These Emotions in my Head, These Thoughts on my Heart
by Jesi_Ki_Kage

Summary

Soulbonds are anchored in the limbic cortex. Because of this only emotions make it across the bond. Sometimes there are exceptions. Sometimes there are bonds that defy expectations. Sometimes there are bonds strong enough to withstand anything the world tries to throw at it.

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Clarke knew she had two soulmates. Had because the day she found out for sure was the day one of them died.

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Lexa can't decide what to do now that her second soulmate decided to show up - three years after her other mate's death.

Notes

Forewarnings:
Costia is still very dead. That being said I've read a bunch of fic that portray Costia as in the way of Clexa. So I decided to try something different.

Some characters will be a little OOC. Keep in mind this is fanfic. For Clexa most of the OOCness is attributed to the soulbond. For everyone else... wait and see ;)

NOT ABANDONED. Hit major writer's block but am still working on this. Just taking the
approach of having multiple chapters written before posting the newest in case I end up changing things. Again.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Impact

Chapter 1: Impact

Terror laces through her, jerking Lexa awake in bed. Breathing rapidly, it takes much too long for Lexa to confirm that she is, in fact, safe in her room in Polis. Another wave of terror washes through her. Understanding comes immediately.

Her soulbond.

Concentrating on the connection for the first time in over a year Lexa breathes deeply before submerging herself in her soulmates emotions.

A second later another wave of terror nearly breaks her concentration. Gritting her teeth Lexa forces herself to look beyond the terror in an attempt at learning just what is happening to her soulmate. Slowly other emotions can be picked out from amongst the terror.

Desperation, disbelief, shock, sorrow.

Clearly the isolation Lexa's soulmate had been in for the last year or so was ending in an unexpected manner. Still, this information was not as helpful as Lexa hoped. Pushing aside her own concern Lexa dove as deep into the connection as she could.

For a moment the inconceivable happened. Having never met her soulmate in person Lexa should only sense extremely intense emotions across the bond connecting them.

Yet, as Lexa sat there on her bed with her entire focus on her soulbond, she saw.

Words muffled as though shouted through a wall. Images coming in and out of focus as if a blow to the head had knocked her silly. A woman talking, flanked by others.

Love, hate, and despair filled Lexa's mate at the sight of the woman. The new rush of emotions jostled Lexa's focus. The last thing Lexa gathered before returning to her end of the bond was four words that shocked her to the core.

"-sending you to Earth."

Lexa is dressed and out the door in moments. Hollering orders for her generals to be fetched she rushes straight to the throne room. Her generals find her on the balcony. Their confusion palpable as they wait for her orders.

"Prep the scouts to depart at a moment’s notice. They are to depart as soon as we receive the sign."

"What sign Heda?"

"You'll know."

Lexa suppressed her humor at their increased confusion. Thankfully none pressed her for more answers. It was only due to her habit of reading books from the old world that she could guess how exactly her soulmate and those with her would be sent to Earth.
Earth.

The knowledge that this whole time her second mate had been in space sent a shiver down her spine. No wonder Costia had been unable to find any sign of their third before-.

Shaking her head Lexa forced herself to think of something else.

Her mate's people were strangers. They could not be from the Mountain due to being in space. But the words Lexa heard were in Gonasleng. Her people would not easily accept them just for speaking the Mountain's language, let alone whatever other grievances will come up.

Lexa should not so easily accept them either.

They may yet prove to be allies of the Mountain. Or to be a separate threat all together.

Lexa could not let the prospect of a mate blind her from her duties as Heda. She'd already lost one of her soulmates. If it was discovered by her enemies that her second mate was among these... Skaikru, there would be trouble.

If it was discovered she had a second mate to begin with there would be trouble.

A shout from below broke Lexa from her thoughts.

Focusing her attention outward, the streak of light at the edge of the horizon was easy to spot. It was a small streak of light. From what Lexa read from the NASA - the size of the streak was not enough to determine the size of the ship sent. Or anything else about the ship and those on board.

A fresh wave of terror raced into Lexa from across the bond. Her soulmate had awoken, confirming their presence on the falling ship.

Shouts and exclamations reached her ears as the citizens of Polis noticed the supposed falling star. Not once did Lexa look away from the sky. Only when the trail disappeared from her view did Lexa relax her posture.

A call of Heda brought her attention back to the generals who had remained with her.

"Send the scouts towards the Trikru lands. Observation and perimeter only. No contact. I want to know everything there is to know before any contact is made. I shall be at Tondici."

For a beat no one moved. A snarl escaped Lexa's throat. Instantly the generals scrambled to obey. Stalking from the room Lexa ignored Titus's gaze. She didn't need to hear his advice to know what he would say.

To be Heda is to be alone.

Lexa had only been in Tondc for a few hours when the first reports arrived.

Humans, loud and unobservant. They appeared to all be young and unskilled. Even worse, the scouts witnessed what appeared to be a power struggle before a group of five left the main group.

The scouts were too far away to hear any words at the time, but the group was heading towards the Mountain.

Lexa fought back a growl.
No clear leader and they were splitting up. Towards the mountain. Making a split-second decision Lexa began barking orders.

"Follow any other groups that separate but do not be seen. Get scouts close enough to hear. I will pursue the initial group."

Any and Gustus both tensed. A sharp glare caused Anya to nod before turning sharply on her heel and leaving to obey.

"Heda..."

"You may accompany Gostos, but I am going."

"Very well Heda."

Lexa kept her focus on him another moment, eyes squinted as she evaluated Gustus's sincerity. After a moment she sighed.

Other than invading - crashing - on Trikru land the new comers had done no wrong.

Unless speaking the Mountain's language counted.

To many, it did.

When it was clear Lexa had no more to say in explanation Gustus sighed and turned to leave. He had reached the tent flap before a thought occurred to Lexa.

"Gostos." He paused. "Notify me immediately if anyone shows signs of reacting to a soulbond with Skaikru."

"Sha Heda."

By the time Lexa's small party met up with the original pair trailing the group of five Skaikru it was clear the newcomers knew nothing of stealth. Even stopping as far as they did to keep the horses out of hearing Lexa could faintly hear the groups conversation.

The muttered branwada from Gustus was not welcomed, although Lexa completely agreed when the skaiga jumped into the water.

Watching the other Skaikru Lexa filed away their interactions. How one male seemed to hover around the blond female. How the other two males seemed to stick together. How-

A scream jarred the air around them.

Automatically Lexa was crouched with her hand on her sword as terror lanced down her soulbond.

Could it be?

Movement out of the corner of her eye revealed one of the scouts breaking rank to rush towards the now panicking Skaikru. Swiftly Lexa cut in front of him. For a second it looked as though he intended to brush past her before he controlled himself.

"Heda."

The warrior's face was pinched with lines of suppressed pain. His eyes pleaded with Lexa to let
him pass.

Another scream behind them caused the warrior to flinch.

The corner of Lexa's lip turned up. Softly she issued her order, aware of Gustus and the other scouts not so subtly watching them.

"No contact is to be made. Not yet." Confusion slipped into his expression as his jaw clenched in frustration. Lexa growled. "Understood?"

"Sha, Heda."

Satisfied, Lexa spun on her heel and motioned for the group to move closer. By the time they had repositioned it was clear the incident was over. Further up the shore the three males gawked as the blond female finished treating the other female's leg wound.

Interesting.

Taking a deep breath Lexa focused inward. Concentrating on her soulbond she sought the echoes of her mate’s emotions. Determination laced with panic reached her.

Opening her eyes, a faint smile flashed across Lexa's face as she watched the blond help the other stand.
Contact

Chapter Summary

So, his attention was nice. He wasn't one of her soulmates - well, soulmate now - but what was the harm in flirting? It wasn't like anything would come of it while they were wandering the woods trying to survive.

Soulmates finding each other on the Ark was uncommon. Clarke knows that this is why there's such a relaxed policy about relationships. She also knows that flirting with Finn distracts her from reality.

It makes her feel normal.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 2: Contact

Clarke thought nothing of it when she felt the faint echoes of emotion through her soulbond.

She was drained after the adrenaline rush of Octavia's little water adventure. Her body ached after walking all day over uneven ground. As gorgeous as the forest was, traveling through the leaf litter was significantly different than walking down the metal halls of the Ark.

Increased nerves coming from her soulbond don't even register to Clarke's exhausted mind.

What does register is the way Octavia keeps glancing around as though looking for something. The way Finn seems to hover over her with no intent to let her rest. The way Jasper and Monty seem able to predict each other’s needs.

Curious.

But not helpful in getting to Mount Weather and getting supplies.

Needless to say, waking up in the night was not what Clarke wanted for her tired and sore body.

The glowing plant life - surely the effects of radiation - was definitely worth it.

Finn, maybe a little.

It was nice to feel noticed, appreciated, by someone who hadn't known her all her life. Wells had been her best friend before betraying her and getting her father executed. Everyone else just saw her as a one of the privileged.

Everyone except the four with her.

So, his attention was nice. He wasn't one of her soulmates - well, soulmate now - but what was the harm in flirting? It wasn't like anything would come of it while they were wandering the woods trying to survive.
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So yes, Clarke flirted back. Clarke paid attention to his advances as well as his overall health. How Jasper and Monty seemed to get tired faster. How Octavia tried to hide how much her leg was hurting her. She paid attention to all four during the long hike towards Mount Weather.

She couldn't help it.

Worrying about others health was second nature.

When they reach the river Clarke has her first doubts that everything will work out.

Initially, she couldn't put her finger on what was bothering her, caught up as she was in the excitement of making a rope swing just like in the old books and films. The idea of swinging across water - an actual river! - was thrilling, if not a little terrifying.

Still.

It was like an itch in the back of her mind, a feeling like she'd forgotten something.

Finn's continued flirting was distracting. Octavia's seemingly constant energy distracted her from her own flagging energy. The stories about making moonshine before getting caught from Jasper and Monty distracted her desire to focus.

Then the rope swing was ready.

Finn in all his male ego was ready to go first. When he caught her staring while taking to Jasper his chest practically swelled. He endowed himself to her more with his pep talk and encouragement, allowing Jasper to go first. It was the moment Jasper began his leap that she felt it.

Her soulbond roared.

Eyes wide Clarke reacted instantly. Arm thrown out in a fruitless attempt to stop Jasper's leap Clarke felt panic bloom in her chest. Her cry for him to wait died in her lungs.

Jasper's scream of pain didn't.

A spear. A hand carved spear now sticking out of the ground on the other bank.

A pair of echoing screams broke her concentration. A hand reaching out and yanking her to the ground forced her to refocus on the task at hand. Her never ending task.

Snapping her eyes around Clarke surveyed the other four.

Finn, full health. Octavia, still wincing from her leg but otherwise fine. Monty clutching his right arm and moaning in agony but no visible wound. Jasper -.

Jasper laying half in the river half on the shore. Blood collecting around him and slowly mixing with the river water he lay in. Part of their rope swing next to him.
A severed rope swing.

Shaking her head Clarke immediately began giving commands.

"Octavia, check on Monty and start ripping cloth for a bandage. Finn with me."

Not waiting to see if she was obeyed Clarke darted out from the rocky outcropping they had ducked into. In three strides she was kneeling next to Jasper, one hand checking for exhale from his mouth while the other went straight to his right arm splayed out next to him.

A shadow caused her to flinch and look up.

Finn.

"He's unconscious. Help me pull him out of the water. Flat ground."

"What if they-"

"Doesn't matter." Clarke cut him off, voice firm. "Would've happened by now."

Ignoring whatever else he appeared to want to say Clarke focused on moving Jasper. She'd barely got her arms under him when Finn started helping. Between the two of them they easily moved Jasper to a flat, dry part of the shore. Looking over Jasper now that he was out of the river Clarke couldn't stop her sharp inhale.

It looked bad.

Surely it looked worse than it actually was.

She could do this.

Taking a deep breath Clarke forced down her panic. With the steady hands of the medically trained she straightened out his arm, wincing as the missing portion of flesh and muscle came into view.

The spear had ripped into his arm while taking the vine.

"Octavia! Bandages now!"

Already Clarke was mentally working through the needed steps to properly clean, bandage, and secure his wound. In the time it took Octavia to reach her with strips ripped from her and Monty's shirts Clarke was ready.

The speed in which she completed the process displayed just how much time she had spent in the medical center with her mom before -.

Shaking her head Clarke rose from her position on the rocky shore. Motioning to Finn and Octavia she stepped back to allow them to pick the unconscious Jasper up. Only once she was sure they wouldn't worsen the arm injury while caring him did she turn her gaze to the still motionless Monty.

The way his whole body hunched protectively around his arm told her all she needed to know. Soulmates.

"Let's go. The others need to know and he needs a bed and better materials than I have on hand."
Just as she's passing Monty Clarke pauses. Crouching down she slowly moves her hands into his line of sight before moving to help him stand. Gently she guides him the first few steps before he begins walking on his own. Doing a mental review Clarke reassures herself that the four with her are as okay as they can be. For now.

That tickling feeling in the back of her mind returns.

Instantly Clarke's gaze whips up from where it was watching the ground to scan the forest in front of them. Her expression betrayed nothing around the set of her jaw and the steel in her eyes. Scanning the trees she saw nothing. Taking a deep breath she focused inward.

There.

Snapping her eyes open Clarke turned her head to match the direction the feeling was coming from. Holding her breath Clarke waited, her eyes searching the tree and adjacent underbrush.

Nothing.

After a moment Finn and Octavia pass her with the still limp Jasper in between. Finn reaches out with his free hand, concern clear across his features. Stiffly Clarke shakes her head once. She didn't need his flirtations right now.

Not when her soulmate may have been the one to attack them.

Chapter End Notes

No beta, so if you spot something please let me know. Constructive feedback welcome.

Let me know your thoughts @standinshadowedsilence
React

Chapter Summary

A shiver raced down Lexa's spine before she could stop it.

Unbidden the image of blue eyes fixing onto her hiding spot raced to mind. Blue eyes locked onto green, even if the blue had not realized it at the time.

There was only one reason the girl - Clarke - could pinpoint Lexa's location in the woods. Especially given the manner of discovery. A manner Lexa had witnessed Costia use. A manner she, herself, had used.

Tracing the soulbond.

Chapter 3: React

Watching the group of five leave Lexa fought to keep her gaze from latching onto the blonde's retreating back. Clearly a leader but also a fisa?

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Tracing the soulbond.

Only those extremely open to the bond could follow the echoes of emotions towards their point of origin. Similar to how bats use echo location, those with strong bonds could consciously sense the waves of emotions being received by their brain. With practice, this sort of echo location can be used to locate a soulmate with little effort.

Costia had never needed to practice.

In fact, that was one of the ways they'd been certain of their bond. Not once had Lexa succeeded in sneaking up on Costia. Even when surrounded by the children she taught, Costia would tilt her head, give that little smile reserved for Lexa, and direct the children to where ever their Heda had hidden that time.

It seemed the ability belonged to all three of them.

Motioning for her group to begin following the Skaikru, Lexa contemplated what this meant.

Most likely Lexa would now also be able to locate this Clarke. Her success would be dependent upon their distance and experience of course, but that Clarke was able to locate Lexa after less than a day in each other’s vicinity... their bond must be extremely strong already. They hadn't even
exchanged words yet.

For a moment Lexa wondered if it was because Costia was gone.

Internally scowling Lexa focused back on the present. It wouldn't do to get distracted. She couldn't reveal her connection to this Clarke yet anyways. To be Heda is to be alone. To be Lexa is to protect.

Such was her fate.

~*~*~

They could hear the Skaikru camp long before they reached it.

Lexa watched the postures shift of the five Skaikru they shadowed. Relief, exhaustion, tension. Her gaze flicked over the blond leader's back numerous times. Already she was attempting to match the girl's physical reactions to the faint echoes she could feel in the bond.

Relief did not appear to be one of them.

"Heda."

Glancing to her left Lexa caught sight of one of the scout captains approaching. Seeing he had her attention he immediately began his report.

"The split in power has continued. As we speak a fight is taking place between a hunter and one they call prince. A Belomi leads by the sheep's sway on the side of the hunter."

Nodding Lexa motioned for the scout to continue his report as they walk.

"Skill wise they are poor hunters and walk as if they have no care. Overall their current threat is low, although that may change should they succeed in contacting the mountain."

Lexa's facial expression darkened a minuscule amount. Immediately she spun to face the captain. Startled the man flinched before schooling his expression. His head bowed slightly but he did not lower his gaze, showing part of why he had earned his position among her scouts.

"That will not be an issue. I took care of it myself. Continue."

Ducking his head slightly in both respect and acknowledgment of her command, the scout captain finished his report.

"There is one additional oddity among them Heda. They each wear a metal band across their wrist, although this Belomi is attempting to force the removal of them. So far only a small portion has removed them. Violent means have been used to do so."

This information caused Lexa to pause, although outwardly there was little notice of it. Metal bands? Thinking over the group of five she had spent the day following, recognition came. A memory of sunlight glinting off wrists at the riverbank.

Nodding Lexa shows she understood. Before she could reply with words a commotion is heard from the camp ahead of them. Quickly Lexa rushes with the others to reach better vantage points.
Some go into more secluded observation posts set at a distance. Others - like her - continue closer on foot.

Gustus, silent since the river, grunted his disapproval.

She ignored him.

Coming to a section of raised ground Lexa swiftly climbed a tree. Gustus remained in the brush at it's base. He would protect her position and in turn she would warn him should they need to move. From her new vantage Lexa could see into the valley clearing the Skaikru had gathered in. When voices raised above close conversational tones she could also hear what was being said.

At the moment, there was plenty to hear.

The party of five had entered the main clearing, the interrupted fighters having returned to their designated leaders sides. Cries of confusion over the unconscious and injured boy rang out, but none were stronger than Clarke's as she demanded answers for the fight.

The exchange between Clarke and the one who must be Bellamy is too quiet for Lexa to hear, but she can tell from Clarke's manners she isn't pleased.

The back of Lexa's skull itches.

Pushing aside her desire to sense the emotions being sent, Lexa focuses again on those below. The crowd is quieting down to hear what their chosen leaders are discussing. The conversation must have changed to what happened with Clarke's party based on the gestures towards the injured. Then a voice rang out above the others.

"Grounders!"

Immediately panic spread through the Skaikru spectators.

Watching the leaders interact and attempt to calm the other Skaikru revealed just how inexperienced they truly were. This close Lexa could tell that none had the build of warriors. In their panic they revealed that only a few had the training to think rationally beyond their emotions. Goufa the lot of them.

After a few moments the crowd began to calm. At this point Clarke reached out and grabbed the wrist of boy who fought on her side. Whatever answer was given caused Clarke to turn towards Bellamy and his fighter.

The crowd fully quieted in anticipation of another conflict.

"-on the Ark is failing, that's why they brought us down here. They need to know the Ground is survivable again. And we need their help against whoever is out there. If you take off your wristbands you're not just killing them. You're killing us!"

"We're stronger than you think. Don't listen to her, she's one of the privileged. If they come down, she'll have it good. How many of you can say the same? We can take care of ourselves. That wristband on your arm? It makes you a prisoner. We are not prisoners anymore. They say they'll forgive your crimes. I say you're not criminals. You're fighters, survivors!"

The cheering of the spectators washed over Lexa. Pushing down her own inner turmoil she payed close attention to Clarke's expression of disbelief. To the way the other four followed after her. To the way the fighter walked behind them but at a distance, gaze flicking about in uncertainty.
Once certain no Skaikru would see her Lexa left her perch.
The order for walls to be built echoing behind her.

"\textit{Heda you cannot be seriously considering allowing these invaders to live. They use Maun-de tech and tongue. Surely they should be destroyed-}"

"\textit{Em pleni!}"

Instant silence greeted Lexa's angry roar. Panting slightly she fought to bring her emotions under control. It was rare for her to react so strongly to something. Normally Lexa kept her counsel fairly and calmly, even when she disagreed internally.

A twinge at the back of her head reminded her of why she was struggling.

Already the bond had strengthened. Even at the distance of a day’s walk emotions were filtering through the bond. Regular emotions. Surely her anger just now had made it across the link.

Just as Clarke's frustration and anxiety and determination reached her now.

There was no denying her bond to the blond Skaikru.

Taking a deep breath Lexa refocused on the three in front of her. Indra, Chief of Tondc and responsible for the survival of Trikru. Anya, a general in the Trikru military and Lexa's former mentor before becoming Heda. Gustus, her personal guard and a close confident in his own right. Better to let these three share their thoughts now than have the ambassadors challenge her unprepared.

Each waited for her to speak with varying degrees of patience.

"\textit{You were not there Indra. They are split amongst themselves yes, but they are just the first. Their home is dying and those here now are torn between letting them die or bringing them here as well.}"

"\textit{All the better to end them now while they are separated.}"

Lexa leveled a glare at the woman. She was fiercely protective of her people and Lexa greatly respected her for it, but Indra lacked in planning when caught by surprise. Her first instinct would always be to kill them before they could kill her. The woman had made her stance clear.

"\textit{Think. What would you do if you sent your children to the river with the intend to meet them there, only to arrive and find them slaughtered by another kru?}"

The woman's silence spoke for her. It was an uncomfortable reminder of what had actually happened to the proud woman's family. After another beat of silence Lexa shifted.

Glancing between Anya and Gustus, Lexa nodded her permission for either to speak.

"\textit{Heda, they are untrained in the ways of the ground. They will not survive long on their own as things are. Either they will need to learn how to hunt and survive for themselves... or they will turn to thievery to survive.}" Anya paused. While her expression remained level, it was clear she was measuring her next words.
"How do we know they will not go to Maun-de for supplies, for survival - even after learning of what they do?"

Lexa suppressed a sigh.

"We don’t. Other than the warning I issued today and a scout reporting that they think Maun-de is abandon, they know nothing of the current state of affairs."

Gustus inclined his head, indicating his wish to speak. Anya and Indra both turned their gaze to him in respect. Both were clearly dissatisfied with what they were hearing and hoping Gustus would be able to support their claims. He would surprise all three of them.

"What do we gain by allowing them to live Heda? They must bring something to the table before they may sup with us. Potential soulmates for our people is not enough to build an alliance on."

The sharp look Lexa sent to him did not hinder the sharp inhale from the other two women. Gustus had been the only person Lexa had mentioned anything about soulmates to. There was a reason he was her confident, but sometimes his protectiveness reared its head at the most inconvenient times. The possibility of soulmates had fail to make the list of grievances until Gustus had spoken.

"Heda-"

"I am aware Gostos." Her tone was flat. The stillness of her body displayed just how displeased she was with this turn of conversation.

"Heda, the Coalition will not even consider them separate from the Maunon until they prove themselves as such. Before then they must have a single leader to represent them."

For a moment no one spoke. Flexing jaw muscles across clenched teeth betrayed just how strained Lexa was. It was only due to their familiarity with her body language that they even noticed.

"Indra prepare a small unit in preparation to potentially capture a Skaikru should the opportunity arise. Onya, select a small group willing and able to act as potential negotiators and instructors. Gostos, stay."

Tension radiated throughout the room. Nods of respect were given and polite "Heda"s issued as the women left the tent. Lexa did not miss the look Anya sent on her way out. Answers would be demanded in private.

As the tent flap closed behind them Lexa fought an internal war. Patience gained through experience led Gustus to remain at his post near the tent entrance. Never had she been so thankful that Gustus knew her as well as he did. Once she had decided on an answer Lexa faced him fully.

"How goes the search for those claiming soulbonds with the Skaikru?"

Gustus opened his mouth to reply before closing it. A beat later he sighed softly. Meeting her gaze he replied, the silent challenge clear.

"Slow Heda. Many place little stock in the bond until they meet their mate and it begins to strengthen. Only a handful have been found with discrete questioning, but I fear any more searching will reveal the quest. People will fear persecution for the bond or seek to gain from it."

Lexa nodded, having already come to the same conclusion.

"Send them to me. I wish to evaluate them myself. Send for the scout - Linkon - as well."
Gustus's stare remained fixed upon her causing Lexa to fight the urge to fidget. This man had spent well over five years protecting her. He had been with her through the loss of Costia. His concern warmed her heart as much as it scared her.

"Do not fear Gostos. I failed once to protect. I have not forgotten the lesson. To be Heda is to be alone. It is safer for all that way." A sigh.

"I will always worry for you Leska."

"Mochuf Gostos."

"Always, Heda."

With a slight bow he departed. Whether intentional or not, his words had left a feeling of dread deep inside Lexa's stomach. Costia's death had been a severe blow, nearly crippling until the shifting waves of her soulbond had settled. It had only been after days of upheaval that Lexa had realized she still felt emotion through her bond.

At the time she hadn't known whether to laugh or cry.

The whole time Costia had been right. They had had a third out there somewhere, waiting for them to find her. It had only been upon Costia's death that the knowledge became irrefutable.

At the time Lexa had found solstice in the mating bands Costia had made.

They were simple sets of matching leather bands. No colored dyes or affixed metal. Rather, their beauty came from the intricate patterns Costia had hand carved into them.

Now Lexa carefully removed the two sets of leather bands from their hiding spot amongst her furs and followed the patterns with her fingers. A pair made for each of them, although Lexa only wore one of hers - the other remain tied to her sword sheath. One for each wrist, to represent how all three of them were equals, at least that is what Costia had said when Lexa had asked.

Costia had never been given the opportunity to wear both. Lexa wondered if Clarke would ever be given the opportunity to wear even one. A shiver raced down her spine at the thought.

A tickle of emotions reached her across her bond.

A gruff call of Heda gave her a much needed escape from her thoughts.
Clarke nodded. Clans, burned land, potential violence dependent upon what they could possibly offer complete strangers who've been surviving on these lands for decades. No pressure. All these unknowns made her wish she had someone to talk to. Her dad used to be a great sounding board before-.

Right.

Shaking her head Clarke stood.

"Thanks Octavia. You've been a great help. I'm going to go for a walk. Hopeful I'll be able to give you an answer for Lincoln sometime tomorrow."

Chapter Notes

First time writing without having the entire story planned out. Chapters are kind of writing themselves and it's both awesome and scary. Also means I start writing expecting to include some fact or scene only for the characters to get going in a completely different direction. At least it'll keep this interesting.

Chapter 4: In-act

Clarke let out a frustrated sigh as she changed yet another bandage on Jasper's arm. If the bleeding wasn't stopped soon they ran the risk of either a tourniquet or severe blood-loss setting in. Shuffling at the ladder caused Clarke to flinch and grab the closest sharp object at hand - the makeshift scissors she'd been using to cut bandages.

"It's just me."

Hearing Octavia's voice settled her nerves. Some. She'd sent Wells away in anger earlier. Monty had needed something to keep him occupied so she'd asked him and Finn to retrieve some fresh water for their small group and look for radio parts. Octavia had been gone just as long.

"How is he?"

The question startled Clarke out of her thoughts. Octavia now crouched next to her, examining Jasper's arm. Suppressing her inner irritation Clarke focused back on undoing the bled through bandage.

"Bad if I can't get this bleeding to stop soon."

For a moment Octavia studied Clarke's frustrated scowl and drawn shoulders. Clarke didn't have the patience right now to deal with the silent observation. Just as she shifted to snap at the other
"Use this. It should seal the wound and speed up the healing process. Probably not enough to return full use but... it should help."

Clarke was really getting tired of being surprised today.

When Clarke made no move to retrieve the object held out to her Octavia huffed out her own frustration. Moving forward Octavia budged Clarke's surprised form out of the way before attending to Jasper's wound herself. Glancing up Octavia couldn't help the chuckle at Clarke's gob-smacked expression.

"You're not the only one with basic medical skills Clarke. Comes from not being allowed to visit a doctor growing up."

Closing her mouth Clarke pouted a little. The slight teasing making her flush. Glancing at Octavia's leg Clarke noticed a similar paste on her bite wound.

"Sorry."

"Don't be, I'm glad I can help. It's nice to finally feel useful ya know?"

"Uhm... yeah I guess."

Awkwardly, Clarke tried to focus on something else as Octavia finished applying the paste. Honestly, Clarke had never given it much thought before. Now that it'd been pointed out to her Clarke realized it made sense. The desire to have a purpose, to be able to contribute or help in some way.

Wasn't that why she'd thrown herself into her medical studies after her soulmate's death?

Subconsciously her eyes drifted to the paste Octavia had. It looked to be some sort of plant mashed in with something else to give it the texture and consistency needed to-

"Octavia?"

"Hmm?"

"Where did you get that paste?"

The other girl's movements jerked slightly from where she was wiping her hands clean. It wasn't much, but it was enough.

"Oh. I was by the river and I saw this red seaweed. Made me think of our Earth Skills classes and-"

"Bullshit."

Emotions began to wag war inside Clarke. Hope and determination. Concern and anxiety. Frustration.

An anger that wasn't her own soared into Clarke's consciousness.

Edged on by this foreign anger Clarke leveled a sharp glare at Octavia, her entire body coiled with tension. Octavia remained frozen with her back to Clarke, as though that would shield her from the coming accusations.
"You met one didn't you? They gave it to you. At what price? And how did you-

Memories, little things Clarke had noticed during their ill-fated journey rushed back to her. A sharp inhale of breath betrayed Clarke's moment of epiphany. Octavia nearly over balanced in her rush to turn around.

"Clarke-

"Soulmate."

"Clarke I can explain. He-

"Of course. Why I realize? You kept looking around as though expecting to see something after the snake bite-

"-gave it to me as a sign of good faith-"

"-I thought you were just stressed from being injured but you weren't-"

"-said they didn't want to hurt us but Mount Weather is dangerous-"

"-you were trying to follow the bond. Oh, I should have noticed considering-"

"-that they've been at war and only wanted to protect us-"

"-I had been doing the exact same thing! I should have known there'd be others but I let myself get distracted-"

"-from getting taken and- Wait, what? Others?"

There was a pause of near silence as the two finally stopped to process what the other had been saying. Both girls stared wide-eyed and confused, then the babbling picked up with renewed intensity.

"You have a soulmate on the Ground? Why didn't you-

"What do you mean Mount Weather is dangerous? We-

"-say anything? Wait of course you wouldn't have! I-

"-were told it was abandoned! Why would they have-

"-didn't say anything and... Okay, this isn't working. Clarke. Clarke!"

"-taken us? How do we know we can- What?"

Octavia just grinned at Clarke, happiness radiating from her. Frustration continued to build in Clarke but Octavia's smile was doing an admirable job of dampening it.

"What?"

So maybe some of that frustration still came out in her tone.

"He said there was at least one more with a bond. I bet he knows who your soulmate is!"

Color immediately vacated the premise of Clarke's face. Her hands started shaking as the knowledge of just how close to her living soulmate she was really sunk in. Flashes of the week
Clarke had spent curled up in her room over the agony of half her bond being ripped away and the pain that had proceeded it caused her breathing to increase sharply.

She wasn't ready.

"Clarke! Clarke! Hey, it's okay deep breaths. That's it."

It was only when she became aware of Octavia's panicked voice that Clarke recognize the blackness at the edges of her vision as having accompanied a minor panic attack. Hands hovered worriedly in front of her. With shaking limbs Clarke latched onto a hand and drew it into her lap, squeezing it tightly for support.

"I'm- I'm okay." Deep breath, that's it. "Tell me- tell me about your soulmate. What happened?"

Concerned eyes watched her warily before their owner consented.

"His name is Lincoln. He's a scout among their warriors. Only those trained to be warriors for the military or negotiators learn English, otherwise each clan has it's own primary language. Although many learn parts of the others. He promised to start teaching me his people's the next time we meet."

Octavia let out a slightly dreamy sigh.

"He didn't mention the bond at all although I know that must be how he knew to approach me over someone else. Taught me about the paste for wounds too. Explained why they attacked us at the river. Apologized for Jasper getting hurt but explained their leader - someone called Heda - had given the order that no one must cross the boundary.

"That's the river we were at by the way. It marks the start of the territory belonging to the Mountain Men. Apparently they've been doing horrible things to the Grounders since the bombs dropped. They have this fog they use that basically boils any skin it comes into contact with and-"

"Octavia. Their leader? Less about Mount Weather and more about what the Grounders want with us?"

"Oh, right. This Heda gave Lincoln explicit orders to 'inform the blond one' - his words, not mine - that they did not seek conflict with us but would attack in self-defense if provoked. He said something about 'blood must have blood'. Doesn't sound good so I vote we don't attack."

Sighing Clarke leaned back against the nearest surface - the hatch cover - and tried to process everything Octavia's soulmate had told them.

Soulmate.

She felt so weary compared to Octavia's positive giddiness.

"Okay. Here's what we'll do...."

It was only the third night on the ground and Clarke couldn't sleep.

Deciding to go for a walk around the camp the last thing she expected to see was a young girl, maybe 12 or 13, in the midst of a nightmare. Immediately Clarke changed her direction to check on the girl. The need to look after others' health instinctive guiding her.

Finding out Charlotte had been locked up because she freaked out after her parents were floated
was not what Clarke was expecting.

