with wings outstretched toward the horizon line.

"And?" Bellamy murmurs after a few silent moments. "Gonna let me in on which one, or do I have to guess?

He squeezes her side, tickling her skin with the rough pads of his fingers, until she laughs and nestles her nose into the crook of his arm to breathe in his pine scent.

"I'm going to UCLA," she whispers, raising her eyes up to his for a brief second.

His lips draw back in confusion.

"Clarke? No," he shakes his head, rubbing at the back of his neck. "You've got all those great options. Pick a school whose art program will do you justice."

"UCLA is ranked eighteenth in the nation for art and design students," Clarke recites it quickly as though she inhaled the department catalog.

"Yeah, but . . . baby," Bellamy stumbles for words, tracing the line of her cheekbone delicately when she turns fully toward him. "You could go somewhere better for what-

"I couldn't," she retorts, tugging a fistful of his hair downward until her lips meet his, "Go somewhere better. There's no better place for me."

Her breath tickles his face even as she pulls away and bites her lip, gazing up at him. Bellamy sighs.

"Well, maybe you'll change your mind," he offers lamely. "You deserve the very best, Clarke."

"That's what I'm getting. The best of every possible world," she says, a glint entering her eye.

When she breaks away from the second, deeper kiss, she cuddles into his side, and he holds her against him, stroking the goosebumps popping up down her arms.

"Will you change your mind? About us I mean?" Clarke murmurs it into the air, fingers clutching at his old, worn sweatshirt.

"I don't see that happening, Princess,"

Farther down the beach, more fireworks explode in a riot of color and sound. Jasper is chasing Octavia now, and Harper and Wells are singing the theme song to The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air horribly off-key.

"Can you wish on this type of shooting star?" Clarke questions as she watches the neon embers fall through the air.
"I already have more than I ever expected," Bellamy replies carefully.

Her answering beam is bright before she turns to look wistfully at the glowing stars appearing from the depths of space.

"What about you?" he elbows her lightly in the ribs. She twitches her mouth and cocks her head to the side. "Want anything special?"

"Oh, I don't know," Clarke sighs. "I'm looking forward to college dorm life. A wise man once told me the guys all walk around half-naked on their way to the shower."

Bellamy snorts, and Clarke bursts out laughing as soon as she catches his eye.

"Figures that's what you'd say."

She climbs easily into his lap, hooking her slim arms around his neck and scooting closer to feel his body heat.

"Well," Clarke begins more thoughtfully. "I'm looking forward to spending my weekends at your place. I'm sure I'll need help with my history homework."

~~Fin~~

Chapter End Notes

If you have stayed with this story from the beginning until now, you deserve a medal. Thank you all so much for your support during this process - it has meant the world to me. I've loved chatting with each and every one of you!

If anyone has a new modern AU story idea you would like me to explore, please leave a comment about it below! You can always write "Prompt Idea - please don't post" and only I will see the idea as an email. I won't approve that sort of thing as a comment to this story since I have to approve my comments before they go live. :)

I may revisit this story later to explore what the future looks like for Bellarke. But for now, I will proceed with finishing up A Sky Full of Stars. Until Season 5, stay strong my fellow Bellarkers! xoxo
Two Years Later

The words are starting to scamper like spiders' legs across the page. Murphy shoves the case study away to the other side of the table, rubbing at his eyes. The clock hanging along the kitchen wall reads 7:30 p.m. She promised she'd be ready a half hour ago. His stomach gives a loud rumble.

"Babe! You almost done?" he yells out.

No answer.

With a sigh, he gets up and starts walking down the hall toward their bedroom. She's not one of those girls who takes forever to get ready, which he appreciates. And honestly, how dressed up do you need to be to grab dinner and catch a movie on a Sunday? Sure, yesterday was Valentine's Day, but it's not like either of them really buy into that Hallmark holiday bullshit. Plus, working at Mecha while trying juggling his political science course load at UCLA was seriously kicking his ass. Still, if he wants to be a lawyer ... sacrifices must be made. He snorts to himself as his knuckles rise to wrap on the closed door, thinking about what Bellamy always tells him after a long night of serving up drinks and hustling for tips.