Although, she couldn't say she was that surprised.

"I can't say I blame you.... You see that bright star up there? That's the Ark orbiting above us. I think whatever happened up there, you know, the pain... maybe we can move past that now. Maybe being on the ground is our second chance."

"Do you really believe that?"

"I'm trying too."

Looking back up at the Ark lights Clarke fought back thoughts of her parents. A warm body leaning into her made her smile slightly. Wrapping her arm around Charlotte to bring her closer brought a slight sense of peace to Clarke, like she was making a difference.

Inspiration struck.

"Hey Charlotte, how would you feel about helping me out tomorrow?"

After leaving Charlotte in charge of caring for Jasper's wound and getting Monty parts for the radio, Clarke set out for fresh seaweed.

Rather, Wells, Finn, Octavia and Clark set out for fresh seaweed.

And then Bellamy showed up.

She couldn't decide whose reaction she liked better: Wells or Finn's. Granted, she was still mad at Wells for her dad, so Finn won by default. A brief head nod exchange and Octavia slipped off into the woods after they left Bellamy and his crew at the camp walls.

Wristband still secure Clarke continued with the boys towards the river.

Then the acid fog Octavia's soulmate had cautioned about trapped her in the car with Finn and Wells overnight.

Of course she took some alcohol.

Glaring at both Finn and Wells as they left the 100-year-old car they had sheltered in Clarke honestly kind of expected the scream. It was the type of day she was having. Especially after the conversation she had with Finn about Wells.

She'd been scrubbing at the blood on her hands for a solid five minutes when Octavia finally approaches her.

"We... we finished burying him next to the others."

"Good... That's good."

Silence fell between them filled only by the sound of Clarke continually scrubbing at her hands. Finally-

"Clarke that's enough." Lithe hands latch around her own, stilling her actions.
"You helped him. Bellamy wouldn't tell me what happened but I'm not dumb. Lincoln described what the acid fog does pretty clearly. Atom would have been in a lot of pain. The burns certainly looked painful."

Clarke allowed the other girl to ramble. Methodically she stared ahead as Octavia dried her hands for her. The words slowly penetrating the haze that had settled over her after she'd checked on Jasper and sent Charlotte to get some food.


"Did he say anything about whether they'd agree to a treaty or at least negotiation?" Eye's focused and vision sharpened. Octavia blinked at the topic change.

"Yes. Heda told him when she first sent him out that if we didn't express interest in setting up some sort of treaty he was to bring it up. He went back to report to her now that we've brought it up."

She paused. Even though they'd only known each other a few days Clarke could tell the girl was holding something back. Slightly narrowing her gaze seemed to do the trick though.

"He- Lincoln said that for any sort of treaty to be established both sides must gain from it. We'd have to offer something in trade for anything we ask from them."

Panic lanced through her as ice settled in her veins.

"O-"

"There's no hurry!" the cut off was rushed, panicked. "He said we'd have a few days at least before any sort of agreement can be reached on their end about meeting with us. Heda apparently supports peace above all else, but we're on Trikru land so the treaty would be with them first and foremost."

"Trikru?"

"Lincoln's people, the Woods Clan. We landed in their forest, burned a bunch of it up in the crash too. Said Heda convinced their Chief not to hold that against us as an act of violence since wild fires happen and hardly anyone died."

"This Heda seems to hold a lot of sway with them."

"Well Lincoln didn't say much other than that the Commander - that's apparently what Heda means by the way - is the uniter of the Clans and so the final voice of authority. At least that's what I got from his answer."

Clarke nodded. Clans, burned land, potential violence dependent upon what they could possibly offer complete strangers who've been surviving on these lands for decades. All these unknowns made her wish she had someone to talk to. Her dad used to be a great sounding board before-.

Right.

Shaking her head Clarke stood.

"Thanks Octavia. You've been a great help. I'm going to go for a walk. Hopeful I'll be able to give you an answer for Lincoln sometime tomorrow."

"Okay Clarke. I'll stay here with Jasper."

Clarke smiled slightly at her. Some of the pressure in her head and chest seemed to ease knowing
someone was on hand in case Jasper needed anything. Monty hadn't shown signs of needing anything while working on the radio other than reminders to eat.

The last thing Clarke saw as she ducked down the ladder was Octavia's face split between worry and happiness.

All Clarke felt was numb.
Lexa knew something was bothering her soulmate. Could tell since the night before when spikes of emotions began rolling in. Anger, disgust, frustration, self-loathing, helplessness and so many more.

Inner turmoil was the best way to describe it.

It had started shortly after the fog horns last night. And while it tapered off through the night, the lingering effects of having an active soulbond for the first time in three years had caused Lexa a restless night. Needless to say, she was not in a good mood the rest of the day.

Neither it seemed, was Clarke.

Another spike of emotions hit mid-morning as she reviewed updates from Polis with Indra and some of the other clans' messengers. Then another shortly after. By the end of the meeting Lexa was grinding her teeth in frustration.

Suppressing one’s emotions was so much harder when someone else's kept blasting in through the back door.

When they finally broke for lunch Lexa asked Indra to stay behind. Once the tent was clear the two focused on each other, both knowing instinctively the following conversation would not be easy.

"How goes the search for those willing to teach or trade with Skaikru?"

Indra scowled. "Slow Heda. Some have expressed a desire to meet the Skaikru for themselves, but most hesitate to make any commitment."
Lexa nodded having expected that.

"Reports say there are some as young as our seconds, all without any skills needed to survive. They need teachers to survive the coming months as well as to become true members of the Coalition."

"Heda you cannot be seriously-"

"I can and will. Would you rather I order you to bring them into Tondici? Into your villages? It would certainly be easier to watch them than."

Indra growled. Her muscles coiled and flexed in anger, but she made no move towards Lexa - towards her Heda. There was a reason Lexa trusted her enough to explain her plans beyond straight ordering her to obey. Some people were more cooperative if they knew the why behind your orders.

"To be recognized as a trading post they need to be able to offer goods or services to our people. To become a Trikru village they would need significantly more time to learn our ways and forsake their own. Assuming they would even agree. Both cases require teachers, not warriors. If we set them up as a trade post or integrate with them now, we can treat with them independently of any others that come down after them."

A blink and a scowl, but no further aggression. Lexa watched as Indra mulled over the problem.

"You would have us secure the goufa as a bridge to the rest?"

Lexa nodded. "Although I fear that may not work. Anyone willing to send 100 untrained goufa into unknown lands do not present themselves as good future allies."

The slight flinch that ran through Indra's frame betrayed her agreement to the comment. Patiently Lexa waited to see if Indra had any further objections. If she could secure Indra's vote many of the nearby Trikru village leaders would fall in line with minimal protest.

And once established on Trikru lands the Coalition would be unable to interfere. Internal clan matters and all that.

Finally, Indra nodded. "Very well."

With a bow Indra left. Moments later Lexa's lunch was brought in. Mentally she thanked Gustus for waiting until the conversation with Indra was over before sending the servers in.

Lexa felt drained in a way she hadn't since allowing Azgeda into the Coalition.

Based on the numbness coming from the bond, Clarke felt much the same.

To say Lexa was surprised when Lincoln was let into her tent late into the afternoon was an understatement. Pleasing, but still a surprise. It meant his mission had gone either really well, or really poorly.

She expected a mixture of both.

As Gustus let Lincoln into the tent she called for him to gather the others they had selected. With Lincoln back he could brief them on the situation and begin integrating them into the scout teams where able. But before that she needed to know what news he had.
"Report."

"I made contact with my mate again as requested Heda. She reports having returned and delivered our initial message of a treaty requiring some kind of exchange. Klark has agreed to the suggestion on principle but has brought up the concern that most of their kru are unskilled goufa. I find myself agreeing with the assessment."

Lexa makes no outward acknowledgment of his words, but they both know she heard him.

Internally she was once again mulling over options. Lincoln was right. If he was already expressing concerns she would be hard pressed to rationalize it to those trained to nitpick alliances. The Skaikru were outsiders, unknowns. And the unknown had always been a threat.

Worry grew in her gut.

Before the silence between them grew too long, however, a call from the tent flap announced Gustus had completed his task.

Calling for them to enter Lexa was unsurprised to find Anya enter with her selected group, although Anya remained in the back while the other four approached to stand equal with Lincoln.

Looking them over Lexa gave a brief nod.

"If you haven’t figured it out by now, you are all here because of two reasons. You are trained enough to act as a scout, and you have a revealed a bond with a Skaikru goufa."

There was slight shifting of weight but otherwise no one betrayed any surprise. Anya's figure stiffened in the background.

"Know this - you are not being punished in anyway nor will you be punished for having this bond. We all know the choosing of our mate is beyond our control. I ask you here to use your bonds only to identify who your mates are. Nothing more is required of you at this stage."

A glance has Lincoln stepping forward from the line to face them.

"Linkon is in charge of you. He is the only one to make contact with Skaikru. If you feel your mate is attempting to locate you notify him immediately and do not be found. We will adjust plans from there. Understood?"

A chorus of "Sha Heda" answered her. Anya's stiff form in the back gave her an idea. Her former mentor would not like it, but Lexa felt she could handle it.

"Linkon will be reporting to Onya who, once we reach that point, will head the negotiations between our kru. If you cannot find Linkon in an emergency, go to Onya."

If possible, Anya's gaze would have burned her. As it was the older woman could not be any tenser.

Taking a moment Lexa surveys the four before her. Two males and two females. Although Lexa is confident there are more of her people with bonds to Skaikru - she knows they will not reveal themselves until they feel safe doing so. And this was only in Trikru.

Internalizing a sigh Lexa raises a hand in dismissal.

"Discuss with Linkon anything you need but be prepared to leave shortly. We need you settled in by
As a unit the five, Lincoln having stepped back in line at her hand motion, bow their heads and leave. For a moment, Lexa has peace - until her angry mentor is stalking up to her in the now private tent.

"What are you."

"Onya."

She quiets. Still fuming yes, but willing to wait and hear Lexa's logic before expressing her displeasure further.

"The Skaikru here are goufa. We know this. We know that means there are more waiting to come down. For generations we have wondered why a portion of our people had bonds, but were never able to find their mates. Now we know. They were in the sky."

Lexa paused. She wanted to tell Anya, the closest thing she had to a mother, about finding Clarke. But Anya knew Costia.

More importantly, Anya knew the significance of a three-person bond.

Among her people nearly everyone had a soulbond, those who didn't were quite happy with their lot - as though they were made that way. Which, considering no one knew how bonds were made, it was quite plausible they were. In the same sense there were those with multiple bonds.

Such as Lexa herself.

Just as there were legends and rumors supposing why someone would not have a soulmate, there were legends and rumors as to why one would have more than one.

Some say it is so you had a second chance at happiness in a world where many died young in battle. Others say it's because it took more than one person to handle you. Personally, Lexa went with the old legends.

Those of the Founding.

Healer. Teacher. Protector.

The three roles needed to stabilize a healthy community, embodied in a three-way bond. Each member specialized in one area of skills. That's not to say they could not also be skilled in the other areas or have interested in them, just that of the three areas each mate tended to lean to one specifically over the others.

A multi-bond was rare. Significantly more so than someone genuinely not having a soulmate rather than claiming they didn't.

To be a member of a multi-bond was to instantly gain status among her people.

And to instantly be put at risk.

It is popular opinion that those with a multi-bond are destined for great things. To leave the people with new innovations or into a better time.

Often only for a few short months or in a single way before death greats them.
But just as there are legends of positive growth and change there are those of destruction. After all, many fear change. Change can mean a loss of power and influence, a loss of land or family, or a loss of personal beliefs.

All three have been recorded to have occurred after a multi-bonded gain novelty in an area.

Whether this was because of those individuals themselves or because of the reactions of those around them is uncertain. History does not record those details. Only the results.

And the results is that multi-bonded were the scapegoats of wars.

"Leksa."

Anya's hesitant voice brought Lexa out of her thoughts. Realizing she'd been quiet for some time, that Anya's anger had shifted into concern, Lexa rose and prepared for the ride.

"Come Onya. We will ride to the Skaikru camp and you will see. The ones here may yet be of great value - even if their parents are still a threat."

The wording confused Anya, but Lexa didn't care. She would find the answers soon enough. Although later, rather than sooner, if Lexa could help it.

To be Heda is to be alone.

To be Lexa is to protect.

And Lexa had already failed once.

After escorting the four additional scouts to Lincoln's cave Lexa was prepared to simply ride back to TonDC. Anya had been given the opportunity to see more of the Skaikru goufa before dark and both had been interested in how the four additions responded to being in closer proximity to their mates.

It was interesting to say the least.

having come forward as having a soulmate among the Skaikru meant they were all willing to at least meet with their mates or otherwise establish a relationship towards the future of their peoples'. Or kill their mate out of spite.

Lexa had sent the two more violent claims to tasks far from the Skaikru camp.

Either way, watching the newcomers attempt to locate their mates in the half hour before dusk had reminded Lexa of her own concern.

Clarke.

Throughout the day the bond to Clarke had been muffled, as though Clarke was trying to suppress it. General impressions such as the undertones of panic and worry bled through, but those had been near constant since the Skaikru had arrived and Lexa solidified the bond that second day by the river.

No.

It was the spike of anguish and anger and self-loathing that Lexa had felt a short while ago that had Lexa deciding a detour was needed before returning to TonDC for the night.
Closing her eyes Lexa briefly concentrates before walking off in a specific direction, slightly away from the Skaikru camp.

Exchanging a look Anya and Gustus follow.

As they approach a small clearing Lexa can hear her mate's voice talking with someone else. The upset tone of voice matches with the emotions coming clearly through the bond now that the two are so close in proximity.

"-can you forgive me?"

"It's already done."

Motioning for Anya and Gustus to stay there Lexa moved to get closer. She missed the look that passed between them. Instead she was focused on getting close enough to properly see the two Skaikru in the low light of dust.

Clarke and the boy - the fighter from the other day - were hugging.

Checking the bond Lexa felt a mix of relief and sadness slowly being eaten by anger and frustration with something else mixed in.

Finally the two broke the hug. Lexa breathed a little easier once Clarke held the boy at arm’s length. The two stared at each other before nodding. Clarke let her hands drop.

"Thank you Wells, for always looking out for me."

"Of course, Clarke. You’re my best friend."

It was hard to tell from her hiding spot but the smile Clarke sent seemed rather strained. Wells turned to leave. When Clarke didn't move he looked back over his shoulder.

"You coming?"

"No. I think I'm going to stay out here for a little bit."

Lexa held her breath in surprise. Not once had Clarke given any indication that she had sensed Lexa's presence through the bond. But Lexa should have known better, after all Clarke had sensed her the very first time they were near each other.

Or maybe Clarke really did just want to be alone for a bit.

Either way Lexa remained perfectly still as the one called Wells left the area. Only once she could no longer hear his foot falls did she relax slightly and return to observing Clarke.

Clarke.

Her second soulmate.

The blond in question appeared to simply be breathing in the night air, gaze turned towards the sky. It was peaceful. Just the two of them existing, being within range of each other to the point where the bond worked without any strain.

It was nice.
Lexa found herself having subconsciously begun to relax in the near presence of her mate. The bond causing her to already trust the other woman before her even though they'd yet to properly meet.

It seemed Clarke was experiencing much the same thing, if the way her shoulders were slowly sagging was any indication.

"I know you're there." Clarke's voice was soft, still it startled Lexa slightly.

When Lexa made no reply after a number of minutes Clarke sighed and continued.

"I got the message from O. I appreciate the heads up but I can't think of anything we could offer. You grew up here. You know the land and how to survive. We don't. We have knowledge of the old world and how stuff from then works, but other than a handful of us we don't know how to fix the old machines anyways."

She pauses. "We just want to survive. That's all most of us want. Some of us have been in lock up since we were twelve." A sigh. "Most of us don't know anything other than petty skills like pickpocketing, making moonshine, or drawing."

She smiles slightly at the end, but it's edged with bitterness.

"You can't live off moonshine and paintings of animals." Her voice changes, emotion begins to clog the throat. "They sent us down here to die. And it doesn't even matter why anymore because unless they come down too they'll run out of air and die too."

Lexa hesitates, then very carefully focuses on the bond and sends a mix of calm reassurance and confusion.

She can tell the moment Clarke notices it because she startles from where she was resting against a snapped tree trunk. Standing Clarke turns slightly so that her eyes look straight at Lexa's hiding place.

"My people are dying up there. We just want to live. They sent us down here to see if the Earth was survivable." Clarke raises her wrist and the metal there faintly reflects the moonlight.

"These are so they know we are still alive. If they think the ground is survivable then they're more likely to come down without doing anything desperate. Some of us don't want them to come down though."

Understanding dawns on Lexa. The power struggles. Clarke must sense her emotions shift because she nods.

"Yeah. Haven't figured out why yet. Granted it's not like my mom-." Clarke cuts herself off, her posture tensing before she visibly forces herself to relax. The burst of emotions over the bond was too muddled for Lexa to make out much of it other than anger.

"It's not like the council did us any favors. Treating us like the expendable criminals we are." She laughs and Lexa's heart clenches at just how broken it sounds. This is the second time Lexa has heard the Skaikru goufa referred to as criminals.

It concerns her.

"Not tonight."
Clarke must of picked up on her concern. Although whether she correctly interpreted what the concern was about, Lexa didn't know. They remained like that for a few more minutes. Quietly soaking in the other's presence through the bond.

"I'm not ready. I'm not ready for this. Mom's the leader not me. Heck, as much as Wells' dad is an ass he still a pretty good Chancellor."

Surprise floods through Lexa. Her second mate was the daughter of a leader. Except Lexa really shouldn't be surprised.

Costia too, had been the child of a leader.

One of the larger villages in Trikru territory. She had been visiting in TonDC as an emissary when Lexa returned as Anya's second. They had hit it off immediately and quickly figured out why. Well, Costia had figured it out quickly. Lexa had needed to be smacked around a bit to accept it.

Taking a deep breath Lexa worked to push down the rush of emotions before they transmitted too much down the bond.

Already Clarke was staring in her direction. A mix of confusion and concern clear on her face and in the bond.

Sighing softly Lexa realized she needed to go. Rising from her hiding spot with care she turned to leave. An echo of regret being sent over the bond.

"Wait!"

At Clarke's call Lexa stopped. She knew the blond hadn't heard her - which meant her message over the bond had been correctly interpreted. Hearing some shuffling from the clearing Lexa looked over her shoulder to see Clarke had turn to face fully in her direction.

She stood ridged, her jaw clenched.

Lexa felt a spark of pride for her mate.

"Lincoln told Octavia that you would attack us if we attacked you. That goes for us too. We want peace yes, but don't think we won't retaliate if attacked."

This time Lexa allowed her pride to bleed into the bond, watching as Clarke blinked in surprise before nodding. Both then turned and continued their way. Lexa to Anya and Gustus, Clarke to the Skaikru camp.

Approaching the place where she'd separated from Anya and Gustus, Lexa immediately noticed something was wrong. For one thing, they were both glaring at her, causing Lexa to wonder how much of her one-sided conversation with Clarke was overheard. For another, lying unconscious and bound at their feet was the boy Clarke had met with earlier.

Wells.

Fighting down her frustration and working to master her emotions - Clarke was still very close and very preceptive to the bond after all - Lexa surveyed the pair. With crossed arms she raised an eyebrow and waited.

After a gruff few moments of staring Gustus spoke, telling Lexa he was the one responsible for
Wells current condition.

"We found him circling back to see who the skaiga was talking too." He shrugged. "Figured you'd want the conversation to remain private."

Lexa stared at him, eyes narrowed. Whether or not he was lying wasn't the issue. No, the fact that he correctly summarized who was in the clearing and why Lexa had gone closer was. Which meant Anya had as well.

A glance at her mentor confirmed the suspicion.

Lexa sighed. Again.

She seemed to be doing that a lot lately.

"Come. We will bring him back to Tondici and verify what I have learned."

Her two closest advisers nodded. Watching as the bent down to pick him up a thought occurred to Lexa. One she should have had earlier, knowing the preference for blood her people had.

"He is not to be harmed. He is a guest not a prisoner."

Anya and Gustus exchange to look, confusion clear in their expressions. Lexa repressed the urge to growl; it figures she would have to explain to them. Looking at the boy between them she felt a bit of softness for what he meant to her soulmate.

"Wells is her tombro, and they are the heirs of Skaikru." (tombom - heart, bro - brother)

It was a testament to their training that neither Anya or Gustus slackened their grip on Wells arms despite the clear surprise in their wide eyes. Their grips on his arm tightened, backs straightened, but they did not question her further. Taking that for the acceptance it was, Lexa turned and began walking back towards the horses.

Already Lexa felt a headache forming in anticipation of Clarke's reaction. Hopefully they would at least learn something from Wells before Clarke held true to her promise.
Degragation

Chapter Summary

She hadn't seen Wells all morning, but after they finally talked last night she was feeling significantly better about their relationship than she had in a long time. Focusing on helping the recovering Jasper, scavenging medical supplies, and checking in on Monty's attempt to contact the Ark kept her busy.

Busy enough to not think about her odd conversation with her soulmate the night before.

One where she freely gave information about their situation to a total stranger who may be an enemy. A total stranger who may not even speak English - Clarke was surprised when Octavia said Lincoln did. A total stranger who may not even be important enough that sharing secrets and asking for guidance on making an alliance would even matter.

Yup. Totally not thinking about it, at all.

Chapter Notes

I had an outline for this chapter. Clarke didn't like it. Hopefully y'all still like this turn of events. Personally, I think this story just became much more interesting. And harder to write. We'll see. I've already tweaked the next chapter twice.

Not beta'd. Feedback welcome! @standinshadowedsilence

Chapter 6: Degradation

At first Clarke didn't think much of it.

She hadn't seen Wells all morning, but after they finally talked last night she was feeling significantly better about their relationship than she had in a long time. Focusing on helping the recovering Jasper, scavenging medical supplies, and checking in on Monty's attempt to contact the Ark kept her busy.

Busy enough to not think about her odd conversation with her soulmate the night before.

One where she freely gave information about their situation to a total stranger who may be an enemy. A total stranger who may not even speak English - Clarke was surprised when Octavia said Lincoln did. A total stranger who may not even be important enough that sharing secrets and asking for guidance on making an alliance would even matter.
Yup. Totally not thinking about it, at all.

She still hasn't decided which will be worse: feeling the bond break again having never met her living soulmate or feeling it break after having had the chance to learn and love.

Shaking her head Clarke focuses on the young girl who just walked into the drop ship.

"Charlotte have you seen Wells?"

The girl pauses in the makeshift doorway.

"No. I haven't."

"Okay well if you do please let me know or tell him to find me?"

"Sure." A shrug. "Doesn't matter to me."

Charlotte moves to walk past Clarke towards the upper level ladder. Clarke hesitates, then grabs her elbow as she passes.

"Hey, are you okay? Did Wells do something to upset you?"

Charlotte keeps her eyes locked on her shoes. "No.... He just alive when my parents aren't." Clarke blinks, mentally taken aback.

Of course, just because Clarke had started to repair her relationship with her best friend doesn't mean everyone else had. Guilt pooled in her stomach. Charlotte wouldn't have a anywhere else to direct her pain. She'd already admitted to Clarke just the other day about nightmares over her parents deaths.

Deaths caused by Wells' dad, whom he looks a lot alike.

"Charlotte.... You know Wells had nothing to do with that right? Just the fact that he's down here means he's as upset as you about stuff that's happened on the Ark. You know that right?"

Silence. A shrug.

Clarke hesitates, then wraps the arm not hold onto Charlotte's own around the younger girl's shoulders, bringing her in for a hug. Maybe words wouldn't reach Charlotte right now. Wells' words certainly hadn't reached Clarke until after Finn had approached her. So, maybe a hug was the best thing for her. She probably hadn't gotten very many since her parents' deaths.

Slowly Charlotte wraps her arms around Clarke's waist. It takes a bit, but the girl begins to relax into her. When they part, Clarke smiles softly down at her.

Maybe she could do this helping people as a leader thing.

Worry abated for now Clarke sends Charlotte on her way. Continuing outside with renewed purpose Clarke surveys the rough walls that have gone up over the three days since Jasper's injury and proof of Grounders had reached them.

So far, only six had died. Two in the initial landing and the rest from the acid fog.

Today marked a week since they had been sent down.

Spotting Octavia talking with a small group Clarke was unfamiliar with Clarke headed over. As she
got with in hearing the groups conversation seemed to die off. Shooting Octavia a confused look Clarke chose to ignore it.

Unease still settled in her chest.

"Have any of you seen Wells? I haven't seen him since last night."

Shaken heads, small frowns, and a "sorry no" were her answers. The earlier panic comes surging back to the forefront. Charlotte's reaction to her earlier questioning causing Clarke to realize another line of though.

"You don't think anythings happen to him do you? I know most people aren't happy about who his dad is but it's not like any of us got a choice in parents either."

A few traded glances and shrugged shoulders. Clarke shifts her weight from foot to foot. Her eyes seek out Octavia's, one of the few she considers a friend.

"O."

"I'm sure he's fine Clarke. May be he just went looking for some food. Lord knows we could all use some more of it."

The others chuckle softly at her attempt at humor. Clarke's eyes remained fixed on Octavia's, the joke falling flat in the face of her growing panic.

"O, do you think you could-"

Clarke cuts herself off. For two reasons. One, she doesn't know if she should reveal Lincoln's existence to the group surrounding them. Two, her soulbond flared.

It felt like something was knocking against the inside of her mind, immediately disorienting her.

Anxiety spiking Clarke held her breath. Closing her eyes with a deep breath Clarke focused inward. Concentrating on the bond she tried to slowly open herself up to whatever her soulmate was sending her. Slowly didn't work though. As soon as Clarke consciously opened the bond, her mate's 'message' flooded into Clarke's awareness.

An image.

Clarke had only once seen an image through the bond. Right before-

Focus.

The image was blurry, as though someone was messing with the focus of a camera, unable to settle on the correct zoom. Everything was dark, shadowed, except for a section of light falling onto what appeared to be a bed. And on that bed?

Wells.

The flood of relief that washed through Clarke jarred her concentration. That last thing she noticed was a flash of red at the bottom of her soulmates vision before the connection faded and the image was lost.

Lungs burning she took a deep breath and let it out. Her hands were shaking slightly. It wasn't until she opened her eyes that she realized the group with Octavia were quietly watching her. Octavia herself hovering next to Clarke, concern spilling from her crinkled expression and hovering hands.
It was then Clarke noticed the emotions that had accompanied the image.


Focusing Clarke sent back as much confusion as she could, although she was certain her concern and relief still bled through.

"Clarke?" Octavia's voice brought Clarke's focus outward again.

"Sorry. Octavia I really need you to go check. They- It's-. He's safe. For now. They just confirmed it. Please can you go check if-"

Clarke trailed off again. A glance at the surrounding group realized Clarke may have just revealed way more than she should have.

Except, maybe not.

Taking the time to actually study the group surrounding her Clarke felt her confusion increase. Clear relief, a smirk, some blank expressions. Some refused to meet her eyes. Those that did however, nodded in acknowledgment of her thoughts.

More of the 100 bonded to Grounders. To Trikru, maybe.

Clarke's eyes progressively got larger as the implications really set in. When it had just been her and Octavia it had been a fluke. Chance. Bad luck. But now... now there was seven, no eight of them, standing in this small group for one common reason.

Hope sprung up so suddenly in Clarke's chest that she latched onto Octavia's shoulder to steady herself.

"Err..." Octavia shifted her eyes between Clarke and the others. "Right. We'll all talk later, ya? I'm going to go do the thing now. Bye."

Turning and shaking Clarke's hand off, Octavia appeared to struggle not to run from the circle. With the excuse of watching her leave Clarke tried to center herself. Looking back at the small group she couldn't keep the wonder out of her voice.

"You all have-? Here? On the ground?"

More nods, smiles grew but the blank expressions remained unchanged. Clarke didn't know what to think about that so she focused instead on the smiles. Before she could complete a sentence however, another interruption came.

Bellamy.

For a moment Clarke wonders how things derailed so fast.

She'd had a plan. It was rather simple and relied a lot on waiting for the Grounders - and her soulmate - to signal the next step, but it required minimal interaction with the Grounders until then. Now, however, now Clarke had no idea what solution would keep everyone from being killed in retaliation.

Actually, death threats might yet be prevented.

Feeling overwhelmed Clarke leaned against the side of the drop ship as she watched two of
Bellamy's goons drag a beaten Lincoln towards her. At least she assumed it was Lincoln based on the way Bellamy was physically restraining a pissed off and desperate Octavia.

Talk about riding in a hand basket.

Knowing she had little time before they reached her and expected a reaction Clarke focused. Focused as much as she could on the bond. Sending first her panic, confusion, desperation, and horror. Then she tried for the trickier part.

Snapping her eyes open Clarke struggled as much as she could to maintain her hold on the bond while simultaneously burning the image of a beaten Lincoln and restrained Octavia into her memory. She had no idea if she was doing this right. No idea if it'd even work. No idea how else to warn her soulmate of what had happened.

But her soulmate had managed to do it earlier so Clarke was determined to do the same.

Just as her eyes began to water from holding them open the response came searing down the bond. Rage hit first, causing a flinch. Closely after was confusion and an attempt at calm reassurance. Clarke sent back her uncertainty, the anxiety coiled deep in her gut, and panic laced frustration. By the time the answering determination, frustration, and reassurance reached her the goons were nearly upon her.

The two goons were about to pass when Lincoln raised his head enough to make eye contact. Maintaining eye contact Clarke nodded ever so slightly. Lincoln blinked twice, then lowered his head as the group moved into the drop ship.

Bellamy stopped in front of her, shoving Octavia into the drop ship opening. The stared each other down, both clearly expressing frustration at the other. Bellamy opened his mouth before closing it again. Already Clarke was running all his potential arguments through her head.

He'd addressed Clarke sending Octavia outside the walls earlier, but there was still Clarke having known and allowed her to meet with Lincoln. Heck, even just Clarke trying to talk with the Grounders behind his back was probably an argument point for him. Bellamy always seemed to be looking for a reason to discredit her.

It really needed to stop.

Bellamy turned and went inside without a word. Eyebrows scrunched in confusion, Clarke watches. Turning her head she searches the crowd of onlooking delinquents. Finding one from Octavia's group Clarke slowly nods. The boy - Clarke still hadn't learned all their names - nods back and takes off towards the gate. Hopefully he can locate his own Grounder and send a verbal message. Hopefully they'll let him do so.

Taking a deep breath Clarke enters the drop ship.

It was worse than she thought but at the same time infinitely better.

Lincoln was chained standing on the far side from the upper level hatch. Octavia was being held back on the opposite side of the hatch with Bellamy and his other goon on either side in case she got free and made a break for Lincoln. The goon with the beanie over his head was at least unwilling to meet her stare. The other had no such problems, scowling at her when she got to close to Octavia upon stepping off the ladder.

Octavia herself turned pleading eyes onto Clarke. Everything in the girls posture was angled
towards Lincoln. Desperation was clear in the tear tracks on her cheeks. Turning Clarke got her first good look at Lincoln.

Her first good look at any Grounder actually.

The first thing she noticed was that under all the grime and blood he was ripped. His muscles put those of every Arker to shame. Which meant that physically, they didn't stand a chance. As it was Clarke was surprised the chains were holding him, although she supposed a threat to Octavia might have made him more willing to comply.

Lincoln caught her gaze and nodded just slightly. Clarke let a sigh out through her nose.

Unfortunately, Bellamy picked up on the exchange.

"Want to finally tell me what's going on Clarke? Why you let my sister get all buddy-buddy with the enemy?"

Clarke scowled. "He's not the enemy. Not yet anyways. Your kidnapping him might very well be what tips them from peace talks to violence though."

"Peace talks? They took Wells. That's why you sent Octavia to him, don't deny it. I heard the rumors that you were looking for him. I saw how you were acting. They took him didn't they?"

He leaned towards her, a self-satisfied smirk adorned his lips. It took all of Clarke's willpower not to lean away. Internally she counted to ten as she tried to decide how much to reveal. A whimper from Octavia made up her mind for her.

Deflection tactics.

"You know nothing Bellamy. Instead of reacting with violence at the slightest provocation how about you actually ask questions and think about your consequences. You want power? You want to stay separate from the Ark? Why? What did you do up there that makes you so terrified of them coming after you? Cause right now I'm more inclined to hand you over for slaughter than protect you."

"Protect me? Your mama's seat on the Council means nothing here Clarke. You have no authority over us."

Clarke stares at him. Her expression completely blank and emotionless. The jab about her mother had hurt, but Clarke refused to let it show. Not like his flinch at her accusation. Grinding her teeth slightly Clarke shifted her gaze to Lincoln. The man remained tense, watching with hooded eyes.

Stepping forward Clarke attempted a power play. Slightly bowing her upper torso Clarke kept her eyes locked on his.

"Lincoln kom Trikru."

The drop ship went deathly quiet. It seemed as if no one dared to breath. He just stared at her, gaze piercing. Then he slowly bowed forward as much as he was able and replied.

"Heda Klark kom Skaikru."

Clarke's eyes widened at the title. Octavia had told her about the Grounder's Heda and what the
title meant. Heda was their leader. One who had united them from warring tribes and brought them into a joint peace. A sharp exhale from behind her brought her out of her surprise and she rose from her slight bow.

The stomping of boots on metal was her only warning to Bellamy marching up to her. He roughly grabbed her shoulder and spun her to face him. His other arm flicked out to point at Lincoln. It was only then she noticed his knuckles were bruised.

Immediately rage filled her.

"How the h-" Bellamy never finished his demand as Clarke jerked away from him and slapped him.

Seething she glared at his astonished gape.

"Did you even stop to ask questions before you started punching him? Or did you decide that simply existing in your sister's orbit was too much of a threat to you?"

Her hands were shaking at her sides. As she watched he drew himself together, his own anger building in the face of her accusations. Before he could speak another voice interrupted.

"He had his goons delay me enough to follow while he distracted you. I think they figured it out last time but waited to be sure. I'd only been in the cave a few minutes when they came in behind me. I tried to stop him but he didn't believe me."

Octavia's voice was rough. Clarke could only assume it was from yelling at her brother and the others during Lincoln's capture. Glancing at the other girl Clarke took in the red mark on her face.

"What did you hit your own sister just because she said something you didn't want to hear? Grow up. You can't change a soulbond."

Bellamy balked. Rage colored his cheeks at the same time as his skin paled. It was a combination Clarke hadn't thought possible. His answer surprised her though.

She wasn't the only one using deflection.

"That doesn't explain why you didn't tell anyone. Why you trusted them in the first place after what they did to Jasper. How do we know they'd even honor peace?"

Grinding her teeth again Clarke spun to face Lincoln. His name was just leaving her lips when he shook his head no, his eyes flicking behind her. Spinning again Clarke addressed Octavia instead.

"Octavia. Please explain to your dear brother here what Lincoln gave you the very first time you met."

"A healing paste. For mine and Jasper's wounds."

"Exactly." Spinning to pin Bellamy with her gaze Clarke continued. "A healing paste. Jasper was hit in the arm, Bellamy. The arm. They could have attacked at any time. Hit any one of us without us even knowing they were there until too late. And what did they do? Instead of spearing jasper through the chest? They wanted to stop us from crossing the river by destroying the rope swing Jasper was using. And then giving us medicine for the wound!"
Clarke took a deep breath. Bellamy tried to interject but she was on a roll.

"Think Bellamy. Would the Ark have done that? If you crossed into a restricted zone what is the punishment? A slap on the wrist? No. What about the fact that we needed more medicine to treat Jasper's arm than we had on hand? Would the Ark have offered that up? No. Grounders did. So make up your mind. You say you don't want the Ark down here but at the same time you're trying to start a war with the only other option we have to survive. I'm just trying to keep us alive. If that means making peace with the neighbors you better believe I'm going to make peace with the neighbors. Are you able to do that?"

Clarke was breathing hard by the time she finished.

Bellamy stood frozen. His eyes wide as he gawked at her in shock. It seemed like he was seeing her for the first time. Glancing around Clarke saw his expression reflected on the rest of his goons. Octavia was grinning at her in relief. Lincoln had something akin to respect in his gaze as he once again inclined his head towards her.

"Damn Princess. Tell us how you really feel."

The voice made Clarke jump. Frantically she looked around until her gaze landed on Finn's head, poking up past the opening from on the ladder. Walking over she looked down. Bellamy at her elbow.

There, standing at crowded around the base of the ladder on the lower level were the others.

Finn had jumped down at their approach revealing more people crowded into the small space. Jasper and Monty stood off to the side, hands clasped securely onto Charlotte's shoulders. A handful from Octavia's group stood clustered together as well as some of Bellamy's goons. The rest were near strangers to Clarke. Faces she'd seen in passing but had never really talked to. Not surprising considering there was just over 90 of them down here.

All in all there was nearly 20 people crowded around the ladder. All of which were currently staring up at her and Bellamy.

Turning to face him Clarke made her piece offering.

"Well, what do you say. Work with me or against me? I'm not to happy with the Ark right now either. Personally I'd rather take my chances with the Grounders than the Council."

Slowly, hesitantly, Bellamy nodded his head. Reaching his hand out he gave his answer, even though his entire posture seemed tense and unhappy.

"With you."

Clarke smiled in relief.

"Good. Now for the love of God, let your sister and her soulmate go."
Speculation

Chapter Summary

Lexa nodded at their words, letting them wash over her. Reassure her. They spoke things she already knew. Now it was time for her to share what she knew and they did not.

The final piece to the puzzle.

A dangerous puzzle once solved.

"Klark kom Skaikru was both apprenticed fisa and haiplana before being sent to Earth. She is currently Skaikru's only fisa on the ground."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 7: Speculation

Talking with Wells kom Skaikru had been surprisingly pleasant. He confirmed some of what she already knew and offered a different perspective on questions she had. This was all after she promised she was doing everything she could to prevent war. After he called her out on being Clarke's mate, of course.

Figures.

Succeeding in sending Clarke the image over the bond had been a highlight of the morning, even though she had to suppress Clarke's near constant worry both before and after.

Returning to her tent after checking to ensure Wells had eaten lunch Lexa was only mildly surprised to find Anya waiting inside. She was less surprised upon Gustus following her in. With one standing in front of her and one standing behind her Lexa felt a bit of dread creep into her core.

She wondered if this is what having parents felt like.

With a sigh Lexa moved to her throne. Gustus and Anya moved with her. Thankfully both were confident enough in her surrender to their questions that they allowed her to sit down. Looking them over Lexa toyed with her dagger. It was a nervous habit she'd picked up shortly after Costia's death, when she needed something to keep her grounded without appearing weak.

Both knew it was one of her tells.

They exchanged a glance. Anya stepped forward to speak, but Lexa beat her to it. She wanted to set the pace for this discussion.
"What was Costia's nickname for me?"

"Heda?" Their body language screamed confusion, for all they hid it well.

"What was Costia's nickname for me? And I for her? Think. Once you can answer I will allow you your questions, but not until you can answer those."

She could tell they were frustrated with her. But they should have known better than to just expect her to answer. Lexa was nothing if not stubborn and they both have had to deal with her being stubborn numerous times throughout the years.

Standing Lexa moved and began to look through the messages that had come in since she'd last been able to deal with news from outside TonDC. Most of it was updates from various leaders about how trade was going and various disputes that could be settled without her. She'd gotten about a third the way through when a noise drew her focus to those behind her.

A strangled gasp had slipped past Anya's control.

Her former mentor was ashen. Eyes widened in what Lexa assumed was horror. Clenching jaw muscles belayed she was still working through her thoughts, so Lexa went to resume her reading when Gustus spoke.

"Protector. Teacher. Those were your nicknames for each other." He sounded weary. As though his final hope had drained away with the realization.

Anya let out a ragged breath. "She always called you her great protector. I thought it was just light hearted flirting given your skills."

The two were quiet. Gustus let out a deep sigh. His body slumped in weariness.

"I should have seen it. She had always gravitated towards teaching. All the reforms she pushed through for the Polis orphans, the inventive new ways to improve teaching methods across multiple disciplines - even if she wasn't the best in them." Having been her guard when Costia was still alive, Gustus had worked closely with them both.

Teacher.

Anya nodded in agreement. "And you, you have always been driven to protect us all. To be the best fighter. To complete each battle with the least losses. To take on the strongest foes by yourself. Always protecting those around you whether they wanted it or not." Her smile was small and bittersweet.

Protector.

Lexa nodded at their words, letting them wash over her. Reassure her. They spoke things she already knew. Now it was time for her to share what she knew and they did not.

The final piece to the puzzle.

A dangerous puzzle once solved.

"Klark kom Skaikru was both apprenticed fisa and haiplana before being sent to Earth. She is currently Skaikru's only fisa on the ground."

Healer.
Their sharp intakes of breath confirm they had reached the same conclusion she had. For a long time no one spoke. Each lost in their own thoughts as the elder two process the new information and what it means. Finally, Gustus break the silence with another heavy sigh.

"Many in the Coalition will not stand for it. Even if the alliance is successful they will claim your bond clouded your judgment. War will threaten you Heda. Such bonds are considered a bad sign."

Healer. Teacher. Protector.

The Founding Three.

Lexa nodded in agreement. "I have dealt with such accusation before. Let us hope when this comes to light that more will see it as a boon than an omen."

"What of the Skaikru?" Anya questioned. "Sure, your second mate is among them along with others' mates, but they are worse than goufa in their manners. At least goufa know they lack knowledge and seek to learn. These Skaikru goufa move with arrogance on land that is not theirs. What of the rest of their kru? Will they be pardoned simply because some of their yongon have bonds? Or do we kill all but the bonded?"

Lexa scowled at the prospect, but she did not deny Anya's point.

"I wish to treat the Skaikru goufa separate from the rest of their kru. From what I have learned they were more or less abandoned here. If we capitalize on that we gain a strong foothold when the rest come."

"And if they do not seek an alliance?"

"They must if they wish to survive."

"And if the Coalition refuses to accept them?"

"The Coalition need not be concerned until the rest of Skaikru falls. Until then it is not a Coalition problem but a Trikru problem."

Neither look happy with her answer. Honestly, Lexa didn't care. She has thought this over again and again from every angle. The Coalition was on thin ice to begin with - only the threat of Mounde truly holding all the pieces together.

Skaikru may be the thread which unravels the quilt, but it was not the one which first snapped.

"For now I plan to do nothing with this bond. Klark is needed to lead her people. Claiming her as mine would not be the same as claiming Costia. Costia knew our traditions and threats. Klark does not, nor do her people understand what it would mean. This knowledge changes nothing."

Yet at the same time it changed everything.

Lexa had just finished a meeting with Indra and other local Trikru leaders when her bond flared. Immediately, she stood. Barking out a rough "Dismissed" she barely made it to the back portion of her tent before the emotions overwhelmed her.

Horror and panic. Confusion and desperation.

Shakily Lexa sat on the edge of her bed. Taking a deep breath, she opened herself to the bond. The flood of an image nearly overwhelmed her. Her pride at her mate figuring out how to send an
image was quickly overshadowed by the content.

Lincoln.

He was unconscious based on the way his arms were thrown over the shoulders of two Skrikru as they supported his weight. The usurper Bellamy leading the way while restraining a struggling female - Octavia, Lincoln's mate. Everything surrounding the group was blurry and impossible to distinguish. But the group being lead into the Skaikru camp was as clear as if she was watching them herself.

"Heda?"

The hesitant voice broke her concentration. Lexa jerked violently, in seconds a blade was drawn and aimed at the speaker. It took a little longer for her eyes to refocus after seeing through the bond.

Indra hovered just inside the flap to the private section of tent. The section reserved for Lexa's bed and chests of belongings. The woman's expression was blank but it was clear she was startled by the reaction as much as her presence had startled Lexa.

It took longer than she would have liked for Lexa to regain control of her breathing.

"Indra."

The older woman opened her mouth to speak, before closing it with a snap. Stiffly she moved to a formal position and reported what had occurred after Lexa dismissed the meeting and practically fled to the rear of the tent.

"The village leaders will support your decision Heda. Some brought up additional concerns about how they should treat the Skaikru in various instances, but they can be addressed at a later time."

Although no mention was made of what had happened to Lexa herself between leaving the meeting and Indra startling her, Lexa could tell only Indra's respect for her position as Heda kept her from demanding answers.

Lexa closed off her facial expression even further.

"Something has occurred to delay negotiations. The village leaders do not need to rush in their announcements to their people. Prep the snatchers to be on the lookout for a Skaikru runner. Likely a bonded."

If possible Indra stiffened even more, displeasure at Lexa's commands and lack of further information - or a clear source - clearly aggravating the woman. The leader really disliked unknowns. Still, Indra nodded respectfully before ducking back behind the tent flap and leaving the room.

Uncertainty gripped Lexa, an echo of how Clarke was feeling.

How long it would take for a message to reach her from the Skaikru camp Lexa didn't know. But she could still feel the muted emotions coming from Clarke's end of the bond. She would have to trust that her mate was capable of the role she was given. Even if her roots were in healing, as Lexa's mate she would be expected to lead competently.

This was a good first test to see if Clarke could handle the pressures of leadership.
Lexa hated that it was necessary.

The sun was hidden by the canopy when Indra burst back into her tent with a pair of gona escorting a bound Skaikru goufa behind her. Bringing up the rear was a scout Lexa recognized as one of the bonded she had sent out with Lincoln. Sevak was from one of the neighboring villages and passed his gona-trial two summers ago, thus making him roughly 16.

The group stopped in front of where Lexa was seated on her throne. With a long look from Lexa the gona stepped back from the Skaikru goufa. Lexa barely had to look at Indra to know her displeasure.

What did interest her was Sevak's attempt to suppress his relief and slight shifting towards the Skaikru once the guards left.

Lexa only managed to hide her smile due to years of maintaining a blank expression.

"What is your name?"

She keeps her voice even, calm. Dare she say gentle for all it maintains its commanding edge. It wouldn't due to frighten the boy before he'd given her an actual update. He looked terrified enough and was certainly younger than the Skaikru Lexa had observed interacting with Clarke.

"M- Mike." While his voice shook slightly, he maintained eye contact. Lexa felt her respect for the youth increase. A glance at Sevak showed he was doing better at hiding his emotions now it appeared Lexa wasn't about to attack his mate without warning.

"Tell me Mike kom Skaikru, what has happened today at your camp? The full account please."

The boy visibly gulped, the action fully showing his youth - perhaps 13 or 14 years.

"It was pretty normal at first. Well, as normal as things have been since we were sent down here. We had been talking with Octavia when C-Clarke came over asking about Wells. She - she was really worried but suddenly in the middle of asking Octavia to..." He trailed off, glancing around in uncertainty. After an encouraging nod from his mate, discretely of course, not that it was hidden with how close everyone was watching, he continued.

"She wanted O to check with... her mate." Strategically Lexa appreciated his reluctance to name Lincoln, but internally Lexa just wanted the boy to hurry up. "But something happened while she was talking. Suddenly she froze and withdrew into herself, barely breathing. She didn't even her Octavia calling for her attention. We all got really scared but when she opened her eyes again it was like she was suddenly calm again. Rambling about how someone had reassured her Wells was okay but that she still wanted O to check."

"Once Octavia left Bellamy confronted Clarke again. Wanted her to let him send search parties out to look for Wells. It was weird. Normally he yells a lot more. We didn't know why until a few hours later when he came back. He- he had Octavia with him, wasn't letting her go no matter how much she struggled. Two others carried a Groun - sorry - carried one of your people between them. He must of been Octavia's mate given the way she was fighting Bellamy, but I didn't get a good look at him. Clarke sent me out to find you as soon as they were inside."

Mike took a deep breath once he was finished. His long-winded answer had come out in a rushed, breathy way once he had gotten started. Internally Lexa was relieved. The tale matched the image Clarke had sent. He spoke true of Lincoln's capture, and Clarke hadn't been the aggressor of the attack.
She pointedly refrained from looking at Indra.

"Thank you Mike kom Skaikru for speaking true and telling me what occurred." Glancing at the scout next to him she continued. "Release his bindings."

The breath of relief from Mike turned into a start of surprise at the sudden change in language. The boy flinched slightly when his mate faced him with a blade. After the bindings securing his wrists were cut - and the knife vanished back to its hiding spot - the boy seemed to relax again, rubbing his wrists nervously.

"Mike kom Skaikru and Sevak kom Trigedakru, are you willing to accept the role of messengers between your clans until such a time as the original messengers replace you or I deem otherwise?"

Among her own people she would simply order them to obey her commands. Based on Indra's instant tensing and opening of her mouth, Indra had expected much the same and was likely displeased Lexa was even offering an option to the two. A sharp glare silenced Indra's protest before anyone else noticed. Clarke's people were not used to obeying her orders, nor were they very respectful of authority from what Clarke had shared and Lexa had witnessed.

"Sha Heda." Sevak answered promptly, as trained. Mike took slightly longer, his uncertainty clear.

"Yes Ma'am... um, Heda."

An exchanged glance with Sevak saw Mike straightening his back and attempting to mimic his mates trained confidence. Lexa felt a measure of pride and respect for the boy.

"You will bunk with Sevak tonight. He will see to your needs while you are here. I expect you both to have left by first light."

"Sha Heda."

"Yes Heda."

This time Lexa allowed a small smile to move her lips. The Skaikru youth learned fast. They both deserved to feel the pride that came from pleasing her. And from what she had seen Skaikru was vary expressive with their emotions.

"Dismissed."

Chapter End Notes

While researching how to make Grounder names I came across a fan theory that most of their names come from the ruined signage in the DC area. As I find that rather refreshing compared to being named for a long dead ancestor, I spent an hour yesterday coming up with a bunch of random names based on names that show up at various zooms of the DC area. So if you're wondering - all OC Grounder names come from that.

@standinshadowedsilence
"So? They're on the Ark. We aren't. It's not like we'll meet again anytime soon. Either one of us could die in the next few days for a number of reasons. Besides, not all bonds are romantic ya know."

"Yeah, but-.

"No Clarke. If I said I didn't bother me I meant it." She huffed.

"Well, it bothers me."

Crossing her arms Clarke turned away slightly, trying to think of a way to salvage this so that he'd still support her without needing to flirt with her all the time. She wasn't sure she could.

"You've met your soulmate, haven't you."

It wasn't a question.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 8: Expectation

It took longer than she would have liked to negotiate terms with Bellamy. At first he refused to allow Lincoln out of the drop ship - and failing that - refused to allow Octavia to be within five feet of him without being there himself. Clarke only got him to cede the last demand by pointing out he would be hard pressed to keep the other delinquents gathering supplies and securing their camp if he was constantly hovering over Lincoln or Octavia.

A pointed question of whether he'd want someone hovering when he met his soulmate had lead to an interesting reaction.

Bellamy had outright paled. Straight up shut down at the mention of his own mate.

There was a story there.

But as much as Clarke was curious, knowing Bellamy's bond status wouldn't solve any problems. A glance at the hovering Octavia encouraged the decision to drop the subject. Bellamy certainly acted like she'd never mentioned it. The moment he agreed to free movement inside the camp Octavia was at Lincoln's side releasing the chains. Clarke smiled softly, a mix of wishful longing and sadness showing in her expression.
She still wasn't quite ready to finally face her own soulmate, the knowledge that they would never be complete after the death of their third weighing heavily on her, but she was closer.

Seeing how Lincoln interacted with Octavia certainly helped.

As if summoned by her thoughts Lincoln's eyes rose to meet hers. For a while they did nothing more than stare at each other. They remained that way long enough for Octavia to fidget and begin genitally tugging on Lincoln's ruined shirt. Blinking, Clarke broke eye contact first to look at Octavia, who was glancing between them both in confusion.

"Mochuf, Heda Klark."

Gaze flicking back to Lincoln Clarke caught his nod and returned it. It was relatively easy to guess he had just thanked her. Although there was a slight hesitation to his title for her, as though he'd wanted to call her something else but thought better of it.

She'd have to ask him later.

For now, she had some friends to track down and thank for their support. Bellamy would have never caved if he thought their witnesses would have wanted him against Clarke. Somehow, she'd have to find a way to keep him from doing something else stupid.

As if kidnapping a Grounder wasn't stupid enough.

It took a while for her to find Finn after making sure everything was settled in the drop ship. Charlotte was given a new task to help Octavia treat Lincoln's wounds. Bellamy was appeased with the knowledge that Clarke wouldn't step on his toes leading his militia so long as he didn't ruin their chances at peace with the Grounders by attacking them first.

Finn was talking with a few of said militia when she found him. Upon her approach he stopped and turned to face her, smile growing even as his posture shifted to look even more nonchalant.

Clarke felt her annoyance grow in turn.

"Hey Finn, can we talk? I wanted to thank you for earlier."

"Sure Princess." Cue confident smirk.

Glancing around Clarke began to lead the way towards a section of the wooden wall no one was by. They were half-way there when Finn grabbed her arm, abruptly turning them towards the nearest gate. That annoyance sharpened.

Looking around as subtly as possible Clarke found the gaze of some of Octavia's group. Jerking her head slightly Clarke continued to allow Finn to lead her out of the camp. She could only hope they understood what she wanted.

After nearly an hour of walking Finn stopped and cautiously glanced around. He'd thankfully let go of Clarke's arm shortly after they'd left the camp walls. Now Clarke remained standing with her back to where they came from, fighting the urge to look behind her.

When Finn crouched and pulled open a hatch hidden in the leaf litter Clarke couldn't hide the
surprise from her expression.

Not that she really tried.

Finn looked extraordinarily pleased with himself.

Annoyance had turned to frustration a long time ago.

Clarke was starting to wonder if she should have just had Wells come with them rather than shadow her with the others.

Except Wells was still held by the Grounders, so she couldn't have his silent support for this.

She didn't realize how much she leaned on his support on the ground until it was gone.

It'd only been about ten minutes of Finn talking her ear off. When they'd first come in she'd let her wonder and pleased surprise show. But that had been the initial surprise about all the supplies now available to them. Then Finn started talking about keeping it hidden, keeping it for emergencies, keeping it period.

Clarke was not amused.

She did her best to not snap at him, to keep from offending him, but as he got more and more flirtatious about what they could do with this space... Clarke snapped.

"What about your soulmate Finn?"

He paused. Emotions flickering across his face faster than Clarke could follow.

"Eh. Does it matter if they're not here?" Disbelief slackened her jaw.

"Yes? Of course, it matters. I get the Ark is lax about respecting your soulbond, but surely if you've met them you want to respect them."

Finn shrugged. He refused to meet her eyes, instead staring off into the shadows of the bunker behind her.

"So? They're on the Ark. We aren't. It's not like we'll meet again anytime soon. Either one of us could die in the next few days for a number of reasons. Besides, not all bonds are romantic ya know."

"Yeah, but-.

"No Clarke. If I said I didn't bother me I meant it." She huffed.

"Well, it bothers me."

Crossing her arms Clarke turned away slightly, trying to think of a way to salvage this so that he'd still support her without needing to flirt with her all the time. She wasn't sure she could.

"You've met your soulmate, haven't you."
It wasn't a question.

Caught off guard Clarke panicked. How was she supposed to answer that she'd yet to actually meet them, but had stood a couple dozen yards from them? That their bond was so strong already it defied all she knew about the limits attributed to soulbonds? That they might one day be able to communicate through words or images on top of just emotions?

Her silence answered for her.

"I get it." He sighed. Dejection radiated from his posture. "You want the fairy tale soulmate romance."

He turned, heading for the ladder. Clarke's emotions were a mess. Panic, guilt, regret, relief, exhaustion. Still she had to try, had to make sure they were still okay.

"Finn wait-.."

He paused on the ladder.

"Let me give you some advice Clarke. Movies aren't real. Sometimes bonds and soulmates aren't all they're cracked up to be. Sometimes they're hurt more than they heal."

Clarke could only gape at his back as he left. Confusion and pity mixed into the on going swirl of emotions. He had sounded so tired. She wondered what had happened between his soulmate and him to drive his actions now. What story lurked under his jovial exterior.

She wondered if one day she'd carry her own pain in a similar way.

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When she hadn't come back out a long while after Finn left one of the others came down after her.

The teen found her sitting in a darkness held off by a single lit candle. She hadn't moved since Finn's abrupt departure. Thoughts, doubts, and concerns churned a storm inside her. Memories of physical and emotional pain trapped her inside herself.

With gentle hands he slowly led her to the ladder, calling up to someone above that they were coming up. He didn't say anything about how Clarke was doing. He didn't pressure her to talk or anything, just coaxed her up the ladder before following.

Once out of the bunker Clarke was greeted by the curious eyes of another teen.

She took one look at Clarke's expression and began to softly encourage her to sit down on the edge of the bunker outcropping. Just like the boy had done - she didn't pressure Clarke or rush her. Just encouraged her to sit, talking softly about how nice of a day it was, how great it was to be outside in nature.

Later, a period of silence, Clarke couldn't contain it inside any longer.

"Are soulmates a good thing? Knowing you have a person made to support you, to always know what you're feeling even when you don't want them too? Would it be better to just, not have them? Be able to choose whoever you want?"
Out of the corner of her eye she saw the two exchange a glance. They waited a moment to see if she had anything else to say. When it was clear she didn't they tentatively sat down next to her, one on either side. A moment's hesitation - another exchanged glance - and the girl spoke.

"I think that with or without soulmates certain people will always find each other. Whether the soulbonds make that easier - make anything easier - depends on how you view the soulbond. It's just like... like choosing to use colors in art class. We could make a black and white picture and it would be beautiful. Or we could make a colored one and it too, would be beautiful in its own right."

Letting the words sink in Clarke feels herself slowly relax. The tension that had built inside her being let out if only slightly. Little by little she could focus on the here and now rather than echoes of the pain that had consumed her when she'd felt her bond rupture and break years ago. The pain of losing a soulmate would forever haunt her. The fear of what might happen to her second mate as well. She wasn't sure if that was worth the joy of finding her other soulmate, but maybe it would be.

Maybe they would have found each other anyways.

"Our parents are bonded." The male teen's voice was just as soft as earlier, "My mom to Krissy's mom, her dad to my dad. When they realized how well they got along, and that they all wanted the chance to raise a child, they made an agreement. Since they're all on the ace spectrum it worked pretty well from what they told us."

"We were basically raised as siblings." Krissy took over when his voice faded out. "Benji here was born a few weeks before me, but because we're so close in age it was easy for them to just leave us together all the time, to let us entertain each other. It wasn't until we were older and started asking why we had four parents that they realized it was time to explain."

"Boy was that an awkward conversation." Benji laughed softly, Krissy smiled as well.

"But it made sense. With the way the laws are on the Ark, it was the only way for them to have kids. The soulbonds didn't force them to marry or prevent them from having a child. The soulbonds just gave them two best friends to support them on top of their soulmate."

Clarke knew she was gaping slack jawed at them.

The idea of Ark laws effecting how soulmates could live their lives had never occurred to her. The idea of people coming together in spite of it was inspiring. Finn may have a negative story, but hers didn't have to be. Despite having lost one soulmate, Clarke still had another waiting for her.

She didn't have to fear what the bond meant.

She didn't have to fear feeling her mate dying.

She could live in spite of her fear.

Walking back to camp with Krissy and Benji hours later Clarke felt much more grounded than she had in years. Hearing that the boy she'd sent to the Grounders had returned only fueled her belief. She could do this. She could forge this peace and finally meet her soulmate.

She was ready.
So this chapter is a little short but it felt like a good ending point. I'm behind on writing - I normally have the next chapter, chapter and a half written before I post the current one - but irl picked up. We'll see what happens. If I end up taking a scene from chapter ten and moving it here I'll let y'all know in the notes.

Let me know if something isn't making sense.
“Additionally, I cannot claim her as mate. Not at this time. We know this. But that means should someone make a connection, she will not have my reputation to protect her.”

The ‘or make the threat worse’ was unneeded. Everyone there know what happened to Costia. None of them was bound to forget it in this life time either.

“What do you propose than Heda? If we cannot order her protection due to her status as your mate? Your bond will only strengthen with time.” Gustus, as her guard captain, speaks first.

Lexa is quiet for a long while, contemplating. When she does speak there is a hesitance none had heard in a long while. A hesitance that came from Lexa - someone who had already lost one mate and feared losing the other - rather than from Heda.

“What- what were your bonds like?”

Chapter Notes

Right. Sorry for the delay, stuff irl kicked my arse. Updates will likely be pushed to every two weeks now. Lexa really didn't want to follow my chapter outline... sorry if she feels really OOC; just remember she's been having emotional Clarke in her head for days on end now.

Also, I never realized until I started posting this that when authors say reviews give them life... they weren't kidding. Thank you to all you wonderful humans who have read this story and stuck with it so far!!!

I'll admit part of the delay was a plot bunny making a spin-off merging the three-way bond with part of the soulbond idea from my other Soulmate AU. Going to hold off on posting that till I get more of this written tho.

Cheers,
Jesi_Ki_Kage
Lexa suppressed a sigh once it was clear Indra would not be leaving with the rest of the meetings occupants.

At least Indra had politely waited until after Lexa had finished her morning meetings, long after watching Mike and Sevak disappear into the woods surrounding TonDC. In fact, Indra waited so long that Lexa had begun to think the leader wouldn’t challenge her on the compiled information she received the day before.

Just witnessing Lexa’s own reaction to the bond had been unprecedented. To have Lexa - Heda - show weakness was a risk. For Indra to hear the Skaiga Mike’s recount of Clarke’s own reaction mere hours later....

Lexa held no illusions the woman would have forgotten. Simply wished her trust in Heda - in Lexa - was great enough for her to not question.

She must have miscalculated how much hearing about Clarke had affected the woman.

“What are your questions Indra?”

Indra paused, taken aback. Lexa still hadn’t turned away from the territory map on the table. Although she would deny it if asked, her gaze lingered on the marker for the Skaikru camp. When it was clear Lexa wouldn’t face her - a reminder of who held more power - Indra spoke.

“Klark kom Skaikru is your soulmate.”

“Yes.”

Indra’s shock was noticeable in the sharp intake and the long exhale. This would be the first real test of faith versus fear over Lexa’s soulbond. Anya and Gustus didn’t count as both knew Lexa on a personal level.

“And Costia? That was not faked?”

Lexa fought down the instant flare of outrage at the accusation. Only the slight tremble in Indra’s normally stoic voice reminded her to hold back. As it was some venom still made it into her answer.

“No.”

“Triumvirate.” It was more of an exhalation of air than anything else.

Patience. Lexa needed to remain patient and calm.

“Sha.”

A rustle of cloth. A pause of shifting weight and the echo of metal making contact with the cement of the floor. Startled Lexa turned to find Indra kneeling behind her.

Well, that was unexpected.

A Triumvirate had brought about the first sense of order after the end. Legends spoke of how each survived a different way and, upon realizing their bonded had survived, fought tooth and nail to return to each other and carve out a future for themselves. That they used their respective knowledge to heal the people, teach them about survival, and protect them as they grew.

One from the stars, one from the sea, and one from under the earth.
A healer, a teacher and a protector for their people.

The people of Polis.

Since then, however, many have claimed triumvirate bonds. Or other multi bonds. Some of those people have done great things for the different tribes. Some of them have done horrible things. Either way, those with multi bonds have left their mark on the psyche of the people.

Some positive, some negative.

“Rise Indra, and share your thoughts.”

Indra obeyed instantly. Whether she thought the bond good or bad was yet to be seen, but when she made eye contact with Lexa it was clear something had changed. The leader of TonDC and the Trigedakru stood a little taller, a little straighter. And maybe, just maybe, if you looked closely and knew what you were looking for, you might have found a mix of pride and awe in her otherwise neutral expression.

“Haiheda.” Lexa flinched minutely.

“No Indra. I have not earned that title. One of my mates is dead. I have failed as the protector.”

“The fault was not your own Haiheda.”

Lexa sighed. Realizing that Indra was strong in her belief of the Founding Three, she took a different approach.

“Tell me Indra, why did you hesitate to approach me with your suspicions of my bond? Think past your beliefs. I am the Protector, yet one of my mates is dead. Our history is rife with violence lead by the multi-bonded. Will all the people truly see this as good? I am not Haiheda. Not right now.”

Flickers of emotion ripples across Indra’s face. Lexa caught surprise and aghast and shame among the mix, but most were to brief and muddled for Lexa to read. For a moment Lexa wondered what Indra’s mate would have felt across the bond, had they still been alive.

Lexa wondered what Clarke was feeling of Lexa’s emotions. If the mental techniques to control her emotions and reactions were dampening what was sent over the bond in moments like these. If Clarke would be discouraged by the blank face Lexa presented the world. Or if she would be able to see beneath it to the emotions Lexa suppresses near habitually.

She hoped for the latter, but she expected the former.

Skaikru were very expressive.

“Apologies... Heda. I did not mean to offend you in any way. No one will learn of this from my lips.”

“Good Indra. Our people may rejoice. Or they may revolt. The Skaikru goufa are new and clueless to our ways, our customs. They appear like the Mounon to our people. To reveal something like this without assurances would threaten the stability of the Coalition. As it is just their very presence may destroy the Coalition without the rest of their kru even making it down.”

Indra bowed her head in acknowledgement. Her body language revealed guilt, likely over her early accusations directed at the Skaikru and their presence. She appeared willing to put aside her past distrust of the Skaiga. Still, Lexa did not trust such an easy turn of character.
“What else? What concerns you, Heda kom Trigedakru, over the presence of the Skaikru in your lands? Over the presence of my mate in their people?”

Silence stretched for a moment. Indra would not meet her gaze at the last line. So Lexa waited. After but a few moments of silence Indra finally spoke her inner concern, or at least one of them.