"You sure do talk enough bullshit to the customers to make it as a lawyer." At this point Clarke frequently reached across the bar where she was seated to smack him in the chest. "Leave him alone, Bell. He's good at his job."

"You want to try that new Thai place off Factory Avenue?" he tries again, raising his voice.
"Babe?"

Still nothing.

"The movie's at 9, so we've really got to head out soon if we're going to make it!"

All at once, the door swings open, and Raven appears flapping her hand at him to quiet him down. She looks amazing even though only one of her eyes is made up in smoky charcoal. Her silky brown hair ripples in waves down her back. She even threw on a dress - and she rarely ever bothers to do that. But it's creamy and hugging her curves. Murphy suddenly hates the person who's taking him
away from his girlfriend on the one night she's not responsible for running simulations on her aerospace engineering project. Raven's nodding along at whoever is talking her ear off through her cell phone, a frown line rising up between her dark eyebrows.

"Wait, slow down. I still don't understand," she says. "He bought you roses and chocolates, right? So ... and don't take this the wrong way, you know I love you, chica, but ... why are you upset?"

Murphy lets out a huge sigh. Relationship drama, great. This was going to take fucking forever. Raven throws him a sympathetic look and reaches out to squeeze his bicep.

"Bellamy and Clarke," she mouths, shrugging.

"Those two?" Murphy interjects, surprised. "They're practically walking down the aisle."

"One sec, Clarke. Shhh," Raven shushes him and presses the mute button. "Just give me five minutes and then we'll go, I promise."

She bats her eyelashes prettily and rises up onto her tiptoes to kiss him. "Aren't I always worth the wait?" she says coyly.

He rolls his eyes but rubs the curve of her waist all the same, heat already shooting through his body at the feel of her under his palm.

"Yeah, yeah," he clips her right under the chin, and she grins at him.

"Honey, please stop crying. I can barely understand you. What? He made you dinner for Valentines? Then what's the--"

Murphy rounds the corner back to their living room and flops down onto the couch, reaching for the remote. Yeah, this might take a while. He tries to relax, he really does. He lands on an episode of *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives* and gets as far as considering trying to figure out how to make this truly excellent Beef Chow Fung, but Raven's pacing is making him more frustrated as each minute ticks by with the conversation still in play.
"You're outside the building? Now?" Raven stops dead and stares through the window where it's raining steadily. "It's pouring. Let me buzz you in. Why didn't you say something?"

Murphy throws up his hands. He knew it. They're not going anywhere tonight. Might as well just order takeout.

"Ok, yeah, come right up. Bye."

Raven bites her lip and drops her phone onto the coffee table before slinking back toward Murphy.

"Don't even try."

"Awww, don't pout, baby," she coos, letting her dress ride up her thigh to expose her tanned skin and settling into his lap to slide her mouth over his for a quick and dirty kiss. "Don't be mad. She needs me. Bellamy fucked up or something, and she's all distraught. We can still call in takeout after she leaves," she grinds down on him and he grips at her ass because he can't help touching her when she's this close, "And then I'll be your dessert."

The door buzzer sounds, and her warm weight lifts right off his lap.

"You're such a tease." He calls after her, and she laughs as she walks away.

"Isn't that why you're with me?"

He stands and stretches, making his way to the closet to grab his rain jacket. "I'm going to get us some Chinese food."

"Ok, get enough for Clarke, too!"

"Sure."

When she opens the door, it's to reveal a soaking wet Clarke, shivering in a thin white T-shirt, ripped jeans and faded sneakers. Her blonde hair's already starting to stick to her cheeks, and she's running
her palms up and down her arms.