“Your bond Heda. How you reacted at the end of the meeting yesterday. How the skaiga described your mate's reaction. If I can determine your connection from that... and what if it happens again, but in battle, or someone takes advantage of it to cripple you? Your bonded needs protection.”

A soft exhale left Lexa’s lips before she could stop it. Her eyes flicked to her wrist.

“She’s not my bonded, not yet.” Another pause.

“Summon Anya and Gustus. Your concerns are valid. Her connection to me must remain secret as long as possible. And I must work to prevent the bond from affecting my ability to perform my duties.”

“Indra has pointed out a weakness that needs to be addressed.”

Gustus and Anya exchange looks of confusion and glances at Indra. The four are arranged around the back of the room, near the entrance to Lrex'a's personal area and out of line of sight for the tent flap. This was a decision made more for comfort than strategic, as eavesdroppers would be just as likely to hear a conversation there as anywhere else in the room. But the area was more secluded and there were places for everyone to sit.

“My bond with Klark kom Skaikru is unusually strong at times. To the point where I was startled by Indra’s presence while immersed in the bond. Something similar was described happening to Klark.”

Both nodded in understanding. Being unaware of one's surroundings even briefly was a major risk. And as explained, Indra clearly had used that to figure out their bond.

“Additionally, I cannot claim her as mate. Not at this time. We know this. But that means should someone make a connection, she will not have my reputation to protect her.”

The ‘or make the threat worse’ was unneeded. Everyone there know what happened to Costia. None of them was bound to forget it in this life time either.

“What do you propose than Heda? If we can not order her protection due to her status as your mate? Your bond will only strengthen with time.” Gustus, as her guard captain, speaks first.

Lexa is quiet for a long while, contemplating. When she does speak there is a hesitance none had heard in a long while. A hesitance that came from Lexa - someone who had already lost one mate and feared losing the other - rather than from Heda.

“What- what were your bonds like? Did they change drastically upon meeting or gradually strengthen?”

There was logic in her asking, as her own bond was currently changing. Still, the other three
exchanged a glance. To share about one’s bond is not taboo, simply discouraged and frowned upon. Bonds and your bond status were considered sacred.

Lexa does not meet any of their searching gazes.

Finally, Anya speaks. Her tone is sarcastic and bitter, although it’s softness belays how serious she is taking this.

“Well, that’s easy. I haven’t met them yet. The bonds been a fuzzy presence in the back of my head since I was about five or six years. Occasionally it spikes, but other than knowing they are younger than me....” she shrugged as she trailed off.

This was the first time Lexa had heard Anya talk about her bond other than to say she hadn’t bother searching for them. If the bond hadn’t changed her entire life it was no wonder Anya held little hope of finding her mate. Yet it made Lexa wonder.

Something about her description sounded familiar.

Before any further contemplation could be given Indra grunted. Gustus and her appeared to have a silent conversation before the man shook his head. With a small scowl Indra spoke.

“When we were younger the bond didn’t transmit much besides broken bones and the like. Once we were in the same village it was like the bond taunted us with increasing strength until we finally ran into each other.”

The “literally” coughed under Gustus’s breath caused a flicker of a smile to cross Indra’s lips. Her expression softened as her eyes shifted to a point in the distance.

“He always said sometimes the best way to learn was through a hard knock to the head. After we officially made contact the bond seemed to settle off. We were able to sense each other’s moods and predict certain things do to it, but we never got to the point of being able to communicate with emotions back and forth.”

Indra stopped there. No one needed to hear the wishful maybes that accompanied Indra’s tale. With the Mounon having taken both her mate and child years ago, Indra had dedicated her life to her clan. And it showed.

Now only Gustus remained. Gaze cast toward the ground he scuffed his boot in mindless patterns. Not once has Gustus’s soulmate come up in all the years he’d served as her guard and companion.

“They- they died young. Whether by the Maun-on or an animal or simple sickness, I do not know. All I remember is that one day I went from getting faint impressions to shearing agony. It lasted on and off for many hours. I was hunting with my Fos at the time and fortunate to be under another’s protection while the bond shattered; I was in no condition to protect myself.”

Memories assaulted Lexa. Bitter and painful - they caused her to swallow rather harshly before she could stop herself. Thinking back, she reflected on how Gustus had handled the shattering of Lexa’s own bond with Costia. How he had seemed to know how to keep Lexa anchored even as her bond was torn from inside her.

She’d never once considered he’d know because he’d been through it himself.

Either way, while their stories were useful - and provided good references - they were not what Lexa was searching for. Taking a deep breath as subtly as possible Lexa mulled over the question in her head. If she could not trust these three to be honest with her she did not know who she could.
“Have any of you... heard of a bond strong enough to send images?”

They startled. Eyes widened, jaws slackened, breath quickened. All of them knew instantly why she would ask such a question. Glances were exchanged. Still, no one verbalized exactly why she would ask such a question.

Everyone was quiet until-

“Haiheda.”

Again, Lexa fought a flinch at Indra’s use of the title. Glancing from face to face she saw the earlier awe had spread to even those who’d known her as a Seken. Disappointment raced through her. Lexa had not wanted them to see her any different.

“The two times in which we became, indisposed. And once before, when they were being sent down.”

Gustus straightened upon hearing that last bit. Understanding began to take hold of his expression.

“Of course. That’s how you knew to ready the Ranger Scouts.”

Indra nodded agreement.

“And that Lincoln had been taken before the Skaiga has been found.”

Lexa nodded. She shifted slightly, mulling over what to say next when Anya’s voice interrupted. The tone cold and jagged.

“How long? Just how long did you know about Klark kom Skaikru? Did these changes come because of-” She cut herself off, but her line of questioning was clear.

Lexa cast her gaze downward, hands automatically seeking familiar leather.

“She knew. She made three sets.” Sharp inhales. “It- I- the bond changed after, during. We- I’ll have to check with her but-.” Lexa shrunk in on herself, her eyes growing haunted.

“The first image was to both of us.”

The others recoiled in their shock. The implications of what Lexa just said rocking them to their core. For the image to have been sent to both Clarke and Lexa meant Costia has sent it. But if the changes hadn’t begun until after Costia had been taken... the only images which could be sent were of Costia’s death.

Shudders passed through the room as comprehension over Lexa’s week-long struggle reached them.

To have witnessed that on top of the bond shattering....

It was Indra who rose and approached Lexa. Not Anya who raised her or Gustus who had become her close companion. Indra, the woman who had loved and lost and came out stronger for it.

Kneeling in front of the huddling form of Lexa, Indra spoke softly, cautiously. Her hands hovered over Lexa’s knees.

“Heda. We will protect her with everything we have. You are not alone in this. You have my word.”
A shuddering breath escaped Lexa’s lungs. Slowly she leaned forward until her head rested upon Indra’s shoulder. Gentle hands came to rest on Lexa’s back, soon joined by more as Anya and Gustus came to stand on either side of her.

None of them spoke. Simply surrounded her with their presence. Tremors raced through Lexa’s body but she did not cry. Instead she drew strength from their support. At last, she took one more shuddering breath before she shifted, the others moving as she did.

“We need to make plans for how to handle distributing the news. Many in Polis will seek to use this knowledge to their own end.”

Wells looked up from the book he was reading when she entered. His smile was genuine, or at least she hoped it was. Her lips twitched upwards slightly in answer, but she did not smile.

"Lexa! Thanks again for the books."

"It was no problem Wells kom Skaikru. I appreciate your desire to know more about our culture and history."

Glancing at the desk next to him Lexa observed said books. The majority of her people could only read simple words - enough to recognize warning signs and the like - but in Polis the literacy rate was significantly higher. This lead to the hand copied series outlining the history of the ground since the bombs fell. Judging by the repositioning of the books and the one in his hand, Wells had managed to completely read two of the four books. Each book covers roughly twenty years with the five still being written to incorporate Lexa’s own reign.

"Of course!"

Wells moved to stand but Lexa waved him back down, electing to sit on the edge of the bed. She had set him up in a small hut whose owner had died in the fires caused by the drop-ships landing. Lexa had managed to keep the cries of retaliation subdued based on the knowledge that many who died in the fire did so due to their own arrogance and refusal to move to safety than from deliberate harm. Still the people of TonDC were not very comfortable with the idea of Skaikru amongst them and so Wells had remained inside the entirety of his stay.

With nothing but the scarce furniture in the tiny room Lexa had brought him the books after their first conversation. Now that his time here was drawing to an end Lexa realized how easy talking to him over the last couple days had been. She wonders if this is why Clarke gets along with him so well.

"What's wrong?"

Wells' question startles Lexa from her thoughts. Glancing up she catches his concerned gaze before returning her eyes to where they fidgeted with her bonding band. A sigh escapes her control before she can stop it.

"I am worried about the repercussions my bond will bring. You are an outsider, yet you have begun reading our histories. Tell me Wells kom Skaikru, what do you think about a bond between Trikru and Skaikru? Between Heda and a haiplana?"
His hesitation is clear. His posture shifting in uncertainty. From the corner of her eye she watches him fidget with the edge of the book for several moments. Finally, he seems to settle upon an answer, drawing himself up even as he draws in breath.

"It could work. You've already changed so much in the last few years. Granted I haven't read the recent history, but based on what I've read of your people's history - bonds are near sacred to your people compared to mine. It'd be harder getting my people to show yours respect, I think, then getting your people to accept her."

Lexa nodded. From all that she had discussed with Wells and overheard from watching the Skai goufa camp she has reached a similar conclusion for the Skaikru. But among her own people... Wells was right saying he did not know the current history or political situation. Lexa wanted to rectify that, yet a risk came with informing him. At the same time, he was trusted by Clarke. To have someone who knew their history among the Skai goufa and able to teach them of the culture would be invaluable. Especially if it was someone they already knew and trusted.

"What if..." at the same time telling Wells was not the same as telling Indra - who believed in Heda above all else, "What if I had already had a mate presented to the people?"

To his credit Wells put it together almost immediately.

"But you and-" his eyes widened, and horror overtook his features. "Three years ago.... Trumvirate."

He stares at her in something akin to wonder and sadness. That he mentioned something occurring three years ago - and Lexa can think of only one thing that occurred three years ago that he could be referencing - tells Lexa that something had happened to Clarke the same as her. She nods at his unspoken question. Although she wants to know his thoughts immediately she waits, having learned early in their acquaintance that Wells prefers to sort his thoughts before speaking.

"A week. She spent a week on bed rest three years ago. It was horrible to witness. No one was supposed to know why, of course, but I was the Chancellor's son, her best friend...." He trailed off as his eyes hardened, his tone shifting in demand of answers. "What happened?"

Lexa's arms wrapped around her stomach as she withdrew into herself. Her sword hand seeking out the second bond bracelet currently tied to her belt.

"It was a political move. Just before I finished forming the Coalition. Azgeda has long sought the title of Heda and the influence it would bring to help their people survive. Their current Queen, however, changed them into a ruthless force. They were the last to join. And their final act of defiance...."

Lexa couldn't bring herself to finish.

But she didn't need to. Wells understood exactly what she was implying. His skin was ashen, his knuckles white where they gripped into the binding of the book. He may not know anything of the current history, but he had read enough to know the traditions of bloodshed that dominated the land. He knew enough to know what would have happened, had an enemy gotten a hold of another leader's soulmate. It had happened many times throughout history after all.

It meant he also knew enough to know the threat now looming over Clarke's head without her knowledge.

"Is... is their Queen dead?" Lexa scoffed.
"No." The hatred in her answer caused him to recoil slightly. Or maybe it was the added knowledge that the woman would likely do the same to Clarke.

"What are you going to do?"

A pause, long and tense.

"I don't know."
And really, that was the root of the problem. Clarke had already lost one soulmate without ever meeting them. But she knew - or at least was fairly certain - that her soulmates had known each other. The reaction from her living mate had indicated as such. If Clarke - having never met them - was terrified of losing her living mate, what must her living mate be feeling having loved and lost their third?

Would they even be willing to give Clarke a chance?

Was Clarke willing to give them a chance?

The boy was nervous meeting with her, but he tried to puff up his chest and stand tall. In an attempt to ease his nerves Clarke initiated small talk. What’s his name, did he meet his soulmate, what did he think of his soulmate - that sort of thing.

Only once Mike was smiling freely after telling an animated story involving Sev and a cultural miscommunication did she address the real topic.

“Did the Commander give a message?”

Mike straighten up. Surprise colored his expression causing some of his joy to fall away.

“Oh! She asked me and Sev to take over as runners. Then before we left said to make sure we told only you the terms of agreement. Then you have to tell us if you accept and set a time.”

Clarke raised an eyebrow in surprise. This was the first time a gender had been associated with the bearer of the title Heda. Clarke couldn’t help but wonder how old this commander was. If she looked like Lincoln or not.

Mike’s expectant stare broke her out of her musing. Smiling softly at him Clarke ruffled his hair. Quickly she thought over the rest of what he said.

“Well, what are the terms?”

“Exchange. Wells for Lincoln. Only three people will be allowed there, one of them the person being exchanged. And then while our leaders are together she wants to set up an agreement so messengers between us will be protected until we figure out a treaty.”

“Okay. We can do that little messenger.” Mike cried out his protest as Clarke wrapped an arm around his shoulders. Releasing him after a few moments Clarke refocused.

“Did she give is a location or anything else?”
“Nope. You get to pick the time and date. She sounded like she already had a location in mind, but she didn’t say it in English if she did.”

“Hmm... tell me more about her? What is this Commander like?”

As Mike launched into an animated retelling of how he was bound and brought to the Grounder village and then brought before their leader something was nagging at Clarke. Something about the description felt familiar. Factoring in that Heda hadn’t needed any time to prepare a response for Mike, simply sent him to rest without any further questions....

Something didn’t add up, but whatever it was, Clarke couldn’t put her finger on it.

After sending Mike out to find Sevek and give her response Clarke sought out Octavia and Lincoln.

Seeing the two of them interacting, seeing them so much in the early stages of love, seeing how deeply they cared for each other after only a few short days - made Clarke's heart ache. Although they entered the relationship knowing practically nothing about the other, they were clearly making headway in learning each other. Since Lincoln had been allowed to wander the camp you could scarcely find one without the other. Even Bellamy's near constant scowl couldn't separate them for more than a few moments.

Their relationship gave Clarke hope.

Their relationship gave Clarke fear.

Was it really so easy? Did falling in love with your soulmate truly take so little effort? Was the relationship so stable from the start, that they were able to get along so well with no sign of needing a break? Did the fact that they had literally nowhere else to go and nothing else to do but spend time with each other play into it?

Would Clarke and her soulmate get along so well?

And really, that was the root of the problem. Clarke had already lost one soulmate without ever meeting them. But she knew - or at least was fairly certain - that her soulmates had known each other. The reaction from her living mate had indicated as such. If Clarke - having never met them - was terrified of losing her living mate, what must her living mate be feeling having loved and lost their third?

Would they even be willing to give Clarke a chance?

Was Clarke willing to give them a chance?

For all their midnight talk had been a 'first meeting', they hadn't actually talked. Or even seen each other face to face. She hadn't even heard her soulmate's voice yet.

She felt ready to meet them after talking with Krissy and Benji. But meeting someone and meeting them to spend three days non-stop in their presence were two different things. Meeting someone didn't guarantee anything. Clarke was ready to meet them now, wanted to at least know what her surviving soulmate was like, but did she want to let the world know who they were once she did?

The fact that their midnight talk even happened meant her soulmate clearly was willing to recognize their bond. That her soulmate had remained hidden while Clarke stood in the clearing spoke volumes about how uncertain her soulmate was about revealing their identity to Clarke. To
anyone. Did that mean they wanted to keep their bond hidden, even though they'd acknowledge it in private?

It was the only answer Clarke could come to, for why her soulmate would behave the way they did. Why else would they send her the image of Wells? And attempt to comfort her when she felt overwhelmed and panicky? If her soulmate didn't want her than surely they would ignore the bond. Would close it instead of leave it open for emotions to flow both ways.

So, they wanted her - they just weren't ready to be with her.

Clarke could work with that. She could.

There had to be a reason they weren't ready to meet Clarke. And a reason that involved interacting in public. There had to be. If the guilt and self-deprecation Clarke had felt after their thirds death was anything to go by, fear certainly played a part. Clarke just wasn't sure how much.

She'd gotten the impression over the last few days her soulmate was rather important in the grounder hierarchy. How much Clarke didn't know, but from a phrase like 'blood must have blood' ad threats of war over just Lincoln's life - it wasn't hard to guess that their culture was violent. Violence meant death. Influence meant power-plays and threats. Put them together and you got death threats.

Likely at soulmates.

Like Clarke.

It was with these thoughts in mind that Clarke finally approached Lincoln and Octavia with. A mix of curiosity and caution lead her to ask how they were doing before passing on the news that Mike had made it back with the start of an exchange. Curiosity over how they were getting along and what they planned to do once Lincoln headed back to his clan. Caution over how they were adjusting to being with their soulmate, to the challenges of such relationships slowly being brought to her attention. The challenges glossed over in fairy-tales.

Once she’d passed on the good news she left the pair and began to wonder. She knew she was still missing something, but she wasn’t sure what. Something important that had nothing to do with soulmates and had been forgotten in the excitement of them and Wells and Lincoln.

She wished Wells was there for her to bounce ideas off of.

Light glinted from by her side causing her to look down.

Of course.

Turning Clarke headed back towards the drop ship and Monty’s unofficial lab. Earlier in the week - while Jasper was still recovering - Monty had claimed a portion of the upper drop ship as a lab. There he’d been working on reestablishing communication with the Ark.

Last Clarke had checked Jasper had rejoined in the task while also working on some moonshine. Between the two of them Clarke wasn’t sure whether to shake her head in exasperation or fondness. Either way they were the best chance she had at establishing contact with the Ark.

Entering the ‘lab’ area Clarke surveyed the area.

Broken bits of scrap metal lay scattered about. Other material lay intermixed: wires, cords, bits of
nature that might serve one purpose or another. Pressed against one wall was a small table with what Clarke assumed was their relay station on it. Surrounding that was the dissected wrist bands of the 100 who’d already removed them.

The boys looked up when she came in, both smiling, although Jasper slide a bottle of unknown contents behind his back as he did so.

Clarke merely raised an eyebrow at him before returning the smiles.

“Monty, Jasper. How’s our technical geniuses doing?” Monty ducked his head.

“I wouldn’t go as far as to say geniuses. Pretty sure I could have figured this out by now otherwise.”

Jasper patted his friend on the shoulder in reassurance. The automatic feel to the action reminded Clarke that the two were soulmates. Questions bubbled to the forefront of her mind after the conversations this morning with Krissy and Benji.

Still she hesitated.

Business first.

“Do you guys need more parts? Or more wristbands? I can see if anyone wants to go scavenging again.”

“No, I think we’re-.” Jasper cuts of Monty’s answer.

“Some fresh wristbands would help. Like taken off right here fresh. The batteries on all the others are dead already.”

Clarke blinked. Batteries? Glancing at her own wrist band Clarke watched the steadily blinking light for a few seconds. Shaking her head and then nodding instead Clarke exhaled.

“Okay. I’ll go see if I can’t find any volunteers. People who don’t have any family waiting on them or anything.”

“Thanks Clarke.”

The relief in their thank you surprises her. She wasn’t sure why they hadn’t asked themselves, but if she could help them this way she would. Bidding goodbye Clarke heads out to find some volunteers.

She missed the way the boys exchanged a glance behind her.

She’d barely made it outside of the drop Ship when voices and laughter reached her ears. Turning she saw Murphy and a few others of Bellamy’s militia standing in a gaggle. Inspiration struck.

“Hey Murphy!”

Instantly the group tensed. Turning to look at her the boy in question scowled at her approach. The others shifted their weight in uncertainty.

“What do you want Princess?”

“You’re pretty good at getting these off, right?”
She brings her wrist up so that it’s clear what she means. His eyes widen slightly before narrowing. It’s clear he won’t trust her words at face value.

“What decide you don’t want your cushy life anymore? And to really join us delinquents?”

Clarke’s smile is hard. “Not quite yet. But I’d like you to assist in removing some more of them if you’re interested. Monty and Jasper need a couple fresh ones to try and get the radio to work. I was thinking if you rounded up a handful of volunteers... people with a bone to pick or no family to worry if they were to appear dead for a while...”

Murphy scowled but nodded. The others around him shifted again. A few exchanged nervous glances. The kid with the beanie was looking at her in confusion. None of them had wrist bands on. When Murphy didn’t answer right away Clarke raised an eyebrow.

“Well, will you? I’m not going to force you. Just figured with all your experience taking them off you’d jump at the chance to remove some more.”

“Sure, I’ll break some wrist bands off. Least I can do to make someone on the Ark panic.” With a sneer he stomped off.

Glancing at the ones left she noticed none of them appeared comfortable around her. Sighing internally Clarke realized she seriously needed to get to know more of the others down here with her. Trying to keep everyone alive was time consuming, but it wouldn’t matter if there was no one around who cared.

She didn’t even know any of their names.

“Uh....”


“Right. Miller. Think you could put together a list for me? Of what people want to be called and if anyone has family on the Ark they want to see or if they’d rather not see anyone. That type of stuff? Oh! And what they’d rather do, like hunt or build or entertain. Stuff like that?”

Clarke glanced around, gauging their reactions. Most seemed surprised, a little pleased, a little suspicious. Better than Clarke expected for a spur of the moment decision. Miller at least seemed interested.

“It’ll help with knowing where everyone is too if we ever get attacked.” He was nodding. That was good. She glanced around again.

“You guys could help him if you want?”

Tentative nods of agreement. Clarke let out a deep sigh.

“Awesome. Thanks.”

An exchange of nods and Clarke left the small group. She hoped they’d actually do it. She hadn’t realized until she’d started talking just how useful a list like that would be for organizing everyone. Maybe they could finally start getting more food brought in once they have a system.

She wondered aimlessly for a bit.

Clarke was watching the sunset from one the many hills when she felt it.
Her bond flared.

Anger. Fear. Outrage. Determination. More emotions kept pouring through the bond bouncing and echoing over each other. Amongst the jumble of emotions something else came through.

A snarled word.

Maunon.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Veterans Day! Whether you're an American veteran or not, thank you.

This chapter wrote itself fairly quickly, but came out too short. So I went and added some stuff. Now it feels kinda filler-y to me. Up next I have the hard part of actually writing some plot for a few chapters from now. While studying for exams. Yay. Also, yes I know 'ponderance' comes up as not a word even though it's a legal conjugation of one.

Reviews are awesome and let me know what y'all think and if I should be aware of anything while writing. Please feel free to give constructive feedback! And kudos ^_^
Compromise

Chapter Summary

“Tell Sevek when he returns that all previous terms for the exchange stand. The date will simply need to be moved back at least two days. Maybe three. We can’t afford to delay much longer than that.”

Anya nodded and though she appeared as if she wished to speak, she left it at that. Lexa was grateful. Her emotions had only gotten more turbulent as the bond strengthened and Clarke’s emotions became clearer. Now Lexa was expending significant focus to maintain her calm exterior when before it came easily.

Slip ups could not be allowed while she was in Polis.

Chapter Notes

Not going to lie, writing this chapter was tough. Like y'all I just wanted to get past this set-up chapter and to the main event next chapter. Hang in there y'all - Clexa finally meet in chapters 12 & 13.

Chapter 11: Compromise

Lexa finds herself seeking shelter in what has become known as the Skaikru hut afterwards.

As far as Maunon attacks this one wasn't bad. They burned a town near the edge of their territory. Resulting causalities were many true, but defense was rallied enough that the village wasn't lost entirely. No, what made it bad was the reminder of what these attacks mean.

They mean the Maunon is still preying on them. That they are still helpless to stop them. That Lexa has yet to find a way to defeat the Mountain.

It is a stark reminder that the Mountain could attack the Skaikru.

Attack Clarke.

Once all the fires have been put out, patrols organized, the area searched for survivors and a final body count made Lexa returned to TonDC. Yet instead of heading straight to her bed she finds herself standing quietly in the doorway to the hut where Wells sleeps.

For a long while she stands there wondering why she's even there.

When her eyes fall on the books she loaned him she finds her answer.

With Wells there is no pressure to be Heda. No near legendary image of greatness to uphold. No mythical spirit in her veins and in her soul. She is simply Lexa, leader of the people yes, but a
young woman only a few years older than him who is as curious about his world as he is about hers. Additionally, they have one more thing in common.

Clarke.

Early on, after Lexa had confirmed Clarke as her mate, Wells had taken to sharing stories about his and Clarke's childhoods. From coloring on walls to chasing parents down hallways and being chased in turn. From their favorite classes to Clarke's love for drawing and Wells skill at chess. She learns about her mate from the eyes of an observer.

In exchange Lexa shares the reports that come in on the Skaikru. She shares what emotions she felt and when so that together they speculate on what correspondence there might be between the reports and Clarke's emotions. Lexa teaches Wells about the customs of the Trigedakru regarding soulmates, how her people view the bond and what actions may be permitted when and by who. How either mate may present the bonding bracelets but it's tradition that they are hand carved. How each must prove capable of some skill which will help provide for the pair should something happen to their partner - be it hunting or producing a product to trade or a skill to exchange. About how the needs of the population affect the bonding of platonic soulmates and occasionally the same sex ones that normally adopt.

All this she shares while quietly grasping a worn bracelet in hand.

Since she had first explained Wells had never asked about the bracelet and Lexa appreciates him even more for it. She would be honored to call him her tombro once she and Clarke are bonded.

Assuming they are ever given the chance to do so.

Maybe it is this underlying fear that has led her to stand outside his room in the dead of night. This certainty that the Skaikru's only hope of understanding lies in the knowledge of her people she has bestowed upon him. And the hope that they will listen to him and her mate long enough for Lexa to find a way to protect them. To keep them safe from the Mountain and from the Coalition and from Nia.

With a deep sigh Lexa turns and leaves.

Nothing stirs inside the small cabin as her shadow passes briefly under the door frame. It is a dark night, a new moon making even the lightest shadows seem dark. Lexa makes her way back to her own bed silently. All the while pondering how to balance her seemingly never-ending responsibilities with her desire for peace. A peace where she is free to be weak for the one her soul is tied too.

She fears there will never be a time where she can be with Clarke as bonded.

They had just finished reviewing the Maanon attack when a messenger arrives. Dismissing the Trigedakru leaders and generals other than Indra and Anya, Lexa calls the messenger in.

The news is not good news.

Lexa is needed back in Polis. Quarrels between clan ambassadors have increased and Titus requests her presence to sort the newest issue. He also sends a carefully worded warning reminding her of her duty to all the clans now and not just her own.
What stung the most was the comment insinuating neglect of her natblida.

Internally Lexa swore. Externally she didn’t so much as twitch.

After acknowledging the message and stating she would leave after lunch, therefore arriving after nightfall, Lexa dismisses the messenger. She did not respond when Anya moved to stand in front of her throne. Instead she focused on her breathing and maintaining her emotions.

There was nothing to be done about the summons.

Certainly, Clarke could feel the frustration pounding through her.

Releasing a long exhale Lexa finally looks at Anya.

“Tell Sevek when he returns that all previous terms for the exchange stand. The date will simply need to be moved back at least two days. Maybe three. We can’t afford to delay much longer than that.”

Anya nodded and though she appeared as if she wished to speak, she left it at that. Lexa was grateful. Her emotions had only gotten more turbulent as the bond strengthened and Clarke’s emotions became clearer. Now Lexa was expending significant focus to maintain her calm exterior when before it came easily.

Slip ups could not be allowed while she was in Polis.

Turning to Indra she evaluated the woman silently. Indra stood steady and confident under her gaze. Nodding slightly in acknowledgment of the woman’s determination Lexa gives her next order.

“Begin strategizing ways to defend the Skaikru from the Maun-de. They are not our allies yet, but they hold knowledge of things our people have long forgotten. I’d much rather that knowledge came to us than somehow allowing the Maunon greater reach. We may need to step in sooner rather than later.”

She hoped not. She really hoped not. But in her experience, nothing would work right the first time and enemies didn’t like to follow your expectations of them.

Indra too appeared as though she wished to speak. Although Lexa had a better idea about what the leader would be protesting.

“I’ve no intention of adding undo strain to your warriors. I plan to petition for troops while I am in the capitol. Perhaps with Skaikru knowledge we can finally find a way into the Maun-de.”

Both women startle, but bow their heads to show their understanding. The idea of utilizing the Skaikru knowledge of tech was something Lexa had been mulling over since her one-sided conversation with Clarke and it had only grown as Wells had shared more about the Skaikru lifestyle. While it was true most of the Skaikru goufa did not understand the inner workings of technology, any one of them had a greater understanding over all of technology than any of Lexa’s people.

If Lexa could find a way to capitalize on that knowledge... or gain access to those with the intricate understanding most lacked... they may find a way past the Maun-de defenses, of which Lexa was certain were technology based.

Decision made Lexa dismissed the two leaders and left to speak with Wells.
Maybe he would be able to present a better case for Skaikru technical knowledge.

"Something has come up. I'm afraid I need to leave for a few days and the exchange has been pushed back in the hope that I can return in time."

Wells looked startled at the news. Or perhaps he was startled by her rather rushed entrance into the hut, door having just finished slamming closed by the time Lexa had started speaking. No matter the cause, Wells blinked at her in a stupor for a few minutes before nodding.

"Okay. What's the real issue?"

It was Lexa's turn to blink. Had she really become so close to Wells in the past handful of days that he could already read her? Or was it because she lowered her guard and dropped her Heda mask around him? Did his connection to Clarke mean she had shown too much of herself in a desire to learn more?

Did it matter that he knew her so well?

No. Well, no so long as he was an ally to her and Clarke.

"What are the odds of your father respecting any deals we make with you and Clarke?" He sighs.

"Slim. He may respect that we made a treaty with you, but he will likely not agree to the terms. We are viewed as children unable to make decisions on our own. Worse, we were criminals with no right to make decisions for ourselves."

Lexa nodded. Even though it wasn't what she wanted to hear, it was what she expected. They had discussed how the Ark viewed the delinquents before. Now it was time to finalize what to do about it.

"What if your people were treated separately from you and the others already down here? We have already suggested to Clarke treating the drop site like a village or trading post. Then when your people come down they would need to establish their own settlements separate from your own."

"That could work yes, but I'm sure if you talked to Clarke she'd tell you we have nothing to trade."

"Moonshine may yet make a valid trading item." Wells let out a startled laugh, his eyes wide. Lexa had not told him the details of the conversation. At his reaction she was quite glad for that decision.

"What about technical knowledge?" Although she had made a joke moments before, there was no humor in her tone or expression now.

"What about it? Most of us down here know how to work a variety of technologies but I doubt more than a handful of us have ever taken one apart."

"Would you be able to work the Mountain's technology?"

Wells jaw dropped. He knew of the Mountain from reading their histories. There were dozens of stories revolving around attacks by the Maunon or attempted sieges upon the Maun-de. Lexa
herself had told him of the theories not in the histories, those of how the Maun-de was able to do what it did.

By use of old world technology.

Now Wells eyes take on a serious glint, his head tilting back slightly as he considers his answer. That was one thing Lexa had found interesting about Wells. His various tells were completely different to any other she had worked with. He would raise his gaze above the head when in deep thought. If he was worried about something his face and tone betrayed nothing, but his hands would shift in certain ways - sometimes smoothing over his lap, other times clenching into fists at his sides.

It was refreshing to be learning to read someone new. Someone so different from everyone else she'd ever met.

She wondered how similar Clarke would be to her best friend. If Clarke would have similar tells. If Clarke would react first or think through her words like Wells did. She suspected Wells was the more level headed of the two. The two times she had seen them interact certainly gave that impression.

"It's possible." Wells' voice broke her out of her thoughts.

"If we could gain access to some of their tech, it's possible. Most of it should be fundamentally the same. Walkie-talkies can only change so much, and cameras all require certain features. The biggest problem would be getting access to it so we could find out. And those with actual experience taking things apart could probably give you greater access if we could get them inside with the tech. Or the tech to them."

That was about the same conclusion Lexa had come to. Still, it was nice to have her thoughts confirmed by someone else with a better grasp of the resources she was talking about. Speaking of resources...

"What about medicines? Surely you have advancements among your people that have been-"

Lexa cut herself off in a sharp inhale. Quickly she worked to mask her reaction. In Polis she would not have the luxury of reacting to the bond. Here though, Wells had already seen her react before. He knew what was happening the moment her eyes had widened and her breathing changed. Closing her eyes Lexa focused on processing what Clarke was sending and keeping it below the Heda mask she showed the world.

The first thing she noticed was an unusual lightness at her wrist.

The second was the shear strength of Clarke's panic and worry and confusion and over all reaction that Lexa mentally labeled as Clarke's 'what just happened' reaction.

Opening her eyes Lexa stared silently at her wrist for a moment.

It took her longer than she would like to admit to remember if Clarke had anything on her wrist. When she did understand came. The metal wristbands Clarke had said sent their information to the Ark about them.