"I'm so sorry, Ray!" she blurts out, eyes widening as she takes in her friend's outfit and then Murphy's nice shirt. "Shit, you guys were going out. I didn't mean to interrupt--"

"Forget about it, Griffin. Any chance I get to call Bellamy out for being an asshole, I'll take it." Murphy winks at her.

She frowns a little and shakes her head, but he can see the hint of a smile tugging at her lips.

"He didn't do anything."

"I'm sure he didn't," Raven's hands find their way to her hips. "That man is--"

"He didn't," Clarke says more insistently. "It's me! I'm the screw up."

Murphy sucks in air through his teeth.

"I think that's my cue to leave. Just don't drip all over my floor, and I'll make sure to get you the sweet and sour soup and sesame chicken, deal?"

Clarke nods gratefully. "Thank you so much. I swear I'll make this up to you guys."

He thinks the pitiful look on Clarke's face is the worst one he'll see this week, but he only makes it down to the lobby of their building before there's a more pathetic one waiting for him through the glass door. Bellamy's pacing back and forth restlessly, one hand holding his phone and the other one raking tightly through his hair.

"Thank God," Bellamy huffs as Murphy steps outside. "I was about to call you. Is Clarke here?"

Murphy smirks. "Course she is. Where else does she go when you fuck up?"
Bellamy opens his mouth, looks about to argue, then shuts it again. He rubs at his eyes. He looks like hell, honestly. Tired and worn down. "Listen, man. I had papers to grade all morning, and then I worked an extra shift at the construction site because Wick got the flu. I'm gonna be with your ass at Mecha tomorrow til midnight, so I'm just not in the mood, all right? Where are you going anyway?"

"To get Chinese food. Raven and I were going out because she couldn't yesterday, but then Clarke called..." Murphy shrugs. "Always here to clean up your messes, Blake."

A glimmer of humor dances in Bellamy's dark eyes.

"You're turning into such a sap, Murphy. Valentine's Day? I never would've pegged you as a romantic."

"Fuck off," Murphy shoves at him, but it it isn't hard.

"Want me to get you something?"

Bellamy stands up straighter as Murphy buzzes him into the building. "No, thanks. I just came here to find Clarke. I'll cook for us at home - don't worry about it."

"Whatever you say," Murphy gives him a salute and heads off into the rain, eager for the smell of egg rolls wafting through the air at Tsing's and putting as much distance between whatever shit Bellamy pulled and himself that he can. The less drama in his life, the better.

It's a testament to the poor construction quality of UCLA's apartments that Bellamy can hear snippets of Raven's conversation with his girlfriend through the door when he arrives at 4A. The raised, golden letters sit a little crookedly against the wood.

"I hate seeing you like this, babe. You shouldn't get this worked up over him. It's not that he's a bad guy, but you two are so intense and--"

His heart lurches straight into his throat when he hears Clarke's voice fighting through sobs.

"It's not him! It's me," she chokes out. "I ran away from him."
The floorboards squeak, and he can imagine Raven joining Clarke on the couch.

"Here, have some tea, ok? Do you want to tell me what happened?"

Clarke continues to cry, and Bellamy can't hear anything she says next.

"Well, you did come flying straight into my Valentine's date, so I feel like I deserve a little bit of this story," Raven says teasingly. "Come on, it can't be that bad. Maybe I can help."

It's wrong to listen. Besides, he already lived through the details, even though they confuse the hell out of him. He doesn't need a recap. He needs Clarke to tell him what's wrong herself, not eavesdrop on her explaining whatever it is that's bothering her to Raven.

His knock is loud and authoritative.

"Raven? It's Bellamy. Let me in please."

There's more shuffling across the floorboards before Raven pulls the door open only as wide as the chain allows. Her hazel eye and straight nose swims into view.

"She needs some time, Bellamy. She can spend the night here with us. You guys can talk tomorrow."

"Let me in, Raven. Please," he repeats, voice breaking on the last word despite his effort to hold himself together.

Raven stares at him for a long moment. In the background, a flash of a petite blonde figure wrapped in a fluffy white blanket emerges.

"Bellamy."
His heart cracks further. She says it so soft and kind. But he remembers the fear in her eyes, the jagged anger when he'd arrived home two hours ago in dirt-covered boots and a shirt sticking to his back and told her he'd been called in to work an extra shift down at the high-rise condo site.

"Yeah, Princess. I'm right here."

"H-how," she hiccups. He feels like the world's biggest asshole for getting her this upset. "How did you know where I was?"

His chuckle is dry.

"I didn't. I went by the art building and down to the pier first. Then I figured you might have wanted to vent to someone who's not my biggest fan."

He can't be sure, but he thinks she might be smiling a fraction.

"That must have left you with a lot of options," Raven says drily.

"Anyone ever tell you how charming you are?"

Raven moves to shut the door, and he's sure he's lost. His shoulders throb. A headache's definitely forming behind his left temple. He pounds into the center of the door once futilely with the side of his fist. But then--

"Open the door, Raven."

A jolt of hope knocks around in his chest.

"Are you sure? You want to see the guy that got you hysterical enough to flee your house in a thunderstorm?"

"You don't know what you're talking about."
"Only because you refuse to explain it to me."

"It's personal," Clarke answers in the smallest voice he can barely hear through the crack of open door. "Let him in."

Raven sighs and throws Bellamy a fierce look that screams don't fuck this up before the door swings open.

He steps slowly into the living room. Clarke's wrapped up in the blanket on the couch, throwing nervous glances at him. It makes him skittish as if her energy was his own.

"Hey, baby," Bellamy says softly, hands digging into his pockets. "Can I come sit by you?"

Clarke bites her lip but nods.

Raven's hands settle back on her hips. Bellamy drops down beside Clarke, close enough for the warmth of his thigh to immediately start leeching into hers where they touch. His eyes don't leave hers, and Raven suddenly feels wildly out of place in her own apartment. More so when he raises a tan hand to cup Clarke's cheek. It's true she's never understood the sudden and fierce connection between her best friend and this man. But she's learned better than to try to get in the middle of it. No matter what happens or what she thinks, they always find their way back to each other. And despite the fact that she still doesn't have full warm and fuzzy feelings for the guy, she knows down to her bones that Clarke would die for him and he'd probably return the favor.

"I'm going to give you two a few minutes," she slips away to her bedroom.

"Are you ok?" Bellamy asks quietly, bringing his thumb across Clarke's cheekbone.

Her aqua blue eyes flicker shut for a moment.

"I'm fine."
She shivers, and he pauses to bring the edges of the blanket closer to her damp clothing.

"I don't like you driving in rain like that. Why'd you run, Clarke? All I did was come home from work."

"I - I know," she stumbles, reaching out surprisingly through the blankets to grip his hand with hers. "I'm sorry. I freaked out when you said you were back at that site."

Bellamy's eyebrows crinkle.

"But I've worked there at least five times already."

"Yeah," Clarke interrupts. "But that was last year."

"So what?"

She blinks at him, eyes frantic but lips silent. Bellamy waits her out yet she says nothing after many strained seconds pass. Her free hand keeps gripping the blanket until he finally lays his own palm over it to still it.

"Princess, I'm sorry," Bellamy sighs at last. "I know we haven't been spending as much time together lately with all my jobs, but-"

Clarke shakes her head violently.

"That's not it!"

She's scaring him now, starting to shake again. He reaches out to rub her waist over the blanket. "Clarke..." he says carefully, willing his voice steady. "Come here, ok? Everything's good. I'm not mad. I don't want you to be upset."

Clarke climbs into his lap like she's half-asleep, and he hurries to bring the blanket up over her shoulders. Her mug of tea sits on the coffee table, forgotten. Bellamy runs his fingertips up and down
her spine soothingly, murmuring *it's ok, princess, you're fine, I've got you* several times over.