"The wristbands. The ones you all wore. Clarke's is off. Maybe everyone's are based on the amount of panic she is sending."

It was Wells turn to inhale sharply.
With the wristbands dead the Ark would not know whether the ones on the ground were okay. That much Lexa clearly understood. From what she'd learned talking to Wells, no one down here could predict what those in space would do now that the bracelets were dead. Whether they would try to send someone down to check, or write the goufa off as lost was anyone's guess. For all they knew the Ark could decide to send people down anyways.

Lexa hated not being able to predict what an enemy would do.
Chapter Summary

"It is good to hear you wish for peace Klark kom Skaikru. Heda seems to have taken a liking to you, and also seeks peace between our peoples."

Was it just Clarke, or was there extra stress on the words 'Heda' and 'you'?

Chapter Notes

Finally, the scene you've all been waiting for. Or at least the first part of it :). I admit to having portions of this chapter drafted the entire time as this was actually one of the first parts I wrote for this fic.

Enjoy a family day and be thankful for those of you in the USA.

Chapter 12: Consequence

They'd been walking for a while when Lincoln tells them the bridge is just ahead. Clarke had noticed the trees thinning out and mentally congratulated herself on her improving navigation skills. And on not being overly distracted by her soulbond.

Pausing in the shelter of the trees Clarke runs through some breathing exercises. She can feel her own worry mixing with that of her soulmate and compounding it. Staring at the bridge Clarke mentally runs begins to run though all the factors that she'd worked control so that this went well. The rest was out of her control and worrying wouldn't change that.

With a deep breath Clarke steps past the tree line. Immediately the faint undercurrent of worry fades from her soulbond to be replaced with relief. The annoyance and frustration remain strong.

Closing her eyes Clarke focuses. Moments later she snaps her eyes open, head tilting to the right even as her eyes shift to the left. Finally, they stilled on a clump of trees off-center from the bridge where the shadows are deep.

Amusement and what Clarke thinks is pride trickle through the bond.

A nudge and a smirk from Octavia has her walking towards the bridge, only just now noticing the group of three representing the grounders had emerged from the trees opposite them. Her soulmate isn’t among them. Which explains the annoyance and frustration.

Continuing forward Octavia and Lincoln follow. Bellamy was convinced to stay with the logic that someone needed to stay back and protect the camp, make sure nothing went wrong there. If both Clarke and Bellamy went and it became a trap... he agreed, with two concessions. Lincoln swearing on his life that even if it was a trap Octavia would not be harmed due to being his soulmate.
Clarke had breathed easier at that, although when questioned she wasn't able to give the real answer as to why.

If afterwards she made sure those following were only the ones with confirmed soulmates among the grounders, well, no one knew to call her on it except Octavia. That being said, Clarke definitely felt better knowing that as long as their mates were nearby the four shadowing them would hopefully be protected should something go wrong.

Like one of them having a gun.

Lincoln had explained the grounder association of the weapon with the Mountain to Clarke and Octavia. Since then a bunker had been found containing supplies and weapons. Once learning of this Clarke had pulled Bellamy aside and verbally confirmed his support for peace with the grounders and his near fear of the Ark. Convincing him that the guns were to be used for defense and as a last resort was easy once she agreed he could keep his original pistol.

Of the group here, only Octavia was armed. Bellamy's second concession. As Octavia was the only one whose safety they could guarantee - armed with a Maunon weapon or not - Bellamy would only let her go without him so long as she had a weapon with which to defend herself.

A throat clearing broke Clarke out of her internal review of their precautions.

Wells was looking at her with a mix of fondness and relief. And maybe hope? Either way he certainly looked cleaner than most of the other delinquents. Where ever he had been held they had at least treated him right. It lent credit to the honesty of the image sent to her.

Looking over the two grounders Clarke was interested to see that the smaller of the two looked only a few years younger than her, perhaps Charlotte's age. Both girl and woman had numerous braids in their hair and a mix of fur and leather clothing. The swords and other visible weapons on their person gave credence to them being a warrior based culture.

The lead woman opened her mouth to speak at the same time Clarke felt a flare of worry and muffled panic shoot through her bond. In reply Clarke raised an eyebrow, fixing her gaze at the origin of the emotions. It wasn't until both Wells and Octavia had reacted - a coughed "Clarke" and an elbow in her side respectively that she realized what she'd done.

She was certain her embarrassment reached her mate.

Glancing at the lead woman Clarke was relieved to spot the hint of a smile under her stony expression. Although the hint faded the moment the woman saw Clarke looking. Seeing that she had their attention the woman began speaking as though uninterrupted.

"I am Onya kom Trikru. I see the prediction of your attendance was true Klark kom Skaikru."

Externally Clarke gave no reaction to the use of her name. Instead she filed away the other woman's name. Doing her best to remain calm, and thankful for the encouragement being sent over the bond, Clarke began her first ever political conversation.

"Greetings Anya of the Tree Clan. I am pleased you agreed to this trade. I wish for peace between our peoples and feared that would not be possible when I discovered what had happened in both cases."

Clarke didn't offer her hand to shake. Instead she followed the coaching Lincoln had given her. Address the situation upfront, make sure she didn't paint the other side as being completely to blame - even if they had been - and look the other person in the eyes while talking. Given the slight
head nod she received at the end, Clarke feels rather hopeful they can pull this off.

"It is good to hear you wish for peace Klark kom Skaikru. Heda seems to have taken a liking to you, and also seeks peace between our peoples."

Was it just Clarke, or was there extra stress on the words 'Heda' and 'you'?

"Great. Shall we complete the exchange and begin discussing terms?"

Maybe she came off a little too hopeful. She just really wanted Wells back. In the back of her head she could tell her soulmate was doing some sort of breathing or meditation exercise to help reduce both their nerves.

Anya nodded and motioned for Wells to step forward. Lincoln did the same. Once clear both sides were ready the two walked across the short distance between them on the bridge. The males exchanged nods as they passed.

Once Wells was close enough Clarke abandon all decorum and drew him into a hug. Wells hugged back just as hard.

"I missed you."

"Me too. But we can talk after okay? Let's focus on making peace first."

Clarke nods against his shoulder before releasing him. Quickly he steps around her to stand where Lincoln had been. A brief flare of an unfamiliar emotion echoes through Clarke's bond and then fades. Dismissing it Clarke focuses on Anya again.

"Before we begin I would like to clarify something. Any terms we set will only be for m people that are here with me. I have no authority over the rest of our people and therefore cannot guarantee they will keep to any terms set. This is why I and my fellows have decided that should they come down they will need to negotiate their own terms with you."

Surprise radiates from everyone around her. Octavia and Lincoln had known she discussed the topic with Bellamy, but neither had heard of the decision. As much as it pained Clarke to be functionally leaving the rest of the Ark on their own... they had done the same to them. Clarke had to worry about the people here, with her now. If she tried to include the adults into the negotiation she knows it wont end well.

What happened with her father was proof enough of how the adults thought.

For once this had been something she and Bellamy agreed on.

The delinquent 100 would sent themselves apart from their parents now. This decision caused Clarke all kinds of worry, but it had gotten Bellamy and his militia in line and would ensure that and treaty they made now would hold even if the adults came down and followed Bellamy's initial thinking. It was the only way Clarke could see them surviving.

She just hoped it didn't backfire once the adults were on the ground.

Assuming they came down.

Subconsciously Clarke rubbed at her wrist.

Meanwhile everyone else finished recovering from their shock.
"That is an interesting decision Klark kom Skaikru. For now, let us discuss terms. This way I can present your decision to Heda along with the initial terms of agreement."

"Very well."

"The first term, which I believe you were already notified of, is that both our messengers be allowed to travel freely to and from our respective peoples."

Clarke nodded. "Yes. Currently we have Octavia, Lincoln, Mike, and Sevek as messengers. My people already know not to attack Lincoln. Once we are done here I will present Mike and Sevek together so that my people know not to attack Sevek as well."

"Acceptable. The other term is significantly more complex. As you are on Trikru land you will need to provide some sort of compensation with our people until such a time as you have become a permanent settlement. Once established, the land inside and surrounding your settlement will be Skaikru, so long as you follow the rules which protect all Trikru villages."

Slowly Clarke nods. The deal was better than she expected but there were still so many unknowns. They had nothing with which to offer the Trikru as of now. Nothing of value anyways. If they were to become a settlement they'd need to know the rules so as to not inadvertently break them and start a war anyways.

Actually, they needed to know the rules now.

"I have a few concerns with this term. First, how are we to learn the rules of your people? I do not want us to start a war due to ignorance if it can be avoided."

Emotions flickered across Anya's face. For a moment Clarke thought she saw respect, but was uncertain.

"One does not kill a child for making a mistake. You teach a child so that they learn not to do so again. In this matter you are children." She paused, considering. "Wells kom Skaikru has already learned a portion of our customs. For now his knowledge will have to do. I will bring the need of further instruction to Heda."

Surprise made Clarke turn to look at Wells, how only shrugged and grinned at her. Considering who he is and who is father is, Clarke supposes she shouldn't be surprised. Still. She wonders if he met her soulmate.

"Thank you. Additionally," hesitation stilled Clarke's tongue and showed her nerves, "we do not have much to offer by way of trade. We are as you said - children. We- we don't know how to survive on these lands let alone produce something of value to offer. The best we have is our tech and medicine."

Anya nodded. "Then start with those. Once Heda is told of your other concerns we can address this issue as well. Most likely-

Anya cuts herself off, immediately ducking to the side. A shout from behind her has Clarke turning to see Krissy unconscious with Benji wrestling her out of someone's hold. Mike and Sev were running towards them while Julian - a new addition - was no where to be seen. If the strange clothes worn by the person holding Krissy hadn't concerned Clarke, Sev's shout of rage certainly would have.

"Maunon!"
There was instant chaos. Lincoln, Anya and the third grounder pushed passed Clarke and the others to get to Sevek and Michael. Cries from the woods on the opposite bank rang out followed by arrows.

One sunk deep into the figure holding Krissy's unconscious body.

A cry of pain from further in the woods had Clarke moving.

Instantly she reached for the gun tucked into Octavia's belt. Never had she been so thankful for Lincoln before, as his pushing Octavia down as he ran pass was the only reason the girl hadn't already moved outside Clarke's reach.

Weapon in hand Clarke ran after the grounders ignoring everything but getting to the unconscious Krissy and finding Julian. She didn't notice the grounders streaming out of the trees and rushing across the bridge and the stream below. Didn't know the emotions storming across her bond. Didn't notice the commands being shouted in the grounder language, how they seemed to hitch slightly when Clarke began to move towards the danger.

She reached the end of the bridge only to watch in horror as figures emerged from the trees. They dressed similar to grounders, but their clothes were filthy and some had wounds leaking day old blood. All of them roared with an anger as they moved less coordinated than Clarke had come to expect from the grounders she had seen.

Arrows slammed into the ones closest to Krissy, Benji and the others. It was this that drew Clarke out of her stupor. Immediately she was moving again, raising her gun to shoot only for Anya to intercept the two between her and the others.

"Ripa." was spat with such hatred that Clarke knew it must be the name for these not-grounders.

Now having a name to match the figures attack them Clarke was even more determined to protect her people. Reaching Krissy and Benji she quickly scanned them for injuries even as she felt for Krissy's pulse.

It was stable. They were fine.

Neither appeared to have more than a few scratches. Looking around Clarke saw Octavia fighting her way towards a surrounded Lincoln, the other grounder from the negotiations fighting beside him. Clarke didn't even bother to wonder where Octavia found the blade, the girl had no training and was clearly only holding her own due to the arrows helping thin the numbers around her.

In the other direction and back towards the bridge Clarke saw grounders fighting viciously with the ripa.

Glinting of sunlight off metal drew her attention to the body next to them. It was a suit of some kind, similar to the containment suits on the Ark.

An idea clicked in Clarke's head.

Instantly she was leaving Krissy's side and dashing into the woods. Ignoring Anya's cursing as she followed and any other ripa, Clarke's eyes searched frantically for her target. They couldn't have gotten far. Especially not if they were caring Julian as Clarke suspected.

There.
Raising her gun Clarke took aim. She'd only worked with a pistol a handful of times in the past, but time was short and ammo limited. Taking a deep breath Clarke tuned out the sound of violence getting closer before letting the breath out.

*BANG*

Her target fell. Clarke had no idea where she'd hit them - or if she even had - but she'd listened to Bellamy's advice to Octavia. If you have to shoot at someone aim lower. The kickback will force the shot up. If you aim lower you have a higher chance of hitting the target, even if it won't be as fatal as something like a headshot.

That was fine with Clarke.

If the suit worked how she thought - if the suit served a similar purpose to their spacesuits - it didn't matter where she hit. She just had to hit the target. Considering the figure in the distance had collapsed and hadn't gotten back up yet, Clarke really hoped she had.

She moved to start running again when a growl from nearby startled her. Turning she saw two of the ripa running straight at her from the side and no Anya nearby.

Clarke felt true panic for the first time since the fighting had started.

Turning she tried to run, her panic making her stumble. She only made it a few strides before she fell. The crunching of leaves and harsh panting told her they were closing in on her. Scrambling she hurried to turn over hoping to raise the gun in time to shoot them before they were close enough to use their swords.

A yell made her flinch even as she rolled.

What she saw when she stopped stole her breath away.

A grounder dressed in black had jumped in between her and the two ripa. Already the first one was swiftly losing even as the second joined the attack. In the time it took Clarke to process this the first ripa was collapsing as a sword was yanked from its throat. The grounder - a woman based on the slim figure - made fighting the ripa look easy. Clarke couldn't help but be impressed with the skill on display as the second ripa was taken down just as efficiently as the first. It was then the red sash trailing from the figure's shoulder registered to Clarke's mind.

Red sash.

Suddenly little clues became pieces to a puzzle as realization dawned on Clarke. The red at the bottom of the image of Wells. The way Anya had stressed the title Heda and the reference to Clarke. How after her little midnight talk every decision made by Heda sounded as though it had been premeditated. Lincoln addressing her as *Heda Clarke* instead of just Clarke that first time they met.

Lincoln causally mentioning that Heda wore a red sash to denote her station along with the symbol of Heda on her brow.

That a red sash would be worn around the waist of Heda's mate.

The other woman turned as the second ripa's body hit the forest floor. Clarke reeled as suddenly all the emotions pouring across the bond returned to the forefront of her mind rather than the corner she had shoved them to.
Worry and distress. Uncertainty and frustration. But most of all - fear. A burning fear so strong it made Clarke's own emotions spike now that she was aware of it. A fear that reduced in force the moment the other woman laid eyes on Clarke's frozen form.

The soulbond pulsed between them.

For a moment neither moved, then relief flooded through the bond strong enough to take Clarke's breath away. A relief that was followed by a single word, whispered as if a prayer.

"Klark."
Chapter Summary

Before her brain had fully processed her desire Lexa was breaking free from her cover and rushing across the river. Gustus and her guard cursing as they and the runners attempted to follow.

Lexa was faster.

Only one thing mattered to her right now. End the fight. Get to Clarke.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so their bond has gotten way out of hand and developed its own characteristics. Still haven’t figured out the consequences and advantage of it but my current justification for it will make a certain WildFox very happy.

Next update may be delayed but I’ll do my best to finish the chapter on time for y’all. Let me know if you spot any errors or think I missed something or didn't explain something well enough.

Chapter 13: Protect

She had known there were Skaikru in the trees watching. She'd had scouts watching them walk over and inspecting them for weapons. Good placement and a quicker mind had one of her scouts earning their keep as they determined only Lincoln's mate had a weapon and catching part of a conversation as to why.

The second she saw the Skaikru and Sevek fighting Maunon, however, Lexa wished with every fiber of her being that they were armed better.

That Clarke was armed better.

Then time was moving and those on the bridge were rushing the Maunon as those in the woods tried to get free. For a moment only one thought dominated Lexa's mind.

Save Clarke.

Then Heda kicked in and logic reminded her that she had nearly enough gonakru with her to count as a small army - the results of her trip to Polis. Sheer determination had seen them back in time to catch the meeting with Skaikru. Most of the gonakru had no idea about the Skaikru other than they were separate from the Maunon and attempting to make peace to protect themselves from the Maun-de as well.

Years of experience and training had Lexa ordering the archers to fire at will once she knew they
wouldn't hit the five Skai goufa. She watched in satisfaction as the Maunon holding the Skaiga fell from the first arrow. Seeing Clarke freeze in surprise Lexa breathed slightly easier.

Then the ripa burst from the woods.

Instantly chaos broke out. Shouting orders Lexa mobilized her army. This was why they had been brought after all. Lexa had made promises and concessions while in Polis. One of them included gonakru to begin aggressions with the Maun-on. Assuming they could even find a way to do so.

The felled Maunon on the other side of the river may just be the first big break they needed.

Emotions flashed through her bond and Lexa looked away from her troops in panic. Clarke was moving again, rushing towards the downed Skaiga. Lexa cursed as realization hit her.

Fisa.

Of course, Clarke's instinct was to check on the wounded - on her people. That didn't stop the terror rise through her as Lexa saw a few ripa head directly for Clarke. Nor did Anya stepping between them or the flash of a metal gun in Clarke's hand make her breathe any easier.

Before her brain had fully processed her desire Lexa was breaking free from her cover and rushing across the river. Gustus and her guard cursing as they and the runners attempted to follow.

Lexa was faster.

Only one thing mattered to her right now. End the fight. Get to Clarke.

When Clarke's head snapped up and a fresh wave of emotions rolled through the bond Lexa cursed internally.

She knew exactly what those feelings in that combination meant. Fierce protectiveness, desperation, determination. A mental head count told Lexa what she had ignored before.

One of Clarke's people were missing.

And moments later so was the blond as she dashed off into the woods.

Slashing down ripa as she went Lexa barely paused to do more than shout a few final orders about what to do as the battle wound down in their favor. Most of the ripa would continue to fight until their last breath. All the dead would need to be burned. The Skaikru protected and a decision about what to do with them made. The body of the Maunon would need to be searched.

But all those things could wait. Or be delegated to Anya and the commanders.

Getting to Clarke couldn't.

Lexa was just reaching the edge of the woods when the shot rang out. Every grounder - ripa included - froze at the sound. Eyes searching the woods Lexa did not pause. Another ripa fell as she bolted passed Anya and the ripa her old mentor had kept from following Clarke.

There.

Her blond hair stood out but then again, she was standing in the open, gun still raised in the direction she had pointed it. The emotions pounding against the back of Lexa's skull told her that Clarke had hit her target.
The two ripa closing in on Clarke told her that she still needed to make hers.

One of the ripa snarled, the action startling Clarke into a rushed motion. The other woman stumbled but managed to shift the distance between her and the ripa just a few strides more before falling.

It was enough.

Lexa could do this.

Failure wasn't an option.

Moments later Lexa leaped upward with a yell, intercepting the first ripa before he could finish closing the distance on Clarke. Clarke herself radiated her surprise and relief through the bond. The lack of pain being sent to Lexa easing some of her worry. As the first ripa fell beneath her sword Lexa felt something else come through the bond.

Shock. Awe. Hope.

Then Lexa realized why.

As she felled the second ripa Lexa was able to shift her focus. Said focus immediately went to her mate and their bond. That's when she realized it. The bond was changing, solidifying. This was the closest Lexa had ever been physically to Clarke - barely two steps away - and however the bond worked, it knew this was it.

And so did Clarke.

Turning Lexa finally faced her living soulmate. This close she could see details about Clarke she'd missed before due to either darkness or distance. Clarke's gaping jaw reminded her that Clarke had yet to actually see Lexa before now.

Not exactly the first meeting she was hoping for.

Still, relief flooded through Lexa as she visibly determined Clarke was unharmed beyond minor scratches and likely bruises. Clarke's slight gasp had Lexa looking up and locking eyes with the woman. She'd forgotten for a moment that Clarke would be feeling her own emotions just as she felt the Skaiga's.

Staring into Clarke's shining blue eyes Lexa nearly forgot everything else. The whispered "Klark" slipped out before she'd realized it, but it seemed that was the sign her mate was waiting for. Clarke blinked. Then smiled up at Lexa with so much emotion showing both in her expression and the bond that the most Lexa could do was swallow under the onslaught.

When it was clear Clarke wasn't about to move on her own, Lexa reached out a hand to help her up.

Their fingers brushed.

And their worlds exploded.

For a moment, barely a blink, Lexa was looking at herself through Clarke's eyes. Since bonds went both ways Lexa felt it was a safe bet that Clarke had just experienced the reverse. Shaking her head and blinking rapidly Lexa instinctively secured Clarke's hand in hers as their visions cleared.
The sensation of skin on skin was nearly overwhelming for a second, before everything seemed to die back down.

Clarke just continued to gape. Lexa didn't blame her. If not for her years of exerting iron control she probably would have seemed just as shocked on the outside. Internally she was certain Clarke could feel her swirling emotions.

Just as she was finally pulling Clarke to her feet their moment alone was ended with nothing being said between them.

"Heda! Heda!"

Turning to look Lexa was relieved to see it was only Anya and Gustus. The near panic on Anya's face certainly erased that relief quickly.

"Good you found her. Please, it's Tris. She's the only fisa out here. Lincoln's mate was also hurt."

The phrasing of Anya's statement was odd, but Lexa dismissed it as she turned back to Clarke.

"Will you help with the wounded, Klark kom Skaikru? Anya says Octavia is among them."

Immediately Clarke's eyes widen. Simultaneously Lexa feels her shock, worry, and panic well up from across the bond. The duality unnerved her slightly. The bond had never been this strong - this instant - with Costia.

Then Clarke was stepping in the direction Anya and Gustus had come from and Lexa understood why.

The thought had never occurred to her to release Clarke's hand.

Apparently the same was true for Clarke, as the girl blinked down in surprise at their still joined hands before shrugging and giving a gentle tug. Startled her torso jerked forward slightly and Lexa automatically stepped forward to compensate. The result was a slightly awkward few steps as they continued to hold each other's right hands.

A clearing throat snapped Lexa out of the daze she seemed to have once again fallen into.

Instantly she dropped Clarke's hand and straightened. Her previously soft facial expression smoothing over into that of Heda's. Turning to look at the culprit she was surprised to find a small smile adorning Gustus's face. Without looking Lexa knew Clarke's eyes had tracked the same path.

"Come Heda, fisa. We must tend to the wounded first and foremost."

Lexa nodded and felt Clarke's agreement. The four had barely made it a handful of steps before Lexa stopped as she remembered why they were here in the first place.

"Gustus, please continue in that direction and locate Julius kom Skaikru and the Maunon who was carrying them."

"Sha Heda."

Surprise, shock, confusion. Emotions were flicking between the two of them so fast it was hard to tell what was originally hers and what was Clarke's. What she did know for certain was that the information she'd just given Gustus didn't come from her. She may have said it, but the knowledge was Clarke's.
 Somehow subconsciously in the seconds that was Lexa remembering and speaking Clarke had sent the information Lexa needed through the bond.

There had been no words.

Lexa had just suddenly known.

And Clarke had no idea either if the question marks Lexa could practically see in her mind's eye were any indication.

They managed to maintain some semblance of control over their currently joint emotions. Clarke clearly panicked at the sight of the battlefield once they returned, but Lexa didn’t have to verbally comment before Clarke was nodding and turning towards Octavia and the young Tris.

It was that same connection that told Lexa Tris wouldn’t make it the instant Clarke reached the conclusion.

While she didn’t understand the medical terms associated with that conclusion, the knowledge was an instant transfer. As Clarke began to take charge over the medical clean-up it seemed some of Lexa’s own leadership experience was rubbing off on her. Knowledge of what equipment they had available and what type of armor marker to look for on runners to fetch supplies - all things Clarke would not have known in advance.

Still, once Tris’s fate was determined Lexa had pulled Anya aside. A pointed glance at the returned Gustus had him staying right behind Clarke. Lexa felt a flicker of humor and relief buried under the rest of Clarke’s on-going emotions at that.

And a strong measure of sadness as soon as Clarke realized why Lexa was pulling Anya off to the side.

Anya was upset. Was frustrated and emotional and passing blame around. But at the reminder that Tris could have been taken instead she seemed to sober up.

Realization hit Lexa hard and fast.

Clarke’s confusion followed moments later.

Ripa. Maunon. Taken.

Lincoln.

Instantly Lexa was dashing back towards Clarke and the unconscious forms of Octavia and the two Skaikru who’d been drugged. In her mind’s eye Clarke’s own panic began to grow even as a mental head shake came across the bond. Clarke hadn’t seen him either.

He was gone.

Barking orders Lexa got a head count. Combine the injured and dead to the living count. No one had seen more Maunon among the ripa beyond the ones who attacked Skaikru... granted ripa took captives back just like the Maunon did themselves. It didn’t look good. When the numbers came back they didn’t look good either.
Over a dozen missing including Lincoln and well over twice that dead or wounded.

Roughly a fifth of new her troops.

For the first time since their skin made contact the bond between them was silent. Or perhaps numb was a better word for it. While Lexa had been the one with the numbers and the math, Clarke had received the information just the same. And Clarke provided the reminder that they’d been taking Skaikru first, before the attack.

Internally Lexa nodded.

Standing silently next to Gustus, Lexa watched Clarke work to bandage a sliced arm. Only a few steps apart the new strength of the bond was still strong. When Lexa had stepped away with Anya it seemed to have faded slightly - or perhaps slowed was a better word for it. Mental jumps between them had taken a few more seconds than it did now.

It was this speed of understanding that lead to Lexa’s next actions.

Seeing as the troops had their orders for the moment Lexa picked up a roll of bandages and began to help Clarke. Whispers broke out among the troops waiting. Awe and surprise filled many expressions. Some even shifted guiltily as though ashamed they’d been wounded and needed to inconvenience Heda for treatment. Some seemed honored that Heda was taking the time to help them. Some were simply confused their leader was volunteering to do the job of a healer.

A select few glanced between Clarke and Lexa with looks of contemplation.

Lexa herself just felt tired.

It would be a long while before they were able to escort the Skaikru home. The mental debate with Clarke over said escort additionally taxed their pooled energy, even if both felt a stirring of fresh emotions from the debate. In the end it was agreed to escort them back rather than send a runner as neither trusted Bellamy not to shoot the runner - both supporting the others confirmation bias on his behavior.

Working side by side neither young woman noticed the looks passing between Gustus and Anya.
Respect

Chapter Summary

Staring into Clarke’s eyes Lexa does everything she can to express her determination - desperation really - to see Clarke safe, protected. Lexa’s own fear at losing Clarke bled through to taint everything else sent over the bond. Clarke stares right back expressing her quiet acceptance and reassurance.

“Yeah, that. The whole getting lost in each other's eyes needs to stop if you have any hope of hiding your bond.”

Chapter Notes

Hey all. So happier with this chapter than I was last night. Have an outline for the next chapter written now as well but not the actual chapter. Appreciate the Clexa interaction while y’all have it. I might need to at the tag 'slow build’ at this point. ^_^

Feedback is welcome and encourages me to write faster.
@standinshadowedsilence

Chapter 14: Respect

Clarke went through the motions of bandaging and healing on autopilot. Her mind was still focused on everything she was picking up from her bond due to Lexa being right next to her.

Lexa.

No one had said the name, but suddenly she went from thinking in terms of Heda to using the other woman’s name. Just as Lexa had suddenly known how to handle different things with Clarke’s people, Clarke suddenly knew how to interact with the gonakru around her.

That was another thing.

Gonakru.

Words were popping into Clarke’s head as she thought. It wasn’t the same as someone explaining the word - for many of them she still didn’t know their actual translation. Rather, on some intrinsic level she knew when to use the word and what it referred to even if she didn’t know how to explain it in English. The information was just there when she needed it.

Like the Trigedakru funeral rites that were being added to her knowledge right now.

Glancing at the quiet Lexa next to her Clarke could only assume that her soulmate was reviewing
the rights in preparation for when they were done with the wounded. Which would be soon.

Emotions rolled through Clarke over the loss of life, echoed moments later by Lexa.

Memories of her father's death rose to the surface as it always did when she thought of death.

Beside her Lexa twitched as she finished tying a bandage. Internally sorrow and protectiveness and determination swam into Clarke's mind from Lexa's. Realizing Clarke had sent the memory she sighed aloud.

The gona she was patching up shifted nervously.

Clarke attempted to give a reassuring smile, but her heart was not in it.

No, her heart was drawn deeper, to the emotions and experience that had shaped her years earlier.

Due to the loss of her other mate Clarke had thrown herself into her medical studies and leapt years ahead of where she would have reached otherwise. Now that pain and confusion and wondering and loneliness were coming back.

And with them the image that had been sent just before the bond was severed.

Abruptly Lexa stands from beside her.

The other woman was breathing just slightly harder than before. The gona she'd finished bandaging hurrying to leave. For a moment Lexa remained frozen as Clarke felt the leader's emotions rise up in response to her own. Then Lexa turned and rushed off - well, Clarke could tell she was trying not to look like she was rushing - the woman from the bridge - Anya, mentor, loyal - followed.

A soft grunt from behind reminded Clarke to focus on finishing with the last few wounded.

Gustus - guard - protector. He was close to Lexa based on the impressions that Clarke had gotten over the bond in the last half hour. While knowing who Lexa was close to was helping in getting to know her soulmate, it wasn't what mattered to Clarke in that moment. Rather, what had come across the bond in the moments Lexa had stood frozen were consuming her thoughts.

Pain, rage, heartbreak, self-loathing.

And a name.

Costia.

It wasn't until much later that Clarke had a chance to talk to her soulmate - Lexa - in semi-privacy. They were being escorted back to the drop ship by a portion of the gonakru. Lexa was continuing part of the way there before heading off. Some twenty odd Gonakru including Anya would stay with the Skaikru over the course of the next handful of days as both teachers and protectors.

Walking as they were with the gona spread out around them only a handful of people were close enough to hear a conversation.

Gustus and Anya along with Octavia and Wells. Two in the front and two in the back.

Although considering how strong the bond still was, a portion of their conversation likely wouldn't
even be aloud.

A sigh from beside her told Clarke Lexa had picked up on her intent.

The bond seemed to have stabilized in the last few hours they’d spent in each other’s immediate vicinity. What had started as a near rapid fire and overwhelming exchange now had a more controlled, more deliberate feel to it. No longer a raging river but a steady one.

It wasn’t ‘true’ communication. They didn’t use sentences and complete thoughts but rather images and impressions and emotions with the occasional focused word making it through. Back and forth the information flowed between them. Somehow remaining separate enough that it was more like having background music to occasionally tune into rather than the dance level music it had initially been.

A question mark bounced to the forefront of that information stream and Clarke realized she’d been remembering the last time she’d been at a dance. Just a few months before being sent to the Sky Box. Clarke’s emotions turned dark and Lexa’s mental presence seemed to backpedal in a mix of confusion and uncertainty.

Externally Lexa simply shifted in discomfort as they walked.

Clarke raised an eyebrow in humor at her mate's reaction and was pleased to see a slight color change at the tips of Lexa’s ears. The other woman’s gaze sharpened as she sent a look at Clarke for making her embarrassed. Clarke just shrugged slightly.

Behind them Octavia groaned.

“Would you to stop being so mushy already? Seriously, it’s disgusting to watch and extremely obvious you’re communicating to anyone who watches you interact.”

Both women blush at the words, Clarke more visibly than Lexa. They exchange another look - knowledge about Lincoln and Octavia’s relationship exchanging hands in an instant - before pausing in their walking to simultaneously turn and face the younger girl. The other four walking with them stop as well.

“Really O? Like you’re one to talk. ‘Lincoln said this’ and ‘Lincoln’s been teaching me that’. Just because we never saw you two together doesn’t mean you weren’t just as obvious about it.”

Beside the younger Blake Gustus cleared his throat.

“That may be, however, their bond is not one that comes with such high stakes.”

Instantly everyone but Octavia tenses. Faces pale or darken depending. Octavia looks around in confusion. As she opens her mouth to ask Clarke shakes her head.

“Later O.” A mental question and answer has Clarke facing forward again. “Let’s keep moving.”

Wells gives Clarke a sympathetic look. Lexa sends a mental shrug at Clarke’s question. Clarke sighs externally. At least that’s one less person to explain too. When Lexa doesn’t turn as well Clarke gently nudges her both mentally and physically. Lexa ignores her to continue evaluating Octavia.

“Okteivia kom Skaikru I have a request for you.”

Octavia’s eyes widen as she straightens her back in response. She nods for Lexa to continue.
“Will you act as a hidden guard to Klark kom Skaikru until such a time as you’re no longer needed in such capacity?”

The four around them react to various degrees of surprise. Shock, confusion, acknowledgement. Clarke can tell the only reaction Lexa cares about is her own. Lexa had been waiting for Clarke's response since the moment the idea solidified. The younger woman turns, gripping Lexa’s forearm in an unnecessary bid for her attention.

Confusion, disbelief, and outrage flare across the surface of their bond. Muffled underneath those are fainter emotions. Empathy, sadness, wonder, fear.

A word - Costia.

Staring into Clarke’s eyes Lexa does everything she can to express her determination - desperation really - to see Clarke safe, protected. Lexa’s own fear at losing Clarke bled through to taint everything else sent over the bond. Clarke stares right back expressing her quiet acceptance and reassurance.

“Yeah, that. The whole getting lost in each other's eyes needs to stop if you have any hope of hiding your bond.”

Once again Octavia’s voice snapped them out of their connection. Humor and annoyance flickered between them as they turned in sync to fix flat gazes upon her. At first Octavia shied away under their combined stare before straightening her shoulders and holding her ground.

“If I’m going to help guard Clarke that means also advising her of when she’s being too obvious about something you clearly want hidden.”

A pause. Lexa nods her head slightly to concede the point. It was true. Mentally sighing Lexa turned around and motioned for them to begin walking again. Clarke was much more reluctant. Her acceptance tampered by a mix of relief, annoyance and amusement. The amused glance Lexa sent her way confirming the older woman had picked up on Clarke's resignation for prolonged contact with Octavia sense of humor.

For the rest of the walk Octavia continued to call them out when they became too obvious about reacting to their bond.

By the time they reached the rest point just outside the drop ship claimed territory everyone was a mix of exasperated and amused.

“Anyia will handle assigning the Gonakru to different tasks so long as you three ensure the Skaikru will listen to whoever they’re partnered with.”

They’d stopped to rest and finalize plans before Lexa left. The three Skaikru were gathered with their backs to the trail leading toward the drop ship. Anyia stood nearby. The twenty Gonakru staying with them stood spread out a respectable distance further up the now darkening trail. Benji walked with the gona carrying the still unconscious Krissy and Julius. Gustus stood solid at Lexa’s shoulder.

“We will see to it Lexa. One way or another.”
Clarke watched as the Trikru exchanged a glance and a nod. She once again found herself wondering at how their friendship had solidified. The impressions she’d gotten from Lexa had been less than satisfying in explanation.

Family.

While helpful in knowing how to interact with Anya overall, it told Clarke nothing about the woman herself or how their dynamic worked. The best guess Clarke had was from the impression of pride, respect, and a fierce fondness for the older woman.

That and the word *Fos*.

Her brain immediately converted the new word into the image of a master craftsman and their apprentice, much like Clarke herself had been apprenticed under her mother and a younger doctor named Jackson. With what Clarke had learned about Trigedakru culture the image seemed to fit.

It also accounted for the familiarity. The familiar bond established between them.

Amusement trickled to her across the bond and Clarke realized she’d been silent for some time, lost in her thoughts.

"You will have to determine the answer on your own Klark."

A flush rose on her checks at the audible address, although she supposed it gave an excuse for the prolonged silence she’d unintentionally caused. The humor increased along with a ripple of pleasure. Clarke blushed harder thinking about what that could mean.

Dang the bond being so strong.

Clearing her throat Clarke nodded.

"Very well. If that's all we best get back to the drop ship before anything else happens." It was a weak line and everyone knew it, but they humored her and bid their goodbyes.

Lexa and her exchange one last long stare before Clarke turned and began leading the way up the trail. She could feel Lexa's eyes on her back until they round the bend into a valley.

The bond pulsed strong between them.

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Surprisingly most of the 100 accepted the Trikru with little fuss. Sure there was dissent over their presence on principle. An explanation of the attack and a re-explanation upon the waking of Julius and Krissy - who knew of nothing since the attack to verify the story - later had the dissenters keeping quiet for the evening.

It helped that the Trikru immediately set about lighting large fires and doling out fresh food to the nearly always hungry teenagers.

The next morning Clarke was woken by the sounds of the first fight between their people. Thankfully it was easily settled by partnering the protesting Skaikru with a same gendered and sympathetic Trikru. Clarke hadn't even considered including previous trauma to avoid triggering on the list she'd requested from Miller.
She had thought her own trauma bad enough although it certainly wasn't enough to cause flashbacks.

Realizing her mistake Clarke had requested one of the more reliable volunteer helpers to spread the word that if anyone had any situations they wished to avoid, PTSD or fears or anything, they needed to come tell her so she could help ensure it wouldn't be an issue when partnering them with Trikru.

The rest of that first day and the second continued in a similar vein.

Situations and conflicts between people occurring - sometimes between cultures, sometimes between her own people - and Clarke being called to sort it out. Clarke was finding it exhausting work.

It was moments like these she thanked Lexa mentally for teaching Wells as much as she did about the grounders culture. Without his knowledge to explain where the cultural difference came from Clarke was certain she would have only made some of the disagreements worse. Ark laws certainly weren't the best example to follow when it came to more than one group interacting after all.

Clarke also came to rely heavily on Charlotte to handle the minor injuries that came into the makeshift infirmary that was the drop ship.

By handling the disputes within visible distance of the door Charlotte was able to call for Clarke's help if any injuries came in that she didn't have the experience to handle yet - like stitches when Octavia accidentally sliced an arm open sparring with a member of the militia. The grounders didn't care things like practice blades. They were either sharp or wooden, and even sticks could do some damage.

It was during one such occasion that Clarke first noticed the odd behavior of her best friend and her seken - as the Trikru called an apprentice.

Wells was behaving like a scolded child, pouting in the corner while Charlotte pointedly ignored his presence while attempting to stop the bleeding on a rather nasty set of claw marks one of the gonakru had acquired against a panther. Said panther currently being prepped for that night's dinner.

With a sigh Clarke sent Wells a pointed look. When he still didn't move she raised an eyebrow and jerked her head in the direction of the door she'd just entered. Clearly reluctant to do so, Wells left, taking one last glance at Charlotte before disappearing out the door. Charlotte seemed to relax several degrees as soon as his footsteps ceased to echo off the metal ramp.

Clarke washed her hands and prepped the needle and thread while she waited for Charlotte to speak. After the younger girl gave no indication so wishing to do so Clarke moved over to the gona and began to work.

"Wells has been my best friend since the day we met as newborns. Granted we didn't get much choice with our parents constantly leaving us together, but we really are close. He's like a brother to me. That's why when I thought he was responsible for my father's death I was consumed with fury and hatred. How could this person who meant so much to me hurt me like this?"

Clarke paused to surreptitiously glance at Charlotte. Seeing she had the other girls interest she continued.

"But then I realized, even if Wells had told his father - which he hadn't - it was Chancellor Jaha's
decision to kill my dad instead of talk him down. He was my dad's best friend. My dad had made
plans sure, but he hadn't done anything yet. Chancellor Jaha decided to kill him on the chance that
he might tell everyone we were running out of oxygen. It was Chancellor Jaha's choice, no one
else's."

Clarke let out a bitter laugh as she paused between stitches.

"Blaming Wells wasn't even the worst part. You know what the worst part was? Thinking he was
dead the night Heda took him with her. I'd only just apologized to him and gotten my best friend -
my brother - back. Then he was gone. If L- if my soulmate hadn't reassured me they were with him
and he was fine I might well have tried storming TonDC to look for him. It had felt like I was
losing him all over again for completely different reasons."

As she spoke Clarke failed to notice how the gona she was stitching tensed beneath her as she
finished up the stitches.

Instead she was focused entirely on watching Charlotte out of the corner of her eye. She noted how
the girl shifted in discomfort throughout. How mentions of Chancellor Jaha made her scowl in
anger - no surprise considering her parents were both floated. How at the mention of Wells being
taken a look of pain and regret and something else flashed across her face.

Tying off the last stitch Clarke turned to face Charlotte fully.

"I don't know what my brother did, but I suggest you at least talk to him before he decides the best
course of action is to follow you around. He did decide to follow me all the way to the ground after
all. Who knows what he'll do till he earns forgiveness for whatever he did to upset you."

Turning back to the gona Clarke begins to wrap the bandage over the fresh stitches.

This was a job she'd normally allow Charlotte to do for the experience, but as the girl looked on the
verge of tears Clarke figured it best if she allowed the younger girl to collect herself.

"He- I-." Charlotte tripped over her words for a few moments before shaking her head and rushing
out of the drop ship.

Shaking her head at the reaction Clarke finished tying the bandage.

"You're all done. Be careful not to do anything too strenuous with that arm for at least a week and
if you tear the stitches come right back her to get them redone. I don't care what time it is."

Medical orders given Clarke set about cleaning up all of the used tools to be washed before the
next person came in. She'd gotten thoroughly involved in scrubbing the dried blood of a pair of
makeshift scissors that she almost jumped at the voice of the gona from behind her.

"Mochuf, Haifisa."

Jumping Clarke spun, flinging soap suds everywhere but the gona had already slipped out the door.
Clarke could only gape after the rustling flap covering the opening.

What the heck did Haifisa mean?

Was it just a title as her instinctive knowledge translated it too?

Was she the Lead Healer?
Her confusion must have been very strong because she felt a nudge of concern and uncertainty from Lexa asking in their weird bond way if she was okay.

Moments later however a shout reached her ears that turned her confusion into amusement. Pushing thoughts about words she didn't fully understand from cultures she was only just learning about aside Clarke dried off her hands and went to meet the messenger.

Even now she could still hear Sevek's call.

"Message for Klark kom Skaikru! Message from Heda for Klark kom Skaikru!"
"Who would the Skaikru blame if they found their members missing? They had yet to experience a Maunon attack. For that matter, from the reports it didn't even turn into an attack until the first Maunon was felled. Just a kidnapping. A kidnapping that we would have been blamed for. Why?"

Shifting weight and quickly exchanged glances were the answer. Why indeed. What would the Maunon gain by pinning the blame of kidnapped Skaikru on the Trikru? Lexa blinked. Or perhaps the question was what would the Trikru loose.

Hey all, looking for feedback on length of chapters and where they break. In my outline this chapter has two more scenes - the ending bit being a full scene and not the teaser I currently have. Yet when I wrote it I really liked ending it here for the point of view change.

Please let me know your thoughts. All feedback welcome.
@standinshadowedsilence

Lexa traced the strength of their bond the entire way back to TonDC. As the distance grew their bond remained strong. By the time Lexa had reached TonDC the bond felt as though Clarke was just on the other side of the city rather than many hours ride. At least, that's comparing it to the previous strength and corresponding distances from just a few days ago.

Now a large distance apart, the intricacies of their bond had faded some.

No longer were they able to feel minute shifts in emotions and sense emotions that Lexa had no words with which to express. Yet the bond was strong enough she could still communicate with Clarke via emotions and impressions much as they'd been doing on the walk back to Skaikru's camp from the bridge.

It was an interesting development to say the least.

Although Lexa was not looking forward to having to manage her emotions during future meetings.

A growl slipped free before Lexa could rein it in. While her hands had steadily clenched under the table, no one could see those. The growl however, was quite obvious.

The bickering village leaders and generals froze.
Taking a deep breath, Lexa briefly closed her eyes before fixing them on Quint and the general he was currently bickering with. The various village leaders sat on one side of the table while the generals sat on another. Lexa herself sat at the head and was thus able to include many in her scathing glare.

"If you would stop with your pointless accusations maybe we can come up with a useful course of action. Or need I remind you that your rank is not a permanent one?"

There was slight shifting at her words. None dared to speak.

"Good. Now let us get back on topic. The Maunon were in the process of kidnapping the Skaikru during the exchange at the bridge before the attack was discovered. This tells us a number of things. The Skaikru are not with the Maunon. The Maunon see value in taking the Skaikru - either for more ripa or something else we do not know. And finally, that they knew in advance the meeting was going to happen." Lexa paused and fixed each person there under her stare.

"Now, can someone tell me how they would know about the exchange and what they would gain by kidnapping the Skaikru during it?"

Silence greeted her question. Some exchanged looks of uncertainty. Some still looked rather frustrated, as though they simply wanted to go hit something rather than think through potential reasons. A handful returned her stare with hints of contemplation under their controlled expressions.

"A trick." The voice was soft, from the end of the table. One of the newer leaders, from a village furthest from the Maun-de.

Seeing they had everyone’s attention the young leader continued.

"Who would the Skaikru blame if they found their members missing? They had yet to experience a Maunon attack. For that matter, from the reports it didn’t even turn into an attack until the first Maunon was felled. Just a kidnapping. A kidnapping that we would have been blamed for. Why?"

Shifting weight and quickly exchanged glances were the answer. Why indeed. What would the Maunon gain by pinning the blame of kidnapped Skaikru on the Trikru? Lexa blinked. Or perhaps the question was what would the Trikru loose.

"To prevent our cooperation. If the kidnapping was blamed on us, then the Skaikru would not make peace. Afterwards they would be slaughtered by us in retaliation and the conflict with the Maunon would remain unchanged. If we make peace with the Skaikru - with ones who understand Maun-de tech - then the status quo will have changed...."

Nods were seen around the table as more put together the idea being presented.

"That still doesn't explain how the Maunon knew of the exchange."

'Tech."

It was Indra who spoke this time. Indra, who had been told about how the wristbands the Skaikru goufa had worn sent information back to their parents in space. Indra whose village was the closest to the Skaikru camp and received the most reports about them out of all the leaders and generals there.

"They must have some sort of tech to watch us, to somehow know what we are doing. Tech that Skaikru know how to use as well."
Silence stretched over them as everyone reflected on the implications of that statement.

To have an information source on an enemy that said enemy did not know of was an extremely valuable thing. To have an unknown third party come in with the ability to reveal that source... it would be a threat swiftly dealt with.

Internally Lexa suppressed her relief as more and more to the Trigedakru generals and village leaders came to the agreement that the Skaikru goufa needed to survive if only to have their knowledge to use against the mountain.

Summoning a runner to send to the Skaikru camp Lexa can only hope they know enough about tech to keep her people from changing their minds.

Clarke arrived two days later with a group of five Skaikru.

Lexa is confused by the numbers and choice in members. Clarke shoots her a look but holds her tongue as the guards escorting the group are dismissed. Lexa expresses her thanks through their bond. Clarke shifts her weight back and forth in response. Lexa remains seated in her throne, toying with her dagger as she surveys the Skai goufa with her mate.

The pair from the river are easily recognizable to Lexa. A twinge of regret courses through her as her eyes focus on the thick scabbing on the one boys arm. His mate stands close to him. The other three are strangers to Lexa.

The wave of reassurance sent to her from Clarke startles Lexa slightly and she breaks her gaze from the healing wound to find Clarke's expression soft with something Lexa refused to name. Clearing her throat Lexa focuses on the task at hand.

"Greetings Klark kom Skaikru. I am pleased by your quick response to my message."

"Greetings Heda. We are pleased to be able to offer our aid against the Mountain."

While not the type of formal address Lexa was expecting, she was none the less please by it and her ripple of emotions sent to Clarke caused a faint flush to appear on the blonde's neck and ears. Amusement and interest followed as Clarke narrowed her eyes slightly and sent a wave of annoyance and a sharp reprimand that rang in Lexa's head like of the word 'focus' even as her embarrassment flowed in undercurrents.

This time Clarke was the one clearing her throat.

"With me are Monty Green, Jasper Jordan, Lee Tang, Teri Kennedy, and Liz Octane. They are the most technically skilled among the Skaikru at this moment."

Each Skaikru nodded as they were introduced, although Liz also gave a slight wave. Monty and Jasper glanced between Lexa and Clarke before nodding at each other. Lexa eyed them for a moment before returning their nods.

"Indra will lead you to where the equipment we took from the Maunon is being kept. As none her like the Maunon or anything to do with them, two of my personal guard are there. Should you need anything ask one of them. Indra will lead you."

With a glance to the back of the tent Indra stepped forward and gestured for the Skaikru to follow her. A brief exchange of impressions with Clarke had her mate hanging back as the others left. Lexa caught the looks Monty and Jaspers sent over their shoulders once they realized Clarke was
staying. At her raised eyebrow the two hurried to catch up with the rest of the group, the remaining
two guards following them out.

The tent flap closed behind them and Lexa took a deep breath.

It was the first time her and Clarke had been truly alone in each other’s presence.

Based on what the bond was resonating Lexa was reassured she wasn't the only one feeling
nervous.

It was then that Lexa realized for all they could feel each other's emotions, they really knew almost
nothing about each other.

Lexa fidgets some more with her knife, tossing it into the air and catching it without looking. She
hears Clarke's breath catch the first time she does this and can't help the slight twitch at the corner
of her lips. As she continues to toss the knife her amusement grows with the widening of Clarke's
eyes until the blond is almost gaping at Lexa as the knife is thrown higher and higher. The corners
of Lexa's mouth are fully upturned when she decides to catch the knife and sheath it.

Clarke's eyes trace the movements before shifting to Lexa's.

Most of the earlier nervousness is gone, replaced by a mix of awe and comfort and amusement and
relief flowing freely between them.

Suddenly Clarke starts, snaping her jaw shut and straightening her posture. She sticks her hand out
towards Lexa.

"Clarke Griffin. Nice to formally meet you."

Lexa feels her amusement settle after a brief moment of uncertainty. Raising her eyebrow at
Clarke's outstretched hand she sends her confusion. An impression of shaking is sent back
immediately as Clarke's lips turn up into a smile and her own amusement mingles with Lexa's.

"Lexa kom Trigedakru. Heda kom Polis." Stepping forward from her thrown Lexa takes Clarke's
hand and shakes it up and down once. A full smile stretches across Clarke's face at the contact.
When Lexa released the hand and stepped back, both women felt a flicker of longing for more
contact.

They stood there awkwardly for a moment.

"So… what now?"

Lexa hesitated before answering, "Now we learn as much as we can about each other's cultures
before you leave so as not to draw attention to our bond."

Lexa expected the disappointment, but it still hurt when she felt it across the bond.

"There are things you do not know yet about my people. Our culture is a violent one from
necessity. We cannot afford to be seen as weak or others may try to take our power. Often our
soulmates are targeted due to being seen as our weakness."

A pause as conflict occurred in Clarke and then-

"Is that what happened to Costia?"

Lexa really should have seen the question coming. But she hadn't, and it hit her like a bolt of
lightning striking a tree.

Heart-ache and sadness and longing and self-loathing raced through her, emphasized by the fact that this was Clarke asking. Her second mate. Outwardly the only change was the tensing of Lexa's posture and blanking of her expression. Internally she waged against the surge of emotions threatening to drown her.

She was the Protector. And she had failed. Here was her second mate asking about that failure.

Lexa wasn't ready.

Arms wrapped around her and Lexa flinched, hands immediately jerking for weapons before she registered the head of blond hair now in her face. Seconds later a sense of peace and comfort and reassurance raced through her as Clarke secured Lexa inside her hug. The blond's emotions acting as a way-point to Lexa's turbulent ones.

For a while they stayed like that. Lexa frozen inside Clarke's arms. After some time Lexa calmed and returned the hug. The sigh as Clarke relaxed into her hug sent shivers through Lexa. She hadn't felt this way since Costia had last held her, and this was only the first hug between the two of them.

Once again Lexa wondered at the strength of their bond.

Clarke simply sent a mental shrug her way.

Then Clarke was talking, asking mundane questions about the tent, the village, the clan and Lexa galdly answered everyone one from inside the warmth of her mate's embrace. They would remain that way until Gustus's gruff "Heda" would call their attention hours later.

Neither addressed Lexa's near breakdown. Both fearing to damage the calm that had settled between them by bringing up painful memories.

Looking back they'll wonder if having that conversation would have changed things.

Two days later Skaikru left to return to their camp.

That afternoon Lexa feels Clarke's relief at being back among her people.

Shortly after that terror lances through her as her vision doubles before she's seeing through Clarke's eyes.

Seeing up form the ground where Clarke had fallen as a Maunon emerges from the fog surrounding Clarke just before Clarke falls unconscious and Lexa's concentration is broken.
Chapter Summary

Clarke's return to wakefulness was marked by an awareness of emotions not her own.

Dread. Agitation. Distress.

Resignation.

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: The story referenced in this chapter is "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas" by Ursula K. Le Guin. To read the work either search for it in your browser or follow the link here.

Serious question, should I kill off Finn or leave him around for potential plot points later?

Chapter 16: Consternation

Clarke's return to wakefulness was marked by an awareness of emotions not her own.

Dread. Agitation. Distress.

Resignation.

Sorting through her own racing heart beat on top of Lexa's emotions took several minutes and deep breaths. Thankfully after the first minute or so of Clarke sending her own emotions back across the bond Lexa seemed to muffle the strength of what she was projecting. It certainly made it easier for Clarke to take stock of the situation without Lexa's misery tainting her decision-making.

It was after Clarke had successfully separated their feelings that the familiarity of Lexa's emotional combination hit her.

Resignation mixed with helplessness - a belief that there was nothing Lexa could do to retrieve Clarke. Which meant the dread and agitation were techniques to try and brace herself for whatever Lexa feared they would do to Clarke. The distress and misery were greater than Clarke expected, but combined with everything else caused trepidation to grow in Clarke's chest.

Her breathing grew rapid as she struggled to fight off a panic attack.

Focusing on the bond she did her best to convey her question to Lexa through the bond.
Moments later a negative was felt rippling back to her followed by the image of a hand print with a spiral inside on a piece of cloth. The symbol looked to have been done in blood. The mental image felt jagged and sharp, as though even thinking it still caused Lexa pain.

It probably did.

Clarke worked to order her swirling thoughts as her panic faded and her heart rate calmed. If the people who currently held her - Maunon - were not responsible for Costia's death, why was Lexa acting like she didn't expect to see Clarke again?

Something of her thoughts must have made it to Lexa for new impressions flashed against the edge of Clarke's mind, many too rapid and garbled for Clarke to understand.

She got the gist of it though.

Snippets of reports - death tolls - and blurred impressions of combat against those who were called ripa at the bridge. The sting of old failure and regret. There were no survivors is what the reports showed her. Those who lived physically were lost mentally is what the ripa taught her. This was not a new problem is what the emotions told her.

When the door to her cell opened - and as much as it didn't look like her cell in solitary confinement Clarke saw it as nothing other than a cell - Clarke had a rough game plan.

Find her people, find out what she can about the ripa and Lexa's people, then get the hell out alive.

Her plan would be a lot easier if she could see straight, however.

Clarke attempted to bring the man in front of her into focus. It was only then that she realized a crucial factor she'd missed before. Prior to this moment Clarke's focus had been internal, completely ignoring anything beyond her own thoughts and the bond. Now that she was attempting to do more than breathe she noticed the problem.

She was drugged, and there were cuffs on her wrists and ankles - even if they weren't currently connected to anything.

Struggling to keep her eyes opened and locked on to the man in front of her Clarke almost failed to notice the shift in her bond. How what she felt from it suddenly shifted. A warmth and comfort settled over her, faint but there. As though someone was standing right behind her. Or laying beneath her, since Clarke was lying on her back.

Others followed the first man in.

They were talking, and Clarke struggled to follow their conversation. Something about decontamination and missing some and stable conditions. When she tried to ask what was going on the chattering pair immediately shifted focus to her. The first man who'd walked in moved out of her blurry line of sight.

The chattering immediately picked up. Continuing as though Clarke hadn't spoken, the subject
changed to her specifically - her being awake - with mentions of 'others' who might be her fellow delinquents. Clarke was having trouble following as she felt herself fading in and out.

Then the words soulbond and drug and suppressant were used in the same sentence and suddenly Clarke was trying to struggle, although her limbs felt leaden and sluggish.

A sharp pain in her arm had her tenuous grip on the waking world slipping.

The last thing she felt was shock and horror ripping through her soulbond before it was suddenly cut off.

The first words spoken by the quiet man were lost to a haze of darkness.

Clarke’s next return to wakefulness was less eventful. In fact, it was less everything.

Though slightly groggy, Clarke found she was able to sit up. The white barren room looked only moderately better than the cell she was in on the Ark. something about it felt off to her, like she’d woken up somewhere before this.

Disorientation led the way for distress and agitation.

It was then that the silence hit her. The emptiness. There was no reply to her rising emotions, and that only made them rise higher.

Taking a deep breath Clarke tried to focus. Concentrating internally she searched those familiar places in the echoes of her mind and found traces of what she sought.

The bond was still there.

Just - cut off. Muffled. As though having to pass through a closed door to get to her.

Blurry memories of being tied down, of being drugged, returned to Clarke in a rush. Reacting to the memory Clarke grabbed at the phantom pain on her arm. Glancing at it she found what she was looking for.

The mark of a needle prick.

Her door opened and a man walked in. Clarke saw the movement of two guards just outside the door. Glancing him over she felt he looked familiar, but her memories from earlier were hazy and none of the faces were clear.

“What did you do to my soulbond?”

In hindsight she probably should have waited for the person clearly holding her captive to speak first, but the lack of emotions from Lexa was honestly throwing her off balance. She hadn’t realized how much strength she drew from the presence of the bond in the back of her mind. How much strength she drew from the reassurance she wasn’t alone.

“We freed you from it. Now you can decide for yourself who you want to be with. No longer are you bound by some unknown force to join another. You get to choose.”
Clarke scowled. His words sounded rehearsed, well-practiced. Clarke opened her mouth to snark about wanting her soulmate but thought better of it. Finn’s face and words flashed across her mind. Startling slightly Clarke realized she hadn’t seen him since the bunker.

The man thankfully seemed unperturbed by her reaction.

“Now then, I’m sure you’ll want to see your friends Miss Griffin. Let me assure you everyone is quite fine now that we’ve gotten you all through decontamination. You’ll be able to see them after answering a few questions I have.”

Uncertainty coiled in Clarke’s gut. Especially when the man’s opening question was about the Grounders and his follow up about the Ark. She didn’t even know his name yet.

Clarke sent a mental surge of warmth to Lexa in hopes she at least was doing better off than Clarke. When no response came Clarke remembered the drug currently suppressing her bond and realized her message probably hadn’t gotten through.

Dread joined the uncertainty.

After what felt like hours of lying through her teeth, dodging straight answers or flat out saying she didn’t know and staying quiet, Clarke’s interrogator left.

She had managed to get a name from him.

Dante Wallace, president of Mount Weather. Authorizer of the ripa program, although apparently it was Cage’s - his son’s - idea. Condoner of using the ‘savages’ outside the mountain for survival. The residents of Mount Weather were unable to leave the mountain due to a reaction with radiation or something else their bodies couldn’t process.

Worse - depending on your point of view - was that Clarke realized to get half the information they had on the delinquents and Trikru meant they had a way to spy on them. Whether by camera or venturing out in the suits Clarke had first seen the kidnappers in didn’t matter. What mattered was they had significantly more information on Clarke and Lexa’s people than Clarke and Lexa had on them.

Clarke mulled over what could be done about that as she was lead towards the dining hall where the other captured delinquents were supposed to be. Oh right, where the other ‘rescued’ delinquents were.

Internally Clarke sneered. Externally she fought to keep her face neutral. She knew from interacting with the Trikru that Arkers were very expressive and that those same expressions often betrayed what they were thinking.

Clarke couldn’t afford to give away her discontent now.

Entering the dining hall Clarke breathed a sigh of relief at seeing her fellows. Doing a quick head count she found there were 47 of them there - including herself. Spotting Jasper and Monty was a mix of relief and concern. A number of other familiar faces jumped out at her - Mike, Teri, and Finn to name a few. She would have to talk to Finn sometime soon.
Quickly she went to them. Several rose to greet her with hugs and relieved smiles. Clarke returned each embrace with relief even as she tried to ignore the way the guards who had escorted her remained in the doorway watching.

Quietly she whispered to them her words of hope. They would find a way out, a way back to the people who mattered.

Some exchanged looks of uncertainty. Some looks of doubt and glances at the guards. The taunt expression on Mike’s young face told Clarke just how he was feeling about their current situation. Clarke could only hope Sevek hadn’t been at the drop ship when they were taken.

The reminder of what happened to the captured Trikru send a shiver down her spine. Anya had been with her during the attack. Anya who was family to her soulmate. Determination filled Clarke as she looked over her people and consciously included the captured grounders that must be somewhere in the mountain as well.

A guard cleared their throat and Clarke began extracting herself from among her friends.

Walking back to the guards she acknowledged them with a nod. Neither returned it, instead they simply fell into step one in front and one behind as they escorted her back to her room.

She wondered what the others were making of it.

If they realized the significance of Clarke being kept separate from the rest of them. Of Clarke being escorted under guard. Of guards being used at all.

She doubted it, but she didn’t dare look back to find out.

The next time Clarke saw the delinquents was meal time. Lunch time if Clarke had to guess by the steady stream of Mountain Weather residents heading in and out from one side of the dining hall, all of them clearly leaving the other part for the new comers.

Numerous people looked up from both sides of the room when Clarke was escorted in. Several delinquents flicked their eyes between Clarke and the guards escorting her. The guards went with her through the food line, one in front one behind.

Once they had their food Clarke looked at them for permission to join her friend’s. One nodded. The other just jerked their head in the delinquents’ direction before turning to look for their own seat.

Clarke found a seat had been left for her between Tori and a girl from Bellamy’s guard named Zoe Monroe. Monty, Jasper and a boy Clarke didn’t know sat across from them. Everyone ate quietly for several minutes before Monty found the courage to ask his question.

"Why do you distrust them?"

Clarke tried not to think of her stifled bond. Of the faint impressions barely making it through the drugs in her system. Of the way Lexa had seemed ready to accept that Clarke would be dead soon or later during the time she’d woken briefly before the drug had placed a choke hold on their
Instead she thought of the Ark.

"Tell me Monty, do you remember that year in Lit, where all we read were short stories?"

At a tentative head nod Clarke continued.

"There's this one that really stuck with me. The story talks of this vivid, happy festival going on in a city. There's no crime, no sickness, no reason for someone to be floated. The people of the city celebrate living there. When asked, the people proclaim they will always be happy so long as one thing remains true.

"If this one thing remains the same, so too will their happiness. When children become young adults, they are let in on this secret condition. They are led to a door that remains always locked. Once there they are shown what is kept inside. A child. A child that is beaten, starved, and scorned. A child that knows nothing outside of the misery of that room. The newly acknowledged adults are then given a choice, stay in the city and be content while condoning the treatment of the child, or leave."

As Clarke talked more and more of the delinquents sitting around them paused to listen. At first it was just those sitting on either side, but as she recounted the story more paused to listen - those sitting at further tables turning slightly to see and hear better. Clarke noticed this out of her peripherals. When she finished she made sure to look around and include them all in her final question.

"Tell me, where is our locked door?"

Silence was the only answer for the rest of the meal.
Adrift

Chapter Summary

She tried not to think about how Costia's death may be the cause of their unusually strong bond.

She tried not to think about how she may shortly feel her bond with Clarke break.

Lexa didn't think she'd survive it this time.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Chapter 17: Adrift

It took longer than Lexa would like to admit for her emotions to balance out after the shock of Clarke being taken wore off.

Lexa knows without Gustus she would have taken much longer to return to her senses.

As it is most of her personal guard are liable to know of her bond to Clarke now. When the reports finally reached her it took all of Lexa's strength not to react beyond the flinch at Anya's name. Nearly fifty Skaikru goufa were in Maun-de hands. The scouts followed the trail as far as they could before ripa attacked them well into Maun-de territory.

The tracks were of a make none had seen. Deep treads, deeper than a horse’s mark, and as wide as one’s fore arm. The marks were evenly spaced the exact same distance apart, although there appeared to be two sets of them interwoven. Some sort of tech surely, as all foot prints and drag marks end where these tracks begin.

The remaining 40 odd Skaikru had been absent from the camp during the attack.

Most were out with her gona learning to hunt, scavenge, and trap. A small group had been a way away training with weapons - primarily blades as well as archery. Some had simply not been in camp.

Lexa is torn over how to feel about those left.

Either way, Gustus succeeded in keeping her focused on making sure the remaining Skaikru were cared for. Gonakru were dispensed to search the area in case of any ripa left behind or Skaikru who were missed. After that the hard part of splitting up the Skaikru between the three closest villages such that the strain of looking after them would be well dispersed. That process included a massive to the village leaders and gonakru who had been with the Skaikru to help integrate the groups.

By the time the report of which Skaikru were still with them came in Lexa was doing a decent job of hiding her worry from the few who knew who her mate was.

Clarke had been unconscious for nearly five hours by that point.
So it came as a with mixed relief when Lexa finally felt Clarke stirring in the back of her mind.

Of course, that brought reality of where Clarke was crashing back to the forefront of Lexa's mind. Which lead to a mix of dread, desperation, and hopelessness. No one escaped Maun-de. No one came out alive unless they were ripa, and many didn't count that as a state of living. That no one now included her second soulmate.

Lexa had failed as the Protector.

It was these impressions and emotions which transmitted to Clarke. It was these that caused Clarke's own anxiety and confusion to spike through the limits of their bond. Then it shifted into suspicion, curiosity, worry, anger.

Taking a deep breath Lexa shifted so she sat cross-legged on her cot and focused.

Immediately she dove into their bond. She did not wish to watch what she was certain would be her mates end, but if it meant that she might avenge Clarke by gaining information to take down Maun-de, it would be worth the discomfort.