Finally, her ragged breathing subsides, and the trickle of moisture seeping into his collar ceases.

"You've been working yourself to the bone." Clarke murmurs into his neck. He smells like the familiar spicy pine she loves. "I don't want you scaling the side of a building twenty stories up, Bell!" She presses her palm into the center of his chest and levels him with a penetrating glare. "You could fall and get seriously hurt and then what would I do?"

Bellamy cocks his head to the side, eyes taking on a shade of melted chocolate. "Nothing is going to happen to me, Princess," he soothes. "You know I want to help out with O's tuition. This is how I do that."

When Octavia got the opportunity to study anthropology at the University of California, Riverside, she wanted to take out loans. But Bellamy wouldn't hear of it. After several rounds of shouting matches across the kitchen, he'd relented and said she could take a job as a kickboxing instructor if he was going to pick up more hours at his various part-time jobs.

"I need you to stay safe." Clarke swoops down and wraps her arms around his neck, grasping him tight.

"I will, baby," he strokes at her hip. "But please. You can't just run out of the house when I come in in work boots, yeah? You've got to talk to me."

She nods, but then she's crying again. He rocks her gently, concern flaring back to life.

"You wanna go home?" he whispers into her ear.

"Yeah," she hiccups.

Raven shot her a deeply skeptical look when she said she was leaving, but Clarke knew she'd come around. She feels horrible about interrupting her friend's special night with Murphy. She hadn't been thinking though when she raced out of the ramshackle ranch house with its yellow door and into the muggy night air. A gripping fear had clutched at her insides and wouldn't let go all day since her trip to the clinic. She'd needed a familiar face, someone to ground her, tell her she was overreacting. Of course if Raven knew the truth ...
"Clarke?"

She comes back to the present moment with Bellamy's palm rubbing lightly against her thigh in the front of his truck. Outside, the rain splatters in random patterns against the glass windshield with a thrumming beat. He's turned the heater up for her though something cold still twists in her stomach.

"Yeah?" She turns to take in the his sharp, handsome profile. The moisture in the air brought out the true spring of his curls against his forehead.

"I'm always here for you. You know that, right?" He holds her gaze for a minute before turning back to the road. "No matter what."

She swallows down acidic bile rising up into her esophagus and tries to shrug. "You're being so sweet," is all she can manage, "and I acted like a nutcase."

Bellamy cracks a grin.

"I'm only sweet with you, Princess. You're my girl."

Tear drops prick at her eyes.

"Mom came by my exhibit at the gallery yesterday," she says while picking at a loose thread on her jeans.

"Yeah?"

"She wanted to know if I was really planning to be an artist. She keeps hoping I'll change my mind and start taking organic chemistry to go pre-med, and--" she sighs loudly. "I don't know, Bell. Maybe she's right. You already work like crazy, and life is full of bills and ... unexpected complications, and doctors make a lot of money, you know? So maybe I should--"

"Woah, woah, slow down," Bellamy cuts off her rambling, turning expertly into his - their she keeps
having to remind herself - curving driveway.

She'd spent the better part of her Christmas holidays lugging her boxes inside with the help of a few of their friends. At first her parents balked at the idea of her moving in with him. "You're only twenty. It's so young," her mother had said. "Wait until you're done with college at least." But it had gotten to the point where she was spending almost all her nights with him anyway, so she didn't see the logic behind her father paying for the suite on campus any longer.