Flashes came through.

It was as though she were walking night patrol through the woods, catching glimpses of the campfires and chatter as she circled, never crossing into the light yet able to see it all the same.

Faces swim in and out of focus. It takes Lexa multiple blinks to realize the blurriness is due to Clarke's vision and not the bond. Thankfully the imagery sharpens and the audio no longer sounds as if from underwater.

Although once they hear clearly both were certain they wished they hadn't.

They sever bonds intentionally?!

Clarke's panicked thought echoed fully formed inside Lexa's mind even as she felt Clarke begin to fall unconscious again, a phantom prick in her arm suggesting the cause unnatural.

Straining as much as she could both against Clarke's fading consciousness and the weakening bond Lexa fought to maintain the connection.

It was a lost cause.

Just as the connection snapped a handful of words tumbled through to leave a chill deep inside of her.

"-give it to all of them."

Lexa hadn't realized how used she'd become to having Clarke's emotions in her head until she was having to spend hours without them.

It was silly considering she'd had Costia close to her for a number of years. Yet even then Lexa hadn't seemed to realize - to rely on - the amount of emotions flowing between them. Lexa can only blame it on how strong the bond with Clarke is - was? Does it matter? How expressive Clarke was in her emotions.

She tried not to think about how Costia's death may be the cause of their unusually strong bond.
She tried not to think about how she may shortly feel her bond with Clarke break.

Lexa didn't think she'd survive it this time.

Love is her weakness.

“Where were you Wells? Why weren’t you with her?!”

So maybe agreeing to see Wells only hours after the bond first felt like it was being thrust underwater was a bad idea. Even as she'd been just waking from unconsciousness Clarke's emotions had been stronger than this. Now the bond felt as weak as when Clarke had first come down, drawn thin and muffled.

It meant Lexa was testy and accusatory.

"You were supposed to help protect her!"

“Lexa calm down! Think! I’d have been taken too!”

That made Lexa real backwards as logic began to overcome the emotional storm dominating her thought process. She’s been pacing inside her tent, the gona outside had explicit orders to send in Wells once he reached TonDC. Now that he was here the rapport they’d build began to settle her some. His presence served as a reminder that although Clarke and Anya were gone, she was not yet alone.

She still couldn’t feel anything more than fog from Clarke.

“You are correct. I’m sorry Wells.” His eyes spoke of emotions she didn’t want to acknowledge.

“We’ll get her back Lexa.” A sigh.

“No one has ever escaped the mountain.” He smirked.

“Well, the mountain hasn’t met Clarke.” Lexa shot him an incredulous look.

His joke wasn’t appreciated at this time.

“Wells, where were you?” Her voice was softer, her anger having run its course for now. Now she simply felt drained. Numb.

Wells shifted. His hands fidgeted at his sides, moving from smoothing over his pants to fists. Eventually he came to a decision.

“I’ll be right back.”

Confusion swam through Lexa’s thoughts. It was a nice distraction though. What was Wells nervous about? What would make him nervous to show Lexa? For that matter, what did he have to show her?

As quickly as he’d left Wells returned. This time a young girl followed him. She was about Tris’s age - the reminder of the young seconds death caused an ache on behalf of Anya - but appeared significantly less scared. Less touched by the violence of the ground. She was quite small if she was indeed the 13 she appeared, yet her expression spoke of how serious she was taking this.
Lexa turned her focus to Wells and awaited his explanation. He fidgeted again before taking a deep breath.

“Lexa, this is Charlotte Waldheim. Charlotte, this is Heda Leksa kom Trigedakru.”

Understanding came swiftly. Lexa blinked in her surprise, gaze returning to the girl beside her friend. It was clear she was uncomfortable before Lexa - or maybe there was more to it than that. Focusing on their body language Lexa noted the slight distance between them, the stiffness in Charlotte’s posture, the uncertainty in Wells’.

There was an underlying tension between them.

“Greetings Sharlet kom Skaikru.”

“Hello.”

An awkward pause settled over the group. Charlotte was clearly still uncomfortable. Wells seemed uncertain of the next course of action. Lexa was simply trying not to think about Clarke.

Eventually Wells spoke up.

“Clarke was teaching her how to help out with the wounded.”

Interesting.

Relieved at something else to focus on, Lexa once again shifted her attention. Looking the girl over once more she nodded. This was something she could work with.

“Did you enjoy helping as a fisa Charlotte? We call our healers fisa. If Clarke was teaching you, then you must have some potential in the field.”

“Or she just wanted to keep an eye on me.” The response was bitter and immediate. It almost made Lexa smile.

“Perhaps. If you would like I can see that you are allowed to learn from one of our fisa, either here at Tondici or with the Skaikru in another village?”

Lexa phrased it as a question, recognizing Charlotte's desire for independence and control.

“You’re Clarke’s soulmate, aren’t you?” Lexa and Wells both startled, although Lexa hid it better.

“She talked about you, that’s how I know. And when Wells was missing you told her he was okay. She told me about you reassuring her, after. I’ve been trying to figure out who it could be but now it makes sense. You are friends with Wells - and only Clarke’s soulmate would know about their friendship and know to reassure her.”

If Lexa had been anyone else her jaw would have been on the ground. As it was her eyes were wider than normal. It suddenly made since how this young girl could be Wells soulmate. Lexa fought down her longing for Clarke as she thought of how proud Clarke would be at her seken figuring them out.

"You understand why we hide it? How she is a target by being my mate?"

Charlotte scoffed at her.

"She's in danger by being who she is. I know the gang wanted to kill her the first day here. No one
pays a little kid any mind. Now that she's a leader she'll always be in danger. That's how it works. This attack by the Mountain guys only proves it."

This time Lexa couldn't keep the surprise from showing on her face.

This girl had just summed up all of Lexa's baseline fears and anxiety about Clarke being known as her mate. Ignoring everything to do with beliefs and prophecies, at the end of the day Lexa just wanted Clarke safe. After Costia, Lexa had more and more firmly believed that to be strong she'd need to remain separate from her surviving mate.

Love allows weakness.

Charlotte had just pointed out something Lexa refused to acknowledge. That even if no one targeted Clarke because of her bond to Lexa, they still might target her because of who she is and what she means to her people - nothing to do with Lexa at all.

A shaky exhale escaped her lips.

"You speak wisely for one of your age. I see you are well matched."

Wells wince and Charlotte's scowl further prove her earlier observation of their being underlying tension between them. Lexa worries for her friend but knows it is not yet her place. Wells preferred to handle things after processing them. When he wanted her advice on his bonded he would seek her out.

Lexa went to dismiss them when something Charlotte said jumped out at her.

"Charlotte, you said this attack by the Mountain proves being a leader put Clarke in danger. Explain. Please."

Charlotte looked at her funny. Whether it was from the near demand in Lexa's tone to the fact that she was commenting Lexa wasn't sure. She was just silently hoping she was wrong about the new conclusion she'd just drawn.

"Didn't someone tell you? Clarke's group passed us on the way in as we were leaving camp. Nothing had happened all day but within an hour of Clarke returning we got attacked. They were waiting on Clarke."

The blood in Lexa's veins went frigged.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter will be delayed as I sort out my timeline.

I had the outline for ch18-21 drafted, but then some of the characters (OC & Canon) decided they wanted a bigger role. Which resulted in a completely different outline for the next few chapters. Let's just say plans to keep their bond quiet have been quickly derailed and now I'm trying to sort out the consequences. If it wasn't clearly canon divergent before it definitely will be now. Plus I'm starting to mix up who knows what
from which story. If anyone want's to be awesome and beta to help I'd be much obliged.

Happy holidays to those who celebrate.
Chapter 18: Makeshift

The second day Clarke awoke in the mountain went much the same as the end of her first. She ate her meals with the other delinquents and was escorted everywhere she went. This included the two-hour window in which she joined the others in the Mountain's equivalent of a workout yard.

In the morning she again met with Mount Weather President Dante Wallace. In the afternoon with his son, Cage Wallace. Whom she recognized as the man standing over her during her brief return to consciousness when she'd first awoken.

Clarke got the impression from their talk that the senior Wallace didn’t know of her second meeting. There were certainly more threats made in that one. Both had lots of questions for her. About the Ark, the delinquents, the Trikru.

Playing dumb seemed to work for the most part.

When they asked why Clarke chose to become the leader of the 100 she answered with a truth. After all, her mother teaching her that it’s a doctor's job to protect those under their care was part of the reason she’d fought to become leader. There was no need for them to know that was only part of the reason.

Dante bought it.

Cage didn’t.

The latter conversation taught Clarke more of what they do to the Trikru and the other grounders they capture. She learned more about their inability to handle the radiation in the air. It was then that her medical mind went to work on the problem, rather than the first day when she was still in shock.

The solution she found wasn’t good.

She pretended the information made her feel only sympathy for their plight.

Not disgust.

Not dread.
The third day was a mix of the same.

The same escorts. The same schedule. The same questions.

Clarke pretended not to notice when several of the delinquents huddled together motioned towards her. She made sure to keep her distance after making her 'rounds'. If they were plotting something she'd need to be able to deny any knowledge.

She checked on each of the 100 there with her, make sure they had what they needed and address any concerns they had. Other than that, she made no effort to talk with them. If she did the guards might take it to be more than a simple conversation.

Clarke wouldn't have one of them getting hurt because of her on her consciouses.

It was a few hours before she was normally woken for breakfast when Clarke woke to twin thumps from outside her room. Moments later the door to her cell - 'quarantine room' - swung inward.

Clarke watched from her crouch against the wall to see who it was.

When Tori walks in moments later Clarke is torn between relief and panic.

When Fox and Zoe drag the forms of her guards inside the room the panic quickly overcame the relief.

"What are you doing?" She hissed.

"Getting you out of here of course. We wanted to get everyone out but figured it'd be a greater risk. Monty offered to stay behind on cameras while everyone else ran but we talked him down from martyrdom."

Clarke open and closed her mouth a few times.

"Oh, come on." Zoe snatched Clarke's arm and began dragging her out of the room, "There's only so long before someone notices and I for one would like to be long gone from here by then."

Tori scoffed. Fox's lips twisted into the impression of a smile, however, Clarke noticed the edges were still crinkled with a suppressed pain. Glancing them over Clarke saw no visible wounds. There was no sign of what was causing the normally talkative Fox to remain quiet.

"Good luck with that. I'm honestly surprised we've gotten this far."

"Oh, come on, the plan's solid. Get Clarke, get to the main stairway using Monty's control of the
system and a guard's ID card, find one of the tunnels that must exist for them to bring people in and
go out it. Rather straight forward if you ask me."

"No one did." Tori and Fox chorused together. The two exchanged a smile. Personally, Clarke
though it sounded like a rather makeshift plan, but after the others teasing decided to keep that
thought to herself.

By this time their group of four had reached the end of the hallway. Once there Clarke could see
how they'd gotten in, the stairway door still propped open with someone's jacket. Tori's apparently,
as the younger girl immediately put it on once they were all through the door.

"I want that back ya know." Or maybe not, as Fox sent a half-hearted glare at the skinniest member
of the group.

"You can have it back when we're not stuck inside a freezing mountain."

"Jeez, hate to see what you're like in the winter with snow." Zoe chimed in immediately after, as
though she'd been waiting for just such an opportunity. As the pair descended into bickering Clarke
wondered if perhaps Zoe had been.

All conversation stopped the moment they opened the door at the bottom of the stairwell.

Cages.

Hundreds of them stacked in rows.

Nearly every cage had a grounder in them.

Ice knotted itself into Clarke's stomach and wove its way through her veins.

The faint tickle of something in the back of her head reminded her that the bond-suppressant would
being wearing off soon without the morning dose they normally forced on her. Once every
morning and once every evening. Meaning nothing more than extreme emotions would get
through. Everything else was just a twinge in the back of her mind.

A muffled sob broke Clarke from her thoughts. Moments later Fox is racing away from their group
and bee-lining towards a specific cell that only she could tell apart from the rest. A broken, hollow
laugh from beside her caused Clarke to turn her head.

"Found your locked door Princess."

Tori's hands were shoved into her jacket pockets, arms held close to her body as though warding
off a chill. Her eyes looked as hollow as her laugh had sounded. A glance at Zoe showed she was
scowling, her glare flicking over everything in the rooms except the cages.

Chatter and an exclamation drew Clarke's attention to Fox, who now stood clutching the hands of a
grounder through the metal of the cage. Cautiously Clarke approached, the others only a step
behind her. Once there Clarke tried to determine what was happening. It didn't take long.

Soulmates.

Fox and the grounder in the cage - they didn't appear to be Trikru - were clearly soulmates from the
way they clutched at each other. The grounder was young - really young. With the mixed effects of
muscle mass being eaten by starvation and what clothes they had on hanging from their frame,
Clarke couldn't tell what gender the grounder was.
She could clearly make out the scars carved into side of the grounders face.

Whatever language was being used was just different enough from the Trigedasleng Clarke had begun learning that she could only follow a handful of words. The gestures, however, were plan enough.

The grounder wanted the four Skaikru to go on without them.

Fox wasn't having it.

Zoe found the solution.

Turning Clarke watched as Zoe ran towards one wall only to return moments later with a solid looking piece of metal. Perhaps a broken staff or shelving support. Now it made for a decent hammer as Zoe slammed it against the cage’s lock multiple times.

The lock came off just as the warning lights began flashing.

Tori cursed, but Clarke didn't need her explanation to know what had happened. Her absence from the room had been discovered, ether due to the guards waking up or some outside factor. It didn't matter. They were running out of time.

Still.

The lack of time didn't stop Clarke from grabbing the metal bar from Zoe when she spotted a pair of familiar figures at the end of one row. Immediately she began bashing on the locks. Protests were raised by both those inside the cages and outside, but Clarke ignored them.

Family was family, even if they were her soulmate's family rather than her own.

The appearance of a second pipe slamming onto Sevek’s lock spread a surge of warmth through Clarke as she concentrated all her effort on freeing Anya. A few more swings and both cages were open.

Voices could be heard echoing from the jammed stairwell door now that they'd stopped slamming metal onto metal.

Clarke didn't remember anyone jamming the door.

Hands grabbed her roughly once it was clear Clarke wasn't looking away from the door.

"Go!"

The way the word sounded made something inside Clarke tense. Even as her feet continued running in the direction she was being pulled her head turned back to look. That feeling inside her grew at what she saw.

Fox stood watching them leave, one of the metal pipes held loosely in her hand. Facing the stairwell door stood her soulmate. Over a full head shorter than Fox the grounder still managed to look formidable from their crouched position just in front of Fox. Positioned so that the danger would reach them before Fox.

Clarke's chest clenched as that feeling inside her grew.

A rough yank on her arm caused her to almost trip until a second hand managed to steady her.
"Keep moving branwada. They made their choice. You are more important." Despite being out of breath from running Clarke couldn't stop the sharp inhale at Anya's words.

No no no.

This wasn't what she wanted.

No one was supposed to die for her.

In the end they ran for what seemed hours. In truth, Clarke had no idea. By the time they made it safely inside the first tunnel she was numb inside and out.

Even well into the tunnel as they were, the sound of gunshots still managed to reach them.

Clarke didn't stumble.

Clarke didn't cry out.

Clarke didn't do more than twitch.

She couldn't.

She was too numb.

Clarke kept running, Anya matching her pace. She tried to ignore the flashes of red out of the corner of her eye when Anya would wipe her face only to show it was blood and not sweat getting into the woman's eyes. She tried not to think about the way the material of Sevek's shirt seemed to be covered in more burgundy than any other color.

When they reached the dam they knew their pursuers were right behind them.

Clarke barely flinched when Anya reached out and yanked her over the edge of the dam. From among the spray of water Clarke spotted Sevek with one hand holding onto Tori and Zoe each.

Clarke doesn't remember how she got to shore.

One moment she was plunging towards certain death with the rest and the next she was coughing up water, four others lying on the shore right beside her.

"We need to split up. Slow pursuers."

Clarke blinked up at Anya as the woman stood up, seeming unperturbed by the blood freely running down the side of her face. Glancing at the others Clarke saw Zoe patting Tori on her back as the other girl coughed up water. Sevek was watching Anya.

"Wha-"

"Come Klark kom Skaikru. We will go on the north side while Sevek will lead the others via the south trail. With luck one of us will find a hunting party before the Maunon find any of us."

Clarke opened and closed her mouth a few times before accepting Anya's hand.
She still couldn't really feel anything. The tickle in the back of her head might have been something from Lexa, but at this point Clarke couldn't tell. They needed to move or they wouldn't survive. Clarke would have to believe in the two Trikru they saved to now save them the rest of the way.

The sight of fresh blood running down Sevek's arm made a small part of Clarke restart. Ripping strips of bandages from the shirts of the three delinquents Clarke bound the wound on Sevek's shoulder. It wasn't bad, but it was bleeding steadily.

The bleeding should have slow down by now surely.

Clarke worried there about potential underlying causes she wasn't aware of.

Anya settled a hand on her shoulder in a silent sign that they needed to go. With a sigh Clarke tied the last knot and nodded at Sevek. As the three began to move away a lump formed in Clarke's throat and her vision blurred slightly.

"May we meet again."

The two former Arkers flinched slightly before turning back around to look at Clarke. For a moment their gazes all met. Together Tori and Zoe returned the farewell. Their voices strong despite the water also gathering in their eyes.

With a final nod Clarke turned on her heel and began to follow Anya's back.

All three tried not to think about Fox.

It had been full black for hours when Anya decided they had no choice but to stop for the night. If Clarke had to guess it was sometime after midnight.

They'd been following an animal trail for hours once Anya deemed them far enough from the Mountain to walk. Along the way Anya had scavenged berries and other plants for the two to eat, teaching Clarke how to spot said plants as she went.

Clarke decided she liked this Anya much better than the snarky and aggressive Anya from days earlier. Although being half-starved and injured while on the run certainly affected ones personality.

Clarke for one thing knew she wasn't nearly being as picky as she normally was when it came to cleaning hands and food before eating.

A wave of emotions rushed through Clarke's strengthening soulbond causing Clarke to look around briefly in confusion. The light of the moon was enough that she could make out Anya just a few feet from her against one of the trees at the edge of their chosen clearing. After seeing nothing nearby Clarke turned back towards her chosen seat when Anya cried out unexpectedly.

Rushing to Anya's side Clarke tried to locate what was causing the woman pain without touching her.

Anya was clutching her head, eyes screwed shut. Suddenly her eyes snapped open, startling Clarke as Anya jerked her gaze upward. Just as quickly Anya's eyes were rolling into the back of her head.
The only clue given to Clarke was a single word.

"Kreyon."

Soulmate.

Fright, confusion, uncertainty roared through Clarke.

Surely they were racing to Lexa with how strongly Clarke was feeling them at the sight of Anya unconscious, half against the tree behind her and half slumped sideways into Clarke's hasty catch. With Anya unconscious Clarke was defenseless and without a guide.

Her own strength would only last so long.

Silently Clarke prayed that either Anya would wake up soon or that Lexa would be able to find her quickly.

She didn't count on either.

Settling in to wait the rest of the night out, Clarke was startled by the streak of light hurtling itself across the sky.

Something had fallen from space.
Indra’s eyes widened and her posture instantly stiffened. Lexa watched as the woman processed the implications of what Lexa just told her. After a few minutes Indra nodded.

“Sha Haiheda.”

Lexa flinched, but didn’t correct Indra as the woman left and began gathering gona for their expeditions. Mentally Lexa began preparing for the debate that would be telling Gustus he was to stay behind.

---

Lexa had been awoken to shouts about a falling star. She’d been just outside her tent discussing plans of what to do with Indra when her bond flared to life.

It had been steadily getting stronger all day yesterday, but Lexa dares not hope for anything as the emotions that did come through were not encouraging. The combination of pain and distress and loss made her muffle the bond as much as she could.

But this?

There was no muffling this.

Desperation, confusion, disbelief, and terror lanced through to Lexa along with the knocking feeling of an incoming image.

Immediately Lexa held up her hand to stop Indra’s comment. She knew her entire posture radiated tension, but Lexa could do nothing to hide it as the waves of emotions through the bond continued to slam against the edge of her mind.

Swiftly she stepped inside the tent, barely noticing Indra closing the opening and taking up guard on her behalf. With shaky limbs Lexa braved herself against the closest support - one of the main tent poles - and closed her eyes.

The second she opened the connection fully she was nearly overwhelmed, her knees threatening to buckle from the onslaught.

Anya, clutching her head in pain. Anya, starring up at the sky towards some source of light in an otherwise dark night. Anya, body slumping foreword as she lost consciousness.

Anya’s voice whispering a single word.

“Kreyon.”
The images stopped. Lexa was left reeling, alone in her tent.

As she caught her breath Lexa frantically sought to understand what she’d seen. Clarke and Anya in the dark, in the woods, somewhere where they too had seen the falling object.

And object that must somehow contain Anya’s soulmate.

For a moment Lexa simply gaped to herself. The way Anya has described her bond nearly a week ago suddenly making sense. Anya’s mate was Skaikru like Clarke.

Another thought had Lexa jerking upright from her slumped position and racing back out of the tent to Indra.

Clarke and Anya - in the woods!

They must have somehow escaped the mountain yesterday which was why Lexa’s connection to Clarke had begun strengthening again. Which meant Clarke was stranded somewhere with an unconscious Anya, both likely injured. Plus, Anya’s soulmate was in whatever ship had just been sent down, likely also injuries if the bond was what had caused Anya to pass out. The images from Clarke certainly implied as such.

“If the ship is down, you will lead the group to secure the Skaikru that has arrived. They will likely be injured. I will be leading a second party of loyal guards and split off once out of the village.”

As she spoke Lexa could see Indra’s growing frustration with the vague, uninformative orders. Lexa took brief amusement from Indra’s frustration before she filled the village leader in the rest of the way.

“It seems Klark and Onya have managed to escape the mountain. Klark has just informed me that Onya’s soulmate is on the falling star, although Onya passed out upon realizing this. Klark and Onya are now stranded in the woods with only our bond to locate them.”

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Any hope of hiding her bond to Clarke had already been dwindling over the days prior to the Maunon attacking the Skaikru. Now, however, it was blatantly obvious to those with her that Lexa was tracing a soulbond.

She found she didn’t care.
Lexa trusted Indra’s judgment. If the ten gona with her were deemed loyal to Heda - to Lexa - above all others, then Lexa would have to also trust them with Clarke.

At this point reaching Clarke was more important than any repercussions of their soulbond being found out.

Considering that the only reason Lexa could guide her group through the predawn dark of the forest was because of the bond, Lexa didn’t pity the task she’d set to Indra. Although, Lexa had been quite pleased to see that Indra had chosen to bring Octavia and Charlotte to greet the new Skaikru without any prompting. That boded well for further integration of the two clans.

The connection to Clarke flickered as the blonde struggled to stay awake. Cursing Lexa reacted more on instinct than logical thought.

“Don’t you dare pass out on me Clarke! Just hold on till I get there.”

The message was said both aloud and mentally, Lexa putting all she can into sending the mental order to her barely aware soulmate. If Clarke passed out now the bond would weaken significantly, making tracking it significantly harder even as Lexa grew closer to its source.

Lexa’s message seemed to work as Lexa felt Clarke startle slightly. Clarke’s weak response gave both encouragement and dread to Lexa.

“-othe-... -id Sev. To- ... Zoe make it? Th… -ent south.”

Clarke was clearly barely awake. Cursing silently this time Lexa nudged her horse’s sides to go faster, ignoring the looks her gona exchanged around her. They were close, the strength of the bond confirming it despite Clarke’s weakness.

The horses broke free from the tree line upon a stream. Instantly Lexa lead her horse across and towards the left. Her bond with Clarke winking in and out of her senses. The next few minutes stretched long to Lexa as they raced along the bank to the clearing she was now confident Anya had lead Clarke too.

Finally, Lexa saw the animal trail she’d been hunting for. Turning the horse away from the stream, Lexa growled in frustration as the horse whinnied in protest at the narrow trail. Urging the horse onward Lexa held her breath. The gona split up, a number of them waiting at the stream as they too recognized where Lexa was heading.

A small secluded clearing used by gona and scouts when retreating from spying on the Mountain.

A little further… there.

Lexa leapt from her horse as the clearing came into view.

Anya, slumped against the same tree trunk as in her vision. Blood caked the left side of her face, visible as her head was slumped towards Lexa. For a moment Lexa panicked that her mentor was dead before reassuring herself that Clarke would have surely gotten that through the bond.

Where was Clarke?

Rustling to her right caused Lexa to turn her gaze as she entered the clearing proper. She blinked at the sight of Clarke, pressed against the tree with a branch clutched in her hands. Clarke’s skin was pale, covered in a sheen of sweat even as she looked towards Lexa with glazed eyes.
The moment their eyes met Clarke’s body seemed to sag, drop like a string was cut. Lexa rushes forward to catch her as her body began to collapse.

“Lexa.”

It was a whisper of breath, almost a whimper, but Lexa heard it. Something in Lexa relaxed the moment Clarke was in her arms. Even as the bond faded to signify Clarke had finally passed out Lexa couldn’t stop the relief that came with the proof her soulmate was still alive.

Moments later the five gona that had followed Lexa stepped into the clearing.

Now that Clarke was with her the frantic edge to Lexa’s thoughts faded. Other information Clarke had tried to communicate with her came to the forefront of her mind. The morning sun was peeking through the tree tops at this point. They would have to move quickly.

Decision made Lexa stood with Clarke cradled against her body. Swiftly she walked towards the gona holding the reins to her horse. Glancing between the five Lexa spotted the most senior and began giving orders.

“Take the other five and search the southern trail. Sevek should be somewhere along it with two other Skaikru. Check the clearings like this one and work your way towards Maun-de but be careful. The Maunon may still be chasing them. We will meet you back at TonDC.”

Turning her head towards the remaining four gona she motioned for one to come help her with getting Clarke into her horse while the others secured the unconscious Anya. The chosen party of gona had left to locate the others in the time it took for Lexa’s remaining party to be ready.

The ride back to TonDC seemed to take much longer than the ride out.

The entire ride Clarke’s body burned against Lexa’s with fever.

It was only when the edge of TonDC came in sight that Lexa realized she should have had one of the gona carry Clarke if she wanted to keep rumors about their soulbond from growing. As Clarke stirred slightly from inside her secure embrace Lexa couldn’t help the warmth that spread in her heart.

At that moment the thought of letting anyone else carry Clarke was painful.

She may have failed Costia, but she would not fail Clarke.

Lexa was the protector.

She would not fail again.

She wouldn’t survive it.
Indra greeted them at the gate. Gustus a silent figure nearby, barely hiding his anxiety at having been told to stay behind prior to Lexa's near frantic departure. Octavia stood two steps behind Indra and one to the right.

The position of seken.

Lexa felt a spark of pride for the girl and was pleased that sending her brother to lead the Skaikru in another village had worked in the younger woman’s favor - even if her brother had been a nightmare to manage when the decision was made.

Glancing over the rest of the crowd Lexa saw gona still removing tack from horses and cleaning gear. Indra’s group must have only just gotten back. Searching more thoroughly Lexa spotted Charlotte scolding the only unfamiliar face among the crowd.

A groan from Anya had Lexa turning to look at her former mentor. She hadn’t expected Anya to regain consciousness for a number of hours given the woman’s condition. Glancing back at the newest member of Skaikru Lexa found her answer.

The bond was the cause.

The Skaikru woman was staring in their direction, mouth slightly agape as she completely ignored whatever Charlotte was saying. The youngest Skaikru huffed before turning to look for herself. Lexa couldn’t quite make out the details of Charlotte’s reaction, but surprise was certainly one before the young fisa schooled her expression.

As she signaled the gona with her to stop and begin dismounting Lexa glances again between Anya and the newcomer. Anya appeared to have not noticed yet through her pain. The debate she was having with the gona who had ridden behind her - likely about dismounting with Anya’s injured leg - also served as a distraction.

A soft “Heda” from her side reminded Lexa that she needed to dismount as well. Glancing at the patiently waiting Gustus it took Lexa a minute to process what Gustus was waiting on. Her grip around Clarke tightened momentarily before she reluctantly released her soulmate. Clarke whimpered slightly at the loss of contact as Lexa passed her still sleeping form to Gustus.

Twin cries of pain had Lexa whipping her head up again. Anya had attempted to stand on her injured leg causing it to buckle, the gona next to her wisely remaining quiet about being used as a crutch. The second cry had come from the newest Skaiga who’d begun to walk towards their group in the time Lexa had been working with Gustus.

The Skaiga was leaning heavily against Charlotte, who had been walking with her. Her gaze was locked on that of Anya’s panting form. Anya for her part seemed to finally be aware of the fact that her soulmate was standing but a handful of strides from her.

Smirking slightly Lexa savored the dumbfounded expression on Anya’s face. It was rare that they managed to surprise the formidable Trikru General.

The Skaiga took a few more steps closer once it was clear Anya wasn’t moving.

“Raven Ryes, mechanical genius. And you hot stuff?”

Lexa snorted internally as she finally dismounted. A gona immediately stepped up to take her horse's reins while Gustus passed Clarke back once Lexa indicated her desire to resume her hold on her soulmate. Striding towards the on-going introductions, Lexa was pleased to see the majority of onlookers had gone back to minding their own business.
“Onya kom Trikru.”

Anya’s voice was stable but hesitant. It was clear the woman was straining herself to control her breathing enough to sound so in control. The clipped tone could have been from any number of things and was standard for Anya. Lexa wondered how this Raven would take it.

“Hmm. Pleased to meet ya Anya. Ya look like you got your ass kicked.”

Anya scoffed even as the ghost of a smile flickered across her face.

“And you look like you couldn’t even go one round in the Pits.”

Raven reared back in what Lexa assumes was dramatic outrage. These Skaikru and their overly expressive reactions. While it was great they were bonding, Lexa had more important things to do right then.

Like getting Clarke’s - everyone’s - injuries checked.

“Enough. Anya, let the gona help you to medical before I order you to be carried there. Raivon kom Skaikru you are to accompany us there. I would like to hear your story while our wounded are tended to. Sharlet kom Skaikrun, I thank you for your assistance. We will gladly welcome your continued help. Indra, please send a fresh scouting unit out along the southern pass to Maun-de to look for the rest of my gona along with Sevek and two more Skaikru.”

A round of “Sha Heda” echoed from everyone addressed except Raven. Anya scowled at Lexa but agreed none the less. The gona supporting her relaxed slightly until Anya’s glare turned on them. Raven watched this all with an appraising expression.

When Raven’s gaze flicked between Clarke’s unconscious form and Lexa’s arms around her, Lexa fought the urge to shift as though caught doing something she shouldn’t. When Raven continued to stare and even raised an eyebrow at her, Lexa worked even harder to maintain her most neutral expression.

When a smile joined the raised eyebrow Lexa decided it best if she lead the way to Nyko and the medical tent.

She withheld her reaction to the quiet snickering behind her.

Lexa could already tell Raven would be the most annoying Skaikru to deal with so far. Considering she was Anya’s soulmate, Lexa found herself unsurprised.

Chapter End Notes

The characters are currently fighting with each other for screen time. No guarantees they’ll behave enough for the next chapter to be finished by next weekend but I’ll do
my best. The telepathic-bond idea might have stolen a large portion of my creative focus.

NOTE: If you've read this prior to 20180117 I've gone back and changed it from Tris to Sevek as I realized I'd already killed Tris to match canon.
Chapter Summary

Together they walk towards the door, Lexa hovering by Clarke's side as exhaustion begins to show in her body language. Before leaving completely Clarke turns back to Raven. She hesitates, but something in her gut tells her to just keep being honest. So she is.

"I'm glad you made it safely, Raven."

Chapter Notes

Okay so writing this chapter took ages because the characters did not want to follow my outline. Still, here you go. Also, if you read the last two chapter prior to the 18th it was pointed out to me that I already killed Tris once and therefore couldn't ki- use her again, so Tris is no longer the second grounder to escape with them.

You can also blame part of the delay on this due to The Shannara Chronicles completely stealing my creative juices. Expect some of those soulmate AU fic to be posted soon if you like that show (just season one because plot twist was stupid). Also, holy crap this story is almost at 50k words!

Chapter 20: Reel

The last thing Clarke remembered was the forest and worry over Anya and hallucinating that Lexa had found them. So, when she regained consciousness to feel a bed under her and furs over her she panicked.

Confusion, disorientation. That sharp burst of fear at the unknown.

Moments later an answer raced back to her. Calm, placating reassurance.

Relief.

Something inside Clarke that had been wound tight relaxed. The bond was open, stable. Lexa was nearby. She was safe. It was that knowledge which allowed Clarke to work past the initial fight or flight reaction as she began to take stock of her body and surroundings.

Sunlight streaming in through an open window. A mix of metal and wooden walls. A desk and a chair. A stack of books sat on the desk, a fur lie draped over the back of the chair, angled haphazardly as though whoever was using it had left in a hurry.