She'd thought it would make things much more intense, living with Bellamy. Solidify their relationship in a new way. To a large extent, she was right. There was something supremely special about waking up tucked against his side and kissing the freckles along his shoulder until he roused. She liked making coffee for him while he scrambled eggs and hummed out of tune. He surprised her with a room to paint in soon after she became a permanent resident, and she thanked him by sinking down onto his hard length right there on the floor of her new studio as the weak winter sunlight streamed into the space through the tree branches. She loved watching him run beside Clara on the sand shouting encouragements as the little girl tried to keep her dragon kite air born. It was his beaming smile she sought out in the crowd at her first exhibit opening at the funky, cramped gallery downtown. She knows the heartbreak in his eyes when he fights with his sister over the phone and the rumbling sound of his pleasure when he fucks her against his shower wall. It thrills her to see him get excited about his lesson plans and talk about his professor applications. And he's the first one she told about her idea to start an arts program for the sick kids at Cedars-Sinai. Sure, they still argue sometimes, and it's still hard. But he's her best friend, her person, the one who keeps her centered.

But this. This might break them wide open.

"You still have so much time to figure all that out," Bellamy's saying in an alternate universe. "I don't ever want you to be worried about money, ok? If you want to be an artist, be an artist. If you think you want to be a doctor because you genuinely want to save lives, then I'll be behind you one hundred percent." He turns to face her as he cuts the engine. "I know it's seemed like a lot because I'm still wrapping up the program, but I swear, Clarke, as soon as I'm a professor, I won't be as worried about how to pay for everything. Things will be easier. We'll have enough money to breathe a bit and be comfortable."

Clarke loves his ambition, his pride. He turned down her father flat-out when he offered him a loan to help get Octavia through school. She knows he's going to be one hell of an impressive academic. She doesn't want to take that from him.

"You work so hard, Bell. Good things are gonna come for you," she whispers through the quiet drum of rain.

He smiles at her and leans across the console to press a sweet kiss to her mouth. Yet when he draws
away, his dark eyes are still flooded with concern.

"Why don't you clean up, and I'll make us something to eat?"

She smiles back at him, pulse racing in her ears. "Ok."

Clarke can't help herself when she finds the old lingerie set buried in the bottom drawer. The elastic is a bit stretched out, but the yellow flowers against the purple lace are as vibrant as ever. She slips them on and throws a robe over her shoulders before padding into the kitchen. Bellamy's flipping omelets in the skillet, back muscles rippling as he moves. It might as well be two and a half years ago. Except this time, things are different. She's all-in. Committed in more ways than one. But what if, despite his stirring speech, he decides this isn't worth it? That he can't cope? That this isn't what he wants? The desire to dry heave returns in full force. She's not sure she wants anything to change about them. They're not perfect - but they fit just like this. She needs him. She'd like to think he needs her, too.

"Are you going to tell me what's going on in that brilliant mind of yours, or are you just going to stare at me cooking?" Bellamy's gruff voice cuts into her thoughts.

He shuts off the heat on the stove with a click and moves the skillet to an empty burner. His pupils expand despite the light of the kitchen when his eyes sweep up her body. Fear floods her system. But this is it. She's out of escape plans. Clarke draws in a deep breath.

"Bellamy, I'm pregnant."

There's silence. Then nothing but the harsh clatter of the fork slipping from his hand and hitting the tile below.

"You're ... what?"

"Pregnant." Clarke gulps, voice steadying as she's forced to repeat the word and speak it into being. "I'm pregnant. We're having a baby."

Bellamy's eyes and mouth are round O's.
"But h-how? When?" he stutters.

Clarke stares down at the ground now, heat streaking up her neck. She rubs one slippered foot against the other.

"I missed my pill once over break when we all went camping in Yosemite," she says quietly. "That night Jasper spiked the egg nog. I'm sorry, Bellamy," she finally looks back up at him, blinking away tears. "I know you've got so many great things ahead of you. I don't want to hold you back. I don't even know what I want to do for sure with my life."

Bellamy's shaking his head. Her stomach drops unpleasantly. She knew this was going to be the death blow. They're not ready, not old enough, not married or anywhere near it. Her mother was right. So goddamn right. She doesn't want to trap him like this---

Bellamy's arms are around her before she fully realizes what's happening. He's rubbing her back and she's all at once sobbing into his neck like the crazy person she's recently turned into.

"Clarke, Clarke," he calls her name like a chant as he rocks her. "I love you so much. This is a good thing. We're going to be a family."

She knows the moment the thought crosses his brain. His forehead furrows with worry as he draws back.

"You want that, don't you? You want this baby?"

She reaches for his hands, stroking her thumbs over the tops of them. Maybe she was wrong. Maybe this is the hardest part.

"Course I do," she confesses after a beat, suddenly shy. "It's something we made together. I know we didn't plan on anything like this so soon, but--"

"Doesn't matter," Bellamy shakes his head. "We would've gotten here eventually. You're the only one I'd want to do this with."
His words spark joy in her veins.

"But I don't want this to stop you from being a professor, from thinking you have to work like crazy. Because you don't. You really don't. I need you to take it easier--"

He holds her by her shoulders at arm's length. "It won't, Princess. I'm going to take care of you. Both of you," he lays a hand over the nonexistent swell of her belly, and she nearly sobs. Her hormones are seriously out of control. Bellamy drops to his knees and looks up into her face. She nods, dropping a hand into his hair, and he pulls back the tie of her robe, unable to completely school his smirk when he sees what she's wearing underneath it. But then he's kissing the spot below her belly button reverently before rising back up again.

"You're going to finish school and be whatever you want to be, Clarke. You were meant to go set the world on fire. And I'm going to help you however I can."

"How?" she asks, fighting with her own desperation.

"I'll watch our kid when you have class. There are night classes, which would make things easier. We have friends, your parents, my sister. We can make this work. You're gonna be a great mom."

Clarke still looks skeptical, but he can tell she's melting a little.

"And you're going to find a safer job than dangling twenty stories in the air?" she shoots him a severe look.

He bites his lower lip and ducks his head before meeting her gaze.

"You really do care about me, huh?"

She launches herself into his arms, forearms locking behind his neck and holding him close.

"I'll find something safer to do if things get slow at the bar," he promises.
Slowly, she exhales.

An hour later, she's leaning against his chest on the couch watching a rerun of an old '90s sitcom she doesn't even know the name of. Bellamy takes his time stroking up the length of her arm from her wrist to her shoulder before dropping back down again. The live audience laughs at a joke one of the sons made, but all she can focus on are the goosebumps erupting up and down her body. It's probably not even a conscious thing for him, but the third time he slides his hand over her stomach, she catches his wrist and shifts it down toward the gap between her thighs where she's ached for his fingers ever since they sat down. Letting her head drop against his sternum, she watches him from upside down.

"We don't have to do anything tonight, Clarke."

Bellamy leans forward to kiss the top of her head. She bucks her hips slightly to try to get his fingers to move toward her pulsing heat but he holds them higher.

Clarke grumbles, and he laughs as she shifts in his lap so they're face-to-face.

"Don't you know you're my weakness by now?" She stands up and unties her robe with a light flourish, letting it fall to the floor in a silken heap.

"Is that right?"

"Yeah," Clarke wiggles her eyebrows at him, amused by his sudden slack jaw. "I realize that might sound a little crazy."

Bellamy shrugs languidly, eyes darkening with lust.

"Not crazy. Maybe a little pathetic but--"

Clarke snorts in a mix of amusement and frustration.

"You have no ground to stand on, Blake."
"How do you figure?"

She lays down on her back beside him, tugging him by the hand though it doesn't take much for him to climb on top of her. He gasps when she palms him right through his pants.

"Looks like I might be yours too."

Bellamy groans, leaning forward to nip at her neck.

"I love you more than I ever have," he confesses into her ear. "And that's saying something."

When he sees her eyes again, they're sparkling. "I love you more than that." She takes his hand and lets it settle with hers over her abdomen. "We made a life, Bellamy. Us. You and me."

"I really like the sound of that, Princess."

Clarke threads a hand through the curls at his neck and arches up to kiss him while her leg hooks around his hip to draw him closer.

"Me too, Bell. So much."

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