That sense of relief and reassurance continued to pulse at her steadily.
Clarke propped herself up on her elbows and closed her eyes. Focusing inward she sought out Lexa through the bond. Amusement trickled to her along with a number of impressions. Something warm in her hands. Movement - walking specifically. The familiar weight of swords on her hip and back. The sense off drawing nearer.

Moments later the door to the hut opened and Lexa herself stepped in.

Sitting up fully, Clarke drank in the sight of her.

It was real. Lexa was here. They'd made it. Lexa had found them -

"Anya? And Sevek and the others? Did they-"

Placing the food down gently on the table Lexa stepped up to the bedside, motioning for Clarke to be quiet and let her speak.

"Anya is resting in her own hut. The two Skaikru who escaped with you were released by the healers this morning. Sevek remains under Nyko and your seconds care."

Clarke can tell by the pinched expression and the twinge of regret that some of that news is not happy. She remembers seeing a lot of blood soaking through Sevek's shirt but thought her binding the wound would have helped. Another thought hits her.

"This morning?"

"You've been asleep for nearly two days Clarke. Anya woke shortly before dark and gave her report before passing out again. You were very brave to risk being caught to free her. Very foolish as well. You should have left her."

It is only the weariness and exhaustion she can feel radiating off Lexa in waves that keeps Clarke from snapping. Instead she growls.

"Foolish? We do not know these lands. Without Anya and Sevek we would have been lost and surely recaptured. As it was we already -"

Clarke's throat closes over as the reality of what they lost in the escape hit her. Fox and her soulmate. Anguish courses through her. She barely even knew Fox beyond that she stood her own among the more aggressive males of Bellamy's militia.

Clarke flinches at soft contact on her shoulder. Before Lexa can pull away Clarke is reaching for her, grabbing at her cloak and drawing the woman in as tears begin to stream freely down her checks. Tentatively Lexa wraps her arms around Clarke's shoulders.

When Clarke's breathing had returned to normal and her sniffling had nearly ceased, Lexa spoke again.

"The dead are gone Clarke, the living are hungry. Your people need their leader. Much has changed since you've been taken."

Sighing slightly Clarke squeezed Lexa's waist even tighter before relaxing so that she was simply holding the material in her hands. Leaning back she tilted her head up to meet Lexa's gaze. The tangle of concern and relief and worry was still present, but a feeling of peace was settling over them both.

"Tell me."
So Lexa did. She told Clarke of how she and Wells met with Bellamy and convinced him the best way to keep the remaining Skaikru safe was to spread them out between the villages. Bellamy lead the group of 14 who went south to R'bore. Wells lead another group to Apeck. TonDC hosted Charlotte, Octavia and a few others as well as the new arrival. When Clarke began to ask about said new arrival Lexa held up her hand in a silent request for patience.

Clarke consented.

Lexa speaks of feeling Clarke call to her through the bond at the same time as the ship fell. How Indra took Octavia and Charlotte - both having continued their training - to great the arrivals while Lexa went after her. Here Lexa hesitated, before squaring her shoulders and pushing on. The ship had contained only the woman Raven - Anya's kreyon - and a radio. A way for them to talk with the Ark. However, Tori - having had a chance to work with the Mountain's systems - was worried that the mountain would hear any messages sent.

Would maybe try to communicate with the Ark on their own.

Dread builds in Clarke's stomach even as Lexa hurries to finish.

Tori is working to get in touch with Monty, who was still inside the mountain, but has had no luck so far. Lexa is worried they will place too much hope in this Monty. But admits that any inside knowledge is more than the grounders have ever had before. With uncertainty slipping through the bond Lexa explains how her generals expect the Skaikru to show their value against the mountain if they wish to be accepted. How Liz and Jasper and Lee have been going through the tek taken from the Maunon killed not even a week ago.

How Clarke will have to attend the war meetings as leader of her people.

How even though Lexa doesn't say it Clarke can feel her fear over Clarke attending those meetings.

It is with great hesitation that Clarke asks if their bond has become public knowledge.

Lexa shakes her head slowly. After pausing to collect her thoughts she elaborates.

"My guard knows. It would have been impossible to deny after so many witnessed me tracking you through the bond. My behavior upon finding you may not have been very, discreet either." The faintest of blushes covers Lexa's cheeks and Clarke swoons just a little. Lexa clears her throat and pushes on.

"Gustus has ensured they will not talk and Indra has worked to impress upon her villagers that you are to be treated with the utmost respect as leader of the Skaikru. The intent being that my care for you is played off as concern for the leader of another people. We are uncertain how well the ploy is working, but if confronted about it we cannot lie. To lie about being bonded would imply embarrassment or shame over the bond and would ruin both of our standings as leaders."

Clarke mulls this over before nodding her understanding. The two hash out what Clarke should do if someone were to approach her about the bond before rising to check on Anya and Raven. As they go Lexa explains what Clarke may expect from her first war council later that day.

Clarke tries not to fidget under the stares of the villagers and gona alike.

The pair of guard following them only made her more uncomfortable. Lexa's calm presence and reassurance over the bond helped quite a bit, but Clarke could tell Lexa was displeased by the looks as well.
And perhaps by the fact that she couldn't physically reassure Clarke either.

The first thing Clarke noticed upon entering the tent in which Anya lived and the mysterious Raven had been tasked to live was the underlying tension between the two. Thankfully the hut had two rooms, and so Clarke dragged Raven into the one not containing the bed ridden Anya to talk. Lexa politely engaged Anya in a discussion as the Skaiga left.

"So, you're Clarke, eh? Bout time you were on your feet blonde. Surprised over-protective back there let you out of her sight considering how much she hovered when they brought you in."

Clarke blinked.

This was definitely not what she was expecting.

"I'm sorry, did I miss something? Clarke Griffin, and you are?" Clarke held her hand out, eyebrow raised as she studied the other woman.

"Raven Reyes, mechanical genius and youngest zero-g mechanic in nearly a century. Not that it matters at this point."

Clarke hmmed in thought. She'd have to approach this carefully. Raven's dynamic was completely different from what she was used to dealing with.

"No. It matters. Just might not be as useful down here on the ground. How'd you get here anyways?" Raven blinked.

"Your mom sent me. Didn't believe it when all the wrist bands went dead at once. She broke the law to buy me enough time to get down here with a working radio."

She didn't mean to, but the mention of her mother caused a flinch to race through her. A pulse of concern reached her from Lexa and Clarke sighed softly as she sent back a soft impression of regret but that she was okay. Opening her eyes Clarke was unnerved to see Raven watching her with narrowed eyes.

"Your bond is really strong isn't it? That she could tell the moment something upset you. What happened between you and your mother anyways? You know that ship I came down in was a two-seater. Doc Griff had planned to come with."

Clarke was sending calm and I'm okay to Lexa even as she felt her heart ache with longing and regret and anger towards her mother and about her father. She opened her mouth to deny anything was wrong and maybe even the bond but thought better of it.

Clearly this Raven was perceptive. More perceptive than most of the people Clarke had dealt with on the Ark anyways and lying to her probably wouldn't be a good start to their relationship.

"You're... really perceptive, did you know that?" Clarke sighed. "My mother was the one who got my dad floated."

Raven winced.

"And I thought my home life was a nightmare. You know she loves you right? Like she was
desperate to make sure you were okay. She broke the law to do so."

Clarke shrugged.

"And don't think I didn't notice you didn't answer my soulmate question. It was kind of obvious to me from the moment I saw her carrying your injured-ass in on a stallion that you two were mates. So, I ask again, you have a really strong bond, don't you?"

Clarke could feel her nerves flaring to life again. Could also feel Lexa mentally telling her to take deep breaths, concern clear. Clarke can't look Raven in the eyes. Clarke sighs. Raven nods.

"Thought so. Well, mama G will be please you have such a dedicated protector I'm sure."

A silence descends over the pair, broken only by the sounds drifting in from outside. There's so much still to discuss, the radio, the Ark, Raven's bond with Anya. It's only Lexa's mental presence encouraging her to take deep breaths that keeps Clarke from full on panicking. When she actually closes her eyes and takes a deep breath Raven snorts.

"She just told you to do that didn't she? I could fucking see you beginning to panic Griffin and now you're doing breathing exercises. Yeah, good luck hiding that. How fucking strong is your bond Griff? Like I can feel Anya but-."

Raven cuts herself off and Clarke gives the other woman a moment. When she finally opens her eyes, Clarke is surprised to find Raven having turned to stare out the window, her fists clenched at her sides.

"Do you... want to talk?"

For a moment Clarke thinks Raven won't answer or will otherwise refuse. Then the woman sighs and her fists relax enough for color to return to them.

"Finn Collins. Is he still alive?"

The name shocks Clarke. She hadn't thought about Finn in a while. Despite seeing him with the others, she hadn't made any effort to talk with him other than to make sure he was getting the food any sure he needed while there. Not once since that conversation in the bunker had she thought about if he had anyone back on the Ark.

"He... he's in the mountain. For the most part he seemed to be doing well. He was definitely getting friendly with the ladies. Why do you ask?"

The way Raven seemed to crumple in on herself while simultaneously straightening her posture amazed Clarke. Head bowed even as her back stiffened, previously relaxing hands tightened back into white knuckled fists. Instantly Clarke knew something was wrong. That Raven knew Finn on a personal level and that something Clarke said about his behavior had hurt the woman.

On instinct Clarke shifted to comfort, hand reaching out towards Raven's shoulder or arm. She froze as a strangled whisper reacted her.

"He's my boyfriend."

Clarke couldn't stop the sharp inhale of surprise.

"Or was, I guess. He saved my life. I owe him my life. I-" Raven's voice broke and in the new silence she could hear Lexa's voice raised slightly, arguing with another - likely Anya. Checking on
the bond Clarke felt a mix of trepidation and exasperation to go with the concern from before. Most likely Anya was feeling whatever internal anguish Raven was currently going through and wanted to get to Raven's side.

Indecisiveness tore at Clarke.

In the end she settled her hand softly, carefully on Raven's shoulder. The flinch was expected, but Clarke didn't remove her hand. She didn't think it would help, but something Finn told her felt like it needed to be said.

"'Not all bonds are romantic.' Finn told me that, after I turned him down the second week here. Just because someone doesn't fit in your life one way, doesn't mean they can't fit a different way."

The door to the bedroom opening caused Clarke to look up. Standing in the doorway was Lexa, concern and weariness carefully hidden behind her mask. Hidden but clearly there through the bond. Glancing past her Clarke saw Anya propped up in a bed of furs similar to the one she had awoken in.

Giving Raven's shoulder a slight squeeze Clarke let go.

"You have time. There's no need to make a decision right away. I'm sure both will respect whatever you choose."

From behind Lexa Clarke saw Anya nod stiffly, as though even moving her head caused her pain. The wince Raven tried to suppress meant Clarke's suspicion was probably right. With a sigh Clarke returned her gaze to Lexa.

For a moment their eyes lock before they both nod.

Together they walk towards the door, Lexa hovering by Clarke's side as exhaustion begins to show in her body language. Before leaving completely Clarke turns back to Raven. She hesitates, but something in her gut tells her to just keep being honest. So she is.

"I'm glad you made it safely, Raven."
Chapter Summary

The last page did not contain an image in the same way as the others did.
Instead it contained words.
Four words.
Haiheda.
Haiteca.
Haifisa.
Triumvirate.

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AKA Clarke finally finds out some things about Grounder culture.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay in getting this up. Some irl stuff took away my desire to write (and read fic for that matter) and even when I tried to make myself write I had to first sort out the next bit of timeline. So yeah, the good news is the next six or so chapters are outlined and there shouldn't be much delay in getting them written and posted back on the weekly schedule.

Much thanks to the @ThatKidWithTheUnkeptHair for letting me ramble, bounce ideas at them, and for beta reading this chapter. As always, feedback is welcome.

Chapter 21: Heir

Lexa still couldn't quite believe what she just witnessed.

After leaving Anya and Raven the two had gone to check on Sevek. Having been unconscious by the time the scouts had found him and the two Skaikru with him, the odds of his survival were low. Nyko hadn't been able to do much for the young gona in the day since he'd been in the village.

Then Clarke had walked into the medical tent.

A portion of what she and Nyko discussed went over Lexa's head but she was still able to follow part of it. Although she had a strong feeling that was do to the bond passing her information as Clarke worked through the problem. Clarke's determination pretty much overrode all the other feelings either of them felt during the hour Clarke worked to stabilize Sevek.

One thing did make it through on top of the determination. Or maybe it was the cause of it.

“Not this one too.”
The flash of darkness and rows of cages and the sheer horror that had accompanied that thought had chilled Lexa to the bone. Lexa worked hastily to hide her reaction so as not to distract Clarke but knew she hadn't fully succeeded when Clarke sent a pulse of reassurance to her over the bond.

Thankfully, Clarke quickly refocused on Sevek.

Lexa calmed as she watched Clarke work. It was fascinating to see her mate in her element. Nyko had done a good job stabilizing Sevek, but Clarke had access to techniques and knowledge that no one on the ground had. It was this difference that made her invaluable as a healer.

But it also limited her usefulness as many of the tools she was used to having access to up on their Ark were not here.

Sensing Clarke's frustration Lexa began sorting through the impressions and knowledge being given to her until she found the tools Clarke needed. From that knowledge she began searching around the medical tent until she found substitutes for what Clarke needed.

Each time Lexa returned to Clarke's side with another improvised tool a wave of gratefulness flooded across the bond leaving Lexa with a mix of positive feelings in response. It was quite addicting.

Before long Clarke was able to complete the impromptu ‘surgery’ on Sevek. Clarke's knowledge told Lexa that he should now be fine with rest and limited movement until his wounds healed enough he didn't risk... ‘reopening’ himself.

The words sounded so weird in Lexa's head, but Clarke's grateful and amused smile made Lexa swoon just a little.

A sharp inhale of breath pulled Lexa from the depths of Clarke's eyes.

Nyko stood looking between the two women. Lexa could see the moment he put the pieces together, her blood running cold as he spoke the word she wasn't ready to hear.

"Haifisa."

Nyko immediately paled. Only Clarke's hand settling on her forearm prevented Lexa from stepping into the man's personal space.

"You will tell no one Nyko, or I will know who to tie to the post." He was already nodding his head in agreement before she finished.

"No one Haihe-" She growled, "Heda." A bead of sweat ran down the side of his face as the man bowed and beat a hasty retreat.

For a moment the hut was quiet beyond Lexa's labored breathing. Then-

"Haifisa? What's that mean? One of the gona called me that before the Mountain attacked."

If possible Lexa's blood froze even further even as she tensed under Clarke's grip. Images and emotions slammed through her faster than she could control and she had little doubt Clarke witnessed most of them through the bond.

"Haifisa. Haifisa. Haiteca."

"The Founders"
An image of Costia, her hand tracing delicately over the memorial of the three Founders inside the old temple in Polis.

The searing agony felt as Costia was torn from her. Clarke being taken by the Mountain. The desperation as she realized her worst fear was coming true. The knowledge that she was the Protector and she had failed.

"Failed. Failed. Failed. Failur-"

"LEXA!"

Lexa ripped her eyes open to find Clarke standing in front of her, hands clasped firmly on each forearm, eyes boring into her own.

"Breath Lexa. Breath. I'm right here. I'm okay. You didn't fail."

Lexa shuddered. She didn't say it, but Clarke still felt her denial, her deep seeded belief that she had failed in her duty. A duty Clarke likely didn't even understand from the onslaught of Lexa's break down.

Break down.

Lexa let out a wet chuckle.

She was Heda and yet here she was breaking down in her soulmate's arms because someone had called them both by their titles.

Lexa wasn't ready for this. She wasn't. But Clarke made no move to release her. If anything, the other woman's grip tightened as she sensed the path Lexa's thoughts were taking.

"NO. You do not get to pull away. Not without at least explaining to me what the hell is going on. This is more than just you being a leader and me an easy target. Please Lexa, just tell me. What is going on?"

Lexa took a deep breath and let it out. She was ashamed to realize she was trembling. That needed to stop first. She needed to be in control to tell this part. To tell Clarke of a history and duty she couldn't possibly have guessed prior to falling from the sky.

She needed to breath.

She wished Costia was here.

A sob broke free from her control.

Clarke's arms wrapped around her in a full embrace, pulling her against the blonde's chest.

"Shhh Lexa. When you're ready. Take your time. I'm not leaving you. Not now. Shhh. It's okay."

For a long while the two simply stood there. Lexa couldn't help but reflect on the last time Clarke had held her like this, after asking about Costia. Lexa really hoped this wouldn't become a pattern.

She needed to get a handle on this weakness before her enemies learned of it.

The Coalition might not survive once they do.
Lexa stayed quiet the entire way to her tent. Clarke, thankfully, understood Lexa's need for time and also remained quiet. The silence lasted until their late lunch was served, Lexa ensuring Clarke's bandages were changed while they waited on the food.

Lexa could feel Clarke's trepidation and anxiety and uncertainty building the longer her lips remained sealed, yet still Lexa couldn't bring herself to speak.

As the quiet discomfort grew stifling Lexa remembered something tucked away in the bottom of one of her chests. Relief and hope and a wave of melancholy rocked through to Clarke. The Skaiga paused to watch as Lexa retrieved the remembered item. When Lexa returned to the small table with a poorly bound leather book in her hands curiosity won out.

"What...?"

Clarke trailed off at Lexa's small head shake. Setting the book to the side, Lexa brought her chair around to sit next to Clarke's. Only once the plates had been shifted around and out of the way did Lexa slowly open the book.

On the first page was an image made of reds and oranges and browns and blacks.

Lexa knew the instant Clarke recognized the scene. Taking that as her que she spoke to Clarke for the first time since breaking down.

"This is the story of Polis, the Founding City, as recorded by the first Haiteca. It has been replicated many times since, but this is the original, gifted to Heda generations ago after a peace had been found for that age. C- Costia used it to teach at the orphanage."

The grief was heard in the faint tremble of her voice. But the echo of rightness as the thought of Costia having owned the book was completely in the bond.

Lexa watched as Clarke began to slowly flip through the pages.

After the image of the bombs dropping and the world on fire was one of deep grays and blacks and browns as the world reeled from the ashes. More images of the survivors followed, of the weather storms that wreaked havoc upon them, of the fighting for supplies and the struggle to adapt to a technology-less world.

Then the images began to change. A streak of color teased along the edge as Polis Tower came to life on the page. And with it a single figure. A peace was brought between the lands closest to the tower and a small settlement began to expand. But the peace was unstable, depicted in shadows that reached for the edges of the settlement and streams of dark red running from slumped shapes inside the settlement. The entire time that streak of color wound its way along through the backdrop of each image. In each the thread started with the single figure.

Towards the back of the book a streak of fire was depicted falling across half the page while the other half was taken up by a half-sunk ship crumpling against a shore. A separate thread snuck off the page from each half of the image.

Over the handful of pages leading up to the end the colorful thread wound between three separate figures as they moved throughout the shambled settlement. In each image the figures would be shown in the process of doing a specific type of action. Healing. Teaching. Protecting. Yet each time they were painted in such a way the viewer knew they were searching for something
of the page.

The ever-elusive thread of color disappearing in the direction of their distraction.

On the second to last page the three figures are see at last together, the thread entwined around them. All around the three the image of what once was a menagerie of dark grays and blacks, shadows and blurs, was transformed into thriving colors and sharp lines; brightness in the wake of misery.

The last page did not contain an image in the same way as the others did.

Instead it contained words.

Four words.

_Haiheda._

_Haiteca._

_Haifisa._

_Triumvirate._

The two sat in silence for a long while after, both with their gazes fixed on the words.

Lexa could feel the weight bearing down on her once again. The knowledge of the roles she must fill, not just as Heda but as Haiheda - a title coveted and revered.

A title she had shamed.

Unbidden her eyes focused on Haiteca. Her thoughts again returned to Costia. To how gentle she was when teaching, how she could take ideas and concepts from one discipline and apply it to another. How clever she always seemed. How the story of the Founders was her favorite.

How she always knew Clarke was out there waiting to be found.

The feel of skin against her wrist resulted in Lexa flinching in instinct. Raising her gaze she found Clarke staring at her, eyes heavy with concern. Checking the bond Lexa realized she must have been silent for some time.

Must have projected her melancholy thoughts for her bond-mate to feel.

"They're known as the Founders. The Teacher, Healer, Protector. The Founding Three. Legend says they followed the bond to each other and together built Polis into the neutral ground it's always been. As this is supposedly the original record, it stands to reason the claim is true."

Silence as Clarke processes the words. Then-

"You're saying that we're... them? Or like their heirs somehow?"

"The how is unimportant. To my people, we hold their titles. Triumvirate are extremely rare, likely due to how rare it is for those with mates from different clans to find each other. Because of this when those claiming to have such a bond come forward there is extreme reactions from both sides."

"You fear the worst. That your people will reject us?" Lexa refused to meet Clarke's gaze. "I know
you do, I can feel it."

Her fingers flexed over a band of leather strapped to metal.

"Yes."

It was soft, but it was still an admission. Lexa feared how her people would respond, knowing that Costia was dead, that Clarke was from an unknown tribe - potentially an enemy one. Lexa fear a lot of things.

How Lexa's failure to protect Costia may be used to destroy the Coalition. How Clarke's origin may be used to remove her from the throne and kill them both. How her people would respond if Clarke was killed also.

How the alliance was hanging by a thread that could be snapped at any moment if they aren't careful.

Lexa was finding herself more and more terrified of how certain parties will react upon learning about Clarke's existence.

A gruff call of "Heda" from outside the tent ended any further conversation. When Lexa got up to put the book away there was no curiosity in Clarke's gaze, only worry.
"Sir, the survivors number approximately 89. 43 are held by the Mount Weather fraction, status unknown. The remaining 46 of us are spread among the grounder villages for protection while we learn to survive."

"I'm sorry, Grounders? Are you implying there are people living on the ground?"

"Yes sir. Several thousand if I had to guess, not including the few hundred stuck inside the mountain due to a reaction with the post nuclear environment. Their leader is here with me."

Chapter Notes

It lives! So, I was going to wait to post this till I had the next chapter written - sorry y'all no second update in the near future - but decided y'all deserved to know this story is NOT abandoned. Writing is just hard after moving halfway around the world, starting a new job, and then dealing with the emotional fall out of such major changes. Basically been a really busy year with several weeks were self-care came first.

So, yeah. Do not expect another update anytime soon. If you need more clexa - or clextia as the case may be - I posted another AU the other day.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 22: Bear

Once the book was away Lexa called for the visitor. Clarke watched as she once again hid her emotions behind that expressionless mask. It made her heart ache that Lexa never really felt free to express herself. To just show her emotions like everyone else Clarke had grown up with.

A tall Trikru woman - Indra, according to the impressions Clarke got that first day - entered along with Tori and a few others. Glancing them over Clarke's eyes immediately zeroed in on the radio in Tori's hands.


Worry began to build inside of her but before she could begin to panic Indra began speaking. Clarke latched on to translating the woman’s words as a way to stave off her panic. She did her best to ignore Lexa’s mental concern, but it was like trying to ignore an itch she couldn’t scratch.

"Heda, the one in the mountain - a Monti kom Skaikru - has made contact. No contact has been made with the Ark since your initial order after the first contact."

Clarke stared at Indra as she struggled to process the words. Something about Monty and the
Mountain, about the Ark and an order Lexa gave. Turning Clarke stared at Lexa, waiting for the moment her confusion made it and Lexa was kind enough to explain what else it was Clarke had missed by being unconscious for two days.

"Thank you Indra." Glancing to Clarke Lexa complied with the silent request. "It seems your Skaikru have show some value. One of the ones in the mountain - a Monty - has made contact with Tori kom Skaikru through your radio."

Clarke nods, but a bigger question weighs on her mind now.

"So we can talk to both the Ark and Monty in the mountain, but we aren't. Is there a way he can hide the frequencies or transmissions or something so we can start coordinating to bring the Ark down? There's only so much air left up their and they are desperate to come down. They may burn down more than just a few houses if we don’t provide some guidance."

Clarke may now be staring at Tori, at the radio, but she still catches the look that passes between Indra and Lexa. The pride mixed with worry.

"I need to talk to Bellamy. There's a reason he was dressed as a guard. He was one. He should know how to get a message to the Ark that the Maunon won’t understand even if they over hear it."

Lexa nodded in understanding. Moments later the order was given to summon Bellamy from the village where he lead a third of the delinquents. Decision made Lexa ensured that Tori and the other technically minded had everything they needed before dismissing them.

A response would be sent to Monty to keep low and learn the system as fast as he could.

They may need him to run interference sooner than they’d like if Bellamy didn’t come through with a code.

---

"Ark Station come in. This is Echo-Delta-One-Niner reporting Polaris. I repeat, Polaris. Ark Station please come in."

Moments after Bellamy first spoke Clarke could feel shock, confusion, and uncertainty roll off of Lexa. A soft mental nudge had the word Polaris echoed back with an image.

Red cloth hanging from walls as torches illuminated a room. In the center of a clearly hidden room was crumpled metal. Crumpled metal that was once an escape pod with a word on the side. A word now partially obscured but still enough.

Pol--is.

Polis like the capital.

Polaris like the 13th station that was jettisoned at the formation of the Ark. Something so monumental that it had apparently become the code word for a large technically advanced threat. A threat that requires radio traffic be encrypted less they be both over heard and understood.

"Who is this? How did you get on this line?"

The crackling static from the response caused a collective wince even as Raven began fussing with the radio to improve the clarity. The mystery of Polaris and Polis would have to wait.
"This is Echo-Delta-One-Niner with the survivors. We have received the radio you sent. Requesting a message be delivered to the Council."

There was movement on the other side of the line. A voice called something that was unintelligible to the listeners before a new voice came on the radio.

"Echo-Delta-One-Niner report."

All the former delinquents in the room flinched as one. In Lexa's ear Clarke whispered why.

"Markus Kane, Director of Security. Most of us haven't had pleasant interactions with him due to our... status."

"Sir, Polaris. We weather the storm just as we weathered the war. There are bats and fruit flies out tonight. Polarity requested."

Another pause.

"Polarity granted." A sharp ringing echoed from the radio before stopping. "Line is secured. Go ahead Mr Blake."

Bellamy glanced at Clarke who nodded, motioning for him to continue speaking. He was already doing significantly better than she expected, much more professional now too. She supposed it made sense he would respond well to the task. There had to have been a reason for him to be chosen as a guard recruit in the first place.

"Sir, the survivors number approximately 89. 43 are held by the Mount Weather fraction, status unknown. The remaining 46 of us are spread among the grounder villages for protection while we learn to survive."

"I'm sorry, Grounders? Are you implying there are people living on the ground?"

"Yes sir. Several thousand if I had to guess, not including the few hundred stuck inside the mountain due to a reaction with the post nuclear environment. Their leader is here with me."

The Grounders in the room bristled at being related in anyway with the mountain but they wisely did not speak. The next pause was significantly longer than before. The watch officer came back on after what seemed like several minutes.

"Please standby. Director Kane is in discussion with Chancellor Jaha and Doctor Griffin."

Clarke felt her pulse race.

Her mother was there. She was alright. Not that Clarke was worried. Nope. She was still very angry at her mother. But it was nice to know she hadn't gotten floated for getting Raven and the radio down here. Angry as she was Clarke didn't want her mother dead.

A hand on her shoulder startled her.

Turning Clarke met Lexa's worried gaze.

Closing her eyes she took a deep breath. Sending her reassurance to Lexa Clarke worked to remain focused, to calm her rising emotions. Opening her eyes she searched the room for Wells's gaze and held it. He grimaced but nodded.

He wasn't sure about taking to his father either.
Glancing at the rest of the room she saw most were either minding their own business or doing the same as she. Raven met her gaze head on with a smirk. Once sure she had Clarke's attention Raven looked pointedly at where Lexa's hand was still resting on Clarke's shoulder.

Fighting a blush Clarke glanced back at Lexa. She was about to comment on it when the radio crackled back to life.

"Bellamy Blake." If the Grounders thought the wince when Kane came on the radio was bad they were not ready for the sudden tension that radiated from every Skaikru member there at the voice of Chancellor Jaha.

"Chancellor." Bellamy's voice trembled just slightly.

"You said the leader of the Grounders is there with you? Can you put them on? And tell us who else is there?"

A quick glance around showed a nod from Lexa but head shakes from both Wells and Clarke. With a shrug and a bit of a smirk Bellamy responded. Withholding information without seeming to do so was certainly something he was skilled at doing.

"Sir, everyone can hear you just fine. Raven fixed up the radio with the speaker from her escape pod. Several grounders are here along with the rest of the Skaikru leaders."

"I'm sorry Sky who?"

Clarke's breath caught as her mother spoke over the line. Lexa's hand squeezed down gently.

"Skaikru. It's what the Grounders call us." Lexa motioned her request to talk. "Here I'll let their leader explain."

"I am Leksa kom Trigedakru, Heda kom Polis and leader of the Twelve Clans. May I know to whom I am speaking?"

Stunned silence greeted her. Clarke let a burst of pride for her soulmate echo across their bond. She could easily picture the dropped jaws of those on the other end.

"I am Chancellor Thelonious Jaha and leader of the Ark. With me are two of my council, Doctor Abigail Griffin and Director Marcus Kane."

"Greetings. When your people first crashed on our land mine knew nothing about you other than that you invaded from the sky. As such your youngon here have been named the Sky People, Skaikru in our language."

"That... That makes sense. Thank you for explaining."

There was a clatter and the faint echo of "invaded?" as the microphone appeared to be jostled.

"It seems we have much to discuss. First would you be willing to tell us who among our people is alive? And what is meant when we were told some are captured by Mount Weather. We were under the impression that it was abandoned. That all of earth was abandoned actually."

Clarke and Lexa exchange a glance.

"That is easy. The Mountain has been attacking and killing my people for generations with their tech." Lexa spat the last word. "The Maunon first showed their hand in the middle of our peace
talks by attempting to kidnap several of your people. When that failed they attacked the camp - 
your youngon call it the drop site - and succeeded in taking everyone who was present at the time."

"That is... Troubling news. Again I ask, who of our people is alive? Where are they? What 
assurances do we have that you're telling the truth?"

"What reason have we to lie? If we wanted to my warriors could have slaughtered your people 
instead of working to make peace as we have been. It is I who wonders if I should trust you. Only a 
fool is willing to send untrained children into the wilderness."

A very tense and awkward silence followed Lexa's statement.

"Please, we just want to know if our children are alright."

The pain in Abby's voice caused a mix of longing and spite in Clarke. She didn't react when Lexa 
squeezed her shoulder, the weight of her hand beginning to feel more confining then comforting.

Silence presses on them as Lexa waits for the Skaikru to decide their response.

" Heda, use the list. "

Lexa looks at Wells, her mental confusion poking Clarke stronger than an elbow to the side would 
have. Wells must have motioned to Clarke because Lexa squeezed her shoulder again. Clarke 
didn't see. She instead stared determinedly at the ground.

" Clarke. " Lexa's voice is gentle, soft in Clarke's ear. " What list? "

Clarke doesn't move her eyes from the dirt at her feet. But her hand moved. Shaking slightly her 
hand pulled a crumpled piece of paper from her pocket. Visible on it is a list of names. Wells had 
given the list to her as they entered the tent.

Lexa goes to take it but Claire shakes her head.

Grabbing a piece of charcoal from nearby Clarke set the list on the table next to the radio. At the 
bottom she adds one more name.

Fox.

No one had spoken since she'd shaken her head, everyone instinctively knowing Clarke needed a 
moment. The moment she finished Clarke threw down the piece of charcoal and left the tent. She 
barely noticed Lexa's firm order to let her go or her guards forming a protective rank around her.

The tears started the moment she closed the door to the small cabin she'd woken up in just that 
morning.

Later Wells would tell her that Abby must have heard one of them using her name because she had 
immediately demanded to speak to Clarke, asking if she was okay and not letting anyone else get a 
word in.

Lexa had snapped at Abby, telling her that if Clarke chose not to talk then Lexa would respect that 
and Abby better as well. When Abby tried to protest further Lexa had ground out a simple 
question.

"Do you want to hear the list of dead or no?"

At their silence Lexa had told Bellamy to read the list and left the room herself. Wells followed
after retrieving the list when Bellemy finished. The last thing he heard was Raven say was "Don't worry Mama G. Clarke's in good hands."

Chapter End Notes

Clarke needs all the hugs.

To all my readers new and old - thank you for bearing with me. I want to see the end of this story just as much as you do so please, have patience, and I’ll do my best to try and update more often.

Come yell at me @standinshadowedsilence on tumblr.

End Notes

Trigedasleng is italicized since I don't want to butcher translating it. Only the common words/phrases will be used unless I have a character translating or I intentionally don't want y'all to know what was said.

Let me know your thoughts @standinshadowedsilence

Once again, please note this is NOT abandoned. Just hit major writer's block.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!